THREATS TO BRITISH “PROTECTIONISM” IN COLONIAL BAHRAIN: BEYOND THE SUNNI / SHIA DIVIDE

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I. Introduction

In the early months of 1923, the Under Secretary of State for the India Office telegrammed the Foreign Office in London concerned that the social unrest among the Bahraini Shia would fuel the Persian government’s challenge to British involvement in the islands.¹ The Persians started agitating in the international press in 1922 against British interference,² followed by press activism on the part of the Bahraini Shia denouncing British complicity in the abuses they suffered at the hands of the Sunni al-Khalifa tribe, whom the British had protected as the de facto rulers of Bahrain in several treaties dating back to 1861.³ Meanwhile, disturbances on the ground were reported by the British Political Agent in Bahrain as frequent rioting between “Najdis” and “Persians” instigated by Najdi loyalists to Abdul Aziz al-Saud who was in the process of consolidating his rule over the Arabian Peninsula.⁴ On May 11, 1923, several boatloads of armed Najdis attempted to land alongside the British Agency while flying war flags and using Ibn Saud’s war shout. They fired several rounds in front of the Agency but were deterred from landing by a British naval detachment drawn up on the sea front.⁵ The Political Resident, Lieutenant-Colonel S. G. Knox, sent a hurried telegram to the India Office to find out when the gun ship was to arrive and to state that he respectfully disagreed with their focus on the Persian threat: If the British were to leave Bahrain, “it will not be the Persians but the Wahabis who would succeed us.”⁶

His opinion was not without warrant. Colonial documents provide ample evidence that the power struggles in Bahrain during the colonial period were not of a
purely sectarian nature. It is not clear that in the absence of British support for the al-Khalifa, the residents of Bahrain would have inevitably turned to Persia for political inclusion, nor is it clear that the Persians could have out-muscled other political opponents interested in the islands and its resources. Yet, historical narratives tend to stress the Persian challenge to British dominion over others, a trend with pernicious consequences for collective memory and social consciousness. This paper aims to complicate the dominant narrative by pointing to the more complex political history of the islands, highlighting when power was contested between Sunnis and Sunnis, and when the social topography was not yet cemented by the oil economy and colonial engineering. While scholars have argued that state-making after 1923 had the effect of intensifying social stratification by religious sect,\textsuperscript{7} attention to the earlier period of 1830 to 1930 paints a relatively nuanced picture of power, politics and sect in colonial Bahrain.

\textit{Research Focus}

Scholarly literature on the history of Bahrain is, for the most part, political history. In this respect, the present study is no exception. However, I approach the political history of Bahrain from a different angle and time period than the rest of the literature. This section outlines the state of the field and how the approach of this paper diverges from it.

The few scholarly monographs that exist on Bahrain focus on twentieth century state-building and its social consequences, and attempt to make sense of the seemingly contradictory nature of a modern state headed by a “tribal” monarchy. All the authors
connect the internal workings of the modern state with colonial intervention and the oil economy. Fuad Khuri identifies the 1920s as the period of state consolidation, when Britain adopted a policy of internal administrative “reform” and made Bahrain a formal protectorate of the Empire.\textsuperscript{8} He argues that the colonial development of state bureaucracy in the 1920s and the production of petrol in the 1930s transformed the nature of al-Khalifa authority from a diffuse power secured through mutually beneficial alliances with other powerful tribes to an authoritative power more independent of local cohorts and social conditions. This made possible the transformation of the tribal system into a monarchical one. Emile Nakhleh argues that the modern state system should be understood as the conflicting combination of traditional tribalism and modernization, a synthesis that he calls “urban tribalism.”\textsuperscript{9} Mahdi al-Tajir presents an in-depth study of the dealings between the al-Khalifa and colonial administration in the state’s formative years of 1920 to 1945, while Fred Lawson presents a historical overview of state and society with a focus on the decades after World War II.\textsuperscript{10}

By focusing on the bureaucratic state and its consequences, their theoretical approach is one in which the outcomes of colonial intervention are taken as that which warrant explanation. Taking the modern state as the object of study entails a focus on the time period when there was a modern state of which to speak—the 1920s and onwards. Within this mid to late twentieth century framework, the main external threat to the colonial policy of state consolidation under al-Khalifa rule was Persia.
Lawson provides an outline of the Persian claim to Bahrain, which was formally lodged with the Foreign Office in London and the League of Nations in 1927, and repeated in the 1930s and 1940s. The League refused to consider the claim until the British announced their plans to leave Bahrain in 1970, at which point a United Nations special commissioner was appointed to ascertain whether the Bahraini population wanted to unite with Iran, about which he concluded, no. The United Nations ratified his report and the Shah abandoned the claim, but it arose again in 1979 when Ayatollah Sadiq Ruhani announced that the islands were a province of the Islamic Republic. The then Iranian Prime Minister distanced himself from the statement by saying it was unauthorized and sending officials to Bahrain to smooth over tensions. However, in December of 1981, the Bahrain government charged seventy-three citizens with an attempted coup and claimed that they had been trained and funded by Iran. Bahrain asked Iran to recall its chargé d’affairs and diplomatic relations were severed until 1985. Lawson concludes that, “Throughout most of the twentieth century, successive governments in Tehran have represented the most serious threat to the autonomy of the emirate.”

The centrality of the Persian claim to Bahrain’s political history reflects not only the focus on the modern state and the time frame it entails but also how what is important in the past is influenced by the politics of the present. Nakhleh and Khuri did their fieldwork in the first half of the 1970s when there was public optimism about the state’s promise of political liberalization after independence in 1971; they mention but do not
focus on the Persian claim. Lawson, on the other hand, did his fieldwork in the mid-1980s after the state had abandoned constitutionalism in 1975, which led to increasing internal subversion and social turbulence, countered by state violence and repression. The recent success of the Iranian revolution provided inspiration for some of those who were opposing monarchical rule. Written in the midst of widespread social unrest due to the state’s failure to liberalize, Lawson’s book reflects the heightened importance of Iran to the social and political dynamics of the islands.

By the late 1980s, social and political discourses in Bahrain were evolving in a more sectarian direction. Lawson notes the utopian narrative among Shia villagers that,

…Bahrain before the coming of the al-Khalifa consisted of 300 villages and thirty cities and town, each ruled by a Shia jurist; these jurists were arranged in a hierarchy culmination in a three-person council whose status was confirmed by the entire population; property in general—and agricultural land in particular—was held on an individual basis according to the Islamic principle of \textit{ihya’}, whereby the right of use accrues to whomever actually works the property.\textsuperscript{15}

The counter-myth advanced by the government is that the al-Khalifa were the \textit{de jure} rulers of Bahrain before colonial intervention. The claim asserted by Tehran is that Bahrain belonged to Persia before the British underhandedly signed a treaty with the al-Khalifa in 1820. All of these are claims about the political history of the islands, illustrating the extent to which such history is used and contested in contemporary power struggles.

This study aims to make an intervention into the way that political history is remembered. Though not responding directly to each of the three narratives above, this
paper triangulates between them. I am interested in what was actually happening on the
ground politically during the nineteenth century, before the outcome of colonial
intervention—the modern state—was underway in the mid-1920s. My central research
question is what were the main political threats to colonial policies in the century before
state consolidation?

While it may be true that Persia posed the most significant threat to the British
policy of al-Khalifa rule after state-making was underway, it is certainly not true of the
preceding century. The colonial sources indicate that the most significant challenges to
the British / al-Khalifa nexus came from Sunni-Arabs on the western side of the Gulf: the
re-emergent Saud-Wahabi force. This paper outlines the Saud-Wahabi threat to Bahrain
from 1830 to 1930 to shed light on this buried dimension of the islands’ political history.
The goal is not to provide a comprehensive account of nineteenth century politics; rather,
it is to ask what was happening with politics on the ground inside Bahrain. The fact that
the greatest threat to the colonial / al-Khalifa nexus in the nineteenth century was from a
fellow Sunni-Arab tribe complicates the sectarian shadow cast by a twentieth century,
Persian-centric reading of political history.

This is essentially a study of perceptions—British perceptions of the threats to
their interests in or “protection” of Bahrain. Although this account is based on colonial
documents and therefore cannot capture the perspectives and experiences of the people
living in Bahrain, it is still possible to read events in such a way that foregrounds what
was happening on the ground as equally salient for collective memory as events
occurring on the level of diplomatic relations, such as the claims made by Persia in the twentieth century. I read the colonial sources with an eye to mapping out the way that events were interpreted, by whom, and what evidence was marshaled in support of differing perspectives. In an effort to understand multiple dimensions of issues and events, I pay close attention to dissentions among British officials and policy makers.

The importance of this research lies in how political history is understood, which events and conflicts are remembered and which are forgotten. By recovering the Saud-Wahabi threat to colonial policy—the “on the ground” narrative of the nineteenth century—this paper attempts to situate the Persian-centric narrative in a longer political history of the struggle for power over Bahrain in the colonial era. My theoretical approach does not take the outcome of colonial intervention as my subject, but aims to understand what the intervening power was forced to contend with in seeking to shape the world.

**Periodization**

The history of the British presence in Bahrain can be conceptualized as two successive phases; the first was marked by a relatively non-interventionist policy of maintaining calm at sea to protect their trade and the second was a policy of intense involvement in state-building. The entire period lasted from the first treaty between the al-Khalifa and the British in 1820 to British withdrawal from Bahrain on December 16, 1971. The transition from relative non-intervention to state-building occurred in and around the year of 1923.
The shift in policy occurred slowly over time, entailing gradual advances into the internal affairs of the islands. In 1861, the British agreed to protect the al-Khalifa as the rulers of Bahrain; in 1880, the al-Khalifa agreed to not have any dealings with foreign powers without British approval; in 1900, a British Political Agent was appointed to the islands and in 1905 he assumed judicial jurisdiction over “foreigners.”16 The official policy shift was marked by the forced abdication of the ruling shaykh in 1923 because he would not cooperate with British plans for administrative “reforms.” The new policy was reflected in the 1924 edition of the Foreign Office’s “Consular Instructions” (Chapter XXII, Annex I) which listed Bahrain in Class B: British Protected States, along with the Federated Malay States, Principal Native States of India, Nepal and Hadramawt.17 The 1920s was the decade of administrative construction and with the discovery of oil in commercial quantities the 1930s, revenue for state projects increased dramatically.

This paper focuses on the pre-statehood century of 1830 to 1930. During this time there were several coups and inter-tribal feuds within the al-Khalifa, much to the chagrin of the British who desired stable allies with which to pursue their commercial interests in the region. This time frame also spans the second rise and fall of the Saud-Wahabi contingency, and their third and final rise under the leadership of Abdul Aziz bin Abdur Rahman al-Saud, who declared the sovereignty of Saudi Arabia in 1932. On more than one occasion, this re-emergent power took an interest in the islands of Bahrain. In contrast, the Persian Qajar Dynasty was on the decline, losing territories to both Russia and Britain.
Archives

This study draws upon British colonial documents from 1820 to 1932 that have since been collected by British librarians into a set of archives called, Records of Bahrain that spans the year of 1820 to 1960. These archives pull together correspondences between British officials in various locales of the Empire as they discussed involvement in Bahrain. Most of the correspondences occurred between the Political Agent in Bahrain, the Political Resident for the Persian Gulf at the Office of the Consular-General based in Bushire, and the Government of India’s Foreign and Political Office. Sometimes, the India Office consulted the Foreign Office in London on policy-level decisions or when Bahrain’s foreign relations touched on issues considered sensitive, such as relations with Abdul Aziz al-Saud in the early twentieth century when the British were unsure about his intentions towards their holdings in the Persian Gulf. The correspondences include telegrams about current events, daily management of British interests, reports of a historical and sociological nature by western travelers, letters and petitions submitted to the Crown by local actors, copies of treaties signed between the British and the al-Khalifa, and discussions about British policy in Bahrain.

The document trail spans several offices and ranks within the Empire. Bushire became the hub of England’s presence in the region after the East India Company closed its factory in Bandar Abbas in 1763. The British had considered moving their regional office to Bahrain in 1750 but decided against it because of the “powerful Arab tribesmen” along the western coast of the Gulf. Diplomatic and administrative functions in the
colonies east of the Suez were transferred from the East India Company to the Government of India in Bombay in 1858 and then to Delhi in 1873. The Agent in Bahrain and the Resident in Bushire were responsible to the Government of India.

As a supplement to the information in the Records of Bahrain, I referred to John Gordon Lorimer’s Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia. Published by the Government of India as a secret document in 1908 and 1915, the Gazetteer compiles critical information on the Gulf to provide British agents with a pocketbook guide to people and places of colonial importance. The guide was intended to provide officers the necessary information to increase British influence in the area. I read parts of the Gazetteer when the Records of Bahrain referenced it directly, allowing me to better understand what information the British were drawing upon in their deliberations and decisions.

The Records of Bahrain are appropriate to this study because, like the British imperialists who were involved in them, I am interested in nineteenth century political power struggles in Bahrain. The archives provide insight into British concerns surrounding the maintenance of their hegemony on the sea. For much of the time, the administrators specifically focused on the political stability of the al-Khalifa as their allies. In the context of these concerns, political threats to the al-Khalifa were a main subject of British correspondences.

Since my primary sources are colonial ones, the ensuing historical narrative is based on British-colonial perspectives. Any local voices therein are always filtered through a
British one, if only through the translation of a letter or petition from Arabic into English (though the treaties appear in Arabic and English). Naturally, the British had an incentive to interpret people and events in such a way as to justify their economic and colonial interests, but I am not particularly interested in whether what the British recorded was completely accurate, and I assume it’s not. I am interested in how they perceived political events as threats to their influence or not, and what these perceptions imply about the political history of the islands. It would also be possible to approach the political history of nineteenth century Bahrain from other primary sources, which would likely complicate the narrative drawn out here.

A second set of archives provide the British historical record for the period in which they formally undertook state-building: 1924 to 1970. This collection is called the Bahrain Government Annual Reports, which were prepared first by the Political Agent and then by Sir Charles Belgrave, British Advisor to the Ruler of Bahrain from 1926 to 1957. After Belgrave’s departure, the reports continued to be prepared by Bahraini government officials up until independence in 1971. The Annual Reports focus on internal administrative issues of governmentality. Since this set of archives does not date back to the period under consideration, they have not been consulted. However, much of the secondary literature relies on them.

Regarding terminology, I usually use British-colonial terms as they were found in the archives even if the terms have since been corrected by a more accurate and nuanced understanding of the region. For example, I use the term “Wahabi” despite recent
critiques of it,\textsuperscript{21} and I refer to King Abdul Aziz bin Abdur Rahman al-Saud by his western misnomer, “Ibn Saud.” My intent is to keep the narrative as transparent as possible. Using the updated terms would be to suggest an understanding of the region that the British did not possess, and it would mask the one that they did. The archives are colored by colonial perceptions of the region and these undoubtedly affected which events are recorded and how they were told. I have also retained British spelling when quoting directly from the archives but I have corrected misspellings.

II. Background

This section provides a brief overview of the politics, economy and society of Bahrain as they are relevant to understanding the events of 1830 to 1930. I start with the history of British / al-Khalifa relations since this relationship was the decisive factor in the modern political history of the islands. Next, I outline the economic foundations and social topography of the islands to give the background for understanding the strategic calculations made by those seeking to gain and maintain their power. The section draws upon both primary and secondary sources.

The al-Khalifa and the British

The al-Khalifa trace their lineage to the ‘Utub tribe from the central area of the Arabian Peninsula known as Najd. The ruling family of Kuwait, the al-Sabah, also trace their lineage to this tribe.\textsuperscript{22} The ‘Utub travelled south to Kuwait in the early eighteenth century when, according to oral history, the Turks expelled them from Umm Qasr, a port
city in southern Iraq. The al-Khalifa broke off from the al-Sabah and left Kuwait around 1760, travelling down the western coast of the Gulf in search of pearl fisheries and trading bases, settling in the town of Zubarah in what is today northwest Qatar. They invaded Bahrain from Zubarah in 1783, and became overlords of the islands through conquest.

When the al-Khalifa invaded, they defeated another Arab tribe originally from Muscat, the al-Madhkur, who administered the islands from Bushire as a dependency of Persia. Persia claims that the al-Khalifa agreed to pay them a tribute. Either way, Persia did not have the sea power to threaten the al-Khalifa directly. Political power in the Gulf at this time was decentralized, boundaries were relatively undefined, and local affairs were often conducted with nominal deference to regional powers in the form of an annual tribute, a promise thereof, or at most, toleration of a local deputy. At times local rulers would defend their domains by actively seeking inclusion or military support from a regional power in order to counteract the ambitions of other powers, and at other times, localized rulers would seek alliances for aggressive reasons, to take control of another area of land or sea. The picture of localized power, shifting alliances, and intermittent regional titularism describes the western Gulf when the British embarked on treaty relations with the al-Khalifa and other Arab tribes in the 1820s.

The British became interested in the Gulf littoral in the mid-eighteenth century in order to gain free passage for their commercial ships between India and Iraq. Their strongest competitor was a Sunni Arab tribal confederacy known as the Qawasimi based
in Ras al Khaimah, who had bases on both sides of the Gulf. The British accused them of “piracy” for demanding a safe passage fee from British East India Company vessels, (a demand which was commonplace in the inter-tribal system in place). On their third attempt, the British finally defeated the Qawasimi in 1819, decimating their fleet and stronghold at Ras al-Khaimah. As a result, the Qawasimi and their allies, including the Al-Khalifa of Bahrain and Zubarah, and the tribal families of Umm al-Quwain, Ajman, Abu Dhabi and Dubai capitulated and signed separate non-aggression treaties with the British. The “General Treaty of Peace”, signed in 1820, bound the tribal chiefs in the newly defined “Trucial coast” to refrain from “plunder and piracy” at sea unless undertaken as an act of war. To enforce this treaty, the British stationed a squadron at Ras al-Khaimah which later moved to Basidu on Qeshm Island to set up a naval base, marking the beginning of Pax Brittanica in the Gulf.

These treaties laid the groundwork for the formation of the Gulf States and the power of their ruling families today. As Khuri and others argue, the tribes or segments thereof who happened to be in de facto control of a given area of land at the time of British intervention were given de jure right to them.

...Great Britain selected a limited number of chiefs and made them responsible for maintaining order along the southern Gulf littoral. This process eventually enhanced the authority and prestige of leaders and families chosen and promoted them from their traditional position as shuyukh, or primus inter pares among their more influential supporters, to a role more closely approximating that of ruler of an established community (hakim).
However, it was not simply the presence of an imperial authority in and of itself that catalyzed the transformation from the diffuse rule of tribal society to the rule of one tribe or family. Imperial authority was not an unknown entity in the region:

The pattern of formalized authority in the Gulf was such that when a superpower, an imperial organization, rose to dominance and held the periphery (in this case the Gulf) as a dependency, it forced the dependency to pay tribute but did not alter its inner structure. The tribal groups of the Gulf thus continued to exist, in one form or another, in spite of external imperial domination. When no superpower was dominant, each tribe or segment of tribe assumed independence and tried to expand its own territories at the expense of its neighbors.34

The difference that British imperial authority eventually made was that they had interests in the region other than the collection of tributes. They were interested in stable, predictable and favorable conditions to plan and pursue their global trading empire. Extrinsic support for particular families in an effort to stabilize local authorities meant that over time, the consolidation of modern state power under specific tribes lessened traditional mechanisms of political accountability such as the need for alliances with other tribal and commercial elite and concern about the social conditions within their sphere of influence.

Over the next century, the British / al-Khalifa relationship evolved such that the more power the al-Khalifa turned over to the British, the more important Bahrain become for British interests in the region, and the more the British agreed to protect al-Khalifa rule. In the “Treaty of Perpetual Peace”, signed in 1861, the chief al-Khalifa shaykh agreed to abstain from all maritime aggressions against any party and gave the British legal jurisdiction over their subjects in Bahrain (mostly Indian); in exchange the British
promised to maintain the security of al-Khalifa “possessions.” In response to Turkish interest in a coal depot, the British negotiated a treaty in 1880 in which the chief shaykh agreed to not have any dealing with foreign powers without British approval. By the end of the nineteenth century, Bahrain “had been firmly integrated into an overarching imperial order centered on the British government in India.” In 1905, the reigning shaykh gave up jurisdiction over all “foreigners” in the islands to the British Political Agent. By 1913, the Ottomans signed a treaty with Great Britain acknowledging Bahrain’s independence (even though it had not been part of the Ottoman Empire) in return for British assurances that the al-Khalifa would not claim any land on the Qatar Peninsula, including their historic stronghold of Zubarah. This occurred in the wake of the outbreak of war in the Balkans and Ottoman efforts to hold onto their governorship over al-Hasa in eastern Arabia, which they lost to Ibn Saud the following year. By 1946, Britain regarded Bahrain as their most important military and political holding on the Arab side of the Gulf; the Political Residency moved its office to Bahrain from Bushire where it had been for nearly two hundred years. It was not until late into the decolonization period, in 1971, that Britain withdrew its mandate over Bahrain and conceded sovereignty to the al-Khalifa.

The al-Khalifa were able to consolidate their power long term by cooperating with the British, who were more involved in the internal affairs of Bahrain than they were in any other Gulf state except Oman. In the course of negotiating treaties with al-Khalifa shaykhs, the British awarded subsidies, rents and commercial incentives in exchange for
exclusive access to local territory. These awards provided sufficient resources to allow the al-Khalifa to act more autonomously of their richer subjects, overturning the symbiotic relationship that had existed between the tribal aristocracy and the merchant oligarchy in previous centuries. Because of Bahrain’s early integration into Pax Brittanica, these revenues began earlier than they did for other Gulf rulers, except for the al-Said in Muscat. After the conclusion of the 1861 treaty, Bahrain became an official port of call for a newly inaugurated steamship service subsidized by the Indian administration for the British India Steam Navigation Company to carry mail between Basra and Bombay. The al-Khalifa profited considerably from the fees paid to facilitate local activities. When Britain received the cooperation of Shaykh Hamad for administrative reforms in the 1920s, a Royal Air Force landing field was built that yielded substantial revenues for state construction. Later on, state appropriation of profits from the production of oil on account of contracts between the al-Khalifa and foreign oil firms further lessened the government’s need for local support.

**Economy & Society of an island thoroughfare**

*Trade, pearls, date gardens, fish, and fresh water springs*

Bahrain is an archipelago of thirty-three islands located just fifteen miles off the eastern coast of Saudi Arabia and thirteen miles north of the Qatari Peninsula. Only four of the thirty-three islands are inhabited, and the largest one, al-Awwal, is just ten miles wide and thirty miles long. Al-Awwal is home to the nation’s capital, Manama, and constitutes eighty-five percent of the total land area and most of the arable land.
Bahrain has been a thoroughfare of traders and travelers since the age of antiquity. Since the time of the Sumerians, the Persian Gulf has been one of the two main waterways linking East and West, the other being the Red Sea. Merchants travelled from the Indian subcontinent and Far East through the Persian Gulf into northern ports such as Basra and overland by caravan to Aleppo, Antioch, and onto Europe. Trade has always been a major source of income for the islands, and the ability to levy taxes and tariffs a major source of political power.

Equally important to the economy was the pearling industry. Bahrain was the premier source for pearls until the invention of cultured pearls by Japan in the late 1920s, after which Bahrain’s industry declined precipitously. The geological formation of the Gulf and the temperate and shallow waters favor a high degree of pearl oysters growth. The pearl fisheries located on the western side of the Gulf stretch from a few miles to the west of Dubai north to Kuwait, though Bahrain has the highest concentration of pearling banks and they are the widest and most bountiful. Fisheries extend as far as seventy miles from the shore. There are also some fisheries on the eastern coast of the Gulf between Lengeh and Taheri, but these were only fished every three to four years because of low yields, while the fisheries on the western Gulf were fished every year, especially the ones on the northwest corner of Bahrain. In addition to trade and pearls as the two main sources of revenue, Bahrain had an abundance of freshwater springs and arable land in an area of the world known for its vast deserts and arid climates. The arable land was
used for date gardens, vegetables and grain cultivation. Land cultivation and fishing made up the bulk of the domestic economy.

As in other times, pearling was an important factor in the political history of the islands during the period of 1830 to 1930. Taxation of sales in the pearling industry was a key incentive for al-Khalifa conquest of the islands and was a major reason why successive leaders from the al-Saud and beyond were interested in Bahrain. After Bahrain was integrated into Britain’s global trading network in the 1860s, the global demand for pearls increased substantially; a thriving pearling industry attracted wealthy merchants from south Persia and India. Pearls were sent to Bombay where they were classified and dispatched to European markets, though some were still sent the historic route via Baghdad.\(^\text{47}\) Up until the 1930s, the banks on the western side of the Gulf were free to anyone who wanted to come fish them, and many Arabs and Persians from both sides of the Gulf littoral did so.\(^\text{48}\)

Just as the global demand for natural pearls was sharply declining in the 1920s, commercial quantities of petrol were discovered in 1932, and oil became the primary industry for the next fifty years. During this period, the freshwater springs and agricultural capacity of the islands were severely degraded by oil drilling, sea bottom dredging and, more recently, sea reclamation for real estate development. As oil supplies dwindled, Bahrain positioned itself as a global hub for international banking and financial services, still a large sector of the economy today.
Baharna, Huwala, Persians, Najdis, Thattia Bhattias, and Jews

Bahrain is distinguished from the rest of the Arab Gulf states by its sociological diversity, a feature of its status as historic entrepôt. Social identities based on ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, and class intersect to create “a matrix of social relations unique to the islands.” Despite the diversity, social life in Bahrain is highly intimate. Doing ethnographic fieldwork in the mid-1970s, Khuri remarked that that his “friends and informants could tell [him] the various family groups in Bahrain, the social categories they belonged to, the history of their settlement in the country, their size, marriage patterns, occupations, and educational achievements.” My experiences in Bahrain confirm this sense of social intimacy among the old families of Bahrain.

Social identities in Bahrain are “historical traditions” that can incorporate reference to ancestral origin, religious affiliation, and in some cases, time of arrival to the islands. The largest social group is the Arab Shia, referred to as Baharna (single: Bahrani), who were historically the agriculturalists of the islands. Virtually all of them follow Twelver Shia Islam and the Jafari School of jurisprudence. Within this school, most used to follow the Akhbari tradition (the global minority) but today the ‘Usuli tradition is dominant. The Baharna were the settled community on the islands who comprised the bulk of the domestic economy. They have strong linguistic and ancestral ties to the Arab Shia of the eastern quarter of the Arabian Peninsula. Before the Portuguese conquest of the islands in 1521, al-Bahrain referred to the Bahrain islands
and to al-Hasa, the eastern province of Saudi Arabia that stretches from Kuwait to Qatar. The term Baharna serves to distinguish the Arab Shia from the Persians.

The Baharna are the social group that has been settled in Bahrain the longest. They are referred to in scholarly literature, and often refer to themselves, as the indigenous people of Bahrain. Historical evidence suggests, however, that the people in Bahrain were always more diverse than the idea of one indigenous community suggests. There were always sea-faring tribes and travelling merchants moving up and down the Gulf waters, either based in or travelling through Bahrain, for which the settled, agriculturalist history of the Baharna cannot account. To the extent that mariners and merchants were less likely to comprise a stable population, their indigenousness is arguably more debatable than it is for the Baharna, but the merchants and mariners were as much a part of the economy and life of the islands. This is not to say that the Baharna are not the indigenous people but that the claim reduces a more nuanced and, I would argue, historically accurate understanding of the diversity of Bahraini society throughout the ages.

When the al-Khalifa conquered Bahrain, there were at least two other stable social groups on the islands. The Huwala are Sunni Arabs who trace their lineage to the Arabian Peninsula but who at some point migrated to southern Persia for several generations or longer and eventually returned. Well-known Huwala family names such as Kanoo, Fakhro, Bastaki, and Khunji are all places in southern Iran. Historically, they followed the Shafi‘i school. Around 1750, there is evidence that the Huwala Arabs
were profitably involved in the pearling industry. \(^{54}\) Today, the Huwala are still among the richest of the commercial elite. There were also many Persians on the islands due to Persian suzerainty for nearly two centuries. Persians were part of the wealthy merchant elite and among the poor, laboring class in the pearling industry.

At the time of conquest, the Baharna comprised the bulk of the domestic economy based on date and grain cultivation, fishing and handicrafts, while the pearling industry was dominated by Huwala and Persian merchants who paid taxes to Persia’s agent. The al-Khalifa consolidated their rule by confiscating much of the agricultural land and organizing it into estates for members of the tribe, though the Baharna remained the cultivators of the land as they had the requisite horticultural knowledge, and remained in their historic villages. \(^{55}\) Baharna were recruited as managers of the palm groves and as tax collectors. The al-Khalifa interfered less in the trade and pearling activities of the islands since the mercantile elite were quite powerful. However, there is some evidence that the elite paid the al-Khalifa taxes on their annual profits as they had previously done to the al-Madkhur.

The al-Khalifa brought with them and were eventually followed by other Sunnis with historic ties to Najd. These “Najdis” were either part of the ‘Utub or were seeking favorable conditions under a fellow Najdi overlord. Zahlan distinguishes between the tribal Sunni who accompanied the al-Khalifa to Bahrain in 1783 (such as the al-Rumaihi, al-Musallam, Sudan, and al-Dawasir) and the non-tribal, urban Sunni merchants from Najd who came soon after (such as the al-Qusaibi and al-Zayani). \(^{56}\) In the colonial
sources, both groups are referred to as “Najdis” though it is not clear from the context whether the term refers to tribal allies or Sunni merchants from Najd (as opposed to the Huwala, Sunni merchants most recently from southern Persia claiming ancestral ties to the peninsula). The Najdis, like the al-Khalifa, traditionally followed the Maliki School. On the ground, the al-Khalifa relied on the loyalty of the other Sunni tribes to dominate the island and its predominantly Shia inhabitants and in return the al-Khalifa gave them tracts of land and favorable tax conditions. The al-Khalifa also ruled through the use of armed retainers referred to in colonial sources as “fidawis” or mercenaries drawn from “stray Arabs” with no traceable tribe or origin, slaves of African origin, and Baluchis.

It is likely that there were always merchants from the Indian subcontinent in and through Bahrain but the earliest record in the colonial archives and the secondary literature is of a group of Thattia Bhattias who settled in Bahrain around 1880. Known in the Gulf as “Banias,” Thattia Bhattias are a mostly Hindu community originating from what is today the Sindh province of Pakistan and the province of Rajasthan in India. They were successful merchants who took advantage of the increased trade between Bahrain and India while both were under British dominion. In the early 1900s, the reigning shaykh appointed Shri Gangara Tikamdas to be his tax accountant, and the records were kept in Sindi. At the end of the nineteenth century, several Iraqi Jewish families immigrated to Bahrain due to the booming pearl industry and commercial activity, though recent reporting suggests that Jews were settled in Bahrain before that time and that they came from Iran as well. In June of 1923, the British Political
Resident noted that Manama had about 20,000 people who were “cosmopolitan traders, Banias, Boras, Persians, Jews, British firms, and Paris pearl merchants.”

III. Threats on the Ground: Saud-Wahabis in the Nineteenth Century

This section details the threats against British policies in Bahrain emanating from the powerful neighbor to the immediate West, the Saud-Wahabis. Threats were at times direct and at other times they occurred through proxies in Bahrain. The period under review overlaps with the consolidation of Saudi Arabia, accomplished in three waves of Saud-Wahabi resurgence from 1744 to 1932. When the al-Khalifa first came into conflict with the Saud-Wahabis in 1830, the al-Khalifa still effectively controlled the port cities on the eastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula. The reigning Saud Amir of the time, like those who would come after him, desired control of this area for its abundance of fresh water springs and arable land not found in the interior. Along with agriculture came a stable and more easily taxable population. By the twentieth century, the al-Khalifa no longer controlled ports on the coast but Saud-Wahabi interest in Bahrain persisted owing to high tax revenues from the flourishing pearl industry.

Uncertain allies (1830-1831)

The British noted the Saud-Wahabi challenge to their allies in Bahrain as early as 1830 when the “Central Arabian Dynasty” re-established its power on al-Hasa under the leadership of Amir Turki bin Abdullah al-Saud. At this time, British policy was focused on preventing warfare at sea so that their commerce from India to Europe could proceed.
unobstructed. Since the British already had a treaty of maritime peace with the al-Khalifa, for which they had fought a war, they paid close attention to the Saud-Wahabi threat to their new found ally. After his ascension to power in al-Hasa, Amir Turki demanded that the al-Khalifa pay zakat as well as compensation for some horses left many years ago under the charge of the chief of the tribe, Shaykh Abdullah bin Ahmed. Amir Turki also demanded the al-Khalifa quit the fort at the port of Dammam, which was central to the import traffic into the eastern quarter. Failing to obtain the intervention of the British authorities, who were waiting to see how the situation panned out, Shaykh Abdullah recognized the renewed ascendancy of the Saud-Wahabi forces and paid the zakat (in German Crowns) but was allowed to remain in Dammam fort as reward for his submission. In return, Amir Turki agreed to protect the al-Khalifa from external aggression, a promise which they were suspicious of since the Amir had just appointed their historic enemies to rule over Tarut Island located between Bahrain and the oasis of Qatif in al-Hasa. Displeased with the curtailment of his sphere of influence, in 1834 Shaykh Abdulla was able to weaken Amir Turki’s hold on the coast cities by blockading the ports of Qatif and al-‘Uqayr with support of local residents, who were apparently not content with their new overlord. Shaykh Abdulla retook Tarut Island when Amir Turki was assassinated that same year by a distant cousin, who was soon killed by Turki’s son, Amir Faisal. The new Amir tried but failed to recover Tarut as Shaykh Abdullah effectively blockaded the port cities again.
Rapprochement between the al-Khalifa and the Saud-Wahabis occurred one year later when Shaykh Abdullah sought regional allies to stem the ambitions of the Government of Shiraz who was reconsidering its claim to sovereignty over Bahrain. Shaykh Abdullah offered to unblock the ports, to the benefit of the residents who had suffered from diminished trade, and Amir Faisal accepted the offering on the condition that the al-Khalifa pay zakat. Amir Faisal had his own reasons to build alliances at the time as he was facing Egyptian pressure on the western front of his domain in Diriyah located just northwest of Riyadh. In exchange for zakat, Shaykh Abdullah again received assurances of Saud-Wahabi protection.

First interventions (1850-1859)

Barely twenty years later, power struggles between the Saud-Wahabis and the al-Khalifa were again noted by the British, this time recorded by the “Native Agent” at Bahrain, Haji Abdul Jasim. Sent as a Persian official in 1839, Haji Jasim reported to the British Resident in Bushire and was by 1875 referred to as the British Political Agent. In May of 1850 there were reports concerning a possible invasion of Bahrain led by Amir Faisal bin Turki who was holding Qatif and edging his way down the eastern coast to al-Bida on the northwest coast of Qatar, a rich pearling site held by the al-Khalifa as a dependency of Bahrain. Unsure of Saud-Wahabi intentions, Shaykh Ali bin Khalifa (grand-nephew of the former Shaykh Abdullah), went to meet Amir Faisal’s agent with an offer of zakat for peace. The zakat was offered in imperial British crowns, reflecting the emergence of Britain as the dominant commercial power (as opposed to payment in
German Crowns in 1830). Through his messenger, the Amir replied that he did not want peace now and that if the al-Khalifa wanted peace they should wait for it, which Shaykh Ali obliged. However, when Shaykh Ali returned to Bahrain he told his brother and co-ruler Shaykh Muhammed bin Khalifa that he suspected Amir Faisal really wanted to take Bahrain. This was confirmed by another family member, Shaykh Rashid al-Khalifa, who spoke to a powerful local figure in Qatif, Ahmed Sudery, who had the ear of the Amir. Sudery had tried to dissuade the Amir from taking Bahrain since “that Island could only be held by those who are powerful at sea,” such as the al-Khalifa, to which Faisal replied that if he should take it he would turn it over to Sudery.

The al-Khalifa began preparing their ships and men for battle should Faisal attack. Another memo dated one year later claimed that war between the Chiefs of Bahrain and the Ruler of Najd was imminent.

The war never came to pass, in no small part owing to British military assistance to the Bahrain shaykhs. Faisal was able to take the forts at al-Bida but his designs on Bahrain failed when a British naval fleet, the Persian Gulf Squadron, docked at Bahrain to dissuade his ambitions, and the al-Khalifa were able to successfully blockade the port at Qatif, preventing Faisal from using it as a launching pad for an attack. After negotiations mediated by another tribe from al-Hasa, Faisal returned al-Bida to Shaykh Ali and agreed not to interfere in the business of the people on the northwest Qatari coast, who Shaykh Ali claimed to be under his rule. In exchange, Shaykh Muhammad, based in Bahrain, agreed to pay zakat to the Amir, though an extension was given on account of
depleted reserves owing to the costs of war.\textsuperscript{70} While the negotiations were taking place, the Saud Amir sent an emissary to the British Office in Bushire seeking direct relations with the British in managing his affairs with Bahrain, especially in forcing the al-Khalifa to pay zakat. The British show of force had apparently impressed on the Amir who the authority was to reckon with. The British refused his request on account that they did not involve themselves in the internal affairs of the islands and made clear that any payment should be interpreted as a religious matter in recognition of Wahabi religious authority and not as a tribute indicating the political subjugation of Bahrain.\textsuperscript{71}

Less than ten years later in 1859, the British were again forced to send their naval Squadron to Bahrain to deter Amir Faisal from an invasion. This time, the Amir was conspiring in concert with the cousin of the chief of Bahrain who was making claims to power by virtue of his grandfather having been the previous chief. The wayward cousin was based in Dammam and had been agitating against the current chief for some time with the support of Amir Faisal, who wanted to consolidate his control over the coast, which the al-Khalifa still effectively controlled from Dammam all the way down to the tip of Qatar. The Amir and his outcast al-Khalifa allies had stolen some Turkish and Persian vessels and were reportedly intent on forcing the crews to fight in the attack against Bahrain.\textsuperscript{72} Upon the arrival of the British Squadron, the Amir sent envoys to Bushire to protest that Bahrain was under his purview by virtue of Shaykh Muhammad’s agreement to pay zakat, and that much like British deference to territories under the reign of the Ottoman ruler Abdul Majid I, the British should recognize the Amir’s claims to
deal with Bahrain without their interference. The British reiterated their recognition of Bahrain as an “independent Chiefship” and their intention to oppose all “foreign” interests in it (excluding their own, of course).73

Saud-Wahabis, Persia, and the Ottomans (1860-1862)

Some months later, Shaykh Muhammad would court both the Persian and the Ottoman governments for protection. Ironically, his courtship generated barely a stir from British administrators, in contrast to their military responses to Amir Faisal. Upon learning of Shaykh Muhammad’s overtures, the Government of Bombay directed regional officials “not to interfere with any occupation of Bahrain either by Persia or Turkey, further than by protest.”74 The British believed that Shaykh Muhammad’s actions were a reaction to their intervention two years earlier on behalf of some Indian subjects of the Crown residing in Bahrain. These subjects had complained that the Shaykh was twice levying taxes on transit merchandise (as imports and exports) and that the Shaykh had blocked a trade vessel carrying the British flag from landing at Qatif.75 In response to British meddling, which was not warranted under their treaties, the Shaykh dispatched a messenger to Baghdad to offer allegiance to the Ottomans, the representative of which was unavailable for a response at the time. In the meantime, the Shaykh sent a similar message to the Prince of Fars in southwestern Persia, who sent a deputy to Bahrain to hoist the flag and declare Persian sovereignty over the islands. When the Ottoman deputy arrived shortly thereafter to accept the al-Khalifa offer of submission, the Persian flag was taken down and an Ottoman one hoisted up but the
Persian deputy refused to leave. These events barely caused a stir on the part of the British.

Colonial communications about Bahrain in the year 1860 assess the three potential threats to British policy: Saud-Wahabi, Persian, and Ottoman. The disparity between the British response to the Saud-Wahabi threat versus the Persian and Ottoman threats points to the different nature of the threats themselves as the British perceived them. In response to the Persian and Ottoman claims, the Bombay Government dispatched orders not to intervene in any military capacity:

As actual resort to force, which might be justifiable under Article IV of the Treaty with the Shaykhs of Bahrain of 1820, for the coercion of the Chief, should, if possible, be avoided, as tending to engage the British Government in hostilities not merely with a petty Chief in the Gulf, but with one or other of two power at present in alliance with England.76

Alliances with the Persians and the Ottomans were not the only or most significant reason for non-intervention, judging by how the matter was discussed. The more important factor was that such occupations were “deemed improbable” by the British.77 Sir Henry Rawlinson, a former East Indian Company officer in charge of training the Shah’s military, “pointed out to the Shah’s Ministers that the assertion of a right of sovereignty over Bahrain without the means of realizing that right, or accepting its obligations is simply ridiculous and may place them in a very awkward and undignified position.”78 Captain Lewis Pelly, another former East India Company officer who was the Secretary of Legislation at the Court of Persia, reported that the Shah’s Government had given him assurances that no steps would be taken regarding Persia-Bahrain relations without
Britain’s recognition of Persian suzerainty. He also reported that requests to Tehran from the Bahrain shaykh for arms, ammunition and troops had been refused.⁷⁹

In contrast, the Government of Bombay continued to express strong concern over the Saud-Wahabi threat even after the war ship had deterred attack. Orders from the India Office approved by the Secretary of State instructed the Bushire Resident to “sternly control any attempt of any neighbouring tribe, or confederation of tribes, to assail the integrity of Bahrain… [such that] the tranquility of the Gulf, the security of the maritime tribes, and the prestige of British authority will be preserved.”⁸⁰ While the Saud-Wahabi threat was a concrete and credible one on the ground which the British could not avert diplomatically, the Persian and Ottoman threats were treated with mockery, disbelief, and no military action.

The next time the British naval Squadron was called upon in 1861 it was again to avert confrontation between the al-Khalifa and the Saud Amir but this time stemming from the actions of Shaykh Muhammad of Bahrain. The shaykh had blockaded the ports at Dammam and Qatif and was harassing the trade and pearling fisheries there. The British policy in the Gulf was to enforce a climate of non-aggression among the Arab tribes. They had information that the Shaykh was acting with Persian assurances of support by way of a French vessel (that never appeared). When the British naval fleet arrived to induce the Shaykh to cease his activities, he ignored them, which officials explained by his expectation of Persian support. Failing to intimidate the Shaykh with verbal admonitions, a British warship surrounded the six al-Khalifa vessels, leaving him
no choice but to submit. British military action elicited a protest from the Ottoman Governor General of Baghdad who claimed that by sailing so close to Dammam, the British fleet had entered an area formally under Ottoman dominion since Amir Faisal was their agent. Ottoman Empire intermittently since the mid-sixteenth century and when the Saud-Wahabis conquered it in 1830, they defeated another Arab tribe ruling as Ottoman agents. The British replied that they maintained direct relations with the chiefs of the Gulf, including the Amir, and as a policy did not acknowledge the authority of any other state over the Gulf shores.81

The confrontation between the Shaykh and the Amir led the British to conclude the “Treaty of Perpetual Maritime Peace” with the Shaykh on May 21, 1861. The treaty bound the Shaykh to all past treaties and to abstain from maritime aggression of all kinds as long as the British government maintained the security of al-Khalifa “possessions against similar aggression directed at them by the Chiefs and tribes of the Gulf.”82 In addition, British subjects of every denomination were to be allowed to reside in Bahrain and carry on lawful trade as long as they paid a five percent ad valorem and all offenses committed by or against them should be dealt with by the British government.

The title prefix of al-Khalifa signatories changed over time in both English and Arabic reflecting changing perceptions of their political status vis-à-vis Bahrain. The first treaty in 1820 was signed by Shaykh Suleiman bin Ahmed and Shaykh Abdullah bin Ahmed “of the family or house of al-Khalifa” and without a title in Arabic.83 The Perpetual Peace Treaty of 1861 was signed in English, “Shaykh Muhammad bin Khalifa,
Independent Ruler of Bahrain, on the part of him and his successors,” and in Arabic, 
Shaykh Muhammad bin Khalifa ḥākim al-Bahrain bi-l-istiqlāl min ẓaraḥ nafsi-hi wa-
ahlāfu-ha.\textsuperscript{84} It was first treaty in which the shaykh signed as Independent Ruler or ḥākim 
al-Bahrain, the first treaty in which the British promised to protect him as such, and the first treaty in which the concept of “successors” was used.

Despite British military intervention to open the ports, one year later a report from Bushire informed the Foreign Office that a peace had yet to be reached between Amir Faisal and the Chief of Bahrain, and that war between the two parties was “inevitable.”\textsuperscript{85} The war did not come to pass since Amir Faisal died in 1865, after which the supremacy of the al-Saud tribe declined until the early twentieth century. The Ottoman army occupied al-Hasa in 1871, extending their rule down the shores of the Gulf to Qatar but not over to Bahrain.\textsuperscript{86}

\textit{Distinctive registers}

Colonial reaction to the events of 1860 to 1862 illustrates distinct interpretative registers for the Saud-Wahabi threat to Bahrain as opposed to the Persian and Ottoman ones. The discrepancy between British responses to these threats reflected the extent to which the British perceived them as plausible. The Saud-Wahabis posed a threat “on the ground” while Persia and the Ottomans made what may be called “formal” threats. “On the ground” refers to contestations involving the credible threat or the use of military power to determine who would reside in or appoint loyal rulers to the islands. “Formal” refers to claims to dominion made without the show of military might on the ground to
force them, claims that local rulers may have solicited, could ignore (potentially to their peril), or could indulge for their own strategic reasons. Naturally, theorizing the concreteness of the Saud-Wahabi presence and the formalism of the Persian and Ottoman ones does not suggest that other political actors were not concrete or formal. Overtures of a non-military nature were made among the Arab tribes themselves and the British presence after 1820 was the most concrete in terms of military and commercial strength. Even if we accept the distinction, these two aspects of political power clearly interact as formal claims are more effective when accompanied by a credible threat of military action. However, this analytical distinction makes sense in the case of nineteenth century threats to British protectionism in Bahrain and it contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the complexity of political power in the early colonial era.

*A new role for Britain (circa 1920)*

The Saud-Wahabi threat to British policies in Bahrain re-emerged in the early 1920s. By this time, the al-Saud tribe had re-asserted its supremacy over al-Hasa, capturing it from Ottoman control in 1913 under the leadership of Abdul Aziz bin Rahman bin Faisal al-Saud (“Ibn Saud”), grandson of the late Amir Faisal. The ruler of Bahrain, Shaykh Isa bin Ali bin Khalifa Al-Khalifa (nephew of the late Shaykh Muhammad bin Khalifa) had been installed by the British as the Chief of Bahrain in 1869 to end a family feud that had destabilized the islands. Shaykh Ali was brought to Bahrain from the Qatari coast where his father Shaykh Ali bin Khalifa had presided over
the northwest shores of Qatar until a British treaty recognized the al-Thani tribe as rulers of Qatar in 1867.89

British mediation in a customs dispute between Shaykh Isa and Ibn Saud in the year 1920 illustrates the new role that Britain had come to play in the politics of Bahrain. In 1916, Shaykh Isa had voluntarily lowered customs tax on goods in transit to the Arabian Peninsula from five percent to two percent in order to increase trade, which dropped precipitously during World War I.90 In 1920, Shaykh Isa reinstated a transit tax of five percent, much to the detriment of the merchants in al-Hasa. Imports from the Far East to ports in the peninsula (Qatif, Ojair and Jubail) stopped in Bahrain and were transferred onto smaller boats to traverse the narrow waters between Bahrain and al-Hasa. Ibn Saud appealed to Shaykh Isa directly to lower the transit tax but received no response. He then sent his complaint on to the British Resident in Bushire for assistance. Apparently, Shaykh Isa was unmoved by the Resident’s appeal to lower the tax and agreed to do so only by direct order from the British Government and not because Ibn Saud had requested it.91 The British eventually did send such orders on the basis that five percent was far above what was recognized by international law as a reasonable transit tax. The Shaykh complied but not without a letter of protest: “It is the first time I understand that International Laws apply to two Arab Rulers.”92

Much of the colonial inroads into the domestic affairs of Bahrain were made during the tenure of Shaykh Isa. The erosion of traditional mechanisms of tribal accountability through colonial intervention occurred most noticeably during his reign.
Shaykh Isa was particularly dependent on British approval as he was made tribal chief through their influence rather than via the approval of tribal elders or victory against a competitor. In 1880, he signed a treaty in which he bound himself and his successors to abstain from entering into negotiations or making treaties with any foreign power, especially as regards coaling depots, without British approval; this was reaffirmed in 1892. In 1900, the post of British Political Agent was upgraded from a “native” appointment to a British one, increasing British scrutiny inside Bahrain. In 1901, Shaykh Isa requested and was granted British recognition of his eldest son, Hamad, as heir apparent, despite primogeniture not being the traditional rule of tribal succession.

In 1907, the Government of India adopted the Order in Council codifying the judicial powers of the Political Agent regarding “foreigners” in the islands, which were assumed two years earlier. The Agent was also involved in advancing British commercial interests inside the islands by overseeing the construction of a pier in the urban center of Manama and, after the discovery of commercial quantities of oil in the early 1930s, soliciting the Shaykh’s guarantee that oil concessions would not be made without British approval.

The case for internal “reform” (1920-1923)

While there was a lull in colonial attention to Bahrain during World War I, involvement after the war quickly evolved into a policy of state centralization. The decision to transition British policy from maintaining maritime peace to active state-making was driven by a number of factors, including, decisively, the re-emergent threat
of Saud-Wahabi power to the East. Other factors included the increasing social unrest in the islands, international press activism by the Baharna, and Persian challenges to British domination in the post-war international context of emerging nations. Both Ibn Saud and the Government of Persia took the opportunity posed by social unrest in Bahrain to pursue their own interest in the islands, and colonial officers discussed and disputed the nature of these two threats. The theoretical distinction that this study makes between the Saud-Wahabi threat as being “on the ground” and the Persian threat as being “formal” is nowhere more apparent than in the events and colonial debates that unfolded in the first few years after World War I.

In 1919 when Major H. R. P. Dickson arrived in Manama as the new Political Agent he found the state of affairs to be “whole unsatisfactory” as there was “a strong anti-British sentiment which is long-standing and deep-seated” and “British prestige rests on entirely false standards, namely fear and not on respect.” He set about to change this situation through a series of “reforms,” starting in 1920 with the establishment of the Manama municipality and new regulations to govern conduct in the city, as well as the formal abolishment of fidawis having allegiance to senior al-Khalifa shaykhs (though the practice remained) and the establishment of a civil guard under command of the municipal council with half the members appointed by the al-Khalifa chief and half appointed by the Agent. In 1920 Major Clive K. Daly replaced Dickson and appointed a leading Persian merchant as secretary of the municipality and head of the city’s market police, all of whom were Persian as well. British reliance on Persian civil servants
during the 1920s when facing the threat of another Sunni tribes contrasts sharply with British treatment of Bahraini Persians in the 1930s and 1940s when the central political threat emanated from Tehran.

In addition to his own incentives for reform, widespread disquiet among the Baharna was soon brought to the Agent’s attention. On December 21, 1921, several thousand Bahrainis from the “outlying villages and gardens” made their way to the British Agency in Manama to meet the Political Resident visiting from the Office of the Consular-General across the waters in Bushire. A local notable and merchant named Khan Sahib Muhammed Sharif, described by the Political Agent as the “head of the Persian community,” intercepted the crowd and made a deal with its leader, “the head of the Bahrain community,” to arrange a meeting with the Resident for a small delegation. The records of this incident reveal British awareness of the social distinction between the Baharna and the Persians and the fact that these two communities did not necessarily act together politically.

The Resident at the time, The Honorable Lieutenant-Colonel A. P. Trevor, interviewed the delegation in the Agency courtroom where he was told story after story of abuse by various members of the al-Khalifa. The Resident said that he would talk to the British Government to see what could be done but the delegation pressed for an immediate solution to one case in particular: a man and his father were attacked in their beds at night by a senior shaykh and while the father was killed, the son survived an attempt to cut his throat. Upon recovery, the son was thrown into jail by a son of the
Ruler and nephew of the accused. Eventually released, the survivor of the attack was warned to make a declaration that he did not know who the attacker was or he would be thrown in jail again. Owing to agitation among the delegation, the Resident felt compelled to put the man under the jurisdiction and protection of the British Agency pending further investigation. The Resident was presented with a petition signed “from all the Shias of Bahrain” within which the authors appealed to the British as “the Chief of the Gulf” to protect them from the injustices of misrule.

In his account to the Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, the Resident wrote,

It is obviously not desirable to make the Agency into a Court of Appeal against the decisions of the Shaykh, but on the other hand, as the deputation pointed out, Bahrain subjects are afraid to take the law into their own hands as the Shaykh is under our protection, and they urge, with same reason, that we ought in consequence to take steps to prevent the Shaykh from abusing his authority.

Apparently having heard of the delegation’s visit to the Agency, Shaykh Isa sought out the Resident and produced copies of the treaties made between himself and the British, pointing out that he had kept them to the best of his ability.

Upon further investigation by the Agent and the Resident into the allegations, several reports were sent to the India Office detailing the instances and types of misrule. Public agitation had been building up for some time owing to judicial corruption, land confiscation, money extortion and irregular taxation, abduction and rape of daughters and sons without recourse for parents, political murder, and forced labor of Shias on religious holidays, which they could only avoid by paying a fine. While examples of judicial
corruption involved historically Sunni family names, the cases of political murder and tax extortion were associated with historically Shia families.\textsuperscript{105} The Agent attributed many of these abuses to one son of the Ruler who remained unchecked by his father.\textsuperscript{106} Summarizing the sentiment of the public, the Resident wrote to his superiors in Delhi:

It is said to me that, if we extend our protection to the Bahrain Government, so that it is immune from outside danger, we should use our influence effectually, in order that the inhabitants not be unduly oppressed, and that they should have reasonably efficient Government in comparison with other Arab states. “Failing this,” I am asked, “Why do you not remove the British protection, then we would at least have the redress usually resorted to by Arabs. We should appeal to another Arab ruler to take over our country and treat us better.” I respectfully submit that these representations made on most adequate grounds, as we have ample proof, [and] are worthy of consideration.\textsuperscript{107}

Several months later, Agent Daly learnt that a major contributor to al-Khalifa revenue other than customs tariffs was the inequitable taxation of the Baharna. These included date garden taxes “collected quite arbitrarily... [and] practically from the Shia only”, a poll tax levied on Shia males at varying rates in different villages, a fixed tax levied from Shia only at varying rates, a special tax on Shia during their religious holidays, and a variety of other taxes collected from Shia only.\textsuperscript{108} While the Sunnis who were heavily involved in the highly lucrative pearling industry used to provide tax revenues to the al-Khalifa, a large number of them had ceased payment several years ago, leading the al-Khalifa to overtax the Baharna to compensate.\textsuperscript{109} According to Daly, without the revenues from the Baharna the al-Khalifa would go bankrupt and the British Government would have to take over internal affairs completely.\textsuperscript{110}
By March of 1922, the sons of the Ruler had stopped collecting taxes from the Baharna for fear of revolt. This was precipitated by several events, including a warning from the British Government to the al-Khalifa that if their misrule led to an uprising, the British could not be relied on to intervene. In February of 1922, a man was arrested and brutally beaten for a charge that the Baharna suspected was made up. When Shaykh Isa sent his fidawis to the Manama bazaar to have the man arrested again, a crowd of Baharna released the man by force, overpowering the fidawis. The Baharna proceeded to close their shops, which constituted about two-thirds of the bazaar, and gathered in large numbers to obtain redress from the shaykh. The outcome was that three merchant notables (a Huwala, a Najdi Sunni merchant, and a Persian) took a delegation from the crowd to meet with Shaykh Isa and his sons.

After two days of discussion, the delegation and the sons of the shaykh came to several agreements. Many of these were related to the regularization of the judicial system: no one except Shaykh Isa and his eldest son Shaykh Hamad should adjudicate legal cases and those which could not be settled to the satisfaction of both parties should be referred to another court (the shari‘a, majlis al-tijāra for commercial affairs, or the salaf court for the pearl diving industry), no one was to be dragged off to the shaykhs without notice but should be served a summons by Shaykh Hamad, and no laws other than those written in documents were enforceable. Other agreements related to economic exploitation: there was to be compulsory bookkeeping in the pearl diving industry, the practice of putting calves belonging to the al-Khalifa (whom the British now referred to
as “the ruling family”) with bakers to fatten for free had to stop, and the implementation of a unified tax code that would apply without reference to religious affiliation.\textsuperscript{112}

When word spread of Shaykh Isa’s consent to a unified tax code, problems emerged with the Sunni tribes who had escaped taxation for years. The shaykh of the Dawasir tribe, the largest and most powerful ally of the al-Khalifa, as well as the shaykh of the smaller al-Lahaj tribe, sent a delegation to Ibn Saud on the mainland informing him of the coming tax code which would effectively treat them as equally subject to al-Khalifa rule as the Baharna whom the al-Khalifa ruled only by aid of the allied tribes.\textsuperscript{113} The Dawasir and al-Lahaj received assurances from Ibn Saud that they would be supported in resisting such reforms, either by force or by moving to al-Hasa and leaving their lands in Bahrain. The al-Khalifa needed the cooperation of the tribal families to avoid losing control of the islands since the Sunnis were the numerical minority and the Najdis even more so. The Sunni tribes also had large ownership interest in the pearling boats and would be unlikely to concede their diving sites on the Bahrain banks when they left the islands, in which case Ibn Saud would be able to profit from the lucrative Bahrain pearling industry, undoubtedly his motive.

The Political Resident explained to the India Office that only popular rebellion would drive the al-Khalifa to reform in this situation since they could not afford to lose their tribal allies nor would they stand up to the Dawasir if they were allied with Ibn Saud. According to the Resident, the al-Khalifa “have great dread” of Ibn Saud and his army, the Ikhwan, and have always been somewhat afraid of the Dawasir.\textsuperscript{114} Fuad Khuri
writes about another tribe that left the islands because of a dispute with the al-Khalifa in 1895, the bin ‘Ali, and how this was essentially a threat of war: “Many an emigrating tribe left for the mainland to organize war parties against the regime and harass its boats and trade.” The difference was that in 1895, there was no Saud-Wahabi force on the other side of the stream.

In July of 1922, the Agent reported that the Sunni tribes and the Dawasir in particular had been picking fights with the Baharna in an effort to force the hand of Shaykh Hamad against them, testing the loyalty of the al-Khalifa to their historic allies. The Dawasir and other Najdi tribes had always been given a free with the Baharna in exchange for their support of the al-Khalifa as the rulers of the islands. Due to the threat of Dawasir defection or worse, Shaykh Isa’s willingness to introduce reforms waned, and popular disaffection deepened. The Resident turned to the Government of India for directions on how to proceed, suggesting that the only way to achieve reform inconspicuously was to force the succession of Shaykh Hamad who could introduce reforms as his idea. He would require, however, substantial support from the British in order to overpower resistance from Najdi tribes and Ibn Saud.

While the threat of Ibn Saud was building on the ground in Bahrain, the Government of India was becoming increasingly concerned that mistreatment of the Baharna would fuel international sympathy for Persian challenges to British “protectionism.” Persian protest was vocalized on the international stage in the summer of 1921 and was strengthened one year later by Baharna press activism against British
complicity in their plight.\textsuperscript{120} By March of 1922, the problem of social unrest and its impact on Persian aims in the Gulf was being discussed not only between colonial administrators in Bushire and India but had moved up the chain of command to the Foreign Office in London and was under review by some of the highest decision-makers in the Empire.\textsuperscript{121} In a series of telegrams, the Under Secretary of State in the India Office (Delhi) wrote to the Under Secretary of State in the Foreign Office (London) noting that social unrest would “furnish a most useful opportunity for our enemies in South Persia and elsewhere for emphasizing to the Persian Shia that their co-religionists in Bahrain have for years apparently suffered gross injustice, if not at the hands of the British Government, at all events with their connivance.”\textsuperscript{122} Both the Foreign and the Colonial Offices in London were consulted in authorizing India to pursue reforms in Bahrain by forcing Shaykh Isa’s abdication.\textsuperscript{123} After a year with no improvement in Shaykh Isa’s willingness to reform, in April of 1923 the Viceroy of India sent permission to the Resident to force fiscal and administrative reforms by deposing Shaykh Isa and, if necessary, deporting resistant family members to India. The Viceroy sternly stipulated that Shaykh Isa’s retirement and the ensuing reforms must appear completely voluntary and not undertaken at the behest of the British.\textsuperscript{124}

\textit{The “Najdi” crisis (April, 1923)}

Just as the Viceroy sent his permission for forced abdication, which the Resident had suggested a year earlier, the situation in the ground took a precipitous turn for the worst. On April 20, 1923, a clash took place in the Manama bazaar between a “Persian”
and a “Najdi,” which developed into rioting between a group of “Persians” and “Najdis.” While the Persians telegraphed to Tehran about their insecurity in Bahrain, the Agent reported that the clashes were instigated by Ibn Saud’s commercial agent, al-Qusaibi, who had incited the Najdis to violence against the Persians and in the end was apologetic, offering compensation for Persian injuries. But his repentance was short-lived.

On May 10, rioting between Persians and Najdis was again noted, and again, Ibn Saud’s Agent was culpable. This time, a boy in the service of al-Qusaibi had stolen a broken watch from al-Qusaibi’s home and sold it to a Persian in the market. When another of al-Qusaibi’s servants saw the watch in the store he demanded that it be returned, to which the storekeeper agreed as long as his expenses for repairing it were recouped. Abdullah al-Qusaibi went to the store, taking two of his Najdis, and demanded that the watch be returned without payment, which the storekeeper refused. Al-Qusaibi’s men forced the man to go with them to visit a Persian notable named Muhammad Sharif who took it upon himself to pay the storekeeper his expenses, returned the watch to al-Qusaibi, and assumed the matter settled. However, a short time thereafter, the shopkeeper and another Persian returned to Muhammad Sharif’s office bleeding profusely from dagger wounds, which they claimed were inflicted by the Najdis in al-Qusaibi’s service. Muhammad Sharif called al-Qusaibi and asked him to send the Najdis to the British Agency to let the Agent work out the dispute but al-Qusaibi preferred to make his own investigation.
Meanwhile, word of the stabbings travelled throughout the market and Persians and Najdis starting fighting each other, the Najdis armed with lathis and the Persians using sticks they picked up off the ground (it’s not clear if the British observer used the term lathi because of his familiarity with India or if the same weapon was actually used in Bahrain). When Muhammad Sharif and al-Qusaibi made their way to the Agency, Sharif asked the Agent to sent his guards to stop the fighting in the market. The Agent asked al-Qusaibi and Sharif to accompany him to the market to use their influence to stop the fighting but al-Qusaibi refused. The Agent dispatched his guards and sent several messengers to spread the word that the guards were on their way. By the time the Agent arrived with Sharif and other notables (he was careful to take two Arab notables with him to avoid seeming partial to the Persian side), the fighting had ceased and the Najdis were nowhere in sight. However, there were two dead and two wounded Persians, and one dead and one wounded Najdi. Al-Qusaibi arrived in the bazaar with a gang of Najdis, incensed about those from his side who were dead and wounded. He took the opportunity to demand that the municipal police, who were all Persians, be barred from carrying shot guns as it made the Najdis insecure, even though the police had not fired a single shot to quell the riots. Wanting to avoid further violence until the matter was resolved, the Agent asked Shaykh Hamad to order the police to put their guns in the Agency, which they did.

The next day another alarming and urgent report was sent by the Resident to the Government of India: “Disturbances continue. Najdis apparently uncontrollable and it is
doubtful whether Shaykh arrangements sufficient to stop serious rioting, in which case there is a danger of British interests suffering.” Attempting to take revenge for the events of yesterday, Najdis were “hawasing” in front of the houses of Shaykh Hamad and Shaykh Isa in Muharraq. Shaykh Hamad ordered that no boats were to leave Muharraq for Manama but the Najdis seized the boats. Five large boats crowded with Najdis armed with magazine rifles were observed coming from Muharraq drawing in at the Agency. The occupants carried flags and were “hawasing” and firing rifles. Al-Qusaibi was sent by the Agent to turn them back. As they were disembarking, he argued with them for some time but was unable to control them as they pressed on to the shore. The Agency was located in the Persian quarter and there were Persians in the Agency so the Agent, wary of more bloodshed, had the naval detachment pull up near the shore and asked al-Qusaibi to inform the Najdis that if they landed, the detachment would take fire. This dissuaded them and they returned to Muharraq. Until the gunboat arrived later that day, the Agent told the Persians to remain in their homes and to keep their shops closed.

The Agent reported that Qusaibi was “genuinely alarmed” at being unable to control the Najdis, who were supposed to be under his influence. Two days later, the Najdis were still walking around in town with daggers and rifles, which the al-Khalifa fidawis were too scared to take away. When the Agent asked the al-Khalifa shaykhs to arrest al-Qusaibi for his failure to keep the peace, they replied that they were too scared of Ibn Saud to do so, and that the Agent should do it himself.
Debating the threats (May, 1923)

After the escalating violence in April, the Resident concluded that the previously considered policy of forced abdication and reforms, which the Residency had sought permission for in July of 1922 and received in April of 1923, was too risky. The situation on the ground was far too precarious given the outbursts by Najdi fighters who were loyal to Ibn Saud. The Resident argued that the deposition of Shaykh Isa and the exile of family members would anger both Ibn Saud and the Sunni tribes, tainting Shaykh Hamad by association and rendering him useless as an instrument of reform. In addition, the recent departure of Sir Percy Cox from the peninsula, the only one who could effectively reason with Ibn Saud, as well as the cessation of Ibn Saud’s British subsidy left the Sultan less vested in complying with British interests. The large Shia population in al-Hasa meant that any equalization of Sunni-Shia taxation in Bahrain would put pressure on Ibn Saud to do the same. The Resident further reasoned that Persia would not be placated by the reforms since Persian motives were not to liberate the Baharna but to disgrace the British in the international theater by way of a tribunal on Bahraini sovereignty. The recent outbursts by Najdis in Bahrain “merely emphasize the acute and pressing danger of Wahabism, before which Persian claims and reforms recede into insignificance.” In lieu of reform, he requested permission to eject Ibn Saud’s agent from the islands with a letter for Ibn Saud detailing the reasons for it and requesting that any future Agent limit himself to commercial activities and be approved by the British.
In making his case, he ended with the warning that if the British were to leave Bahrain, “it will not be the Persians but the Wahabis who would succeed us.”

The Viceroy wrote back that the Resident “overlooks the fact that the Foreign Office consider that the time has come to face the direct issue with Persia; that should Persia be so ill-advised as to appeal to the League of Nations over Bahrain, our acquiescence in the misrule would perhaps be the really serious flaw in our case.” The Viceroy suggested that the Resident use “Persian pretentions” to scare the Shaykh into pursuing reform but also gave permission for the Resident to eject Ibn Saud’s agent and send a warning about “Najdi interference.”

What emerges from the juxtaposition of the concerns of the Viceroy with the concerns of officials on the ground in Bahrain is the analytical distinction between the formal threat of Persia and the concrete threat of Ibn Saud and his army.

In an effort to reconcile their differing perceptions of the nature of the threat to British interests, the Resident suggested a compromise: the virtual abdication of Shaykh Isa, who would nominally retain his title but would allow Shaykh Hamad to govern as his deputy. However, the Resident warned that,

Hamad’s great difficulty will be the terror Ibn Saud has inspires in him as well as elsewhere on the Arabian Gulf coast, notably Kuwait, for the Dawasir and others aggrieved will certainly turn to Ibn Saud, but if, in spite of this, we can establish his authority firmly, other reforms will come of themselves with our guidance...

To manage such a charge, the Agent in Bahrain would need an Assistant to take over the Order in Council and petty day-to-day matters so that the Agent could focus on guiding Hamad and tending to the delicate relation with Ibn Saud. In an equally conciliatory
tone, the Viceroy conceded that the Government had “throughout recognized that the Ibn Saud reaction [to reform was] one of the major and, may be, dominating factors in the Bahrain case.”

**Forced succession (May 26, 1923)**

On May 20, Shaykh Isa was informed by the Resident of their plan for his retirement (though he had been warned of the possibility for some months). Shaykh Isa told the Resident to “consult the tribes of Bahrain” to see if they desired his resignation and if so, to bring him a letter saying so. The Resident replied that the Shaykh knew very well that the only tribes of “any significance” in Bahrain were the al-Khalifa and the Dawasir, both of whom preferred the status quo as it afforded them complete freedom to do as they will. The Shaykh sent around a petition in his support organized by his Baharna supporters that all of the Shia in Bahrain were reportedly ordered to sign but few did. In response, the Baharna circulated two of their own petitions addressed to the Resident testifying, again, to their suffering over the last twenty years due to Shaykh Isa’s toleration of all malfeasance committed by his own family members and his Najdi allies. To facilitate the transition of power, the Resident ordered the Director of Customs, a British subject from Sindh, to henceforth pay all revenues directly to Shaykh Hamad rather than dispensing cash to any family member who may request it. At this point, Shaykh Isa threatened to leave Bahrain and take his Najdi allies with him, to which the Resident caustically replied that proper retirement accommodations could be arranged for him in Bombay or Ceylon.
The ceremony (majlis) to transfer power was held at the British Agency. Commercial and community leaders from both Sunni and Shia backgrounds were in attendance, along with a number of English residents and visitors. Shaykh Hamad and his brother, Shaykh Abdullah invited Sunni leaders to attend, though many of them took leave directly from Shaykh Isa to do so, which he gave on account of Shaykh Hamad being his son and the rightful heir apparent. In a row at the head of the majlis sat Shaykh Hamad, Resident Knox, Captain Coleridge of His Majesty’s Ship “Cyclamen”, Agent Daly, and Shaykh Abdullah. Hamad’s accession speech, written in close consultation with the Agent, was delivered by his third brother Shaykh Muhammad, “the poet of the family.” The Resident also gave a speech in which, among other things, he addressed the Dawasir and Sunni tribes directly, saying,

Gentlemen of the Sunni persuasion and especially the Dawasir tribesmen: It is for you to understand that we mean to establish the rule of these Islands under a Shaykh of the al-Khalifa and that the Shaykh’s rights are going to be enforced equally over all to the best of Shaykh Hamad’s ability and in such attempts he will have the full support. You have frequently met such threats in the past by a counter threat to leave these Islands in a body and go over to Bin Saud or others. If that is your intention, in God’s name, go! But, if you resign as a protest, do not be surprised if your lands and houses are confiscated to the State and given to others, and I can assure you that there will be no lack of applicants…We have no use for absentee landlords or persons owning a double allegiance…If you reside in the Islands of Bahrain, you must, while owning property there, conform to the rule of the country and pay the customary dues, nor can be tolerated an imperium in imperio.

The Resident also took the opportunity to outline the nature of the some of the reforms that would occur under Shaykh Hamad, such as levying taxes equally and non-arbitrarily, reform of the pearling industry, and the state monopolization of judicial authority.
The most striking difference after succession was the extent to which Shaykh Hamad, as opposed to his father, did not undertake political decisions without the Agent’s approval. The British were well-aware of the intensity with which they were getting involved in the internal affairs of Bahrain. On June 30, 1923, the Resident wrote to the Foreign Secretary in India, “I had already sounded a note of warning in my telegram…that there was grave danger that this position in Bahrain might approximate to that of Muscat.”

Pearling industry and reforms (1915-1923)

The socio-economic group that mounted the most resistance to the proposed reforms was the *nakhūdas*, the owners and captains of the pearling boats, who were predominantly Najdis or other tribal Sunnis. They were accustomed to averting taxation under Shaykh Isa and were not pleased by the prospect of regular and enforced payments. The new state had a strong interest in taxing the pearling industry as one of the largest commercial enterprises on the islands and potentially a source of steady revenue for state-building. Before describing the resistance to reforms, it is useful to understand a bit about the pearling industry and how the reforms were intended to affect it.

There were three main classes of those working in the industry: the crew, the financiers, and the *nakhūdas*. The *nakhūda* was the captain of the pearl fishing boat. The crew included the divers, the haulers (whose job it was to pull up the divers), the extra hands (who assisted the haulers), and an apprentice (whose duty it was to catch fish,
cook, look after the water pipes, make coffee and attend to other minor duties). Each boat had ten to forty people. The *nakhūda* was about seventy-five percent of the time the owner of the boat which he commanded or working on a boat owned collectively by his tribal group. Otherwise, he was the hirer of a boat or the employee of a boat owner.

Pearl diving was capital-intensive as the *nakhūdas* had to fit and provision their vessels for the five month pearling season (May through September) and pay advances to the crew so their families would be taken care of while they were away for the season. Customary laws pertaining to debt were enforced by a local tribunal, referred to as the salaf, presided over by the merchant financiers (but which the local qadis would have nothing to do with). The boat owner would take a large advance of grain from a prominent merchant at about a twenty percent interest rate. (The merchants generally would not make cash loans due to religious injunctions on charging interest on cash.) The owner would sell this grain to convert it into cash with which he paid his crew in advance at the start of the season (the *salaf*). The owner would pass on the merchant’s interest rate to the crew, subtracting the *salaf* plus interest from their seasonal earnings. As such, at the end of each pearl season the crew received practically nothing, forcing them to take another advance (the *ṭiqsām*) from the boat owner to survive until next year’s season. To pay the *ṭiqsām*, the boat owner would again take a grain advance from the merchant and pass along the high interest rate to his crew, taking it out of their shares from the next season. The end result was that crew would never be out of debt to their boat owner due to the advances, and according to customary law no crew member...
was allowed to leave the services of an owner to whom he owed money, meaning that the crew members could be perpetually bound in debt.  

The Agent reported in 1923 that this process of recurring debt was made worse by the fact that the nakhūdas did not always keep written accounts and that the crew never had copies of these accounts. The Resident noted that this was by no means unique to Bahrain but that since it was by far the largest industry, reform would have the most far-reaching impact. Local qadis informed the Agent that abuses had gotten worse over the last few decades because of the greed created by the exponential increase in pearling profits.

Around 1923, most of the pearling fleets were owned by Najdi and other Sunni tribes. The al-Khalifa did not pearl dive themselves but charged tax on the sale of pearls. There were only a handful of merchants who were able to afford selling grain on credit, including Yusuf Kanoo and Yusuf Fakhro. The crew members were nearly all British-protected subjects: Africans, Arabs who were not Najdis (i.e. from south Persia or Shia Arabs), Persians, and Baluchis.

The most significant “reform” was the mandatory keeping of written accounts which nakhūdas were required to present to the court when asked. This was, in fact, already expected in customary law and the local qadis were the first to support it. A nakhūda who did not present his accounts would have the payments owed to him nullified and could be imprisoned for three years or fined if he were found cheating his crew. Government-approved clerks were staffed at the customs house to help nakhūdas
with their book-keeping and *nakūdas* were required to give each crew member an updated copy of his individual account at the start and end of each season; no payments were to be made that were not entered into the personal accounting book. Standardized accounting forms and booklets were drawn up by the Agent and copies were made available. Limits were set on the interest rate that could be charged on the *tiqsām* (fifteen percent) and the *salaf* (seven percent) and on the interest rate that the large merchants could charge on the grain loans. A system of boat licensing was put in place so that the state could collect money from the industry in a regular fashion, and the *salaf* tribunal was abolished. Cases between two Bahrainis were to be brought to Shaykh Hamad’s court and to the new Joint court if a foreigner was involved. However, none of these reforms were carried out without first suppressing resistance to them over the next year.

*Resistance to colonial reform (June – September, 1923)*

One tribe in particular, the Dawasir, became the source of great concern for the al-Khalifa and the British Agent, in no small part due to their alliance with Ibn Saud. The Dawasir were a pearling Najdi tribe who lived in the northwest corner of Bahrain in an area known as Budaiya. Like other Sunni tribes, they opposed reform of the pearl industry but unlike the other tribes, they had the power in terms of size and wealth to mount a credible challenge, paving the way for others to do so too. Within weeks of Shaykh Isa’s forced abdication, the Dawasir attacked the Baharna village of ‘Ali, killing three and seriously wounding four, as well as looting 5000 rupees. One of the elders of the tribe, Isa al-Dosari, came to Shaykh Hamad and told him the story of how he tried to
restrain them, and succeeded in turning back a majority, but not the young chief, Ahmed al-Dosari. Accounts of the attack were confirmed by several sources, including residents of a Baharna village next to Budaiya who saw the Dawasir make their way to ‘Ali “in fighting form.” Shaykh Hamad was reluctant to take action but shortly thereafter, on June 18, the Dawasir pearling boats closed in on a boat manned by Baharna and severely beat them. Upon hearing this, Shaykh Hamad ordered the detention of Ahmed al-Dosari in Muharraq pending prosecution.\textsuperscript{161} The Agent suggested to the Resident that if the Shaykh’s sentence was not complied with, it may be necessary to bombard Budaiya and perhaps fire a few rounds over the village to strike fear into their hearts regarding the Shaykh’s authority. The Agent asked the Resident to obtain permission for such action, to which the Resident replied that it was not likely considering the risk of turning the Sultan of Najd into an open enemy of the British.\textsuperscript{162}

The penalty meted out by Shaykh Hamad to Ahmed al-Dosari was a fine paid directly to the Baharna of ‘Ali who had lost family or property in the attack but this was widely considered to be a weak penalty and it was rumored that the wealthy Yusuf Kanoo and other Sunnis paid for it, undermining the Shaykh’s effort to enact punishment.\textsuperscript{163} Shaykh Hamad was concerned that releasing Ahmed al-Dosari would lead to his conniving with Ibn Saud so he sought to have al-Dosari sign a document stating that if he was hereafter guilty of intrigues against the Shaykh inside or outside Bahrain, he would be liable to deportation and forfeiture of property. Shaykh Hamad solicited British
support to compel al-Dosari to sign, to which the Resident replied that it would “give rise to false impressions that subjects can bargain with their ruler.”

Less than a month later, Dawasir violence and fear of Ibn Saud were again a concern for the Shaykh and the Agent. On August 10, a highly-respected Shia religious scholar (‘ālim) named Shaykh Abdulla bin Ahmed and another Bahrani man named Hassan bin Ramadhan were murdered with daggers between the Dawasir village of Budaiya and the neighboring Baharna village of Diraz. Circumstances pointed to the crime having been committed by persons from Budaiya, and it was widely believed that the Dawasir had taken revenge for their punishment. This particular scholar had advised the residents of Diraz who had seen the Dawasir proceeding to the attack on ‘Ali to testify to Shaykh Hamad, which is why this scholar was singled out as the victim of revenge. No one was ever brought to justice for these murders, though the Baharna circulated a petition (madhbata) asking the Shaykh and the Agent for protection.

The Agent believed that Ibn Saud was involved in Dawasir insurrection,

…it is not improbable that the Dawasir receive some encouragement from Najd, as regard their relations with the Shia, as I have several independent reports which tend to show that ammunition has recently been reaching Budaiya from Ojair and Qatif. Reports also indicate that Bin Saud has lately ordered oppressive measures to be taken with the Shias of Qatif, who are closely allied to the Bahrain Shias.

At the same time, Shaykh Hamad informed the Agent that his father had written to Ibn Saud complaining of his financial position with a view to Ibn Saud interfering in the government of Bahrain on behalf of the old shaykh. Al-Khalifa allowances from the
customs revenue had been decreased on the advice of the Agent in an effort to build up a state reserve.\textsuperscript{167}

Another attack on the Baharna occurred on September 18, this time by a member of the al-Khalifa family, a brother of Shaykh Isa and uncle of Shaykh Hamad. One of the shaykh’s camels was found wounded near a Baharna village in the area of Sitra. Upon hearing this, the shaykh reportedly went to visit Shaykh Isa, after which two of his sons and a number of fidawis attacked the village and killed one man, whose body was brought to the Agency Hospital. While the villagers fled into the adjoining gardens, their houses were looted. The next morning, Shaykh Hamad sent a summons for the accused to appear before him but they did not come. The Agent was worried that the Shaykh would not be tough on his own family, especially since his father was likely one of the instigators. Meanwhile, public outrage among the Baharna led a crowd to gather outside the Agency and Shaykh Hamad’s court.\textsuperscript{168}

The Agent suspected that the al-Khalifa had been emboldened by the lack of real punishment meted out to the Dawasir for their murderous actions. The attack on ‘Ali was only met with a fine, which was paid with the assistance of the Sunni merchants, and the murder of the Shia scholar had not even received a response from Shaykh Hamad, who claimed that he could not ascertain for certain who did it, though the Agent believed it was fear of the Dawasir that prevented him from making an arrest.\textsuperscript{169} Perhaps realizing that inaction would lead to further crimes and social unrest, two days later the accused were was brought to Manama by Shaykh Hamad’s levy corps, including his own family.
They were all put on trial by Shaykh Hamad and his second brother Shaykh Abdullah, who found all of them guilty and handed out sentences that ranged from forfeiture of property and compensation to banishment from Bahrain. Shaykh Hamad wanted to banish his guilty cousin to Kuwait (hardly a punishment since they had extensive family there) but the Agent worried that the cousin would conspire with Ibn Saud if sent there. The Agent suggested that the cousin be sent to India with an annual allowance and allowed to return in ten years on the condition of good behavior.

While all these disturbances were occurring, Shaykh Hamad and the Agent were pursuing said “reforms.” On June 6, precise allowances were specified for al-Khalifa family members in order to curtail spending from the customs revenues and save for a state reserve. On the advice of the Agent, Shaykh Hamad appointed the Eastern Bank Limited as the state bank for depositing revenues, keeping accounts, and dispensing allowances. On September 27, the Undersecretary to the Government of India approved of a three month leave for Mr. G. N. Bower, Imperial Customs Officer, to the Bahrain government to manage the reorganization of the Customs House.

*Dawasir Exodus (October, 1923)*

The Dawasir eventually left Bahrain with the support of Ibn Saud. Ahmed al-Dosari went to visit Qatif and had several meeting with the al-Qusaibis, the agents of Ibn Saud in that area. Ibn Saud offered to let them settle in the neighborhood of Jubail but the Dawasir were not willing to do so as it was too much under the watch of the al-Qusaibis. Ahmed al-Dosari asked Ibn Saud if he would allow them to occupy Dammam,
a promontory which becomes an island at high tide, about two miles outside the limits of
the Qatif oasis. To this the Sultan agreed and on October 28, news reached Shaykh
Hamad and the Agent that Ahmed al-Dosari had left with 2000 of his followers to a place
offered by Ibn Saud. About one-third of the tribe, 1000 people, remained in Budaiya to
prevent the confiscation of their lands. The Resident sent a message that they could
not live in both places: they either had to all come back to Bahrain or they had to leave
Budaiya and see their lands confiscated, their divers set free, and be barred from the
Bahrain pearl banks. They were given ten days to make a decision and they left.

The Dawasir divers were all in Bahrain and the Dawasir would inevitably try to
continue their use of the Bahrain banks. This would afford Ibn Saud the opportunity to
collect taxes on the most lucrative pearling industry in the region. It was believed that
Ibn Saud offered the attractive terms of no taxation to convince Ahmed al-Dosari to move
and establish a pearl trade in al-Hasa. If it was proven that Ibn Saud was conspiring
with the Dawasir, the Agent suggested that India warn him that the export of supplies
from India and Iraq to his territory would be restricted.

Other Najdi nakhūdas, Sunni merchants and members of the al-Khalifa were
voicing their opposition to reform and fomenting resentment towards Shaykh Hamad for
his cooperation with Agent Daly. Two petitions against the reforms were sent by the al-
Khalifa, one by Shaykh Isa to Bushire complaining (ironically) that the Agent was
interfering in domestic affairs and the other by Shaykh Hamad’s nephew to Bushire,
Delhi and London stating that “all the tribes of Bahrain” were supporting Shaykh Isa and
were against Major Daly.\textsuperscript{180} Several other petitions were submitted to Bushire by the tribal chiefs and Sunni merchants protesting the Persian police force and Agent Daly’s presumption to introduce any reforms to a country in which he has no authority.\textsuperscript{181} To counteract these petitions, the Baharna sent several of their own supporting the reforms, one of which claimed to represent 60,000 people.\textsuperscript{182}

Shaykh Hamad was worried that the Sunni tribes would depart to nearby areas and regroup to mount an attack on him. He asked the Government of India to expressly forbid tribal chiefs from leaving Bahrain out of contumacy and to warn Qatar, Kuwait and Ibn Saud not to harbor wayward tribes.\textsuperscript{183} Before the Dawasir left, Shaykh Hamad had tried to exile their leader, Ahmed al-Dosari, to India to prevent him from conspiring with Ibn Saud or anyone else. He asked the Government of India to accept as exiles Ahmed al-Dosari and two other powerful tribal chiefs who were inciting the resistance, Ahmed bin Lahaj and Abdul Wahab Zayani. The India Office accepted too late to stop Ahmed al-Dosari but the other two were deported to Bombay.\textsuperscript{184} Bombay could not, however, issue a warning to Ibn Saud, as such a communiqué would need to come from His Majesty’s Government directly and so the memo was sent to London for further review.\textsuperscript{185} With the Dawasir gone, insurgent tribal leaders exiled, and the rest sufficiently cowed, pearling reforms were implemented over the next few years.

\textit{Consolidating the state (1926 - 1930)}

The return of the Dawasir from 1926 to 1930 sparked a controversy between the Agent and Ibn Saud that illustrates the way that both sides had shifted into a mode of
state consolidation. Their conflict was over whether the Dawasir were subjects of Ibn Saud because they were originally from Najd or whether they were subjects of Bahrain where they had lived for some time. This same conflict over where people belong arose in relation to the Arab Shia population whose historic community spans the modern national boundaries of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. The purpose of this final section is to show the start of a transition in the mode of interaction between the Saud-Wahabis and the British as regards Bahrain, which will conclude the historical narrative of the “concrete threat” that this paper has theorized. The question of who belongs where was a qualitatively different type of discourse than what had come before and it was enacted in a different register.

In less than three years, the Dawasir chiefs began making inquiries as to the possibility of their return to Bahrain. In September, 1926, two tribal elders and the young Ahmed al-Dosari visited the Resident while he was in Bahrain. They had not been barred from the pearling banks (the Shaykh’s attitude was that Bahrain was open or maftūḥa), but they had been shut out of the lucrative Bahrain bazaar. It was also likely that they were being pressured to send fighters to join Ibn Saud’s army. They raised the question of returning to them their lands in Budaiya, which had fallen to ruin despite the Agent best efforts to populate the place by selling the mortar and stone houses off very cheaply. The land was no good for agriculture and the area remained nearly empty. The Resident informed them that were they to return they would have to submit to the new rules and regulations governing the state, including equal taxation, and that their chief would be
nominated and could be changed by Shaykh Hamad. Upon hearing this, the young Ahmed said he preferred to remain in Dammam, though the older men did not seem to agree. It was eventually agreed that they would return with Shaykh Hamad vouching for their intention to live there without special privileges. By February, 1928, only about 250 to 300 of the Dawasir had returned under the leadership of the elder Shaykh Abdul Latif who told the Resident that the rest wanted to return but the Wahabi authorities and the young Ahmed al-Dosari would not let them.\textsuperscript{187} By January of 1930, there were only some 500 Dawasir left in Dammam, suggesting that many had managed to get to Bahrain one way or another.\textsuperscript{188}

However, in October of 1930, the Governor of al-Hasa wrote to Shaykh Hamad and the Agent demanding the return of the Dawasir who were of Najdi origin and therefore subjects of the King of Hijaz and Najd.\textsuperscript{189} To this, the Agent replied that they were considered legitimate subjects of Bahrain and would not be forced to return.\textsuperscript{190} When more than 1,000 Shia from Qatif took refuge in Bahrain in 1929 due to over-taxation by Ibn Saud to finance his war against the Ikhwan, Shaykh Hamad’s position was that Bahrain and Qatif were the same, and again, that Bahrain was mafīḥa. The Agent took a different view. He offered Bahraini protection to only a small minority of the refugees who could prove they had been born in Bahrain or had left only recently for work, classifying these individuals as Bahraini nationals, to which Ibn Saud did not object.\textsuperscript{191} This type of back and forth over who belonged to which political sovereign became the tenor of al-Saud—British communications over the next several years, during
which time Ibn Saud declared the independence of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932 and made his first oil concession to the Americans in 1933, rendering the commercial advantages of Bahrain far less attractive. The dealings of the British towards the Saud-Wahabis, which had been fraught with the fear of violence for a century, shifted in tone and substance with the emergence of the Saudi state. Once the Saudi state was defined, and Britain had managed to retain its imperial position vis-à-vis Bahrain, relations between the two parties shifted and the threat that had persisted for a century was on different ground.

IV. Persia and State Consolidation in the Twentieth Century

Once political relations with the powerful neighbor to the West had stabilized and state consolidation was underway, the Persian threat became more prominent in the mid to late twentieth century. From 1935 to 1940 as oil production expanded, British administrators encouraged the replacement of the Persian workforce at the Bahrain Petroleum Company (BABCO) with South Asian migrant workers in an effort to undercut Iran’s claims to sovereignty, which had been repeated in 1930 and 1933. South Asian workers were less accessible and more expensive than skilled labor from southern Iran and the oil company continuously resisted British efforts. The Residency staff intensified their recruitment of Indian workers after the police carried out a series of deportations of Persian “illegal immigrants” from 1937 to 1939. With the coming of World War II, the state subjected the Persian community to greater administrative control in the name of national security. In early July of 1941, just prior to the British-Soviet
invasion of Iran, government officials rounded up approximately 150 of Bahrain’s Persian residents and expelled those whose papers were not in order. After World War II, Bahrain’s trade with southern Iran suffered greatly as Great Britain intensified its efforts to topple the nationalist regime led by Dr. Muhammad Mossadegh.192

Besides the instances of overt colonial engineering of social composition, social identities were also re-interpreted through the process of state consolidation. Over the twentieth century, the social climate shifted away from a sense of a plurality of communities towards greater polarization of Sunni versus Shia. Though people retained their identities based on “historic traditions,” there was greater social identification along sectarian lines as well. The earlier picture of Shia Arab agriculturalists (Baharna) with links to al-Hasa and Sunni Arab merchants (Huwala) with connections to southern Iran stands in stark contrast to the social map of late twentieth century. By that time, the Baharna had developed strong cultural and political ties to Iran while the Huwala had all but disavowed their Persian past (to the extent of no longer speaking Farsi). This historical transformation in social identities is an outcome of the twentieth century process of colonial state formation in which al-Khalifa power was reinforced by encouraging modern class formation along sectarian lines and drawing in the Huwala and other Sunnis by protecting their interests in exchange for loyalty. There are Baharna and Persian families among the commercial elite but the vast majority of the poor and unemployed are Baharna, the historic agriculturalists based in the fishing villages. The al-Khalifa used Sunni-Arab identity (vis-à-vis Shia and Persian identities) as a way to
build a social coalition in their favour over and against the majority Shia population. “The resulting coalition was thus structured along both old and new forms of stratification”; it was rooted in pre-colonial communal identities that were socially re-interpreted in response to the state. In this context, a purely twentieth-century, Persian-centric political history of Bahrain reinforces the sectarian identities of the modern period.

V. Conclusion

This paper attempted to draw out the Saud-Wahabi threat to British “protectionism” of Bahrain from 1830 to 1930 and to theorize the nature of this threat as opposed to the type of threat that was posed by Persia during this same time. While the Saud-Wahabi threat was taking place on the ground, the Persian claims were occurring at the level of sovereign-to-sovereign relations. The British feared the Saud-Wahabi threat as a potential disruption to their hegemony over the sea while the Persian claims were treated with far less concern. Even in the twentieth century, Persian claims to Bahrain can be characterized as largely formal threats; the only accusation of Persian military involvement in the islands is the attempted coup of 1981.

This paper also draws out the complexity of political claims to and struggles within Bahrain during a century when formal state-making had not yet commenced. The sovereign-to-sovereign framework that the Persian threat implies does not account for the political formations and dynamics that dominated the western Gulf before the twentieth century. Tribal society and sovereignty was less centralized and this posed a problem for
British interest in controlling the Gulf waters. The Saud-Wahabis were not the only tribal threat to Bahrain in this time, as there were those from the tribes in Muscat and other tribes within Bahrain, which this paper has not addressed, but the Saud-Wahabis were the threat that the British were most concerned about. To omit this aspect of the narrative from the political history of Bahrain and to focus on the Persian aspect only is to look at the past from the vantage point of the present. It is modernist history—history that privileges centralized authority as political actors. The full complexity of the political history of Bahrain cannot be captured in this framework. An alternative framework is to look at what was happening on the ground rather than only on the level of sovereign-to-sovereign relations, bringing the social back into the political. In the case of Bahrain, perhaps a more complete picture of politics and power intersecting with sect and society helps to clear the air of the selective histories that simplify power and society in the past.
3 *Records of Bahrain*, vol. 1, p. 727.
4 *Records of Bahrain*, vol. 3, p. 753.
5 Ibid, pp. 757-60.
6 Ibid, p. 756.
11 For an overview of political relations between various Persian empires and the Bahrain islands, as well as an overview of the diplomatic controversy between Britain and Persia/Iran in the twentieth century from a Persian point of view, see Fereydoun Adamiyat, *Bahrain Islands: A Legal and Diplomatic Study of the British-Iranian Controversy* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Inc.), 1955.
12 This statement was recently repeated by an Iranian parliament speaker, halting bilateral talks on a natural gas deal (Reem Khalifa, “Bahrain halts gas talks with Iran over insult,” Associated Press Wire, February 19, 2009, http://www.foxnews.com/wires/2009Feb19/0,4670,MLBahrainIran,00.html).
13 Lawson, pp. 123-5.
14 Ibid, p. 123.
16 *Records of Bahrain*, vol. 1, p. 727; volume 2, pp. 456-7; volume 3, pp. 123-5; Lawson, p. 42.
17 *Records of Bahrain*, vol. 4, p. 208.
18 Lawson, pp. 28-9.
19 Khuri, p. 21.
23 Lawson, p. 29; Khuri, p. 23.
24 Zahlan, pp. 59-61.
25 Lawson, p. 29; Khuri p. 28. The Arabs of Muscat had gained supremacy in Bahrain when they defeated the Persian garrison in 1717, and were left in place as proxy rulers when the Persians reasserted dominance during the reign of Nadir Shah (1737-1744) (Lawson, p. 28-29).
26 See Adamiyat.
27 Khuri argues that increased British interest in the Gulf in the mid-1800s resulted from the transition from a mercantilist economy in Europe, in which the British were simply traders in the Far East, to an industrialized economy in which the British (and others) became colonialists and settlers with a vested interest in monopolizing foreign markets and raw materials (p. 21).
28 Khuri, pp. 19-20.
29 The British deemed the al-Khalifa accomplices of the Qawasim for allowing “stolen” goods from British ships to be sold in Bahrain and for harboring several ships that had escaped decimation by the British in the battle in 1819 (J. G. Lorimer, *Gazetter of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia* (Historical Part 1B),

30 Before this treaty, there is only one entry in the archival collection on Bahrain. It is a memoir by Lieutenant Thomas Tanner, dated 1817, who visited Bahrain in October with the East India Company’s Bombay cruiser, “Psyche” (*Records of Bahrain*, vol. 1, p. 109). His memoir includes details on how to navigate to Bahrain from Cape Berdistan on the northern Gulf shores of Persia (Charles Knight, *Penny Cyclopedia of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge*, Boston: Harvard University, 1840, p. 487). From the memoir, it appears that he set off for Bahrain with navigation instructions that he had gathered from local sources in Cape Berdistan or thereabouts.

31 Khuri, p. 20.


33 Lawson, p. 31.

34 Khuri, p. 23.

35 *Records of Bahrain*, vol. 1, p. 727.


37 Lawson, p. 27.


39 Lawson, pp. 34-37.

40 Ibid, p. 32.

41 Ibid, p. 38.


43 Khuri, p. 13.


45 *Records of Bahrain*, vol. 3, pp. 277, 484.

46 Ibid, pp. 478, 484.


49 Lawson, p. 3.

50 Khuri, p. 5.

51 Ibid, p. 2.


53 Khuri, p. 4.

54 *Gazetter of the Persian Gulf*, p. 837.

55 *Records of Bahrain*, vol. 3, p. 674; Lawson, p. 5.

56 Zahlan, p. 60.

57 *Records of Bahrain*, vol. 3, p. 725; Lawson, p. 7.


59 *Records of Bahrain*, vol. 4, pp. 60, 88.


61 *Records of Bahrain*, vol. 4, p. 69.

62 Toby Jones, professor of History at Rutgers University, is working on a book that highlights the importance of al-Hasa’s agricultural capacity to Sultan Abdul Aziz al-Saud’s early twentieth century policy of settling the desert Bedouins and attempting to replace tribal loyalty with loyalty to the Ikhwan (“Oil for Water: The Politics of Nature in Saudi Arabia,”, paper presented at the Institute for Transregional Study of the Contemporary Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia, Princeton University, March 10, 2009).
Records of Bahrain, vol. 1, p. 11.

It is not clear if the British mean zakat or tribute here. They seem to have used the term zakat for what appears to be a tribute to the Saud Amir, a more powerful political figure. They may have done this as a way of denying the political prowess of the Saud Amir over the al-Khalifa since the British had an interest in recognizing the al-Khalifa as independent rulers of Bahrain. Alternatively, it may be a result of confusion on the part of some British officials as to the difference between zakat and a tribute. A tribute was paid to a more powerful political entity in recognition of their power, while zakat is defined by the Encyclopedia of Islam as “the obligatory payment by Muslims of a determinate portion of specified categories of their lawful property for the benefit of the poor and other enumerated classes or, as generally in Qur’anic usage, the portion of property so paid” (Zysow, A. “Zakāt (a.)” in Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, eds., P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel & W.P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill), 2009, Brill Online, Princeton University Library, www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_COM-1377, accessed May 1, 2009).


Zahlan, p. 99.


Ibid, p. 625.


This occurred despite the fact that Amir Faisal was nominally under Turkish protection at the time.

Records of Bahrain, vol. 1, p. 702.

Ibid, p. 706.

Ibid, p. 705.

Ibid, p. 706.

Ibid, p. 723.


Zahlan, p. 101. The Ottoman Empire extended its control to include Qatar until 1893 when the local population led by the al-Thani tribe took it back.


The treaty between the British and the al-Thani was precipitated by a naval attack by Shaykh Muhammed al-Khalifa on the people in the eastern villages of Doha and Wakrah for their opposition to al-Khalifa supremacy there. The attack violated the Treaty of Perpetual Maritime Peace and the British got involved to settle the dispute, marking their first contact with the al-Thani tribe. The treaty between the al-Thani and the British tacitly recognized the independence of Qatar from Bahrain, which became the status quo in years to come (Zahlan, p. 100.) As late as 1919, Shaykh Isa lobbied the British to return Zubarah to him but was unsuccessful (Records of Bahrain, vol., 3, pp. 596-8).


Ibid, p. 615.

Ibid, p. 626.

The last “native” Agent was Mohammed Rahim, from a family of Persian subjects of Arab descent (Records of Bahrain, vol. 3, p. 68).

Lawson, p. 42. Records of Bahrain, vol. 3, pp. 123-5. Khuri writes that in 1911, subjects of Great Britain, India, Germany, America, Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia were all under British jurisdiction as foreigners (p. 87).

Lawson, p. 42.


Lawson, pp. 42-3; Records of Bahrain, vol. 3, p. 783.


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Lawson, p. 42.


Lawson, pp. 42-3; Records of Bahrain, vol. 3, p. 783.


Ibid, p. 663.

Ibid, p. 662.


Ibid, p. 668.

Ibid, p. 674.


Ibid.

Ibid, p. 713.

Ibid, p. 691.

Ibid, p. 713.


Ibid, pp. 718, 725.

Khuri, p. 66.


Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid, pp. 715, 743, 750.


Ibid, p. 753.

Records of Bahrain, vol. 4, p. 48. Lathis are six to eight foot long canes, often tipped with a metal blunt, used by swinging back and forth like a sword.


In May of 1923 a new Resident, Lieutenant-Colonel S. G. Knox, took over temporarily from A. P. Trevor, who went on leave.

Records of Bahrain, vol. 4, p. 51.


Ibid, p. 784.

Ibid, pp. 755-6, 773-5.

Ibid, p. 775.


Ibid, p. 760.
Records of Bahrain, vol. 3, p. 761. The Resident banned Qusaibi from Bahrain and sent him to Ibn Saud with a letter detailing his misdeeds and suggesting that Ibn Saud send a new Agent who will need British approval (Records of Bahrain, vol. 3, p. 767).

139 Ibid, p. 763.
140 Ibid, p. 768.
141 Ibid, pp. 769-70, 772.
142 Ibid, p. 772.
143 Ibid, p. 779.

According to the Agent, there was some inconsistency in how customs payments were collected. The wealthy merchants, like Yusuf Kanoo and Yusuf Fakhro, were allowed to settle their customs accounts once a year when the Director of Customs came from Karachi for this expressed purpose. According to the Agent, payments from the wealthy merchants’ were never entered into the customs books but were entered into the books of the Director’s private firm of Gangaram Tikamdas, the family business of the man who had set up the system for Shaikh Isa in the early 1900s (Records of Bahrain, vol. 4, pp. 60, 88). See Khuri, p. 52.

145 Records of Bahrain, vol. 4, p. 12.
146 Ibid, pp. 12-15. Shaykh Hamad’s Court was established as the court of first instance for all cases, and it was to be his prerogative alone to submit cases to the sharia. This is not to say that this new rule was actually followed, and there is plenty of evidence in the archives that other judicial avenues were still used by litigants, but the state made it illegal and might punished them for it.

147 Ibid, p. 67.
150 Records of Bahrain, vol. 3, p. 496; vol. 4, p. 189.
151 Historically, there was a special class of financiers for the pearling industry called musaqqamūn who borrowed money from wealthy capitalists (Arab, Indian or Persian merchants) at a ten to twenty-five percent interest rate. If a nakhuda was financed by a musaqqam (rather than a merchant), he was bound to hand over the season’s pickings at a rate previously arranged, which usually varied from fifteen to twenty percent below market value. That was, unless he could sell to a larger trader (tājir) who the musaqqam would not normally out bid as long as the nakhuda could meet his obligations. A tājir operated wholesale and his business was brought to his door, he made his purchases in cash, and he had direct relations with merchants in other locales. A smaller merchant called a tawwāsh went in search of his trade, obtaining pearls on the shore by payment of cash or from the fleets at sea in exchange for provisions, and who usually resold his pearls to a tājir (Records of Bahrain, vol. 3, p. 499). A British observer, J. G. Lorimer, noted in 1915 that the musaqqamūn class was dying out, with only three left in Bahrain (two Baharna and one Sunni Arab) (Records of Bahrain, vol. 1, p. 490).

152 Once the season’s financing was repaid, the profits were divided by 1/5 going to the boat owner, three shares to the nakhuda and the divers (if the nakhuda is also a diver, he gets paid twice), two shares to the haulers, one share to the extra hands, and nothing to the apprentice son (Records of Bahrain, vol. 3, pp. 495-6).

155 Ibid, p. 496.
156 Ibid, p. 188. In 1905, pearling revenues for Bahrain amounted to 12,603,000 rupees (Rs.), as compared to 8,000,000 Rs. for Trucial Oman, 695,861 Rs. for Lingeh, 134,700 Rs. for Kuwait, and 22,500 Rs. for Muscat (ROB v3: 516). In 1915, two-thirds of the produce was said to pass through the customs house of Bahrain (Records of Bahrain, vol. 3, p. 277). There were about 4,500 boats employed in the pearling
industry on the Arab side of the Gulf, and about 74,000 operative personnel (*Records of Bahrain*, vol. 3, pp. 482-3).

157 *Records of Bahrain*, vol. 4, pp. 243-75.


159 *Records of Bahrain*, vol. 4, p. 250; vol. 3, p. 491.

160 Ibid, pp. 118, 120.

161 Ibid, p. 118.


164 Ibid, p. 121.


166 Ibid, p. 126.

167 Ibid, p. 84.

168 Ibid, p. 129.

169 Ibid, p. 129.


172 Ibid, pp. 57-9. The Eastern Bank was established in London in 1909 and was heavily involved in commerce in Bombay. Bahrain was the first Gulf branch of the Eastern Bank, and the British protected its monopoly there until 1944. In the 1930s, the Eastern Bank made much of its profit from Bahrain’s oil industry (Geoffrey Jones, *British Multinational Banking 1830-1990*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 107).

173 *Records of Bahrain*, vol. 4, p. 90.

174 During the month of October, Resident Trevor returned from leave and took back his post from Knox (*Records of Bahrain*, vol. 4, p. 147).

175 *Records of Bahrain*, vol. 4, p. 147.

176 Ibid, pp. 183, 199.

177 Ibid, p. 186.

178 Ibid, pp. 175, 199.


180 On October 2, a letter was sent from Kuwait by Shaykh Abdulla’s son, Muhammed, to British offices in Bushire, Delhi and London, stating that Major Daly was ruining the relationship between the British and the tribes of Bahrain and imprisoning people without cause (i.e., Ahmed al-Dosari) (*Records of Bahrain*, vol. 4, pp. 202-3). On October 23, Shaykh Isa sent a petition to Bushire complaining that Major Daly was interfering in domestic affairs, the effects of which would be negative on the sentiments of the Arabs (*Records of Bahrain*, vol. 4, p. 149).

181 On October 25, a petition signed by several of the tribal chiefs, including Shaykh Isa, the Dawasir, al-Bufalaseh, Mosallin, Jalahamah, Zayani, Na’im, Manafaah, al bin ‘Ali, and bin Jodar protested the “injurious” actions of Major Daly, chiefly his establishment of a “Persian police” and appointment of a Persian man as the Municipal Director of an “Arab town” (*Records of Bahrain*, vol. 4, pp. 160-2). On November 1, another anti-reform petition was submitted to the Resident, again protesting Major Daly and the reforms, and signed by twelve pearling *nakhudas* who threatened to leave Bahrain if they were forced to accept the proposed reforms. Indignant in tone, this petition denounced Major Daly for acting like a qadi when he had no authority from the sharia to do so, closing all the courts and the opening only one “in a place like Bahrain” (perhaps alluding to its social plurality), putting the revenues of the country into an English bank without taking the opinion of the people when the revenues come out of their pockets, and denying the people their choice of Shaykh Isa who has agreed to a parliament. Another petition signed by the “leaders of tribes, ulama and traders” called for the reinstatement of Shaykh Isa and objected to judicial monopolization (*Records of Bahrain*, vol. 4, pp. 192-3).
On October 25, a petition was submitted that claimed to represent 60,000 residents who were subject to discriminatory taxation and was signed by several families including bin Khami, bin Alawi, bin Hasan, bin Rajab, al-Samk, and Darasi (*Records of Bahrain*, vol. 4, p. 170). On November 7, another petition was sent to the Resident signed by a local Shia cleric, Mulla Hasan bin Shaykh al-Majid (*Records of Bahrain*, vol. 4, p. 202).

In May 20, 1927, Britain recognized the sovereignty of Ibn Saud over the Hijaz and Nejd in the Treaty of Jeddah.

Shaykh Hamad’s conception of the social fluidity between Bahrain and Qatif was a historically grounded one that contrasted to the British conception of territorial belonging. The difference between the pre-state era conception of space and societies and the state one is evident in their different approaches to the problem of Shia refugees from Qatif.

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183 *Records of Bahrain*, vol. 4, p. 175.

184 Ibid, pp. 185-6.


188 Ibid, p. 333.

189 In May 20, 1927, Britain recognized the sovereignty of Ibn Saud over the Hijaz and Nejd in the Treaty of Jeddah.

190 *Records of Bahrain*, vol. 4, p. 351.

191 Ibid, pp. 331-347. Shaykh Hamad’s conception of the social fluidity between Bahrain and Qatif was a historically grounded one that contrasted to the British conception of territorial belonging. The difference between the pre-state era conception of space and societies and the state one is evident in their different approaches to the problem of Shia refugees from Qatif.

192 Lawson, pp. 52-59, 123-125.

193 Crystal, p. 276.
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