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Petroleum's Promise: The Neo-colonial Imaginary of Oil Cities in the Modern Arabian Gulf

by

Mona Damluji

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Architecture

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Global Metropolitan Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Nezar AlSayyad, Chair

Professor Greig Crysler

Professor Teresa Caldeira

Professor Michael Watts

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Abstract

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University of California, Berkeley

Professor Nezar AlSayyad, Chair

Oil from the Arabian Gulf has made the modern world as we know it possible. This dissertation documents representations of urban modernity in oil-producing Gulf countries that emerged in the context of British controlled oil extraction during the twentieth century. With the success of national independence movements following World War I, British imperial authorities were compelled to invent new forms of colonial rule. This study examines the bold yet stumbling beginnings of British oil company public relations practices in the modern Arabian Gulf and the emergence of cooperative corporate and state efforts to use documentary film to project new national imaginaries to citizens of oil-producing countries. It shows how oil company sponsored films constructed an imaginary of cities that linked the promise of nation building and modernization in oil-producing states to the neo-colonial practice of oil extraction. By weaving together related histories of oil, urbanization, and cinema, this dissertation provides an account of the rise of British oil company public relations as linked to the modern urban development of oil company towns and capital cities in the Arabian Gulf. Focusing on documentaries made by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and Iraq Petroleum Company before 1958, this dissertation examines the oil city in cinema as the primary object of inquiry. Based on archival evidence and filmic analysis, this dissertation sheds light on how imperial power and oil extraction have shaped and been shaped by public relations practices in the modern Arabian Gulf.

For
Teita Mona

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Introduction

Oil, Urbanism, and the Neo-Colonial Imaginary

In the age of oil it is the image, at this time more than in any other era that proliferates as a medium of communication. And, the very image-technologies that allow us to conceptualize our relationship to energy and petroleum are a product of oil: the first photograph in 1827 resulting from a combined use of bitumen, metals, solar energy and chemicals in a solvent. The problem of visualization, of the proliferation of determinate, useful maps of our economic lives, is not specific to oil, but one politically structural to a system that is at once spectacularly consumerist and fully globalized on the level of production.

—Andrew Pendakis and Sheena Wilson¹

A young woman in a silk robe sits with her back to us as she combs her elegantly coiffed hair in a bedroom vanity mirror. A booming male voice fills the room on the screen. He tells us, “Whether you know it or not every single preparation on this beautiful lady’s dressing table, every single thing she is wearing is influenced by oil.” The scene is from *Oil for Aladdin’s Lamp*, a documentary film sponsored by the Shell Oil Company in 1949. The narrator goes on to explain that, “the shampoo she used on her hair, her comb, the lacquer on her nails, and her make up all or in part have come out of some oil well.” The voice then provokes us to imagine what would happen if every item dependent on oil was suddenly stripped from the scene. Within seconds, the woman is literally stripped down to almost nothing as everything from her cosmetics to her synthetic silk robe is snatched away by an invisible hand (Figure 1.1). The narrator cuts off the scene before her undergarments disappear and chuckles, “did it without a magic lamp too!”

Oil for Aladdin’s Lamp is not a direct advertisement for Shell products or an industrial film for specialists. This oil film was made specifically to entertain and educate the general public. Using a combination of campy, orientalist, sexist and scientific tropes, it delivers Shell’s message: without oil we are all naked. Scene by scene, the film depicts and calculates the aspects of modern life that rely on oil in some way. Well beyond the gas in our tanks, the narrator points out, oil shapes the world around us with petroleum based lubricants, petrochemicals, and numerous products like asphalt, paint, and ammonia. From the fertilizer used to grow oranges for juice, to the ammonia used to refine sugar in coffee, and the pectin used to make jelly for toast, the film shows us that in the modern world even what we eat and drink is touched by oil.

This totalizing vision of a petroleum-based reality is Shell’s historiography of oil modernity. According to the film, “Little did [the earliest oil men] know that the black substance was destined to advance our standard of living in a thousand different ways!” Notably, however, save for a few frames at the outset, the black substance itself remains entirely *unseen* in the images of everyday life playing on the screen. Yet, the narrator reminds us repeatedly that in this modern world, oil is *all* we see.

Indeed, as the quote above reminds us, oil makes film itself possible as way of seeing. Films are a continuous series of images — captured in another place and time — flickering on a screen before our eyes as light passes through strips of celluloid. Thus, from the bitumen used to develop the first photograph in 1827, to the petrol that fueled vehicles carrying cameramen to locations around the world, to the petrochemicals used in

the treatment of celluloid filmstrips, the history of cinema is a history of oil. Cinema creates collective imaginaries of the modern world, shaping the ways in which we interpret, relate to, and operate within that world. Without cheap carbon energy and petroleum-based products the industrial scale of filmmaking would not be possible.

At the same time, histories of oil and histories of cinema are embedded in histories of imperialism. Scholars have studied the practices, policies, and moving pictures that have tied British Empire to the proliferation of cinema throughout the colonized world from South Asia to Africa.² By the 1920s, documentary cinema had become, “an important element in fostering the wealth of the nation and the elaboration of a capitalist and imperialist governmentality.”³ Film historians have examined the fundamental paradox of the British documentary movement; namely, that despite its social democratic mission, the central objective of state-funded filmmaking was, most often, to uphold British imperial power in the world. Indeed, the emergence of industrial sponsorship after World War Two freed documentary filmmakers to make international films with ample funding apart from state-driven agendas.⁴ However, the critical role that the neo-colonial politics of petroleum extraction and nation building played in shaping the cultural production of postwar documentary in oil-producing states has yet to be studied.⁵

Although the 1949 film described above never explicitly mentions the geographical source of Shell’s oil, the film title and premise exploit orientalist tropes of the Middle East that had been popularized in Europe and the United States through the translated folktales of *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights* and readily reproduced in orientalist painting, photography and cinema. The narrative premise of *Oil for Aladdin’s Lamp* is that modern science can now make clear that Aladdin was wrong all along; in fact, the true genie of the lamp is none other than oil. For Shell, this glib reference to Aladdin’s lamp serves as a straightforward way to contrast the scientific and rational progress of modernity in the west with the imaginary of a timelessly antiquated and exotic orient. While the pioneering Anglo-Dutch oil company film units of Royal Dutch Shell freely deployed such orientalist tropes, British petroleum countries that were invested on the ground in oil producing countries of the Arabian Gulf used documentary film to reinvent the neo-colonial imaginary of the region.

Aims of the Dissertation

Oil from the Arabian Gulf has made the modern world as we know it possible. This dissertation is about the representations of cities in relationship to oil and modernity that emerged during the height of British-controlled petroleum output from Iran and Iraq and other countries adjacent to the Gulf. It examines how documentary films worked as a means to link the promise of nation building and modernization of oil-producing states to the neo-colonial practice of oil extraction. It aims to disrupt false dichotomies of tradition-modernity and East-West and asks how oil extraction transformed space and society in the context of producing countries. In the early twentieth century, after centuries of ruling its colonies by means of brute domination, British imperial authorities were confronted with a new kind of subject. Oil companies had to communicate deliberately with national governments and national citizens in order to continue petroleum extraction from the Arabian Gulf. What was the imaginary of oil-producing states that emerged in the age of neo-colonial extraction?

The foundations of the neo-colonial British and American efforts to extract oil from countries in the South America, Africa, and the Arabian Gulf region have been examined in numerous historical accounts. Historians beholden to British and American oil companies produced the first order of this literature.⁶ Subsequently, critical scholars concerned largely with the impetuses and outcomes of British and American hegemony in the region have developed a significant body of scholarship examining political economies and geographies of oil.⁷ This later group of scholars has documented how states and firms have shaped, navigated and manipulated circuits of global capital, legal discourse, and political arrangements in order to facilitate the establishment of corporate oil extraction and its geopolitics. By analyzing linked representations of oil extraction and urban modernization, this dissertation engages a previously unstudied field of spatial and discursive practices that also *constituted* the means for oil extraction from the Arabian Gulf region.⁸

The Neo-Colonial Imaginary

This dissertation introduces the concept of the neo-colonial imaginary to describe the field of symbolic meanings and discursive representations of the changing institutions, values, national identities and geopolitical relationships that constituted the historical transition from colonial to neo-colonial political economies of trade and extraction. I use the term “imaginary” to broadly refer to the construction and circulation of symbols and tropes that assign coded meanings to a wide array of representations, public discourses (e.g. on post-independence oil production and national development), and institutional sites for circulating these meanings as constitutive of a particular public. Thus, the imaginary is not equivalent to a particular assemblage of imaginations about a historical conjuncture, and it does not depend on a unified subject. Rather, I examine imaginaries utilizing the cinematic metaphor of “projections.”⁹ As Rabinowitz explains, “Documentary films provide a stability to an ever-changing reality, freezing the images within their frames for later instructional use.”¹⁰ Thus, the projection of documentary serves as an ideal medium for public relations work that is explicitly engaged in reconstructing the public culture of national values.¹¹

I argue that the neo-colonial imaginary is distinct from the “imperial imaginary” in its proliferation and dependence on notions of independent nation states as equal (or equalizing) trading partners within a modern world economic system. Within this context, British oil extraction from the Arabian Gulf during the twentieth century was thus the pivotal means to national modernization.¹² In their essay, “The Imperial Imaginary,” Shohat and Stam examine the work that cinema has done in the context of Empire during the twentieth century. They write, “The dominant European/American form of cinema not only inherited and disseminated a hegemonic colonial discourse, it also created a powerful hegemony of its own through monopolistic control of film distribution and exhibition in much of Asia, Africa and the Americas. Eurocolonial cinema thus mapped history not only for domestic audiences but also for the world.”¹³ Accordingly, the imperial imaginary operated through cinema that narrated history from the colonizer’s perspective, using “programmatically negative portrayals” of the colonized to help rationalize the human price of empire.¹⁴ However, this definition is based on consideration of narrative feature films, and thus excludes the cinematic depictions of modern space and society in the context of neo-colonial British hegemony

in the Arabian Gulf region that appear in the oil documentary film archives. By highlighting the rising institutional importance of independent corporate interests and their relationship to new national governments, this dissertation contributes an analytical insight into the historic linkages between corporate public relations and documentary film as fields of neo-colonial discursive practice that were substantially developed by oil companies.

In this dissertation, the use of the term “neo-colonial” adheres to Cole and Kandiyoti’s definition of twentieth century colonialism in the Middle East, which distinguishes among periods of informal imperialism, formal colonial domination, and neo-colonialism.¹⁵ This is also in accordance with Shohat’s identification of the neo-colonial as a regeneration of formal colonialism by other means, in the sense of “broad relations of geo-economic hegemony” and associated modes of cultural production.¹⁶ In Iran, which was never formally colonized, British economic hegemony over the country’s resources worked directly through the operations of the oil company (of which the British government held the majority share). Kwame Nkrumah, the Ghanaian president who coined the term in 1965 to describe the status of postwar European hegemony in Africa, defined neo-colonialism in similar terms. He wrote, “The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside.”¹⁷ Thus, I take the neo-colonial period in Iran to be the fifty years during which British authorities dominated Iran’s economic system vis-à-vis the oil company until nationalization of the industry terminated British control over Iran’s oil in 1951.

In Iraq, formal colonial rule lasted during the mandate period, from the end of World War I until Iraq was recognized as an independent nation-state by the League of Nations. Iraq’s independence in 1932 has been described as a period of ‘informal empire’ or, in other words, an ambiguous and/or nominal condition of national sovereignty by historians who critically observe that the hegemonic British presence in the country remained in place and visible in terms of political, military, and economic authority.¹⁸ However, the new configuration of political and economic relations established between the company and the Iraqi government after the 50-50 agreement of 1951 (detailed in chapter one) inaugurated a period of British neo-colonialism, characterized most prominently by the IPC’s control over Iraq’s crude production/output, industry labor practices, and related in-country operations. It was within this context that I study how the field of British public relations emerged and operated in the Arabian Gulf as a new mode of colonial practice.

The neo-colonial imaginary of the Arabian Gulf was constituted by a corpus of public relations films and related corporate and state publications. Central to this image world was the cinematic imagery of modern cities in oil-producing states. Through these images, the films produced a novel discourse that tied the promise of urbanization and modernization in the newly defined nation-states of the Gulf region to the neo-colonial British project of oil extraction. This dissertation provides a historical account of the production of the neo-colonial imaginary of oil modernity in Gulf cities through British petroleum company public relations films in Iran and Iraq during the first half of the twentieth century. Furthermore, this dissertation is interested in how the production and distribution of these films directed at new national audiences attempted to create a

national imaginary of modern capital cities in relationship to oil. In my usage of the terms neo-colonial and national imaginaries, I argue that though clearly contingent, these evolving meanings depended not on revolutionary transformations, but on the relational assumptions of imperial geographies that newly attendant institutions (e.g. national development boards) held.

Oil Company Public Relations

Until today the relationship between oil and cities in the Arabian Gulf has been examined primarily through the analysis of architecture and urban planning practices. Chapters two and four synthesize key literature from the emergent field of research on oil urbanism in the Gulf that has resulted in a number of rich urban histories of individual cities. Over the past five years, beginning with the publication of Nelida Fuccaro's seminal 2009 *Histories of City and State*, which examines the relationship between oil and urbanization of Manama, Bahrain, the scholarship on oil cities has grown and seen significant contributions in the doctoral work of scholars in a range of disciplines.¹⁹

However, this emerging literature has yet to engage substantially with the systems of visual representation that linked oil extraction and the production of urban space during the height of British imperialism in the region to produce highly visible imagery of oil cities. This dissertation engages with the moving image archive of the British oil industry to address this gap. It examines how moving images of oil company towns and oil capitals were crafted and deployed as visible evidence of modernity in the Arabian Gulf in the films and publications that circulated among mass audiences in Britain and the oil-producing countries.

These films were, in essence, propaganda films. However, in technical and practical terms, they were the products of the public relations practices that had begun to emerge in postwar Britain. This dissertation builds on the theoretical arguments and historical work of Weaver et al and L'Etang that explain how the notion and practice of "public relations" emerged in Britain and the United States after the Second World War as a means to legitimate and professionalize the practice of information management as a means to manipulate public opinion in favor of policy decisions. Critically, they argue that public relations was defined as a field distinct from "propaganda," which had previously been practiced as a normalized aspect of British imperial communications at home and abroad during World War I. Weaver et al explain that during the interwar period, "social psychologists, political scientist, politicians, and the corporate sector saw propaganda as providing a means of engineering public opinion, controlling the masses, and reinstating social order" in the wake of the collapse of Victorian ideals and imperial hierarchies.²⁰

Jacquie L'Etang, the leading critical scholar and historian of the British public relations industry, describes propaganda as the wartime and peacetime practice of persuasion communicated through a range of media, including symbols, articles, books, literature, poetry, architecture, music, film, and posters. She defines the term as "monolithic communication on a grand scale that attempts to encompass all aspects of culture. Thus propaganda is that which affects social construction to such a degree that its assumptions are welded to the taken-for-granted norms and values of the host culture and makes it difficult for deviant views to be expressed."²¹

Propaganda became a dirty word after World War II, when it became most definitively associated with totalitarian regimes (and in particular Nazi Germany).²² Today, the word is typically reserved for use as a pejorative term to refer to the unethical “*self-interested* attempt to manipulated the behavior of others.”²³ Weaver et al explain that, “As propaganda has become increasingly discredited as an unethical tool for the manipulation of public opinion, new models of supposedly ethical persuasion have been developed. These models have attempted to notionally distance public relations from propaganda (despite early public relations theorists regarding them as one and the same thing) and provide legitimacy for the public relations profession.”²⁴

Weaver et al put forward a discursive theory of public relations that builds on Foucault’s assertion that truth and power are inextricably linked and co-constitutive.²⁵ “Discourse is the vehicle through which knowledge and truth circulate and the strategic mode by which social, political, and/or economic power is maintained or transformed.”²⁶ They contend that public relations practice is not simply the management of information, but rather the control of producing, contesting and transforming discourses that circulate in society. Public relations practitioners privilege some discourse over others, thus constructing public knowledge and public interest through the strategic production and distribution of texts that “facilitate certain socio-cultural practices and not others.”²⁷ Ultimately, they argue that it is difficult to maintain any essential and substantive difference between public relation practices and propaganda. “Public relations,” they assert, “is involved in the *attempt* to govern our discursive understanding of organizational practice” by delimiting the field of public and private discourse.²⁸

Public relations and propaganda are thus concerned with a singular objective: the contentious politics of consent. In practical terms, L’Etang describes public relations “as the practice of presenting the public face of an organization (be it a company, educational institution, hospital, or government) or individual, the articulation of its aims and objectives, and the official organizational view on issues of relevance to it.” Fundamentally, she defines the aim of this practice to be the encouragement of “target publics to engage sympathetically at emotional and intellectual levels with the organization in order to encourage publics to take on board the organisation’s point of view.” Thus, public relations can be more accurately understood as a practice of *meaning management* than the management of information.²⁹

In Nye’s study of General Electric’s (GE) photographic archive, *Image Worlds*, he argues that a corporation’s complex communication system “cannot be dismissed as a secondary or tertiary institution but must be studied as the principal instrument coordinating and harmonizing the corporation’s activities.”³⁰ Nye maintains that the images produced as part of this system “objectify the corporation’s values, presenting in concrete terms its conception of both economic and social relations.”³¹ This dissertation builds on Nye’s contention that examination of media systems, or what he refers to as corporate “image worlds,” is necessary to understand how a corporation constructs and expresses a worldview of economic, social and political realities. The image worlds of oil companies are embodied in the vast collections of film reels, stock photography, company magazines, promotional booklets, news photographs, advertisements, and trade publications they generated. These image worlds are an essential archival source of historically embedded evidence tracing the emergence of a neo-colonial imaginary of oil production in the Arabian Gulf and the practice of corporate public relations.

Oil Films in Context

The globalization of public relations through the establishment of public relations offices in corporations was not limited to the British petroleum companies in the Arabian Gulf. Nonetheless, these visible efforts to govern the national discourse of oil extraction in the region are instructive cases for understanding the emergence of neo-colonial practices that linked foreign corporate interests with local state agendas in the wake of British imperial domination. In this regard, British oil company public relations in the Arabian Gulf might indeed be read as thinly veiled reincarnations of colonial propaganda disseminated throughout the British Empire. However, I argue that while the neo-colonial was dependent on the assumption of imperial geography, it also required the construction of new institutions, forms of power, and engagement with a broader array of relevant subjectivities. In *Film and the End of Empire*, Grieveson discusses the British imperial effort to ‘project the State’ to its colonies through a network of colonial film units, theatrical and non-theatrical distribution circuits, and mobile cinema vans in remote areas, which flourished after the Second World War and confronted illiterate audiences with colonial propaganda for the first time. He writes that, “All these efforts were predicated on ideas about the utility of cinema for engineering consent and managing the conduct of diverse populations.”³²

At the same time, as Patrick Russell notes in *Shadows of Progress: Documentary Film in Post-War Britain*, the emergence of sponsored industrial films after the war was promulgated not by colonial units alone. Indeed, he emphasizes, “no sector of society made more enthusiastic use of the sponsored film than the oil companies; no medium was more enthusiastically embraced by them than the documentary film, and so nobody interested in the relationship of media to society can afford to leave the post-war oil documentary out of its history.”³³ What distinguishes the public relations filmmaking practices in the context of postcolonial oil-producing nation-states in the Arabian Gulf is that the films operated simultaneously as corporate and state propaganda that made the cities and urban populations of the region highly visible to mass audiences in Europe and the Middle East for the first time in history.

Indeed, the late 1940s marked the simultaneous rise of postcolonial nation-states in the Middle East and the rise of the oil industry during the Second World War fueled by the British decision to switch Royal Navy fleet from coal power to petroleum. This marked a historical moment when oil companies had to operate on new terms and communicate with national subjects (i.e. citizens) as opposed to heads of state alone. This dissertation aims to reveal the bold yet stumbling beginnings of oil company public relations practice in the context of nation building in the Arabian Gulf. Using oil company towns, capital cities, and documentary film as a canvas to reinvent the so-called orient in a neo-colonial imaginary, the British petroleum companies, namely Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) and Iraq Petroleum Company, crafted and controlled nationally and globally visible images of modern cities in the Arabian Gulf. The spatial and discursive fields of public relations and nation building worked to link urban modernity to oil extraction in narratives that circulated among mass audiences in Europe and the Middle East.

Scholars of Iranian cinema have produced rich histories and analytical debates related to the national, transnational and diasporic contexts of film production.³⁴ Most recently, Hamid Naficy’s four-volume tome, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*, has

contributed the most comprehensive chronicle of Iran's film history. In the first volume, Naficy details the contribution of the films made about Iran by the British oil company as part of the broad history of cinema produced in Iran since 1897.³⁵ While, the context of the existing study of AIOC films is limited to a national scope, this dissertation places existing knowledge of these oil films in dialogue with broader regional politics of oil and representation in the Arabian Gulf during the first half of the twentieth century. Namely, it considers how the British oil company documentaries made in and about Iran for English and elite Persian audiences both challenged and reinforced the existing colonial imaginary of the so-called orient. Further, it argues that these films embodied the first approach of British oil companies in the region to public relations, which failed to communicate with the citizens of Iran. The move to nationalize the oil industry in 1951 marked a decisive change in this approach by British companies in the Gulf region. This is most clearly observed in the work of the Iraq Petroleum Company film unit's emphasizing Arabic language production and distribution throughout Iraq.

In contrast to the abundant scholarship on Iranian film, relatively little work exists documenting the history of Iraqi cinema or engaging in critical analyses of the films.³⁶ The first publication to examine the film industry from the consumption and distribution perspective is Jacob M. Landau's *Studies in the Arab Theater and Cinema* (1958), which details the status of cinemas in Iraq by 1950. The most comprehensive and recent study of the history of film production in Iraq is Shakir Nouri's book, *A la Recherche du Cinema Irakien: Histoire, Infrastructure, Filmographie* (1986), and his booklet, *Aspects of the Irakian Cinema*, which was published by the Iraqi Cinematic Bureau in English and French.³⁷ These document the forty years history of film production in Iraq since 1945 when the "Information Centre on Theatre and Cinema" was first established in Baghdad through a private initiative.³⁸ Unlike Naficy's history, these chronologies do not include the work of oil company film units.³⁹ This dissertation fills this lacuna by examining the work the Iraq Petroleum Company film unit, which produced and circulated the earliest moving pictures of modern cities in Iraq to mass audiences, and weighing its role in the production of a national imaginary during the 1950s. Furthermore, this dissertation is the first to document and assess the role of the Iraq Petroleum Company in the context of the development of Iraq's cinematic history.⁴⁰

This history fits into a corpus of recent work on "oil culture" or "petro-culture" that has been established largely by scholars in Canada and the United States over the past three years and expanded to include contributions from scholars in Nigeria, Venezuela, and other key oil-producing regions.⁴¹ Oil culture is generally defined as "the broad field of cultural representations and symbolic forms that have taken shape around the fugacious material of oil in the 150 years since the inception of the US petroleum industry."⁴² Szeman, Worden and others have given particular attention to raising questions of the ways in which films work to construct the 'problem of oil' for global audiences. This literature provides rich case studies of contemporary independent documentary films and popular Hollywood feature films from the 1950s onwards.⁴³ However, a historical study of the cultural production of petroleum company films has yet to be addressed.

This dissertation contributes a historical perspective to this literature that will better define the relationships between the oil industry and documentary filmmaking in the twentieth century. Indeed, as chapter one will show, Shell and its contemporaries

were largely responsible for the globalization of the British documentary film movement. The films that resulted from this movement in the context of oil company public relations in oil-producing countries circulated vivid images of modern urban planning and architecture in oil company towns and capital cities to audiences throughout oil-producing countries as evidence that these nation-states were plugged into the modern world.

Oil company towns and capital cities were the major sites where the mechanization of labor practices, the modernization of the built environment, and the transformation of modern society took shape in the Arabian Gulf. Millions around the world watched oil company public relations films made for educational and entertainment purposes over the course of the twentieth century. The films made explicitly for the citizens of oil producing countries were fundamental to making men and women in oil-producing countries aware of themselves as modern subjects. Visible evidence of the nation state, the city and the citizen was projected to mass audiences for the first time in the screenings of oil company films in major cities and remote sites of oil extraction across the region.

Overview of Methods

There are, one might say, three intersected layers to be prised apart in visual events...These are the locality of the viewer, the contents and contexts of the image, and the global imaginary within which the viewer attempts to make sense of the screen-images. [...] During the invasion of Iraq from March to May 2003, it seems likely that there were more images produced – whether on television, as photography or on the Internet – than in any other comparable period of history. There is a need to engage in some extended visual thinking about what all that watching meant.

— Nicholas Mierzoff⁴⁴

The screening of oil films to audiences in Britain, Iran, and Iraq constituted visual events, which as Mierzoff proposes, require several levels of analysis to parse. This dissertation does not deal with media content strictly as text, but rather seeks to understand how the content and context of oil film distribution chartered configurations of national audiences. The way in which Mierzoff writes of the “global imaginary” divides media content from its context. I argue that the context of nation building was being actively produced through the content of oil company films. Put differently, I am concerned here with how the neo-colonial imaginary of the modern Arabian Gulf was being produced through the emerging field of public relations and screen-images projected to viewers. I am not presuming a particular effect of this projection. This dissertation examines the work that the neo-colonial imaginary attempted to accomplish, how the imaginary failed, and how it was shaped dynamic relations of power and politics among the oil companies, states, and national populations. Additionally, I am interested in the work that oil company public relations officers, filmmakers, government agencies did to establish new fields of intervention.

Oil films are further understood as part of the repertoire of expert practices that constituted the modern transformation of real cities in oil-producing countries in the Gulf. In *Cinematic Urbanism: A History of the Modern from Reel to Real*, AlSayyad offers “a

history of modernity and postmodernity by focusing on the city in cinema as the primary medium of investigation. In this regard, cinematic space is employed both as an analytical tool and an object of critique: the city, real and reel, experienced and perceived, is both the medium and the subject of the book.⁴⁵ Similarly, this dissertation uses an approach that aims to interrogate the making of the modern Gulf city in oil films. It also analyses cinema as an integral part of the experience of urban modernity in the context of postcolonial nation building. In this respect, this dissertation builds on the work of Clarke on Impressionist painting, Berman on literature, and AlSayyad on cinema, which all take the view that the artistic form “is inseparable from its content,” namely, the city.⁴⁶

Beyond visual and textual analysis of oil films, this dissertation presents histories of the filmmaking, architectural, and urban planning practices and major figures that shaped the making of the modern city in the Arabian Gulf. As a key precedent for this work, Larkin’s *Signal and Noise: Media Culture and Urban Infrastructure in Nigeria* is an anthropological study and socio-spatial history of radio and cinema that focuses on the city as the primary site for understanding cultural and political transformations in Nigeria. In addition to presenting a regional context for urban change in the oil company towns and capital cities of the region, this dissertation focuses on in-depth analysis of oil films and public relations practices in the two central case studies of Iran and Iraq. As will be detailed below, these case studies are based on the films, related trade publications, interview transcripts, and internal documents in the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and the Iraq Petroleum Company archives as well as a number of original interviews conducted by the author.

The historical material provided in chapters one, three and five are the result of twelve months of archival research and interviews conducted in London and Coventry in the United Kingdom. The untapped and disparate collection of British oil films comprise a substantive corpus of visual content that is supplemented by archived files of company and state publications, trade publications, newspaper articles, files of documentation related to film productions, and public relations office correspondences. The film archive includes Iraq Petroleum Company films housed in their original format by the British Film Institute in London, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company films housed in original format and digitized by the British Petroleum Video Library in London, and public relations files of correspondences, film scripts, treatments, production notes, and internal reports stored in the British Petroleum Company Archive in Coventry.

Film Centre, the major consulting group that oversaw the production of oil films in the Arabian Gulf region, dissolved in the 1970s and its collection of films and related materials were “thinned out” and absorbed into the archives of British Petroleum and Film Index.⁴⁷ Further substantiating the archive in textual documentation are film trade periodicals stored at the British Film Institute, as well as a limited number of Iraqi state propaganda and government records housed at the British Library. I also consulted the UK National Archive for files related to the Iraq Development Board’s planning and policy decisions made in direct consultation with the British Foreign Office and general information on the dissemination of public relations films in the Middle East after World War Two.

Indeed, despite the richness of this unique and visually abundant archive, it is riddled with holes. There are numerous films, files, and publications that are altogether

absent or have gone “missing” from the archives. This condition presents certain limitations for the analyses presented here. The archive is particularly limited in its ability to address questions related to the distribution and reception of the oil films, particularly in the context of Iran and Iraq. This dissertation uses all available documentation of the distribution and reception of the IPC films in Iraq, which comes largely from reporting done by the company for internal reference as well as and publicity.⁴⁸ Additionally, I have conducted a number of interviews with filmmakers and public relations officials who worked during the period in order to address these inherent gaps. I use existing documentation of the general colonial and corporate practices of film distribution to the colonies and “developing nations” to pose hypotheses about the importance of these films’ contributions to the construction of a shared national imaginary of oil modernity.

While this project sheds light on previously unexamined and fascinating corners of the British archive that deal with the twentieth century history of the Arabian Gulf, it undoubtedly encounters similar limitations as previous historical work on the region. Many of the foundational historical research conducted on Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, and other oil producing states in the Arabian Gulf to date has relied heavily on British colonial, state and corporate archives.⁴⁹ In part, this can be attributed to the relative consistency and accessibility of archives created as a result of the meticulous practices of documentation used in the context of British imperialism and corporate oversight. Yet, though the British archives are most often well organized and available for public or scholarly use, there are significant problems with transparency in regards to the question of the politics of curatorial practices that dictate what has been included in the archive and what has not. Lack of personal access to archives inside Iran and Iraq has limited the scope of this research to what has been included in the archives; however, that which is available provides a significant amount of original primary source material, mostly in English and occasionally in Arabic, that provides evidence for the historical accounts presented here.

Finally, this dissertation draws together the recent work of urban and architectural historians on the production of space in oil company towns and the capitals of oil-producing states in the Arabian Gulf (Figure 1.2). In chapters two and four, I present an analysis of the transformation of space and society in oil company towns and capital cities of oil-producing nation states based on these rich yet discreet urban histories. Placing this new scholarship in conversation with key literature from urban studies, I aim to clarify, first, how these cities emerged as the primary sites of urban modernity across the Arabian Gulf region, and second, how they related to the global contexts of imperialism, capitalism, and modernism. These in-depth studies of urbanization in the region are in dialogue with the oil films, in that they allow a better understanding of how oil films also contributed to the making of these modern cities—crafting highly visible images of urban life and space.

Structure of the Dissertation

The subsequent five chapters weave historical inquiry together with filmic analysis in order to better understand the constitutive relationships among oil industry, nation building, urbanization, and modern society in Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Chapter one frames the case studies presented in subsequent chapters. It provides a historical account of the emergence of a political landscape of oil extraction

and the associated practice of public relations in the Arabian Gulf dominated by British and American interests. At the heart of this chapter is an observation of the discursive shift from British imperial propaganda to corporate public relations; in other words, the ways in which the image of British “enterprise” was crafted in the context of neo-colonial corporate and state hegemony in the region. Considering that the British government was the majority shareholder of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, oil extraction continued to be an obvious extension of colonial practices carried out by the same players at the helm of the British state. The instruments of rule over local populations and mechanisms for socially engineering consent of the British public were being actively construed in terms of the emerging professional corporate practice of “public relations” as discussed above.

Chapter two presents an analysis of the British oil company towns that were the earliest sites of modern architectural and town planning practices in the Arabian Gulf. This chapter contributes a new perspective to the current literature on company towns, which until now has focused on the spatial practices of corporate paternalism and Jim Crow policies almost exclusively in the American and European context.⁵⁰ Indeed, British oil company towns are more similar to colonial cities, such as New Delhi and Algiers, which Rabinow contends served as laboratories for modern planning practices that sought to control populations.⁵¹ British petroleum companies worked to manage populations and engineer consent through the production of segregated residential enclaves for ex-patriot employees and migrant and local workers. In fact, the initial planning of oil company towns was modeled on Lutyen’s design for colonial New Delhi. As the chapter shows, British petroleum companies in Iran, Iraq and Kuwait commissioned the same architect, James M. Wilson, who was trained directly under Lutyens to draw up the designs of their major company towns.

The chapter focuses on the attempt by oil companies to manage the demands of national populations (and in particular local workers) using planning and the production of exceptional spaces in the oil company town using case studies of the British oil company towns of Abadan in Iran, Kirkuk in Iraq, Ahmadi in Kuwait, and Awali in Bahrain. These case studies draw attention to efforts by the oil companies to use the built environment as a tool of public relations. They aimed to address the fractures and failings of top-down segregation through the introduction of new enclaves for indigenous company employees that mimicked the quality of life in the white enclaves. Ultimately, as the subsequent chapter examines in detail, these exceptional spaces were fundamental to the production of images of the city that positively linked oil extraction to urbanization and the modernization of oil-producing countries.

Chapter three examines the earliest approaches to documentary filmmaking in Iran that the Anglo Iranian Oil Company established between 1926 and 1952. Anglo-Iranian’s oil films were used to reinvent the imaginary of the orient using cinematic vocabularies of urban modernity. It is perhaps no surprise then that in the three major documentary productions examined in this chapter, the oil company town of Abadan is central to the narrative. However, in contrast to the realist documentary movement budding in Britain under the influence of John Grierson’s vision of film as a tool for social democratic education (as discussed in chapter one), the films produced in the context of neo-colonial oil extraction in the Arabian Gulf rendered invisible the most complex aspects of urban space and society in the oil company town of Abadan.

This image of the oil company town linked the promise of modernization of Persian space and society to the extraction of oil, facilitated by British enterprise. This was circulated primarily to the British public, as a means to normalize the efforts of “Great British Enterprise” in Iran as vital to modern life at home. The films begin and end with the premise that, in the first place, Britain needs oil, and, in the second place, the Persians need to be modernized. Oil extraction is represented in terms of its power to civilize and modernize Persians. In this sense, the films further mark a kind of departure from the typical orientalist depictions of backwards Eastern society in oil paintings and literature that had previously and contemporaneously shaped the British colonial imaginary of the so-called orient.

In *Oil for Aladdin's Lamp*, Shell's use of the hackneyed orientalist trope of the genie in the lamp worked as a simple means to juxtapose the imaginary of a timeless and backwards orient to the practical and rational modernity of the west. However, in Iran, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company had established the world's largest oil refinery in operation.⁵² The company was invested in demonstrating to the British public through the use of film, that oil was changing the face of the orient. AIOC's *Persian Story* set out to capture, what they called, “the most sympathetic” images of Persians as modern and urban subjects as visual evidence that the country was modernizing thanks to oil.

Regarding the AIOC documentaries, Naficy notes, “the overseas operations of these film units were inspired by John Grierson's famed film units,” and therefore suggests that, “because of their commitment to the realist documentary form and to a socialist viewpoint, they could potentially erode the conventions of entertainment movies and the stereotypical views of non-Western worlds that Hollywood dream factories were propagating.”⁵³ However, he concludes that any effort to do so ultimately failed. As chapter three will show, these earliest films depicting modernization in Iran ultimately relied on the narrative of westernization that reinforced the false dichotomy of so-called eastern tradition and western modernity.

If oil company towns were the initial sites of modern architecture and planning in the Arabian Gulf, then the capitals of Baghdad, Kuwait City, Manama, and Doha were the first cities where Arab states used oil revenues from British extraction to shape the architectural and urban identity of the modern nation. Chapter four examines how the international language of modernist architecture and planning arrived and worked to shape the capital cities of oil producing nation states of the Arabian Gulf following the wave of 50-50 agreements established between newly independent states and the British oil companies from 1951. During the 1950s and 1960s, national governments in the region established development boards responsible for channeling new oil wealth into national infrastructure and planning projects. By the 1950s, the public relations aspect of development board work was evident in urban design and architecture projects that were directed at creating modern capital cities. International firms were commissioned to create landmark buildings and master plans that would to define the image of the oil producing nation states of Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar as modern. Indeed, as the chapter shows, the top down principles of CIAM that shaped the modernist capital of Brasilia played out on a rather different stage in the context of the Arabian Gulf. These modernist architectural practices further entered these Arab states into an international discourse on modernism in relationship to nation building. James Holston's critique of

Brasilia illuminates the paradoxes of the linked teleological conceptions of nation building, high modernist city planning and architectural formalism.⁵⁴

The documentary films produced and circulated by British oil companies in the early to mid-twentieth century set out to reinvent the image of cities in the Arabian Gulf in order to establish a clear and indisputable link between oil extraction and the modernization of the young oil producing states of the region. In his own words, Michael Clarke, the director of the Iraq Petroleum Company's (IPC) first documentary, wrote "in making *The Third River* we were faced with Iraq as it is, not with the luscious and cloying luxuries of a Hollywood gorgeous east."⁵⁵ Chapter five examines the imaginaries of the modern oil city of Baghdad constructed in the documentary films sponsored and produced by the British-controlled Iraq Petroleum Company in the 1950s. These were the first moving images of Baghdad to be filmed on location in the city and were circulated widely among general audiences in Britain, Iraq and the Middle East.

These documentaries were the first oil company sponsored films that were deliberately planned to communicate between the company and the "public" in Iraq. In this regard, these films mark a critical shift in the evolution of public relations practices in the context of the collapse of the British Empire. Oil films in Iraq offered the citizens of the newly independent nation-state the earliest moving images of the modern capital city, framed by the successful extraction of oil from the Kirkuk fields. Indeed the three oil films in chapter five portray the built environment in Baghdad as the most visible evidence of petroleum's potential to transform and modernize the nation-state and its citizens as a whole. The narrative of petroleum's promise is the very premise that shaped the neo-colonial imaginary of oil cities in the Arabian Gulf during the twentieth century. This dissertation aims to excavate the co-constitutive spatial and discursive practices that worked to build the foundations of the modern world, as we know it, shaped by the abundance of oil from the Arabian Gulf.



Figure 1.1 Stills from *Oil for Aladdin's Lamp*, 1949.



Figure 1.2 Map showing location of oil cities in the Arabian Gulf region that are examined in this dissertation.

¹ Andrew Pendakis and Sheena Wilson, "Sight, Site, Cite: Oil in the Field of Vision," *Imaginations* 3, no. 2 (2012), 4.

² See Lee Grieveson and Colin MacCabe, and British Film Institute, *Empire and Film* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Peter Limbrick, *Making Settler Cinemas: film and colonial encounters in the United States, Australia, and New Zealand* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Peter J. Bloom, *French Colonial Documentary: mythologies of humanitarianism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: media, infrastructure, and urban culture in Nigeria* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

³ Lee Grieveson, "The Cinema and the (Common) Wealth of Nations," in *Empire and Film*, eds. Lee Grieveson and Colin MacCabe (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 73.

⁴ Patrick Russell and James P. Taylor, *Shadows of Progress: documentary film in post-war Britain* (London: British Film Institute, 2010), 3-7.

⁵ Several works of historical scholarship have been essential in laying the groundwork for the critical questions about emergence of corporate sponsorship of British documentary films after the great world wars of the early twentieth century and the relationship of that work to the political geographies of postcolonial nation-building. These are Russell and Taylor, *Shadows of Progress*; Vinzenz Hediger and Patrick Vonderau, *Films that Work: industrial film and the productivity of media* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009); Lee Grieveson and Colin MacCabe, *Film and the End of Empire* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

⁶ See Wallace Stegner, *Discovery: the search for Arabian oil* (Beirut, Lebanon: Middle East Export Press, 1971); Ronald W. Ferrier and James H. Bamberg, *The History of the British Petroleum Company* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000 [1982]); Joost Jonker, J. L. van Zanden, Stephen Howarth, and K. E. Sluyterman, *A History of Royal Dutch Shell* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁷ See Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: nature, money, and modernity in Venezuela* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Michael Watts, "Petro-Violence: Community, Extraction, and Political Ecology of a Mythic Commodity," in *Violent Environments*, eds. Nancy Peluso and Michael Watts, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Robert Vitalis, *America's Kingdom: mythmaking on the Saudi oil frontier* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2007); Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: political power in the age of oil* (London: Verso, 2011).

⁸ Recent cultural studies and anthropological work on the question of oil have been limited yet significant in initiating this field of inquiry. This scholarship includes Miguel Tinker Salas, *The Enduring Legacy: oil, culture, and society in Venezuela* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Mandana Limbert, *In the Time of Oil: piety, memory, and social life in an Omani town* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2010); Andrea Behrends, Stephen P. Reyna, and Günther Schlee, *Crude Domination: an anthropology of oil* (New York: Beghahn Books, 2011); Nelida Fuccaro, "Shaping the Urban Life of Oil in Bahrain: Consumerism, Leisure and Public Communication in Manama and in the Oil Camps, 1932-1960s," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 33, no. 1 (2013).

⁹ See Lee Grieveson, "Introduction," *Film and the End of Empire*, 4.

¹⁰ Paula Rabinowitz, *They Must be Represented: the politics of documentary* (London: Verso, 1994), 17.

¹¹ The imaginary is procesual and includes technological and discursive representational components in varied attempts to assemble and institutionalize modes of communication, rationality, and stabilized social interests.

¹² Sassen argues that such processes of building national economies within imperial geographies were necessarily transformations to assemblages of territory, authority and rights. These transformations, then, required “the work of making the institutional, legal, discursive, ideational, and other capabilities required for implementing world-scale operations.” Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 90.

¹³ Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: multiculturalism and the media*, (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 103.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁵ Juan R. I. Cole and Deniz Kandiyoti, “Nationalism and the Colonial Legacy in the Middle East and Central Asia: introduction,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34 (2002), 190.

¹⁶ Ella Shohat, ‘Notes on the “Post-Colonial,”’ *Social Text*, no. 31/32 (1992): 107.

¹⁷ Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-colonialism: the last stage of imperialism* (New York: International Publishers, 1965).

¹⁸ See, Majid Khadduri, *Independent Iraq, 1932-1958: a study in Iraqi politics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960); Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 77; Daniel Silverfarb, *Britain’s Informal Empire in the Middle East: a case study of Iraq, 1929-1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: the failure of nation-building and a history denied* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq: contriving king and country* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007) 211.

¹⁹ See Farah Al-Nakib, “Kuwait City: urbanisation, the built environment, and the urban experience before and after oil (1716-1986),” (PhD diss., School of Oriental and African Studies, 2011); Reem Alissa, “Building for Oil: corporate colonialism, nationalism and urban modernity in Ahmadi, 1946-1992,” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2012); Arbella Bet-Shilmon, “Kirkuk 1918-1968: oil and the politics of identity in an Iraqi city,” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2012).

²⁰ C. Kay Weaver, Judy Motion, and Juliet Roper, “From Propaganda to Discourse (and Back Again): Truth, Power, the Public Interest, and Public Relations,” in *Public Relations: Critical Debates and Contemporary Practice*, ed. Jacquie L’Etang (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 9.

²¹ Jacquie L’Etang, “Public Relations and Propaganda: Conceptual Issues, Methodological Problems, and Public Relations Discourse,” in *Public Relations: Critical Debates and Contemporary Practice*, ed. Jacquie L’Etang (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 24.

²² For a thorough comparative study of British and German propaganda during this period and literature review of related debates see Jo Fox, *Film Propaganda in Britain and Nazi Germany: World War II Cinema* (Oxford: Berg, 2007).

²³ Weaver et al, "From Propaganda to Discourse," 12, emphasis in original; also see Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992), as cited by Weaver et al.

²⁴ Ibid, 13; also see the definition of public relations practice in James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt, *Managing Public Relations* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1984) as a two-way symmetrical communication model, which assumes, as Weaver et al (14) explain, "an organization will engage with the public to assess what courses of action will work to benefit *both* the organization and the public. Responding to public opinion may require that substantive changes are made to decisions about organizational direction and objectives."

²⁵ See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1972).

²⁶ Weaver et al, "From Propaganda to Discourse," 19.

²⁷ Judy Motion and Shirley Leitch, "A discursive perspective from New Zealand: Another world view," *Public Relations Review* 22, no. 3 (1996), 299.

²⁸ Weaver et al, "From Propaganda to Discourse," 20, emphasis added.

²⁹ Jacquie L'Etang, *Public Relations in Britain: a history of professional practice in the twentieth century* (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), 2-3.

³⁰ David E. Nye, *Image Worlds: corporate identities at General Electric, 1890-1930* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1985), 5.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Lee Grieveson, "Introduction," *Film and the End of Empire*, 4.

³³ Russell and Taylor, *Shadows of Progress*, 88.

³⁴ See Hamid Dabashi, *Close Up: Iranian cinema, past, present, and future* (London: Verso, 2001); Richard Tapper, *The New Iranian Cinema: politics, representation and identity* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002); Negar Mottahedeh, *Displaced Allegories: post-revolutionary Iranian cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad, *The Politics of Iranian Cinema: film and society in the Islamic Republic* (London: Routledge, 2010); Christopher Gow, *From Iran to Hollywood and some places in-between: reframing post-revolutionary Iranian cinema* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011); Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*, Volumes 1-4 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011-2012).

³⁵ See Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*.

³⁶ This is despite the numerous collections and books written on "Arab" or "Middle Eastern" Cinema, which focus on Egyptian, Algerian, Moroccan, Lebanese and Palestinian filmmaking with no or minor attention to the history of cinema in Gulf countries, including Iraq. See, for example, Lina Khatib, *Filming the Modern Middle East: politics in the cinemas of Hollywood and the Arab world* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006); Viola Shafik, *Arab Cinema: history and cultural identity* (Cairo, Egypt: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007); Gonul Donmez-Colin, *The Cinema of North Africa and the Middle East* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007); Josef Gugler, *Film in the Middle East and North Africa: creative dissidence* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011).

³⁷ Shaakir Nouri, *A la Recherche du Cinéma Irakien: histoire, infrastructure, filmographie, 1945-1985* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986); Shakir Nouri and The General Establishment for Cinema and Theatre, *Aspects of the Irakian Cinema* (Baghdad, Iraq:

Iraqi Cinematic Bureau); Nouri's work focuses on the production of feature films in Iraq's private and public sectors, especially after the 1958 July Revolution.

³⁸ See Jacob M. Landau, *Studies in the Arab theater and cinema* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1958), 4-6; Landou notes that the first production house, the "Baghdad Studio," was set up in 1948 "boast[ing] the most modern equipment in the Arab world." However, the commercial films that resulted during the late 1940s – including *Cairo-Baghdad* (1945), *Son of Orient* (1945), and *Alia and Issam* (1948) – were exclusively co-productions with regional studios. Thus, Landou writes, these "circumstances account for the fact that those years of production do not really have any local characteristics and are under the influence of more developed cinemas, such as the Lebanese and, above all, the Egyptian." Also see film chronology index in Nouri, *A la Recherche du Cinéma Irakien*, 223.

³⁹ This dissertation is the first to highlight the fact that some of Iraq's best-known filmmakers began their careers in the Iraq Petroleum Company film unit, including Muhammad Shukri Jameel, Simon Mehran, Abdul Latif Saleh, Yehyeh Faiq and Kerim Mejjid. Notably, several films directed by Muhamad Shukri Jameel, who edited several episodes of IPC's cine-magazine, *Beladuna*, are extensively documented and commented upon by Nouri. Two of Jameel's most famous films are *The Thirsting* (1972) and *The Walls* (1979), which are historical fiction films in which he has blended newsreel footage and narrative film techniques to convey commentaries on relevant social and political problems in Iraq. See Nouri, *Aspects of Irakien Cinema*, 30, 32.

⁴⁰ See Hakki Chelbi, "History of the Iraqi Cinema," In *The Cinema in the Arab Countries: anthology prepared for UNESCO*, ed. Georges Sadoul (Beirut: Interarab Centre of Cinema & Television, 1966), 118; Chelbi mentions the documentaries of the Iraq Petroleum Company, but provides no detail or information about the involvement of Iraqi filmmakers, content of the films, or distribution in Iraq or elsewhere.

⁴¹ See Imre Szeman, "The Cultural Politics of Oil: On *Lessons of Darkness* and *Black Sea Files*" *Polygraph* 22 (2010), 33-45; Ross Barrett and Daniel Worden, "Oil Culture: Guest Editors' Introduction," *Journal of American Studies* 46 (2012), 269-272; Robert Lifset and Brian C. Black, "Imaging the 'Devil's Excrement': Big Oil in Petroleum Cinema, 1940-2007," *Journal of American History* 99, no. 1 (2012): 135-144; Pendakis and Wilson, "Sight, Site, Cite," 4-5 (see entire issue).

⁴² Barrett and Worden, "Oil Culture," 269.

⁴³ Oil films discussed in this literature include recent films like *Crude* (2009) and *There Will Be Blood* (2007), as well as older films including *Giant* (1956) and *The Formula* (1980).

⁴⁴ Nicholas Mierzoff, *Watching Babylon: the war in Iraq and global visual culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 12.

⁴⁵ Nezar AlSayyad, *Cinematic Urbanism: a history of the modern from reel to real* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 4.

⁴⁶ T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the art of Manet and his followers* (New York: Knopf, 1985), 5.

⁴⁷ Steven Foxon, "Film Centre (United Kingdom)," in *Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film*, ed. Ian Aitken (New York; London: Routledge, 2006), 413.

⁴⁸ See A.E. Jeakins, "Filming Round the World: Talk by Sir Arthur Elton," *Cine-*

Technician 22 (1956), 136; “The Future of Public Relations within the IPC Group of Companies” (1966) British Petroleum Archive Reference (hereafter “BP”) 162027; “Welcome to a New User: The Iraq Petroleum Co.,” *Film User* (January 1953), 47; “Film Premiers in Iraq: ‘Our Land and Our King’,” *Iraq Petroleum* 3, no. 5 (December 1953), 36.

⁴⁹ The major exception is Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary movements of Iraq: a study of Iraq's old landed and commercial classes and of its Communists, Ba 'thists, and Free Officers* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978), which is based on extensive access to and use of Iraqi state archives.

⁵⁰ See John S. Garner, *The Company Town: architecture and society in the early industrial age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Margaret Crawford, *Building the workingman's paradise: the design of American company towns* (London: Verso, 1995).

⁵¹ Rabinow writes of French colonial planning in Algeria, “The colonies constituted a laboratory of experimentation for new arts of government capable of brining a modern and healthy society into being.” Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: norms and forms of the social environment* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989), 289.

⁵² The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company was originally named the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, and was later known at British Petroleum.

⁵³ Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema, vol. 1, the artisanal era, 1897-1941* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 186.

⁵⁴ James Holston, *The Modernist City: an anthropological critique of Brasilia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

⁵⁵ Michael Clarke, “Making ‘The Third River’” *Iraq Petroleum* 2, no. 5 (1952), 14.

Chapter One

The Rise of British Oil Company Public Relations

[It] is simplistic to understand oil merely as money and rent...The almost 'supernatural' properties attributed to the black gold have also been able to generate competing myths and realities of the modern world and urban living, often contributing to popularise different discourses about states, nations and progress. In other words, the far-reaching effects of oil and its very persuasive discursive qualities have mobilised a multitude of actors at different historical junctures.

—Nelida Fuccaro¹

No sector of society made more enthusiastic use of the sponsored film than the oil companies; no medium was more enthusiastically embraced by them than the documentary film, and so nobody interested in the relationship of media to society can afford to leave the post-war oil documentary out of its history.

—Patrick Russell and James P. Taylor²

The colonized world witnessed a pivotal moment in British foreign policy language at the outset of World War II. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued the Atlantic Charter in 1941 as a framework for more equitable objectives in postwar geo-politics. It outlined eight principles, including respect of all peoples' right to self-government and a condemnation of territorial aggrandizement, which catalyzed a fundamental shift in the language of imperialism. Despite initial resistance to the notion that the language of self-determination outlined in the Charter could apply to its colonies, Britain was eventually pushed to morph its longstanding doctrine of direct colonial rule into a paternalistic posture, fostering so-called developing countries and colonies towards independence.³ The age of naked British Empire was collapsing.

The United Nations was established after the Second World War as an international organization of Allied countries, officially advocating the right to democratic self-rule as a new global norm.⁴ The powerful regimes of Britain and the United States employed novel and creative tactics to guarantee continued control over key resources and raw materials that were abundant in colonized territories. Oil above all became central to this story. In *Carbon Democracy*, Mitchell explains, “a wartime battle for a more democratic control of imperialism and the acquisition of raw materials, fought by the European left, was translated into an undemocratic machinery for producing ‘the consent of the governed’.”⁵ This paradox characterized the history of oil extraction by British controlled oil companies in the Arabian Gulf during the first half of the twentieth century.

Building on Mitchell's critique, this chapter examines the shifting political relationships and public relations discourses of oil exploration and extraction in the Arabian Gulf during the early twentieth century. The central aim of this chapter is to illuminate a shift in the approach of British imperial power from that of brute Empire towards benevolent enterprise in the context of a rapidly growing oil industry. The later part of the chapter presents a history of how oil company public relations emerged to

address this discursive shift and the need to justify the neo-colonial project of oil extraction from the Gulf region.

During the rise of Arab nationalism in light of political events including the Israeli occupation of Palestine, Arab-Israeli Wars and the Suez Crisis, the discontent of oil workers was bolstered by the mounting criticism of petroleum companies as harbingers of British imperialism in oil-producing countries. From the late 1940s onwards, the production of publications and documentary films, showcasing cities as representations of the promise of modernity, dominated the efforts of oil company public relations offices from Iran to Kuwait. This chapter shows how British petroleum companies used shifting public relations strategies that would craft a new imaginary of oil premised on narrative of urbanization and modernization in the Arabian Gulf.

British Imperialism and Oil in the Arabian Gulf

European and U.S. oil companies' efforts to control and manage the flow of global petroleum reserves at all costs throughout in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were fundamental in shaping postcolonial power relations and transforming the map of the modern world. In the wake of the British Empire's decline and new agendas espousing self-determination in former colonies, imperial discourses of paternalism were reproduced as promises of progress for the mandates and nation-states born out of World War I. In the Arabian Gulf, British and U.S. control of oil resources was dependent on maintaining the strategic arrangements of political, economic and socio-cultural landscapes in the region that it had crafted during negotiations at San Remo in 1920.

In the case of the Middle East, the geography British oil concessions encircling the Arabian Gulf region cannot be understood apart from the political map that emerged after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, and the special postcolonial relations that continue to characterize much of the region today. A history of the negotiations, concessions, and lines drawn by British and U.S. companies in the Gulf is fundamental to the story of neo-colonial practices of oil extraction. The following overview serves as a background to addressing the question of how these oil companies shaped urban life and the built environment in oil-producing countries.

At the close of the 19th century, Royal Dutch Shell and Standard Oil of California (SOCAL) dominated global oil extraction and petroleum markets. Speculation among oil prospectors that great "lakes" of oil lay beneath the desert regions surrounding the Arabian Gulf coincided with Churchill's decision that the British Navy would switch from coal-based fuel to petroleum.⁶ Prevailing scholarship on the history of oil, championed by Daniel Yergin (1991), suggests that Churchill's decision was a fundamental catalyst for oil pioneers to set off for the isolated deserts of Arabia and Persia in a race for the prize of petroleum.⁷ However, in a recent intervention, Mitchell contends that European and U.S. companies' ongoing quest for oil concessions in the Middle East was driven primarily by the desire to block the competing interests' access to major potential petroleum reserves and restrict oil development as a means to secure profits. Mitchell frames the history of oil exploration in the Middle East according to the intention of major firms and associated governments to abate any threat of overproduction and traces a detailed history of rival firms seeking control to obstruct the development of oil.⁸ Thus, the real prize sought after by British and U.S. companies was not the rich developed oil fields that Yergin describes, but the power to determine who

can and cannot explore, exploit and build pipelines in Gulf countries where petroleum was predicted to exist in nearly limitless quantities.

Britain's formal entry in the race for control over crude oil in the region can be marked in 1901 when the British millionaire William Knox D'Arcy acquired a sixty-year concession from the Imperial Qajar Shah of Persia to explore and exploit crude in exchange for 20,000 GBP and 16% of future profits.⁹ Crucially, the concession included an agreement that the Shah would not permit any other company to build a pipeline through his country to gain access to the Gulf.¹⁰ Seven years later, D'Arcy's geologist and his team of local laborers discovered first oil at M.I.S. and the following year Britain's largest oil conglomerate, the Glasgow-based Burmah Oil Company, partnered with D'Arcy to establish the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC), headquartered in London.¹¹ Within five years, the company had constructed a pipeline linking the oil fields in Khuzestan Province to the island refinery and port of Abadan along the Shatt Al-Arab River (an outlet to the Gulf). At this point, Churchill's government in London acquired the controlling interest in APOC in order to break from its dependence on Standard Oil and Royal Dutch Shell.¹² As a majority shareholder, the British government ensured the oil company would operate chiefly in the interest of state.

To the west, extraction from hand-dug pits for lamp oil had been in practice by local producers in Mosul since the middle of the 19th century. An 1899 British geological survey confirmed the high potential that rich petroleum deposits were accessible and abundant in Iraq's northern province. Deutsche Bank purchased concessions to develop oil and a railway in Mosul and Baghdad provinces from the Ottoman government, however failed to move forward with the project. Mitchell argues this was precisely because it intended to block the region's "inexhaustible supply" of oil from flooding the European market. In 1914, after years of competition between British and German interests a new deal was struck between the Ottoman government and a consortium of British financiers for future discovery and development of oil in Mosul and Baghdad. The British group partnered with Deutsche Bank together with the major French (CFP) and Anglo-Dutch (Shell) oil companies to form a new consortium: the Turkish Petroleum Company (TPC).¹³

APOC was the largest single company shareholder of TPC (acquiring majority shares by 1914) and as a result the British government maintained chief control and interest in the company.¹⁴ Thus, the two major oil companies positioned to explore and exploit oil from Persia and Mesopotamia (APOC and TPC) were effectively extensions of the British state. In this regard, Mitchell's assertion illuminates the symbiotic relationship between the companies and the imperial state. He explains, "Petroleum companies were never strong enough to monopolise the flow or stoppage of oil by themselves. They needed outside help, both military and financial. To draw on the resources of well-armed states and government treasuries, Western oil companies began to describe their control of overseas oil as an 'imperial' interest of the state, or in later language as a 'strategic' interest, and thus somehow beneficial to the public well-being."¹⁵

The Shifting Political Landscape of Oil Extraction

The beginning of World War I postponed any efforts to move forward with exploration and development in Mosul. The subsequent collapse of the Ottoman Empire worked in favor of British, French, and U.S. interests who gathered at the San Remo

conference in 1920 to invent borders that fractured the region into politically discrete territories subject to British and French colonial authorities. The British mandate over the provinces of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra endowed the British government, and thus TPC, with an easy avenue to maintain its control over the crude-rich deserts near Kirkuk. British authorities installed the Hashemite monarch Faisal I to rule Iraq, and within five years on March 14, 1925 TPC obtained concessions for exploration.

Baba Gurgur, the first productive oil well of Kirkuk, was discovered in 1927. The company changed its name to the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) constituted by six shareholders. Interests were split equally in shares of 23.5% among APOC, Shell, Compagnie Française des Pétroles (CFP), and the Near East Development Corporation (NEDC), a consortium of American oil companies, and the remaining 5% was given to Gulbenkian. The companies established the so-called “Red Line Agreement,” an informal decision to favor cooperation in the former Ottoman Empire (excluding Kuwait).¹⁶ Thus, IPC dominated production inside the red line for twenty years while the arrangement remained in effect.

The company’s hegemony over all of Iraq’s known and potential oil reserves meant IPC had the power to control the production of oil for foreign markets in the interest of its shareholders over that of the Iraqi state. TPC shareholders with ongoing major crude production elsewhere – including APOC, Shell and SOCAL – remained reluctant to initiate extraction in Iraq for fear of creating a market surplus and forcing prices to plummet. IPC intentionally restricted its exploration to just one half of one percent of land in the country. In other words, the Iraqi government had sold control of its oil to a company that had no intention of developing its potential in the near future.

Meanwhile, in 1932, SoCal established the Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO), discovering first oil on the island in Awali. The following year, SoCal was granted concessions for exploration in Saudi Arabia, securing U.S. hegemony over oil reserves found on the Arabian Peninsula. Failing to strike black gold, the Texas Oil Company (Texaco) acquired a 50% stake in the Saudi concession and became a 50% shareholder in BAPCO in 1936. Within two years, the American partners struck the first oil gusher at a well in Dammam. The California-Arabian Standard Oil Company (CASOC) changed its name to the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO) in 1944, which was joined a few years later by additional U.S. oil companies including the predecessors of Exxon and Mobil.¹⁷

British and U.S. hegemony in the region eventually spilled over the red line, when the Kuwait Oil Company was established as an Anglo-American partnership between APOC and Gulf Oil in 1934. First oil was found in Kuwait by 1938.¹⁸ APOC changed its name to the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) in 1935 and subsequently initiated further efforts to diversify its holdings following a renegotiation of its original concession in Iran. The new agreement, which extended the agreement for thirty-two years and put Iran at a significant earning disadvantage, has been described as “a complete sell-out” to the British company.¹⁹ The agreement, however, stipulated the company’s responsibility to improve worker pay and conditions to facilitate “more chance for advancement,” through the construction of new schools, roads, hospitals, and a telecommunication system.²⁰

In 1950 King Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia catalyzed a watershed in foreign oil company relations throughout the region, successfully pressuring ARAMCO to sign onto

a 50-50 profit sharing agreement in lieu of his threat to nationalize the oil industry. The government purchased 25% of the company and ARAMCO moved its headquarters from New York to Dhahran. This 50-50 arrangement, modeled on a precedent in Venezuela, created a domino effect across oil-producing states in the region.²¹ Sweeping efforts to renegotiate and nationalize the oil industry ensued, beginning with Iran.

By this time, Abadan in Iran was the site of the world's largest and most productive oil refinery. In light of the news of the ARAMCO agreement, AIOC's exploitative arrangement with the Iranian government was made even more apparent. Poor labor conditions and meager profits inspired broad support among Iranians for nationalization of the oil company, and in 1951 the Majlis (Parliament) voted in favor of this move. Mohammed Mossadegh was elected Prime Minister and championed a movement to nationalize Iran's oil facilities, resulting in AIOC's pull out from Abadan and a British call for international boycott of Iranian oil.²²

In the aftermath of AIOC's evacuation from Iran, Kuwait's Sheikh Abdullah al-Salem used his increased leverage with the British company to renegotiate the existing terms of the KOC concession as a 50-50 agreement.²³ By 1952, the Iraqi government had succeeded in achieving its own 50-50 arrangement with IPC.²⁴ In both countries, output increased dramatically to fill the vacuum left by the hiatus of Iranian oil production for the world market. Kuwait, Iraq and Bahrain established national development boards to funnel increased oil revenues into modernization programs that would play a major role in shaping the social, economic, and material environments of these young countries.

The following year, the CIA executed a coup backed by Britain's MI6 to throw out the democratically elected Mossadegh government in Iran and reinstate an autocratic regime under Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi. This resulted in an arrangement in which a new consortium spearheaded by British Petroleum (BP - formerly AIOC), and including Gulf Oil (later Chevron), Shell, CFP (later Total) and the American partners in ARAMCO -- the so-called Seven Sisters -- calling itself IOP operated and managed the production of Iran's nationalized oil facilities in a 50-50 arrangement with the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC).²⁵

The complexity of the political landscape of British neo-colonial intervention and namely efforts to control oil extraction in the Arabian Gulf region cannot be underestimated. However, several key events catalyzed shifts in the strategic approaches that British oil companies used to address rising tensions. The Arab-Israeli Wars and British support for Israeli occupation of Palestine during the 1940s and 1950s served to increase vocalized criticism among local populations of the British oil companies. British support for the Israeli occupation of Palestine fueled populations and governments of Iran and Arab countries disgust with the British oil companies' advantageous position in the region, and namely their total control over oil production. The confidential 1948 IPC report *Anti-British Sentiment on Iraq* reads, "One thing is certain, as long as Great Britain has bases in Iraq she is bound to attract hostility. A foreign occupation, however tactfully and discreetly disguised, is never a pleasant thing, and Iraqi opposition to this is natural and certain."²⁶

Ultimately, the Arab-Israeli War of 1948 and later the Suez Crisis of 1956 were turning points in the history of British neo-colonialism in the Middle East. British oil companies worked with professionals in the emergent field of public relations to reinvent the public image of oil companies in the region as harbingers of modernity to the so-

called East. Public relations professionals developed a new discourse that linked modernity in oil-producing countries to the productivity of the industry as a central strategy of British oil companies' communications with national populations in Arabian Gulf. As will be explored in subsequent chapters, the built environments of oil company towns and capital cities were constitutive of the representation of oil modernity in oil company documentary films that circulated in Britain and the Middle East. Cinematic representations of these Arabian Gulf cities were central to the neo-colonial project of oil extraction. I argue that documentary images of urban modernity came to stand in for the promise that oil companies could and would modernize these young nation-states to the benefit of its citizens.

The following sections provide historical context for the analyses presented in subsequent chapters. The remainder of this chapter will offer a historical overview of shifting strategies in public relations approaches taken by oil companies in the Arabian Gulf in relationship to the production of documentary films picturing modern oil-producing countries to global audiences for the first time.

The Professionalization of Public Relations in Britain

Public relations in England developed in light of debates around the rise of totalitarianism in Europe during the interwar period. L'Etang explains that the emergence and professionalization of public relations was marked by the shift from the normalized production of explicit state propaganda (promulgated by the Ministry of Information in Britain) during the First World War to the rise of the so-called bureaucratic intelligence during the Second World War. In this context, "the term 'public relations' was seen quite literally as relations with the public and the role of providing information. The concept of 'intelligence' was seen as a complementary role responsible for information gathering and distribution both between an organization and its publics and within the organisation."²⁷ Public relations were essential in the British government's effort to manage public opinion in light of the economic, social and physical consequences of war, and in particular to garner support for the massive reconstruction efforts underway across England. In addition to the emergence of new policies and discourses intended to facilitate the democratization of planning programs, the development of mass communication technologies, and in particular the British documentary film movement was a central driver of these public relations efforts.²⁸

Following the lead of the Shell Film Unit in the 1920s, British and American oil companies began using documentary film for numerous purposes. This included sponsorship of film programs intended for instructional or technical use, marketing objectives, internal company communications, educational tools (intended for schools and classrooms), and entertainment for general audiences. This dissertation is concerned with the subset of British oil company films that were used explicitly for the purpose of public relations with general audiences; in other words, documentary films that were sponsored or produced by British oil companies for non-specialized, non-industry audiences. Typically, these films fell into the later two categories of film use described above: education and entertainment for general audiences that were unrelated to the oil industry. In the earliest decades of oil films, companies such as Shell and the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (later Anglo-Iranian, AIOC) typically invested in such films as a means to create positive associations between their brand and filmmaking as a practice

of public interest and mass education in Britain, continental Europe and the United States.

The influence of John Grierson on this corporate approach to documentary film production cannot be overstated. Grierson was a Scottish filmmaker and scholar, who espoused that the realist approach to documentary filmmaking was the ideal vehicle to deliver information to mass audiences as a fundamental practice of a social democracy. In his own words, Grierson reflected that the origins of the British documentary “lay in sociological rather than aesthetic aims.”²⁹ Grierson is considered the godfather of the British Documentary Film Movement, and is dually credited for establishing filmmaking as a universal tenant of wartime propaganda and later corporate public relations practice in Britain (and later Canada).³⁰

Grierson, viewed filmmaking as a fundamental practice of mass media to be used in the public service for improving social and democratic education. Documentary film had the unique power, Grierson contended, “to bridge the gap between the citizen and the wide world.”³¹ His ideas diverged from those of the commercial film pioneers in Europe and America motivated by cinema’s potential to entertain and its function as a commodity to be bought and sold. To the contrary, Grierson declared, “its function is the immediate and practical one of being a deliberate social instrument - not dreaming in an ivory tower, but outside on the barricades of social construction, holding citizens to the common purpose their generation has set for them. Education is activist or it is nothing.”³²

Grierson held the position of assistant film officer at the Empire Marketing Board (EMB) where he wrote, directed and produced his first major documentary, *Drifters* (1929). Soon after, the government abolished the EMB, which it had established as the official marketing research and publicity organization to promote imperial preference in the colonies. Grierson’s film unit moved under the administration of the General Post Office (GPO). Grierson’s GPO film unit made several landmark documentaries, which primarily circulated through non-theatrical distribution channels, like public screenings, school classrooms, and film societies.³³

While Grierson was making his move from the EMB to the GPO, he saw opportunity for a mutually beneficial relationship between documentary filmmakers and the private sector. Grierson imagined industrial sponsorship as a fruitful bargain between private companies and the general public. He argued that industrial sponsors could step in as financiers of documentaries on critical social issues where government funding fell short. Companies, in turn, would benefit from the social capital of its positive cultural contribution. Grierson organized the Associated Realist Film Producers (ARFP) collective to “liase between documentary filmmakers and potential sponsors.”³⁴

Grierson famously articulated his vision for the potential of corporate film sponsorship in his 1933 report for Dutch Royal Shell.³⁵ He proposed a scheme of six film uses to serve in the company’s interests: “general films, dramatizing dominant themes in the oil industry; sales-promotion films; popular science films; technical films for specialized audiences; staff department information films; and a Shell newsreel.”³⁶ Shell had already produced one of the earliest examples of an oil company documentary that points the camera towards the people and place at the heart of oil production nearly a decade prior to the report. *Bataafsche Petroleum Film* (1924) was a silent three-hour documentary film of the Dutch East Indies, which “besides showing the colonies, the

exotic nature, and promoting the company as an important player on the world market, the film also had a clear educational function, displaying the production of crude oil, oil products, and the uses to which they were put.”³⁷

The film premiered near The Hague for government representatives, diplomats, business people and the press. As the oil company’s first public relations film stunt it was considered a success.³⁸ A glowing Dutch newspaper review lauded Shell for teaching the audience “that the petroleum industry is not a money-making concern for shareholders; [...] but she, wherever she comes, creates a prosperous colony, spreading her benevolent influence far and wide. Without a doubt many eyes will be opened, and it is good that the Royal Dutch called in the aid of the honest film to present herself, as she has nothing to hide.”³⁹ Thereafter the film circulated among film societies and elite circles, while unused footage was recut for subsequent versions and shorter films.

Royal Dutch Shell as a Public Relations Model

Shell established its in-house film unit in the 1930s, which grew to become an integral feature of its operations. The company initiated its novel approach to public relations, as Hewitt explains, because:

Shell was in the position to appeal to its customers, to build up brand loyalty, in a different manner. Increasingly through its most prestigious campaigns it chose to *market the company* and not the petrol. You bought Shell petrol not for what it did but because of what the company stood for, for its concern with the wholesome aspects of civilized life, nature and art. Such a strategy marginalized not only the petrol itself but also the whole technological and industrial world to which it was directly and indirectly related.⁴⁰

After soliciting Grierson’s report Shell invested immediately in making documentaries that featured subjects made possible by its petrol and petroleum-based products: aviation, motor racing, firefighting, disease control, and robotics engineering to name a few. Shell films were distinct in that they were not used as vehicle for product advertising. Shell made films that associated its brand with the prestige and promise of modern science and technology. The first Shell film unit documentary, *Airport* (1935), depicted a “typical day” in London’s Croydon Airport, one of the world’s busiest travel hubs. It circulated in London cinemas and was billed as “compelling entertainment.”⁴¹

Shell instituted a “no-plugging” policy that insisted its name never appeared in the picture or soundtrack, other than in credits. Arthur Elton, Shell’s chief film advisor, detailed the logic behind this strategy, which he often referred to as “The First Law in Industrial Sponsorship”:

This detachment has served Shell companies well for today. Shell films are a part of the curriculum of schools all over the world. They have been adopted by scores of universities and are used by international, national and government institutions everywhere. They have publicised Shell Petroleum's reputation as a great international commercial company, but one with a lively sense of international responsibility and a leader in the fields of science and technology. Such is the broad public relations purpose of the Shell Film Unit.⁴²

In Canjels words, “with a few exceptions (made for special purposes), prestige was to be obtained through association instead of clear propaganda.”⁴³ Another significant aspect that distinguished Shell’s filmmaking among its corporate contemporaries was the fact its maintenance of an in-house film unit. As a result, just the number of Shell documentaries made each year elevated the company to a category all its own; it produced more than 130 films in the 1950s, reaching over 8.5 million people.⁴⁴

By 1938 Grierson established Film Centre in London as a formal organization to assume ARFP’s role as a go-between among companies and filmmakers. The Planning and supervision of Shell films was shifted to Film Centre in order to give the documentaries “an appreciated sense of detachment” from the oil company, supposedly making them “more universal.”⁴⁵ In fact, more than half of Film Centre’s work was with Shell, and numerous people shifted seamlessly between Shell and Film Centre. Among these people were Arthur Elton and Edgar Antsey who held key positions in the Shell Film Unit as Managing Director and Producer respectively.

By the 1930s, Arthur Elton had emerged as a leader in the documentary film movement in Britain, coming up as a director and producer as part of Grierson’s Empire Marketing Board. From 1931 onwards, Elton developed a signature style in his filmmaking that has been described as “the lucid filmic explanation of general principles and their relationship to specific circumstances,” which was “sometimes applied to social subjects suiting his liberal-reformist political sympathies.”⁴⁶ The most famous example of such work was Elton’s 1935 documentary *Housing Problems*.

The film, sponsored by the British Commercial Gas Association, was about the dismal living conditions of working class slum-dwellers in the London neighborhood of Stepney. *Housing Problems* depicts the most severe visible evidence of the poor and insanitary living conditions endured by residents of slum housing, including sagging roofs, crumbling walls, and unhygienic toilet facilities. Additionally, Elton and his co-director, Edward Antsey (who subsequently became the first producer for the Shell Film Unit), conducted interviews with residents, in which they tell their nightmare stories about overcrowded living, lack of water, rotting staircases, and rat infestations directly to the camera. The documentary was made not only to raise public awareness of slum conditions but more so to promote plans put forward by local councils to carry out slum clearance and erect new housing. The intended public message in *Housing Problems* was heavy-handed, emphasizing the modernist ideology that proper housing and planning by ‘enlighten’ experts would provide a remedy to the problem of the slums and even influence improved hygiene practices by residents.⁴⁷

Although the film worked directly in the service of modernist postwar planning ideologies espoused in Britain, *Housing Problems* provides a key example of the realist approach taken by Elton and other documentary filmmakers when depicting urban life and the materiality of social conditions in the British context. In contradistinction to this approach, Elton and others spearheading the production of oil films in the Arabian Gulf, adapt documentary practice to craft an imaginary of the oil company town that is devoid of such problems. Instead, modernist housing and plans for company towns and capital cities are pictured as straightforward evidence of the benefits of oil extraction to the indigenous populations.

Film trade magazines such as *Film User* and *Sight and Sound* catalogued oil company films as “factual” and “educational” documentaries, regularly recommending

them as classroom teaching aids. The quantity and popularity of oil company documentaries increased and soon the Petroleum Film Bureau was created in London to provide regular non-theatrical distribution of oil films to grade schools, colleges, film societies, and special interest clubs. In addition to circulation in theatres and festivals, non-theatrical distribution of oil films climbed to 78,000 oil films borrowed in that 1956 alone.⁴⁸ Elton noted the importance of these channels of distribution for the company, “From the beginning, the Shell programme has been directed towards non-theatrical channels of distribution. For this purpose, every area served by a Group company has a film library, and the films are regularly converted into foreign languages; sometimes there are up to twenty different versions. Nearly every important Group company has its own cinema and in Australia most of the principal cities are so equipped.”⁴⁹

The unprecedented scale of Shell’s film output created, in Elton’s words, the first “genuine international documentary film movement.”⁵⁰ Shell was indeed the first company to institutionalize global film production and distribution. The oil industry differed from many other industries because of the identified need to extend public relations abroad where existing and potential markets had been identified. For this reason, Shell began exporting its filmmaking endeavors and expertise to countries where the company was already at work extracting, refining and marketing petroleum products, setting up film units in Venezuela, Australia, Nigeria, Egypt and India.⁵¹ Elton claimed that Shell pursued this policy in hopes of contributing something of value to the culture of these countries.⁵²

Shell used this program to publicize its claim to educating and improving society in oil-producing countries. British colonial film units pioneered this didactic model in Nigeria and elsewhere, underlining the ways in which film viewership and filmmaking served in favor of Britain’s civilizing mission.⁵³ Colonial film units developed and created films largely on location using local production units, while concept development, scriptwriting, editing, and distribution of the oil company films was controlled and managed via London (as explained in the introduction). Shell translated documentaries from English into over twenty different languages for distribution to classrooms, film libraries, film festivals and commercial theatres worldwide. Increased distribution after 1952 grew Shell films circulation from 80,000 to nearly 375,000 viewers worldwide over just two years.⁵⁴

Early on, Shell’s films were crafted as a versatile form serving simultaneously as mass media for brand building among existing and potential consumers, entertainment and popular consumption, educational media, and at times as direct propaganda in oil-producing countries. However, relative to the immense collection of films produced by Shell, its filmmakers rarely turned the camera onto the subject of the oil-producing countries. As an exception, Shell planned a series of films in 1951 about Venezuela’s history and culture, its national economy, and transportation public health, and education systems.

For the first time, Shell developed a film program explicitly for Venezuelan audiences. The company wanted to use the films to narrate the importance of the country’s oil for national development to the general population. Shell completed two of the planned films, *Horizontes Nacionales* (Translation: *New Horizons*, 1949) and *Las Bases del Progreso* (Translation: *Harvest for Tomorrow*, 1950) and distributed them widely within the country. Canjels suggests that the foreign oil company intended the

films to send a didactic message to the population “that profits derived from oil could create opportunities to industrialise the economy, stimulate agricultural development, and raise technical and educational standards.”⁵⁵

Tinker Salas’ (2009) study of oil, culture and politics in Venezuela suggests that during the 1940s and 1950s foreign oil companies were particularly concerned with establishing the country’s role as a global model of strong positive relations between oil companies and indigenous societies. The model, they hoped, could serve as a positive precedent for continued American and European expansion into oil-rich territories of the Middle East.⁵⁶ Shell’s documentaries about Venezuela associated the image of a prospering oil industry with the promise of modernization and national development in an oil-producing state. John Sherman, a British filmmaker who worked closely with oil companies, declared that by the 1950s Grierson and his colleagues at Film Centre in London “had invented a need for films to be made for oil companies in the Middle East.”⁵⁷ As cinema increased in popularity and accessibility around the world and British petroleum companies faced increasing political opposition among indigenous employees and local populations in the producing countries in the Arabian Gulf region, they invested seriously in new public relations strategies that used film as a public relations tool to the reinvent the imaginary of oil extraction by equating it to the promise of modernity.

Early Oil Company Public Relations in the Arabian Gulf

Shell may have been the first oil company to establish an in-house film unit, but it was not the first to experiment with the possibilities of emerging motion picture technologies. Following the completion of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company’s (AIOC) first pipeline in 1911, the company recorded its first documentary, *Anglo-Iranian Oil Company’s Operations in Iran* (1921). The silent black and white 35mm documentary survey of “company activities” for company officials ran just over sixty-five minutes and cost just over £2000 to make. This precedent served as the model for AIOC’s first non-survey film, *The Persian Oil Industry: The Story of the Great National Enterprise* (1925), a silent 35mm that ran 98 minutes. That footage was then recut to a 45-minute version that was distributed in technical institutions and schools. The film recut yet again into the 15-minute version, *In the Land of the Shah* (1926), which premiered for general cinema audiences in England and was eventually seen by upward of one million people across Europe.⁵⁸ That same year AIOC established its first program to screen films to company staff based in Abadan.⁵⁹

The various versions of AIOC’s first prestige documentary depicted the most visible aspects of company operations: oil rigs in southern Iran, vast pipeline networks, the giant Abadan refinery, and the impressive Royal Navy fleet that shipped AIOC petrol to the European market. The film presents the context of lived space and society in Iran as little more than an exotic oriental backdrop to the expansion of the British Empire. Furthermore, the film’s focus on the spectacle of industrial machinery renders invisible the lived experience of the majority of Iranians and other exploited non-British oil workers.

After years of opposition from the Iranian government, the British oil company received permission to produce another film about Iran in 1936. Arthur Elton directed the company’s first sound film, *Dawn of Iran* (1938), which ran fifteen minutes and featured a positivist narrative of the modernization of the country under Reza Shah. A second

version of the film *Dawn of Iran...Dawn in the East...The Story of Modern Iran* (1938) was directed by John Taylor of Realist Film Unit, who produced the later version. In correspondence with film historian Hamid Naficy, Taylor explained that they encountered significant and strict interference from Reza Shah's government in terms of what they could and could not capture on camera. For example, they were not permitted to film camel caravans or carpet makers because the government "considered that they would make Iran look primitive." A police captain was assigned to the film crew in order to monitor compliance of these regulations, "[looking] through the camera and [censoring] every shot on the spot."⁶⁰ The resulting film features modernization program throughout the country with very little focus on the oil industry itself.

AIOC established a special branch within its public relations division dedicated to overseeing the production and distribution of documentary films in 1948. In addition to marketing and instructional films, the company pursued a program of documentaries to serve internal, stockholder and especially public relations in Britain. According to Ronald Tritton, AIOC public relations director, filmmaking was used considered a key public relations strategy because "films can evoke feelings in an audience: they can make people feel well disposed towards a company or an industry and realize that it is a decent, honest, well-run and efficient organization."⁶¹ Unlike Shell, which emphasized the prestige to be gained through scientific and informational films that circulated in non-theatrical distribution and educational use of its documentaries, AIOC's earliest films focused on company operations in the oil-producing country of Iran. In addition to projecting the films at company headquarters in England and for internal staff at screening facilities abroad, the films were shown widely in to public audiences in British theatres during company premieres as well as in regular circulation in public cinemas prior to feature films. Overseas, and particularly in Iran, films were shown in existing public cinemas in Tehran and also by associated companies and British Government Information Services in private showings. AIOC films also circulated for many years following their initial release in non-theatrical distribution via the Petroleum Film Bureau in London. In 1953, there were reportedly 600 to 800 AIOC film showings for schools, social clubs, and technical institutes each month.⁶²

Derek Williams, a prolific British documentary filmmaker who worked with oil companies, remarked that the earliest and most famous film to have engaged the politics of oil was AIOC's 1951 documentary *Persian Story*.⁶³ This film made Iranians a subject of the documentary, depicting a story about how the native population experienced life in in the oil city of Abadan. AIOC executives conceived of the film as one that would have mass appeal to the general public, and as "the first genuine effort to portray Iran sympathetically to the outside world,"⁶⁴ and perhaps more importantly "as the story of a great British enterprise."⁶⁵

However, almost as soon as filmmakers started shooting on location in Iran in 1951, mounting protest among oil workers in response to AIOC's exploitative practices and the squalid conditions in the city had reached a peak. By April, Iran's Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh made a move to nationalize Iran's oil industry, provoking strikes at the refinery and in major cities. AIOC evacuated its British employees from Abadan and company operations were usurped by the National Iranian Oil Company.

Despite enduring a troubled production and the company's upheaval among the shifting political tides in Iran, the final cut of *Persian Story* premiered to an

unprecedented audience of over 11,000 viewers in seven cinemas across London.⁶⁶ As chapter three will show, contrary to lived experiences of most Iranians and oil workers in AIOC's segregated company town, the documentary depicts Iranians living a life of leisure in Abadan's lush garden suburbs. Nonetheless, *Persian Story* ultimately garnered exceptional praise in Britain as the only surviving portrait of the westernized Iranian oil city and refinery at Abadan as it had existed prior to being overtaken by Iran's radical nationalist movement.

Among all the oil companies with stakes in Arabian Gulf during the 1950s, the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC), a multinational enterprise with head-quarters in London and concessions for unmitigated oil exploration and exploitation within Iraqi borders, was the only one that created a full program of documentaries intended first and foremost for Iraqis. Despite the apparent variety of subjects in IPC documentaries, the films continually promoted the narrative that the country's 'natural' oil wealth promised the rebirth of the 'cradle of civilization' as the modern nation-state of Iraq.

British Oil Company Public Relations after the Iranian Oil Crisis

The Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) established its public relations office in conjunction with the renegotiation of the 50-50 agreement between the company and the Iraqi government in 1951. The focus of the office was to produce and circulate publications that explained the company's operations in Iraq to internal company employees and public audiences. This included magazines, illustrated reports, company calendars and annual diaries that were produced in English and Arabic language versions and circulated in London and throughout the Middle East. Circulation of the monthly magazines reached 46,000 per issue for *Ahl al Naft* (in Arabic) and 20,000 per issue for its English language counterpart *Iraq Petroleum*. In its inaugural issue the editor in chief of *Iraq Petroleum* explained that, "Between them the two publications represent an important step in the forward march of the Iraq Petroleum Company and its Associates, and it is confidently hoped that it is a step that will lead to a closer integration of the interests of all our people everywhere, from Banias to the Persian Gulf, from Baba Gurgur to the crush and bustle of Oxford Street."⁶⁷

Publication headquarters for *Ahl al Naft* was based in Beirut, with contributions from Arab contributors across the region with ties to the IPC. Meanwhile, the English language version produced in central London made its way into the homes and offices of company employees living in Europe and across the Middle East, often profiling national development programs in Iraq as its main features. The relationship between the magazine's editorial board and the Iraqi government was made explicit through the regular contribution of government officials writing on everything from education policy to housing development. The close-knit collaboration between the government and the company was further reflected in the editorial selections for imagery and text in major Iraqi government publications on its development program, for which IPC photography and text was lifted directly off of the pages of the magazine and reproduced in the pages of government publicity books such as *Land of Two Rivers: Building a New Iraq*.

This included a film unit dedicated to making documentary films in 1951. In many ways IPC relied on the Shell Film Unit model, eventually establishing a permanent production unit in Baghdad through London's Film Centre. However, the IPC film unit was distinct from its contemporaries because of a deep concern with its public image

among Iraqis. An internal report by the IPC Public Relations office emphasizes that IPC made documentaries with the cooperation of the Iraqi government, “which welcomed the concept that films would publicise the country's historical traditions, plans for development and, generally speaking, arouse public interest, both inside and outside Iraq.” The same report claims that these films, “probably contributed to bringing Iraq before the public eye, both in the sense of awakening the interest of the Iraqi people themselves, many of whom had little or no concept of their own country's history and an equally sketchy knowledge of development projects.”⁶⁸

The company speculated that the government looked to the IPC “to do a job of general publicity that, for various reasons, they were unable to do themselves.”⁶⁹ According to founder John Shearman, the IPC film unit's stated goals were, first, “to train Iraqi film technicians in [the British] tradition of technical and documentary filmmaking,” and second, “to make films which would explain to the people of Iraq what the oil company was doing in their territory...that it was not really taking away the black gold because it was putting money back into national development.”⁷⁰

The first IPC film, *The Third River*, was directed by Michael Clarke in 1951 and was screened widely. In 1953 an article in *Film User* reported that the film was “being extensively shown with Arabic commentaries in Iraq. At the major cinemas in Baghdad 35mm. versions are used, while at the oilfield and at various pumping and maintenance stations along the pipeline the films are being shown to the company's employees both on 35mm. and 16mm.”⁷¹ In addition to special premieres in Baghdad for nobility, government ministers, and other dignitaries, IPC films and especially episodes of the cine-magazine *Beladuna* were shown regularly in theatres of Iraq's major cities, Baghdad, Kirkuk and Basrah, prior to feature films.⁷² According to film unit cameraman Peter Kelley, the company would hold special outdoor film events featuring the IPC films. The oil company also coordinated screening for its staff in remote based in and near oil fields, pump stations and refineries. Mobile cinema van units would travel to remote towns like Nasriyah and stage special screenings for audiences of IPC staff and oil workers that were as small as 50-100 people.⁷³

Senior advisor to the film unit, Arthur Elton, noted enthusiastically that the IPC documentary series *Beladuna*, “happened to be almost the first film ever made about Iraq, almost the first time anyone had recorded what was happening in Iraq. In no time at all the film was showing in public cinemas to enthusiastic audiences. In fact, enthusiasm was so great that the film was sometimes played through twice, and tickets changed hands at a premium!”⁷⁴ According to the company, during the 1950s one- to two-thirds of the total Iraqi population had seen the IPC films.⁷⁵ The company magazine *Iraq Petroleum* reported on the premiere of *Beladuna* in Baghdad, Basrah and Mosul, emphasizing the Iraqi role in the production of the documentary series, as follows:

In the cinemas of Iraq the reception of the film has since been most enthusiastic. In the making of the film the Unit was greatly helped by the work of Iraqi writers, commentators and musicians. The use of national music, specially arranged for the films and played on the traditional Arab instruments, is a feature of the “*Beladuna*” series and is appreciated by all audiences in Iraq. The Unit's aim is to do as much of the making of these films as possible in Iraq, so that their production can become a truly national enterprise.⁷⁶

Initially, IPC adopted Shell's model of translation, scripting films in English and then artfully translating them into Arabic with the help of local Iraqi and Syrian writers. By 1953, IPC's public relations strategy took on a more nuanced approach in response to the "Iranian oil crisis" beginning to produce original Arabic-language film episodes of a company cine-magazine. *Beladuna* was filmed and edited by collaborative British and Arab production teams. The British filmmaker Michael Clarke emphasized "the Arabic version was very important because the film was designed to reconcile the oil company to the population, much more than to describe its operations to the English speaking audiences in Europe."⁷⁷ English-language versions of IPC's Arabic language documentary films were sometimes distributed among internal staff audiences outside of Iraq, particularly at the cinema room in IPC's London headquarters on Oxford Street, "so that office personnel can learn - from English versions of the Iraq films - what takes place at the oil-producing centres they are never likely to see."⁷⁸

Nonetheless, the company's stated priority was the production of Arabic-language documentaries for Iraqi audiences. Elton clearly spelled out the motivation behind IPC's strategy to make Arabic language films, writing that:

If...done imaginatively and from the point of view of the people...themselves (and not from that of the film technicians introduced from overseas), the effect will be gradually to create a favourable attitude towards the oil industry as a whole, and to make the Operating Companies seem a more natural and useful part of the economy...than many people are at present prepared to allow. Irrational, emotional attitudes will be damped down and criticism directed into informed and constructive channels.⁷⁹

IPC promoted its films as an effort "to project modern Iraq" to ordinary Iraqis.⁸⁰ Films were used as a key mechanism in IPC's public relations program in Iraq. In the company's own words from 1953, IPC "has now begun to use film for a more serious purpose - to prevent Persian happenings repeating themselves in neighbouring Iraq, by showing the public there that the activities of an oil company benefit not only the shareholders but the country which owns the, oil."⁸¹

The films of the Iraq Petroleum Company were shown prior to feature films in the thirty-nine cinema houses and thirty-two outdoor cinemas that existed across Iraq. Cinema was extremely popular by 1950 and altogether the cinemas of Iraq's major cities drew a reported annual attendance of 25 million viewers in Baghdad, Mosul and Basra.⁸² Beyond this, the IPC projected its films to audiences based in more remote towns using the mobile cinema vans pioneered for use in rural areas and small towns, first in Britain and soon after the British colonies, from 1925 onwards.⁸³ The first modern cinema house opened in the Kirkuk Fields in 1953.⁸⁴

The decision to make the national population of an oil-producing country the primary audience for corporate films was until then unprecedented in the region. As previously mentioned, oil companies like AIOC and Shell had been far more concerned with crafting stories of oil for modern consumers and stockholders than with winning over local populations. *The Third River* crafted a positive image of the company for Iraqis with a coherent image of dignified and cooperative Iraqi oil workers, invested in the construction of the pipeline as a nation-building project. At the same time the film tied the project of oil extraction to the promise of modernity and social progress in Iraq.

Following Shell's model, IPC hired local production crews and employed local artists and writers for very practical reasons, but also as a way to authenticate its cultural project.

British filmmakers overseeing the production could not shake the undergirding fantasy generated in popular orientalist depictions of the Middle East. In colonial and postcolonial representational practices of painting, photography and film, Arabs, Islam and the imagined geography and landscape of the Middle East figured as Europe's necessary other, as an object to be studied, deciphered and ultimately controlled.⁸⁵ Clarke, even while acknowledging that ordinary Iraqis were the primary audience for the IPC film, crafted the moving pictures of "the real" Iraq in *The Third River* with reference to distinct British imaginaries of a "Hollywood gorgeous East" and his own imbedded positivist socio-economic relations between oil, modernity and society.⁸⁶

Despite its unabated and uncritical approach to portraying the story of Iraqi oil, in 1953 the company executed a film program that was notably the most genuine effort among its contemporaries to engage with the complexities of modernization. Several of the short films included the company cine-magazine *Beladuna* provide a relatively nuanced study of the challenges of nation building, from the destruction of old Baghdad neighborhoods to efforts to cope with river flooding. Although *Beladuna* never came close to providing an explicit critique of the power wielded by the oil industry or government, a distinction in IPC's approach to filmmaking is obvious in the specific nature of the film subjects and input of the Iraqi production crewmembers.⁸⁷ Chapter five will examine the collection of IPC's films in detail and discuss the how the oil films worked to cultivate a cinematic imaginary of urban modernity for Iraqis.

Ultimately, despite its public relations efforts IPC could not shake its symbolic status in Iraq as the quintessence of western imperialism. "There is no question that Iraqis, even those who welcomed the foreign contribution to the oil industry and had no strong feelings against the government of the time, felt that the sovereignty of the country was reduced by the power of the IPC."⁸⁸ The oil company film unit continued to sponsor films until 1958, when the July Revolution overturned the Hashemite monarchy and regime of Nuri Al-Said that had facilitated British control over Iraq's economic resources and development for more than forty years. Under the leadership of General Abd Al-Karim Qassim, the Republic of Iraq was born and by 1961 the government proclaimed that under Law 80 it would take back almost 99 percent of the IPC's concessionary area without compensation as a radical blow against the legacy of British imperial control.⁸⁹

A New Model for Public Relations in Oil-Producing Countries

Inspired by the short-lived model of public relations pursued in Iraq, the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) established its public relations office in Kuwait in 1956. This followed a significant spike in public criticism of the company mounting around local support for Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser's historic move to nationalize the Suez Canal. KOC's public relations office planned efforts to reach local and regional populations through news broadcasts, lectures, magazine features and films that linked the company and its partnership with the State to the progress and modernization of Kuwait, often focusing on images of urban modernity Ahmadi and Kuwait City.⁹⁰ KOC launched *Risalat al-Naft* (The Oil Newsletter), and in 1957 shifted the focus of its existing English-language magazine *The Kuwaiti* to feature articles and photographs illustrating modern

architecture and urban planning projects in the capital Kuwait City. Established in 1961, Alissa observes, the Arabic-language sister magazine *al-Kuwayti* on the other hand showcased KOC's contributions to modern living conditions of Kuwaiti employees in Ahmadi.⁹¹ Throughout this period, and even before the establishment of the formal public relations office dedicated to overseeing company publications, KOC sponsored several films showcasing modernization in Kuwait, including *Oil in Kuwait* (1946), *Focus on Kuwait* (1953), and *Close Up on Kuwait* (1961).

In Bahrain the public relations efforts of the Anglo-American oil company was largely controlled by American partners, but greatly influenced by the precedent of British oil company public relations in Iraq and Kuwait. During the 1950s, Caltex (the oil corporation that controlled BAPCO) sponsored as many as twelve films in English and Arabic language versions that premiered in Bahrain's capital as part of its initial public relations efforts with the general public. The first of these films, *The Pearl of the Gulf* promoted positive images of Bahraini culture. The Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO) established its own film unit by 1958. 'Bahrain News Magazine' was seen by as many as 40,000 Bahrainis across the island in its first year of its production. Like IPC's *Beladuna* the cine-magazine presented short documentary episodes of a range of subjects from football matches to national development projects. The films were screened as entertainment features in Manama's theaters and the cinema houses in BAPCO's company towns and workers' quarters. The company regularly sent mobile cinema units to hold screenings in Bahrain's schools and youth centers, as well as in more remote villages and towns. BAPCO also produced an Arabic language periodical to promote positive images of the oil company's role in Bahrain's modernity and development, similar to IPC and KOC's magazines. *Al-Najmah al-Ushbu'iyyah* was distributed free of charge to BAPCO's indigenous workers and the general population receiving circulation among approximately 8,000 readers by 1960.⁹²

Evidence of the extent of the Arabian American Oil Company's (ARAMCO) initial filmmaking endeavors is limited. It is apparent that the oil company was committed to filmmaking in some capacity from the 1950s, and a program of documentaries intended for audiences of company employees as well as the general public in the early 1960s.⁹³ This included *The Explorers* (c.1962), which is described in the company magazine *ARAMCO World* as a film about "the story of the search for oil." The stated purpose of the ARAMCO film program was to "interpret to the Saudi Arab audience the nature of its most important industry. And...provide employees with a framework for understanding how their jobs fit into the free world petroleum industry. All in basic visual terms that entertain while they teach."⁹⁴ This "interpretation" was a story of oil that suited the objectives of the company, both in promoting its brand image globally and controlling information for its oil workers within Saudi Arabia.

ARAMCO was the first oil company to stray from the documentary model and flirt with the possibilities of narrative film production. Vitalis details the story of the company's first and only feature-length film, *Jazirat al-Arab* or *Island of the Arabs* (1955). Vitalis' discussion of this ARAMCO public relations effort focuses on the film's unfavorable reception during its Saudi and American premiers. He observes how the oil company shelled out to hire the Academy Award winning documentary filmmaker Richard Lyford to direct the company's cinematic celebration of the Saudi King Abd al-Aziz, and then oddly enough cast employees as actors in order to reduce the project

budget. In *Island of the Arabs*, as in *The Explorers* and subsequently a number of retrospective “anniversary” documentaries, such as *Fulfilling the Vision* (1999), ARAMCO’s obsession with constructing a dominant origin story of oil becomes clear. *Island of the Arabs* crafts a narrative of the peninsula’s history as the story of Wahabi conquest and oil pioneers, and was critiqued bluntly by one viewer as “nothing more than a tasteless combination of travelogue, historical drama, and documentary about the Arab World.”⁹⁵ Vitalis ascertains that “what the story of the film points out now, apart from the questionable media savvy of an oil-producing enterprise, is the moment when the firm began to market its story beyond the borders of the United States to Europe and, more significantly still, the Arab world. In doing so, ARAMCO mixed the century’s older technologies of industrial public relations with newer ones, notably, sixteen-millimeter sound film.”⁹⁶

Conclusion

The history of oil extraction from the Arabian Gulf during the first half of the twentieth century is largely dependent on the series of deals struck among profiteers, kings and statesmen who themselves remained largely unaffected by the material and socio-economic conditions produced on the ground at sites of oil exploration, extraction, transportation and production. British petroleum companies established themselves in the region just prior to the collapse of British Empire, and emerged from World War II to a chorus of Arab nationalism sweeping the Middle East. During the late 1940s and 1950s local populations in oil-producing countries identified the petroleum companies as agents of British imperialism, which was closely linked to the occupation of Palestine.

Petroleum companies embraced the emerging profession of public relations in Britain and especially the potential of films technologies as a new tool of mass communication as a means to shape public opinion. Beginning in the 1930s, oil companies made films as a powerful means to control global imaginaries of their brands and oil as a commodity in a rapidly changing world. While documentary filmmakers in London viewed industrial sponsors as an ideal means to get films made in the name of public good, companies like Shell understood film as an innovative public relations tool to showcase the brand.

After the decline in state-sponsored documentary production in the 1940s, Shell emerged as an industry leader in the production of popular sponsored films. As emphasized by Russell and Taylor in the quote that opens this chapter, the co-constitutive histories of the oil industry and documentary movement are vital to a broader understanding of media and society after World War II. Based on Grierson’s vision for a mutually beneficial relationship between filmmakers and private companies, Shell established the earliest model for an in-house film unit that would eventually globalize the production and distribution of popular documentaries.

Initially oil films were made intentionally for English-speaking and other European audiences, as a means to improve the image of the Shell brand. By 1951, the Petroleum Films Bureau in London sent out prints for 44,095 film programs for showings at British schools, film societies, clubs and technical institutes. This was an increase of 7,676 from the previous year, indicating the growing popularity and circulation of oil company documentaries that were catalogued as educational or entertainment films.⁹⁷

The Anglo-Persian Oil Company began using film as early as 1921 in order to document its operations for internal company records. Five years later, following the Shell's lead, the company cut its first film for distribution in public cinemas. As Abadan grew to be the world's largest oil refinery, the company continued to make films for general audiences in Britain. Film productions were increasingly regulated by the oversight of the Iranian government. The films framed the company's efforts as a "Great National Enterprise" and established a visual discourse to promote the idea that revenues from oil had the potential to modernize the oil-producing country. Although the films were shown to elite audiences in Iran, the films were primarily intended for audiences in Britain and thus failed to address the emergence of a need for new strategies to manage the image of oil companies among local populations in the oil-producing country.

By 1951 uprisings in Iran jeopardized the British oil companies' claims to regional concessions and 50-50 profit-sharing arrangements surfaced as the new norm between companies and governments. In the pivotal decade of the 1950s, British oil companies experimented with film's potential to address emerging political challenges and anti-imperialist movements gaining steam in oil-producing countries, constructing stories of how oil companies worked to improve the economic and social circumstances for people in oil-producing countries. The Iraq Petroleum Company established a program for public relations that focused on the production of Arabic language films and a documentary series called *Beladuna* for Iraqi audiences. As chapter five will discuss, the themes of these films focused on the promise of petroleum in relationship to nation-building and modernization projects.

This marked a critical shift the public relations approach of the British oil company after the nationalized the Iranian oil industry in 1951. The Iraq Petroleum Company used film to create an imaginary of urban modernity in Iraq for Iraqis, and established a new model of film sponsorship that was followed by the Kuwait Oil Company and Bahrain Petroleum Company. These films circulated in oil-producing countries in theatrical premieres, in cinema houses prior to feature films, and as novel events in remote towns where mobile cinema vans would hold special screenings. Although what has been recorded about the local reception of these films depends on reporting by individuals and officials affiliated with the oil companies, there is an indication that the majority watched these films. It is thus significant that the oil films were the first moving pictures of modern national subjects and national landmarks to be shared by people of different social, economic and geographic positions within these young countries.

Collectively, oil films have been fundamental in creating an imaginary of neo-colonial development that cloaked what Coronil (1997) described as the "Faustian trade of money for modernity" and instead emphasized oil's potential to transform the "backwards" countries of the Arabian Gulf into modern players in the world economy. As Fuccaro emphasizes in the quote that opens this chapter, discourses about oil are bound to discourses about progress and nation building that shape collective knowledge of the modern world and urban living. Documentary film emerged as one of the most powerful discursive mediums in the twentieth century that circulated new imaginaries of the modern oil city to audiences in oil-producing countries and around the world.

The following chapter examines the earliest sites of material and social change in relationship to oil. In most oil-producing companies, these were the earliest places were

modern architecture and planning took shape in the built environment. British oil companies commissioned designers experienced in colonial urban planning to shape the character of these modern enclaves. However, in the context of increasingly discontent among national populations and pressure by national governments, oil companies introduced modern housing for indigenous workers as an intervention in the existing plans. In this sense, planning and architecture lay the ground for public relations efforts inside the oil producing countries, prior to the production of oil films. As subsequent chapters will show, these films featured images of the modernization of the built environment and emergence of oil cities as central to the neo-colonial imaginary of the Arabian Gulf.

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- ¹ Nelida Fuccaro, "Introduction: Histories of Oil and Urban Modernity in the Middle East," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 33, no.1 (2013), 4.
- ² Russell and Taylor, *Shadows of Progress*, 88.
- ³ Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 533-4.
- ⁴ "Chapter 1: Purposes and Principles," *Charter of the United Nations* (1945), Web, 1 May 2013.
- ⁵ Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy*, 9.
- ⁶ Ibid., 45-49.
- ⁷ See Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: the epic quest for oil, money, and power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 155-165.
- ⁸ Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy*.
- ⁹ Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: an American coup and the roots of Middle East terror* (Hoboken, NJ: J. Wiley & Sons, 2003), 48.
- ¹⁰ Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy*, 50; This blocked any competitors from developing and transporting oil from the Caspian Sea or elsewhere in the region; Mitchell claims that "a principal reason for searching in the barren hills of Persia was not to launch the region's oil industry, but to delay its development." (43)
- ¹¹ Burmah Oil controlled supply to the Indian market.
- ¹² The deal included a guaranteed supply of petroleum for Britain's Royal Fleet.
- ¹³ Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy*, 47-48, 58.
- ¹⁴ TPC's other original shareholders with minority stakes included the Deutsche Bank with 26.5%, Royal Dutch Shell (via its subsidiary the Anglo Saxon Oil Company), the British controlled National Bank of Turkey, and the Armenian entrepreneur Calouste Gulbenkian.
- ¹⁵ Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy*, 45.
- ¹⁶ J. H. Bamberg, *A History of the British Petroleum Company*, vol. 2, *The Anglo-Iranian Years, 1928-1954* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 161-2.
- ¹⁷ Fuccaro, "Shaping the Urban Life of Oil in Bahrain," 67; Vitalis, *America's Kingdom*, 281.
- ¹⁸ Bamberg, *A History of the British Petroleum Company*, vol. 2, 173.
- ¹⁹ Mohammad G. Majd, *Great Britain & Reza Shah: the Plunder of Iran, 1921-1941* (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 2001), 259.
- ²⁰ Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men*, 67.
- ²¹ Bamberg, *A History of the British Petroleum Company*, vol. 2, 428-9.
- ²² Ibid., 457; also see Mohammad G. Majd, "The 1951-53 Oil Nationalization Dispute and the Iranian Economy: A Rejoinder," *Middle Eastern Studies* 31, no.3 (July 1995), 449-459.
- ²³ Al-Nakib, "Kuwait City," 168.
- ²⁴ Bamberg, *A History of the British Petroleum Company*, vol. 2, 339.
- ²⁵ M.S. Vassiliou, *Historical Dictionary of the Petroleum Industry* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 269.
- ²⁶ "Anti-British Sentiment in Iraq," 5 May 1948, BP 126890.
- ²⁷ Jacquie L'Etang, "State Propaganda and Bureaucratic Intelligence: The Creation of Public Relations in 20th Century Britain," *Public Relations Review* 24, no. 4 (1998), 416.

²⁸ Ibid., 417, 421; See Susanne Cowan, "Democracy, Technocracy and Publicity: Public Consultation and British Planning, 1939-1951" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2010).

²⁹ John Grierson, "The course of realism," in *Grierson on Documentary*, ed. Forsyth Hardy (London: Faber & Faber, 1979): 78, as cited in Jacqui L'Etang, "John Grierson and the Public Relations Industry in Britain" *Screening the Past* 7 (1999), Web, 19 Jan 2013.

³⁰ Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: a history of the non-fiction film* (New York: Oxford University Press), 95; L'Etang, "John Grierson and the Public Relations Industry in Britain," 422; L'Etang and Barnouw examine how the relationship between John Grierson and Stephen Tallents was critical to promoting the use of documentary film in British wartime propaganda (vis-à-vis the establishment of the Empire Marketing Board film unit) and later within public relations broadly speaking. L'Etang notes that within the public relations field, Grierson's role is minimized if acknowledged at all in relation to the Tallents following the publication of two articles, in which his writing acts as vector for Grierson's ideas on the value of documentary for public relations. "Members seek definition of public relations," *Public relations* 1, no.3 (1949), 4; Sir Stephen Tallents "Who goes there?," *Public relations* 5, no.2 (1953), 3-6.

³¹ L'Etang, "John Grierson and the Public Relations Industry in Britain."

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Steven Foxton, "Film Centre (United Kingdom)," in *Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film* Volume 1, ed. Ian Aitken (London: Routledge, 2006), 411.

³⁵ Sir Arthur Elton, "How We Use Films: In Shell" *Film User* (August 1956), 344.

³⁶ Elton, "How We Use Films," 344; Rudmer Canjels, "From Oil to Celluloid: A History of Shell Films," in *A History of Royal Dutch Shell*, vol. 4, ed. J. Luiten van Zanden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 18. [Original report now missing from archive: 'The Record of the Film Unit', (1951), 2-4. PAC/21 B SFU 13.]

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⁴⁰ Hewitt, "Shell Advertising," 126, emphasis added.

⁴¹ Canjels, "From Oil to Celluloid," 19.

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⁴⁶ Patrick Russell, "Elton, Sir Arthur (1906-1973)," *BFI Screen Online: The definitive guide to Britain's film and TV history*. Web. 22 Apr 2013.

⁴⁷ Danny Birchall, "Housing Problems (1935)," *BFI Screen Online: The definitive guide to Britain's film and TV history*, Web, 22 Apr 2013.

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- ⁴⁹ Elton, "How We Use Films," 347.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., 345.
- ⁵¹ Canjels, "From Oil to Celluloid," 25.
- ⁵² Jeakins, "Filming Round the World," 55.
- ⁵³ Larkin, *Signal and Noise*, 76, 106.
- ⁵⁴ Canjels, "From Oil to Celluloid," 25.
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- ⁵⁶ Tinker Salas, *The Enduring Legacy*, 218-9.
- ⁵⁷ John Shearman, Interview with Alan Lawson [audio recording], 26 October 1987 (London: Broadcasting Entertainment and Cinematograph Technicians Union).
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Chapter Two

British Oil Company Towns in the Arabian Gulf

Architecture and urbanism have an obvious advantage over other cultural formations in shedding light on social relations and power structures: they constitute an essential part of the human experience and their experiential qualities make them accessible to everybody. They express cultural values, but they are also firmly grounded in material and daily life.

—Zeynep Çelik¹

The remarkable reach of the early oil industry can be readily illustrated by its power to transform socio-political, cultural, ideological and physical space beyond the confines of its operational settings - oil wells, pumping stations, refineries and pipelines. The cumulative effects of the 'magic' touch of oil were nowhere more apparent than in the urban settlements that entered the orbit of this extractive commodity.

—Nelida Fuccaro²

British imperialism in the Middle East is deeply rooted in histories of oil exploration and extraction. Until now, dominant histories of oil in the Arabian Gulf foreground the sequence of oil concessions in Persia and the former Ottoman Empire that a small number of men negotiated behind closed doors.³ Missing from this textbook narrative are urban histories of oil in the region. This chapter begins to examine how British determination to control the exploitation of vast crude deposits underneath land adjacent to the Arabian Gulf in the twentieth century transformed built environments and urban life there in fundamental ways.

In the wake of the First World War, the political doctrine of British Empire refashioned itself in terms of fostering self-rule in the colonized world. In the context of this new geo-political landscape, oil company towns emerged as primary sites of neo-colonialism. Initially, these planned enclaves functioned simultaneously as corporate outposts and what Rabinow calls “laboratories” for modern British planning. In colonial cities, European planners had experimented freely in the art and science of governing “modern society,” using blunt spatial techniques that could only be realized in the sphere of colonial dominance.⁴ The white enclave in particular was a central feature of spatial planning in colonial cities from Rabat to New Delhi. Similarly, British oil company towns were established first and foremost as idealized garden suburbs for white ex-patriot company employees. Fundamentally, the planning of corporate enclaves in the Arabian Gulf was shaped by the same principles of isolation and differentiation from existing social, cultural, and material landscapes that defined much of colonial urbanism.

Initial plans for oil company towns approached the basic housing needs of native and migrant workers as secondary and separate from the design of company enclaves. As a result, indigenous and migrant Arab, Persian and Indian laborers overwhelmed poorly designed and insufficient bachelor housing and informal, self-constructed settlements rapidly grew to accommodate the local population. This socio-spatial condition mirrors what urban scholars have theorized as the ‘dual city.’ This condition of segregation and differentiation in colonial urbanism was described by Abu-Lughod as ‘urban apartheid,’ which can apply to most colonial cities. As Abu-Lughod (1980), Rabinow (1989), Wright (1991), Çelik (1997) and others have argued and demonstrated, hyper-inequality

and systematic separation of the impeccably ordered European city from the severely neglected native city were spatial norms of colonial planning.⁵ Typically, in cases of colonial urbanism under French and British imperial rule, planners imposed a white enclave upon an existing metropolis, and in many cases executed violent erasures of significant swaths of existing urban fabric to create a false 'blank slate' for new construction.

Oil company towns, on the other hand, were strategically planned in remote locations nearby or strategic sites of oil extraction and usually far removed from major urban centers. Nonetheless, the socio-spatial realities of the oil company town produced divisive and contentious environments that severely damaged the public image of foreign petroleum companies in oil-producing countries. Nationalist, communist, and anti-imperialist movements spread throughout the region and fueled consistent and collective attempts to challenge and even dismantle the hegemonic position of petroleum companies. Oil workers were often at the center of these battles; rising up against the exploitative conditions imposed by the oil company to demand fair wages and improved living conditions. In response, British petroleum companies invented new strategies to address criticism and improve their public image. This points to a primary distinction between colonial cities and the neo-colonial settlements that were oil company towns. In the later case, where the foreign corporation operated as a guest of the national government and not as an acting colonial regime, the British company was forced to take seriously its reputation among local populations. Out of this condition, British oil company public relations were born.

Public relations efforts took shape in a variety of highly visible and often piecemeal projects. However, among the earliest and least visible projects were socio-spatial interventions in British oil company towns. Generally, these took the shape of new designs for neighborhood enclaves intended to house non-white indigenous employees and their families in oil company towns.⁶ These hybrid enclaves were spaces of exception that maintained principals of isolation and differentiation in their spatial planning. In these enclaves, space was construed as an image of modernity that accommodated a small minority within the indigenous population, putting regulated street plans and westernized spatial conventions on display. However, companies overwhelmingly failed to address serious and unrelenting problems in the neglected brown enclaves that left the majority of indigenous and migrant non-white laborers in degrading and impoverished living conditions.

This chapter examines how the production of the built environment in oil company towns through planning and architectural design functioned as an early manifestation of corporate public relations in oil-producing countries. Examining case studies of the earliest and largest oil company towns in Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, and Bahrain, this chapter shows how petroleum companies worked to manage their public image through the production of space as an image. In each case, the company enclaves and indigenous settlements are established during the earliest phases of planning and later a hybrid space for housing native company employees is planned as a spatial intervention aimed at improving public relations.

The subsequent section begins with a discussion of how the analysis of oil company towns presented in this chapter figures in relation to the existing literature on company towns. Thereafter, the chapter focuses on an analysis of neo-colonial urbanism

in four British oil company towns: the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's Abadan, the Iraq Petroleum Company's Kirkuk, the Bahrain Petroleum Company's Awali, and the Kuwait Oil Company's Ahmadi. In part two of the dissertation, chapter five will build upon the analysis presented here to examine how public relations strategies carried over in cinematic representations of the oil company town in British petroleum company films.

Planning Company Towns

Crawford defines the company town, according to the *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, as "a community inhabited chiefly by the employees of a single company or group of companies which also owns a substantial part of the real estate and houses."⁷ In general, scholarship on company towns is chiefly concerned with the disjuncture between modern planning ideals and socio-economic realities that arise in the growth of American mining and manufacturing company towns. Crawford's *Building the Working Man's Paradise* examines changing approaches to company town planning in the United States over the course of three centuries. Her chronicle pulls together otherwise disconnected case studies of company towns to present an analytical perspective on the history of corporate planning in the United States.

Planning approaches born out of the nascent era of American capitalism in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries developed as a direct response to the wretched image of industrialization embodied by the horrific living conditions working classes endured in England's urban centers of textile manufacturing.⁸ Manchester, England was a famous example, which had grown into an urban center of the expanding textile manufacturing in the early nineteenth century. The rapid speed and immense scale of industrial growth resulted in unmitigated mushrooming of squalid living conditions for the working class. In Engels' *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*, the epic ethnographic tome that first exposed the living conditions of England's working class slums in detail to a general audience was inspired largely by his experience in Manchester. He writes:

Every great city has one or more slums, where the working-class is crowded together. True, poverty often dwells in hidden alleys close to the palaces of the rich; but, in general, a separate territory has been assigned to it, where, removed from the sight of the happier classes, it may struggle along as it can. These slums are pretty equally arranged in all the great towns of England, the worst houses in the worst quarters of the towns; usually one or two-storied cottages in long rows, perhaps with cellars used as dwellings, almost always irregularly built. These houses of three or four rooms and a kitchen form, throughout England, some parts of London excepted, the general dwellings of the working-class. The streets are generally unpaved, rough, dirty, filled with vegetable and animal refuse, without sewers or gutters, but supplied with foul, stagnant pools instead. Moreover, ventilation is impeded by the bad, confused method of building of the whole quarter, and since many human beings here live crowded into a small space, the atmosphere that prevails in these working-men's quarters may readily be imagined.⁹

The evocative descriptions of the urban environments in which England's working classes are forced to dwell vividly illustrate the relative depravity of these slums in

juxtaposition to the ordered, hygienic, and spacious landscape where the profiteering bourgeoisie rest comfortably.¹⁰

In the United States, disgust and fear that American industry might replicate the horrific conditions of England's working class slums in American cities simultaneously inspired modernist approaches to town planning that hoped to control the social and physical conditions of the working class.¹¹ Central to the scholarship on the planning of American company towns is the case of Pullman, Illinois. As the first town that was planned in its entirety by professional architects commissioned by an American company in 1881, Pullman represents a critical paradigm of company town planning. George Pullman, the company man for whom the town was named, executed a design guided by his moralistic vision that the "right" built environment would have the power to improve the social character and control the economic efficiency of his labor force.¹² Famous for inventing the luxury train car, Pullman chose to locate his new factory complex for the Pullman Palace Car Company near but not in the midwestern metropolis of Chicago. According to his rationale, this was close enough to draw in a workforce and far enough to establish a safe distance from what he called the "baneful influences" of urban life.¹³

Pullman entrusted the young duo of architect S.S. Beman and landscape architect Nathan F. Barrett to realize his vision for a factory complex and town that could "transform the workingman."¹⁴ His impetus to create social change through control of the built environment came largely as a response to the recent wave of labor strikes that was fueled by a working class living in the slums that engulfed the nearby metropolis. The spatial determinism that guided his approach supported his belief that he might single-handedly elevate the condition of the workingman through his vision for Pullman. He went so far as to claim that "the building of Pullman is likely to be the beginning of a new era for labor."¹⁵

Following the construction of the first factory buildings, the town's planned residential blocks were built in proximity to the south of the manufacturing complex. The residential area was divided from the factories by a major thoroughfare, and laid out according to a linear gridiron street plan (Figure 2.1). Accommodations allocated according to employees' rank and skill-level were differentiated in terms of size, amenities, and location.¹⁶ From the outset, George Pullman sought total control of the residential and social spheres of his company town: acting as planner, landlord, employer, and even governor for Pullman's residents. His reach extended from decisions about the collection of books held at the "public" library, to which plays could show at the Arcade theatre. His unwavering restriction on the sale of liquor in Pullman resulted in an exodus of many residents to the serving establishments in the neighboring so-called "bum town" that developed in parallel to the pristine streets of Pullman.¹⁷

Pullman's population quickly boomed to approximately 8,600 by 1885, and eventually to 12,600 just eight years later. However, George Pullman maintained total ownership of all properties in the town through a subsidiary landholding interest. Residents were forced to pay rent to their employer without any opportunity for future home ownership. George Pullman reasoned that maintaining his position as sole landlord would allow for him to uphold the integrity of his properties and still "help the workingman to help himself."¹⁸ In reality, the instability of residential tenure resulted in a massive turnover rate in Pullman, averaging employee turnover every four and a half years.¹⁹ In subsequent decades, as the national economy suffered and demand for the

palace cars dwindled George Pullman cut salaries and laid off hundreds of workers. At the same time he refused to lower rents, leading to a historic two-month long strike beginning in 1894 driven by Pullman's labor force and supported by local unions. This action effectively shut down regional train lines and isolated Chicago from the rest of the country. This eventually resulted in the demise of Pullman as a company town, which was annexed to the municipality of Chicago and its properties sold off to individual occupants after the turn of the century.

The paternalistic, single-handed, top-down approach that shaped the history of planning and development in Pullman served as a company town planning paradigm for planning mining company towns like Tyrone, New Mexico. By 1918, the Phelps-Dodge copper mining company's settlement of Tyrone was upheld as a "landmark of company town design," notably due to its eventual approach in accommodating the population of migrant Mexican workers. For the first time, as an "experiment" the American mining company provided basic housing and welfare programs for Mexican workers. Providing minimal shelter and only basic services, Phelps-Dodge built flat-roofed row houses with running water and electricity signified a definitive upgrade from the ramshackle self-constructed huts where Mexican workers typically resided in mining company towns. However, the housing area was intentionally segregated from the rest of the town by railroad tracks, and so segregation of American employees from Mexican workers in all aspects of social life remained a fundamental aspect of planning in Tyrone.²⁰

This Jim Crow model of segregation in American mining company towns in the United States was soon exported abroad, as Vitalis argues in *America's Kingdom*. He notes that although the "model" manufacturing and mining company towns characterized by welfare work norms disappeared from the United States in the late 1920s, the same model was deliberately reborn overseas. Oil firms recreated these "Little Americas" across the global frontiers of mineral extraction and development. In other words, what the war to end the racial wage system [at home] would be "reenacted" in dozens of places, including in Saudi Arabia."²¹

In his study of Venezuela, Tinker Salas points to planned housing and social services for indigenous workers in oil company towns as "sites of social engineering and cultural hegemony." He goes on to detail:

The residential communities, or campos petroleros, that the foreign oil companies fashioned to house their local and foreign employees became the most important stage for the profound economic, social, and cultural changes that Venezuelans experienced after the discovery of oil. At the economic level the companies controlled employment and provided housing, while at the social and cultural level they organized recreational activities and oversaw the education of employees and their families. The creation of these Venezuelan residential enclaves involved an unparalleled degree of social engineering.²²

In his analysis, Tinker Salas emphasizes the sharp contrast between perceptions of the modern quality of life in the oil camps and the poor conditions of most rural communities in the country. He notes that, "while labor unions in the United States fought against the visible symbols of corporate intrusion into their lives, including company housing...Venezuelan oil unions ironically defended these as benefits."²³

In the context of Saudi Arabia, Vitalis' analysis powerfully demonstrates how the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO) strictly enforced a color line in the American oil company towns like Dhahran. From the outset, housing in Dhahran was segregated, and the quality of environment drastically differentiated between white and non-white staff and labor. The American oil company originally established a camp near its oil field just four miles from the coast on the highpoint of Jabal Dhahran for its American executives and managerial staff in 1935. The settlement was home to the majority of the company's American employees and functioned as ARAMCO's administrative headquarters in Saudi Arabia. For two decades, the company's planners guarded the original enclave (referred to originally as Casoc Town, and a decade later as American Camp) from any encroachment of non-white workers (Figure 2.2). American Camp originally provided sixty or so American staff and their families with new two-bedroom air-conditioned housing units, alongside offices, a small hospital, and mess hall. Within a few years, ARAMCO responded to increasing incidents of theft and subversive acts of resistance carried out by locals against the new and "hardly legitimate" authority of the American company by enclosing the enclave with a fence.²⁴

After discovering its first productive oil well in Damman in 1938, ARAMCO began expanding the small settlement into an oil city that maintained the color line around American Camp. ARAMCO established infrastructure for power, telecommunications, sewage, and fuel systems that serviced the enclave, and constructed more housing, a second hospital, a new recreation center, and eventually a four-hole golf course inside the camp for American employees and their families.²⁵ By the end of the Second World War, the American presence in Saudi Arabia was decidedly there to stay and Dhahran was on the cusp of major expansion. As one visitor described it, "The oil town at Dhahran [sic] is just like a bit of USA – modern air-conditioned houses, swimming pool, movie theatre etc. Six American wives have already arrived and more are on the way. About 1000 men (American) are employed and about 10,000 Arabs. This is only the beginning of a tremendous expansion."²⁶

As the numbers of new recruits quickly grew to support the boom of new construction at the planned refinery in Ras Tanura, so did the tensions surrounding American Camp in Dhahran. ARAMCO lacked sufficient housing to accommodate the hundreds of new arrivals to the workforce. With no housing prospects, Arab workers settled their families alongside squatters in Nahadin, northeast of Saudi Camp, amidst squalid conditions of overcrowded barastis (palm-thatched huts). Another problem arose for the company that challenged the executives' defense of the color-line. As the company grew, educated and higher class Hejazis, Syrians, Iraqis, and Egyptians were increasingly eligible for clerical and teaching positions. However the problem of where socially upward Arabs should live forced ARAMCO executives to consider the possibility of allowing them to settle within American Camp. As Vitalis explains, this was a point about which there was no dispute, no dissent, and no doubt raised: "no Arab, whatever his skill level and seniority, should be permitted to reside inside American Camp itself."²⁷ The company's short-term solution was to begin hiring American girls for secretarial jobs and bringing over 1,700 Italians from Eritrea to fill various positions, including doctors, barbers, kitchen staff, and master masons. The Italians were housed in a camp that remained separate from American Camp.

ARAMCO implemented a change in naming policy as an attempt to disguise the racial distinctions among camps with nominal designations referring to purported rank and skill: American Camp was renamed Senior Staff Camp, Indian Camp as Intermediate Camp, and Saudi Camp as General Camp. Vitalis paints the following picture of these segregated quarters: “conditions in each of the camps grew worse as you descended the ladder from whites, with their ranch-style homes, swimming pool, movie theatre, and the rest, to Italians, kind of like whites but with many fewer amenities, then the Indians, in what some called the Servant Camp, and finally the miserable surroundings of Saudi Camp.”²⁸

Vitalis argues that ARAMCO’s practice of segregating and differentiating the quality of housing, transportation and social spheres in Dhahran based on race (and national identity) reproduced the fundamentally *American* practice of Jim Crow segregation.²⁹ In order to attract ex-patriot managers and staff to the oil fields of the Arabian Gulf, BAPCO and ARAMCO designed suburbs in the desert that could be conducive to family living with all the comforts of home. Part of constructing the illusion of a home away from home, was to keep these well planned and maintained American or white camps separate from the under- or completely un-serviced informal settlements of indigenous and other non-white migrant labor from India and elsewhere.

As the four case studies in this chapter will detail, these same practices characterized the development of British oil company towns in Iran, Iraq and Bahrain. However, this chapter follows Vitalis’ argument that, “Even if British oilmen had never set foot in Abadan, Kirkuk, and Bahrain, American Camp would have looked the same. American Camp’s racial geography was identical to that of every other oil installation Americans had built in three continents across one hundred years in places under widely different forms of rule.”³⁰ The planning of British oil company towns in the Arabian Gulf emerged from a distinct practice of colonial planning that has been well studied by urban scholars. The following section will discuss a key precedent of colonial planning in New Delhi as a blueprint for the planning of neo-colonial British oil company towns during the first half of the twentieth century.

Colonial Urbanism

Dominance is not exclusive to colonial cities, but the use and manifestation of dominance in the colonial context is particularly blunt. [...] Colonial cities are important to understand, therefore, not because they are so different, but because the politics of decisions in them are more transparent. Analysis of the forms of dominance deployed in colonial cities may point the way to a better understanding of the power of architecture and urbanism in general.³¹

Imperial regimes have engaged in the destruction and creation of built environments for millennia. In the colonial context, urban settlements not only work to accommodate, but also reproduce systems of hierarchy and domination at every scale of the urban experience. Thus, urban planning and architectural design have operated as some of the most powerful and blunt tools of empire building. As AlSayyad (quoted above) argues in *Forms of Dominance*, creative destruction of urban environments colonized under French and British rule during the 18th and 19th centuries prove to be among the most transparent and productive sites for understanding colonial urbanism.

Colonial cities under French and British rule were laboratories for modern planning ideologies. In *French Modern*, Rabinow's study of urban planning in the colonial context of Morocco and Algeria under French rule reveals how urban planners freely experimented with spatial practices in the colonies that they could not get away with at home. In his words, colonial cities were spaces in which metropolitan imperial powers could test the limits of the art and science of governing "modern society."³² Existing settlements were treated as blank canvases upon which designers could dream up projects to implement colonial ideologies of controlling, containing, and even civilizing urban populations. As a result, duality and segregation emerged as the prevailing spatial conditions of colonial cities under European rule, which Abu-Lughod has described as "urban apartheid" in her study of Rabat.

Gwendolyn Wright's study of French practices of urban planning and architecture in its major colonies reveals how an imperial policy of "associationism" worked to justify the systematic differentiation and segregation of the urban environment. The result was an urban condition of duality, in which the European city developed apart from and in contradistinction to the native city where colonized populations resided. French imperial authorities and planners adhered to the policy of associationism, which encouraged the coexistence of cultural differences, as opposed to forcing natives to assimilate to a set of cultural norms. Thus, while planners continually improved and modernized the condition of streets, housing, public space and infrastructure in European settlements, French authorities mandated a policy of "preserving" the native city. In Morocco, the French defined the medina and its quintessential architectural motifs as the embodiment of Arab culture to be "protected" from the impact of modern cultural influences. As Wright demonstrates, these practices institutionalized the production of material, social, and economic inequalities based on categories of race in the colonial city under French rule.³³

Colonial cities were never merely receptive sites of imperial expertise and domination in the periphery of Empire. As King points out, "colonial urban development not be understood separately from developments in the metropole but similarly, urbanism and urbanization in the metropole cannot be understood separately from developments in the colonial periphery."³⁴ The development of urban centers in colonized territories emerged largely as a means to support the imperial exploitation of labor, resource extraction, and the production and transportation of materials and goods. In this sense, the development of modern livelihoods, economies, and built environments in the metropole depended completely on colonial cities. While imperialist discourses worked to produce an image of the West as inherently superior to and wholly distinct from its colonies in the East, the mutually constitutive urban development of cities 'at home' (in Europe) and in the colonized territories controvert this powerful yet fictive dichotomy.

British Colonial Urbanism

As the largest and most significant colonized territory in the British Empire, the Indian subcontinent provides among the most obvious and blunt displays of colonial urbanism. As the planned British capital, New Delhi's planning and architecture was intended to foreground imperial hegemony above all else. Thus, the built environment served both as an expression and as an instrument of British colonial discourse. Orientalism was central to Britain's justification for colonizing India, representing the imperial power as a modern and progressive civilization, always in contrast to images of

“the native” and native space as backwards and exotic. Throughout British colonial history in India, the colonial authorities had assumed an inherent positional superiority over the colonized and developed an image of India as a place *in need* of British protection and governance.

In 1608, the British arrived to India largely in the interest of trade. By 1784, mercantile interests had given way to political ambitions, and the colonial project was officially underway. Beginning that year, British Parliament granted unprecedented rights to the East India Company and established itself as the dominant governing authority in the subcontinent. British objectives focused on internal unification of the politically fragmented region, and by the mid-nineteenth century nationalist sentiments among the colonized had surmounted British expectations and came to a head in the uprisings of 1857-58.³⁵ Following the British suppression of the revolts, colonial authority over India was transferred from the East India Company directly to the British Crown. At this time, the industrializing metropole viewed India both as a source of raw materials as well as a new market for cheap textiles coming out of British industrial towns. Trade between the distant metropole and colony was further bolstered by the Suez Canal opening in 1867, and soon the economic upturn combined with Britain’s strong state mentality, drew increasing numbers of British immigrants to the subcontinent as part of the economic, military, and administrative colonial apparatus.³⁶

By 1912, as the political and economic influence of the British in India had continued to increase, the colonial administration made plans to move the capital from Calcutta to the interior city of Shahjahanabad, or Old Delhi.³⁷ Aside from the practical advantage of the new capital’s central location, the site carried symbolic weight, which the British believed would help to impress their inherent superiority upon the colonized and create an “illusion of permanence” for their rule in India.³⁸ Challenged with ruling over the diverse range of subjugated populations on the subcontinent, the British imposed a new social order that was intended to overrule the Indian caste system and other indigenous hierarchies. Increasingly, “westernized” Indians were incorporated into governing ranks alongside British officials, and Indian clerks were employed in service of the colonial administration. The British codified the “Warrant of Precedence” as an official ranking system to categorize and control the diversified body of employees, in which ethnicity and race were central criteria.³⁹

In his own words, New Delhi’s chief architect, Edwin Lutyens, illustrates the colonial administration’s perception of the colonized as an inherently inferior race, stating, “I do not think it possible for the Indians and whites to mix freely and naturally. They are very different and even my ultra-wide sympathy with them cannot admit them on the same plane as myself”.⁴⁰ New Delhi was planned as an administrative city to the south of the existing walled city, and in every possible way the new capital was designed as physically separate and spatially distinct from the dense, pedestrian-based urban fabric Old Delhi (Figure 2.3). Jyoti explains, “colonial discourse consciously developed and nurtured the contrast between the old city of Delhi and the new one,” and accordingly urban design schemes focused solely on building the European city while neglecting the growing needs of the native city.⁴¹

British authority was clearly expressed in the layout of New Delhi, which made clear reference to the urban design model of Versailles in the plan’s comprehensive clarity, symmetry, axial pathways, and extensive landscaping. The urban design

demonstrated the colonizer's total control over the environment, social structure, and allocation of resources in the new city.⁴² From the street system to the organization of residential quarters, the plan's various components each served to somehow underpin the principle of social differentiation established in the colonial ranking system.⁴³ New Delhi's focal point, the Viceroy's House, was built at the highest elevation possible, overlooking the existing old city and standing taller than any indigenous structure in the area. Flanking the House and its gardens, stood the Secretariat, offices buildings to accommodate the imperial bureaucracy.⁴⁴ A system of broad thoroughfares and parks radiated outwards from this central complex, the most prominent of which was the 440-foot-wide, magnificently landscaped avenue, Kingsway. This main axial path established a ceremonial route from India Gate towards the Viceroy's House, and was intersected perpendicularly by Queensway, a broad avenue that projected north to connect to New Delhi's commercial center, Connaught Circus.⁴⁵

Beyond the central imperial complex, New Delhi was designed as a stratified system of residential quarters, in which the location of a residential area was determined by the clear criteria of its inhabitants' racial, socio-economic and occupational status in relation to the Crown. Distinct residential areas were allotted to the following categories: gazetted officers and members of council (mostly European), European clerks, Indian clerks and low-ranking officials, Indian princes and elite, and "peons" (Indians with non-official rank). The status of any individual residence was expressed through various spatial indicators, including distance from the Viceroy's House, elevation, size of estate, size of dwelling, road width and nomenclature, and the presence of landscaping and other facilities. For example, gazetted officers were accommodated on large garden estates relatively near to the Viceroy, while Indian clerks and peons resided in apartment complexes on narrower streets in the areas closest to the walled city and furthest from the Viceroy's house.⁴⁶

Although Old Delhi remained spatially distinct from the new city – so much so that the physical boundary between the two as buffered by a large park – the old city was nonetheless inextricably tied to New Delhi, as "the economic needs of the colonial community continued to affect sections of the old city rather than the new".⁴⁷ In other words, in addition to being the discursive traditional city against which colonial discourse defined the image of the new modern capital, the old city was vital to the new city in that it was constantly servicing the colonial administration with imported goods and indigenous labor. Commercial products were brought from the old city to be sold in New Delhi's commercial center, Connaught Circus, which was planned midway between Kingsway and the southern edge of the old city. However, in contrast to the pedestrian-friendly street markets that existed in Old Delhi, New Delhi's spacious, colonnaded, circular marketplace, like the rest of the city, was deliberately designed for vehicular access. The larger plan was based on motorized transport, and thus the city largely catered only the needs of the colonial elite, while making it intentionally inconvenient for the native underclass of pedestrian city dwellers.⁴⁸

Perhaps the ultimate marker of difference between the two cities of colonial Delhi was the contrast in density between the two urban arrangements (Figure 2.4). New Delhi's central quarters were comprised of spacious estates, ranging from one to six acres. The new city occupied an area about twice size of the old walled city, whose population had drastically risen to nearly 350,000 by 1931. The dramatic population

boom, a direct result of the employment opportunities created by New Delhi's development, severely strained the limited housing stock that was confined by the old city walls. Though British planners had at some point discussed plans to knock down a portion of the southern wall in order to accommodate the mounting demands of the old city's congestion and housing crisis, no action was ever taken by planners to expand the city.⁴⁹ Neglect of the old city was coupled by seemingly unbridled investment in housing for elite residents of New Delhi.

By the early twentieth century, the term "bungalow" had been adopted into the English language to describe "the most usual class of house occupied by Europeans in the interior of India".⁵⁰ Under the colonial occupation, elite classes of "westernized" Indians soon began to adopt the domestic habits and spatial arrangements of the bungalow for themselves, which is ironic since the term "bungalow" was derived from the seventeenth century reference to "bangla", an Indian hut structure in Bengal. In *The Bungalow*, King discusses the social and economic changes that shaped the etymological and formal aspects of the bungalow in colonial India, emphasizing that the defining criteria related not to the form of the dwelling necessarily, but for whom the building was intended. As a result of colonial processes, King explains, ownership of the term was transferred from the natives to their colonizers.⁵¹

The bungalow had clear significance as a socio-spatial instrument of colonialism, in that, despite its formal variations in style and plan, the dwelling type was always distinguished by its contrast to regional types of Indian housing. By the early twentieth century, the "classic bungalow" was the most typical accommodation for colonial officials across the subcontinent, and usually comprised of a detached, flat-roofed, single story house, situated in a large gated compound. The house normally included a verandah, or covered patio that served as an outdoor dwelling space in which the Indian servant staff would cater to their masters. These servants were often segregated within the living compound according to caste and task – for example, the "sweepers" in charge of removing the master's feces were relegated to the verandah, and not permitted to enter the interior rooms.⁵²

Just as the urban design of New Delhi gave spatial expression to the racial, socioeconomic and political hierarchies of the colonial authority, so did the allocation of housing in the city. Lowest ranking officials and non-ranked Indian peons already had to travel the farthest to work at the administrative center due to the location of their residential area, which corresponded to their social rank. And yet, further stratification of social status was indicated by the size of one's housing lot and the dwelling type they could occupy. For example, Peons were housed in communal apartment complexes on the edge of the city, while elite Europeans occupied multiacre bungalow-estates isolated from one another by their elaborately landscaped gardens, yet within convenient reach by car of the city's administrative and commercial centers.⁵³

As the following section will demonstrate, the initial planning of oil company towns was explicitly modeled on Lutyen's design for colonial New Delhi. British petroleum companies in Iran, Iraq and Kuwait commissioned the same architect, James M. Wilson, who was trained directly under Lutyens to draw up the designs of their major company towns. Despite the distinction between Britain's political positions in India (as the colonial authority) to the Arabian Gulf (as a private corporation operating in cooperation with independent national governments), the practices of colonial planners

and oil company planners shared more similarities than differences. As detailed in the previous chapter, the British government was a majority shareholder in most of the petroleum companies operating in the Arabian Gulf. Furthermore, during and after the conference in San Remo that redrew the map of the former Ottoman Empire, the British government had a big hand in shaping the political boundaries and installing the political leaders of oil-producing countries. Accordingly, the spatialized imperial hierarchies characterizing British colonial urbanism in New Delhi remained transparent in the development of oil company enclaves in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, and Kuwait. However, as will be discussed below, these neo-colonial enclaves failed to be politically and socially sustainable as such. In an effort to survive mounting political opposition to British hegemony in the region, British companies began to use planning and architecture to produce a new public image for the company.

British Oil Company Towns

Beginning in the first decade of the twentieth century, petroleum companies established camps and eventually commissioned plans for new towns to house white expatriot employees, typically clustering these settlements around isolated locations of strategic importance to the extraction of oil. Early on, oil company towns were characterized by segregation and hyper-inequality between these company enclaves and the informal settlements that emerged as the self-constructed housing of local and migrant “low-skilled” or “unskilled” workers.

Although the British never formally colonized the oil-rich countries of the Arabian Gulf, but rather established concessions for oil exploration and development in independent countries and (for a time) British mandates, the petroleum companies planned settlements according to the model of colonial urban planning discussed above. The organization and character of the built environment in these oil company towns intended to keep the physical and social worlds of local labor and migrant non-white workers and ex-patriot white employees separate and distinct from one another. In Iran, Iraq, and Kuwait, the petroleum companies commissioned James M. Wilson, an architect trained under the chief colonial planner Sir Edward Lutyens in New Delhi, to draw plans for the company towns of Abadan, Kirkuk, and Ahmadi. Imperial hierarchies remained transparent in the development of the built environment throughout the initial phases of the design and settlement of these oil company towns, which established differentiated, segregated, and unequal living conditions for residents based on race and class hierarchies.

The segregation and differential allocation of housing and access to basic services among company employees based on race and ethnicity was therefore a norm in oil company towns established in the Arabian Gulf. Company towns were established as enclaves for ex-patriot employees, conveniently located nearby oil fields and/or refineries. As the population of indigenous migrant workers grew in response to the new industry’s demand for so-called lower-tier skilled and unskilled labor, oil companies often neglected to provide their workforce with even the most basic housing and services. As a result, informal self-constructed settlements mushroomed outside the company enclaves, making the division and inequality between the populations glaringly obvious.

British and American planners designed new garden city-inspired residential quarters for expatriate staff in order to ensure ample comfort for Anglo-Saxon employees

while minimizing any discomfort of unheralded daily interactions with the indigenous population. Meanwhile, Arab, Persian and other non-White oil company staff and laborers lived with less access to mobility, less privacy, less space, and fewer (if any) basic amenities like sewage, clean water, and electricity. Across the board, planned white neighborhoods tended to include a variety of amenities and comforts, such as movie theatres, hospitals, and schools. Meanwhile, local and migrant laborers occupied basic shelters, often in auto-constructed informal settlements without proper sewage or electricity.

Thus, the production of space in oil company towns characteristically entailed two fundamental principals: first, the company's normalization of racial and ethnic segregation, and second its strategic isolation and differential treatment of indigenous or non-white workers. The following four case studies of the oil company towns with national headquarters in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain and Kuwait illustrate how foreign companies initially planned oil company towns, and how they adapted these designs in light of a need to address animosity towards the company within the local population sparked by anti-imperialist and other political critiques. In conclusion, I highlight the ways in which architecture and planning were used in each case to produce an *image* of modernity that the British-controlled companies hoped would improve public relations with the local population.

Abadan, Iran

The Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) found its first productive well in 1908 at Masjid-i-Suleiman (MIS) located in the southwestern hills of Iran's Khuzestan region. APOC was a subsidiary of the Scottish/British-owned Burmah Oil Company and renamed Anglo-Iranian (AIOC) in 1935. Within three years of discovering the productive well at MIS, APOC completed a pipeline to transport oil 130 miles away to the Shatt-al-Arab River. Abadan, a large mudflat island at the mouth of the Gulf, was chosen as the site for its future oil refinery and distribution port. Abadan's existing population was comprised of around 24,000 Bani-Kaab Arab tribesmen, shepherds and date palm farmers, residing in several dispersed villages around the island.⁵⁴ In order to build a modern oil industry in this remote region of Iran, the company determined that it would have to import all of the materials and resources it needed, including sand, stone, lime, bricks, as well as trained artisans and architects.⁵⁵

APOC quickly established plans for the refinery and an adjacent bungalow to the west that housed senior staff and a general office and dispensary. The first bungalow was an impermanent building constructed of poles overlaid with date palm leaves and mud. After a few years, the "pucka bungalow" as it is described on a map dated 1910, was replaced with a permanent brick structure called No. 1 Bungalow. Within a decade APOC planned its company enclave, the bungalow settlement area known as Braim. The small network of modern buildings and roads were built to accommodate the growing numbers of British staff and senior officials. Bachelor housing, two-story bungalows with arcaded verandas, communal buildings, and numerous gardens became regular features of company enclave, which was reserved for white company staff and officials.⁵⁶

The construction of the oil refinery and pipeline immediately drew a new population of migrant men from diverse ethnic and regional backgrounds seeking work with the oil company.⁵⁷ APOC did not provide housing for migrant laborers who

comprised the lowest level of skilled and unskilled contract labor for the company. Meanwhile, the company brought Indian men to Abadan to fill the demand for clerical and technical staff positions. The company provided these workers with basic living quarters and offered higher wages than available to indigenous and local migrant workers. As local migrants arrived in Abadan, often with their families, they were left to settle in makeshift tents and mud huts flanking the eastern side of the refinery.

By 1928, the rapidly increasing population on the island and APOC's lack of housing provision for indigenous labor working in and around the refinery produced an overcrowded settlement of informal dwellings and markets referred to on a company map as Abadan Town, and colloquially among British residents as the bazaar.⁵⁸ Basic infrastructures (like sewage and electricity) and social services (like hospitals and schools) were inadequate or absent, compounding the struggle of under or unpaid oil workers to provide clean and decent living conditions for their families.⁵⁹ Manucher Farmanfarman documents that at the time for most refinery workers, "Wages were 50 cents a day. There was no vacation pay, no sick leave, no disability compensation. The workers lived in a shanty town...without running water or electricity."⁶⁰

Not only was the quality of life in the town starkly differentiated from the company enclave in terms of material conditions, but also absolutely segregated from it. Crinson describes, "Contact between the 'town' and Braim was largely made via servant intermediaries. Both residential areas served the refinery but they were also separated by it: the 'bungalow area' spaciouly laid out to the west in favour of the prevailing winds; the 'town' as a compact yet increasingly stifled area to the east, the 'other sore within our operations' as one AIOC official described it." The refinery, he puts it, "formed a curtain or cordon sanitaire between these ill-matched twins"⁶¹ (Figure 2.5).

Discontent among Iranian oil laborers and their families in Abadan culminated in a massive labor strike in May 1929, when as many as 9,000 of the 10,000 refinery workers gathered to demand better wage and living conditions.⁶² Oil company's British officials retreated to their enclave in panic, and following subsequent pressure by the Iranian government APOC ultimately implemented a visible policy of greater "Iranianization" of the overall workforce as an attempt to quell political instability in Abadan after 1933. At the same time, Crinson points out, there was recognition among company officials that the housing situation had spiraled out of control and there was "a need for a new propaganda of architecture and urbanism."⁶³

APOC had hired the British architect James M. Wilson, a former assistant to the colonial planner Sir Edwin Lutyens in New Delhi, for several building commissions in Abadan since 1927. Beginning in the 1930s, Wilson was charged with planning residential areas (or "dormitory estates") to begin to address the lack of housing accommodation and services provided to the company's non-European employees.⁶⁴ New housing was allocated among company employees according to rank and ethnicity, as Crinson details:

For non-European staff Segoush-i-Braim and Amirabad were located to the north and Bawarda-i-Shemali to the south. For non-European labour Bahar and Ferahabad were sited beside the Bahmanshir river; Ahmedabad and Bahmanshir just east of the town; and Jamshid to the south-east. To the north-west an extension of Braim was laid out for European staff.⁶⁵

As it expanded, Braim maintained its garden oasis character featuring “large villas and bungalows set on green lawns, surrounded by parks and gardens and lined with English hedges, and built on lots averaging 1,000 m², and 4.5 units per hectare.”⁶⁶ On the other hand, typical workers’ quarters, like Bahmanshir and Bahar, consisted of linear row houses with high walls, tiny courtyards, and unfurnished wall-to-wall units.⁶⁷ By 1951, less than 20% of the tens of thousands of AIOC Iranian laborers lived in company housing.

Meanwhile, the population of the town had mushroomed to over 200,000 residents. AIOC eventually provided some basic services to the town including schools, transportation, and health facilities, as well as a cinema.⁶⁸ However, despite the relative improvement in company housing provisions, AIOC maintained the underlying policies of segregation and differentiation between British, Indian and Iran oil company officials, staff and workers through the planning of separated enclaves and a policy of distributing housing types that ranged tremendously in quality based on rank and race. The experience of Iranian laborers differed entirely from that of the British administrative personnel and technicians, and a minority of Iranians hired for more technical positions or married to British staff.

In 1933 the AIOC and the Iranian government renegotiated the original 1901 concession as a thirty-two year contract, stipulating among other conditions that the oil company was responsible for improving worker pay and conditions to facilitate “more chance for advancement,” through the construction of schools, roads, hospitals, and a telecommunication system.⁶⁹ In light of the new agreement, AIOC took steps to examine the much-disputed issue of housing disparities between British and Iranian employees in Abadan. Wilson was commissioned to assess existing conditions in Abadan and propose a scheme for improving worker accommodations. Wilson overtly recognized that the severe housing inequalities between Iranian and British employees established the perception of an “almost insurmountable” barrier for the average young educated Iranian working for the company and living in Abadan. In his report, he wrote:

As the quality of Persian labour fostered by the Company, improved, and as the service of the Company attracted the more intelligent Persian, it became evident that these conditions of living were unsatisfactory. This feeling of dissatisfaction, among superior Persian employees has been increasingly evident for some time, and, indirectly due to the revised concession, it is now demanding careful consideration and action. [...] There is little doubt that it has aroused in the various Nationals feelings of jealousy towards the British, which in some instances are closely akin to dislike. [...] [the company] must introduce measures to meet it. Failure to do so will in all probability result in measures of a more serious nature being forced upon it.⁷⁰

Responding to these stated concerns, Wilson’s proposed a solution.

The architect proposed an experimental design for a neighborhood that would accommodate British and Iranian employees “on a parallel basis” for the first time. He believed this approach to planning would potentially “bridge over the present gulf” between the Iranian and British populations of Abadan.⁷¹ However, Wilson’s plan for a new enclave likely served to exacerbate rather than abate the tensions cause by segregation. Like Braim, the new mixed neighborhood of Barwada was also segregated

and differentiated from the town and failed to address the housing problems ailing the majority of Iranian employees in Abadan. Ultimately, even though Wilson originally intended Barwada to accommodate multiple ranks of Iranian employees, Crinson notes that, “the only Iranians who lived in Bawarda were those few, generally educated in British universities, who had attained senior positions in the Abadan hierarchy and become part of the Company’s ‘great machine’.”⁷²

Iranians in Abadan Town, remained cordoned off from the enclave of Barwada. Wilson planned the new residential area as an enclave effectively enclosed on all sides. A perimeter of various natural and manmade features boxed in the garden suburb: the Shatt al-Arab river on to southwest, a creek to the northwest, and a road (and pipelines) running adjacent to both eastern perimeters of the development. Wilson designed a roundabout at the junction connecting Barwada to the main road that ran north and passed the perimeters of the refinery, town, and Braim. Tower houses and a cinema house marked the entry from the roundabout on a diagonal axis road that south from the corner to the riverbank. These design features established the roundabout as the central point of access and oriented the axial boulevard, which determined the perpendicular orientation of all of Barwada’s housing plots (Figure 2.6).

Housing design for the British and senior Iranian staff residents included European, and specifically ‘Dutch’ style estates surrounded with sprawling gardens (Figure 2.7). However, houses for European and Iranian residents remained differentiated to some degree by the plot size, with more generously sized sites allotted to British residents. Along the river at the end of the arterial road, Wilson planned a central garden area that included playgrounds and sportsgrounds for Barwada’s families to enjoy. Although the plan for Barwada initially intended accommodation in the enclave for “middle grades” of Iranians married to British staff; however Iranian residents ultimately included just senior staff. As Crinson suggests, “The existence of some senior Iranian staff living in the same development as their British counterparts was now manifestly an insufficient token of the Company’s good intentions. In fact the very spaciousness of the plots in Bawarda and its generous and largely redundant road provision could only be provocative to the Iranians in the ‘town’.”⁷³

In his proposal, Wilson did not address the town except to describe its location and orientation in relation to the new residential area, and to suggest that a footbridge over the creek should be constructed to allow pedestrian traffic to access the bazaar for shopping. In fact, Wilson explicitly discouraged direct vehicular access to the town for worry that “the risk would be incurred of the town overflowing into the residential area.”⁷⁴ The architect framed his solution to the problem of disparities in terms of accommodating well-educated (or in his words “intelligent” or “superior”) Iranians. Indigenous and migrant labor living in the slum-like conditions of the town relegated to continue in their present environment (Figure 2.8). Wilson’s solution, the design for Barwada, simply reproduced an enclave for “superior” brown residents, rather than addressing the substantial basic needs of the majority of Abadan’s Iranian population.

Indeed the solution was superficial. The company hired Wilson in the service of improving public relations between the AIOC and Iran by utilizing urban planning and architecture to create an image of modernity in the oil company town. This image of modernity featured the large estates and lush gardens of the colonial camp occupied by Iranians. A substantial transformation of the oil company town would have required

eliminating the barriers and equalizing the differences between spaces occupied by British and Iranian employees. Instead, Barwada served to reinforce segregation and simply allow a minority of selected Iranians to cross-over and mingle in the spaces of British modernity.

Kirkuk, Iraq

The case of the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) is unique to the region in that the oil company was in fact a multinational conglomerate administered and controlled by its majority British shareholder. After World War I, the IPC (formerly the Turkish Petroleum Company), which came to hold the monopoly concession for oil exploitation in Iraq, was reconstituted as a group of British, Dutch, American, and French company shareholders, as well as the 5% individual share of the Armenian oil magnate Calouste Gulbenkian. The Anglo-Persian Oil Company and Royal Dutch Shell maintained majority interest. The British government held significant shares through the APOC, and used its influence over the Iraqi mandate to establish the monopoly concession.

IPC established headquarters in Kirkuk in 1931, southeast of the well at Baba Gurgur where first oil was struck in 1927.⁷⁵ The case of IPC's company town is also unique in that it was planned adjacent to the major urban settlement Kirkuk (formerly part of the Ottoman province of Mosul), which existed prior to the British arrival during World War I, and subsequent exploitation of oil in the northern region of Iraq. Whereas most companies located company towns adjacent to key extraction or production sites in areas that could act as a "blank slate" for new town planning, IPC's established its headquarters and enclave as an outgrowth of a diverse Iraqi city that was home a population Turkmens, Arabs and other ethnic communities.

IPC established a residential enclave for expatriate British and other European executives and their families somewhat outside and northwest of the urban core towards the oil fields at Baba Gurgur. As Bet-Shilmon discusses in her study of the influence of the oil industry on Kirkuk's development during this period, IPC's decision to locate its residential camp outside of and apart from the existing urban core populated by Iraqis was a "physical manifestation of the social segregation that the IPC created and perpetuated" in various aspects of the company's relationship to the city.⁷⁶

IPC's economic influence on Kirkuk and the wider region was dramatic. The company's demand for local labor drew people from all over Iraq to the city and the urban population more than quadrupled over the next three decades, recorded at 120,000 residents in the 1957 census. Bet-Shilmon describes the spatial transformations that accompanied the population boom:

Over the course of these few decades, Kirkuk's urban fabric expanded in all directions on both sides of the Khassa River, progressing from a small built-up area centered on the citadel and local government headquarters when the British initially occupied the city to a sprawling collection of non-differentiated residential, commercial and industrial neighborhoods over an area of approximately sixteen square kilometers in 1958.⁷⁷

Originally, in 1930, the company had drawn up tentative plans to build new housing units to permanently accommodate up to 1,250 Iraqi laborers in or near the company camp.

However, it is apparent that these plans were never executed. IPC failed to provide or even subsidize housing for Arab employees. Iraqi workers were left to fend for themselves, settling in or near the urban core, as it was possible, and without the benefit of company-provided transportation to the fields.⁷⁸

In Kirkuk, oil workers' strikes in 1946 demanded better wages and housing from the Iraq Petroleum Company. As a result the Iraqi Parliament passed Law No. 29 in 1947, which required all companies employing more than one hundred workers to provide employee housing.⁷⁹ IPC initiated plans for new worker housing by that year, commissioning the British architect James M. Wilson, who also designed for AIOC, for the job. A 1950 British government report describes the construction of brick houses consisting of three or four rooms with ceiling fans, and some with central heating, as well as some smaller two-room units. Within five years of the report, 450 homes had been constructed in the new Iraqi company enclave.⁸⁰ The workers' residence was named after an ancient Assyrian city, the Arrapha Estate, and located nearby IPC's original European enclave, meaning that it was similarly segregated from the neglected older urban core of Kirkuk (Figure 2.9).

The company claimed to have distributed housing units according to household size, but allocations fell more apparently along to ethno-religious lines. The majority of residents in Arrapha Estate were Christian Assyrian Iraqis. IPC expressed concerns that the obvious differential quality in the housing options provided to Iraqis afforded new company housing in the enclave and those left to settle in the urban core would further aggravate tensions among workers. Furthermore, it was concluded that provision of housing in Arrapha Estate was an inefficient expenditure as it limited the number of employees that could be provided improved housing (Figure 2.10). Thus the company established a new home ownership scheme in 1950 to support Iraqi employees financially and logistically in order to buy property and build a new home in the existing Kirkuk town. The new scheme was intended to, "encourage the employee to make good use of his wages in the improvement of his standard of living and give him a positive stake in the community of the town of which he is a member. [...] Early start is essential for practical demonstration of the Company's intentions and to provide timely alternative to the extensions that will otherwise be necessary in the present progressing build-up of the Arrapha Estate."⁸¹ An internal 1952 memo among IPC executives expressed, "we...feel that the principles of employee home ownership and employee communities integrated into non-company employee communities or municipalities are sound and should be encouraged where conditions permit. This seems much more desirable than the old-time company camp with the familiar, unsanitary, unsightly, 'Ragtown' growing just outside the Company fence."⁸²

Largely it was the population of Muslim Turkmen, Arab and Kurdish oil workers who participated in the new program, and within four years 202 houses had been built and 19 purchased. Bet-Shilmon emphasizes, "It is difficult to glean from available sources how Iraqi IPC employees and Kirkukis in general viewed these housing projects. However, the ethno-religious composition of each is suggestive of how attitudes toward them were probably affected by the relationship that different communities had with British authorities in Iraq."⁸³ She concludes, "the IPC's housing schemes ultimately failed to address the greatest contributing factor to the unrest that undergirded the 1946 strike: the separation of the company camp from the city's historic urban fabric and the

corresponding segregation between expatriates and locals, and even between local communities.”⁸⁴

Indeed, IPC’s promoted its efforts to accommodate Iraqis in the Arrapha Estate and through its home-ownership scheme as evidence of the petroleum company’s hand in fostering modernity for Iraqis. The company neglected to use planning as a mechanism for integrating planned company housing for ex-patriots with the rest of the city and instead invested in the producing a superficial image of modernity. Ultimately, the principal of segregation that characterized AIOC’s project in Barwada was maintained in the planning of IPC’s housing for Iraqis.

Awali, Bahrain

Standard Oil of California (Socal) established the Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO) in 1929. Three years after oil was discovered on the island in June 1932, BAPCO was registered as a subsidiary of the new co-shareholder California Texas Oil Corporation (Texaco). As the site of the first productive well discovered in the Gulf, Bahrain inspired a regional treasure hunt for concessions in neighboring countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar. BAPCO’s oil fields on the small island were less significant than the major reserves discovered on the peninsula, however the company established a major refinery that maintained Bahrain’s status as a thriving and productive hub of the regional petroleum industry.⁸⁵

Despite the jointly owned American company’s status as the sole proprietor of oil concessions on the island, a century-long history of British imperial presence in Bahrain resulted in London’s on-going and strong influence over political, economic and cultural life in the capital Manama. The majority of foreigners in the country were British expatriates, including many of BAPCO’s employees and a large close-knit community of residents in the company town Awali. In 1937, the oil company located construction for its modern planned company town in the desert the site of an original company camp just north of the productive field. This meant the administrative center and residential quarters of BAPCO’s foreign employees was physically isolated from the heart of urban life in Manama, as well as general social and political life in Bahrain.⁸⁶

The construction of the new oil town was only intended to accommodate the company’s white employees and followed a standard garden suburb plan mixing American and British styles. Vitalis argues that BAPCO’s plan followed the “time-tested” formula of American mining and petroleum company town planning practices already established in the United States and Venezuela.⁸⁷ Fuccaro details that the white enclave of Awali “included some thirty family houses and seventeen quarters for bachelors. The town expanded several times over the following years in order to house growing number of families. By the mid-1950s it had reached the size of a European or American suburban settlement with approximately two thousand residents” (Figure 2.11).⁸⁸

Awali was organized in a manner that segregated employees according to race and nationality, and just as was the case in Abadan and Kirkuk the quality of housing obviously varied according to one’s place in the determined racial hierarchy. Vitalis provides a vivid description of the material and spatial nature of these inequalities:

The town [was] of course divided into separate reservations, in this case for Anglo-Saxons, Bahrainis, Iraqis, and Indians respectively. Whatever the relative state of primitiveness or luxury that American employees enjoyed, for instance, living originally in corrugated metal and cement huts, all non-Anglo-Saxon employees were to be given and expected to be content with less. Arabs and Indians in the camps lived in thatched, palm-frond and floorless huts, known as “barastis,” remaining in them even after Americans moved into permanent housing, with air conditioning among other amenities.⁸⁹

On the other hand, housing was neither planned nor provided in Awali for BAPCO’s non-white employees. Fuccaro describes the cramped and segregated accommodations allotted to the Persian and Indian domestic workers and wait staff employed in Awali’s modern facilities, such as its club, supermarket, cinema, and canteen. These workers and attendants lived five to a room, with minimal furniture and no access to modern amenities. Young Bahraini employees viewed the isolated social and cultural world of the Awali enclave as a “dreamland” to which they always remained outsiders.⁹⁰

Yet within the all-white enclave rank/class identities still ruled the spatial hierarchy of the location and material quality of a BAPCO employee’s living conditions. Fuccaro explains, “In line with the corporate nature of BAPCO as an industrial enterprise, salary scale defined rank and determined the type of accommodation of the company’s white employees. The largest family villas occupied by the management were the oldest and most comfortable. Their position on the top of the hill which dominated the settlements and the gardens that surrounded them sheltered their residents from the desert, in contrast with the bachelors’ bunkhouses.”⁹¹ (Figure 2.12) The elite class enjoyed spaces of luxury like the club and beach resort in Alawi that were not open to Bahrainis, except of course the royal family.

After 1951, Bahrain’s nationalist movement led to increasing and more vocal criticisms of Awali’s segregation from the socio-economic life of the rest of the country during the 1950s. BAPCO developed a Workmen’s Quarter in the early 1950s called *Hayy al-Ummal* to accommodate its Bahraini and Arab workers with modern housing. In terms of material conditions, this represented a significant upgrade from the thatched roof barastis. In the Workmen’s Quarter, located between Awali and the Sitra refinery, BAPCO provided dormitory-style housing with electricity and fans, communal bathrooms with showers, canteens, shops, a mosque, and even a cinema and swimming pool.⁹² However, the company policy was explicit in preventing Bahraini oil workers to live with their families in the town, as was the norm for its British and American employees. Bahraini men lived alone and were allowed to travel home and visit their families only once every few months, though eventually this policy changed to every few weeks.⁹³

Similar to IPC and AIOC, BAPCO made every effort to promote the image of *Hayy al-Ummal* and other housing schemes for employees as evidence of the company’s hand in modernizing and improving the conditions of indigenous workers. Fuccaro describes how, “in an article published in June 1958 in *al-Najmah al-Usbuiyyah* life in *Hayy al-Ummal* is portrayed as a replica of slick suburban Awali: self-contained, comfortable, leisurely, communal and devoted to sport.”⁹⁴ Yet despite the stylized depictions of modern accommodations and social services that BAPCO used to promote the Workmen’s Quarters among the local population, *Hayy al-Ummal* and other less

‘glamorous’ examples of BAPCO’s Bahraini worker housing were quite obviously differentiated in quality and remained physically separate from the company enclave for British and American ex-patriot employees in Awali. Over the following decade, mounting criticism of the imperialism and elitism that the oil company manifested in its plan for Awali fuelled the rise of a student movement in the 1960s.

Ahmadi, Kuwait

In 1945 the jointly British and American-owned Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) located its operations adjacent to Burgan oil field, and established a new settlement for staff and oil workers at the site that would later be named Ahmadi. From the outset, KOC provided ethnically segregated and differentiated housing for its employees according to what Alissa calls *structural hierarchy*. The oil company housed the European and American managers and senior staff in air-conditioned quarters that included amenities such as kitchens and bathrooms. Meanwhile South Asian junior or clerical staff and skilled labor were initially provided tents, and later steel frame huts with fans that included access to latrines. KOC allocated shared concrete bays lacking any basic amenities as shelter for some of its indigenous laborers, however most of these “non-skilled” oil workers were left to self-construct shelters out of scrap wood and metal (Figure 2.13).⁹⁵

In 1947 KOC commissioned James M. Wilson, the British architect responsible for designing much of AIOC’s Abadan, to plan a new permanent town in Ahmadi. Wilson’s plan would ultimately formalize and thus reify racial and ethnic inequality in Ahmadi according to a colonial urban planning model of segregated and differentiated housing that already existed in the original informal settlement established by KOC housing. Wilson’s plan spatially reproduced difference among KOC employees according to its segregated quarters for white, South Asian, and indigenous employees.⁹⁶ Furthermore, the plan for Ahmadi reified inequalities according to the provision of housing types and allocation of lot sizes in Ahmadi determined by KOC’s racial and ethnic hierarchy.

European and American senior staff lived in air-conditioned and furnished detached single-family homes with large gardens and servants’ quarters, while South Asian junior staff lived in smaller semi-detached homes that were only partially furnished and un-air conditioned. Indigenous oil workers were housed in adjacent living quarters that included an interior courtyard and small room furnished only with a stove and sink. Alissa emphasizes that despite the fact that the plan incorporated a naming system which implied rank (senior, junior, etc.) determined where an employee would be housed, the structural hierarchy in Ahmadi was in fact determined not by one’s position but rather by ethnicity and race. One KOC’s first Kuwaiti employees recalled, “Even an English driver was senior staff. The senior staff was for the nationality not the experience. The English doctor was senior staff but the Indian doctor was junior staff.”⁹⁷

Beyond the segregation and differentiation of accommodations for KOC employees according to a hierarchy of ethnicity and status, planning of Ahmadi as a whole reinforced the separation of Arab labor from the rest of the town. The company treated the housing of Arab labor as a non-issue. It assumed that they would live in Kuwait City. This was despite the fact that Ahmadi was more than twenty miles south of the city and many could not make this commute regularly. KOC opted to provide

transportation to and from Ahmadi rather than include housing for Arabs in the building program for company employee housing (1947-1951). Arabs employed by KOC but provided no housing increasingly began to settle around the perimeters of Ahmadi, and by 1954 the company decided to resettle what they called the “fringe population” from the so-called slum area that represented an “eyesore” at the entrance of the company town to an area south of the company enclave referred to as *Badawiyah*. As a result, 1,000 Arab families were forced to dismantle their homes, which were little more than four walls and a ceiling, and rebuild them in the area designated for the Arab village. By 1948 there were estimated to be 10,000 people living in *Badawiyah*, which was intentionally segregated from the employee housing to the north. KOC did not provide any social services for the local population and the living conditions were criticized as “unhygienic” and “deplorable” (Figure 2.14).⁹⁸

It was not until after the Suez Crisis in 1956, when criticism of KOC as an extension of British imperialism escalated in Kuwait, that the petroleum company initiated efforts in the so-called ‘Kuwaitization’ of the industry towards the end goal of nationalization. Public relations efforts ramped up in effort to demonstrate KOC’s hand in fostering modernization of living and working conditions, increasing wages, providing opportunities for higher positions within the company, and improving access to education for Arabs. A central part of this public relations campaign was to radically transform the quality and availability of modern housing and social services for Arabs in Ahmadi. By the mid-1960s KOC had planned a modern hospital, social club, cinema, shopping center, and new housing in South Ahmadi to accommodate Kuwaiti employees. The houses were designed as semi-detached three room bungalows with a façade that matched the aesthetic of the rest of the planned town, but integrated local features such as a separate sitting room for women and a flat roof for sleeping in the summer heat.⁹⁹ Eventually as greater numbers of Kuwaitis and Arabs were appointed to more senior positions, they moved into the housing initially planned for British, American, Indian and Pakistani employees in North and Mid areas of Ahmadi. As ex-patriot residents left over time, Kuwaitis eventually inhabited the entire company town.¹⁰⁰

KOC made every effort to publicize an image of Arabized urban modernity in its public relations campaigns in the region, which included the promotion of articles like this one from an Egyptian magazine *Akher Saa’a*:

The features that most attract the eye in the town of Ahmadi are the extent of its streets, the orderliness of the buildings and the gardens that surround every house. These gardens are the work of the Staff and the Labour themselves. Every employee is given a free hand over his garden. He may make it a flowering paradise or leave it a barren waste. You cannot believe Ahmadi is a town in the desert. Thanks to the Kuwait Oil Company, it's the Kuwaiti Paradise.¹⁰¹

Earlier efforts by BAPCO, IPC, and AIOC to establish housing schemes for indigenous employees in response to resounding public discontent and government pressure to improve conditions continually maintained the principal of segregating the company enclave. However, by the 1960s, political pressure on the British petroleum company after the Suez Crisis and evidence of sweeping political movements to nationalize the oil companies in Iran, Iraq and Bahrain cornered KOC. After a few years of developing South Ahmadi for Arab employees in the same vein as the projects of AIOC’s Barwada,

IPC's Arrapha Estate, and BAPCO's *Hay al-'Ummal*, KOC initiated a more drastic integration of the original company enclave. Nonetheless, the space of the Arabized company town served as the image of urban modernity that would tie oil extraction to the promise of modernity.

Conclusion

British petroleum companies in the Arabian Gulf deliberately planned new company towns as a means to keep native populations out. To achieve this, oil company enclaves were designed to replicate key characteristics of British colonial cities like New Delhi, and often using the same designer. Ehsani has described this phenomenon as the "glaring modernity" of oil company towns. The architectural design and planning of oil company towns introduced some of the earliest modern cinemas, technical schools, sports clubs, bus services, and hospitals to Iran and other oil-producing countries; however, this was a segregated condition based on race and rank that kept these modern amenities out of reach for most of the local population.¹⁰² Meanwhile, oil companies provided no such accommodations to the indigenous and migrant workers until labor demands were backed with direct action.

Bahraini oil workers viewed Awali as, "a utopian city...a dreamland, an unreachable star," in the words of a former BAPCO trainee.¹⁰³ In this sense, unattainable dreamworlds were emblematic of British imperial domination in oil-producing countries. Despite oil companies' efforts to reject the association linking company towns to imperial ambitions, local populations and governments in oil-producing countries pointed to the severe disparities among the living conditions provide for native and foreign company employees as evidence of imperial exploitation. As chapter one discussed, British petroleum companies eventually responded by introducing new strategies to take control of their public image in oil-producing countries. Oil company towns were a critical stage on which British companies began to test and shape these image-making efforts. Fuccaro puts forward the fundamental premise that, "both at the onset of oil exploitation and in more recent times, cities and urban environments constituted the primary setting where oil modernity unfolded," and, as this chapter illustrated, oil company towns "featured prominently as rhetorical instruments used by oil companies, local governments and city planners to impose particular visions of oil modernity upon indigenous populations."¹⁰⁴

Oil company towns in the Arabian Gulf were distinct from company towns elsewhere because they were produced as part of a neo-colonial project that required the production of space as an image-making tactic. Certainly, oil company towns served as laboratories for the British to experiment with new forms of urban modernity, just as Rabinow observed in cases of colonial urbanism within the North African context. However, the development of these enclaves differed significantly from both company towns elsewhere and colonial cities in that the planning of space figured centrally as the basis of a neo-colonial discourse about oil. The British oil companies planned and circulated images of enclaves like Barwada in Abadan, Arrapha Estate in Kirkuk, and *Hayy al-'Ummal* in Awali to craft a new discourse of a better life for indigenous oil workers living in modern company accommodations. In Kuwait, the British oil company initially employed a similar strategy in the relocation of Arab workers from to the Arab village in *Badawiyah*. Ultimately, however the company was cornered into a

Kuwaitization scheme leading to nationalization, which entailed the Arabization of its planned ex-patriot enclave in north Ahmadi.

The following chapter examines how AIOC used film to project an image of oil as the catalyst for the modernization of Persian space and society. As the site of the world's largest oil refinery at the time, Abadan was projected to audiences in Britain and elite Iranian audiences in Tehran as the heart of modern planning, architecture and progressive social life in the country. AIOC focused its efforts to create a documentary that would project an image of Abadan as a "dreamworld" of Iranian modernity achieved. Meanwhile the tensions between the oil companies and their oil workers, neglected in the film, only continued to worsen behind the scenes.

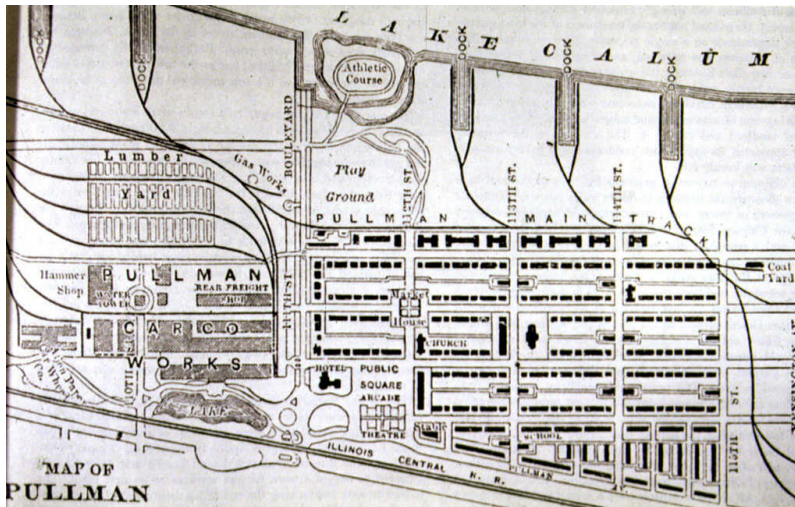


Figure 2.1 Solon S. Beman prepared this site plan of Pullman, IL in 1884 for George Pullman, who commissioned the new town design to house his factory workers and their families adjacent to his railway-car factory. The plan depicts a rectilinear street grid with evenly sized plots for company housing oriented in parallel to the existing factory buildings (left). The residential grid is enclosed by a perimeter of train tracks and a major boulevard that separates the factory from the worker housing.



Figure 2.2 Migrant Arabs seeking employment gathered outside the perimeter wall that enclosed ARAMCO's "American Camp" company enclave at Dhahran from its surroundings in 1935.

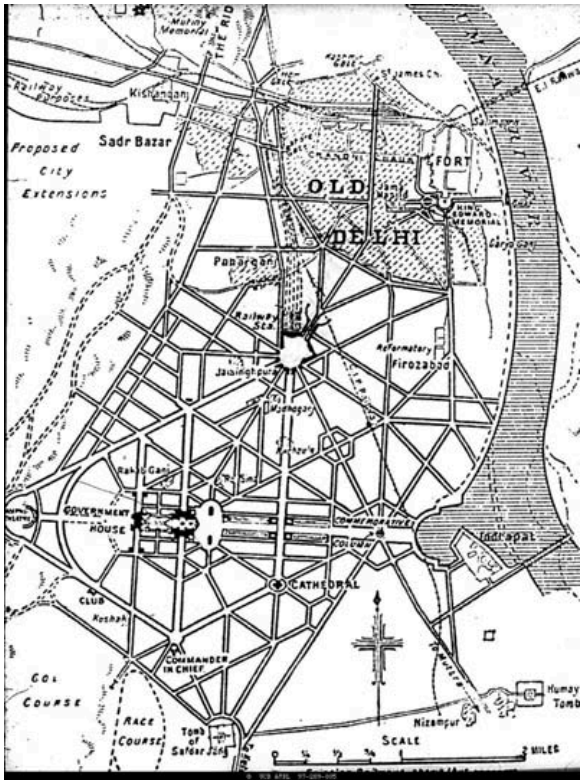


Figure 2.3 This site plan of major road systems in New Delhi clearly illustrates the planned spatial division and distinction between the Old Delhi settlement (top) and the British imperial capital (center to bottom). Indians resided in the densely populated and auto-constructed settlement, sequestered to the north of the capital where British residents occupied large estates in an ordered and well-serviced urban environment.



Figure 2.4 This aerial photograph shows the distinct boundary that segregated between the Indian settlement (top) from the British imperial capital New Delhi (bottom). The contrast between the dense fabric of the old city and the regularized and spacious grid of the colonial city reflects huge disparities in the allocation of resources and space for colonized populations versus British colonizers in India under British imperial rule.



Figure 2.5 The aerial photo of Abadan in 1951 clearly depicts the physical segregation of AIOC's planned enclaves of Braim (top) and Barwada (bottom) from the area of dense informal settlements (known as the town) that housed the majority of indigenous migrant residents that served the company and enclaves (pictured at center). The refinery serves as a physical barrier keeping the original plan for the British enclave of Braim apart from the town. Wilson's intentional planning further segregated the orderly streets of Barwada from the town and also separated it by a significant distance from the white enclave.

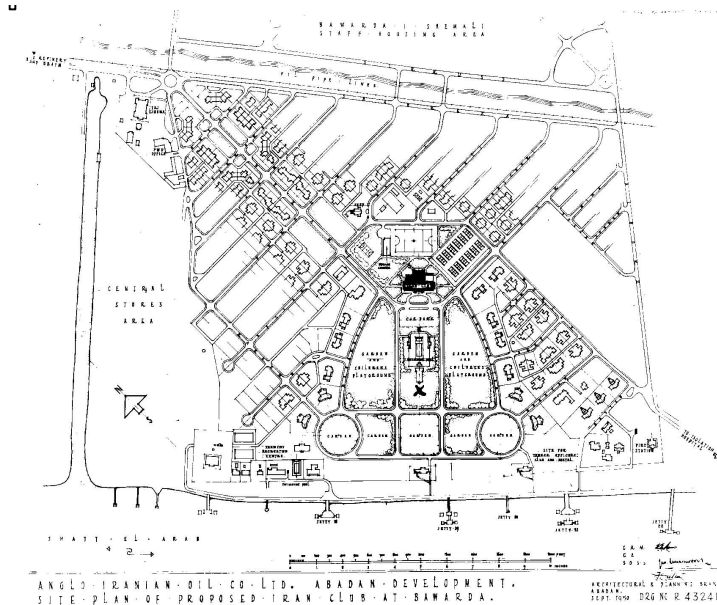


Figure 2.6 James M. Wilson’s plan for the new company enclave of Barwada from 1950 shows the rectilinear plan for streets and housing estates within the enclave. The plan’s focal point was the roundabout to the north that symbolically and functionally connected the enclave to the major road towards the factory and Braim. Barwada is enclosed on all sides by the river to the southwest, a major road to the southeast, and a system of roads and pipelines to the northeast. Finally, a creek running along the northwest of the enclave effectively isolates the Barwada from the adjacent native town, protecting the suburb from any chance of “spill over” from the town.

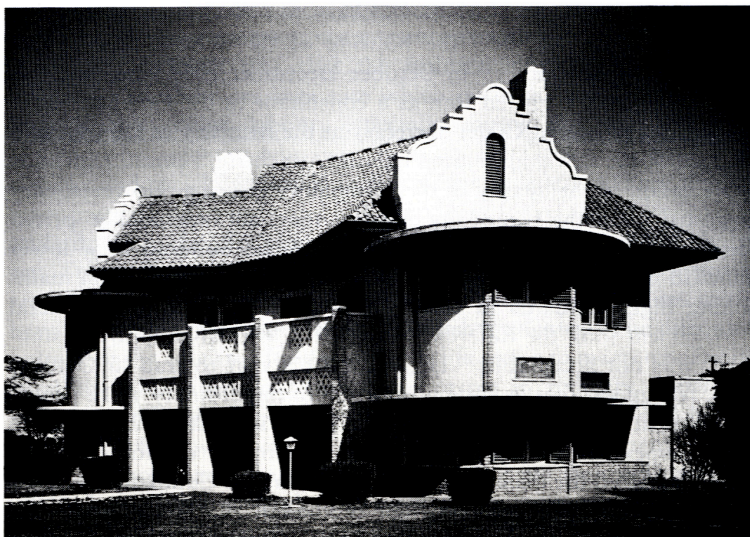


Figure 2.7 An example of the European style estate designed for British and senior Iranian staff residents in Barwada, c.1949.



Figure 2.8 An example of the squalid living conditions in Abadan where Iranian workers and their families resided in the shadow of AIOC's company enclaves, 1950.

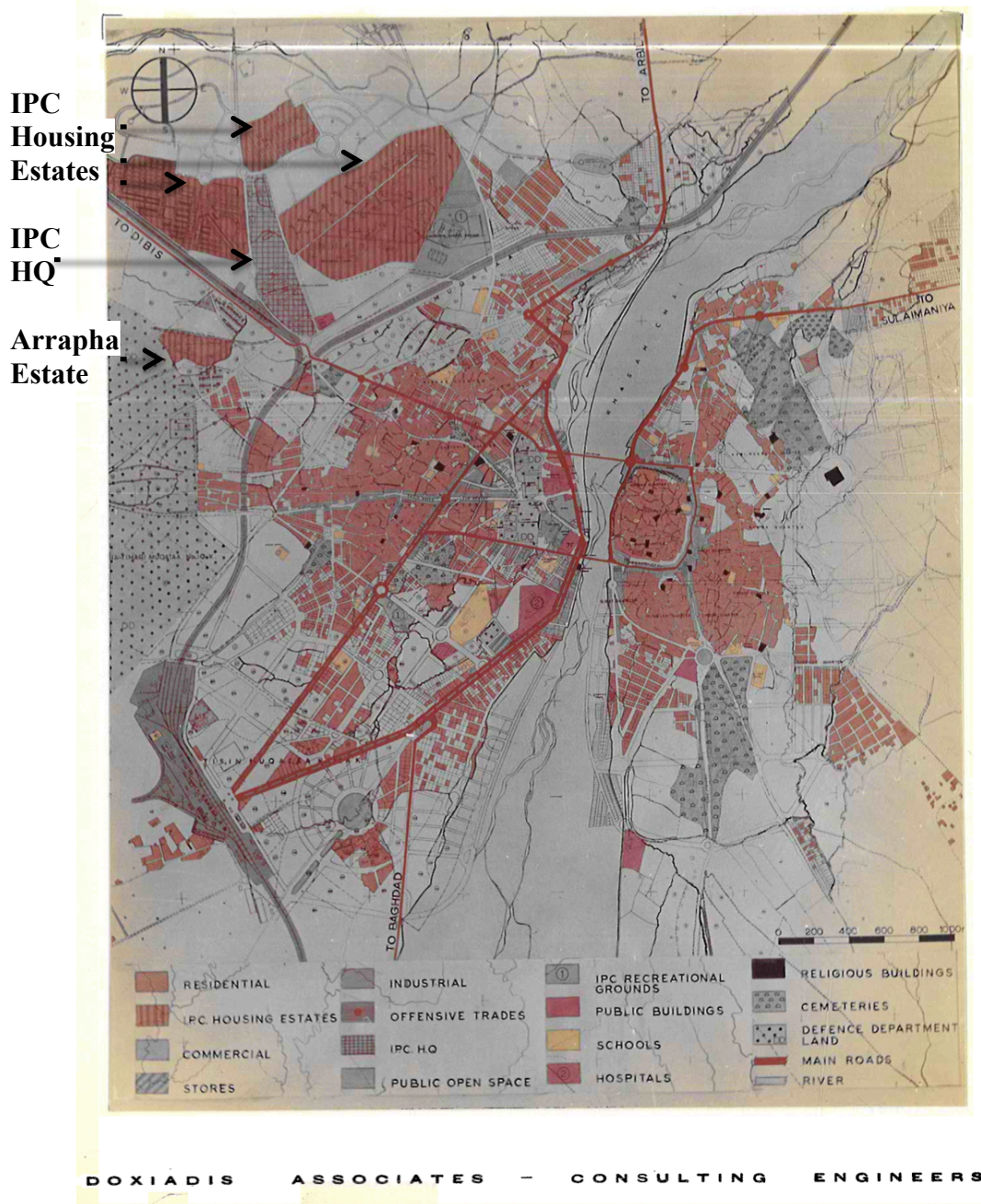


Figure 2.9 Doxiadis Associates prepared this map in 1958 to analyze land use in Kirkuk, revealing the spatial relationship of IPC's company housing to the existing Iraqi town. IPC housing estates (top) are located northwest of the town. Train tracks create a physical barrier between the city and the oil company enclave. Arrapha Estate, IPC's enclave for Iraqi employees is located to the west of the tracks, effectively isolating the compound from both Kirkuk town and the original company enclave.



Figure 2.10 Outside the oil company enclave, local children from Kirkuk stand outside the thick wall that enclosed IPC's housing enclave, Arrapha Estate, from the existing city.



Figure 2.11 Inside the company enclave, ex-patriot American and British families lived in a surreal mimicry of white suburbia in the Arabian Gulf. Young and old, the residents of BAPCO's company enclave lived an existence isolated from and untouched by the reality of Bahraini workers beyond the walls of Awali.



Figure 2.12 Awali, BAPCO's company enclave, provided ample housing for ex-patriot employees and their families, along ordered rectilinear streets. This plan depicts the differentiation within the enclave of housing planned and allocated by size and location according to rank and salary scale. Spacious garden villas reserved for BAPCO management were planned uphill (top, left) from the smaller houses intended for lower ranks of company officials and staff. Planned differentiation and segregation was also maintained at a larger scale. The company enclave was planned as a self-sufficient suburban settlement, isolated from the social and economic worlds of Bahrainis residing outside of Awali's walls.



Figure 2.13 In stark contrast to the spacious, modern company housing and paved roads that KOC provided ex-patriot British and American employees in Ahmadi (top), Arab workers and their families lived in ramshackle shelters (bottom). The oil company treated housing provision for Arabs in Ahmadi as a non-issue, and as a result this left indigenous workers no choice but to construct their own homes out of scrap materials on the outskirts of the company enclave.



Figure 2.14 This aerial photograph of Ahmadi from 1954 clearly shows the juxtaposition of the development of *Badawiyah* to the south of the original KOC enclave to the north, which is characterized by semi-circular avenues bisected by radial roads and uniformly laid out housing plots. South Ahmadi is characterized by a road grid, but built structures are arranged organically and without evidence of the formal pattern of settlement in the enclave.

¹ Zeynep Çelik, *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations: Algiers under French rule* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1997), 2.

² Fuccaro, "Introduction," 4.

³ The most influential of these is Yergin's *The Prize*, which is widely referenced as the most comprehensive historical text on the oil industry.

⁴ Rabinow, *French Modern*, 289.

⁵ See Nezar AlSayyad, *Forms of Dominance: on the architecture and urbanism of the colonial enterprise* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1992).

⁶ These hybrid developments were echoed by similar efforts attempted by French colonial authorities in Algiers during the 1950s. See a case study of one such development, Diar el-Mahçoul, in Zeynep Çelik, *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations*, 144-149.

⁷ Crawford, *Building the Workingman's Paradise*, 1.

⁸ Ibid., 11.

⁹ Friedrich Engels and V G. Kiernan. *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 2005 [1887]), 26.

¹⁰ The contrast between the slum and the estate are central to illustrating Engels' greater analysis of the dialectic of capital accumulation.

¹¹ At the turn of the twentieth century, Ebenezer Howard's "garden city" town planning ideal eventually emerged as a key response in Britain to the squalor of industrialized cities and the bleak urban condition of informal slums. See Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: an intellectual history of urban planning and design in the twentieth century* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1988): 88-97; Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (London: Faber and Faber, 1945 [1902]).

¹² Stanley Buder, *Pullman: an experiment in industrial order and community planning, 1880-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967): 60-1.

¹³ Ibid., 42.

¹⁴ Ibid., 61; 72.

¹⁵ Crawford, *Workingman's Paradise*, 37.

¹⁶ Buder, *Pullman*, 70-71.

¹⁷ Ibid., 69, 120-1.

¹⁸ Ibid., 73.

¹⁹ Ibid., 81-2.

²⁰ Crawford, *Workingman's Paradise*, 140-144.

²¹ Vitalis, *America's Kingdom*, 268.

²² Tinker Salas, *The Enduring Legacy*, 5-6.

²³ Ibid., 8.

²⁴ Vitalis, *America's Kingdom*, 60.

²⁵ Ibid., 61.

²⁶ Mary Eddy, as cited in Ibid., 80.

²⁷ Vitalis, *America's Kingdom*, 88-90.

²⁸ Ibid., 90-93.

²⁹ A racist practice that operated as a strategy to deter unionization and organizing among non-White workers in its mining and oil company towns; Ibid., 54.

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- ³⁰ Ibid., 119-20. Vitalis asserts that because the Anglo-controlled petroleum companies in Iraq and Iran operated in political contexts where a parliamentary system and functioning unions were in place to translate the population's dissatisfaction into political pressure on the companies to improve the conditions for indigenous and non-white migrant labor in company towns.
- ³¹ AlSayyad, *Forms of Dominance*, 5.
- ³² Rabinow, *French Modern*, 289.
- ³³ Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
- ³⁴ Anthony D. King, *Urbanism, Colonialism, and the World-economy: Cultural and Spatial Foundations of the World Urban System* (London; New York: Routledge, 1990), 7.
- ³⁵ Hosagrahar Jyoti, "City as Durbar: Theatre and Power in Imperial Delhi," in *Forms of Dominance: On the Architecture and Urbanism of the Colonial Enterprise*, ed. Nizar AlSayyad (Aldershot: Avebury, 1992), 85-6.
- ³⁶ Anthony D. King, *The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture* (London: Routledge, 1984), 41-2.
- ³⁷ Anthony D. King, *Colonial Urban Development: Culture, Social Power and Environment* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), 231.
- ³⁸ Jyoti, "Imperial Delhi," 86, 93.
- ³⁹ Ibid., 100; King, *Colonial Urban Development*, 241-3.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 238.
- ⁴¹ Jyoti, "Imperial Delhi," 95.
- ⁴² King, *Colonial Urban Development*, 264.
- ⁴³ Jyoti, "Imperial Delhi," 100.
- ⁴⁴ King, *Colonial Urban Development*, 239.
- ⁴⁵ Norma Evenson, *The Indian Metropolis: A View Toward the West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 153.
- ⁴⁶ King, *Colonial Urban Development*, 244-6, 251.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 255.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., 256.
- ⁴⁹ Evenson, *The Indian Metropolis*, 150.
- ⁵⁰ King, *The Bungalow*, 37.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., 37, 52.
- ⁵² Ibid., 38, 45-9.
- ⁵³ Jyoti, "Imperial Delhi," 101-2; King, *Colonial Urban Development*, 248-51.
- ⁵⁴ Kaveh Ehsani, "Social Engineering and the Contradictions of Modernization in Khuzestan's Company Towns: A Look at Abadan and Masjed-Soleyman," *International Review of Social History* 48 (2003), 372.
- ⁵⁵ Mark Crinson, "Abadan: Planning and Architecture under the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company," *Planning Perspectives* 12 (1997), 342.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 342-3.
- ⁵⁷ Ehsani, "Social Engineering," 377.
- ⁵⁸ Stephanie Cronin, "Popular Politics, the New State and the Birth of the Iranian Working Class: The 1929 Abadan Oil Refinery Strike," *Middle Eastern Studies* 46, (2010), 706-7; Crinson, "Abadan," 342.

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- ⁵⁹ Cronin, "Popular Politics," 706.
- ⁶⁰ Manucher Farmanfarmaian, *Blood and Oil: inside the Shah's Iran*, (New York: Modern Library, 1999), 184-5.
- ⁶¹ Crinson, "Abadan," 343.
- ⁶² Cronin, "Popular Politics," 717.
- ⁶³ Crinson, "Abadan," 348.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 348-50.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 351.
- ⁶⁶ Ehsani, "Social Engineering," 383.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 384.
- ⁶⁸ Crinson, "Abadan," 346-7.
- ⁶⁹ Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men*, 67.
- ⁷⁰ "Report by J.M. Wilson, A.R.I.B.A., on certain aspects of the Company's Building Proposals in Persia," 3 April 1934, BP 49673, 2-3.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ⁷² Crinson, "Abadan," 356.
- ⁷³ Crinson, "Abadan," 357.
- ⁷⁴ "Report by J.M. Wilson," 7.
- ⁷⁵ Bamberg, *A History of the British Petroleum Company, Vol. 2*, 157.
- ⁷⁶ Arbella Bet-Shilmon, "The Politics and Ideology of Urban Development in Iraq's Oil City: Kirkuk, 1946-1958," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 33.1 (2013), 28.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.
- ⁸⁰ *Guide to Kirkuk*, (London: Iraq Petroleum Company, 1955), BP 119015.
- ⁸¹ H.S. Gibson, "House Building in Kirkuk Town," 30 Jan 1951, BP 135819.
- ⁸² "Memo from H.W. Page to W. Fraser, H.S. Gibson, A. de Grouchy, A.P. Hacobian, and H.E.W. Kirby," 10 June 1952, BP 13581810.
- ⁸³ Bet-Shilmon, "The Politics and Ideology of Urban Development," 32.
- ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁵ Keith Bradley, "Land of the Two Seas," *Saudi Aramco World* 15.6 (Dec 1964), 20.
- ⁸⁶ Fuccaro, "Shaping the Urban Life of Oil in Bahrain, 67; "Isle in the Gulf" *Saudi Aramco World* 13.5 (1962), 14-17.
- ⁸⁷ Vitalis, *America's Kingdom*, 56.
- ⁸⁸ Fuccaro, "Shaping the Urban Life of Oil in Bahrain," 67.
- ⁸⁹ Vitalis, *America's Kingdom*, 56.
- ⁹⁰ Fuccaro, "Shaping the Urban Life of Oil in Bahrain," 68.
- ⁹¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁹² *Ibid.*, 71-2.
- ⁹³ Vitalis, *America's Kingdom*, 56.
- ⁹⁴ Fuccaro, "Shaping the Urban Life of Oil in Bahrain," 72.
- ⁹⁵ Reem Alissa, "The Oil Town of Ahmadi Since 1946: From Colonial Town to Nostalgic City," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 33, no. 1 (2013), 43.
- ⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 47.

⁹⁸ Alissa, "Building for Oil," 56-8, 82.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 87.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 102-103.

¹⁰¹ "Article Translation of the Egyptian Magazine '*Akher Saa*'" (26 December 1957), BP 106863/001, as cited in, Ibid., 83.

¹⁰² Ehsani, "Social Engineering," 385.

¹⁰³ Fuccaro, "Shaping the Urban Life of Oil in Bahrain," 12-13.

¹⁰⁴ Fuccaro, "Introduction," 1.

Chapter Three

A Cinematic History of the British Oil Company Town

So the pipeline goes, over the hills and under the rivers; past ancient cities and modern pumping-stations; beside roads and caravan-trucks and sun-dried villages of mud -- and down to the plains at last. Until, with the hills and the deserts behind and the wells far away, the pipelines of Khuzistan are drawn together and into the great oil city of Abadan. [...] A great temple to the Twentieth Century god of oil. A nerve-centre of the Middle East - and yet, less than a lifetime ago, there was only the desolate unpopulated desert, and an empty island.

— Commentary, *Persian Story* (1952)¹

In June 1951, crowds of Iranian oil workers gathered in a mass demonstration to shut down the British controlled Abadan oil refinery (Figure 3.1). The anti-imperialist movement galvanized by the leadership of Iran's Prime Minister Mossadegh opposed the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's control of the country's oil resources and eventually succeeded in the campaign to oust the British and nationalize Iran's oil industry. Eighteen months later, in December 1952, a very different crowd gathered in London to attend the film premiere of Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's documentary *Persian Story*. This cinematic portrait of Anglo-Iranian's infrastructure of oil extraction in Khuzestan, the massive Abadan refinery, and the adjacent oil company town premiered as part of "the biggest film party ever given in Europe."² British Petroleum sponsored the film event, which screened *Persian Story* in seven of London's large West End cinemas concurrently to more than 12,000 guests (Figure 3.2).

Persian Story was considered Anglo-Iranian's first "real" company film and "the first genuine effort to portray Iran sympathetically to the outside world."³ The timing of the film's production and release coincided with the so-called Persian oil crisis that ousted the British company from its controlling position over Iran's oil industry by 1951. As a result, *Persian Story* was launched to an amplified status in the United Kingdom as the first and only film to document modern life in Abadan: portraying Iranian men, women and children living contently in the serene garden suburbs of a British company town. After premiering as part of British Petroleum's grand film screening, the documentary continued to circulate widely through theatrical and non-theatrical distribution circuits, including screenings in European film festivals and use in British classrooms. Audiences lauded *Persian Story* with overwhelmingly positive reviews; however, as a handful of critical observers argued, the film was deceptive in its avoidance of the causes of tensions between the oil company and the Iranian public.

As discussed in chapter one, British petroleum companies began to sponsor documentary films in the tradition of colonial film production as early as the 1920s. In the case of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), these documentaries were intended to impress stockholders and consumers in Europe with visible evidence of productive company operations in Iran. However, as the political landscape of oil imperialism shifted in the 1940s, British companies were forced to contend with strong criticism from local populations and pressure from local governments.

Oil company public relations emerged in Iran as a mechanism to reframe the explicit colonial endeavor of oil extraction as a corporate enterprise that would serve to

modernize oil-producing countries. The previous chapter examined how British oil companies in the Arabian Gulf used architecture and planning to adapt existing forms of colonial urbanism to this neo-colonial project of oil extraction as enterprise after the 1940s. British petroleum companies designed new neighborhoods to accommodate indigenous employees as a way to craft images of modernity in Abadan and other company towns. This chapter examines the representation of the oil company town in the AIOC documentaries *In the Land of the Shah* (1926), *Dawn of Iran* (1937-8), and *Persian Story* (1952).

This collection of AIOC documentaries produced between the 1920s and 1950s offers an excellent case study of a critical shift in cinematic imaginaries of the so-called oriental city. Initially these films relied on recreating standard orientalist tropes of representation – images of Persia as monolithic, static, isolated, and backwards. However, Anglo-Iranian's films sought to document “the modern Persian scene” for mass audiences in Britain. This required an effort to re-invent the imaginary of Persia as story of modernization.⁴ However, as I show in this chapter, while the documentary does work to depict the oil company town of Abadan in ways that disrupt inherited colonial imaginaries and blurs boundaries of the constructed East-West binary, the making of *Persian Story* ultimately reproduces the hegemonic paradigm of knowledge production intended to control the cultural imaginary of the other, and specifically the orient.

Postcolonial studies of the Middle East have established how western political, military and economic interventions in the region for purposes of oil extraction, together with simultaneous efforts to control the production and circulation of knowledge about the region, have critically shaped the imagined geographies of modern states in the Middle East.⁵ However, the political and cultural significance of intersecting histories of British oil exploitation and cinematic production in the Middle East in the course of the previous century have yet to be examined. By unpacking this connection, this chapter brings to light some of the key ways in which oil and the cinema worked in tandem to construct a neo-colonial imaginary of urban modernity in the Middle East.

Early Documentary and the Orientalist Imaginary

Early in AIOC's history, the oil company began projecting flickering black and white images captured in Iran onto screens in London for its stockholders and later for the general public. These silent moving pictures documented Britain's imperial presence in Iran. This took the physical form of an extensive network of oil wells, pipelines, roads, buildings, and the Abadan refinery. Furthermore, these AIOC films portrayed Persian people, landscapes, and livelihoods as an exotic backdrop to the arrival of modern British industry. This manner of representation overtly conformed the image of Iran to the common tropes of orientalist representations reproduced in contemporary British painting and narrative filmmaking.

The British oil company's first major productions reproduced an established formula for narrative cinema that European and American filmmakers had established by the early twentieth century. Namely, the primary convention used at the time to narrate plot points and comment on the ongoing or forthcoming action was the use of black and white title cards, or intertitles, spliced into scenes of onscreen action. AIOC translated this practice for documentary purposes, using titles initially to provide dry descriptive texts that named places in order to locate the viewer. Eventually, however, these

intertitles developed into explicitly narrative elements, offering commentary on the footage of landscapes and scenes of urban life appearing onscreen.

This section examines a critical shift in the representation of Persia that occurred in AIOC's early silent documentaries during the first two decades of its filmmaking practice. The earliest survey films focused on presenting evidence of British operations in Iran vis-a-vis images of the built environment and industrial infrastructure, and largely neglected efforts to capture images of Iran outside of this framework. However, by the late 1920s filmmakers began using narrative practices in order to deliberately construct images of Persia for general audiences. Accordingly, filmmakers staged scenes of Persian artisans and rural peasants to reproduce the visual orientalist tropes that served as familiar references to western viewers. These portrayals crafted an image of Persia that could serve as an exotic, static, and backwards backdrop against which the ingenuity and dynamism of modern British industry could be performed. On numerous occasions, the filmmaker unintentionally captures himself and his role in manipulating the scene. As a result these films offer unique evidence of the calculated construction of the representational dichotomy between east and west in terms of tradition and modernity through documentary filmmaking.

The completion of AIOC's first pipeline in 1911 was followed ten years later by the company's first film production in 1921. Black and white 35mm footage capturing exterior images of the AIOC's buildings, infrastructure, and industrial operations in the Khuzestan region was edited into a survey film with a straightforward title by 1939.

Anglo-Persian Oil Company's Operations in Iran was a silent reel composed of continuous wide shots and intertitles that served to locate the viewer and foreground the various activities captured on camera: the drilling, pumping, and transportation of oil. The film was made for a small audience of "company officials" in Britain, running just over one hour and costing the company just over £2000 to complete.⁶

Footage captured in Iran for the survey film largely consisted of exterior, wide shots. Action on screen was crafted through camera panning and tracking movement proximate to the named existing structures. The final cut of the film uses intertitles in order to locate the viewer. In dry and straightforward descriptive language, such as "The offices of the Company" or "Views of the country around Masjid-i-Suleiman," intertitles primarily explain to a viewer what they are looking at and where it is located. In some cases, intertitles are slightly more descriptive. One example reads, "The 'climb' – a Company-built road cut into the mountainside of the hilly country between Batwand and Sar-i-Naft," which is followed by a wide framed shot of a mountain road in the context of a hilly landscape. There is almost no visual or written information provided in this film to contextualize the places depicted in terms of geography or history. Presumably, since this film was screened exclusively to company officials, the filmmakers assumed an audience with a reasonable degree of familiarity with the place names and locations in the context of a map of company operations in Iran.

This early precedent was followed by AIOC's next film production, *The Persian Oil Industry: The Story of the Great National Enterprise* (1925). This documentary is a silent 35mm that originally ran an excessive 98 minutes. The title of this film indicates a critical shift in the company's narrative approach to crafting a documentary about oil in Iran. The critical omission of the phrase "Anglo" from the title suggests that Persia is suddenly central to the British story of oil. The phrasing used in the subtitle is also

significant. In contrast to the dry survey film, this documentary is presented to its audience as a story. Of course, this indicates that a narrative arch will be established and carried through the presentation on screen. Finally, the term “Great National Enterprise” presents the British presence in Iran in terms that depart from the language of Empire that was common in imperial propaganda documenting extractive colonial practices in India, Africa, and elsewhere under British rule. “Enterprise” suggests a different relationship between the producing country and the extractive regime. In this case, the company was working to argue that this relationship was strictly business and not another example of colonialism.

Despite the nominal turn away from the language of colonialism, the resulting film reproduced the very same representational tropes of an exotic, timeless, and backwards Orient that had constituted the production of knowledge about colonial territories since the eighteenth century. The documentary was initially cut down to 45 minutes for circulation in schools and technical institutions. In 1926, AIOC produced a 15-minute version of the film for general audiences with a new title. *In the Land of the Shah* was shown in public cinemas in England and seen by upward of one million people across Europe.⁷ All three versions constructed a narrative arch that established a timeless and static imaginary of Persia as the backdrop for the arrival and success of the modern oil industry.

In the Land of the Shah (and the longer versions that preceded its release) signified a critical departure from the oil company’s survey film model. This film was the first to construct a deliberate narrative arch using techniques in the production and post-production of the film that combined techniques from narrative filmmaking and documentary surveying. These narrative elements establish a recognizable dichotomy that separates and defines the east (Persia) and western (Britain) against each other. In the first part of the film, Persian traditions are illustrated using timeless pastoral scenes of shepherders and depictions of the primitive work of craftsmen and traders in the bazaar. Once these recognizable tropes from orientalist painting and literature are established, the story shifts to introduce western expertise as the driver of industrial scale modernization in the so-called Land of the Shah. Here the filmmakers pair survey footage of industrial landscapes and infrastructure (roads, oil wells, pipelines, refinery) with scenes of Persian oil workers laboring to build, maintain and operate the company’s infrastructure. No explicit comment is made in the intertitles about the oil industry’s transformation of the Persian male body as a signifier of the exotic, backwards, static culture of the east into a carrier of industry and modern labor; however, the message is implicit. The film ends with survey footage of the transportation of oil from Persia to Britain. An animated map charts the course of an oil tanker ship from Abadan to APOC’s refinery in South Wales. Thus, the film drives home the bottom line that all these operations are in service of the European market and in particular the British consumer.

The greatest departure from survey filmmaking in this film comes in the first part, which uses a combination of production and post-production techniques modeled on contemporary narrative filmmaking norms to construct the familiar orientalist imaginary of Persia. During production, the cameraman (director) staged on camera action using Persian “actors” in order to compose scenes that conformed to the British orientalist imaginary of the east as traditional and timeless. Staging is revealed throughout the film by on camera interactions that were unintentional captured and yet kept as part of the

final cut. This is most obvious in scenes depicting Persian men at the outset of the film. One of the opening scenes shows a group of herders transporting a flock of sheep across a river on “rafts of goatskin” as a way to illustrate the traditional aspects of Persia’s pastoral landscape. Upon first glance, the scene appears to be a candid observation. However, as the scene progresses the photographer’s shadow can be observed in the lower third of the frame, cranking the camera arm. This is a reminder that the action recorded for this scene was timed and deliberately constructed to conform to the length of the film.

The scene is introduced by an intertitle that reads, “Where the East and the West meet and mingle Pastoral Tribes on trek as they have done for countless generations.” Here the text is doing far more than locating the viewer; instead it inserts a narrative text that provides an interpretive framework for the scene. In this instance, the reference to Persia as a place where East and West meet sets the stage for the larger theme of the film: modern British industry has transformed Persia from a backwards place to a modernizing country. The dichotomy between East and West is then reinforced in several staged scenes that follow. The narrative text and footage work together to reproduce moving image portraits of urban life in Persia that conform to the orientalist imaginaries of the *medina*.

One title reads, “In the bazaars primitive trades still flourish,” followed by a scene taken in what appears to be an outdoor public market. The camera pans over a wide shot of crowds in the market and then cuts to a medium shot of a man wearing a turban with a basic scale in his hand. As he performs the action of weighing some goods another man half way in the frame is at his side smiling at the camera and seemingly encouraging the older man to continue performing. Suddenly an interaction takes place between the person standing behind the camera (presumably the director) and the older man who begins to speak and gesture towards the camera. The invisible wall between the subject on camera and the person behind the camera is broken, making visible the constructed nature of the bazaar scene. Yet the film does not cut, despite the fact that the older man in finished performing for the camera. He even lights a cigarette before the film eventually cuts to a different scenario. It is clear from the title that these scenes have been staged to conform to the primitive and traditional tropes of urban life that could be imagined as belonging to an oriental city. Certainly, the chaotic and exotic setting of the bazaar was among one of the most common scenarios for orientalist representations of urban life in the East.

This first section of the film establishes the cinematic imaginary of Persia using visual and textual references to orientalist terms and tropes. The section ends with the depiction of Masjid-i-Suleiman, where first oil was struck, as an ancient site of temple ruins. The intertitle offers an explanatory connection between “Fire Worshippers” and the modern oil industry in Southern Persia, stating that the worshippers’ “altar fires were fed from vast subterranean reservoirs of oil” and that “This oil has now brought to Persia the most modern of the World’s great industries.” This transition marks a critical development in the narrative arch of the film. The next scene is a static medium shot of a British surveyor at work in the fields of Southern Persia. The man is wearing a dress coat and smoking a pipe, presumably as an indication of his “civilized” character in contrast to the Persian assistants standing by his side as he marks his map.

For the first time in documentary film the moving image reveals an explicit relationship between the orientalist observer behind the camera and the subject in the frame. Staging and performance certainly shaped what was captured on the canvases of orientalist painters and later photographers, however the final image was less transparent in exposing these practices. On film the staging is overt and the presence of the stranger (camera man) and the camera is always foregrounded for the viewer in one way or another. This is revealed through the spoken and gestured interactions between cameraman and subject, and indicated by the presence of the shadow of the photographer cranking his camera in the frame of a shot. When the invisible wall between the subject and the photographer is broken, the fiction that the camera is capturing ongoing or natural action is disturbed and can be analyzed as a performance.

Thereafter, *In the Land of the Shah* focuses on the visual spectacles of the oil industry: the rig, the pipeline, and the refinery. On film, modernity was constructed in terms of industrial technologies of oil that conquered and controlled the timeless pastoral landscapes and primitive cities of Persia. In a letter to the editor of the Persian newspaper *Ettela'at* published in 1928, a reader identified as H. Khuzestani vents his frustrations with the film's misrepresentations of the Iranian oil industry by remarking:

In Tehran they show you the beautiful films of the oil operations in the south. Of course, these tell of the enormity of the company's buildings and facilities and of the importance of its oil lines, and, naturally, you and your journalist colleagues enjoy them, and perhaps think that this company is serving and benefiting Iran. But have these films ever shown the wretched lives of those lowly Iranian workers who for three qerans a day toil in highly dangerous conditions and in really heart-wrenching manner? ... Have these films ever shown you the dictatorial manner in which the [British] managers of the southern oil company govern your fellow citizens and push and shove them around and stifle those who voice the slightest complaint?⁸

As the letter's author points out, the British oil company's film presents the context of lived space and society in Iran as little more than an exotic oriental backdrop to the expansion of the British Empire. The lived experiences of oil workers are rendered invisible as the camera focuses on staged scenes of traditional activities as a contrast to the foreign industrial ingenuity that is reshaping the landscape.

Navigating the Political Landscape of Oil

In 1936, AIOC convinced the Iranian government to allow it to begin work on the short sound film *Dawn of Iran*. The film portrayed the emergence of the modern state of Iran and glorified the reign of Reza Shah. This marked a shift in the company's approach to filmmaking. For the first time AIOC used it to appease the Iranian government which insisted on strict supervision of film production to ensure that the movie would not include any footage of camels and carpet-makers as they would "make Iran look primitive."⁹ Yet in spite of this, *Dawn of Iran* marked the British oil company's first representation of Iran as more than an oriental backdrop to oil-production. The narrative constructs an arch that moves representation of Iran from the orientalist imaginary of a timeless Persia to a story of the making of a modern nation-state. Progress is the central theme of the film, and specifically progress under the reign of Shah Reza Pahlavi.

A review of *Dawn of Iran* published in the cinema-focused British periodical *World Film News* gives a clear sense of how the film narrative is constructed.

The discovery of oil and the appearance on the scene of Reza Khan made Iran possible. The former brought wealth to the country and Reza Khan knew how to control that wealth for his people's good. ... Roads are built in a couple of shots – deserts reclaimed in a sequence; crops improved with a cut; and agriculture mechanized in a dissolve. Progress appears almost too easy. The film *Iran* is built in a day. Towering behind this renaissance are the shining and fantastic shapes of oil wells; pumping their liquid power through mile after mile of pipeline to the refineries of Abadan. Bringing back from the West money for the Treasury, money to educate a nation and build a new country.¹⁰

In *Dawn of Iran* AIOC exhibited progress in terms of top down modernization fueled literally and figuratively by the oil industry. The film circulated among company staff and in European cinemas, exposing public audiences for the first time to close up moving pictures of Iranians and their modernizing country.

The central message of the film *Dawn of Iran* is that the introduction of mass transportation and modern industry in Iran, which begins with the opening of the first railroad in 1935, constituted a momentous break in history: the dawn of modernity. The narrative is delivered as a scripted voiceover commentary that is laid over scenes shot on location in Iran. The narrative is structured to emphasize the benefit that the oil industry has brought to the Iranian people, as opposed to focusing on the success that British enterprise has had in fueling modern western economies (as in *In the Land of the Shah*).

The film opens with an intertitle that reads: “On the 21st of March, 1935. His Imperial Majesty Shah Reza Pahlavi announced to the world that his country would in future be known by its original name: Iran.” The image on the screen is a map of Iran, and the camera zooms in until a brick wall bursts open and fades into an image of Tehran and the Shah’s golden post ceremony to open the railway’s Caspian section. The film’s opening lines of commentary then illustrate the intended message very clearly: “Sixteen years ago the Iranians were a people living on their past... but bubbling out of the foothills in the southwest was signs of existence of the one thing for which the west was searching: natural crude oil.” The repetition of the phrase “sixteen years ago” establishes the premise that before the discovery of oil in commercial quantities, Iran was ruled as an oppressive feudal society. However, beginning in 1921, Reza Shah used oil revenues “to rebuild this barren disorganized country” and changed the fate of his countrymen. Above a montage of machinery and laboring male bodies, the commentary says, “men who had never seen a motor car, never used anything more mechanical than a wooded plow, started to work in steel and cement to handle tools and machinery.”

The film then moves on to introduce images of oil urbanization, stating: “Factories, schools, and public buildings... whole towns were built.” The sequence climaxes as the camera pans over aerial landscapes of pipelines running over the hills, leading to a view of Abadan, “the refinery town that oil built!” The narrator locates the viewer but also provides a framework for reading the montage of images of the refinery’s industrial infrastructure appearing on screen. Shiny steel pipes and refinery equipment are admired in slow panning shots as an ode to AIOC’s industrial gem.

The following sequence focuses on the production and distribution of petrol on the Iranian market, and the ways in which oil has served modernize labor and the social worlds of the Iranian people. Over a scene of men working alongside a conveyor belt, the commentary states, “Of great importance to Iran is the stream of petrol that goes back into the country.” A montage of wide exterior shots interspersed with close ups inside sugar, cotton, and wool factories is framed by the narration as evidence that, “in sixteen years the Iranians have learned to live a new way: feudal towns have changed to cities, mules and camels have given way to cars and motor buses, docks have been laid out in the Caspian sea and the Persian gulf, the people are taking to rail travel, in Tehran a great national university has been started.” Scenes from the city, including wide exterior shots of large buildings and street traffic transition the sequence into the following analysis of oil’s affect on Iranian society.

The film’s narrative culminates in the subsequent sequence, which focuses on the transformation of women and young citizens in Iran after oil. A swipe effect transitions the viewer from a landscape of architectural ruins to the image of young school girls playing a game of ball, while the narrator makes the claim that, “After one thousand three hundred years the women of Iran have been emancipated, they may go about unveiled, free to mix with other men and women and to take part in the life of their country” (Figure 3.3). The next scene depicts children in a classroom reciting answers to a young female teacher, as the commentary notes, “In sixteen years, five thousand schools have been built.”

The film closes with a montage of close up shots on the faces of Iranian men, women and children. The final commentary states, “this great people, which has clung to its own soil through many wars and famines and plagues, which has kept its identity for over two thousand five hundred years, today faces the future with fresh hope and renewed vitality.” The film presents the possibility of a modern Iran, thanks to oil.

Anglo-Iranian’s First “Real” Oil Film

In 1949, AIOC officials proposed to undertake a novel documentary project that would produce the company’s first “real” film and “avoid a straight oil well to petrol tank story.”¹¹ Following a visit to the AIOC’s key refinery in Abadan, Tritton developed the idea for a film that could reach the public in cinemas in England and Iran. Declaring it to be one of the most important publicity projects the company had ever undertaken, Tritton and other company officials reveled in the notion that the documentary would make history as, “the first sympathetic portrayal of Iran” ever made for a public audience.¹² The film would entertain audiences with spectacles of industrial technology and exotic landscapes, and simultaneously demonstrate to stockholders and general audiences at home that AIOC was the benevolent harbinger of modernity to an otherwise backward country.

For almost two years, between March 1949 and January 1951, AIOC officials in London bounced around ideas for a documentary film centered on daily life in Abadan. Off the bat, Tritton conceived of the film as a lively portrait of Abadan, the refinery and adjacent company town. His objective was to create a film that reflected what he saw as the “real” atmosphere of the place:

The film might start at midnight in the Refinery itself something full of noise and steam and heat to set the scene. This noisy production sequence could give way to the quiet of a hospital ward in the early hours with an English nurse soothing an ill and frightened Iranian girl. From there we might go, say at 5am to the dairy farm and the comfortable homely noise of milking cows. [...] Do you see what I am getting at? Through the day, sequence can fade into sequence...The whole thing would have the Refinery as its backcloth and the rhythmical pumping of oil as its musical theme - the real heartbeat of Abadan.¹³

As he elaborated in his proposal for a “Film about Abadan,” this sort of well-crafted movie about Iran would succeed in simultaneously fulfilling several of AIOC’s key public relations objectives.

Ambitiously, Tritton saw this film as having the potential “to reach the public in cinemas and to describe Abadan to the widest possible audience, thus indirectly placing the AIOC before them.” What is more, he believed it would “show the Iranians what is being done in the way of amenities, housing, health services and so on, yet do it incidentally without underlining or making a special point of it, which is suspect.” He imagined the film’s potential to develop notions of ownership and community, “[giving] both the British and Iranian inhabitants of Abadan a sense of pride in their huge organisation and a feeling of being recognised by the outside world,” and “[enabling] those of the Company’s employees who have not been to Abadan to realise how their colleagues live and work, thereby adding to the cohesive ‘family’ spirit.”

Beyond internal use, Tritton intended this film to, “have considerable prestige value for our Associated Companies, thereby helping sales,” and “be widely used non-theatrically by PFB [the Petroleum Film Bureau] after its commercial release.” Finally, he noted that, “it should be possible for the British Information Services to use it overseas as the story of a great British enterprise.”¹⁴ In his early memos and correspondence with AIOC executives about the film project, Tritton emphasized that the company had great odds of reaching the general public with this sort of short documentary, as it was expected to receive wide circulation in cinemas. Evidently, the objective of making a film with appeal to general audiences was a top priority for the company when undertaking on-location film productions. Tritton’s colleagues went so far as to suggest that the film should include, “sex, drama or other moronic-appeal” to ramp up public interest.¹⁵

From these early stages of planning the film, AIOC officials expressed an explicit intention to feature the participation of Iranian employees and residents of Abadan in the film. This fundamental element of capturing a Iranian presence in the film soon evolved into an assumed point of view that defined the narrative altogether and determined the final choice for its title: *Persian Story*. Anglo-Iranian’s public relations officer Ronald Tritton pitched the original idea for *Persian Story* as follows:

The object of the film is quite definitely not to advertise the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company or to display it in anything but its correct place and proportion in the modern Persian scene. The object of the film is to make, I think for the first time, a first-class film of Persia available for public and private showing, which there is every reason to expect will attract wide public interest and attention.¹⁶

The oil company’s approach to constructing a story as if from the point of view of the native workers would later become a hallmark of the film genre pioneered by this

landmark project which ultimately worked to speak for and control any knowledge of the native's experience.

Persian Story signified a key turning point in the politicization of oil films and marked the oil company's attempt to upstage the voice of protesters in Abadan in 1951. Early that year, just as *Persian Story* filmmakers were beginning to shoot on location in Iran, increasing discontent about labor conditions among oil workers had reached its peak. From the beginning of production, AIOC's British film crew faced obstacles that affected their ability to follow the intended shooting script. These obstacles ranged from troubles with equipment and transportation to issues of government censorship. However, the film production was cut short when the political upheaval in Iran materialized in widespread strikes and in the takeover of the Abadan refinery and eventually culminated in the evacuation of British oil company employees and the nationalization of the Iranian oil industry in 1951.

The film's director Ralph Keene reported to Tritton from the Fields in southern Iran as their production was terminated ahead of schedule. Keene's colorful language and urgent tone paints a vivid picture of the mood and situation for the AIOC film unit as they prepared to evacuate Iran:

As the political situation was again rapidly deteriorating, and all Company officials were asking and advising us to clear out as quickly as possible, I reckoned our job was done and said "Finis." And now we can't get back to Abadan, because of the disturbances there - oh dear, oh dear, oh dear!! Last time we weren't allowed to stay in Fields, and now we aren't allowed to leave - whatever can happen to us next? The rest of the Unit, with the equipment, will be returning to England as soon as they can get away.¹⁷

As a result AIOC screened the final cut of *Persian Story* in London for mass only *after* the oil industry in Iran had been nationalized. For the film premiere "the biggest film party ever given in Europe was organized" for audiences totaling of over 12,000 in seven large West End cinemas in the British capital.¹⁸ The film continued to enjoy theatrical and non-theatrical distribution with extremely positive reviews, and was selected by the Venice, Locarno and Edinburgh film festivals in 1952.¹⁹

As the only documentary film to portray Abadan before the British evacuated in August 1951, *Persian Story* garnered exceptional status as a surviving portrait of the westernized Iranian oil city that ceased to exist after it was taken over by Iranian radicals. However, as the following section will show, AIOC's *Persian Story* ultimately fails to reconcile the incongruity of the film's harmonious image of Iranians living in the modern oil city of Abadan and their lived experience of degrading conditions which they endured for decades.

Cinematic Urbanism in *The Persian Story*

Underneath the film's commentary script, quoted at the top of this chapter, AIOC's filmmakers assembled a visual narrative of Abadan through carefully constructed montages and a dynamic soundtrack. The camera travels across the landscape using an aerial bird's eye perspective over the land, mapping the route of the pipeline as it snakes from the well to the refinery at Abadan. The narrator says, "Over the landscape, once so

empty and abandoned, appear new works, new buildings, new gear: all the visible concrete shapes of a project that has now become an industry.” Here, the film suggests, AIOC’s pipelines shape and order what is described as an otherwise “empty” landscape. This visual and spoken narrative reinscribes the hills of Khuzestan, the home to generations of indigenous tribes and livelihoods, as the pathway for oil to flow through pipes towards Abadan.²⁰ The Persian landscape is thus valued only in terms of the potential of extraction (Figure 3.4).

The camera stitches together a portrait of the landscape as a two-minute montage of non-contiguous aerial tracking shots passing over towns and stretches of hills, farmland and desert (Figure 3.5). Meanwhile the music builds to produce an overwhelming sense of anticipation through a series of crescendos that tease the viewer and peak one’s curiosity about what this continuous momentum is leading towards. The narrator interjects, “So the pipeline goes, over the hills and under the rivers; past ancient cities and modern pumping-stations; beside roads and caravan-trucks and sun-dried villages of mud -- and down to the plains at last.” Intervals between cuts grow shorter until the commentary declares, “with the hills and the deserts behind and the wells far away, the pipelines of Khuzestan are drawn together and into the great oil city of Abadan.” The climax finally arrives: an aerial view of the Abadan refinery.

The narrator introduces a retrospective voice at this point, establishing the authority of the visible evidence presented in the film as an authentic representation of Abadan. In reference to the so-called “Persian Oil Crisis” that captured headlines in Europe and the United States in the same year that *Persian Story* was released, the script suggests that few people know the “real” Abadan. The narrator explains, “Abadan: many people know the name now in terms of argument and uncertainty, who never saw the place, nor rarely knew that such a curious complex place stands there in the delta of Tigris and Euphrates.” This claim is critical to framing the subsequent sequence of the film for British audiences. Here, the “reel” Abadan that appears in the film is equated with the “real” city: a portrait that uses visible evidence and thus holds authority over all other news reports and rumors about the political situation in Iran.

Abadan’s industrial landscape is constructed as nothing short of the light at the end of a long tunnel. A musical flourish booms as the refinery comes into view. Beyond this, the narrator contends, Abadan is not just a city or a refinery, but more so, “a great temple to the Twentieth Century god of oil!” The allusion to religious conquest implies a new crusade of western capitalism in the Middle East. The idea that before oil nothing of value existed in this region is rearticulated as the camera pans slowly across a landscape of refinery exhaust pipes: “A nerve-centre of the Middle East - and yet, less than a lifetime ago, there was only the desolate unpopulated desert, and an empty island.” Together the inquisitive soundtrack, the slow pace of the camera movements and drawn out crossfades between images of oil infrastructure draw attention to both the vast scale and the minute detail of western engineering embodied in Abadan (Figure 3.6). The result is an explorative montage that creates an air of admiration for the refinery.

As the music fades, the film cuts abruptly from views of the refinery to the city via a staged urban street scene: a Persian officer in a formal white uniform directs automobiles and cyclists in traffic around a bustling roundabout. The narrator proclaims, “Abadan is the exit of the oil - a teeming place where ships meets streets, and a quarter of a million people live dedicated to one single proposition: the refining of twenty five

million tons of oil every year.” The music shifts to a more complex, upbeat melody accompanied by an operatic female voice that produces a tone of mystery and curiosity. A montage of tracking shots move along a street bustling with Iranian pedestrians who frequently look into the camera lens as it moves past. The shot is taken from the point of view of an automobile passing along the road without pause. The photographer’s distance from the scene and quick pacing of camera-movement along the street directs the viewer’s eye so that it will catch large objects centered in the frame: colorful market stalls and shiny modern cars parked along the sidewalk. Iranian men dressed in European-style suits stand out against surrounding pedestrians in street clothes walking along street.

The camera movement used to construct these tracking shots is so quick-paced in fact that darker details at the edges of the frame slip from the viewer’s attention. Focusing on a still frame from the sequence, the badly maintained quality of the built environment in this local street scene from the market or “bazaar” in Abadan Town becomes visible. These poorly maintained roads and dilapidating buildings are, however, nearly impossible to identify while the shot plays in real time (Figure 3.7). It is important to note that this continuous shot sequence is devoid of any commentary, and as a result the street captured in this sequence is never located within the context of the rest of the city. In a final tracking shot the camera movement slows and pauses to frame a colorful storefront that is flush with fish and bouquets hanging above piles of yellow and orange produce. The image of plentitude creates an opportunity for transition to the following sequence: a portrait of the garden suburb (Figure 3.8).

The film cuts seamlessly from the fruit stall to shot of an Indian servant holding a watering hose to refresh the flowers of a lush garden. This transition creates an illusion of continuity between the “Town” where the majority of Iranian residents and oil workers live in informal self-built housing, and the estates of the garden suburb Barwada, where a minority of upper-ranking Iranian company officials reside. The Barwada montage is comprised of several still shots, in which the director fixes the frame to key in and linger on the grand architecture of a large bungalow house, and a lush landscape of palm trees where two Iranian women stroll through the scene, pushing prams and wearing recognizably European-style dresses and hairstyles (Figure 3.9). The scene of these two women, set in a quintessential European garden suburb is made exotic only through the musical soundtrack. The garden suburb is pictured here as a world apart from the dirty industrial atmosphere of the refinery. If not for a brief moment in which the camera catches the smokestacks of one of the oil refinery in the background (Figure 3.10), the entire visual sequence of Barwada otherwise renders invisible the industrial machinery, pollution and noise that constantly loom over these the real city of Abadan.

In *Persian Story* modernity is visually constructed in terms of legible spatial arrangements and the transformation and liberation of the female Iranian subject from tropes of the veiled woman. This gendered notion of modernity in Abadan is constructed through images of Iranian women in the recognizable roles of full-time mothers, cheery nurses, and swimmers at leisure (Figure 3.11). These representations of Iranian women clearly reference contemporary visual tropes of quintessential modern women found in popular British (and American) mainstream movies and advertising. This gendered picture of modernity works to suggest Iran’s mimicry of modern European values, in that women walk, dress and live as if they were just like the women in a modern garden

suburb outside of London. In other words, the oil city fits within the paradigm of colonial urbanism in cities such as Algiers and New Delhi in that modernity exists as a condition dependent upon a British imperial model, provided in this case by the oil company.²¹

In addition to the emphasis on modernizing residents in terms of hygiene via the systematic provision of sewerage, piped water and medical facilities, the planned residential units in Abadan “modernized” the household via the transformation of gendered and spatial division of labor - from one where women acted as primary economic agents within the home (livestock, gardening, weaving) to one in which there was a spatial division between work and home in which the male was the sole legitimate economic agent returning wage earned outside the home.²² The gendered division of labor was pictured in the film, reflecting the same developments taking place in capitalist western societies at the same time.

The ordered and legible spaces of the garden suburb in the Iranian oil city represent material evidence of a modern way of life comprised of immediately recognizable symbols: the large single-family home, the automobile, the garden, the tailored dress, and the two-piece swimsuit. The film’s impressionistic representation of the city of Abadan is created through a sequence of tightly constructed montages featuring static spatial and social environments. The single-family home, and the image of domesticated women pushing their prams while the men earn wages at the refinery are normalized and valorized as evidence of modernity. Here we see a story about the civilizing mission of western industry, defining modernity in terms of the reproduction of recognizably western spatial and gendered practices in the division of labor.

Yet these happy images of Iranian women and children are complicated by the fact that the oil city of Abadan, featured in the film, was a central stage upon which anti-imperial struggles unfolded, led by Iranian workers and citizens in favor of nationalizing the oil industry and improving labor conditions. The film disguises the dynamic or problematic aspects of modernization in Iran and more specifically avoids the elephant in the room: the troubled relationship between the oil company and Iranian employees that ultimately bolstered widespread support among Iranian oil workers for the nationalization of the oil industry.

Barwada and the Image of Oil Modernity

As discussed in the previous chapter, living conditions for most of AIOC’s Iranian oil workers were extremely poor and strictly segregated from the neighborhoods inhabited by the British employees of the Company. The majority of indigenous laborers did not receive housing and lived in slums on the periphery of the refinery where the company provided little to no services. Manucher Farmanfarmaian documents that at the time for most refinery workers, “Wages were 50 cents a day. There was no vacation pay, no sick leave, no disability compensation. The workers lived in a shanty town...without running water or electricity.”²³ The experience of Iranian laborers differed entirely from that of the British administrative personnel and technicians, and a minority of Iranians hired for more technical positions or married to British staff.

As a critical study by the architectural historian Mark Crinson has demonstrated Barwada - the planned garden suburb pictured in the *Persian Story* that housed this minority of Iranian employees and their families - was a space of exception and by no means represented the norm for Abadan’s Iranian residents (Figure 3.13).²⁴ AIOC’s chief

architect planned and built this neighborhood in the late 1940s as an experimental integrated residential area in the otherwise spatially and socially segregated oil city. In this garden suburb, selected non-European staff could live side-by-side in the same bungalow-style homes that Europeans had occupied in specially planned and isolated neighborhoods since the 1920s. By 1951, with a city population over 200,000 inhabitants (of which 65,000 were company employees), less than 20% lived in the planned residential districts where the AIOC provided housing.

The integrated plan for Barwada was exceptional as in the past all living quarters for the Iranian workforce were segregated from those occupied by the company's British employees. Crinson details that from early settlement until the 1950s, European staff lived in isolated bungalow areas mainly to the west of the refinery with their own system of buses, markets, cinemas, clubs, and so forth. Although some company housing was provided for Iranian staff the great majority of company resources was poured into European staff housing.²⁵ Despite this condition of segregation, the film closes with a series of shots of Iranian men who work for the company. Images of oil workers walking to work are paired in parallel to staged scenes of young men enjoying the company of friends and reading leisurely while taking a stroll in the gardens of the Abadan technical school (Figure 3.12). In fact the lived experiences of oil workers and the upper ranks of Iranian company employees could not be more different. To the east of the refinery, Iranian AIOC laborers were left to settle informally in a densely populated town with little services and infrastructure (Figure 3.14).

The film *Persian Story* glosses over the complex, dynamic and troubled socio-economic conditions that underpinned the role of AIOC in the production of lived space around the Abadan refinery and in the making of the city. In the film modernity is constructed as a static material condition, and depicted as fixed and unproblematic. Framing the film within Crinson's critical analysis of Abadan's spatial development, in fact, informs a particular reading of the film. *Persian Story* pairs selective footage depicting the manicured garden suburb and the street running through the town center to suggest that these spaces somehow blend together. It does not examine or explain how these spaces relate to one another and how the inhabitants of either space are kept apart and socially segregated in their everyday lives. *Persian Story* privileges the story of everyday life in the exceptional space of the garden suburb, situated in the context of the broader city without any indication of the social and spatial barriers that define Abadan as a segregated city. Ultimately this depiction serves as a means to suit the company's aim to popularize the idea that in addition to extracting oil, AIOC played a civilizing role in Iran: as the harbinger of western notions of modern spatial order and social conventions.

By privileging the visual narrative focused on the suburb over the spaces of the city where most Iranian workers lived, the film spotlights the intervention of utopian garden city design while otherwise ignoring the broader context of change and the problems the company encountered in accommodating Abadan's booming population of laborers. As suggested by the turbulent events of 1951 the utopian experiment in the Barwada suburb ultimately failed to ease the greater underlying tensions of urban segregation and inequality on the ground. Yet the portrait in *Persian Story* of Abadan as a harmonious garden city was impressed upon the tens of thousands of people outside of Iran who watched the film as a "factual" documentary account.

In *Persian Story*, the oil company town enclave is pictured as visible evidence that the civilizing mission of the west has been carried out to its ultimate and best possible conclusion, all thanks to oil. In fact company towns in Khuzestan are modeled after company towns in America and Europe; designed first and foremost to suit the needs of the industry/company and not the environmental, social and economic needs of the residents/workers. What remains invisible in the film *Persian Story* is the informal space of the workers' quarters that emerged alongside the tidy streets of the planned Barwada neighborhood. Dual cities segregating the planned elite city from the auto-constructed and underserved residential quarters of the native and working or peasant class emerged as a standard outcome of colonial and modernist top down urban planning throughout the world.

The urban conditions that defined Abadan and shaped the lived experiences of the majority of Iranian residents were left out of this film. Anglo-Iranian's oil city was a deeply segregated city, and much like Britain's colonial cities throughout the world, residents were kept apart based on class and race, producing disturbing conditions of hyper inequality. It was in large part the conditions of this contradictory modernity that fueled the struggle for labor rights and the movement that eventually ousted the British from Abadan in 1951. This is the most obvious irony of the film *Persian Story*, which nonetheless held the dominant and most visible narrative of lived experience in the oil city.

Conclusion

Although the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company initially used film for internal purposes, its ambitions grew as the need for a public relations program became more obvious. In *the Land of the Shah* and *Dawn of Iran*, the first two documentaries that the oil company sponsored for distribution to the general public, were shown in public cinemas throughout England and Europe. With each film the representation of Abadan changed somewhat, from the backdrop of oil operations to the subject of the film. By the time that Tritton's, AIOC's public relations officer, enthusiastic idea for a new "film about Abadan" in 1949 was approved he had set out to make the first film to *genuinely* portray Iran to the outside world in a positive and even sympathetic light.

Persian Story focused on the life of AIOC's Persian employees in Abadan as visible evidence of modernity in Iran. As detailed in the previous chapter, modern planning ideology (based on the precedent of colonial planning in Delhi) had shaped the oil company town. In fact, the film reproduces the top-down planning perspective in its representation of the town. The viewer is introduced to the refinery and the town from the air, as the airplane follows the pipelines from the fields to the epicenter of AIOC's operations. The establishing shots of the company town are composed of wide boulevards, shiny cars, and a large roundabout that constitutes the planner's entry point into Abadan. The garden suburb is the site of modern living apart from the world of the refinery, but nonetheless dependent on it. Ultimately, the film argues that oil extraction is the purpose that fuels Abadan and keeps it alive.

Urban space in *Persian Story* is idealized through the planner's eye, as a modernist vision of everyday life where work, education, and leisure are segregated functions of urban life and the domestic sphere is a woman's world. In Abadan, however, oil workers who lived in slum conditions actively contested the planner's vision of the oil

company town. Although this narrative is excluded from the documentary record, the oil film reproduces the vision of the city from the expert or planner's perspective. This point of view was of course fundamental to shaping the oil company towns of the Arabian Gulf.

Persian Story was featured as part of the major film event that British Petroleum held in London's Odeon theatres and circulated in theatres, festivals, classrooms and film societies afterwards. However, the company's public relations efforts were directed toward the British public and failed to address the tension between the British oil company and the Iranian population. The next chapter examines how planning and architecture shaped the capital cities of four oil-producing states: Iraq, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar. Chapter five will then examine the new public relations and filmmaking approach that the British Iraq Petroleum Company established in response to the Iranian oil crisis, using the modern oil city as visible evidence of development and progress as well as a site for performing national identity.

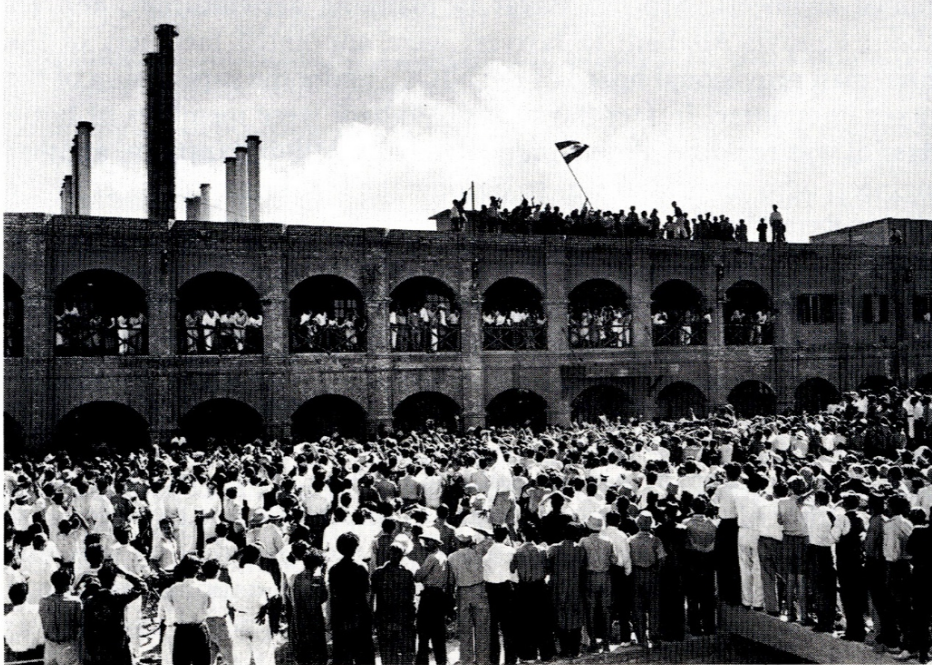


Figure 3.1 Oil Workers' Demonstration in Abadan, June 1951.



Figure 3.2 British Petroleum Company film screening for a collective audience of 12,000 in London's West End, December 1952.



Figure 3.3 Film stills from *Dawn of Iran* from a sequence about the modernization of women in Iran after oil. Whereas women are absent from the earlier film *In the Land of the Shah* here they are central to the narrative.

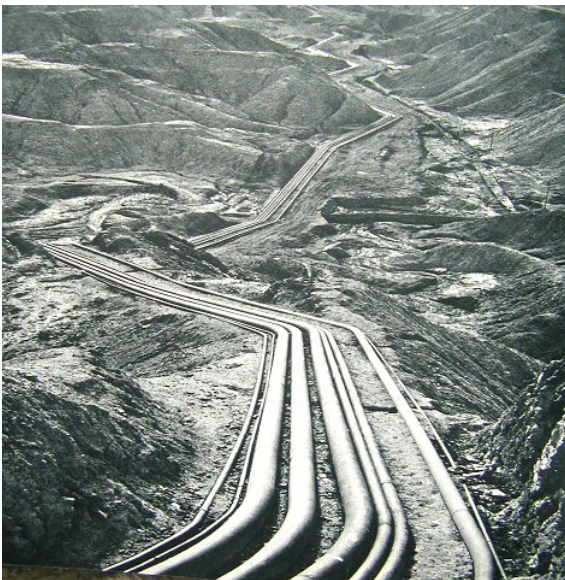


Figure 3.4 A promotional image for *Persian Story* conveys the imaginary of the Persian landscape conveyed throughout the opening sequence of the film.



Figure 3.5 This sequence of still is taken from the montage of tracking shots that comprise the opening of *Persian Story*. The aerial images depict AIOC’s pipelines slicing through a landscape, which the narrator describes as once “so empty and abandoned.”



Figure 3.6 Stills from the admiration montage depicting the machinery of the Abadan oil refinery through slow moving pans and long cross-fades in *Persian Story*.



Figure 3.7 This still from *Persian Story* from the sequence of the ‘Town’ reveals what the quick-paced tracking shot cannot, such as the poor conditions of the street surface and informal construction of buildings. Indeed, this brief glimpse of the town indicates that the living and working conditions of average Iranians in the town is not the subject of this film, despite the fact that the majority of Iranians lived in such conditions.



Figure 3.8 The seamless transition from the town to the garden suburb is crafted through a cut between these two images. The framing in the first shot and the bountiful appearance of the produce market stall at its center parallel the vegetation framing the subsequent shot of a lush garden. This illusion of sameness and seamlessness in the construction of the reel Abadan renders invisible the condition of segregation that characterized and kept the town apart from Barwada in the real oil company town.



Figure 3.9 These stills from the garden suburb sequence in *Persian Story* comprise a visual narrative of the pace of life and the spacious and ordered quality of the built environment in AIOC's Barwada enclave. Domestic life is pictured in a slow and deliberate sequence of scenes that feature the architectural grandeur and order European style estates set in lush gardens. In contrast to the urban street scene from the town, in the suburb a pair of women in western dress push prams stroll at a leisurely pace away from the camera through a serene grove of palm trees.



Figure 3.10 This still from the garden suburb sequence of *Persian Story* is the closest to depicting the real oil company town. A nurse caring for a patient while he lounges in a garden is pictured as serene thanks to the calming melody in the soundtrack; however, the refinery looms in the background. This is the only point at which the viewer is reminded that the real atmosphere of life in the oil town is dominated by the sights, sounds and smells of the oil industry.



Figure 3.11 This still from *Persian Story* depicts an Iranian women swimming in a two-piece at the company club. This image stands in great contrast to the typical images of veiled women that were typical.



Figure 3.12 The closing sequence depicts scenes of Iranian men working at the refinery side by side with the idealistic portrayal of Iranian students at the technical institute, as if their experience were shared.



Figure 3.13 Wilson's experimental suburb of Barwada, c. 1950.



Figure 3.14 An example of the squalid living conditions in Abadan where Iranian workers and their families resided in the shadow of AIOC's company enclaves, 1950.

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- ¹ Ralph Keene, "Anglo-Iranian Oil Company Film: "Persian Story" (Commentary as Recorded)," 1952, British Film Institute Archive "Persian Story" Microfiche.
- ² Tritton, "How We Use Films," 465; "The Anglo-Iranian Co.'s Film Show: Past and Present Portrayed to a Great Audience," *The Petroleum Times*, 9 January 1953, BP 35516.
- ³ Tritton, "Memo to Mr. Keating."
- ⁴ This project was deeply and necessarily tied to the Shah's campaign to modernize the image of his country. He changed the name of his country to Iran, and government monitors ensured that no images that could make Iran appear as a backwards country be included during the filming of the Anglo-Iranian documentaries.
- ⁵ Said, *Orientalism*; Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004).
- ⁶ Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*, vol. 1, 183; Adams, "BP Archive History," 1.
- ⁷ Naficy, 183.
- ⁸ Ibid., 183-4.
- ⁹ John Taylor, "The Production of *Dawn of Iran*," (Unpublished report from 1982 cited in Naficy, 185. Naficy notes that in 1938 the government implemented explicit regulations on any images of Iran that foreigners recorded and projected.
- ¹⁰ "Oil Beneath the Bough," *World Film News*, October 1938, 35516 BP.
- ¹¹ Ronald Tritton, "Film on Abadan," 22 September 1949, and "Film on the AIOC," 12 January 1950, 183091 BP.
- ¹² Tritton, "Memo to Mr. Keating," 1951, 183091 BP.
- ¹³ Tritton, "Film about Abadan," 9 March 1949, 183091 BP; Also, see Ehsani, "Social Engineering and the Contradictions of Modernization in Khuzestan's Company Towns," 380; Ehsani writes, "The imposition of this industrial order of work and time discipline were among the very first and most critical tasks of the oil company in Khuzestan."
- ¹⁴ Ronald Tritton, "Film on Company's Operations," 4 January 1950, 183091 BP.
- ¹⁵ Tritton, "Film about Abadan," 9 March 1949, 183091 BP.
- ¹⁶ AHT Chisholm, 8 Nov 1950, 183091 BP.
- ¹⁷ Ralph Keene, "Letter to Ronald Tritton," 14 April 1951, 183091 BP.
- ¹⁸ Tritton, "How We Use Films," 465; "The Anglo-Iranian Co.'s Film Show."
- ¹⁹ Tritton, "How We Use Films," 465.
- ²⁰ See Abd Al-nabi Qayyim, *Five Hundred Years of Khuzestan History*, Trans. Pansad Sal Tarikh Khuzastan, (Akhtaran: Tehran, Iran, 2009).
- ²¹ See AlSayyad, *Forms of Dominance*.
- ²² Ehsani, 386-7.
- ²³ Farmanfarmaian, *Blood and Oil*, 184-5.
- ²⁴ Crinson, "Abadan," 347-357.
- ²⁵ Ibid., 342-6.

Chapter Four

Oil, Capital Cities, and National Identity in the Arabian Gulf

By manufacturing dazzling development projects that engender collective fantasies of progress, it casts its spell over audience and performers alike. As a “magnanimous sorcerer,” the state seizes its subjects by inducing a condition or state of being receptive to its illusions – a magical state.

—Fernando Coronil¹

Beginning in 1951, 50-50 profit sharing arrangements between British petroleum companies and Arab states became the new norm. Oil-producing countries experienced an influx of wealth, which was viewed as an opportunity to invest in nation building projects that would modernize the young states, and particular their capital cities. Oil wealth was channeled into highly visible urban development projects that oil companies and national governments in oil-producing countries would feature in films and publications, as well as in international newspapers and magazines. Meanwhile, the urban planning and architecture professionals focused on development projects that wholly neglected the critical demands and problems resulting from recent waves of rural-urban migration.

This chapter examines how the production of the built environment in oil capitals through the modernist planning and architectural design work of international consultants worked to make oil wealth visible on the urban, national, and international scale. Examining case studies of capital cities in Iraq, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar, this chapter shows how governments used newly acquired state revenue to produce images of the capital cities that circulated in the global discourse of international modernism. In each case, most of the key urban projects pursued by government agencies under the banner of national development were highly visible and publicized by petroleum companies. Often the contracts for these projects were given to foreign consultants associated with the British government and thus benefited a minority of the elite and powerful players. The top down CIAM principles that shaped other modernist capitals in South America and South Asia played out on a rather different stage in the context of the Arabian Gulf. However, the modernist architectural discourses that shaped the built environments and ultimately the image of these cities entered these Arab states into an international discourse of modernism in relationship to nation building.

National Identity and the Built Environment

Scholarship that studies the relationship between national identity and the built environment has built on key theories that identify nationalism as a state-led practice of collective imagining. In *Architecture, Power, and National Identity*, Vale defines “nationalism” according to Gellner, as a “theory of political legitimacy,” which maintains that, “the political and the national unit should be congruent.”² Hobsbawm adds that the imagining of the nation entails the deliberate invention of national traditions by the state as a means to instill a sense of national consciousness regarding the historical continuity and legitimacy of the nation-state.³ In his seminal work on the origin and spread of nationalism, Anderson agrees that all nations are imagined into existence, and argues that national identities are constructed through the circulation of representations that create an

imagined community. The rise of print-capitalism, he suggests, made it possible to produce representations of a constructed national identity across an otherwise fragmented or incoherent territory, in the form of newspapers, maps, and novels.⁴

The emphasis on nations as imagined and invented constructions, first put forward in these key texts, has led to the emergence of critical studies in various disciplines examining practices of nation building. However, as Kusno indicates, “in his study, Anderson does not regard architectural and urban space as an important component in which an imagined community acquires concrete space.”⁵ Yet, as Kusno emphasizes, practices and representations of architecture and urban design “profoundly shape the way in which the nation imagines its body – the shape of the people it rules, the legitimacy of its age, and the geography of its domain.”⁶ In his work on architecture, urbanism, and identity, King echoes, “It is the *building*...in which the ideology of all ‘imagined communities’...is contained, materialized and symbolized.”⁷

The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of “identity” derives its meaning from the Latin root *idem* or “sameness.” Hall emphasizes that in fact the processes involved in forming an identity of the self always operate across difference, through practices of exclusion that establish the “constitutive outside” against which the self is in turn defined.⁸ In terms of *national* identity, it is the state that holds the political power to determine who and what will be excluded from and included in the definition of a nation. National identity, Vale explains, “whether taken in architectural or any other terms, becomes increasingly artificial and subject to the dictates of those in power.”⁹ Kusno adds that beyond the monumental scale of state monuments and capitol complexes, practices of architecture and urban design intervene in the everyday lived spaces in pursuit of the formation of national subjects.¹⁰

Postcolonial Cities and Nation Building

Capitals cities are critical sites for understanding how newly independent states have used the built environment to embody constructed imaginaries of national identity. As Vale argues, architecture and urban design in postcolonial capitals embodied symbolic meanings that surpassed programmatic objectives to build appropriate structures to house the functions of new parliamentary democracies. Vale argues that, although, “the professed goal of such government buildings is to forge something most often termed national identity or national unity...the design of these buildings remain closely tied to political forces that reinforce existing patterns of dominance and submission.”¹¹ While designs for capital cities claim to represent national identity and national interest, Vale explicates, in fact, plans for government buildings and urban layouts embody subnational, personal, and supranational identities.

The symbolic function of the built environment is of primary consideration in the production of space in postcolonial capitals. Bozdogan examines how aesthetics of progress in Kemalist Turkey were made visible through the production of space and the reproduction of modernist designs and industrial infrastructures in photographs and drawings. Bozdogan writes, “Architecture, by its very nature, has always been a powerful symbol as well as an effective instrument of reform and change in the modern world. As a result, modern architecture in non-Western contexts has often been a *representation* of modernity without its real material and social basis.”¹² Postcolonial capitals are primary sites for the production and circulation of these representations of modernity.

Kusno's study of Jakarta, Indonesia under President Sukarno (1957-65) examines how the leader employed modernist architecture and planning practices in the city as part of a "nation-building" project aimed to shape the capital as a "'beacon' for the international gaze of the world community."¹³ Similar to the case of Baghdad and other capital cities discussed in this chapter, unfavorable economic conditions in villages and outer islands had sent waves of new migrants to the postcolonial capital Jakarta in the wake of Indonesia's independence from the Dutch in 1950. As a result, informal settlements referred to as *kampungs* mushroomed in the city, with the majority of new migrants concentrated in the center. Kusno cites a telling account from 1954, stating that, "existing 'kampungs' are long since filled to the brim and new arrivals in the city are thrown largely upon their own resources, roaming around by day, and finding a place to sleep in whatever unoccupied nook or cranny they can find."¹⁴ However, to realize his vision of a modern capital, Sukarno focused not on housing, but instead on creating architectural spectacles and spatial interventions in the city. As an example, this included a major six-lane thoroughfare originating in the newly minted Independence Square that was lined with modern high-rise office buildings, as well as the iconic Hotel Indonesia and Sarinah Department Store.

In Sukarno's symbolic city, Kusno explains, "a limit was...set to the excessive over-flow of the *kampong* by means of monumental structures that ordered and symbolized the capital city as a center of Indonesian postcolonial power."¹⁵ Ultimately, "the 'modern' part of the city, named after heroes, decked with brick-and-glass buildings, opened up by a clover-leaf bridge, the Jakarta Bypass, and financed as a material symbol, while illuminating the power of 'nation-building,' also illuminated the presence of the rotten (and rotting) *kampong*."¹⁶ Sukarno's aesthetic transformation of the city through modernist architecture and urban planning was intended to simultaneously unite the rest of the nation around a postcolonial modern center and address the external gaze of major cities in the region and worldwide. However, Sukarno's sleek, top-down approach to this intervention neglected the growing needs of *kampong* residents and ultimately failed to bring the changes that consumed the people of Jakarta: steps to resolve the housing crisis and improvements to basic infrastructure.¹⁷ This pattern of failure is endemic to postcolonial capitals that emerged across the developing world during the 1950s.

In *The Modernist City: An Anthropological Critique of Brasilia*, Holston presents a critical study of Lucia Costa's 1957 master plan for Brazil's new capital city. Brasilia was conceived of, planned, and constructed under President Kubitschek, who declared that the new city would generate "both a new national space and a new national epoch, the first by incorporating the interior into the national economy and the second by being the decisive mark on the time-line of Brazil's emergence as a modern nation."¹⁸ As the premise of his larger thesis, Holston argues that Brasilia was designed as a modernist city by state sponsored planners with the explicit ideology and political objective to use the built environment as an instrument to transform society. Further, Holston argues, "the paradox of Brasilia's development is not that its radical premises failed to produce something new, but rather, that what they did produce contradicted what was intended."¹⁹

Postcolonial states in South America and across the developing world welcomed the promise of the modernist ideologies espoused by CIAM to transform society through universal design and construction methods. The architectural language of modernism was also a highly visible practice of image making in capital cities that brought new nation-

states into an international arena of architectural and planning discourse. In the case of Venezuela, Coronil argues, “the arduous establishment of state authority was achieved in intimate relation with the exploitation of petroleum. [...] It was only when [the state] was transformed into a mediator between the nation and the foreign oil companies in the early twentieth century that the state acquired the political capacity and financial resources that enabled it to appear as an independent agent capable of posing its dominion over society.”²⁰ Similarly in the context of the British hegemony in the spheres of politics and resource extraction in the Arabian Gulf, states worked to establish the image of national authority vis-a-vis the capital city. Urban space operated as a highly visible arena for constructing national identity and engaging with the international discourse of modernism.

The capital cities of the Arabian Gulf are not postcolonial capitals in the literal sense of the phrase. In other words, Baghdad, Kuwait, Manama and Doha are not former colonies, but rather sites of neo-colonial encounter subject to indirect British imperial authority vis-a-vis arrangements with the nation-state and British government consultants and petroleum companies. Thus, the production of space in these capital cities used new oil wealth to forge national identities through the images of the city created by international architects and planners. As the following chapter will show, oil companies and states circulate images of new architectural projects to narrativize the city as evidence of national development and social progress.

Oil Wealth and State-led Urban Development

Oil companies in the Arabian Gulf faced increasing pressure in the form of labor strikes and eventually national movements in protest of imperialism embodied most overtly by the petroleum industry. In Iran, this came to a head in 1951 when the Prime Minister Mossadegh made a move to nationalize the oil industry, which eventually resulted in AIOC’s withdrawal from Abadan. ARAMCO’s decision to negotiate a 50-50 profit-sharing agreement with the Saudi Arabian government in 1950 led to a wave of similar new arrangements across the region. As new wealth poured into the hands of government officials, capital cities emerged as the hallmark spaces of oil modernity.

Across the board, centralized national governments of oil-producing countries invested in outwardly oriented urban development schemes with high visibility. States commissioned foreign architectural and planning firms to dream up landmark projects that would transform the capital city into an *image* of oil modernity. Plans to modernize the facades of buildings lining new grand boulevards that sliced through old neighborhoods were often prioritized over and above development projects to raise the standard of living and quality of urban space for most residents. The following sections detail the histories of modern planning and architecture in four capitals of oil-producing countries that emphasized urban development as a path towards modernity. These case studies show how the concentration of oil wealth in state hands shaped Baghdad, Manama, Kuwait City, and Doha according to a similar pattern of image making.

The politically motivated projects that shaped the built environments of capital cities across the Arabian Gulf prioritized the image of the modern city above efforts to modernize the lived city. Sleek imaginaries of the promised Petropolis circulated in the state’s promotional publications and celebratory events, sidelined material evidence of the stark class-based inequalities of urban life for most of the population. The new order

of urban life in oil-producing countries worked primarily to accommodate the oil companies that were born out of imperial European regimes. Meanwhile new migrants, working class and poor families struggled in worsening conditions, as capital cities boomed spectacularly with grand boulevards and modernist buildings.

Baghdad, Iraq

The British mandate in Iraq existed from 1920 when British officials unified the three former Ottoman provinces of Mosul, Baghdad and Basra until the country gained independence in 1932. This was enough time for Britain to create a constitution, install a ruling monarchy, and establish a military base in Iraq, guaranteeing an instrumental hand in the country's future national economic and political affairs. The London-based conglomerate of European oil interests (Americans entered the consortium later) that formed the Turkish Petroleum Company gained the concession for exclusive rights to explore and exploit potential petroleum resources in Iraq from the Ottomans in 1912.²¹ After the League of Nations formally recognized Iraq's sovereignty as an independent nation-state with Baghdad as its capital, the oil company changed its name to the Iraq Petroleum Company. It maintained exclusive control over petroleum extraction from Iraq's northern oil fields in Mosul, where oil was discovered in commercial quantities at the Baba Gurgur well 1927. Following the dissolution of the mandate, the British administration in London relied on the compliance of the installed monarch and political influence of the landowning class to ensure that the Iraq Petroleum Company did not lose its grip on Iraqi oil.

In subsequent years, popular sentiments opposing the ongoing political and economic intervention by the British state and the oil company in Iraq continually mounted. Iraqis were increasingly frustrated by the sluggish output by IPC as compared to AIOC's oil production in Iran. Mass anti-imperialist demonstrations culminated in the capital in 1949. Responding to the pressure within Iraq, the government renegotiated a profit-sharing agreement with the IPC demanding an even share in revenues, modeled on the 50-50 principle that ARAMCO established as a new precedent in Saudi Arabia. In 1951, this resulted in a contract between the state and the company that promised a 50-50 split in revenue and, immediately following the renegotiation, the establishment of the Iraq Development Board to oversee the allocation of 70% of all oil revenues into national and urban development schemes.²² The initial five-year development plan (1951-1955) produced prior to the renegotiation had focused primarily on national schemes for improving irrigation, flood-control, and transportation in Iraq; however, the plan was revised in light of the new agreement with IPC and substantial increase in development funds. The revised plan (1951-1956) allocated funding towards technical education of engineers and technicians, as well as some public housing.²³ Overall, planned and actual expenditure on urban development was quite limited during this initial period.

Beginning in 1953, the Board's approach to national development was reevaluated to account for the dramatic influx of state oil wealth. "Between 1952 and 1958, output and revenues doubled, raising Iraq's oil income to ID 84.6 million (\$237.7 million) in 1958."²⁴ Two subsequent plans for 1955-1959 and later 1956-1960 were produced as a result. The second revised plan followed guidelines and recommendations offered in a critical report prepared by the British economist Lord Salter in 1955.²⁵ The report placed significant emphasis on the fact that the government had to make its work

more visible to the Iraqi people by producing tangible results that clearly benefited the population rather than investing everything into wide-scale and long-term projects such as dams, bridges and roads. In Salter's words:

There is a strong and widespread resentment against the Development Board among many sections of the population. [...] It is complained that the large oil revenues are bringing no benefit to the country as a whole; and it is no effective answer to say that after many years the water-schemes and other longterm projects will enrich the country. There is therefore the strongest reason for substantial expenditure of a kind which will bring quick and clearly visible benefits. Among these housing, pure-water systems, and detailed and immediate help to farming and husbandry are among the most obvious. All these can give quick results. The benefits can be dispersed throughout the country; and their effect can then be greatly increased by suitable publicity.²⁶

As Penrose and Penrose observe, "the political as well as the economic value of improved housing was strangely overlooked" prior to the Salter report.²⁷ Thereafter, the Development Board embraced housing as top priority for its development schemes.

Baghdad's rural-to-urban migrant population mushroomed in the early 1950s as a result of government land tenure reforms that only worsened an already exploitative set of relations between landowners and labor. Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett's study of these reforms describe in detail how government policies under the British Occupation, Mandate, and Monarchy periods worked to institutionalize top-down control of the country's agricultural land by sheikhs and landlords. This was so severe that by 1958 just one percent of Iraq's landowners owned 55.1% of all private land.²⁸ During the 1930s, these politically motivated policies blatantly favored the landowning elite in order to "furnish the social base for the monarchy, and indirectly for the maintenance of British influence in the country," creating a crisis of sweeping unemployment and underemployment across Iraq's rural areas.²⁹ Sluglett and Sluglett explain that, "migration from the land began as early as the end of the 1920s and continued throughout the rest of the period of the monarchy, particularly from the provinces of Kut and 'Amara to Baghdad, where whole areas of *sarifas* (shacks made from palm branches), the Iraqi equivalent of the North African *bidonville*, were constructed by the new arrivals."³⁰

As migrants rushed to major Iraqi cities in search of unskilled and low-skill job opportunities, the population in Baghdad grew from 515,459 residents in 1947 to 793,183 by 1957. The lack of adequate housing resulted in the prevalence of *sarifa* dwellings, which housed about 92,000 individuals by 1956. Over ten years, the ballooning housing shortage transformed Baghdad and the city continued to be the primary destination for rural peasant migrants seeking an escape from the oppression of exploitative landowning sheikhs.³¹ Housing was thus upheld as the solution for satisfying the perceived need to improve public relations between the oil rich state and the Iraqi people. Housing produced tangible images and spatial interventions in the city that had potential to make visible the ways in which the government was putting petrodollars to work in order to raise the standard of living for Iraqi people.

In 1955 the Development Board commissioned the Greek architect and planner Constantinos A. Doxiadis to produce a master plan to modernize the capital, and develop a "comprehensive five-year plan for the improvement of housing conditions" in several

Iraqi cities, including Mosul, Kirkuk, Mussayib and Baghdad.³² The guiding principle behind the master plan “was for the city to expand continually along one axis, to avert congestion, and for the business district to grow along this axis, controlled by zoning and the siting of public buildings, road systems, and green areas.”³³ Doxiadis’ housing plan for the capital centered on the Western Baghdad Development Scheme. The new sector was planned to accommodate 100,000 residents through publicly funded or self-help housing organized according to rigid and pre-determined functionalist and modernist principles.³⁴ Pyla notes that, “such preoccupation with the rational ordering of both the urban fabric and the society, understood more in visual and aesthetic terms, was typical of twentieth-century high-modernist urbanism and its grand vision for the rational engineering of social life.”³⁵ The housing scheme was featured as a centerpiece of the government’s celebratory Second Development Week in 1957, which culminated in a barrage of publications and public relations events. In the Development Board publication detailing the scheme, a black and white photograph depicting the facade of a row of newly constructed housing units is captioned by the exaggerated declaration: “Houses constructed in Baghdad have solved the housing crisis.”³⁶ (Figure 4.1) In fact the crisis continued, as the shortage of housing continued to put great pressure on the city. Glossy images of the housing project only created the appearance of a solution.

Urban planning schemes carried out in the capital included the establishment of Al-Jumhuriya Street, which was opened in 1956 running parallel to the Tigris River in East Baghdad (*Rusafah*). For the first time the municipal administration in Baghdad permitted construction of tall non-uniform buildings along the avenue. Al-Tahreer Square, Al-Rusafi Square and other new roundabouts were constructed to manage vehicular circulation throughout the city along major roads and also to create a canvas for new urban landmarks and vistas. The existing buildings that lined the thoroughfares and roundabouts were eventually demolished and replaced by new buildings designed by European architects. However, while the building façades lining the new avenues were developed in order to create the appearance of an overall modern urban character in the built environment, the buildings along older streets typically remained untouched.³⁷

Nooraddin describes the Development Board’s overhaul of Al-Rasheed Street, a commercial boulevard in *Rusafah* that had been the first of many schemes to clear the city center for better vehicular and pedestrian traffic, during the 1950s. The new plan included “removing some structures to create new public squares and cutting or removing the balconies from buildings abutting the street so as to allow enough space for the London buses imported from England. Many buildings were also demolished and replaced with large and high-rise structures, so changing the established character of the street.”³⁸ The government spent its petrodollars to transform Baghdad in such ways that created a spectacular public image of a modern capital, while in reality about 45% of housing in the city was located in *sarifa* settlements, where residents lived in mud reed huts without clean running water or electricity.³⁹

The Development Board invited several world-famous foreign architects to design landmark buildings for the capital, as part of its campaign to produce urban images of modern Baghdad that would make Iraqi oil wealth visible on an international stage. Frank Lloyd Wright, Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier and several other modernist superstars arrived in Iraq with plans for new building projects that would leave their architectural signature on the cradle of civilization (Figure 4.2). In 1958, a military coup turned

revolution overthrew the existing monarchy and parliamentary system in Baghdad and established the Republic of Iraq, based on socialist principles and led by President General Abdul-Karim Qasim. The new government and Ministry of Planning symbolically cancelled contracts with many of the foreign consultants the pre-1958 Development Board had commissioned to design public buildings throughout Baghdad. However, the government executed some of the housing plans produced by Doxiadis Associates, including the construction of the neighborhood Medinat Al-Thawra, which housed low-income residents uprooted from *sarifa* neighborhoods cleared by the government.

Manama, Bahrain

Prior to the discovery of oil in Bahrain, the major economy was based on a thriving pearling industry. During the early twentieth century, the elite merchant class at the helm of the pearling boom acquired control of government affairs through the municipal council/*majlis al-baladiyyah* in Manama. By then the city already functioned as the country's administrative center and had consolidated status as a major hub for British imperial interests in the region. The discovery of oil in Bahrain by 1932 led to the centralization of oil revenues, which the *baladiyyah* channeled a significant part of into the urban development of Bahrain's capital city. Fuccaro emphasizes, "Manama became the harbinger of Bahrain's modernity as well as that of the entire Persian Gulf," as it was, "the capital of the region's first modern state and its first 'metropolis'." ⁴⁰ Thus, highly visible projects to modernize urban space in Manama emerged as centerpieces of the government's agenda for national development.

During the 1930s, as American oil companies continued to invest in the exploration and exploitation of oil from the Gulf region, Manama maintained a key position vis-à-vis British imperial interests. After World War II, the local population increasingly criticized the *baladiyyah* as a symbol of the corrupt alliance between the country's elite and the western imperial order. Fuccaro explains that at this point "the focus of the political discussion shifted from the suitability of supporting Bahrain's modernisation to the entitlement of individuals to share the benefits of oil revenue."⁴¹ In other words, the *baladiyyah* pursued projects that served to profit individual and foreign interests over the needs of the broader population.

Under the authority of the Department of Land Registration (*Idarah al-Tabu*) and the Department of Public Works (*Idarah al-Ashghal*), the government focused on modernizing the capital city's waterfront and port. This included the development of customs facilities, official buildings, landing services, road construction, and landmark monuments to support Bahrain's expanding entrepôt economy and global position as a hub for strategic maritime and aviation routes. At the same time, the municipal development schemes seriously neglected Manama's older neighborhood markets and residential areas that grew increasingly congested and remained underserved. Until 1968, more than thirty years after the oil industry was established in Bahrain, no master plan for Manama existed. However, as the value of urban land increased by the late 1930s, *Idarah al-Tabu* initiated a campaign to relocate inner city working class residents to ballooning *barasti* (thatched hut) settlements on the outskirts of Manama. Despite the availability of cement by the 1940s, thatched hut dwellings comprised more than half of the urban housing stock.

Bahrain's rulers emphasized a globally oriented frame of reference for municipal developments in Manama. Thus, urban renewal projects funded by new oil wealth centered on the outward facing spaces of the modern oil capital: the visibility of waterfront elements and efficiency of port services. After 1945, the construction of *Bab al-Bahrayn*, literally conceived as the 'gateway' to modern Bahrain, signified the opening of a new entrance to the city (Figure 4.3). As the new seat of government, the building design incorporated a combination of British modernist and Arab indigenous architectural elements: a rectilinear plan bolstered by wooden panels, banisters and doors with local features. Its grand central archway was a straightforward spatial intervention established a monumental link between the harbor and the capital's Customs Square (*Maydan al-Gumruk*), which emerged as the heart of modern Manama.⁴²

Modern thoroughfares largely accommodated the port while cutting through the existing fabric of Manama. In the capital, the development of roads were given priority over other planning projects in order to accommodate the transportation of British officers, ruling family members and wealthy businessmen who owned motor cars.⁴³ Named after British imperial officials and members of the ruling family, roads were visible symbols and physical arteries of Bahrain's path to modernity. The *baladiyyah* attempted to create uniform facades along the main roads so that vehicles would not have to see the informal settlements of *barastis* that still congested the city.

As roads became the modern services and facilities par excellence, they became antithetical to the unruly layout and messy appearance of *barasti* compounds. The resilience of the *barastis* in the inner city symbolised the growing political threat posed by Bahrain's lumpenproletariat which was developing around the oil industry. The official ban on the construction of huts was enforced in 1937 along the main arteries which embraced and intersected the quarters of the old town.⁴⁴

Meanwhile, upper and middle-upper class urban residents tended to repair and expand upon their existing courtyard homes rather than adopt the new modernist style of houses built for foreigners. However, even as domestic architecture largely maintained elements that existed prior to the oil era, residents gradually replaced more traditional elements of domestic life with modern conveniences, such as the common use of window curtains, tables and chairs, radio sets and refrigerators.⁴⁵

The pattern of expansion and development that characterized Manama's urban growth in subsequent decades attempted regularize roadways. At the same time, the Land Department sponsored new projects such as cinema houses and a housing project for oil workers and civil servants.

The 1960s ushered in a new phase of urban development inspired by Western concepts of urban planning. Awali, the headquarters of BAPCO...provided the model for al-'Adliyyah, a new residential district built in the 1960s with modern housing compounds and residential villas surrounded by private grounds.⁴⁶

Urban planning project gained momentum after independence and by 1971 the growth of residential and commercial developments in the coastal city transformed the green belt that had once characterized the surrounding landscape. As Manama's municipal boundaries swallowed more and more of the land surrounding the capital, control over

urban real estate increasingly figured as the centerpiece of the government's nationalist development discourse in relationship to Bahrain's oil wealth (Figure 4.4). In other words, the oil city was the stage upon which Bahrain's oil wealth was displayed and shaped the country's image as an emerging modern state in the Arabian Gulf.⁴⁷

Kuwait City, Kuwait

In 1950, Abdullah al-Salem became the ruler of Kuwait, which maintained its status as a British protectorate. Kuwait's oil assets made the British increasingly concerned over matters of the country's economic and political stability, further keying in on opportunities to benefit financially and expand British influence in the region. Al-Salem enacted several key changes to the country's laws and administrative structure in order to carry out his sweeping and novel agenda to use oil revenues towards modernizing the capital and establishing a social welfare state for its citizens. The same year, he was pressured to appoint two British advisors to the state administration. Colonel G. C. L. Crichton, Kuwait's Financial Controller, and Major-General William Hasted, Controller of Development, immediately established the Development Board as a way to control government spending for development projects. Tasked with approving and managing new projects from concept and commission through planning and building phases, Al-Nakib asserts that, "their objective was to gear Kuwait's development boom towards British planners, architects, and contractors."⁴⁸

At the same time, Abdullah al-Salem used Kuwait's leverage from its abundant oil production capabilities to negotiate a favorable 50-50 profit sharing agreement with the British-controlled Kuwait Oil Company. The result was an enormous influx of national oil wealth: growing from approximately \$5,600,00 in 1948 to \$169,000,000 by 1953.⁴⁹ Al-Salem's efforts to use these oil revenues towards health, education, and urban development was unprecedented, as he was the first among Kuwait's rulers to invest significantly in the development of infrastructure and social programs. Central to his agenda was the decision to commission an English firm to produce Kuwait City's first master plan in 1952 (Figure 4.5). The ruler sought a plan to remake the city so that it would "accommodate the country's rapid population growth alongside the increasing number of cars, and that could simultaneously turn Kuwait into a modern urban centre reflecting its newfound wealth."⁵⁰ The town-planning firm Minoprio and Spencely and J. W. Macfarlane designed an influential plan that guided the future development of the Kuwaiti capital according to the "new town" planning practices that were increasingly popular in post-WWII Britain, and inspired by the "Garden City" ideal engineered by Ebenezer Howard at the turn of the century.⁵¹

According to Al-Nakib, four central objectives constituted the master plan: "the development of an efficient road system, the redevelopment of the central area of the old town within the wall to allow for commercial growth, the expansion of the city outside the wall with the construction of new residential areas and the development of the existing villages, and the creation of specialised industrial, educational, and health districts outside the city centre."⁵² The vision for the future city center was thus grafted onto the urban neighborhoods within the existing perimeter wall, reimagined as a blank slate. Based on the planners' recommendation, Al-Salem and his Development Board moved forward aggressively to demolish the old town as soon as possible to make way for a modern city center. To achieve a land acquisition scheme was launched to buy

residents out of existing houses, then relocating communities en masse into brand-new or expanded satellite suburbs beyond the greenbelt, and commencing wide-scale demolition of existing buildings to make way for proposed construction of new roads, open spaces and public buildings.⁵³

Al-Nakib's detailed and critical discussion of this era of urban transformation in Kuwait emphasizes that, "because they no longer paid any form of taxes the general public was in no way involved in how their city transformed or how their lives changed after 1950," and thus, "when it came to urban planning and city formation, the focus all along was on the city itself rather than on the society that would inhabit it."⁵⁴ As urban residents were pushed to the perimeter of the metropolis where new housing on empty land was being built apace with the steady demand, construction in the center stagnated. The chaos and misadministration that led to the near standstill was due in part to interference by Fahad al-Salem, the brother to Kuwait's ruler, who opposed the level of favoritism towards British firms within the administration that was the result of Hasted's influence as Controller of Development to hand out contracts as he pleased. Fahad seized control of the Development Board in order to counter the bias, and as a result Hasted and the British firms he commissioned quit and left their contracts unfulfilled.

By 1955 the state was left with a city that was half demolished, and an administration lacking any experience in how to proceed with the urban redevelopment of the center from scratch as prescribed by the foreign plan. Although development of the ring roads and suburban residential areas beyond the greenbelt moved forward, Al-Nakib writes:

Aside from road widening and tree-planting, development activity inside the city throughout the fifties was "piecemeal and spasmodic" due to the "the meteoric rush into construction which often precluded thorough design" driven by "the rush to make quick-profits irrespective of the consequences bequeathed to the city." Fahad al-Salem, for example, insisted on the "automatic acceptance of the lowest tender for all development work," which regularly resulted in substandard work but saved the government money.⁵⁵

Despite how little the government had to show for its efforts to redevelop the capital in the wake of its oil boom, the government produced an international campaign to promote Kuwait's "developmental awakening" at world exhibitions, featuring images of new construction in the form of roads, hospitals, schools and housing. Modern Kuwait projected a false image of itself to the world, concerned with the need to "secure its presence among the world's civilised nations" while disguising the mess at home.⁵⁶ Kuwait Oil Company publications, like *The Kuwaiti*, circulated countless features on new hotel, hospital and road construction projects in Kuwait City to promote this modernizing image among English-speaking employees across the region and the world.⁵⁷

In the following years, the government made subsequent attempts to develop the city center as an image to be projected to the world, rather than to accommodate the people who lived there. In 1957, the Municipality planned a broad commercial thoroughfare to serve as a corridor connecting two of the main gates of the old walled city (Safat and Jarha Gate) to the center. Al-Nakib explains, "Fahad al-Salem Street was conceived to be the linchpin of Kuwait City's newfound modernity. The project was promoted to the public as an experiment in the most up-to-date and superior building

techniques, complete with tree planting, street lamps, and ample parking, that would serve as a model for all other streets in Kuwait.”⁵⁸ Yet the plan emphasized upgrading visible aspects of the exterior streetscape while neglecting the interior spaces and blocking views of the old city (Figure 4.6).

Building facades along the thoroughfare received the most attention and treated largely as a two dimensional canvas as opposed to a complete building. Al-Nakib explains that, “A ‘Jahra Street Façade Committee’ was even established in the Public Works Department to ensure that the street-facing side of each building was no less than fourteen metres wide, the height of all colonnaded arcades was equal, and the style of each façade adhered to a harmonious and uniform design and colour scheme.”⁵⁹ Meanwhile, poor circulation and substandard workmanship and construction characterized the building interiors. Al-Nakib explains that resulted from “hurried construction and a lack of government controls or regulations to guide the actual building process as existed for the façade requirements. The image of the street had been given more importance than its sustainability, and the buildings began to obsolesce before they were even completed. The areas behind the buildings, meanwhile, remained nondescript and were cluttered with parked cars, which were deliberately kept out of sight to maintain the pristine image of the street.”⁶⁰ The government eventually commissioned a new master plan for the capital from Shiber, a Palestinian-American planner, one year prior to gaining independence from the British in 1961. However, despite his claims to produce a plan that was sensitive to Kuwait’s urban heritage, the plan fell short and reproduced many of the same zoning practices of the 1952 plan.

Doha, Qatar

During the 1930s, the British-controlled Iraq Petroleum Company was actively seeking to expand its territories for oil exploration in the region. Although it was not successful in obtaining the rights for Saudi Arabia, in 1935 the company successfully reached a concession agreement with Qatar’s ruler, Sheikh Abdullah bin Jasim al-Thani. Oil was discovered in the British Protectorate in 1939, but the British company did not initiate full-steam production until the 1950s after the Second World War.⁶¹ State oil revenues grew dramatically in the first five years of production, from \$1 million in 1950 to \$35 million 1955.⁶² Beginning in the same decade, the Qatari government initiated some investment of petrodollars into new urban development schemes in an effort to modernize and eventually expand footprint of the capital to accommodate the population boom that accompanied the birth of the oil industry. Doha received a major influx of village-to-city migration as well as new immigration of skilled and unskilled labor in response to the growth of the oil industry and associated expansions of construction projects and government services. By 1970 the government reported that among the total urban population of approximately 85,000-110,000, foreigners comprised about 67 per cent. In just twenty years the capital’s population grew 600 per cent, and the foreign population alone increased more than 1,000 per cent.⁶³

“Both state and private agencies in Qatar cooperated with the foreign oil companies and other specialized agencies to build the facilities and infrastructure needed for the oil industry, introducing many foreign building and planning technologies [to the country],” according to Nagy.⁶⁴ Granted, the pace of development in Doha was sluggish at first. Adham attributes this largely to the fact that Qatar’s rulers did not establish a new

government apparatus dedicated to the oversight of development projects, as was the case in Baghdad, Manama and Kuwait. Rather, Sheikh Abdullah had a hand in matters as involved as allocation of housing lots, which he determined according to a resident's social and political status.⁶⁵ This was a longstanding tradition in Qatar. Nagy explains how "at the middle of the century, and earlier, individuals in need of housing assistance could approach a member of the ruling family and ask for personal assistance or intercession. Although Qatar was officially a British Protectorate, Britain was primarily concerned with Qatar's external affairs and was not yet involved in housing issues. A few prominent members of the ruling family were known to provide houses as charity to members of the community."⁶⁶

Early development concentrated in the residential expansion of suburbs to the south and west of the existing metropolis, and "the city grew like an arc around and in relation to the harbor, the source of work, after the discovery and exploitation of oil," an enterprise that was still based on land at the time.⁶⁷ Adham recounts that following the jump in revenue, "asphalt roads were extended and lit; a new desalination plant was constructed with pipes connecting it to many houses nearby; an electric plant was built in Kahraba Street near Musheireb; new schools began admitting students; and a new hospital, Al-Remallah, opened its doors for the first time in the country, followed by maternity and children's hospitals."⁶⁸ Nagy notes that, "many of Qatar's institutions and much of its infrastructure had been developed with the assistance of the British administration," while it was a British Protectorate, and "industrial development had been facilitated by the efforts of British petroleum interests."⁶⁹ Unsurprisingly, most of these early construction projects were contracted to British firms, as was the case in the British Mandate of Iraq and British Protectorate of Kuwait.

It the late 1960s that Qatar established a Public Works Department (PWD) as the first official state apparatus charged with the management and maintenance of new and ongoing projects for developing Doha's municipal services, infrastructure and built environment. Nagy explains that Qatar's bureaucratic system continued to expand over the next decade and resulted in the creation of "new offices and officers [that] assumed more responsibility for planning the built environment including a Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture."⁷⁰ Among the PWD's responsibilities was a new housing program established in 1964 that was jointly managed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.⁷¹ The purpose of Qatar's official housing policy was to provide for the "distribution of homes to the disabled, elderly, and unemployed as well as those whose previous homes had been acquired by the state for the implementation of development plans."⁷² Nagy explains:

The housing policy of 1964 is written as an extension of assistance to citizens without independent means to acquire property and housing. However, in reality it was used to provide housing to both low and middle income Qataris. Housing was offered by the state as an incentive to relocate in order to facilitate the implementation of its development plans and to accommodate the relocation necessary for Qataris to accept some of the newly created employment opportunities.⁷³

As in Kuwait, many Qataris residing in central urban areas were moved to new state provided housing at the outskirts of the expanding capital and the older neighborhoods

were bulldozed for redevelopment and the construction of new roads that could accommodate automobile traffic.⁷⁴

The government housing was primarily designed and built as residential tract housing typical of suburban developments across the United States: adjacent rows of cookie-cutter, one-story, single-family homes with two to three bedrooms, a living room, kitchen, two bathrooms, a small porch, and carport. The street façade was comprised of a uniform sequence of privacy walls with pedestrian and car entrances. Nagy emphasizes that this housing type signified a dramatic shift away from the courtyard style homes that had typified domestic architecture in Qatar prior to oil urbanization. “The reduction of outdoor activity space, and the altered orientation of that which is provided, do not provide the open, interactive area in which domestic activities were customarily conducted. A self-contained house placed near the center of the property is less amenable to additions to accommodate changes in the size and needs of the family. The most consistent criticism about the public houses is that there is a noticeable reduction in the ease of movement and the frequency of visiting amongst Qataris living in these homes.”⁷⁵

Qatar declared independence in 1972, and the decade ushered in sky-rocketing oil wealth and as a result, ever-increasing urban development plans. Older neighborhoods in the city center were bulldozed to make way for thoroughfares like the six-lane Grand Hamad Street, which cut through the urban core as a ceremonial corridor from the airport to the waterfront. Modernist architectural landmarks designed for the city center by foreign firms emerged as the iconic images of modern Qatar. Adham recalls, “Like other buildings of the 1970s and 1980s, such as Doha Sheraton, Qatar National Bank, Gulf Hotel, and Qatar University, Al-Jeedah tower appeared frequently on postcards and brochures of Doha. Such images were representative of the modernization that Qatar was undergoing. To put it differently, in addition to the use values of these buildings, they have acquired an image, which signaled the introduction of Qatar to the modern world.”⁷⁶ (Figure 4.7) In 1972 the government contracted the British firm Llewellyn-Davies, Weeks, Forester-Walker and Bor in an advisory capacity to prepare a master plan for Doha. Among the main tasks requested of the firm, Qatar requested “proposals for the redesign of Doha’s central district and expansion into new areas,” which resulted in a recommendation to remake the city’s waterfront using land reclamation techniques that would transform the shallow area of the Doha Bay into developable land.⁷⁷

Qatar’s ruler at the time, H.H. Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani, backed the proposed redevelopment scheme and hired an American firm called William Periera Associates to design the concept for the grand waterfront reclamation project, referred to as the New District of Doha. The scheme was intended to enhance the capital’s “image of prosperity and development” for a regional and global audience, as well as allow the State to acquire urban land as part of a broader political agenda.⁷⁸ Plans for a crescent shaped Corniche provided a foundation for Doha’s modern structural logic, which consisted of a pattern of radiating semi-circular ring roads intersected by radial boulevards (Figure 4.8). Furthermore, “the Corniche opened new areas for [waterfront] development and...became a symbol of the new city as most iconic and emblematic governmental and commercial buildings were lined up along its length.”⁷⁹ Fluctuations in global oil prices during subsequent decades eventually led to relative stagnation in the development of Doha’s center; nonetheless, Qatar’s image of urban modernity had taken shape at the behest of its oil rich state rulers.

Conclusion

Through the lens of Baudelaire's *Paris Spleen*, Marshall Berman accounts how Haussmann, under the authority of Napoleon III, systematically destroyed and remade the city. Haussmann sliced into a map of the nineteenth century city with merciless lines representing new arteries that would breath new life into Paris. The plans intended to open broad avenues suited for modern traffic and unheralded spaces designed for public consumption and leisure. The ensuing cycle of creative destruction that Berman declares will ensure that "all that is solid melts into air" characterizes the spatial articulation of capital accumulation and the "ephemeral" and "contingent" nature of modernity that shapes the development of cities from Paris to Baghdad until today.

As Berman explains, these boulevards were spaces of new visibility among urbanites from every walk of life. At the same time, these spaces were made highly visible through the reproduction of images of modern life they represented.

Five generations of modern painters, writers and photographers (and a little later, filmmakers), starting with the impressionists in the 1860s, would nourish themselves on the life and energy that flowed along the boulevards. By the 1880s, the Haussmann patter was generally acclaimed as the very model of modern urbanism. As such, it was soon stamped on emerging and expanding cities in every corner of the world, from Santiago to Saigon.⁸⁰

In the capital cities of the Arabian Gulf, the production of urban space beginning in the 1950s similarly resulted in the creation of new spaces for encounter; however, these were also critical opportunities for petroleum companies to craft visible narratives that defined oil modernity as an urban condition. As a lynchpin of British oil company public relations campaigns across the Arabian Gulf, documentaries were made that justified oil extraction as a necessary and logical mechanism for national progress.

In the four cases discussed above, a sudden and significant increase in state oil wealth was followed by the first major attempt to modernize the capital city as a representation of the nation-state. Modernist plans for Baghdad, Manama, Kuwait City and Doha were distinct from one another in the context of variegated political and economic conditions shaping the particulars of project commissions, planning, and administration. Nonetheless, collectively, these cases of urban development in capital cities can be characterized by the fact that production of space was driven largely by the state's effort to produce an imaginary of the modern nation-state using the international discourse of modernist planning and architecture.

In the Arabian Gulf, the influx of national oil wealth transformed the capital cities of various oil-producing nations in drastic ways. The populations of these urban centers mushroomed and governments were faced with a novel demand for adequate housing. In Iraq, changes in land and fiscal policies that favored elite landowners and devastated the livelihoods of rural peasantry led to a massive trend of rural to urban migration, leading to the uninhibited growth of auto-constructed reed-hut dwellings in Baghdad. The growth of new construction and other industries that accompanied the spike in petrodollars in Baghdad, as well as Manama, Kuwait, and Doha pulled in new migrants seeking employment opportunities, and as a result urban populations and informal settlements ballooned at unprecedented rates. Further, the increase in national revenue from oil

production gave rulers a platform for justified radical changes to modernize these cities. The impetus and incentive behind development schemes certainly varied among the cases described above; however, in all cases the governments largely focused on fostering commercial growth in the city center, supplying contracts to foreign consultants, and the creative destruction of existing neighborhoods in order to produce modern spaces that would grab and hold the attention of a global audience.

Governments glorified modernist housing schemes as solutions to the urban crisis, despite the fact that in the case of Baghdad nearly half the urban population continued to live in the squalid conditions of *sarifa* settlements. In Baghdad, as in the case of Manama, Kuwait City and Doha, government authorities charged with the task of implementing and overseeing modern building schemes excised the urban centers its migrant and poor residents to make way for new spectacular developments. The political structure of the postcolonial nation-states, established largely as puppet regimes to accommodate British interests, meant that urban development was carried out according to an absolute principle of strong hand, top-down planning and implementation funded through centralized state oil revenue. This made these countries ideal testing grounds for the realization of various modernist visionaries with god-like fantasies of a creating city from scratch. This was expressed quite literally in Kuwait, where the master plan called for the total erasure of the old walled city. Foreign architects and urban planners produced numerous visions of modern city built by oil wealth, many of which fell short in their promises to transform urban life or were never realized at all.

In each case, the influx of national oil wealth resulted in subsequent emphasis on three key forms of urban planning as image making: grand avenues, architectural icons, and housing schemes. In respect to the emphasis on destroying the existing urban core in order to create modern urban spaces, namely the thoroughfare, these oil rich regimes transformed their capitals according to the infamous principles of modernist urban planning embodied by Haussmann's Paris. The tension between the destruction of the old city and new construction in Baghdad and Kuwait City was absent from circulation of images and narratives in state and oil company public relations. The following chapter examines the mass circulation of images urban space in the oil films produced by the Iraq Petroleum Company. These documentaries established a visual language for narrating the city and linking urban modernity in Baghdad to neo-colonial oil extraction. The films were made in cooperation between the petroleum company and the Iraqi government and attempted to project a national imaginary of modern Iraq to audiences across the country.



Houses constructed in
Baghdad have solved the
housing crisis.

Figure 4.1 Images of new construction on a block of modernist housing units designed in Western Baghdad by Doxiadis Associates was featured in the Second Development Week publications. The caption below the photograph attempts to craft the imaginary of architecture as a total solution to the housing problems in Baghdad. However, a close look at the image, which depicts piles of dirt clogging the entranceways, reveals the impossibility of the caption. In fact, construction on these units remained incomplete.

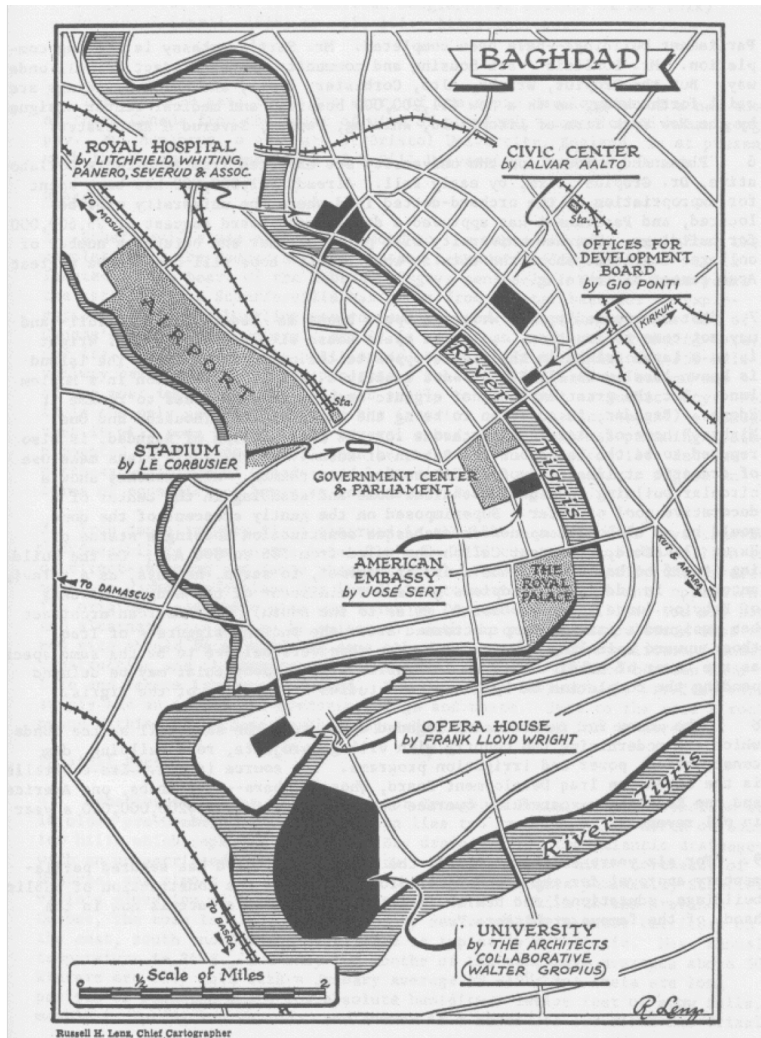


Figure 4.2 This 1958 map of Baghdad depicts the locations of public building projects, which the Development Commission commissioned internationally renowned modern architects including Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Walter Gropius to design.



Figure 4.3 This aerial photograph of Manama from the 1950s depicts Bab al-Bahrain – the symbolic ‘gateway’ to modern Bahrain – in the center of Custom’s Square – the ‘heart’ of the modern city – in the foreground. *Barasti* settlements to the south of the capital are visible in the background.

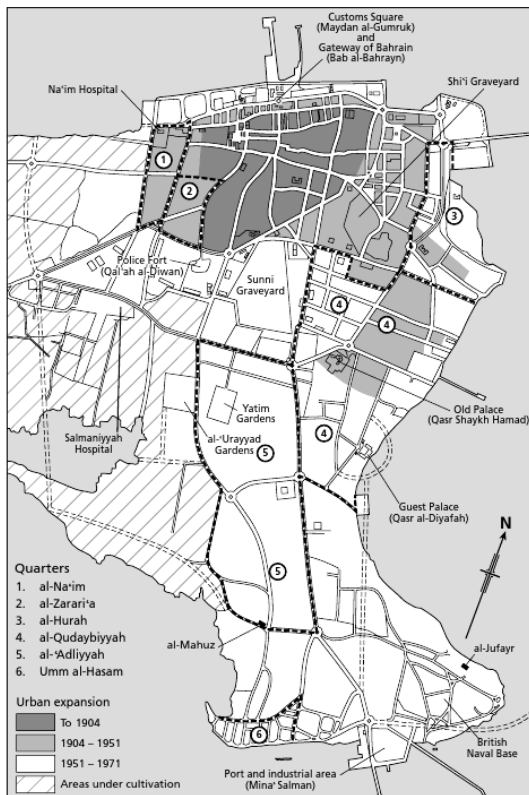


Figure 4.4 This map depicts the pattern of urban expansion in Manama from 1904 until 1971. By the end of this period the greenbelt that had once enveloped the urban core was replaced with expanding commercial and residential developments.

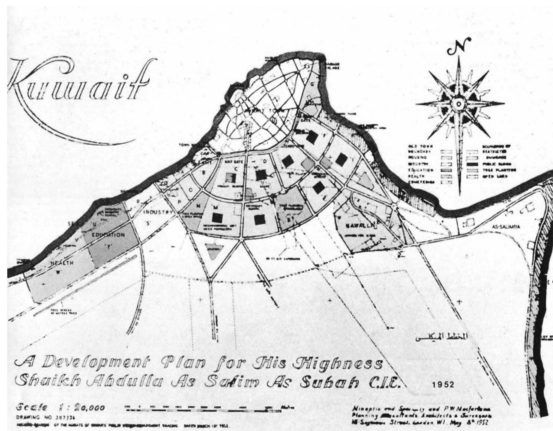


Figure 4.5 The 1952 plan for Kuwait by the English firm Minoprio and Spencely and J. W. Macfarlane preserved the existing urban core and planned for the expansion of residential and commercial development along a system of ring roads radiating outward from the old city.



Figure 4.6 The building facades lining Fahad Street were designed to create a modern corridor in Kuwait City. This photograph shows the contrast of these prominent new construction projects against the urban landscape of the old core.



Figure 4.7 The image of the Doha Sheraton Hotel was reproduced a symbol of modern Qatar on postcards and brochures during the late 1970s and 1980s.



Figure 4.8 The 1975 plan for the New District of Doha (right) established a new foundation for the city's modern structural logic. Compared to Doha's urban layout circa 1972 (left), the plan transformed the urban street grid and significantly expanding the waterfront Corniche to establish a new skyline.

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- ¹ Coronil, *The Magical State*, 5.
- ² Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 1, as cited in Lawrence J. Vale, *Architecture, Power, and National Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 45.
- ³ Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.)
- ⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).
- ⁵ Abidin Kusno, *Behind the Postcolonial: Architecture, Urban Space, and Political Cultures in Indonesia* (London: Routledge, 2000), 98.
- ⁶ Ibid., 97.
- ⁷ Anthony D. King, *Spaces of Global Cultures: Architecture, Urbanism, Identity* (London: Routledge, 2004), 5.
- ⁸ Nezar AlSayyad, *Consuming Tradition, Manufacturing Heritage: global norms and urban forms in the age of tourism* (London: Routledge, 2001), 4.
- ⁹ Vale, *Architecture, Power, and National Identity*, 49.
- ¹⁰ Kusno, *Behind the Postcolonial*, 15.
- ¹¹ Vale, *Architecture, Power, and National Identity*, 10.
- ¹² Sibel Bozdoğan, *Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 10.
- ¹³ Kusno, *Behind the Postcolonial*, 54.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., 53.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., 60.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 66.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Holston, *The Modernist City*, 18.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 23.
- ²⁰ Coronil, *The Magical State*, 4.
- ²¹ Ramzi El Houry, "Too Little Too Late? A Critical Evaluation of the Iraq Development Board: 1950 -1958," (M.A. Thesis, American University of Beirut, 2009), 14.
- ²² Ibid., 16.
- ²³ Hamid Attiyah, "The Iraqi Development Board (1950-1958)," (M.A. Thesis, American University of Beirut, 1973), 99-10.
- ²⁴ Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1985), 68.
- ²⁵ The Iraq Development Board commissioned the report from Lord Salter in response to growing criticism.
- ²⁶ Lord Arthur Salter, *The Development of Iraq: a plan for action* (Iraq Development Board, 1955), 37.
- ²⁷ Penrose and Penrose, *Iraq*, 182.
- ²⁸ Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, "The Transformation of Land Tenure and Rural Social Structure in Central and Southern Iraq, c. 1870-1958," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 15.4 (Nov 1983), 498.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 501-2.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 500.

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- ³¹ Ibid., 501; Doris G. Phillips, "Rural-to-Urban Migration in Iraq," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 7.4 (July 1959), 409.
- ³² Panayiota I. Pyla, "Baghdad's Urban Restructuring, 1958: Aesthetics and the Politics of Nation Building," in *Modernism and the Middle East: Architecture and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Sandy Isenstadt and Kishwar Rizvi (Seattle; London: University of Washington Press, 2008), 97-8.
- ³³ Ibid., 101-2.
- ³⁴ Ibid., 103-5.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 106.
- ³⁶ Government of Iraq, Board of Development and Ministry of Development, *Development of Iraq: Second Development Week* (1957), 52.
- ³⁷ Hoshiar Nooraddin, "Globalization and the Search for Modern Local Architecture: Learning from Baghdad," in *Planning Middle Eastern Cities: An Urban Kaleidoscope in a Globalizing World*, ed. Yasser Elsheshtawy (London: Routledge, 2004), 65.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ Nelida Fuccaro, *Histories of City and State in the Persian Gulf: Manama Since 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 191.
- ⁴¹ Ibid, 119-120; Fuccaro elaborates, "Bahrain, alongside Iran and Iraq, became crucial to British planning in preparation for World War II as its oil reserves supplied British imperial possessions east of Suez, including India. [...] Besides oil reserves, the strategic importance of Bahrain as an air station between Great Britain, India and the Far East reshaped the basis of the British presence in the islands. As these strategic considerations gained the upper hand after the end of World War II, Bahrain was transformed into the harbinger of British power in the Gulf region. In 1947 the Residency was transferred from Bushehr to Manama following the independence of India."
- ⁴² Ibid., 192-6.
- ⁴³ Mustapha Ben Hamouche, "Manama: The Metamorphosis of a Gulf City," in *The Evolving Arab City: Tradition, Modernity & Urban Development*, ed. Yasser Elsheshtawy (London: Routledge, 2011), 198.
- ⁴⁴ Fuccaro, *Histories of City and State in the Persian Gulf*, 198.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 199-200.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., 205.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 211.
- ⁴⁸ Al-Nakib, "Kuwait City," 200-1.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid, 168.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid, 184-5.
- ⁵¹ See Howard, *Garden Cities of To-morrow*.
- ⁵² Al-Nakib, "Kuwait City," 185.
- ⁵³ Ibid., 190.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., 171-2.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., 203.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 204.
- ⁵⁷ Alissa, "Building for Oil," 84-5.
- ⁵⁸ Al-Nakib, "Kuwait City," 204-5.

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- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 205.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid.
- ⁶¹ Bamberg, *A History of the British Petroleum Company*, vol. 2, 171-3.
- ⁶² Khaled Adham, "Rediscovering the Island: Doha's Urbanity from Pearls to Spectacle," in *The Evolving Arab City: Tradition, Modernity & Urban Development*, ed. Yasser Elsheshtawy (London: Routledge, 2011), 226.
- ⁶³ Ibid., 226-7; Sharon Nagy, "Dressing Up Downtown: urban development and government public image in Qatar," *City & Society* 12 (2000), 128.
- ⁶⁴ Nagy, "Dressing Up Downtown," 125; Unfortunately, available scholarship does not yet chronicle in detail the histories of the creation and function of such state apparatuses and private agencies during the early period of urban development in Qatar.
- ⁶⁵ Adham, "Rediscovering the Island," 225-6.
- ⁶⁶ Nagy, "Dressing Up Downtown," 128-9.
- ⁶⁷ Adham, "Rediscovering the Island," 226; later major American oil companies succeeded in negotiating the concessions for offshore exploration in the Gulf.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid., 226.
- ⁶⁹ Nagy, "Dressing Up Downtown," 130.
- ⁷⁰ Nagy, "Dressing Up Downtown," 129.
- ⁷¹ Ibid., 129; Adham, "Rediscovering the Island," 227.
- ⁷² Sharon Nagy, "Social and Spatial Process: An ethnographic study of housing in Qatar," (Ph.D. diss, University of Pennsylvania, 1997), 290.
- ⁷³ Ibid., 291.
- ⁷⁴ Nagy, "Dressing Up Downtown," 125.
- ⁷⁵ Nagy, "Social and Spatial Process," 291.
- ⁷⁶ Adham, "Rediscovering the Island," 229.
- ⁷⁷ Nagy, "Dressing Up Downtown," 130-1.
- ⁷⁸ Adham, "Rediscovering the Island," 232-3.
- ⁷⁹ Adham, "Rediscovering the Island," 233.
- ⁸⁰ Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: the experience of modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 151-2.

Chapter Five

Cinematic Baghdad and the Modern Oil City

The urban plans for Baghdad and the Development Board's celebrated recruitment of internationally renowned modernist architects to design signature buildings in the city were more than innocuous attempts to build a modern city with its appropriate modern structures. These plans had, first, to be staged in the imagination. How was the spectacle of modernity staged? How was it narrated and rationalized?

— Haytham Bahooora¹

A cinematic history of Baghdad begins in London on the eve of World War Two. For the Academy Award-winning Technicolor remake of *The Thief of Baghdad* (1940), British filmmakers invented an imaginary version of the city vis-a-vis an elaborate London-based film set.² The urban landscape, based on the fantastical setting of *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*, painted Baghdad as an exaggerated portrait of extremes: brilliant hues and massive forms of opulent palatial architecture juxtaposed with monochromatic sand-colored facades and chaotic informal market stalls belonging to the people's city below (Figure 5.1). In one of the most famous scenes from the film, the Sultan soars out of his palace walls and high above Baghdad on his golden horse. An image of a make-believe Baghdad is pasted into the background as a two-dimensional cutout of a hilltop cluster of desert toned structures.

The Thief of Baghdad epitomizes Orientalist cinema, in which filmmakers used motion pictures to animate rich imaginary worlds of Islam, Arabs, and Persians that were crafted in the letters, oil paintings, and photographs of European Orientalists during the previous two centuries. Central to this production of an imagined geography is the fact that despite the specificity of location (i.e. the city of Baghdad) the relevance of historical time (i.e. 9th century versus 20th century) has no significant bearing on the depiction of space and society in this imagined geography. In other words, Baghdad is frozen in time and space, and reflected uniformly across time and space. The city depicted in the fantasy film mirror the urban scenery of lavish orientalist paintings from the late 19th century, which mirror the passages of orientalist literature from the 18th century, which mirror the translated tales of *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*.

Although the filmmakers conceived the film as a fantasy epic located in an invented version of Baghdad from centuries ago, the cinematic city borrowed its imagery directly from the painters who claimed to document urban life there in the late nineteenth century. Examining two depictions of Baghdad side-by-side, the first a still taken from the 1940 final cut of *The Thief of Baghdad* (Figure 5.1) and the second a watercolor painting by the British artist Arthur Melville from 1882 (Figure 5.2), the similarities are undeniable. Copious fruit baskets decorate the foreground, while the central action takes place in front of informal market stalls crowded by mass of nearly indistinguishable covered bodies with sand-colored facades featuring pointed arches filling in the distant background. The interchangeable characteristics of these orientalist images of Baghdad endow the city with timelessness that persists in popular British imaginaries of the city regardless of medium (e.g. narrative film or "documentary" painting) and historical time.

Orientalist Hollywood film fantasies of a timeless Baghdad, including but not limited to the backdrop sets constructed in London for *The Thief of Baghdad*, conceal the

socio-economic transformations and spatial practices in the making of the modern capital. Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) documentaries, made during the 1950s, were the first films to attempt to project the “real” modern Baghdad. These films recast the legendary city of flying carpets and genies in the lamp as the modern oil city. As a result, Baghdad was no longer the backdrop to the action, but rather the central subject of the films. These documentaries and their related publications, advertisements, and photographs captured nuanced aspects of the production of urban space and transformation of urban society. In other words, they depicted a perspective on the making of the modern oil city that otherwise remained invisible in the colonial imaginary of the so-called orient.

The documentary films produced and circulated by British oil companies around the mid-twentieth century set out to reinvent the image of cities in the Arabian Gulf in order to establish a clear and indisputable link between oil extraction and the modernization of the young petro-states of the region. The documentaries are evidence of a significant shift in existing cinematic discourse about the Middle East. These films projected the earliest moving images of urban modernity in Iraq for national and regional audiences. Baghdad was no longer an exotic backdrop for a fantasy adventure narrative. Instead the city was portrayed as the central stage for the modernization of Iraq, the so-called ‘cradle of civilization’.

This chapter examines the imaginary of the modern oil city of Baghdad developed in the documentary films sponsored and produced by the British-controlled IPC during the 1950s. These were the first moving images of Baghdad to be filmed on location in the city and circulated widely among general audiences in Britain and the Middle East. Therefore, the images of space and society in Baghdad that are depicted in these films garnered attention among the local population as the first moving images of national development and urban modernity in Iraq to appear on films intended for the national public. The documentaries provide a critical opportunity to examine how the oil industry’s cinematic project shaped popular imaginaries of modernity in the petroleum rich and young country of Iraq.

Baghdad and the Narrative of Oil Modernity

The IPC films are not about oil. In fact, the cameras never intended to capture naked crude in its material form. Rather, these films set out to depict space and society in Baghdad as visible evidence of the promise of petroleum. The images of the modern city and its surrounding landscapes assembled selected for these films create a cinematic account of the modern world and modernist city that oil makes possible. In other words, the films worked to make black gold visible to the people of Iraq as national wealth that manifested in modern infrastructure, public buildings, and boulevards. IPC’s approach to making documentaries was distinguished by the company’s objective to project a vision of modern Iraq for Iraqi audiences, as opposed to the precedent set by Anglo-Iranian of making films that would entertain British stockholders and cinemagoers. This prioritization of Arabic-language production led IPC to establish a Baghdad-based film unit in 1951 that sought to train and employ Iraqi filmmakers as part of its cultural project to legitimate the image of modern Iraq crafted for the screen.

In this way, the IPC films constructed a national imaginary for Iraqis residing in the north, center and south of the country, most of whom had never physically toured the extends of the nation-state of Iraq – the political entity to which they had belonged since

independence in 1932. The 50-50 agreement between the oil company and the Iraqi government led to the establishment of a Development Board charged with overseeing the implementation of national development projects that would transform the built environment of Iraq's cities. This chapter builds upon Benedict Anderson's (1991) original thesis that a modern sense of national belonging was born out of the mass circulation of novels and newspapers. The representations of national community imagined in modern forms of prose made it possible for individuals to collectively identify with others who were geographically distant or otherwise differentiated from their immediate social worlds. In other words, "print-capitalism" fostered the imaginary of a nation sharing a common national history and space, and the collective experience of national belonging. This chapter presents a critical analysis of IPC's oil films in order to better understand how they worked to produce a collective imaginary of national history and national identity for Iraqis using images of the modern oil city.

The built environment in Baghdad was central to the production of a narrative of oil modernity. That is, images of urban space and urban life were used to construct a visual argument about oil as a national resource. In the IPC films, the modern city and its architecture is pictured not only as images of static facades, but as dynamic sites in which Iraqis actively participate in the building of the nation through physical labor and social performance. Images of the city are also juxtaposed with pastoral images of rural life in order to define urban modernity against rural tradition. The documentaries catalogue and depict traditions in order to establish a framework for the dramatic change brought about by modernization fueled by petroleum industry revenue.

This chapter analyses the representation of urban space as the basis for a national narrative in three IPC documentaries, which were made and distributed prior to the 1958 July Revolution that diminished the hegemonic British position in Iraq since the First World War. This is a small yet significant collection of oil films and includes *The Third River* (1951), *Ageless Iraq* (1954), and *A More Beautiful Capital* (1955). These are the first moving pictures to be shot on location in Iraq and crafted into documentary narratives about the modern nation-state for general audiences in Iraq and Britain. Taken together, this corpus of documentaries can help us to better understand how the neo-colonial imaginary of Baghdad worked to recast the modern city as a promise of petroleum. Indeed, IPC sponsored, produced, and circulated these slick documentaries precisely because they hoped to communicate a version of the story of modern Iraq that would be viewed as a national narrative.

Making Modern Baghdad

Contrary to the static and timeless imaginary of Baghdad crafted in orientalist films, like *The Thief of Baghdad*, urban space and society has undergone centuries of dynamic change in the built environment. In the late eighth century, the Abbasid caliph known as al-Mansur selected the land near the ancient Persian capital of Ctesiphon at the bank of the Tigris River for his circular plan for a new fortified city. Baghdad, al-Mansur's so-called City of Peace (*Medina al-Salaam*) grew well beyond the two-mile diameter of its mud brick wall. Within ten years residential expansion followed by new markets spilled outside its four gates into the area that is still identified as *al-kharkh*. Eventually the caliph relocated his troops to the opposite left bank and the area known today as *al-rusafa* was established.³ The earliest decades of Baghdad's urban history are

mere indication of the constant transformations required over forthcoming centuries to accommodate the demands of its alternately expanding and shrinking urban population.

Orientalist films that relied on invented sets and backdrops to stand in for Baghdad, concealed urban transformations as the city was developed into the capital of a young oil-producing state. As discussed in the previous chapter, the first half of the twentieth century saw a complex series of political, economic, and social transformations caused a sea change in the approach to the built environment of Iraq as a means for national development. The British occupation of Baghdad in 1917 was followed almost immediately by the implementation of professional top-down planning and building design practices in the capital by the colonial authority of the mandate of Iraq. This professionalization of architecture created a new medium and rationale of representation, which would project new images of a modern Iraq to its national subjects and the rest of the world.

At the turn of the twentieth century, building practices in Baghdad remained under the control and direction of master builders: the local craftsmen, stonemasons, carpenters and bricklayers whose vernacular building materials and methods had continuously shaped the city's neighborhoods over centuries. Before the age of industrialization, Baghdad's builders had total control of the production of the built environment. They manufactured materials and construction equipment, designed and selected building elements, and managed on-site construction.⁴ Master builders passed down knowledge and skills through each generation of craftsmen, often from father to son. As with the production of vernacular architecture around the world, in Baghdad this developed a trade rich with traditional building practices that articulated and were articulated by the city's local social, cultural, economic and environmental needs and conditions.⁵

The built environment in the capital Baghdad experienced a novel phase of transformations in the context of British hegemony. Changes to the city were made both as a means to accommodate the needs of the British administration, oil industry and military complex in Iraq, and as a way to expand Britain's socio-cultural sphere of influence in the region and reap the economic benefits of new planning and construction projects. Whereas transformations of the built environment in Baghdad had typically entailed additions to expand or improve existing structures, the new phase of urban development that took place in Baghdad in the early twentieth century was guided by contemporary ideologies of modernization and planning and eventually funded by state revenues from the oil industry.

The spatial interventions to modernize Baghdad entailed the destruction of existing urban neighborhoods. Buildings were demolished in order to make way for wide thoroughfares that could accommodate automobile traffic and establish new commercial corridors through the city center. Just years prior to the British occupation of Iraq, the Ottoman administration in Baghdad established Al-Rasheed Street, which was designed as a straight and regular modern commercial boulevard in East Baghdad (*Rusafa*). Colonnaded pedestrian arcades and new three-story buildings bordered the central portion of the avenue running parallel to the Tigris River, transforming the area from a dense network of old houses intercut by narrow and winding roads into a bustling modern commercial center.⁶ Al-Rasheed served as a precedent for future expansion and development of the city center in subsequent decades.

As a new British controlled government administration took shape in Baghdad during the 1920s, the department of Public Works was established and soon introduced European Classical approaches to practices of architecture and planning to Baghdad's urban landscape for the first time.⁷ The Government Architect, appointed at the helm of Public Works, was responsible for design and construction of new public sector buildings in Baghdad. A wave of standalone building projects including administrative offices, hospitals, schools and railway stations were carried out during this period. These projects were largely intended to establish the modern character of the new Iraqi capital. At the same time a major influx of rural migrants caused a population spike in Baghdad, growing from approximately 130,000 residents in 1920 to 250,000 in 1930 and 358,840 in 1935.⁸

Over the next two decades, a succession of three English architects and engineers filled the position of Government Architect. Those appointed were military officers, including James Wilson, who had no formal training but worked as assistant to Luytens in Delhi; Harold Mason, who was trained for three years at the Liverpool School; and Brian Cooper, a novice architect whose experience was earned as during his time in India. During the 1920s and 1930s, urban construction projects in the public sector were carried out under the Government Architect and initially reflected a mix between European Classical architecture style and traditional Iraqi craftsmanship. This unique style was the result of attempts by the appointed architects to collaborate with local master builders. At that point, most residential and other private sector construction throughout Baghdad was still carried out by Iraqi craftsmen, who combined traditional methods and materials with new ideas published in western architectural magazines and catalogues. Gradually, however, the role of local master builders was considered to be subordinate to the coveted expertise of academically trained British architects and British and Iraqi civil engineers versed in the modern building technologies.⁹

In 1932 the League of Nations recognized Iraq as an independent nation-state, and though the explicit presence of British officials in the ranks of government administration waned, authorities in London continued to exercise a powerful hand over the country's political affairs. By 1939, as Iraqi authorities worked to fill top positions with local rather than foreign faces, Ahmed Mukhtar Ibrahim became the first Iraqi architect to hold the position of Government Architect. The projects carried out under his appointment proved to be little more than a continuation of his predecessors' work. Yet, nonetheless, Ibrahim's official appointment of as the first foreign-trained Iraqi to serve as Government Architect marked a crucial transition of professional architectural practice in Baghdad.

The government's first attempt to regulate construction in Baghdad was marked by the 1935 Buildings and Road Law (no. 44). The law entailed new regulations of minimum street widths, building heights, and façade alignment, as well as the granting of building permits and so on. The implementation of these new codes, "brought about the demolition or straightening out of the old street layouts...discouraged the building of *shanshil* houses, and favored, to the contrary, the development of a grid of plots along wide avenues, which in turn invited the use of appropriate transport."¹⁰ Subsequently, the East (*Rusafah*) and West (*Kharkh*) districts that comprised the capital city were unified for the first time under a single administrative municipal authority (*baladiya*).¹¹ Al-Kifah Street, a second modern thoroughfare running parallel to Al-Rasheed, was opened in 1936.¹²

During this period, English architects designed several housing projects including Al-Sikak, Al-Rasmilyyah and Al-Elwiyya to begin to address the growing problem of *sarifa* or mud reed hut settlements where migrants resided throughout Baghdad.¹³ Nooraddin notes that these “squatter settlements were not limited to Baghdad’s fringes but also mushroomed in the open areas within the city,” and within the next two decades, “Baghdad had some 44,000 *sarifa* (reed and mud houses), which accounted for about 45 per cent of the total number of houses in the city.”¹⁴ Penrose and Penrose describe how rural migrants to the capital constructed huts from mud or sometimes tree branches in the poorest sections of the *sarifa*.

The sharp contrast between the conditions in the poorest *sarifa* areas just outside the city and the conditions in the suburban areas just inside it gave political importance to the issues raised by the growing migration from poor rural areas to Baghdad. Again and again the voices of the active elements in the student and professional classes were raised against what appeared to be government inaction in face of the conditions in the *sarifa*.¹⁵

In 1937 the government appointed the first Iraqi as Government Architect. Ahmad Mukhtar was Iraq’s first foreign-trained architect to return to Baghdad and immediately put to work designing the country’s pavilion for the Paris World Exposition, which would be on display from May to October of that same year.¹⁶ Pieri emphasizes that this was the moment in which Iraq made its first effort to project a modern image of the independent country towards an international audience, and represented a shift in national priorities

By this time, Iraq’s colleges had been producing well-trained civil engineers for some time and Iraqi architects, recently graduated from various European universities, were returning to Baghdad and beginning to play a crucial role in the building process. British architects no longer served as de-facto public sector appointments, and instead European firms were readily contracted as visiting consultants. This established the rise of a new body of academically-trained Iraqi architects. After the preceding decades during which modern materials, construction methods and design aesthetics were adopted from western influences, the emergence of the new profession resulted in a rupture in the production of the built environment between increasingly obsolete master builders and new academic professionals.¹⁷

The polarization in production of the built environment was only exacerbated as Iraqi architects obtaining their degrees abroad in European and American continued to return to Baghdad in increasing numbers during the 1940s and 1950s. Richly steeped in knowledge of European architectural traditions and contemporary modernist designs, many started practicing architecture with the spirit of the International School. Their modern designs transformed Baghdad’s skyline, which for the first time since its establishment in the 8th century had buildings with more than two stories tall. Among them, Mohamed Makiya, Rifat Chadirji, Qahtan Awni, Qahtan Al-Madfai, Maath al-Alousi, Hisham Munir, Ellen Jawdat and Nizar Jawdat proved influential in shaping the early foundations of architectural practice in Iraq. These pioneering architects were the first Iraqis to grapple with the intellectual and practical challenges of reconciling advantages of modern construction technologies and materials with the local conditions and historical legacies of Baghdad’s rich urban fabric.

In the 1950s, at their own accord several of these young architects directly approached the Iraq Development Board, which until then had poured the country's oil revenues into high-profile building commissions from classically trained British architects. Considering the work of these colonial architects outdated, Rifat Chadirji, Qahtan Awni and the Jawdat's prompted the Development Board to invite the world-famous modernist architects they most admired to Baghdad, and commission designs from them. As a result, throughout the decade Walter Gropius, Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, Alvar Aalto, Constantinos Doxiadis, Gio Ponti and others convened in Baghdad to offer designs for the city and give lectures to the engaged community of young architects and artists shaping Iraq's modernist cultural movement (Figure 5.3).¹⁸

By the mid-1950s, Baghdad was at the heart of world modernism. Not only were internationally-renown modernist architects drawing up plans for new landmarks throughout the capital, but a vibrant home-grown discourse on the future of modern Iraqi architecture, painting, sculpture, poetry and literature was constantly circulating in meetings, exhibitions and conversations put on between Baghdad's young practitioners and thinkers of the day. Images of the Iraqi capital as an emerging site of modernist architectural projects proliferated in periodicals around the world in the form of maps, drawings, and photographs (Figure 5.4).

Haytham Bahoora writes, "The urban plans for Baghdad and the Development Board's celebrated recruitment of internationally renowned modernist architects to design signature buildings in the city were more than innocuous attempts to build a modern city with its appropriate modern structures. These plans had, first, to be staged *in the imagination*. How was the spectacle of modernity staged? How was it narrated and rationalized?"¹⁹ I argue that the IPC documentaries worked to create an accessible, powerful and durable imaginary of oil modernity staged in the making of Baghdad as the modern oil capital of the Iraqi nation-state. As the following section will show, the films worked to achieve this by foregrounding images of modern built environments in juxtaposition to traditional spaces, and giving visibility to selected labor practices involved in the making of modern infrastructures and architectures.

From London's perspective, Baghdad was imagined as the gateway to the modern Middle East in the 1950s. A barrage of publications circulated by the Iraq Petroleum Company and the Iraqi government highlighted the ongoing transformations of the centuries old 'cradle of civilization' to the epicenter of modernity in the region. One publication went so far as to claim, "Iraq looks confidently forward to its development into one of *the most modern* nations of the world."²⁰ This kind of statement attempted to capture the power of petroleum's promise. Yet, despite the reach of the IPC's public relations office printed publications (company magazines, illustrated annual reports, and promotional booklets and brochures), the documentary was the oil company's most effective means of communicating with mass audiences across social, economic and geographical boundaries. The following analysis of three IPC films examines how the imaginary of oil modernity was staged using documentary images of the making of modern Baghdad.

The Third River

Government and corporate publications and films promoting nation building and development in Iraq since its independence in 1932 have closely identified the imaginary

of the modern nation-state with the ‘cradle of civilization,’ also known as Mesopotamia. The Greek origins of the name for this ancient region literally translate to the “land between rivers,” referring to Iraq’s two great rivers: the Tigris and Euphrates. Iraq’s rivers feature centrally in the majority of visual and discursive portraits of the country and its capital, as the life-giving natural resource that bestowed the land with the potential to support the beginnings of human civilization. IPC’s project to construct the world’s largest pipeline in 1951 from Kirkuk to the Mediterranean port at Banais, Syria, borrowed from this popular imaginary of ancient Mesopotamia to create its own imaginary of modern Iraq. IPC named its Kirkuk-Banais pipeline “The Third River” as a symbolic and literal reference to the flow of “natural wealth” that would bring modern civilization back to the cradle of civilization. The imaginary of Iraq’s man-made river of oil circulated widely in company publications, but was most dramatically and successfully captured in *The Third River* (1952), IPC’s first documentary.

The Third River was the earliest film about modern Iraq to be made for and circulated to audiences around the world. Sponsored by the British-controlled Iraq Petroleum Company, produced by Film Centre in London, shot on-location in Iraq and Syria, and translated into both English and Arabic versions, this film signified a new approach in the long Orientalist history of representing Baghdad. For the first time in cinematic history, the land, people, and places of Iraq figured as a primary subject of a film narrative rather than serving merely as an exotic backdrop. The film’s director, Michael Clarke (Figure 5.5), wrote of the project that, “in making *The Third River* we were faced with Iraq as it is, not with the luscious and cloying luxuries of a Hollywood gorgeous east.”²¹

Notably, *The Third River* was also the first corporate public relations film of its kind; that is, a sponsored documentary foremost intended for general audiences in Iraq, and secondarily for English-speaking audiences in Britain.²² Clarke recalls that the film “was shown...extremely widely, yes. It was shown in 35 and 16, it was shown in every cinema in Iraq. This was so different from the specialized film and the all the too specialized distribution we were used to in most of the documentary business.”²³ The company’s decision to screen the film in cooperation with the Iraqi government as an event for the cinema-going public in Iraqi cities indicated a shift away from the strategy of Anglo-Iranian’s public relations efforts, which were directed almost entirely toward the British population. By the time of *The Third River*’s theatrical release in Iraq, there were already seventy-one cinema houses in the major cities. Cinema was very popular among Iraqis with an estimated annual attendance of twenty five million in 1950.²⁴ Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the first film about modern Iraq would have drawn significant interest among the general population, despite being a corporate propaganda film.

Running just shy of thirty minutes, *The Third River* documents the construction in 1951 of the 555 mile-long pipeline planned to bring oil from the fields of Kirkuk in northern Iraq to the port of Banias on Syria’s Mediterranean coast. This was to be the world’s largest capacity pipeline, deemed in the film’s narration as Iraq’s “Third River” – a river of oil. The filmmakers captured the tedious and repetitive procedures involved in transporting and assembling the thirty-inch pipeline, one thirty-one-foot long steel pipe segment at a time. Tracking the gradual movement of the pipe-laying crews from the origin point in Banias, across the dessert and into Iraq, the black and white images

dynamically capture a glimpse of the labor and the landscape required to fuel carbon-based economies in the modern world.

The Third River presented Iraqi, Syrian and British audiences in the 1950s an unparalleled, close-up perspective on the infrastructure of oil extraction, and the construction of the new pipeline that would deliver unprecedented quantities of Iraq's so-called black gold to the European market – yielding unprecedented quantities of petrodollars. However, in his discussion of the making of *The Third River*, director Michael Clarke suggested that, “To a great extent the 30 in. line served as a vehicle to convey impressions of the life and background of modern Iraq as the ‘cradle of civilization’ – as all important focal point of industrial development and as a land of sound economic promise.”²⁵

Once complete, the pipeline's projected capacity was estimated to result in a dramatically increased flow of fourteen million tons of crude oil per year from Iraq. This would more than double the existing annual output of eight million tons of oil that had initiated its course from Kirkuk to the port of Tripoli, Lebanon via a sixteen-inch pipe the previous year. This significant turning point in the profit margins of IPC stockholders was coupled by a major turn of events in Baghdad. In 1951, the Iraqi government renegotiated its contract with the oil company so that it would receive a fifty percent share of company revenue. Immediately following the renegotiation, the government established the Development Board to oversee the allocation of 70% of total oil revenues towards national development schemes.²⁶

The five-year development plan (1951-1955) that the Iraqi government produced prior to the renegotiation had focused narrowly on national schemes for improving irrigation, flood-control, and transportation in Iraq; however, in light of the new agreement with IPC and substantial increase in development funds as a result of increased projected output, the plan was significantly revised. Continued assessment and revision of the plans eventually resulted in a large investment in urban development projects including the planning and construction of new bridges, hospitals, schools, roads, public buildings, and public housing in the capital.

During production, the filmmakers of *The Third River* were faced with a challenge: how to depict the ways that oil promised to change Iraq for the better before any remarkable visible evidence of development had been created for the cameras to capture. In other words, the film was to document the promise of modernity yet to come. Michael Clark wrote of the film's objective:

Our aim throughout was not merely to make a record of the construction of the 30 in. line, but to put this into its context. The new pipeline is more than an example of remarkable engineering skill; it presages much for the people of Iraq. During our stay in the Middle East, the new “fifty-fifty” agreement was signed...About us was the bustle of change; and we wanted to say, however briefly, however synoptically, that the subject of our films was, fundamentally, Iraq itself. Our theme was, indeed, twifold: in the foreground, the drama and achievement of building the pipelines, the pumphouses, the terminal; and beyond all this, the development and improvement of the human lot which the Iraq Government, through the Development Board, would have the means to achieve.²⁷

Unlike the films sponsored by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, IPC's first documentary project prioritized the inclusion of Iraqi participation. IPC's priority was to make a public relations film for Arab audiences.

Drawing on local talent was one important means through which the public relations executives in London hoped to achieve some success in connecting with local audiences. Clarke recounts:

The Arabic version was very important because the film was designed to reconcile the oil company to the population, much more than to describe its operations to the English speaking audiences in Europe. And I mean it is clear that the oil resources have made and can make enormous money and may produce enormous benefits to Iraq.²⁸

IPC contracted Film Centre in London – founded by John Grierson and Arthur Elton – to produce the documentary. In 1952 the British director Michael Clarke was sent to Baghdad for four months to begin production on a “dramatic” script treatment prepared by Stuart Legg in London. After conducting some research among engineers in Tripoli, Clarke was joined by the British cameraman Peter Kelley and assistant cameraman Kelvin Pike to commence shooting.

The fourth member of the on-location production unit was Kerim Mejid, an Iraqi cameraman with experience at Studio Misr in Egypt (Figure 5.6). Clarke writes that Mejid was brought on, “to help us, not only technically but with his knowledge of language and customs.”²⁹ However, in a later interview Clarke notes that Mejid's social status as a middle class Shi'a proved at times to present a challenge when meeting and dealing with elitist representatives of the petroleum company.³⁰ Mejid's role as part of the production team was highlighted in the *Iraq Petroleum* magazine where his image was featured with the caption: Iraqi Cameraman. In later productions, the image of Iraqis involved in the production process would become fundamental to the public relations strategy of the IPC and other oil companies in the region.

Although the English-language version of the film is the only preserved copy of the film available in the British Petroleum Archive, two Arabic versions were originally produced and widely distributed to specialized industry and general audiences in Iraq and the region. The filmmakers worked in co-operation with Sayed Ziad Fahim, of IPC's Baghdad Office, and Professor Rifa'ai, of the University of Damascus, to write and record Iraqi and Syrian Arabic versions of the original commentary.³¹ It is impossible to know how closely the Arabic language version copied the original script, analyzed in the following section; however, the standard approach to documentary film commentary translation established by the Shell Film Unit typically attempted to produce as close as possible to a direct translation of meaning through an uncritical procedure of “revoicing” or “converting” the script into other languages. Thus, it can be reasonably assumed (for the sake of analysis) that in the course of this first IPC documentary project, the filmmakers hired from London's Film Centre employed a similar approach to translation based on the simplified Shell model.³²

After completing the filming of pipeline construction in the rural landscapes of Iraq and Syria, the production team moved to Baghdad to capture footage that they believed could represent the larger story of development in Iraq. Clarke describes, “With the aid of Government officials in many departments, we set about the task of getting

scenes which would stand for the developments still under way. These scenes, of technical institutions, building, irrigation, measures of hygiene, are more than symbolic.”³³ The subsequent section examines how these scenes work to construct the story of modern Iraq in the documentary *The Third River*. It will analyze how representations of the built environment and labor are used as visual evidence for the argument that oil extraction – embodied by the construction of the world’s largest pipeline – carries with it the promise of modernity in Iraq.

The story of the construction of the pipeline construction is framed the narrative of progress. The title *The Third River* emphasizes oil as Iraq’s natural wealth and conduit of national progress and modernity. The naturalization of the pipeline as part of Iraq’s landscape is articulated in a few different ways. First, the film emphasizes that the buried pipeline is camouflaged as to be nearly invisible to the naked eye buried under the sands stretching from Kirkuk to Baniyas; in fact implying that by the end of the project the landscape remains undisturbed by the “natural” flow of oil. Second, the burning fires of Baba Gurgur are inserted into a historical or temporal narrative as ancient and belonging to the territory of Iraq. Third, the vestiges of great civilizations are depicted as evidence of an Iraqi heritage and used to set up the argument that oil will help Iraq return to her place of greatness in the global stage.

The Third River opens with a wide shot zooming in onto a map of the pre-modern Mesopotamian region (without indication of modern nation-state borders). The two-dimensional image then cross fades into a sequence of low angle and wide shots of archeological sites located inside modern day Iraq, including the iconic Ctesiphon Arch outside of Baghdad and the sculpted walls of Babylon. The voice over commentary explains that, “long before maps were made, successive empires left in Syria and Mesopotamia the monuments of their splendor.” In the present day, it goes on, the “wasting brick and stone” chronicle the history of fallen civilizations and empires that once dominated the area. Notable among these ruins signifying various periods and empires are the tilted and broken winged Assyrian sculptures that appear in other films as cinematic landmarks in Baghdad framing the entrance to the national museum.

In the next sequence, Islam is introduced in the commentary as a monotheistic religion “bridging history” over thirteen centuries. This language is matched with images of mosque architecture and suddenly interrupted with a cut to a low angle show of an oil derrick. The juxtaposition of the two towers - the minaret and the rig - is provocatively cued by the narrator’s utterance of the word “deity” and presents the architectural image of the oil tower as kind of a mirror or mimicry of the architectural symbol and embodiment of Islam.

Next, a musical flourish amplifies the energy of the scene and the physical atmosphere of the film transforms in turn. The viewers are introduced to a high angle wide shot of vehicular traffic in Baghdad, accompanied by the following commentary: “Iraq of the twentieth century begins to acquire the trappings of modernity: the internal combustion engine, the power lines and the concrete buildings, the factories and the efficient products of their industry” (Figure 5.7). Without locating or naming the industrial sites pictured in the following sequence, the images of factory facades stand in for evidence of successful and efficient industrialization. Here, the “trappings of modernity” are identified explicitly in the commentary and visual images that link modernity to the petroleum industry as obvious and necessary.

The visual juxtaposition of “old” and “new” constructed in terms of vernacular and modern built environments and practices, is a trope that is repeated again and again throughout this and subsequent films. “Life is changing for the people of Iraq. But change of course comes slowly and today the oldest techniques are practiced side by side with the new.” Here, for example, the sequence contrasts and mirrors a row of newly constructed rectilinear buildings with a row of mud reed huts that are quintessential to settlements in Iraq’s marshes.

The narration frames the wellbeing of Iraqis in terms of a timeless relationship to water: “For every Iraqi today, as for his forefathers... water for crops and cattle is still the first need. But as the twin rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates, carry the water past the historic cities and into the parched lands of the south, once so rich and fertile, every drop is needed to harden the dusty soil afresh and to bring it once again to the land new methods begin to displace the old.” Agricultural production is pictured in a sequence that suggests linear advancements from cattle drawn plowing techniques to tractors. The following sequence links this image of progress to oil extraction.

The commentary explains, “Iraq is advancing, but every step needs wealth. And unexpected wealth is there, matching in its flow the power of her two great rivers. Oil, laid down in bygone geological ages, and now extracted with all the resource of twentieth century man. A river of wealth: a third river.” The image of the river of wealth (referring to the pipeline) is introduced as a natural endowment to the nation-state and is linked to the wellbeing of Iraqis: “Dormant till now in the earth’s crust, oil that the world needs, tamed and controlled by prosaic concrete and pipe in sixty wells, makes Kirkuk in northern Iraq the prime source of new wealth and of further advance for her people.”

The Third River uses these powerful discursive frameworks to introduce the remainder of the film, which documents the physical human and mechanical labor entailed in the construction of the pipeline. Rather than focus on the top-down planning that was necessary to carry out the pipeline project, the film crafts the image of the project as a cooperative bottom up effort. The camera focuses on long sequences of men at work, welding and lifting and patiently waiting as the tedium of construction goes on. In the film and related promotional materials, the image of dignified and cooperative Iraqi oil workers, invested in the construction of the pipeline as a nation-building project, are featured as the driving workforce behind the project of oil extraction (Figure 5.8). The image of the foreign experts is virtually absent from the overall plot, except when cooperating with men on the ground. Ultimately, *The Third River* defines the project of oil extraction as a logical extension of natural wealth, a foundation for the promise of national development (signified by modernization in the capital), and a stage for workforce productivity and cooperation.

Ageless Iraq

Released in 1954, *Ageless Iraq* is a twenty-one minute long documentary that sets out to narrate the history of modern Iraq for general audiences. Sponsored by the Iraq Petroleum Company and produced by the Associated British Pathe in association with Film Centre, the documentary features the first footage captured on location in Iraq that was shot and edited entirely in color.³⁴ Little is known about the production of *Ageless Iraq*, as no production records exist in the available archives. Nonetheless, the film

remains the most in depth and globally circulated cinematic portrait of modern Iraq and its oil industry prior to the 1958 Revolution.

Based on the policy adopted by the Iraq Petroleum Company and Film Centre during the making of *The Third River*, it is likely that an Arabic language version of *Ageless Iraq* was produced for Iraqi audiences in addition to the English language film that remains in the British Pathe archive; however this cannot be verified using available records. Based on the fact that a promotional brochure was printed to accompany the film, *Ageless Iraq* was likely distributed in limited theatrical release. Most of its showings were probably non-theatrical and handled by the Petroleum Film Bureau, which screened the documentary for classrooms and film societies. *Ageless Iraq* was catalogued as an educational film in the trade publications *Film User* and *To-day's Cinema* and recommended for use in schools by 1956.³⁵

Ageless Iraq opens with an establishing shot of an airplane and the commentary, "At the center of our world lies the Middle East, and at its very heart the ancient land which is Iraq." The subsequent shot, taken from the ground perspective, is of a shepherd looking skyward, the ruins of the Arch of Ctesiphon looms large in the background (Figure 5.9). The next shot cuts to an aerial view of the monument. The sequence establishes the viewer in the role of a tourist approaching Baghdad from the air, contrasting the normative perspective from the airplane with the local perspective on the ground. The image of an airplane flying over Iraq provides continuity between a sequence of shots that indicate the approach towards Baghdad: the river, the ancient monument and shepherd, and finally the birds eye view of the dense network of roads and buildings in an older urban neighborhood (Figure 5.10). "Out of this ancient heritage, the citizens of one of the world's youngest nations are building a new life and a modern state." The commentary and even the title of the film establish from the outset that this is a story of historical continuity, with a modern twist.

European looking passengers arrive in Baghdad by train. "Ageless Iraq is no longer a remote isolated country. Today she is a main junction linking the east and west." The viewer's arrival in the capital is indicated by a pan to the sign "Baghdad West" and the narrator's words: "Her capital is Baghdad, a name that conjures up all the romance of Haroun Al-Rashid and the Arabian Nights of a thousand years ago when this was the fabulous capital of the Islamic World." After this reference to the orientalist imaginary of Baghdad, tradition and modernity is contrasted visually in order to establish a narrative of progress based on visual codes of individual dress and built environment: "The tempo of an age old way of life, contrasts with the swifter rhythm of the new." In the first instance, the camera frames a crowd of casually dressed young boys and old men near the river with a herd of cattle drinking from the water at their feet, and a small boat moving towards the opposite bank in the background. The second shot, depicts a group of young schoolgirls in uniform playing volleyball, a modern concrete block building in the background (Figure 5.11).

The city is framed in a sequence of long views down broad boulevards and intersections. The commentary defines modernity explicitly in terms of the built environment: "The twentieth century has come to Baghdad: steel and concrete, with shining cars and wide streets." This sequence cuts together scenes of a bustling city street intersection, brightly colored cars, pedestrians and a red bus contrasting against the concrete facades of tall buildings in the background (Figure 5.12). The camera pans down

to introduce us to a small group of well-dressed Iraqi men playing backgammon, reading, and socializing over tea on a balcony overlooking the street.

The camera lingers over the image of modern urban life, and then jumps to a sequence of visual tropes that signify traditional aspects of Baghdad culture. The commentary juxtaposes the two scenes using the following transition: “But the people of Iraq hold on to the *best* of their old traditions.” Cutting to a scene of a copper craftsman on the ground, molding a sheet of metal into a cone, it goes on, “In the bazaars you can see and hear them, carrying on the art and exquisite craftsmanship that has been their pride for hundreds of years.” The visitor’s perspective returns as the scene turns to a European couple shopping for rugs.

Baghdad is introduced in a sequence of street traffic and the soundtrack of honking horns and car engines. The commentary states, “Today the streets of the city are alive with the bustle of a young people who are taking back from the west the means to a brighter future.” The film then moves to a long sequence that focuses on pastoral scenes of Kurdish villagers performing everyday tasks like cleaning, carrying water and agriculture. The underlying theme is Iraqis relationship to water and the rivers: the sources of civilization.

Thereafter, *Ageless Iraq* pins the origins of urban settlement directly to Iraq. In a sequence weaving together various images of ruins from around the country, the commentary states: “These were the first cities of the world, for here in Iraq men first began to build and create a settled way of life. Here were the very beginnings of civilization.” The historical narrative leaps across time to highlight the Mongol invasion of Baghdad, the birth of Islam, and finally the coronation of King Faisal II. The film depicts the King’s speech, broadcast over radio, as a sequence that unifies Iraqis as a common national body. Staged close up shots of young men in Baghdad, oil workers in the Kirkuk fields, and unspecified villagers drinking tea gathered on the ground are cut together in a sequence intended to convey that the entire nation was listening intently as the King’s voice was broadcast over the airwaves (Figure 5.13).

Iraq’s “natural wealth” is described as being a product of two major industrial undertakings. Agricultural production and irrigation schemes are introduced as the most important to Iraq. This is interesting as it suggests an attempt by the filmmakers to underplay the role of the oil industry at first, despite the fact that the remainder of the film is dedicated to explicating how oil wealth is transforming development in the country. “The revenue from this new wealth is being used to create more wealth for the betterment of the country.” Brief images of oil workers and oil derricks are paired in a short sequence that is intended to stand in for the entire project of oil extraction. The entire sequence on oil runs under one minute.

The last part of the film conveys an explicit narrative tying oil extraction to national development. “Today, her revenues from oil are helping Iraq to lay a foundation for a new standard of wellbeing for all her people. The young people of today know that life for them is going to be different, and better, far better, than it was for their fathers.” The visual scenario cuts directly from landscape of oil infrastructure to a montage of pageant floats carrying costumed young women parading before the King (Figure 5.14). Images of modern women continue to be featured as indicators of the modernization of urban society in Baghdad. For example, over a montage of women walking onto a campus and working in a chemistry classroom the commentary states, “When you see

these young girls in their western clothes, so assured and confident, you're inclined to forget how surprised their mothers would have been at the idea of training for jobs that their daughters take in their stride. Jobs they thought that only men could and should do."

The film closes with a sequence emphasizing how modern developments in healthcare and education are tied to modernization of urban society. This is particularly tied to the appearance of women. "And it's natural that with all these modern developments, the women of Iraq are breaking away from their traditional style of dress, unaltered for centuries, to wear the comfortable, practical clothes that are right for this new life. It's a turn of events significant of a wider change, of a more liberal attitude to life." The accompanying sequence of a young woman in a tailor shop ends on a shot of her turning in the mirror to admire her dress (Figure 5.15).

The final sequence depicts two men waving to each other, as one steps on board an airplane, closing the narrative as it began with the perspective of the visitor to Iraq looking out the window at the view of Baghdad from the air, connecting the city to its broader global context (Figure 5.16). *Ageless Iraq* clearly addresses a global audience, as opposed to being intended for distribution primarily among Iraqis, as the previous two films. In this sense it offers a different perspective on the project of documenting the modern oil city for a general audience. It presents the nation-state as a unified and seamless community, bound together by a common history and future. This narrative is linked directly to oil, framed as new wealth. The transformation of Iraq is figured most prominently through the image of the urban woman whose outward transformations are told to signify a "wider change" sweeping the country.

A More Beautiful Capital

In 1952, half way through the production of *The Third River*, Film Centre proposed that the IPC establish a permanent film unit in Baghdad. Michael Clarke was approached to direct the unit, however he declined the job due to personal reasons.³⁶ John Shearman took up the position, and hired the young British cameraman Peter Kelly to stay on in Baghdad as lead cinematographer of the film unit (Figure 5.17).³⁷ According to Shearman, the IPC Film Unit objectives were first, "to train Iraqi film technicians in [the British] tradition of technical and documentary filmmaking," and second, "to make films which would explain to the people of Iraq what the oil company was doing in their territory...that it was not really taking away the black gold because it was putting money back into national development."³⁸ By 1953, IPC's public relations strategy took on a more nuanced approach in response to the "Iranian oil crisis" beginning to produce original Arabic-language film episodes of a company cine-magazine.

Beladuna was filmed and edited by a team comprised of a British director, two British cameramen, and several Iraqi film technicians, scriptwriters, and editors (Figure 5.18). This included Muhammad Shukri Jameel, Simon Mehran, Abdul Latif Saleh, Yehyeh Faiq, and Kerim Mejid, some of whom went on to have significant filmmaking careers after the 1958 revolution. Arthur Elton, senior film advisor for the IPC, spelled out the motivation behind the approach strategy to make films for Iraqis and by Iraqis, writing that:

If...done imaginatively and from the point of view of the people...themselves (and not from that of the film technicians introduced from overseas), the effect

will be gradually to create a favourable attitude towards the oil industry as a whole, and to make the Operating Companies seem a more natural and useful part of the economy...than many people are at present prepared to allow. Irrational, emotional attitudes will be damped down and criticism directed into informed and constructive channels.

As the title of the documentary series *Beladuna* –which translates as “our country” - clearly suggests, the cine-magazine embodied this rationale. However, despite the significant Iraqi participation, the films were ultimately produced with the oversight of British directors and producers, and the scrutinizing censorship of Iraq Petroleum Company and Iraqi Government officials.

Among the dozens of episodes made as part of the *Beladuna* series, the modernization of Baghdad reoccurred as a central theme. *A More Beautiful Capital* (*Assimatun Ajmel*) is a short documentary made in 1955 as part of the tenth episode of the IPC’s Arabic language cine-magazine. The film depicts the transformation of Baghdad’s built environment in the mid-1950s. The documentary is constructed as a sequence of montages accompanied by an original soundtrack and scripted voiceover, narrating various scenes of the making of modern Baghdad. Visible evidence of urban change is used to illustrate and substantiate scripted commentary. The musical composition shifts in tone and level to enhance the mood of each sequence. The narration works to persuade audiences that destruction of older neighborhoods is necessary to facilitate construction of modern buildings, which are fundamental to making Baghdad into “a capital fit for a modern country.”

A More Beautiful Capital opens with a sequence of wide shots from the streets of the old central neighborhoods of Baghdad. In the style of early Lumiere films, a static camera captures the movements of pedestrians, animals and vehicles entering and exiting the frame. In the initial shot, a horse-drawn carriage travels down a wide road adjacent to a row of older homes in an older neighborhood. Covered windows projecting from the street façade (*shansheel*) characterize and date the neighborhood as belonging to the typical aesthetic of vernacular urban domestic architecture in Iraq.³⁹ A sequence of images of broad sunlit streets and picturesque covered balconies is then juxtaposed with shadowy images of narrow pedestrian alleyways, scattered with silhouettes and pierced by streams of light entering the frame from afar. A dramatic cut and change in music takes us from dark to light, and a subsequent montage depicting the construction of the new Parliament building in central Baghdad (Figure 5.18). The commentary narrates, “In Baghdad, there are old neighborhoods that have beautiful houses, but most of them are rickety and it is time to re-design most of these neighborhoods. So the obsolete old houses are being destroyed to make way for modern building/construction.”

Pan shots and jump cuts set to an upbeat melody combine in this montage to convey a quick-paced and dynamic tempo of progress. One man speedily pushes a wheelbarrow through the frame of the first shot, followed by a high-energy montage of bricklayers at work, hammering stone and pouring concrete to set the foundation for a new wall. A variety of camera angles are cut together to enhance the dramatic effect of movement and labor in the construction process: a birds eye view of stone being lifted on a pulley, a focus on bricklayers’ hands and arms at work, a close up of a crane arm in motion, and several wide shots of laboring bodies (heads covered in turbans) in the context of the construction site (Figure 5.19).

Many shots are composed to center elements of the material process and built environment; thus, laboring bodies are often dismembered in the frame. A sequence in the later half of the Parliament construction montage dissects the body of a single laborer limb by limb. First, only his hips and legs cut through the frame. Then, a tight shot on his covered head as he shovels in the sun. Finally, the film cuts to a close-up of his hands gripping a shovel as he digs and stirs into the cement.

This level of focus on the laboring body amplifies the approach to representing oil labor that established in *The Third River*. The visual emphasis on individual labor highlights the fundamental role that Iraq's working class plays in moving forward the national project of modernity, not only in terms of the productivity of the primary national economic resource (i.e. oil extraction), but also in terms of the production of a nationally significant feature of the built environment in this case Iraq's new Parliament. This approach may be a result of the fact that Iraqis were involved in pitching and realizing the documentary episodes of *Beladuna*. The camera lingers on the architectural details of the building itself, and in particular the pointed arches in the arcade as evidence of architectural heritage, despite the modern planning design. "As Baghdad grows, it also becomes more beautiful. Its construction shows workmanship and artistic skill. And in moving forward, it does not lose its old artistic heritage, as evidenced by these beautiful Arabic arches."

While Iraq Petroleum Company films, such as *Ageless Iraq*, that were made by foreign production teams failed to move the narrative beneath the surface image of top down modernism, *A More Beautiful Capital* acknowledges the demolition of old neighborhoods as a point of controversy. The commentary states, "Modern planning requires the destruction of many of these old buildings, which everybody mentions. [Cinema Ghazi] will disappear to be replaced by a spacious plaza/square." This is followed by a montage of demolition footage, focused on the physical labor required to tear down of the famous Cinema.

The final sequence of the film is a tour of the capital's major thoroughfares, landmarks, and newer neighborhoods (Figure 5.20). "Wherever we look we see buildings rising, their shapes changing the face of the city. And in every corner, there is construction and renewal." Cars and double-decker buses pass through nearly every shot, except in one instance where a horse-drawn cart is pulled into the frame, highlighting the juxtaposition between modern and traditional modes of transportation (Figure 5.21). The final shot tracks a brand new car as it drives past, before panning up to the façade of a multistory building facade adorned in modernist *brise-soleil*. "More homes, more beautiful houses, and more grand constructions make Baghdad a capital city fit/suitable for a modern country." As a kind of foil to the traditional projecting façade of *shansheel* featured in the earliest sequence, this closing image of concrete *brise-soleil* protruding from the surface of a modernist high rise implies a remaking of Baghdad's vernacular architecture in terms of a modernist approach to material, function, and scale.

IPC promoted its *Beladuna* series as an effort "to project modern Iraq" to ordinary Iraqis.⁴⁰ The decision to make the national population of an oil-producing country the primary audience for corporate films was until then unprecedented in the Middle East. IPC screened the films in theatres of every major Iraqi city prior to feature films, as well as in mobile units that would travel to audiences of oil workers in remote oil fields, pump stations and refineries. During the summer special screening would be held outdoors.

Reportedly, *one- to two-thirds* of the total Iraqi population had seen the IPC films during the 1950s and, according to Elton, *Beladuna*, “happened to be almost the first film ever made about Iraq, almost the first time anyone had recorded what was happening in Iraq. In no time at all the film was showing in public cinemas to enthusiastic audiences. In fact, enthusiasm was so great that the film was sometimes played through twice, and tickets changed hands at a premium!”⁴¹ Since no available documentation on the distribution and reception of these films from the Iraqi perspective was found, one can only speculate (based on official accounts) that these films had a significant impact in reaching the population. What is clear is that the company and the state used the IPC films as an attempt to establish a coherent national imaginary of the creative destruction resulting from the modernization and development as a positive signifier of progress in Iraq.

Conclusion

The IPC films deliberately projected a coherent imaginary of the modern nation that centered on the oil city to audiences across Iraq. Michael Clarke has said that when *The Third River* first played in Iraqi cinemas, the oil film caused a powerful reaction among audiences. “It was said that people were not aware of their country - how [little] the Kurds really felt any sense of union with Iraqis in the deep south and the marsh Arabs.”⁴² *The Third River* was the oil company’s first attempt to produce a national imaginary for Iraqis residing in all parts of the country. As this chapter has shown the film established the central narrative that linked oil extraction to the promise of urban modernity, which ultimately signified national development.

The narrative of *Ageless Iraq* shifted emphasis away from moving pictures of the oil industry; however, the film maintained the same premise. According to the film, Baghdad was a modern city whose beauty, functionality, and social progress depended directly on oil wealth. The image of modern and urban Iraqi women is put forward as evidence of wider change on a national scale. On the other hand, *A More Beautiful Capital*, produced as part of the *Beladuna* series cut the oil industry out of the story altogether and focused instead on making short films about the transformations affecting the people of Iraq and region. In *A More Beautiful Capital*, the destruction of Baghdad’s old neighborhoods is rationalized as evidence of modernity, making way for new construction of “beautiful” public buildings and modernist housing estates.

According to internal company reports, IPC produced and distributed these films in full cooperation with the Iraqi government, “which welcomed the concept that films would publicise the country's historical traditions, plans for development and, generally speaking, arouse public interest, both inside and outside Iraq.”⁴³ The same report claims that these films, “probably contributed to bringing Iraq before the public eye, both in the sense of awakening the interest of the Iraqi people themselves, many of whom had little or no concept of their own country's history and an equally sketchy knowledge of development projects.”⁴⁴ The report then explains that the Iraqi government looked explicitly to the IPC, “to do a job of general publicity that, for various reasons, they were unable to do themselves.”⁴⁵ In this sense, IPC’s films operated simultaneously as corporate and state propaganda directed at audiences in Iraq.

Anderson (1991) examines the power that mass circulation of popular novels and newspapers had to cultivate a national consciousness. In the case of Iraq, the collective experience of watching cinema fostered the possibility of cultivating an imaginary of

national belonging. The films were projected to citizens across the country, from oil workers in the fields and residents of Baghdad in the city center. In colloquial Arabic, the narration put words to the moving pictures of modern Iraq that linked these distant communities across the country. IPC and the Iraqi government relied on these oil films to produce a collective national imaginary of national territory, national history, and national identity for Iraqis. The underlying premise in these films is that oil is the lifeblood of modern Iraq.

Documentary film was the ideal medium for the oil company and the state to promote its narrative of the modern oil city. Images of new boulevards, schools, public buildings, automobile traffic and double decker buses signified the modernization of the built environment. This was held up on screen as evidence of petroleum's promise. These films are efforts to imagine the modern nation of Iraq and naturalize oil wealth using images of the built environment to construct a modern geography of national territory, national history, and national identity.

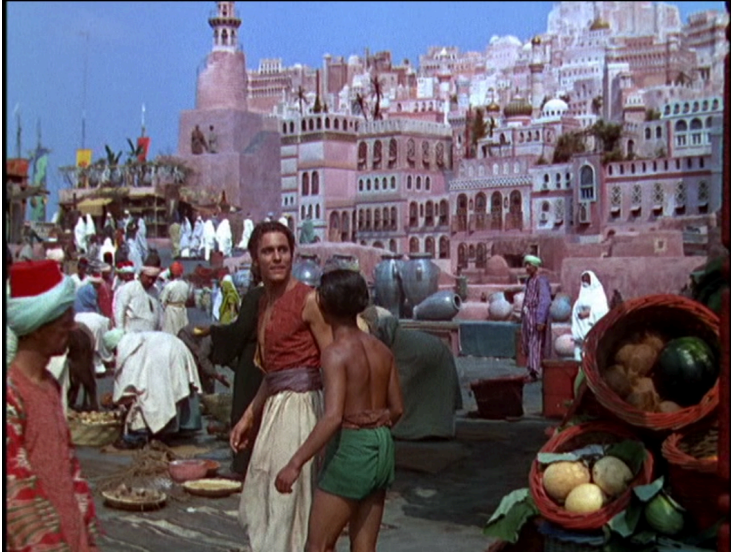


Figure 5.1 Still from *The Thief of Baghdad*, 1940.



Figure 5.2 *The North Gate, Baghdad*. Arthur Melville, 1882.

Despite the distinct historical contexts that separate these portrayals of Baghdad by over one thousand years, the characteristics of the cinematic and the watercolor imaginaries of the city are nearly identical: copious fruit baskets in the foreground, informal market stalls crowded by mass of nearly indistinguishable covered bodies and sand colored facades featuring pointed arches in the distant background.

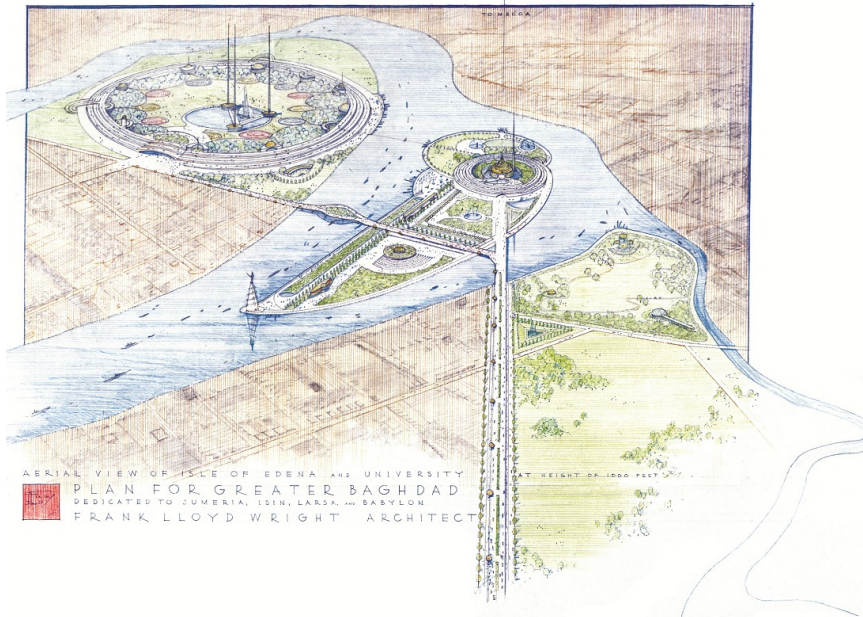


Figure 5.3 Watercolor rendering of Frank Lloyd Wright’s plans for central Baghdad, which circulated in architectural periodicals during the 1950s and beyond. In this imaginary, the surrounding urban landscape is rendered flat and simplified as a blank canvas for the master architect’s fantastical design.

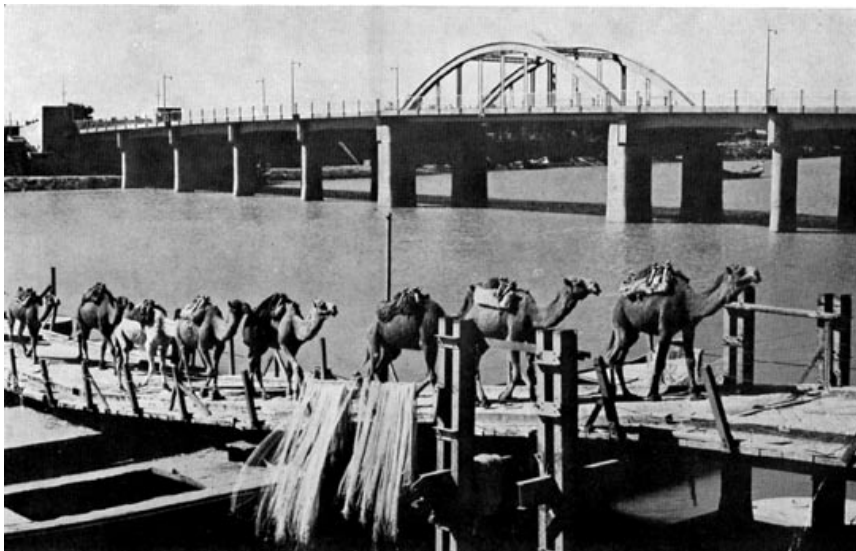


Figure 5.4 A photograph used in a 1957 Development Board publication to contrast the construction of a modern bridge in Baghdad with the “traditional” image of the Twaireej foot bridge on the Tigris. New construction juxtaposed in relation to existing structures is a common method for creating a distinct and powerful imaginary of modernity in Baghdad.

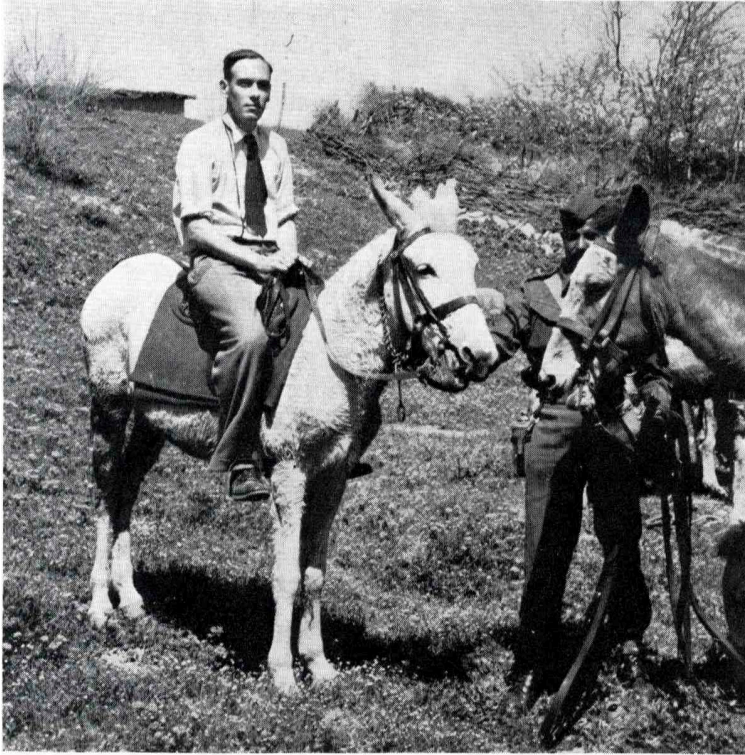


Figure 5.5 Michael Clarke, director of IPC's *The Third River*, on location.

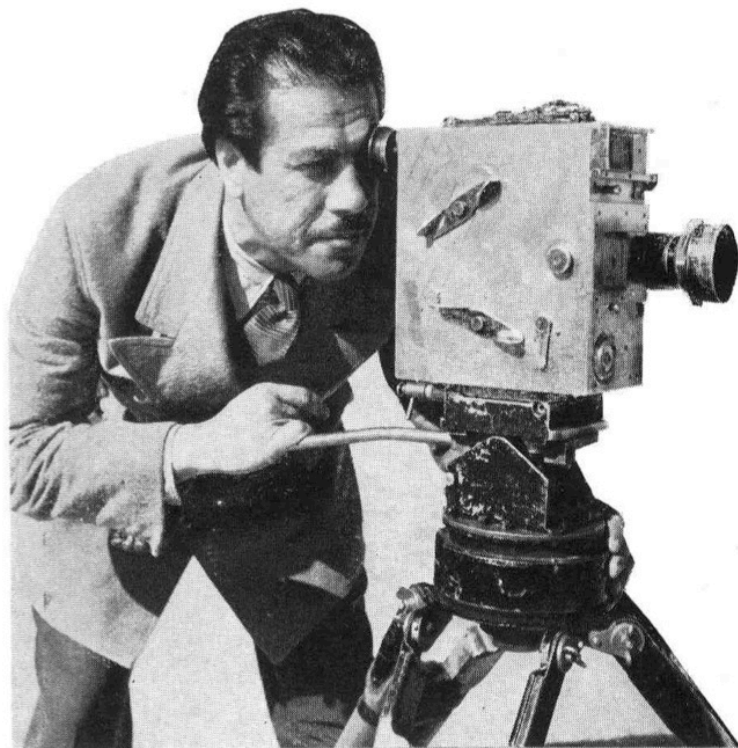


Figure 5.6 Kerim Mejid, "Iraqi cameraman" on the production team for *The Third River*.



Figure 5.7 A still from the Baghdad street sequence in *The Third River*, 1952.

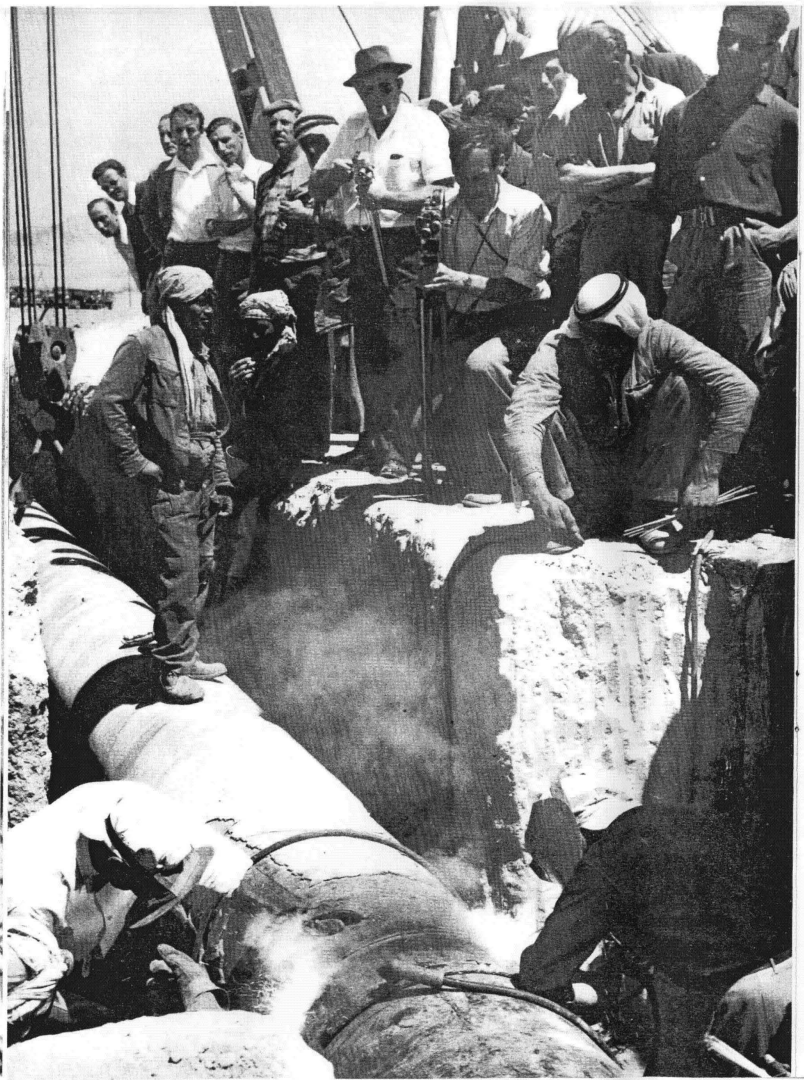


Figure 5.8 A promotional image for *The Third River* that depicts the cooperative labor of Arabs in the project to build the oil pipeline.



Figure 5.9 The opening sequence of *Ageless Iraq* juxtaposes two perspectives on the Ctesiphon Arch outside of Baghdad, from the ground and from the air.



Figure 5.10 In *Ageless Iraq* Baghdad comes into view first from the air as a dense network of buildings.



Figure 5.11 Tradition and modernity are visually contrasted in the juxtaposition of images of Baghdadis in various contexts.



Figure 5.12 This perspective on Baghdad's streets from *Ageless Iraq* is narrated as follows, "The twentieth century has come to Baghdad: steel and concrete, with shining cars and wide streets."



Figure 5.13 This sequence from *Ageless Iraq* depicts the seamless image of Iraqis from all regions and contexts around the country, from Baghdad to the oil fields, unified by the experience of listening to King Faisal II coronation speech broadcast over the radio.



Figure 5.14 This sequence in *Ageless Iraq* links the country's new oil wealth with national progress and uses images of women as visible evidence of Iraqi modernity.



Figure 5.15 In *Ageless Iraq*, the appearance of women's clothing is explicitly identified as evidence, or an indicator at least, of a wider trend of urban modernity among Iraqis.



Figure 5.16 The final shot ends *Ageless Iraq* as it began: Baghdad from the aerial perspective of an airplane window.



Figure 5.17 Peter Kelly (left), lead cinematographer of the Iraqi production team that comprised the IPC Film Unit



Figure 5.18 Stills from transition from old Baghdad (dark) to new construction of new Parliament building (light) in *A More Beautiful Capital*



Figure 5.19 Stills from montage of Parliament construction in *A More Beautiful Capital*



Figure 5.20 These stills juxtapose the image of domestic space in Baghdad's older neighborhood depicted at the beginning of the film (left) and the newer houses (right) featured in the final sequence of the film.



Figure 5.21 Stills from closing sequence depicting the modern image of Baghdad in *A More Beautiful Capital*

¹ Haytham Bahooora, "Cultivating the Nation-Space: Modernism and Nation Building in Iraq, 1950-1963" TAARII Newsletter 2.2 (2007), 10.

² Alexander Korda's academy-award winning production changed hands among six different directors and eventually relocated to a set in California due to the difficulty of filming under wartime conditions. *The Thief of Baghdad* captivated audiences and maintains a definitive legacy in film history, for one, as the classic that inspired Disney's *Aladdin*.

³ See Nezar AlSayyad, *Cities and Caliphs On the Genesis of Arab Muslim Urbanism* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991).

⁴ Rifat Chadirji, "Architectural Education in Iraq," in *Architectural Education in the Islamic World*, ed. Ahmet Evin (Singapore: Concept Media/Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 1986), 114.

⁵ This refers to the definition of vernacular architecture articulated by Paul Oliver, which makes the distinction that vernacular architecture entails the production of the built environment "of and by the people," as opposed to a popular architecture that is "for the people." For a thorough discussion of vernacular architectural practices worldwide, see Paul Oliver, *Built to Meet Needs: Cultural issues in vernacular architecture* (Oxford: Elsevier, 2006). For a detailed description of vernacular building practices in Baghdad, see John Warren and Ihsan Fethi, *Traditional Houses in Baghdad* (Horsham, England: Coach Publishing House, 1982).

⁶ Nooraddin, "Globalization and the Search for Modern Local Architecture," 64-5.

⁷ Ibid., 64.

⁸ Caecilia Pieri, *Baghdad Arts Deco: architectural brickwork, 1920-1950* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 37.

⁹ Chadirji, "Architectural Education in Iraq," 114; see Pieri for an in depth and illustrated discussion of the collaboration between Iraqi master builders (*ustas*) and foreign architects in Baghdad.

¹⁰ Pieri, *Baghdad Arts Deco*, 38.

¹¹ Ibid., 41.

¹² Nooraddin, "Globalization and the Search for Modern Local Architecture," 65.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Edith Tilton Penrose and E. F. Penrose, *Iraq: International Relations and National Development* (London: E. Benn, 1978), 182.

¹⁶ Pieri, *Baghdad Arts Deco*, 41.

¹⁷ Chadirji, "Architectural Education in Iraq," 115.

¹⁸ Magnus Berhardsson, "Visions of Iraq: Modernizing the Past in 1950s Baghdad," in *Modernism and the Middle East: Architecture and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Sandy Isenstadt and Kishwar Rizvi (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008); Rifat Chadirji, Interview with Author, (12 April 2010).

¹⁹ Bahooora, "Cultivating the Nation-Space," 10.

²⁰ "Ageless Iraq" [publicity booklet], British Film Institute Archive "Ageless Iraq" Microfiche, emphasis added.

²¹ Clarke, "Making 'The Third River'," 14.

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- ²² Michael Clarke, Interview with John Legard [Audio Recording], The ACTT History Project. (London: British Film Institute; Broadcasting Entertainment and Cinematograph Technicians Union, 1993).
- ²³ Clarke, Interview.
- ²⁴ Landau, *Studies in the Arab Theatre and Cinema*, 175.
- ²⁵ Clarke, "Making 'The Third River'," 17.
- ²⁶ El Houry, "Too Little Too Late?," 16.
- ²⁷ Clarke, "Making 'The Third River'," 18.
- ²⁸ Clarke, Interview.
- ²⁹ Clarke, "Making 'The Third River'," 16.
- ³⁰ Clarke, Interview.
- ³¹ Clarke, "Making 'The Third River'," 18.
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- ³³ Clarke, "Making 'The Third River'," 18.
- ³⁴ "Ageless Iraq" [publicity booklet].
- ³⁵ "School Radios and Screens," *Film User* (Jan 1956), 27.
- ³⁶ Clarke, Interview.
- ³⁷ Sherman, Interview; Peter Kelly, Interview with Author (2012).
- ³⁸ Shearman, Interview.
- ³⁹ *Shansheel* are a characteristic of urban vernacular architecture in Iraq developed in cities like Baghdad and Basra since the 12th century (Abbasid period).
- ⁴⁰ "Welcome to a New Film User," 47.
- ⁴¹ Jeakins, "Filming Round the World," 54.
- ⁴² Clarke, Interview.
- ⁴³ "The Future of Public Relations within the IPC Group of Companies."
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.

Epilogue

What we know about the other of the Middle East is mostly fantasy: images of our unspoken fears and desires, projected onto a few scraps of landscape and décor, costume and legend collected by long-dead travelers of the imagination. [...] Built into the spatial mapping is an assumption of the marginality of the Middle East, a zone which, in our presumption, is beyond the bounds of the only moral and reasonable law – “ours.” This presumption is not as frankly spoken today as it was in the old world’s colonial heyday.

—McKenzie Wark¹

The central aim of this dissertation has been to contribute a historical perspective on how imperial power relations structured around oil extraction have shaped and been shaped by media representations of the modern Arabian Gulf. In the quotation that opens the dissertation, Pendakis and Wilson remind us that the oil industry was responsible in part for facilitating the emergence of the very images and technologies that help us to construct and conceptualize our relationship to oil in the modern world. Yet, as this study has shown, not only are the production and circulation of images dependent on the physical and even economic properties of petroleum, but the political geographies of oil have also shaped how the modern world has been imagined through the medium of cinema. In particular, the intersection of the British documentary movement and the neo-colonial British corporate practice of oil extraction in the Arabian Gulf constitutes a rich space to examine how the politics of oil informed the globalization of postwar filmmaking.

In 1951, the so-called ‘Persian Oil Crisis’ resulted in the nationalization of oil production in Iran. Thereafter, British petroleum companies were cornered into renegotiating profit sharing agreements with national governments across the Arabian Gulf. The companies responded with a change in the approach to public relations practices in oil-producing countries. Rather than using film chiefly to impress British audiences with the scale and success of the industrial operations of its corporate enterprise, as Anglo-Iranian had done until 1951, the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) focused on the national population of Iraq as its primary audience. The oil company developed and culled the talent of Iraqi writers, cameramen, musicians, and editors in an attempt to make the production of oil films a “truly national enterprise.”²

Oil films projected the modern city and nation to Iraqi citizens. Circulating its Arabic documentaries in the cinema houses, classrooms, and community spaces of Iraq’s cities and towns, the central premise of IPC films was the narrative that oil was the lifeblood of modern Iraq: transforming cities, modernizing society, and making Iraq integral to the global economy. More than the pipelines that literally moved Iraq’s crude oil to the sea and the world market, the films feature Baghdad as the space that links workers in remote oil fields to the greater world. State revenues from oil extraction funded the Development Board’s commissions for modernist architectural landmarks and urban plans by Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius and TAC, Constantinos Doxiadis and others that would reshape the capital city as a metonym of the modern nation.

Baghdad’s commissions for highly visible projects by the world’s most famous modernist visionaries launched it into the ongoing international dialogue on modernism and nation building during the 1950s and 1960s. Through the films, Iraqis were made

aware of the necessity of the oil industry to enable the modernization of urban infrastructures and build the “more beautiful” neighborhoods and public buildings that represented Iraq to the world. Ultimately, the oil film was the primary vehicle for the narrative of the oil city.

In Iraq and the Arabian Gulf more broadly, oil extraction made possible the architectural projects, urban plans, and films that shaped the modern cities. The expertise of international professionals in planning and filmmaking was enlisted to construct the tangible embodiment of oil modernity and were thus fundamental to the practice of public relations in the region. Under the direction of newly founded development boards, international architects and planners were responsible for the designs of the oil company towns Abadan, Kirkuk, Ahmadi, and Awali as well as those for the capital cities Baghdad, Kuwait City, Manama, and Doha. British public relations officials, film directors, and film consultants shaped the vision and practices of the oil company film units that proliferated in the Arabian Gulf from the 1950s onwards to bring the modern cities of the region to the screen before the mass audiences. Oil companies and national governments relied on the work of these experts – consultants and practitioners in architecture, planning and filmmaking – as new technologies for governing the neo-colonial oil economy, its urbanism and its image. Indeed, this production of cultural and spatial governing mechanisms is at the core of the energy system that makes the world we live in now possible.

Oil films used documentary moving images to craft the neo-colonial imaginary of modernity in the Arabian Gulf from that urban vantage point. This cinematic imaginary played a role in the way that oil company towns and capital cities in oil-producing countries were experienced, navigated, and understood. The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and Iraq Petroleum Company films examined in chapters three and five reproduce modernist ways of seeing, navigating, and experiencing the city that were inherent to the top-down planning practices described in chapters two and four, which were simultaneously shaping oil company towns including Abadan and modern capitals including Baghdad.

Ultimately, both the oil company towns and oil films were means for managing populations and in particular labor in the new geopolitical context of oil-extraction in the Arabian Gulf. *Persian Story* worked as an extension of the neo-colonial planning and architectural designs, seeking to narrate Abadan and other oil company towns as mixed enclaves and therefore as exceptional spaces of oil modernity. Meanwhile, national governments in the Arabian Gulf used oil revenues to elevate the status of capital cities onto the world stage of modernist architecture and planning. *The Third River* and *Ageless Iraq* represent Baghdad on film as the modern city that petroleum promised and explicitly linked oil extraction to the experience of urban modernity and nation building in Iraq.

Any historical inquiry engaged in questions of the meaning or impact of visual cultures is subject to the limitations of the archive, particularly in the context of societies and countries that are or have been subject to imperialism. Undoubtedly, as media circulates it can shape the worldview of the societies and individuals that it engages. Yet, mediated knowledge production is simultaneously contested and resisted in ways that might not be documented and thus are not visible in the archival record. While the objective of this dissertation has not been to presume a particular effect of the neo-colonial imaginary, further research on oil films can attempt to address this gap by

engaging substantially in a contemporary study of audience reception within the Gulf countries.

Since the First Gulf War in 1991, critical scholars have struggled to understand how the proliferation of media images embedded in imperialist and militarized power structures dictate what we know about Iraq and the Middle East, and how that knowledge shapes the way in which the United States and Britain operate in the world. The aim of this dissertation has been to show how the media history that shapes understandings of Iraq, Iran and the modern Arabian Gulf region are concomitant with early twentieth century histories of oil and imperialism. If dominant knowledge and mappings of the Middle East are “mostly fantasy,” as McKenzie Wark suggests, then it is crucial to seek a better understanding of why, how, and to what end these image worlds attempt to define the modern world for us.

¹ McKenzie Wark, *Virtual Geography: living with global media events* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 5.

² “Film Premiers in Iraq: ‘Our Land and Our King’,” *Iraq Petroleum* 3.5 (Dec 1953), 36.

Illustration Sources

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Chapter 3

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