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Entangled Boundaries:
British India and the Persian Gulf Region
During the Transition from Empires to Nation States, c. 1880-1935

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Preface

The present work itself has a history, of which certain elements shall be recorded. It was initially and primarily conceived of in the course of a research seminar under the supervision of Dr. Radhika Singha at the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi in the winter semester 2008. I was very fortunate to audit this course as part of my university exchange year and I remain most grateful to Dr. Singha for her constant support and for showing me what rigorous archival research is.

I completed a further 6 months of research work in the National Archives of India, New Delhi before returning to Berlin in October 2008. I especially thank the archival staff for their support and for enduring naiveté and stubbornness of a newcomer to historical research.

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Re-conceptualized and rewritten parts of this work have been published in my article “The Turn of the Gulf Tide: Empire, Nationalism and South Asian Labor Migration to Iraq, c. 1900-1935”, *International Labor and Working Class History*, 79, 2011, 7-27.

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Abbreviations

APOC	Anglo-Persian Oil Company
AD	Army Department
BOC	Burmah Oil Company
BRR	Baghdad Residency Records
CC	Civil Commissioner
CD	Department of Commerce
CI	Department of Commerce and Industry
CO	Colonial Office
Dy.	Deputy
EHL	Department of Education, Health and Lands
Emi.	Emigration Branch
FO	Foreign Office
FD	Foreign Department, GoI
FPD	Foreign and Political Department, GoI
GoI	Government of India
G.O.C.	General Officer Commanding
HD	Home Department, GoI
HC	High Commissioner
IO	India Office
IOR	India Office Records
OiC	Order in Council
OOiC	Ottoman Order in Council
Ov.	Overseas Branch
PCIOiC	Persian Coast and Islands Order in Council
RA	Department of Revenue and Agriculture
RB	Railway Board
Secy	Secretary
SoS	Secretary of State

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Introduction

The extension of the Empire in what may be called middle-Asia, whether under the Indian administration or the Colonial, must of necessity extend the use of Hindustani, India’s *lingua franca*. [...] [It] has already to a small extent found its way in the bazaars on the Gulf shores, where many petty Indian traders have gone and settled. If trade follows the flag, language follows trade and this fact will now be largely developed by the immense influx into middle-Asia of Indians whether as soldiers, civilians, camp followers and office-dependents, almost all of whom more or less speak Urdu, making it the necessary means of their communications and intercourse with their new fellow-subjects. [...] At the same time one may well look to some sort of bilingual *mélange* or *mésalliance* resulting from the extensive intercommunion of the Indian and Arab population in ‘Mesopot’ and round about that way.¹

Amidst the ongoing Mesopotamian campaign of World War One, the retired judge of the Bombay High Court, Cursetjee Manockjee Cursetjee, set out in early December 1916 for a month-long sea voyage onboard the freighter S.S. Zayanni from Bombay to the head of the Persian Gulf and back. Calling at numerous Persian and Arab Gulf ports upstream, the Oxford-educated Parsee experienced at first hand the gradual proliferation of the British Empire, also evoking speculations about future prospects and implications of close relations between British India and the Gulf shores. While acquainting himself with considerable India-trade and dealings of Indian merchants in ports of Bahrain and southern Persia, the arrival in war-transformed Basra and encounters with Indian shopkeepers and craftsmen in the city’s port Ashaar left the greatest mark.

Despite British and Indian forces experiencing a severe defeat at Kut-al-Amara only months earlier, the partly occupied territory of Ottoman Iraq, or Mesopotamia as some called it, arguably offered the greatest prospects for future Indian expansion. Cursetjee observed that Hindustani would extend into this area following the immigration of diverse groups, hence serving as communicative interface between Indians and Arabs to keep the acquired lands within easy reach of British India and its subject population “out of compliment [...] for her sacrifices and services opening out these ancient derelict lands to a new life of happy betterment, progress and prosperity.”² For Cursetjee, a future prominent British Indian role in Iraq seemed justified given its services to Empire and its prime concern with regard to the country’s commercial and political considerations. Whilst fully supporting its annexation to Empire, he was tellingly critical of British attitude in the occupied areas. A recent cartoon in the Basra Times of a British officer manhandling his Hindu attendant enticed him into warning that “the Arab is not likely to be so long-suffering as the Indian has so far been.”³

¹ Cursetjee, C.M. (1996), *The Land of the Date. A recent Voyage from Bombay to Basra and back*, fully descriptive of the ports and peoples of the Persian Gulf and the Shat’-el-Arab, their conditions, history and customs, 1916-1917. Introduction by Robin Bidwell. Reading: Garnet Publishing, 189-190.

² *Ibid.*, 190.

³ *Ibid.*, 172.

1. Focus and Research Questions

Such an acquaintance with occupied territories of Mesopotamia and ideas were part of a larger story of interregional exchange between the Indian subcontinent and the Persian Gulf region for a long time pre-dating and succeeding the period of the First World War. Nevertheless, this juncture ushered important changes in the respective regions themselves and in the modes of exchange between them by introducing certain actors and aims, which had not existed likewise before. We might not be able to fully interpret in retrospect whether Cursetjee then overemphasized the future use of Hindustani and in general of cultural and commercial contact between the two regions. His report is at least tainted in that it exposes a strong affinity towards Empire, advocating and defending its extension into these territories also for the greater good of Indian commercial gains. In addition, Cursetjee belonged – although aged seventy – to British India’s contemporary elite and actively took a stake in the affairs of Bombay’s Parsee community that held commercial and cultural contacts into the region. However, aware that British self-importance would not work with Arabs for long, he unconsciously predicted later events. Despite these and other limitations, we can retrace bits and pieces of a larger narrative that connects developments in the arena of international politics with the everyday practices, occupations and activities of individuals and groups across this region.

Taking a closer look at a variety of human and other interconnections and especially at processes of migration and exchange, this paper focuses on the entangled histories evolving between British India and the wider Persian Gulf region during the period of transition from informal British Indian imperialism in the area to its gradual retreat and the inception of nation-states, spanning more than fifty years between 1880 and 1935. In this connection, the paper will particularly focus on political, economic and social interactions in the Gulf rather than in the Indian subcontinent, although developments within the latter were of course a constitutive part of such processes. The paper more directly asks for transformations of people’s lives in immediate or more distant connection to the advancing and later retreating British Empire during this period. The questions are why and under what circumstances migration and exchange processes started, and why and under what circumstances they ceased to exist. From a broader spatial, yet rather unusual perspective, the mapped terrain of this study geographically encompasses the maritime and land routes connecting British India with the wider Persian Gulf region and notably the landmass forming the northern and southern shores of the Gulf and its immediate and more distant hinterland.



Map 1. British India and the Wider Persian Gulf Region⁴



Map 2. The Persian Gulf Region⁵

⁴ The Imperial Gazetteer of India. New edition, published under the authority of His Majesty's secretary of state for India in council. Oxford: Clarendon Press. Vol. 26, Atlas 1909 edition, India and Surrounding Countries, 2.

⁵ Persian Gulf Region, Political, 1981. Accessed at http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east.html on 24 Sept 2009.

2. Concretisation

The extent of entanglement of these two regions is scrutinized at re-occurring junctures throughout the text in four specific areas, which were important for the evolution of interregional connections and the British Empire in the period under review. Although forming fields quite apart from each other, they are yet closely connected to one another. The first aspect deals with the extent of legal formations impinging or affecting the Gulf region, which partly pre-dated the arrival of the British Empire, and partly evolved during its consolidation. Law in this regard had nothing or very little to do with the populations of local rulers, but became important for the management, maintenance and expansion of communities of British Empire’s subjects residing in these realms. The second aspect includes a historical scrutiny of the commodity oil whose distinct processes of safeguarding, production and distribution established an important link between the Indian subcontinent and the Persian Gulf region. The third field of inquiry can be regarded as fragment of a social history of war at the instance of the Mesopotamian campaign of World War One. Wars are usually waged with a clear objective, in this instance to safeguard British oil interests in the Gulf, and they are peculiar in that they allow, under the exigencies of a war economy, what is not done during other periods. In this regard, the question is whether and if so how interregional relations changed with the inception and end of World War One. Again in conjunction with all three afore-mentioned aspects, the fourth field of inquiry concerns an interregional history of employment and occupations, for which the label ‘labour history’ would not suffice as this history encompassed a diversity of skills and knowledge.

These aspects are dealt with in three subsequent chapters. The first chapter relates the evolution of British influence in the Persian Gulf during the late 19th and earliest 20th century and its relation to imperial subjects. It argues that the aim of British informal influence in the Gulf was to achieve the strategic aim of defending India from advances of other Great Powers. The presence and growth of economic activity and actors proved one proper means to establish this influence in its various dimensions on land and sea. Expanding British and Indian business interests towards the end of this first period also resulted in recruitment of Indian labour towards the Gulf, addressing Indian emigration laws for the first time. The second chapter takes a combined look at the emerging oil economy in southern Persia and the Mesopotamian campaign of the First World War that started out as just another immediate step by the Indian Empire to safeguard an oil complex. Both theatres, inhomogeneous of course when comparing their size, subsequently relied heavily on resources, especially labour of various forms, from the Indian subcontinent for several reasons. This chapter tries to shed

light on efforts of the colonial state in ensuring a constant flow of labour and resources to these areas, as much as on the subsequent histories of migrant labour in these realms. Finally, the third chapter looks at the gradual onslaught of nationalism in the places referred to, the disentanglement of the Indian subcontinent from parts of the Gulf and partial continuance in other parts. It shows that the reduction of Indian staff and labour in countries of the northern Gulf was slow and unsteady, as their skills were still a necessity, while the evolving oil economy in the southern Gulf provided yet another field for Indian employment.

3. Sources

This paper owes its existence to a variety of primary and secondary sources. It is mainly based on research in the official archives of the former Government of India established at the National Archives of India in New Delhi. This includes correspondences of a number of governmental departments responsible for relations with foreign governments, other matters of external relations such as emigration, or the army during the period under review. In addition, it includes consular records of the Baghdad Residency and High Commission maintained by the Government of India during the 19th and early 20th century. Other sources consulted encompass primary documents, such as correspondences, parliamentary and command papers of the British government available online or via published archive editions. Moreover, travelogues, official histories or private recollections concerning the period under review were consulted.

Despite this large archive at hand, one has to point out its limitations on different levels, and therefore the constraints of views and perspectives expressed on their behalf in this paper. These documents written in English represent the perspective of British colonial authorities and allow only an insight into their views. I did not consult any archives of Indian states or provinces in English or vernacular languages, nor did I consult private papers, local histories or archives of those state formations in the Gulf that this work is concerned with. I also did not consult any records of companies that I frequently refer to, hence giving only a fragmentary view of their considerations. What needs to be done in future is to include such archives of other state formations and companies, local histories, and private papers. As much as Cursetjee’s account was tainted, this colonial archive itself is tainted by the position of those recording and deciding over processes at stake. Colonial state’s officials had various reasons for and means of avoiding information in the official or even confidential archive.

4. Historiography

Apart from primary sources, this paper has draws on previous historical writing and literature touching on issues at stake more immediately and remotely. At the outset of any consideration lies a scrutiny of the ‘containers’ and theoretical backgrounds that one avails oneself of in order to best conceptualise and present a theme. For some time now, historians have increasingly recognized the limitations of ‘old-fashioned’ histories whose central node once was the modern European nation-state and the political class immediately connected with its erection and maintenance. In an effort to divest themselves of such limitations while not disregarding the importance of nation-states, historians have ventured into various realms that transcend state formations and instead look at the interstices between them. This is true for various forms of international, transnational, imperial and global history, despite disputes remaining among exponents of these ‘new traditions’ as to the importance or place of nations and states within such histories.⁶

However, some of these historical ‘containers’ are too vast for and often do not fit when trying to write just the interconnected histories of two regions or of a limited regional space without studying comparisons at the same time. In addition, many studies in the framework of imperial and world history attribute the initiative power to a larger extent to the imperial “metropolis”, regarding developments in the “periphery” as a reaction, not more. We can argue that these approaches are potentially too wide in scope and necessarily focus only on primary movers and moves of history, so that minor developments whose impact was confined to a few countries are not observed or remain untouched.⁷ Comparatively low quantity of exchange and interconnection in this regard becomes a reason for neglect. Others will have to judge whether this is desirable at all, or whether it is a fruitful task in the end. Far from seeking exceptions and building up a new teleology after leaving behind the one of the nation-state, the enterprise of writing interregional histories might be evocative and give new insights as well. This kind of ‘container’ seems especially necessary when developments in a region are not or only to a limited extent of global or transnational reach, but yet go beyond imperial reach, and are in their immediacy restricted to a region or an interregional space. This enterprise is already under way to some extent in an endeavour to define and write such inter-relational or entangled histories more generally.⁸ Still, these approaches often frame

⁶ For a discussion, see AHR Conversation (2006): On Transnational History. *The American Historical Review*, 111, 5.

⁷ Although an important contribution to the field of study, one example of such an approach is Bayly, C.A. (2004), *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons*. Blackwell Publishing.

⁸ Examples of such works are Osterhammel, Jürgen (2001), *Geschichtswissenschaft jenseits des Nationalstaats: Studien zu Beziehungsgeschichte und Zivilisationsvergleich*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. Conrad, Sebastian/ Randeria, Shalini et al (Eds.) (2002), *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus: postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*.

their histories in the context of colonising and colonised formations, leaving out for example histories emerging between two colonized formations. Moreover, connections cannot only be studied between Europe and Asia but to a considerable extent also only within Asia themselves.⁹

Theoretically, this paper aims at establishing and analyzing connections between and entangled histories of two regions within Asia, British India and the Persian Gulf region, that were both objects of colonizing and imperial formations, albeit in different periods and to different extents. Thereby, it tries to go beyond recent trends in writing Asian histories that somehow overemphasize all things Asian and exclusively look at ‘Asian’ actors, thereby leaving out that ‘non-Asian’ actors were pretty much active in Asia as well. Some of these studies perceive of inter-Asian relations only on the level of ‘-isms’.¹⁰ However, especially the study of such ‘-isms’ is misleading and depicts histories of social relations only to a very limited extent. Ultimately, they can explain respectively the emergence of nationalist ruling elites in countries of Asia, or overrate threats that imperial formations thought they were facing. They remain, however, within a paradigm of old-fashioned histories in studying state formations and their elites, their paranoia and measures of control.

For various reasons, many of these historical schools seem not apt for what is scrutinized here. Given its design and parameters, another historical tradition in existence roughly since the 1980s might afford a more suitable environment for studying the theme at hand. Indian Ocean History reveals to us that processes of migration and exchange between the Indian subcontinent and the Persian Gulf necessarily involved the transgression of natural and imperial boundaries within and adjacent to the ocean’s basin. This basin and its branches such as the Persian Gulf or the Red Sea constituted a ‘seascape’ allowing various people on the move to settle and sojourn in various places.¹¹ Partly invigorated through seminal works of the Annales School,¹² several scholars were inspired to focus on various forms of interconnections of countries along the coastal line of the Indian Ocean. Many works on the Indian Ocean overwhelmingly focussed on the time of the onslaught of European economic

Campus Verlag. Werner, Michael/Zimmermann, Bénédicte (2006), *Beyond Comparison. Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity*. *History and Theory*, 45, 30-50.

⁹ Van Schendel, Willem (2005), *The Bengal Borderland: Beyond State and Nation in South Asia*. London: Anthem Press.

¹⁰ Some studies specifically highlight the transnational character of such movements, be they Pan-Asianism or Pan-Islamism. For Asianism, see Fischer-Tiné, Harald (2008), “The Cult of Asianism“: Asiendiskurse in Indien zwischen Nationalismus und Internationalismus (ca. 1885-1955), in: Frey, Marc/Nicola Spakowski (Eds.) (2008), *Asianismen seit dem 19. Jahrhundert*, *Comparativ*, 18, 6, 16-33. Also Saaler, Sven/J. Victor Koschmann (Eds.) (2007), *Pan-Asianism in Modern Japanese History: Colonialism, Regionalism and Borders*. London and New York: Routledge. For Pan-Islamism, see Low, Michael Christopher (2008), *Empire and the Hajj: Pilgrims, Plagues, and Pan-Islam under British Surveillance, 1865–1908*. *International Journal for Middle East Studies*, 40, 269-290.

¹¹ Reinwald, Brigitte/Jan-Georg Deutsch (Eds.) (2002), *Space on the Move. Transformations of the Indian Ocean Seascape in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag.

¹² Braudel, Fernand (1996), *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

and naval power with their temporal frameworks ceasing before or in 1800.¹³ With these frameworks at times assuming that various interconnections abruptly ceased to exist with the onslaught of European economic power, we can possibly assess that historians themselves are complicit in creating retrospectively a perception of the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf as a ‘British lake’ from the 19th century onwards. A number of historical accounts in recent years, though, have ventured with new vigour into the history of interconnections in the Indian Ocean during the 19th and 20th centuries, conceptualising the region of study as an ‘interregional arena’ that can be positioned between general features of a world system and specific treats of particular regions.¹⁴ This view challenges both regional categories of area studies in Western Academia and the macro-model of a world-systems perspective enabling us to perceive of a region that is usually not featured in maps and teleologies of states. In addition, the paradigm of ‘entangled boundaries’ set forth in this paper is apt to show the entangled histories of interconnections between two regions while not omitting that different boundaries might possibly arise between them over time.

When turning to actual accounts of an interregional perspective hitherto written, one can witness that concepts discussed above have been applied already to some extent to the study of the Indian subcontinent and the Persian Gulf region. Historians have extensively addressed the political and diplomatic history involving Britain, India and Gulf state formations, elaborating on the period before, during and after the First World War.¹⁵ Already during the late 1960s and early 1970s, historians found that the British imperial stronghold in the Gulf was a reason but also depended to a large extent on its ownership of the Indian subcontinent. Recent studies in this field do not substantially add information to this idea, but rather point to specific institutions or junctures important in shaping these histories. They address the establishment of British Indian imperialism in the Gulf, the inter-imperial and disputed relationship between Britain and India over the Gulf as well as India’s contributions during the Mesopotamian campaign that benefited India’s industrial complex.¹⁶

¹³ Chaudhuri, K.N. (1985), *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750*. Cambridge University Press. Das Gupta Ashin/M.N. Pearson (Eds.) (1987), *India and the Indian Ocean, 1500-1800*. Calcutta: Oxford University Press. Das Gupta, Ashin et al (2001), *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant, 1500-1800*. Collected Essays of Ashin Das Gupta. Oxford University Press.

¹⁴ Bose, Sugata (2006), *A Hundred Horizons. The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire*. Delhi: Permanent Black. Metcalf, Thomas R. (2007), *Imperial Connections. India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860-1920*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black.

¹⁵ Of these only a few are mentioned. Kumar, Ravinder (1965), *India and the Persian Gulf Region 1858-1907 - A Study in British Imperial Policy*. London: Asia Publishing House. Bush, B. C. (1967), *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1894-1914*, Berkeley: University of California Press. Ibid. (1971), *Britain, India, and the Arabs, 1914-1921*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Greaves, Rose (1991), *Iranian relations with Great Britain and British India, 1798–1921. From Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic*. Cambridge University Press. Sluglett, Peter (2007), *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country, 1914-1932*. Columbia University Press.

¹⁶ Onley, James (2007), *The Arabian frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Blyth, Robert J. (2003), *The Empire of the Raj: India, Eastern Africa and the Middle*

Fortunately, this was by far not everything that has been written on this interregional perspective, although other studies have and continue to appear rarely in comparison to the diplomatic and political complex. Thus, studies addressing diplomatic and political relations have been importantly supplemented by works particularly focussing on more immediate economic, social and cultural implications of exchange and impact between the two regions. Within historical writing, these topics are covered by interests in economic exchange and traders operating between the two regions, lives and trajectories of pilgrims travelling to and sojourning in the Indian Ocean, the employment of soldiers and migration of camp-followers during the First World War and to some extent the emerging labour migration to Gulf countries connected to oil exploitation. We are yet to sketch a comprehensive overview of all these forms of Indian migration to localities in question over an extended period. However, we can assess various interconnections with the Persian Gulf resting on a 'circulatory regime' encompassing pilgrims, traders and workers in the period under review.¹⁷

Despite the fact that British companies and businessmen commanded much more capital quantitatively, the emergence and existence of several transnational merchant communities commanding and operating capital in the Gulf and between the Gulf and the Indian subcontinent is looked upon as important instance in interconnected histories. Merchant capital was not only important for opening up new markets, but it was ultimately the basis for contemporary multinational companies and other business houses in India and the Gulf. Several Gulf port cities of southern Persia and Mesopotamia, such as Bushehr, Bandar-Abbas and Basra altogether comprised a few hundred British Indian and British protected subjects, mostly traders or those connected to trading businesses and their families. In the southern Gulf, Indian merchants were especially active in Muscat and in Bahrain in connection to the pearling industry.¹⁸

East, 1858-1947. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. Satia, Priya (2007), *Developing Iraq: Britain, India, and the Redemption of Empire and Technology in the First World War*. *Past and Present*, 197, 211-255.

¹⁷ The term 'circulatory regime' is discussed for the South Asian context in Claude Markovits et al (Eds.) (2003), *Society and Circulation: Mobile People and Itinerant Cultures in South Asia, 1750-1950*. Permanent Black.

¹⁸ Lorimer, John Gordon (1908), *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, Vol. II, Geographical and Statistical. Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, India, 10-15, 276, 345-349. For a study of Muscat's Indian merchant community, see Allen, Calvin H., Jr. (1978), *Sayyids, Shets and Sultans: Politics and Trade in Masqat under the Al Bu Sa'id, 1785-1914*. Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Washington, esp. 99-177. For a study pertaining to merchants from Sind in Persia, see Markovits, Claude (2000), *The Global World of Indian Merchants, 1750-1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama*. Cambridge University Press. The latter points to the early operations of the Hinduja family in Iran that represents today a multinational conglomerate. One important route of the mentioned Shikarpuri network ran from Karachi along the Mekran coast and then towards Meshed in northern Persia and further to Central Asia. A more general survey of Indian merchant communities is given in *Ibid.* (1999), *Indian Merchant Networks outside India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: A Preliminary Survey*. *Modern Asian Studies*, 33, 4, 883-911. For one particular Persian merchant family in contacts with Bombay, see Onley, James (2005), 'Transnational Merchants in the Nineteenth Century Gulf: The Case of the Safar Family'. In: Madawi Al-Rasheed (Ed.), *Transnational Connections and the Arab Gulf*. London: Routledge, 59-89. For the early emergence of Arab merchants on India's western coast, see Benjamin, N. (1976), *Arab Merchants of Bombay and Surat (c. 1800-1840)*, *Indian Economic Social History Review*, 13, 85, 85-95.

In addition to traders, historians have emphasised the histories of Persian and Indian pilgrim communities especially in Shia holy cities such as Najaf, Karbala and Kadhimain in Mesopotamia or Meshed in Persia and the institutions allowing for this circulation. The overall number of Indians permanently residing in Mesopotamia in 1882, for example, amounted to some 3,000. In addition, a considerable floating population of visitors to the holy cities existed who returned to India after a few months.¹⁹ This strong presence in Shia holy cities of southern Mesopotamia had specific reasons. The British Government channelled financial remittances and donations from officials and individuals of the former Shia state of Awadh, the so-called Oudh Bequest, to Ottoman Iraq. Distributed by the British resident in Baghdad, it was partly used for maintaining the shrines and for the support of pilgrims. It enhanced the coming and staying of large numbers of Indian pilgrims, with many deciding to settle and earn their livelihood in petty-trade, profiting from this influx. Some historians have argued that this device was partly used by consuls and residents to ask for and establish British influence in these cities.²⁰ The pilgrimage to holy cities in the Hedjaz fed in the pilgrim population of the Persian Gulf as well. Many pilgrims to Mecca and Medina used to travel through Persian Gulf ports in order to get there. Of lower monetary means, these pilgrims utilized the fact that deck passages to the Gulf were cheaper than directly to Red Sea ports. This lasted until 1912, when shipping companies increased ticket fares following the introduction of pilgrim ship rules disallowing the overcrowding of ships.²¹

A third migrant group addressed by historians are different forms of labour. These were recruited and employed from the 1910s onwards for the Mesopotamian campaign of the First World War and the nascent oil economy in southern Persia and later in the Arab Gulf. For the first two years, the Indian army led the campaign in Mesopotamia owing to political and commercial interests in the region that had built up over the previous century. This also caused the mobilisation and recruitment of various forms of Indian labour resources for the military complex and infrastructural development in the war theatre. As argued already, this

¹⁹ Consul-General, Baghdad to Secy, Foreign Department (FD), Government of India (GoI), 13 Feb 1882, FD, General (Gen.), Apr 1882, 14 B. All primary sources are from the National Archives of India (NAI), New Delhi unless otherwise stated. Most of these residents came from Lucknow and the North Western Provinces, to a smaller extent from Kashmir, Punjab and Madras and included by far more women and children than men. The majority of them, resided in Kerbala (1700), followed by Kadhimain (1000), north of Baghdad, with one thousand. Smaller Indian communities also existed at Baghdad and Najaf. In regard to the floating population, on a particular day at Kerbala this made up “three hundred - not counting women and children - of these temporary residents; the number varies according to the season of the year.”

²⁰ Nakash, Yitzhak (1994), *The Shi'is of Iraq*. Princeton University Press: Princeton. Litvak, Meir (1990), *Continuity and Change in the Ulama Population of Najaf and Karbala, 1791-1904: A Socio- Demographic Study*. *Iranian Studies*, 23, 1/4, 31-60. Ibid. (2000), *A Failed Manipulation: The British, the Oudh Bequest and the Shi'i Ulama of Najaf and Karbala*. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 27, 1, 69-89. Ibid. (2001), *Money, Religion, and Politics: The Oudh Bequest in Najaf and Karbala, 1850-1903*. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 33, 1, 1-21.

²¹ Singha, Radhika (2008), *Passport, Ticket, and India-Rubber Stamp: “The Problem of the Pauper Pilgrim” in Colonial India ca. 1882-1925*, in Harald Fischer-Tine and Ashwini Tambe (ed.) *Spaces of Disorder: The Limits of British Colonial Control in South Asia and the Indian Ocean*. Oxon: Routledge, 49-83.

mobilisation was of a broad nature, addressing several ends of the Indian labour market, and took place under the exigencies of war that partly allowed for circumventing existing emigration laws.²² The labour supply for the oil economy in southern Persia and the Arab Gulf has been scrutinised as well to some extent. With regard to the oil economy in the whole Gulf during the first half of the 20th century, one historian argues that Indian labour in the oil economy was not used primarily for commercial, but owing to strategic and political concerns, as it was more agreeable in some circumstances than other potentially available labour.²³ Looking at a juncture during the early 1920s, another account argues that increasing training for Persian labour aimed at replacing Indian labour.²⁴ However, alongside the vast labour resources for Mesopotamia, the state of war also allowed a lapse of emigration laws for recruitment connected to the early oil complex, a fact that sheds some new light on the company’s history.

²² For a lucid account of labour recruitment for the war in Iraq, including prison inmates, see Singha, Radhika (2007), *Finding Labor from India for the War in Iraq: The Jail Porter and Labor Corps, 1916-1920*. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 49, 2, 412-445. For a broader discussion of military labour used different campaigns, see Ulrichsen, Kristian Coates (2006), *The Logistics and Politics of the British Campaigns in the Middle East, 1914-1922*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, esp. Chp. 6.

²³ Seccombe, I.J./Lawless, R.I. (1986), *Foreign Worker Dependence in the Gulf, and the International Oil Companies: 1910-50*. *International Migration Review*, 20, 3, p. 548-574.

²⁴ Dobe, Michael Edward (2008), *A Long Slow Tutelage in Western Ways of Work: Industrial Education and the Containment of Nationalism in Anglo-Iranian and ARAMCO, 1923-1963*. Unpubl. PhD Dissertation, Rutgers University.

I. Empires of Trade and Religion, Questions of Nationality and Jurisdiction

Between August 1910 and April 1911, a severe diplomatic dispute ensued between British and Ottoman officials over various sites of British property in the Ottoman cities of Baghdad, Karbala and Kadhimain, including the British Residency grounds as well as corporate and private property belonging to British and British Indian subjects. The cities' administrations had planned and put into action the partial destruction of these and more properties also belonging to other nationals because of their alleged dangerous conditions and in order to improve infrastructure. Suspecting a malicious and political intention on the part of local authorities, the British Consul-General in Baghdad, John Gordon Lorimer, represented the subjects' grievances to the British Ambassador in Constantinople asking for intervention at the Sublime Porte to halt the action. However, these representations did not yield much effect. Finally, property worth several thousand pounds was destroyed and British officials were able only to demand payment of compensation for some of the damages caused.²⁵ Despite other nations being affected, the incident seemed to have dealt a blow principally to British prestige at these places. In November 1910, Lorimer reported that “[...] British reputation at Baghdad has fallen to a very low ebb, and I find that British subjects are seriously alarmed, seeing that their rights have never hitherto been so tramped upon here.” Moreover, Abdul Ali, a prosperous Indian merchant running an ice-factory at Baghdad, talked of renouncing his British nationality for Turkish, while several British Indian pilgrims had done so already, owing to the apparent inability of British authorities to afford them proper protection. Lorimer expressed his conviction that a more intelligent man should replace the responsible present Wali, Nazim Pasha, adding that the Baghdad municipality loan should not be entrusted to local authorities until compensation for British subjects was decided upon.²⁶

Arguably, a range of motives – both of subjects and states – characterized this series of incidents. While subjects were anxious to secure protection, regardless of the authority presiding over them, authorities tried to keep up their wards' status and the privileges granted. With states being held accountable to their promises, the British also feared and actually experienced a loss in reputation if they could not. Yet, explaining the conjuncture solely in this perspective seems insufficient. It would attach immense importance to a rather negligible number of subjects living beyond the formal outskirts of the British Empire that would probably not matter otherwise. In contrast, one might argue that rarely, if ever, subjects' fates

²⁵ Demolition of property belonging to British subjects at Karbala and Kadhimain. FD, External (Ext.), Jul 1911, 236-242 B. Turkish encroachments on British owned property at Baghdad, Karbala, etc., FD, Ext., Jul 1911, 243-322 B. Attempt of the Turkish Authorities to encroach on the grounds of the British Residency at Baghdad. Demolition of the property of British subjects at Baghdad, Karbala and Kadhimain. FD, Secret (Sec.) Ext., Jul 1911, 566-597.

²⁶ Consul-General, Baghdad to British Ambassador, Constantinople, 12 Nov 1910. FD, Ext., Jul 1911, 243-322 B.

prompted such reactions between authorities. Situated within a highly politicized region belonging to the Ottoman Empire and almost naturally considered as British Indian sphere of interest and influence, they rather served simultaneously as indicator of British prestige and as a premise of increased political intervention.

1. Multiple Imperialisms and Subjects of Empires

More generally, this peculiar case in Ottoman Iraq is but just one example of larger entangled histories of empires and subjects in the Persian Gulf region in decades preceding the First World War. Political-strategic and economic ideas and the interests of a multiple states intersected here, often colliding with each other. As chief actors, the Ottoman, Persian and British empires clearly emphasized the importance of the Persian Gulf and adjacent lands in their broader political-strategic approach and increasingly wrestled for authority and legitimacy among the subject population. Smaller formations in the Gulf with relatively less power in turn often became objects of imperial designs or were in subordinate relations to empires.²⁷ Also other Great Powers such as Russia and Germany took an increasing interest in developments in the Gulf towards the end of the 19th century, but only the latter was perceived of as a real threat to the British position in the Gulf.²⁸ As a result of its imperial designs on the region, the overall political and economic influence of the British Indian Empire in the Gulf gradually increased towards the end of the 19th century reaching its zenith with World War One. While this advancing drive resulted in many smaller formations successively becoming part of the British Empire, the larger territorial states bordering to the north of the Gulf indeed stayed independent of formal subjugation, but constituted most crucial spheres of British imperial interests.²⁹

Most especially, the Ottoman regime of Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909) suspected the British of such designs and actions, which a series of reports of high-ranking Ottoman officials and administrators beginning as early as 1889 reflect. Pointing to British power in the Persian Gulf and Iraq that materialised, for instance, in the safeguarding of interests of British Indian merchants through a British corvette being placed in the Muscat harbour, they

²⁷ Constantinople’s Sunni central authorities contested Persian-Shiite spheres in southern Iraq. Deringil, Selim (1990), *The Struggle against Shiism in Hamidian Iraq: A Study in Ottoman Counter-Propaganda*. *Die Welt des Islams*, 30, 1/4, 45-62. During this time, Persia often laid claim to Bahrain at the instance of Persian subjects residing there. Kelly, J.B (1957), *The Persian Claim to Bahrain*. *International Affairs*, 33, 1, 51-70.

²⁸ Especially the German-led Baghdad railway scheme frightened the British, who were able to avert the establishment of direct communication between Germany and Basra. Cohen, Stuart (1978), *Mesopotamia in British Strategy, 1903-1914*. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 9, 2, 171-181.

²⁹ For a recent discussion of this, see Onley, James (2009), *The Raj Reconsidered: British India’s Informal Empire and Spheres of Influence in Asia and Africa*. *Asian Affairs*, 40, 1, 44-62.

made suggestions as to how this position of dominance should be contested.³⁰ Arguably, British colonial authorities used, *inter alia*, the presence of British Indian subjects throughout the region resulting from extensive economic and religious ties with the subcontinent as leverage to argue for continued authority and intervention. Furthermore, the incident initially depicted seemed contiguous with increasing tensions and Ottoman objections to British privileges in the larger Gulf area, and in Baghdad in particular, after the coming into power of the Young Turks in 1908.³¹ However, when British authorities faced Ottoman encroachments they often succeeded in resisting these objections to their dominant regional position, at times even by threat of force.³²

Similarly, Persia had been fully inscribed into this orbit of late 19th century British imperialism. Allegedly, it was the fear of a possible Russian advance via India’s North-Western Frontier that particularly determined imperial interests in its neighbour to the west. The conclusion of the Anglo-Russian Convention in 1907, usually seen as end to this great power rivalry, secretly apportioned Persia’s northern zone to Russia and its southern zone to the British Empire.³³ By this time, British imperial power had already attained a comfortable position in the Gulf. When travelling the country during 1889 and 1890, George Nathaniel Curzon, then Member of the British Parliament and later the most determined advocate of forward British imperial policy in the Gulf, was able to observe the extent to which British India’s role had already increased in southern Persia, also imagining its future economic and political stakes there. In Bushehr, for example, he observed the high share of Anglo-Indian trade, the wide circulation of the Indian rupee, and overall a position “not of British power, but of British influence [...] whose unwritten authority is among the many silent monuments to the British name.” This authority was invested to a great extent in the position of the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, a senior officer of the Indian Political Service and subordinated to the Indian government, who was allegedly treated like the “uncrowned king

³⁰ Other critical observations included the system of political officers reporting to the Indian government, the influence attained by British officers in Bushehr and Baghdad, and the extent of foreign trade. Cetinsaya, Gökhan (2003), *The Ottoman View of British Presence in Iraq and the Gulf: The Era of Abdulhamid II*, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 39, 2, 2003, 196-198.

³¹ Besides the size of the residency grounds, they objected to several other British privileges at the time, such as the Residency’s Indian Sepoy guard, the presence of the gunboat ‘Comet’ and the flying of British flags on steamers of Messrs. Lynch Brothers, a British merchant house operating ships in Mesopotamia and Persia. Field Notes (1917), *Mesopotamia. General Staff, India. Calcutta*, 2. Coke, Richard (1927), *Baghdad: The City of Peace*. London: Thornton Butterworth, 284.

³² When workmen reached the grounds of the British Residency and intimated that they would cut right through it, the Resident telegraphed to India for orders, being directed to hand out ammunition and resist by force any attempt of destroying the wall. On hearing this, the city’s authorities immediately decided to realign the road. Willcocks, Sir William (1935), *Sixty Years in the East*. London: William Blackwood & Sons, 251.

³³ Hopkirk, Peter (1992), *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia*, Kodansha International. Others argue that a Russian advance was never likely to happen and Anglo-Russian rivalry as regards the defence of India was hence magnified. Far more important were internal threats in British India. See Yapp, Malcolm (2001), *The Legend of the Great Game*. *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 111, 179-198.

of the Persian Gulf”.³⁴ While several British business houses started operations here, Curzon encountered British Indian and Parsee traders having extensive connections in places of the interior such as Yazd and Kerman as well as on the Gulf littoral at Lengeh and Bandar-Abbas.³⁵ Finally analyzing the commercial and political situation in Persia with regard to Russian competition with British Indian interests, he foresaw a generally positive development. However, he strongly supported further British commercial and political ascendancy in the southern zone, without usurping any territory, in order to oppose possible Russian advances into the country’s north. As Viceroy of India, Curzon paid another visit to the Gulf in 1903, this time halting at other ports as well such as Muscat, Bahrain and Kuwait, where he similarly encouraged British Indian traders to further push trade in their places.

This story is part of a larger narrative of different formations existing and competing in the Gulf. In yet another perspective, imperial formations and political considerations in the Gulf also intersected with movements and lives of various individuals and communities from different regions in the Indian Ocean, that partly pre-dated the arrival of British imperialism in the Gulf. Among these were traders, pilgrims, and, more so at a later stage, various forms of labourers who travelled, sojourned and settled in these realms. Such individuals, usually subjects or protected persons of one of the empires and thus under their consular protection, had a special legal status in their places of foreign abode, for example in regard to jurisdiction, exemption from military service and taxation. The implications of empires mentioned above definitely had repercussions on the way people of different origins lived together and certainly impinged on the socio-economic status of subjects as well. Port cities and urban spaces in the interior of the Persian Gulf region were the most important localities in this regard. They were focal points where different individuals and communities of the Indian Ocean anchored and settled for various reasons and for varying amounts of time. While no neat pattern of national, ethnic or religion-based alliances existed across the region, it was precisely because of the presence of communities from different backgrounds that urban spaces were also the site where foreign residents and consuls took up their office. Thus, these cities were localities of cohabitation as much as of controversy and contestation of imperial power between officials and subjects of different empires.³⁶

³⁴ Curzon, George N. (1966), *Persia and the Persian Question*. Vol. I, II. London: Frank Cass & Co., 236, 451.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 240 f., 244 f., 333 f., 407.

³⁶ Some Ottoman cities have been studied in this regard. Hanley, Will (2007), *Foreignness and Localness in Alexandria, 1880-1914*. Unpubl. PhD dissertation, Princeton University. Constantinople and Smyrna are scrutinised in Berchtold, Johannes (2009), *Recht und Gerechtigkeit in der Konsulargerichtsbarkeit. Britische Exterritorialität im Osmanischen Reich 1825-1914*. Oldenbourg Verlag. For a Gulf city, see Fuccaro, Nelida (2005), *Mapping the Transnational Community. Persians and the Space of the City in Bahrain, c. 1869-1937*. In: Madawi Al-Rasheed (Ed.), *Transnational Connections and the Arab Gulf*. London/New York: Routledge, 39-58.

Often, this special status according to the most-favoured nation status allowed subjects to settle and prosper in foreign lands, claiming consular assistance when needed. However, the mechanism of enabling subjects through extraterritorial jurisdiction and rights was a complex issue. It could be, and actually was, used as well to disable their lives. Far from any uni-dimensionality, exceptions occurred, as the initial case clearly shows, and a neat picture of affinity towards empires was disturbed time and again. Subjects were able to negotiate their affinity and nationality with the situation they were in and imperial formations were at times deeply unstable. At the same time, British residents and consuls for example contested claims to British nationality and rejected petitioners as British subjects for only rightful claimants to British nationality were to enjoy the protection and extra-territorial rights granted to the British Empire in this region. Negotiations of affinities vis-à-vis the region’s empires were nothing new, thus one question is whether and if so what changed with the coming of British Imperialism.³⁷ I dwell in the following on some of the implications of late 19th and early 20th century British imperialism in the Gulf with regard to law and the subjects of empires.

2. Legal Implications of British Imperialism in the Gulf

Arguably, Indian traders and pilgrims, as British subjects or protected persons, as well as other European Empire’s subjects, held a special status nominally conferred only on them and not on the remaining population of the territory, thus being able to prosper in countries surrounding the Persian Gulf.³⁸ While several reasons were probably attributable to this fact, one important factor was a special legal situation in which they found themselves. Certain legal provisions partially existed since the early modern period, but were interpreted differently during the 19th century, while other implications developed in the wake of British Empire’s advances into the Gulf region. In this context, the aforementioned implications of political and economic imperialism were directly connected to various legal forms playing out differentially over time. To use a simple differentiation between direct and indirect imperialism, British power in the Persian Gulf was not used directly to acquire and to subject their populations to European rule, as was the case in parts of India and China; instead, it was applied indirectly in order “to further the economic interests of the inhabitants of the

³⁷ Questions of allegiance occurred under Mughal, Safavid and Ottoman rulers as well, and contentions appearing between the British and Ottoman empires were resonant of disputes over trade and sectarian differences in the nexus of three early modern Muslim empires. Pearson, M.N. (1994), *Pious Passengers. The Hajj in Earlier Times*. London: Hurst & Company.

³⁸ In effect, this special status was not at all conferred only on subjects of European states. In regard to British action, one can definitely say that also others came to be regarded as their subjects and protected persons, either because they satisfied British requirements, or whose becoming protected was a viable imperial interest. In several cases the British Empire effectively claimed persons as subjects, probably for commercial and prestigious reasons.

European State.”³⁹ Thus, legal forms in the way of treaties and agreements were techniques to safeguard economic interests of Empire’s subjects in foreign countries, without annexing any such territory.

Throughout the 19th and early 20th century, the British Empire concluded a substantial number of treaties with almost all existing state formations in the Persian Gulf region regarding a number of points critical to imperial politics. The very nature and contents of these treaties depended on the reasons and environments finally leading to their conclusion (whether out of war or cooperation) and depended on the type and size of state of the opposite party. Occasions for such treaty conclusions had different origins, some took place as peaceful incidents of two high governments deciding over their political and commercial aims, others took place clearly showing which of the two parties was the stronger one, which profited more from the provisions. Among these were also treaties that indirectly or directly touched upon questions of imperial subjects in a number of ways.

One example of treaties indirectly addressing subjects aimed at securing trade routes by land and sea towards the Gulf. Some of these were concluded very early on. In 1820, a treaty was concluded with the smaller Arab Gulf states addressing the suppression of piracy in the Gulf, which the British Empire perceived of as menace to British and international trade and shipping interests. It referred to imperial subjects by stipulating that any offender against it shall be “accounted an enemy of all mankind and shall be held to have forfeited both life and goods.”⁴⁰ With later treaties in 1843 and a perpetual peace in 1853, Trucial states agreed to end intertribal hostilities among them and between their subjects and dependents, as the treaty text professed primarily for their own subjects’ uninterrupted carrying on of pearl fisheries in the Gulf. However, the treaties provided as well for a regulation in case of any of the Sheikhs’ subjects committing offences on imperial subjects. The assailants were to be punished, and the rulers had to afford full redress upon the case.⁴¹ The provisions allowed for and quite effectively facilitated the emergence especially of British and British Indian trade in the Gulf, lasting even into and beyond the period under review here. During the later 19th

³⁹ Woolf, Leonard (2006), *Economic Imperialism*. Read Books, 13. Woolf had been cadet in the Ceylon Civil Service from 1904, rising to the position of assistant government agent before resigning and marrying famous author Virginia Woolf in 1912. He was later on recognized as exponent of the theory of Idealism in International Politics. Glendinning, Victoria (2006), *Leonard Woolf: A biography*. New York: Free Press.

⁴⁰ Aitchison, C.U. (1983), *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, XI, Pt. 2. Delhi: Mittal Publications, 245, 248. The phenomenon of and British reactions to piracy in the Persian Gulf are highly debated. Some argue the British East India Company merely constructed the threat, in order to police the Gulf, thereby furthering its trade and defend India from French plans. Al-Qasimi, Sultan bin Mohamed (1988), *The myth of Arab piracy in the Gulf*. Routledge. Others hail British interventions on piracy as resulting in a ‘Pax Britannica’ actively sought for by local rulers in need of protection. Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj*.

⁴¹ Following the treaty in 1843 with the Trucial Arab Shaikhs for preserving the maritime peace of the Gulf for a period of ten years, a treaty was instituted in 1853 in which the rulers of the Trucial Coast agreed to maintain in perpetuity the maritime peace of the Gulf. Aitchison, *Treaties*, XI, II, 250, 252.

century, further treaties were concluded with smaller Gulf States, which put them into subordinate relation to the British Empire.⁴²

Overall, these and later treaty regulations with states of the lower Gulf also expressed their inferior position and/or subordinate relation to the British Empire. In fact, with Bahrain (in 1880), the Trucial States (1892) and Kuwait (1899) several of these states became British protectorates during the 19th century, from then on they were represented in all foreign matters by the British crown. In fact, they were considered part of the Indian Empire and were in effect administrated by the Gulf Residency that was subordinated to Bombay or the Indian government. While the British resolved not to interfere with internal matters, they actually did by having a decisive impact at least on local commercial courts dealing with disputes between British subjects and subjects of the local rulers. While treaties provided for similar action, such cases were not held in this way in the Ottoman and Persian empires. Thus, the fact that the British Indian hold in the southern Gulf was stronger also resulted in better conditions for Indian merchants in these places.

The above regulations regarding piracy and maritime peace applied, of course, only to the lower part of the Gulf and its adjacent regions, with British authorities having no such power on analogous cases in territorial waters of the Ottoman Empire and Persia to enhance their political and economic position there. With other state suzerainty reigning supreme in these places, British officials were, at least legally, only bystanders when these states’ officials proceeded against piracies in their own waters.⁴³ But local British authorities somehow objected to this reality, also voicing such pretensions after an attack on the Indian buggalow ‘Ganesh Persad’ in October 1879 just a few miles south of Basra that killed two of her crew and seized its property.⁴⁴ British observations to the case were illustrative of the low esteem of Ottoman jurisdiction and prosecution, and their wishes to have a higher influence on such cases. They assessed the incident merely as a result from the impunity with which piracies in these parts of the Gulf had been carried on for a longer period, allegedly owing to the weakness and indifference of Turkish authorities.⁴⁵ With Ottoman authorities still unsuccessful in their efforts of catching assailants by late 1880, British authorities felt compelled to press for more vigorous measures, so that British prestige was further kept up and no one ought to be able to say “that a British vessel can be plundered and British subjects

⁴² For Bahrain and the Trucial States, see *Ibid.*, 237-238, 256 f.

⁴³ Some observations were directly in the opposite. Towards the end of the 19th century, the Inspector of the 6th Army, Nusret Pasha, submitted a report to the Sultan complaining that local Ottoman officials in the Gulf acted as “neutral bystanders, as if these regions’ entire administration had been handed over to Britain.” Quoted in Cetinsaya, *Ottoman View of British Presence in Iraq and the Gulf*, 199.

⁴⁴ Piratical outrage on British Indian buggalow ‘Ganesh Persad’ and murder of two of her crew on the 29th October 1879. Baghdad Residency Records (hereafter, BRR), Files, 1879-1885, 75.

⁴⁵ Consul-General, Baghdad to Foreign Secy, GoI, 19 Nov 1879, *Ibid.*

killed almost within sight of a British Consulate and that no satisfaction can be obtained.’⁴⁶ Earlier British suggestions to institute a special commission with one of them partaking to investigate into the case were not admitted by the Wali of Basra. Later, the British gathered that the rejection was based on him being anti-English in sentiment, and that such a commission with a British official taking a leading role would have resulted in an increase of British local influence.⁴⁷

In conjunction to this, another interesting observation arose long after the culprits had finally been arrested and sentenced. The Indian owner of the ship represented his case claiming some 4,000 Rupees that had allegedly been settled – after representations by the former British Consul at Basra – by the ruling Ottoman authority as indemnification for damages caused, remaining unpaid in the British Treasury at Basra since.⁴⁸ British authorities responded in the negative, with the allegation that no such arrangement had been arrived at. While trade and traffic were regarded as safer in future, no room for action in this particular case appeared to have been discovered or indeed to exist.⁴⁹ This latter account possibly shows that British authorities in the Gulf were effectively more concerned about establishing British influence there on behalf of concerns over the security and protection of trade, rather than actually indemnifying British subjects for losses occurred in the Gulf.

Capitulary rights and extra-territorial jurisdiction

On the other hand, treaties, or rather agreements between European Empires and respective state formations of the Gulf directly touched upon and addressed British subjects and protected persons in these realms. Among the most important were capitulary rights which were freely granted to subjects of European Empires for several centuries past, mostly as a measure by rulers to attract trade to their Eastern empires. Another reason for granting these privileges seems to have been that rulers were at times unwilling to preside over subjects of non-Muslim denominations. The rights included financial benefits in the form of tax exemptions, exemption from military service and overall, the institution of consular jurisdiction.⁵⁰ The underlying idea was that European (Christian) merchants residing in territories in the East were used to laws of their home countries and not amenable to local

⁴⁶ Consul-General to Assistant Political Agent, Basra, 22 Oct 1880, 16 Nov 1880, Ibid.

⁴⁷ Assistant Political Agent, Basra to Consul-General, Baghdad, 19 Nov 1879, 2 Dec 1880, Ibid.

⁴⁸ Parshotam Kahanjee Jawan, Custom House, Porbandar, Kathyawar to Consul-General, Basra, 1 Apr 1885. Ibid.

⁴⁹ Consul-General, Basra to Parshotam Kahanjee Jawan, 1 Apr 1885. Memo, 27 Nov 1885, Ibid.

⁵⁰ The system of capitulations, dating back to the 14th century in the case of the Ottoman Empire, meant that foreign subjects remained under the respective laws of their empires once the capitulary favour had been granted. Foreign subjects in Ottoman realms also enjoyed full exemption from taxes and customs duties. Quatert, Donald (2000), *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 77. For the system of capitulary rights in Iran see Floor, Willem (1983), *Change and Development in the judicial system of Qajar Iran (1800-1925)*. In: Bosworth, Edmund/Carol Hillenbrand (Eds.), *Qajar Iran. Political, Social and Cultural Change, 1800-1925*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

laws existing in these places. This meant that whenever disputes arose between two subjects of European Empires, these were referred to their representatives’ consular and not to local courts. Mixed cases between a British subject and a subject of the respective ruler were usually referred to local authorities, or to mixed courts presided over by a representative of each of the subjects. Here existed a fundamental difference within the Gulf. Ottoman and Persian authorities showed a tendency to bring cases in front of their local authorities and not to mixed courts. On the other hand, cases were referred to mixed courts in places of the southern Gulf, but they were mostly carried on under the supervision of local British consuls or agents, whose authority was probably decisive in such cases.

Certainly, there was no attempt to fully impose British and Indian laws on entire populations in the Gulf at no time during the British colonial period, except for the period of World War One in Ottoman Iraq; likewise, consular jurisdiction had no direct connection with territorial expansion.⁵¹ However, this was also not the aim of British Imperialism in the Gulf during the early 19th century, as discussed earlier. Rather, their aim was to uphold British Indian influence in these places in general, and in particular to safeguard the interests of British Indian trade. In this regard, capitulatory rights and consular jurisdiction seemed to have played quite an important role for individuals, such as merchants and pilgrims trying to gain redress for losses occurred, as much as for the British Empire to carve out ever more rights from decaying empires. In another aspect, consular jurisdiction came to be used also on subjects of other empires. However, quite often British policy seemed to follow a directive of letting subjects of other empires and states participate in their legal provisions. There was a clear difference in regard to the British policy of claiming subjects of other empires between the Ottoman Empire in Europe and in Asia. In European provinces, their policy was to keep British communities rather small, while in Asian territories it was a much more aggressive policy.⁵²

The actual system of Foreign Jurisdiction in the territories surrounding the Gulf played out quite differently. In the case of Muscat, for example, the Sultan agreed in 1873 to the extension of British jurisdiction to subjects of Indian native states, especially subjects of the Rao of Kutch, resident in that place. All other British Indian subjects in these places and in trade relations with India had already come under British jurisdiction during the 1830s.

⁵¹ Fisch argues that there was a tendency in European consular jurisdiction in general throughout the colonial period to encroach upon mixed cases, as European subjects preferred this privilege and their representatives wanted to control their subjects. But the institution of consular jurisdiction had nothing to do with legal or territorial expansion. Fisch, Jörg (1992), *Law as a Means and as an End: Some Remarks on the Function of European and non-European Law in the Process of European Expansion*. In: W.J. Mommsen/J.A. De Moor (Eds.), *European Expansion and Law. The Encounter of European and Indigenous Law in 19th- and 20th-Century Africa and Asia*. Oxford/New York: Berg Publishers, 22 f.

⁵² Berchtold, *Recht und Gerechtigkeit in der Konsulargerichtsbarkeit*, 279.

Henceforth, those British Indian subjects residing in the Sultan’s territory coming from British India as well as those subjects from Kutch were considered as British subjects and thereby under the jurisdiction of the local British Political Agent, a member of the Indian Political Service and subordinate to the Resident in the Persian Gulf.⁵³ In other Gulf States, extra-territorial jurisdiction was introduced and started to work at different times. Rulers of Muscat and Bahrain had already officially conferred on the British the right to jurisdiction over British subjects during the 1830s for the former, and during the 1860s for the latter. For the other states, these rights were probably as well conferred, but they were not stipulated. They started working in Kuwait in 1925, in Qatar in 1939, and in the Trucial States in 1946.⁵⁴

In contrast to the smaller Gulf state formations, the large territorial states of the northern Persian Gulf were independent of any formal subjugation to the British Empire. Instead of direct means, European powers and especially the British Empire, made use of a combination of factors to reach imperial goals. In these countries, one can observe a considerable change in the notion of extra-territorial rights from the earlier voluntary granting in an effort to avoid the burden of administering justice to foreign merchants to the later granting that resulted from military pressure by European states. Now, capitulations were a resource of humiliation, seen as undercutting the authority and sovereignty of the Ottoman and Persian states.⁵⁵ However, given financial constraints and the granting of loans from foreign powers, Ottoman and Persian rulers held back from abolishing the system. Demands of the British Empire in regard to the position of its subjects in the foreign domains were not a singular occurrence. Other empires, such as the Austrian-Hungarian and Russian, also claimed special rights for their subjects.⁵⁶ Yet, besides the gradual winning over in commercial areas and the increasing influence it seems that the British Empire was more successful in this regard than others. This position of privilege of British and British Indian subjects in the Persian Gulf during the later 19th century was, however much contested, to last for another two decades. While capitulations in the Ottoman Empire were suspended during the First World War and finally abolished in the Turkish republic in 1923, capitulatory rights in Persia existed until 1928, and in some smaller Arab Gulf states into the late 1960s and early

⁵³ Agreement regarding Muscat Consular Jurisdiction over subjects of Native States in India residing in Muscat dominions. FD, Political (Pol.), Oct 1873, 218-220 A. Also, Aitchison, *Treaties*, Vol. XI, Pt. III, 309. These subjects were morally entitled to receive in foreign territory all privileges enjoyed by Natives of British India in the same locality. Foreign Secy, Gol to Secy, Government of Bombay (GoBomb), 3 Feb 1866. FD, Pol., Feb 1866, 9-11 A.

⁵⁴ Al Baharna, Husain M. (1998), *British Extra-Territorial Jurisdiction in the Gulf 1913-1971. An Analysis of the System of British Courts in the Territories of the Gulf during the Pre-Independence Era*. Archive Editions: Slough, 10-12, 24-26.

⁵⁵ See for example, Hershlag, Zvi Yehuda (1980), *Introduction to the Modern Economic History of the Middle East*. Brill Archive, 151 ff. Also, <http://p2.www.britannica.com/eb/article-9020158/capitulation> accessed on 2 May 2008.

⁵⁶ Deringil for example shows this for subjects of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. Deringil, Selim (1991), *Legitimacy Structures in the Ottoman State: The Reign of Abdulhamid II (1876-1909)*, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 23, 3, 345-359.

1970s when they finally received their independence from Britain.⁵⁷ Provisions of these capitulations and the extra-territorial jurisdiction granted were important from after the 1910s, when migration processes and the composition of migrant groups from the Indian subcontinent started to change. Then, most Indian migrants explicitly served British imperial institutions in the region as workers and clerks, and thus the provisions were also used to their disadvantage. The regulations in place, especially those in regard to extra-territorial jurisdiction, regulated the lives of British imperial subjects and protected persons. In the following, I address their mode of operation and consequences for these subjects.

3. Claims to British Nationality: Empire’s Subjects and Protected Persons

In December 1911 Abdul Samad alias Mir Samad Khan, Son of Habeeb Khan, a Pathan of Peshawar, about 45 years of age and a tea maker by profession, had to give ample reasons why he wanted to be acknowledged as a British subject residing in the Baghdad *vilayat* (province) of the Ottoman Empire. In an affidavit he explained his life trajectory to officers in the Residency. He said he left Peshawar about twenty-five years earlier. He came to Baghdad for pilgrimage and stayed there for several years before he moved on to Aleppo and Damascus. After travelling this area he finally came to Baghdad in 1908 and married an Arab woman who bore him a son. Intending to settle in Baghdad forever, Abdul Samad asked for a registration certificate enabling him in future to give proof of his nationality. In order to substantiate his claim he produced a discharge certificate from the Commanding Officer of a squadron of the Bombay Lancers where he served for little more than four years in the 1890s. Abdul Samad gave further verbal proofs of his origin and finally, in May 1912, the Consul at Baghdad, John Gordon Lorimer, accepted him “without difficulty” as a British subject.⁵⁸

Abdul Samad's case is just one of several instances in which migrants from the Indian subcontinent made efforts to register themselves with British Consulates in the Persian Gulf before the First World War.⁵⁹ Different British, Ottoman and Persian regulations at the time necessitated such a move and the success or failure to register finally decided to a great extent on the applicant's future in the new country. Over the course of long and arduous journeys migrants lost their identity documents or never possessed such. Inevitably, at the time of application then many were not able to produce veritable documents as required by

⁵⁷ Quatert, *The Ottoman Empire*, 78. Al Baharna, *British Extra-Territorial Jurisdiction in the Gulf*, 10-12.

⁵⁸ Papers regarding nationality of British subjects discussed with and admitted by the Turkish Government. BRR, *Nationality Questions*, A.23, 1911-1913.

⁵⁹ Given that I had only access to the records of the Baghdad Residency I can make statements solely for this locality. However, as will be seen later on in the paper, the process of registration was true for the Persian Gulf in general. A rough estimate of the documents available suggests that some two hundred similar cases were dealt with. However, this number includes only cases in which applicants did not possess regular identity documents and thus had to prove their nationality by other means.

regulations. Under such circumstances, registering with the British Consulate still left subjects in an ambiguous position. Who would be granted – by way of a registration certificate – the status of a British subject and who would not? Most claimants succeeded in the efforts of retaining their status as British subjects, while other claims to British nationality – rightfully or not – were disputed, at times rejected.⁶⁰ In a larger framework, this policy expressed the concern that only rightful claimants to British nationality were to enjoy the protection and extra-territorial rights granted to the British Empire in this region. It also expressed the assumption of empires at that time that “each state possessed its own unique laws too exalted for others to enjoy.”⁶¹ Of course, a grey zone existed in which such considerations were secondary. Former Ottoman and Persian subjects, for example Jewish traders, could obtain British protection and subject status. In return, the British Empire secured their trade and thereby gradually expanded its economic strength and political influence in the region. We can also trace singular cases in which British Indians tried to become Ottoman subjects.⁶²

As stated above, British and British Indian subjects as well as commodities circulated to a considerable extent between the Indian subcontinent and the Persian Gulf region. For British Indian migration to and living in the Persian Gulf, in the period under review, was inevitably of a different kind compared to what contemporaneous forms of coerced and indentured migration in the Indian context for example to the West Indies meant. British imperial and colonial policy within the Persian Gulf during this early period was rather particular about carving out a special status for all those who had rightful claims to being a British subject or to enjoy any other form of British protection. Most importantly, the British Empire had immanent interests in the economic fortunes of its subject people and the smooth functioning of their economic sphere. This policy was, of course, part of a larger effort to ensure and increase vital political and economic interests in the region. Eventually, it challenged the sovereignty of the respective rulers over their territory. Thus a picture evolves in which the British colonial system, in a sense, took on paternalistic role that enabled subjects residing in its overseas territories to circulate under the provision of extra-territorial rights and jurisdiction. However, especially Ottoman administrators from the late 1880s and certain parts of the Persian public from the early 20th century onwards increasingly contested this position of privilege, especially of British subjects. In some instances this was regardless of religion or race and sometimes British Indian subjects became targets of these resentments.

⁶⁰ Doubtful cases of Nationality of British subjects. BRR, Nationality Questions, Vol. 13, A.25.

⁶¹ Quatert, *The Ottoman Empire*, 77.

⁶² Mirza Mohammad Mohsin Ali Khan, a fugitive from justice: his attempts to become a Turkish subject. BRR, Files, 464, 1902-1913. Mirza Mohammad Mohsin Ali Khan had been convicted at the Faizabad court to imprisonment but managed to flee to the Ottoman Empire, where he applied for Ottoman nationality.

Provisions and operations of the Orders in Council

On the side of the British Empire the special rights granted by the Ottoman and Persian Empires as well as by smaller Gulf state formations resulted into several successive Orders in Council for different places, working somehow as executive orders and delineating more specifically the rights and duties of British subjects in the foreign country, and several other important provisions. The earliest Ottoman Order I found dates from 1873, the earliest Persian Coast and Islands Order from 1889. Political and judicial developments in Britain, India and in these territories made it necessary time and again to repeal former orders and replace them through updated ones. In addition, these Orders were also issued for other places during the 19th and 20th centuries, for example for Muscat in 1867, Bahrain in 1913, Kuwait in 1926 and Qatar in 1936. However, the substance of all these legislations did not change considerably over time. Given shortage of time and space I shall focus here only on the stated Ottoman and Persian Coast and Islands Order.

Judicial relations of a criminal, civil and administrative nature between parties involved were regulated according to British or British Indian laws. While one order extended only British laws to the Ottoman dominions, two separate orders extended British and British Indian laws on the one hand to the southern littoral part of Persia, running from the Mekran coast of the Gulf of Oman to the Shatt-al-Arab in the Persian Gulf thus comprising the Persian coast and islands, and to the remaining part of Persia on the other hand.⁶³ In fact, the provisions of several Acts such as the Foreign Jurisdiction Act of 1890 were herewith transferred to the countries around the Persian Gulf “as if they were a British colony or possession.”

Certain provisions in these orders allowed for the administration of British subjects in the foreign territory. It was thus compulsory for British subjects permanently residing in the foreign realms to register themselves once in the beginning of every year with the Consulate of the district they lived in. Newcomers had to register within one month after arrival. This process involved that applicants, as in the case of Abdul Samad, whom we encountered earlier, had to produce either a passport or any other veritable identification document if they wanted to receive a certificate on completion of the registration process. Migrants were at times not able to produce such documents and thus did not receive a registration certificate. In 1903, the Government of India warned Indians proceeding to the Ottoman Empire, except to

⁶³ Ottoman Order in Council, 1899 (hereafter OOiC). FD, Extl., Nov 1899, 97. Persian Coast and Islands Order in Council, 1907 (hereafter PCIOiC). FD, Sec. E., Jan 1908, 546.

Medina, to carry with them passports or identification documents.⁶⁴ However, the granting or denial of certificates had implications for their future life and the relation to the host society too. Ottoman officials demanded proofs of nationality in a number of cases, for instance in matters relating to property.⁶⁵ Another provision in the orders regulated the proceedings after the death of a British subject. This implied for example that the Political Resident in the consular district was to take into his possession the property of the deceased as long as relatives did not make any claims.

Both orders made it necessary for the Political Residents in the respective domain to report to the Governor General or the Secretary of State on the operation of the Order in Council every year, showing among others the numbers and circumstances of civil and criminal cases and the number of registrations. I was able to retrieve these reports only for the Persian Coast and Islands Order. The under-mentioned diagram shows for various years the number of British and British Indian subjects residing in the area of the Persian coast and islands and the number of civil and criminal cases and deaths.

Year	Br. subjects	Br. Indian Subjects	Total subjects	Criminal Cases	Civil Cases	Deaths
1901	-	-	-	1	1	1
1904	3	86	89	2	-	2
1907	5	93	98	2	2	3
1909	19	112	131	4	1	4
1911	23	267	289	-	-	-
1913	36	216	252	1	1	-

Table 1. Number of registered British and British Indian subjects, court cases and deaths in the area of the Persian coast and islands in various years, 1901-1913⁶⁶

Apart from the different origin and extent of laws that were applied to the respective dominions, the Orders contained similar provisions for the jurisdiction over British subjects residing in the foreign realms, comprising both natives of any British Protectorate as well as other persons enjoying British protection.⁶⁷ Additionally these provisions extended to the property and all personal or proprietary rights and liabilities of all British subjects within the

⁶⁴ Steps taken to inform British Indian subjects proceeding to Turkey of the necessity of providing themselves with passports or some similar documents showing their identity. FD, Ext., Dec 1903, 77-80 B.

⁶⁵ This was necessitated by an 1867 legislation, which admitted foreigners to possess immovable property on the same title as Ottoman subjects and under the same laws and regulations provided a registration certificate was produced. Law conceding to Foreigners the right of immovable property in the Ottoman Empire, 7th Sepher 1284 (10 June 1867 accordingly). BRR, Files, 25, 1868-1909.

⁶⁶ Reports on the operation of the Persian Coast and Islands Order (various years), FD and FPD, various Branches (General, Establishment, Secret....). I was not able to trace the reports for several years and could therefore not include them.

⁶⁷ OOIC, Art. 5, para. 1-5. PCIOiC, Art. 5, para. 1-5. Persons that enjoyed British protection often included religious or other minorities such as Jews and Armenians. But also European traders such as Germans were at times included, especially when their respective governments did not have a representation in the country and thus applied for British protection of their subjects.

limits of the order; to Persian or Ottoman subjects and foreigners under certain circumstances; and finally to British ships with their boats, the persons and property on board or belonging thereto.⁶⁸ Another provision made it possible for Ottoman and Persian subjects to file a case against a British subject in a British court in the territory of the foreign country;⁶⁹ in return, British subjects were able to file a case against native subjects in the established British courts as also in Ottoman or Persian courts.⁷⁰

These provisions of course helped to build an informal sphere of the British Empire in the territories and impinged in a number of ways on the sovereignty of the respective rulers over their territory and subjects. Together with these orders British courts were established in several cities over the region with the respective Political Residents acting as judges in these courts. This resulted to an almost duplicate system of jurisdiction. Given the fact that native and British subjects could file cases against each other at British courts or at Persian and Ottoman courts that were divided into religious ('shar) and civil ('urf) courts meant a real blow to the rulers of the territories.⁷¹

There were a number of reasons for persons, whether eligible to the status of British Indian subjects and protected persons or not, to enrol and register with the local authorities. On the one hand, it was a way to prevent, or forego, conscription into the Ottoman Army. It seems to have been common practice of the army to go through the streets and to enrol whoever was not able to make representations otherwise.⁷² A registration certificate taken out from the consular establishment was thus a way to secure protection from claims of foreign authorities, and a way to represent grievances to the resident or consul in the foreign country of abode. This included on the one hand business claims of British subjects and protected persons against Arab and Persian merchants, and on the other hand claims against the respective governments because of local tribes who frequently looted caravans, native crafts and other establishments of merchants.

As regards the process of applying for British nationality, local British officials often inquired quite meticulously into claims of British nationality in order to strictly verify their correctness before admitting them. This included interviews of claimants and witnesses conducted by residents, consuls and subordinate residency staff, the proof of relevant identity

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ OOiC, Art. 150, para. 1. PCIOiC, Art. 38.

⁷⁰ OOiC, Art. 150, para. 1, Art. 152. PCIOiC, Art. 40. In either case, respective subjects had to abide to decisions of the courts.

⁷¹ For a discussion as regards jurisdiction in Persia see Floor, *op. cit.*, p. 133-137.

⁷² Nationality of Allowee Ibn Abdul Hussain and his sons. FD, Pol., Jul 1881, 219-227 A. Nationality of certain men in Turkish Arabia who are claimed by the local authorities as Ottoman subjects. FD, Pol., Aug 1881, 607-613 A. Forcible enrolment in the Ottoman Army of two British Indian Subjects. FD, Pol., Feb 1882, 73-83 A.

documents and giving of affidavits, as well as gathering information from other authorities, whether foreign or British Indian.

The Baghdad resident, for example, noted the need for such procedure when inquiring for information from the government of Bengal about one particular claimant. Accordingly, the advantages of being recognized as British subject in Turkish lands (i.e. the exemption from military service and from certain taxes) were sometimes fraudulently claimed by persons not entitled to it, and were also frequently contested by the local Turkish authorities. Consequently, claims were not consented to until the consulted authorities responded, or rejected in case they responded negatively.⁷³

4. Socio-Economic Aspects of Nationality and Jurisdiction

The regulations were of course also reaching into the economic sphere as personal and proprietary rights of British subjects were explicitly stated in the orders. We can account for a number of instances in which the British Empire, or the Political Residents at the places, demanded the payment of liabilities that either the Governments or their subjects had with British and British Indian merchants and traders. Also in other peripheral cases the jurisdiction had implications for subjects. If a subject had been convicted to imprisonment before a British or a native court they were handed over to the respective Consulate to further deal with them. Sometimes they were interned in the jails that some Consulates possessed or they were sent to Bombay for imprisonment.

However difficult it is to make specific remarks on the Ottoman perception of British and British Indian subjects in the Persian Gulf we can account for several situations in which these subjects became the aim of an Ottoman administration in Mesopotamia that was marked, in certain ways, by bureaucratic power and ill-will. As indicated above, foreign subjects in the Ottoman Empire in general were not exclusively independent from Ottoman administrative authorities and procedures but had to relate to them in a number of instances, for example in cases including real estate or marriages with Ottoman subjects. Here these subjects were dependent on the goodwill of the singular administrators who could delay the processes involved or comment on the subject's origin.

We come across one instance of administrative delay, possibly for political reasons, in the case of the British subject Ibrahim son of Hasan Panjabi, originally from Peshawar, whose

⁷³ Consul-General, Baghdad to Secy, Government of Bengal (GoBeng), Pol. Dep., 3 Oct 1913. BRR, Nationality Questions, A.311-A.320, 1909-1914. This was the case of Saiyid Muhammad Ali, who had allegedly come from Calcutta for pilgrimage as well as to find a job in the Baghdad Railway works in 1913. The Bengal authorities were neither able to trace the address nor the family relations which the claimant had given in his affidavit. Under Secy, GoBeng to Consul-General, Baghdad, 9 Dec 1913, *Ibid.* He had probably left Baghdad by January 1914. Note, 16 Jan 1914, *Ibid.*

plan was in 1898 to marry his brother Muhammad Ali to an Arab woman. In such cases, Ottoman regulations made it necessary to apply to and receive from local authorities permission to marry a Turkish subject. Within a period of several years, Ibrahim and consular officials addressed letters to various institutions including the *Wali* (Governor) of Baghdad. An initial reply totally rejected the case saying that Indians and Afghans in general were like Persians, prohibited from marrying Turkish subjects. Only in 1903, four years after Ibrahim's initial request, a final answer issued that the marriage could take place on the ground that foreign Muslim subjects could marry women of the same sect. However, Shia Muslims in general were not allowed to marry Sunnis.⁷⁴

Subjects and protected persons of the British Empire received similar treatment from Persian authorities, which had to do with commercial considerations. In this regard, one also witnesses British Indian and Persian attempts to claim subjects of other states, either residing in their territory or not. This was common British practice also in the Asian parts of the Ottoman Empire.⁷⁵ One particular case spoke volumes in these regards. While travelling in Egypt, Abdul Hussein Shirazi, reportedly a rich merchant residing in Bombay, and his son Mirza Mohamed were claimed by the local Persian Consul General as Persians, although bearing a passport issued by the Bombay government that recognized them as British subjects. Enquiring information from superior authorities about the merchant's status, the British Consul at Cairo expressed the undesirability of conceding to his Persian colleague's wishes unless evidence would suggest otherwise, especially since this could form a dangerous precedent for the future. His caution was also based on previous experience with yet another British Indian in Cairo, Mirza Fadlullah, whom the Persian authorities frequently claimed. He was prompted to ascertain that “Persian Consular officials in the East are only too desirous of claiming rich Indians of Persian origin as their own nationals, as it is from such sources that they are enabled by exaction to derive the greater part of their incomes.”⁷⁶

Subsequent enquiries from Bombay authorities brought to light that Abdul Hussein Shirazi had resided in Bombay ever since arriving there in about 1856. His father, Haji Zynool Abidin, had become a naturalized British subject in 1858, when he was still a minor aged eight, which carried with it the dependent's naturalization as well. Later on, he was a merchant and agent to the Bombay Persian Steam Navigation Company and created a Justice

⁷⁴ Marriage of a British Indian subject with an Arab woman. BRR, Files, 398, 1898-1906.

⁷⁵ However, quite often British policy seemed to follow a directive of letting subjects of other empires and states participate in their legal provisions. Arguably, there was a difference in regard to the British policy of claiming subjects of other empires between the Ottoman Empire in Europe and in Asia. In European provinces, their policy was to keep British communities rather small, while in Asian territories it was a much more aggressive policy. Berchtold, *Recht und Gerechtigkeit in der Konsulargerichtsbarkeit*.

⁷⁶ Persian Consul, Cairo to Consul-General, Cairo 4 May 1888. Consul-General, Cairo to Secretary of State (SoS) for Foreign Affairs, 20 May 1888. FD, Ext., Dec 1888, 158-173.

of the Peace for the Presidency town in 1884, which according to section 23 of the Criminal Procedure Code presumed that he was not the subject of a foreign state. As all his intentions suggested, Abdul Hussein had elected a British Indian nationality, the Indian authorities considered him being correctly treated as a British subject.⁷⁷

Authorities in Britain acknowledged the peculiarities of the case. Accordingly, British Indian naturalization had no legal effect beyond the limits of British India, and despite the naturalized subject being entitled to diplomatic and consular protection in foreign countries, the naturalization did not strictly withdraw “him from Persian jurisdiction in Persia nor from the jurisdiction of the Persian Consular Courts in the Ottoman dominions when those Courts have extra-territorial jurisdiction.” However, based on the fact that the Russian government had been allowed for some time by Persian authorities to treat those Russian subjects formerly being Persian even in Persia as Russian subjects, the British Foreign Office scented a possible loophole. Citing stipulations of the Treaty of Paris of March 1857, which had ended the Anglo-Persian War and conferred the most-favoured nation status on both parties, they demanded rights for their subjects and commerce equal to the ones Russia was able to acquire, and directed their Cairo representative to properly insist on Abdul Hussein Shirazi being considered and treated as a British protected subject.⁷⁸

5. Early Labour Migration and Legal Implications

At the turn of the century, the international position of the Ottoman and Persian Empires was characterized simultaneously by high debts to European powers, as well as an underdeveloped industry and commerce. On the contrary, European empires backed by economically lucrative possessions such as British India were able to develop and invest abroad and played on these empires’ plight. The dependent powers were left to buy European technology and services for the erection of necessary infrastructure.⁷⁹ In the Gulf region, this circumstance obviously facilitated British business presence, and major British and small-scale British Indian enterprises started operating in these parts. The former were active in works connected to large-scale industrial projects in Ottoman and Persian parts of the Gulf, such as the building of railways and roads, irrigation works, and shipping, while Indian

⁷⁷ SoS for India to Governor-General, 28 June 1888. Under Secy, FD to Secy, PD, GoBomb, 27 July 1888. Secy, GoBomb to Foreign Secy, GoI, 17 Aug 1888. Ibid. Secy, GoBomb to Foreign Secy, GoI, 15 Oct 1888. Statement of Abdul Hussein Shirazi, 26 Sept 1888. Viceroy to SoS for India, 27 Nov 1888, Ibid.

⁷⁸ SoS for Foreign Affairs to Consul-General, Cairo, 11 Jan 1889. FD, Ext., May 1889, 8-12.

⁷⁹ Quatert, *The Ottoman Empire*, 71 f. As for railways, with a few exceptions foreign capital built almost all lines in the Ottoman Empire. Ibid., 121.

enterprises connected to this stream were more of an intermediary character.⁸⁰ Contrary to the traditional trading businesses then prevalent, these new operations included more industrialized forms of production that necessitated different sets of skills. Moreover, the local labour supply was thought of as insufficiently skilled and scarce by imperial firms and companies. In concession agreements concluded with the respective governments, the companies promised to adhere to certain principles in regard to their operations.

Thus, expanding business interests in the Gulf triggered in part considerations within British enterprises and beyond, and at times actually led to the implementation, of importing labour from various places in India. Individual contractors, private enterprises and officials asked for and Indian governmental officials discussed the possibilities of Indian labour migration to certain Gulf destinations. Within these consultations, some of the legal implications depicted above came into the picture, with other legal aspects of the colonial state adding. Most especially, the Indian Emigration Act of 1883 posed major problems in regard to proposed endeavours. It principally stipulated that Indian ports from and countries to which emigration was lawful had to be specifically notified as such. But none of the Gulf countries were notified accordingly, and only Calcutta, Madras and Bombay were ports from which emigration was generally lawful.⁸¹ Although parts of the Indian government were quite hesitant initially to allow labour emigration to such places, small spaces opened up nevertheless to accommodate decisions in the colonial legal apparatus favourable to private enterprises, the commercial position of ports, and regional and governmental interests.

One of the earliest discussions in this regard was over the recruitment of labour for the erection and extension of residency and consulate buildings in Muscat, Persia and Mesopotamia. In November 1903, the Bombay government pleaded to the central authorities to allow future emigration to these places from Karachi under sections 7 and 8 of the Indian Emigration Act of 1883. Several contractors for government works had earlier asked for permission to despatch necessary coolies and artisans to such destinations, but legal restrictions then only allowed emigration from Karachi under special provisions to East

⁸⁰ One important British company, among others, was Messrs. Lynch Brothers who operated the Euphrates and Tigris Steam Navigation Co. in Mesopotamia as well as a line on the Karun river since its opening up to foreign trade in the late 1880s. At least in Persia, they were also active in building and managing of roads. Shahnava, Shahbaz (2005), *Britain and the opening up of South-West Persia 1880-1914: A Study in Imperialism and Economic Dependence*. London: Routledge, Chp. 6-7. Irrigation projects in Mesopotamia are invariably connected to Sir William Willcocks, a British Indian engineer and then Adviser to the Turkish government for irrigation projects, and several British companies, who implemented his plans. One example is Sir John Jackson Ltd. Co., London. Indian enterprises are less known by name, while their existence is shown in the following case of Karachi firms.

⁸¹ Section 7 and 8, Indian Emigration Act of 1883. In: Royal Commission on Labour. *Foreign Reports*. Vol. II. *The Colonies and the Indian Empire*. House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, C. 6795-XI, 1892, 234.

Africa, in connection to the building of the Uganda Railway, and to the Seychelles.⁸² Allegedly, these and various other firms as much as Sind authorities had viable commercial and economic interests in such an amendment that would spare the former additional costs for channelling labourers to the Gulf via Bombay, and overall improve regional trade links with the Gulf.⁸³ The Indian government was quite reluctant initially, though. Various officials of the emigration branch strongly objected to any action on the lines proposed and expressed fears it would allow also emigration apart from that connected to government and its contractors. For the time being, the central government suggested that other provisions of emigration law should be used in the case of artisans, while requesting more information on the extent of proposed coolie emigration before taking any decision.⁸⁴ Further representations as to the urgent necessity of an amendment met with replies that labour could be obtained easier from Bombay instead.⁸⁵

Within this process, the Indian Foreign Secretary, Louis William Dane, compassionately argued for an amendment on proposed lines, if no other solution was available. Commenting that coolies and artisans, as British subjects, were sure of fair treatment because of capitulations effective in the places mentioned, he thought it

[...] rather ridiculous that the provisions of the Emigration Act intended for the benefit of the Indian artisans and coolies should work to deprive them of a chance of making honest money and Government of their services on Government works where other skilled labour is not readily available. [...], [and that] a little judicious illegality is desirable if the object cannot be achieved otherwise [...].⁸⁶

Principally, he argued that the protection and efficient safeguarding of Indian labour migrants was provided for by British imperial rights over its subjects, for example in regard to jurisdiction, as well as the wide-spread presence of British officials in northern Gulf countries. Admittedly, his view contrasted existing law. The Indian Emigration Act of 1883 clearly stipulated that in order to notify a country for emigration, the Governor General had to officially confirm that laws and provisions of the country to which emigration was to be sanctioned were sufficient for the protection of emigrants during residence therein.⁸⁷ In

⁸² GoBomb, General Department (GD) to Secy, Revenue and Agriculture (RA), GoI, 25 Nov 1903. RA, Emigration (Emi.), Jan 1904, 1. Note, Emi., Jan 1904, 1-5.

⁸³ Collector, Karachi to Commissioner, Sind, 8 Feb 1904. Commissioner, Sind to GD, GoBomb, 12 Feb 1904. RA, Emi., Jul 1904, 6 A. Several merchant houses showed interest in recruiting Indian labour. Among these were Messrs. B.R. Herman and Co., the Swiss-based coffee and cotton traders Messrs. Volkart Bros., Seth Jewanji Ibrahimji and Co., Seth Sheikh Adamji Jewanji, Seth Jesraj Valiji, Mr. Edulji Lodawalla. Protector of Emigrants, Karachi to Commissioner, Sind, 25 Jan 1904, Ibid.

⁸⁴ An official pointed out that the laws and provisions prevailing in Muscat would adhere to the necessary statement to allow out-migration, but expressed doubts for Persia and Turkey. Note, Ibid., p. 1. See also Note, J.O. Miller, Ibid. Note, Denzil Ibbetson, Ibid., 3. Note, J.O. Miller, Ibid., 4.

⁸⁵ Secy, RA, GoI, to GD, GoBomb, 1 Dec 1903. GD, GoB to Secy, RA, GoI, 2, 7 Dec 1903. Secy, RA, GoI to GD, GoBomb, 9 Dec 1903. RA, Emi., Jan 1904, 2-5.

⁸⁶ Note, L.W. Dane, Ibid., p. 5.

⁸⁷ Indian Emigration Act, Royal Commission on Labour, 234.

another observation on the proposed amendments, we can not only witness arguments of procedure pertaining to the case, but also that departments within the Indian government held quite opposing views, and diverse intentions and explanations on issues of emigration. Officials in the emigration branch, thus, were less optimistic about the case and wanted more and precise information about the extent of emigration. As one officer noted: “Even if it is decided to venture on a little judicious illegality, it is as well to know precisely to what extent the law is being exceeded.”⁸⁸

The issue still being under discussion in March 1904, Bombay brought forth strong support from several Sind authorities to dispel any fears held by the Indian government. According to them, the Epidemic Diseases Act would prevent unrestricted coolie emigration from that port following its opening to emigration, while sparing Karachi-based contractors to send artisans five hundred miles to embark from Bombay.⁸⁹ Further statements voiced these present restrictions’ negative economic effects for the business of Karachi firms and the general interests of that port. The former had been sending workmen to the places already for years, fearing a loss in their operation now if they were to abandon their competitive advantage of proximity to the Gulf over rival Bombay firms.⁹⁰

While the Protector of Emigrants in Karachi also pleaded for an amendment, the city’s collector seemed to have the most intriguing arguments favouring the procedure. He pointed to the constant flow of labour between Karachi and the Gulf ports, especially a number of artisans, chiefly masons, that migrated every year to Basra and Muscat in expectation of obtaining employment there. He professed that they merely went in search of employment and not under a contract, thus not being covered under the provisions of the Emigration Act. Attributing this to restrictions in place that allegedly drove artisans to emigration without certainty of employment, he argued instead for a system of assuring labourers of their future under a contract. He estimated that the dangers arising from the present system were greater than those to be apprehended from the possibility of men being occasionally engaged on objectionable terms or of the employees not fulfilling the terms of the contract.⁹¹ He substantiated his argument through two instances and left it rather rhetorically for government to decide whether they would give reasonable facilities to Karachi firms for sending labour

⁸⁸ Note by R.E.V. Arbuthnot, *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ GD, GoB to RA, GoI, 11, 13 March 1904. RA, Emi., July 1904, 5-13 A.

⁹⁰ Commissioner, Sind to GD, GoBomb, 12 Feb 1904. Collector of Karachi to Commissioner, Sind, 8 Feb 1904. *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Collector, Karachi to Commissioner, Sind, 8 Feb 1904. *Ibid.* One case referred to some 225 artisans, riveters, carpenters, and masons recruited from Karachi for the construction of buildings connected to the residency at Baghdad and of steamers that the Euphrates and Tigris Steam Navigation Company built at Basra. The offenders were punished for recruiting labour to these places. The second case referred to an advertisement of the company Jewanji Ibrahimji & Co., wherein they advised artisans to proceed to Muscat on the distinct understanding that the advertising firms of contractors will employ them there at certain specified rates of wages.

overseas, or to further tolerate adopting modes of evasion. If the law was not amended as proposed, he prophesied detriments “to the interests and welfare of the very class of persons whom it is the object of [...] the Emigration Act to protect.”⁹²

Overall, the arguments in favour of amendment on proposed lines had convinced the Indian government. Towards the end of March 1904 they declared the port of Karachi to be a port from which emigration was lawful, providing for a cancellation as soon as the need for it no longer existed.⁹³ In this particular case we see unravel a number of reasons and environments for legislation to finally take place. In this particular case, considerations were less about the needs of government to procure labour, but the adherence to commercial interests of certain regions and business interests of certain merchants.

In other circumstances, similar discussions took place as well, albeit under different pretexts. Considerations of the British Indian engineer William Willcocks over several years during the early 1900s to import Indian coolie labour for irrigation projects in southern Mesopotamia afford a particularly astonishing example. A graduate from Thomason Engineering College at Rurki in India in 1872, Willcocks started his career in the irrigation department of the United Provinces, and subsequently continued to work in Egypt and South Africa. Becoming adviser to the Turkish government for public works some time during the early 1900s, he actually stayed in Mesopotamia only from 1908 and 1911 to oversee the works finally sanctioned by the Ottoman administration.⁹⁴ While still employed by the Egyptian government, Willcocks already professed a clear vision for the re-transformation of the Tigris region and its surroundings into the flourishing and prospering land it had been some two and a half millennia earlier. This, however, seemed inevitably connected to

“labourers from India and possibly from Egypt [who] will dig the canals, construct the weirs and regulators, and then settle down in millions to reclaim and cultivate these lands potent with future wealth, just as though they were in another Punjab or another Egypt.”⁹⁵

In his vision, the scope of future immigration of “thousands and tens of thousands of industrious labourers from British India, and possibly from Egypt [...] flocking to the Delta of the Tigris” also benefited the construction of railway connections that could in turn transport “men and materials from the Persian Gulf to the irrigation canals, renovated fields, and rising

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Notification, 23 Mar 1904. RA, GoI to GD, GoBomb, 26 Mar 1904. Under Secy, RA, GoI to Legislative Department (LD), 6 May 1904. Ibid.

⁹⁴ For his autobiography, see Willcocks, *Sixty years in the East*. The importance of Indian irrigation engineering within the empire is closer scrutinised in David Gilmartin (2006), ‘Imperial Rivers: Irrigation and British Visions of Empire’. In: Ghosh, Durba/Kennedy, Dane (Eds.), *Decentering Empire: Britain, India and the Transcolonial World*. New Delhi.

⁹⁵ Willcocks, William (1903), *The Restoration of the Ancient Irrigation Works on the Tigris, Or, The Recreation of Chaldea*. Cairo: National Printing Department, 16.

towns of Upper Chaldea.”⁹⁶ In 1904, William Morgan Moylan, a negotiator for some of the large irrigation works under Willcocks, obtained information from the Indian government that the Commerce and Industry Department had to be applied to for sanctioning the emigration of coolie labour for works outside India.⁹⁷

By 1905 at the latest, Willcocks had a clearer view of designs and estimates that possible irrigation works in Mesopotamia would entail. These first plans resulted in a book publication during the same year in which he dwelled on necessary work processes, giving descriptions of the general population of Iraq and specifically referring to the types of craftsmen needed to carry out the building work, with the number of builders available in Baghdad and rates of pay.⁹⁸ However, the text did not at all refer to Indian labour. Again, a similar report a couple of years later included a section concerning labour, but stated that it was available plentiful, although periods existed in spring and autumn when people were busy with ploughing, sowing and harvesting. Local Sheikhs were engaged to give guarantees to the government of supplying workmen.⁹⁹

Despite the absence of references to recruitment of external labour in these reports, Willcocks was still interested and he himself acquired further information on the possible supply of Indian labour. In 1909, for example, Willcocks foresaw that he might require about 15,000 Indian labourers, in case the proposed works were sanctioned and entrusted to him by the Ottoman government, after which the Baghdad resident sounded out Indian authorities on whether any legal difficulties existed in obtaining such labour.¹⁰⁰ Shortly afterwards, Willcocks officially addressed the Resident on the idea of importing Indian labour, which he thought necessary for it would be “[...] the first occasion on which foreign labour, provided by British subjects, will have been imported into this country.”¹⁰¹ The Indian government’s response was not overwhelming. Alongside a copy of the Indian Emigration Act of 1908, they stated with reference to its section 4 that they were not ordinarily disposed to allow “emigration under indenture to countries not under the British flag.” Permitting it in the case

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 31.

⁹⁷ William Morgan Moylan to Under Secy, FD, GoI, 18 Oct 1904. FD, Gen., Oct 1909, 97. Slightly later than Willcocks (AMICE 1885, and MICE 1887), Moylan became associated member of the Institution of Civil Engineers in 1902 and a member in 1914. Moylan had spent part of his career as railway engineer in India and was involved in the construction of the Gaya Katrasgarh Railway during that time. I thank Annette Ruehlmann of ICE’s library for providing this information from available membership application forms.

⁹⁸ Willcocks, Sir William (1905), *The Irrigation of Mesopotamia*. Cairo: National Printing Department, 45, 122.

⁹⁹ Willcocks, Sir William (1911), *The Irrigation of Mesopotamia*. London: Spon, 95.

¹⁰⁰ Consul-General, Baghdad to Secy, FD, GoI, 18 May 1909. FD, Gen., Jul 1909, 342-345 B. Willcocks stated without further reason that he favoured employing Muslims from the Attock, Rawal Pindi, and Jhelum Districts. An official in the Commerce and Industry Department doubted whether the Punjab would look favourably on a proposal of taking such an amount of labour from the province. He stated that labour was difficult to procure for India’s own canal works, and pointed to emigration laws that also “intended to prevent (...) labourers being taken from a part of the country which cannot afford to let them go.” Note, 18 Jun 1909, Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Willcocks to Consul-General, Baghdad, 9 June 1909. Ibid.

of Mesopotamia would depend partly on the political situation at the time, while it would require the Ottoman Government itself to put forward diplomatically any such proposal and to take responsibility for the proper treatment of labourers and the fulfilment of terms on which they were to engage.¹⁰²

Works on the Hindiya barrage, the major project proposed by Willcocks and commenced under him in 1911, were transferred to the London-based Sir John Jackson Ltd. Co. after some time and finalized before commencement of World War One.¹⁰³ The available archive does not reveal whether Indian labour was employed at any time during completion of the works.¹⁰⁴ Nor does it say whether the Ottoman government undertook any such proposal, nor whether Indian labour was recruited otherwise. That Willcocks did not mention the idea of using Indian labour in reports and proposals submitted to the Ottoman government possibly demonstrates that it was a contentious issue, or not an issue at all. Given the tense political situation at the time and the concession agreements concluded between government and enterprises, which often stipulated the strict use of local labour, Indian labour probably did not come into the country. After all, these projects were also sites of prestige even for a dependent power like the Ottoman Empire, for which the employment of one’s own labour resources might have seemed an inevitable necessity, given that enterprises engaged were necessarily European. This was to be different only a few years later during the Mesopotamian war campaign, when many Indian labourers and technical staff were engaged on irrigation and dam projects in the country.¹⁰⁵

These two examples show that the colonial state allowed and facilitated under certain circumstances emigration, under indenture or otherwise, to places not unequivocally notified as such, thereby foregoing emigration laws in force. Permissions depended however, inter alia, on the exceptional status of the proposed scheme, the future employer’s application for such cases, the nature of the laws and provisions in the country of immigration, and a guarantee by the importer of treating the migrant labourer according to contract. Mobilising Indian labour was also conditioned by the political will of elastically interpreting respective policies, which were higher the higher regional or imperial interests were. While voicing the

¹⁰² Dy. Secy, FD, GoI to Consul-General, Baghdad, 15 Jul 1909. Ibid. The term political situation referred to “(...) concessions, Railway and other, which the British Government might be backing up at the time.” Note, 18 Jun 1909, Ibid.

¹⁰³ The Hindie (Euphrates) Barrage (1914), *The Geographical Journal*, 43, 4, 415-419.

¹⁰⁴ Parts of the worldwide operating concern of John Jackson Ltd. Co. had experience with recruiting Indian labour, though. While charged with developing the harbour at Simonstown in Cape Colony, they applied for recruitment of a few hundred Indian contract labourers in 1902, after they had employed labour from the Punjab earlier. Their application was however rejected. Dhupelia-Mesthrie, Uma (2009), *The Passenger Indian as Worker: Indian Immigrants in Cape Town in the Early Twentieth Century*, *African Studies*, 68, 1, 119.

¹⁰⁵ During the war, almost all of the technical staff in Iraqi irrigation was foreign, British and Indian. Most of the Indians were repatriated after establishment of national administration and replaced with Iraqis. Sousa, Ahmed (1945), *Irrigation in Iraq: Its History and Development*. New Publishers, 35.

will and aim of the colonial state to mobilise labour, it was rather of a clandestinely facilitating nature, neither putting it directly nor inscribing it into legislation. This had to do with considerations of ordinarily allowing emigration to countries under the British flag only, and not to others. Although most of them were independent state formations, it proved more viable to allow emigration to certain Gulf destinations, such as Muscat, that were in closer or more subordinate relation to the British Empire, than to parts belonging to sovereign states, such as the Ottoman Empire and Persia. Above examples elide, however, that apart from facilitating a decision to emigration extra-territorial British rights more directly impacted on Indian labour in countries of immigration as well. Whenever disputes arose between a British employer and an employee being a British subject in regard to labour contracts, they were referred for decision according to British Indian laws to the closest British diplomat concurrently holding magisterial powers to preside over a consular court. The next chapters also ask for effects this procedure finally resulted in.

While permissions were granted to some enterprises for importing labour from the Indian subcontinent already during this period, labour migration on a more considerable scale took place only with developments initiated by the exploitation of oil and the war campaign. These conjunctures marking new environments and circumstances for labour requirements allowed for increasing exceptions and their necessary transcription into legal forms rendering possible the obtainment of a wide array of Indian labour resources for the Gulf.

II. Mobilising Resources, Securing Empire’s Commodity: Oil and War Economy

The political order in the Persian Gulf underwent a dramatic transformation after the first decade of the twentieth century. During the period sketched above, various imperial formations were first of all concerned with the region’s political and geo-strategic importance. Mercantile and/or religious activities and exchange played an important role, yet mostly in the sense that political actors appropriated them as justifications for increased regional engagement and wrestling for greater authority, and not as motives in and of themselves. The discovery and exploitation of oil raised the economic stakes that directly affected British political and strategic designs in the Gulf. Hence, international powers were increasingly interested in the region’s resources, even to the extent of waging war and occupation.

Overall, the inception of oil exploitation and the First World War considerably altered British India’s Gulf connection, and vice-versa. Definitely, the coming of oil and the numerous immediate and more distant processes enabling its production, distribution and consumption, fundamentally changed interregional links between the Indian subcontinent and the Gulf.¹⁰⁶ Yet, the rise of oil economies in Arab Gulf countries and related patterns of production and consumption during the late 1930s was not without precedent. Rather, these formations built on previous patterns of labour migration and consumption proving crucial to the exploitation and marketing of Gulf oil from the early 20th century. Within the transformative processes that were about to set in and prevail for several years, British India enjoyed a particularly important stake. As a central hub from which the British Empire exerted power over the Persian Gulf, its position rose to higher importance than ever before. Besides providing empire, in a political-strategic sense, a proxy from which to usurp the adjacent Gulf, it moreover contributed vast economic and human resources crucial to imperial aims. These materialised within the oil operations of southern Persia and in the Mesopotamian campaign of World War One and its aftermath to the extent that both enterprises ran to a considerable extent on Indian resources, material and human.

1. Oil Operations and their Imperial Link

When receiving word of the first oil strike at Masjid-i-Sulaiman in Persian Khuzestan in late May 1908, the Indian government was yet to discover that resource’s broader implication for Empire’s near and more distant future.¹⁰⁷ The search for oil had started in 1901 under a sixty-year concession given to the British businessman William Knox D’Arcy,

¹⁰⁶ Bose, *A Hundred Horizons*, 94-97.

¹⁰⁷ Discovery of some promising oil fields in Persia. *Commerce and Industry (CI), Geology and Minerals*, Aug 1908, 20-21B.

remaining unsuccessful initially. When D’Arcy ran out of money in 1905, the British state – fearing other competitors would obtain the concession – induced the Burmah Oil Company (BOC) to gain a majority stake in the undertaking and thus support further exploration in Persia. With the Indian government’s considerable intervention on supply and demand in the oil market, the latter company had been operating virtually without competition. Burmese oilfields already for a decade or so, its Glasgow-based owners pocketing large profits through their near-monopoly market position on the Indian subcontinent and as the sole source in the entire Empire for the Royal Navy’s early fuel demands.¹⁰⁸



Picture 1. Early geological survey party in Persia, 1910¹⁰⁹

Following the Persian oil strike in 1908, the new group of concessionaires instituted the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) in 1909 and started erecting the company’s installations in Abadan and other places. However, it was not before 1913 that the company commenced production in viable commercial numbers, breaking even only some time afterwards.¹¹⁰ During the initial years, the company was not directly involved in local operations, but handed these to their managing agents of Strick, Scott & Co., a business joint venture already established in the Gulf with offices in Basra, Mohammerah, Ahvaz and

¹⁰⁸ Corley, T.A.B. (1984), *A History of the Burmah Oil Company, 1886-1924*. Vol. 1. Heinemann: London. Ibid. (1988), *A History of the Burmah Oil Company, 1924-1966*. Vol. 2. Heinemann: London. Jones acknowledges the subordination of the Indian oil industry to British strategic and economic interests, but argues that exclusion of foreign companies aimed at developing Burmese oil industry. Jones, G.G. (1979), *The State and Economic Development in India 1890-1947: The Case of Oil*. *Modern Asian Studies*, 13, 3, 353-375.

¹⁰⁹ BP Archive, University of Warwick. Archival Ref. 64874. I thank BP archivists Peter Housego and Joanne Burman for providing this and other pictures.

¹¹⁰ APOC was renamed Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in 1935, to be renamed British Petroleum Company in 1954. Ferrier, R.W. (1982), *The History of the British Petroleum Company*. Vol. 1: *The Developing Years, 1901-1932*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. Bamberg, J.H. (1994), *The History of the British Petroleum Company*, Vol. 2: *The Anglo-Iranian Years, 1928-1954*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

Baghdad.¹¹¹ Another important company was Shaw Wallace & Co., a British Indian trading house firmly established in the subcontinent. It had been acting for the BOC as its commodity’s distributor and simultaneously as recruiting agent throughout India already since the 1890s, later assuming these tasks for APOC as well.¹¹² After the 1920s, this system of managing and recruiting agents was dispensed with and the companies’ own branches took over responsibility for production, distribution and recruitment.

Finding and commanding its own oil resource and constant supply within the empire was of quite an importance to Britain, which had otherwise very little at its command. Furthermore, the oil quality for example of Burma was not such that it could be easily refined into benzine and petroleum for purposes of heating machines, then increasingly used for ships and railways, as was the Persian oil. In this way, Persia’s oil resources were regarded as highly important to imperial politics. On the other hand, APOC along with several other oil companies constantly lobbied for business-friendly decisions of the British government and repeatedly attempted placing themselves under state control, willing to fulfil strategic needs.¹¹³ With such close connections between the Anglo-Persian Oil Company and British imperial politics emerging, the next step was not too far. In 1913, company managers started negotiating with the First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, about oil supplies for the Royal Navy. In exchange for future secure supplies to its fleet, the British government suggested to inject new capital into the company. In May 1914, the government bought more than half of the company’s shares from BOC, and, in doing so, acquired a controlling interest in APOC.¹¹⁴ Simultaneously, the Admiralty signed the first contract with the company to supply a certain amount of heating oil to the Royal Navy’s fleet for 30 years at fixed prices.¹¹⁵ British Navy ships increasingly switched from coal to oil burning from 1912 onwards, but it took several more years to complete this process, giving APOC ample scope for further prosperity.¹¹⁶ Other channels of distribution opened up soon after, one important being the Indian railway system that started using oil instead of coal progressively from 1917

¹¹¹ The business partners were Llyod, Scott & Co., and Frank C. Strick. The latter had expanded into the Persian Gulf trade already at the turn of the century with the Anglo-Arabian and Persian Steamship Co. Ltd. For more information on the latter company, see <http://www.nmm.ac.uk/collections/archive/catalogue/record.cfm?ID=SRI> accessed on 15 Sept 2009.

¹¹² Townend, Harry (1965), *A History of Shaw Wallace & Co. and Shaw Wallace & Co. Ltd.* Calcutta: Shaw Wallace.

¹¹³ Jones argues that initially APOC’s desire to come under state control was much greater than the state owning parts of the company. Jones, G.G. (1977), *The British Government and the Oil Companies, 1912-1924: The search for an Oil Policy.* *The Historical Journal*, 20, 3, 648, 651.

¹¹⁴ *Anglo-Persian Oil Company (Acquisition of Capital) Act, 1914.* Cd. 345, HoC, PP online. See also Marlin, J. (1968), *The Purchase of the British Government’s shares in the British Petroleum Company, 1912-1914. Past and Present*, 39, 139-68.

¹¹⁵ *Agreement with the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, Limited: Navy.* Presented to Parliament by Command of His Majesty. London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1914, Cd. 7419.

¹¹⁶ Jones, *The British Government and the Oil Companies*, 651.

onwards.¹¹⁷ Throughout the war campaign, the company also supplied British and Indian forces in the field, which greatly demanded petroleum products.

Safeguarding the company’s operations

With APOC thus closely connected to the British government and of greatest importance to its larger strategy within the Indian Empire, imperial authorities had substantial material interests in securing the company’s precincts, the oilfields and operations thereon as well as the product’s land and maritime transport routes. While not ruling out dissonances within Indian authorities regarding the policy to be pursued towards the oil company, many of the local British officers and officials of the Indian government apparatus were particularly concerned about the company’s well being and its fortune. British Indian military might and capabilities had been crucial from the outset to defend the undertaking, even when oil was still to be explored and APOC not yet floated. In 1907, for example, soldiers of the 18th Bengal Lancers under the command of Captain Arnold Wilson were sent to Ahvaz from Bombay in order to reinforce the local consular guard. In reality, they protected British drillers searching for oil from local people trying to defend their grazing grounds.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, the officer’s responsibility included making surveys of the areas under concession and negotiating with local rulers further specifics of the company’s operations, such as the lease of additional land. Noting the company’s brisk rise, Wilson wrote later on that he was privileged to assist in the company’s “prenatal creation and subsequent birth”, being able to observe at closer quarters its “rapid growth to healthy maturity”.¹¹⁹

Shortly before and throughout the war period, the company also constantly voiced concerns over their installation’s internal and external security, asking British and Indian authorities to help out, mostly encountering positive response. In April 1914, the British consul at Mohammerah, Major Haworth, represented to the Political Resident in the Persian

¹¹⁷ It is interesting to note that APOC employed a former official of the Indian Railways shortly before the contract was made. This connection seems to have facilitated the contract later signed by Indian authorities. Ferrier, *The History of the British Petroleum Company*, 286 f. A contemporary German energy analyst pointed out that it also made sense economically, especially for the Western and Northwestern Railway to receive oil from Persia rather than coal from Calcutta, calculating 15 days of transport for the former and 30 days for the latter product from one place to another. Ulrich, Leo (1920), *Die Anglo Persian Oil Company, Limited*. *Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv*, 15, 1, 73-85.

¹¹⁸ Wright, Denis (2001), *The English amongst the Persians: Imperial Lives in Nineteenth-Century Iran*. London: I.B. Tauris, 40-41. Wright recounts altogether seven events between 1898 and 1913 in which Indian troops landed on Persian shore and were stationed in different places. Besides affording protection at one time to oil drillers, the reasons for other advances included protection of consulates, British communities generally and the precincts of the Indo-European Telegraph Department. The severest intervention took place in 1911 after tribesmen attacked four squadrons of the Central Indian Horse, the response from India being to send another 250 Indian sepoy from Bombay. Beinart, William/Lotte Hughes (2007), *Environment and Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 255.

¹¹⁹ Wilson, Arnold T. (1941), *SW. Persia. A Political Officer’s Diary, 1907-1914*. London: Oxford University Press, ix f. In fact, Arnold Wilson was one of the most important Indian officers in the Persian Gulf during these and ensuing years. After this interlude, he became Consul in Mohammerah in 1909. During the war he was Deputy Chief Political Officer of the Mesopotamian Campaign and became Civil Commissioner of Iraq later on. In 1920, he became APOC’s resident director in the Persian Gulf, working for the company until 1932.

Gulf the need of an Indian guard for the Abadan refinery. The company had become quite nervous after several outrages, a particularly recent one that included five hundred employees of the Lurs community who had destroyed company property after one of them died in an accident involving an Indian engine driver. Reportedly, the guard of thirty men provided by the local Sheikh was not able to cope with the volatile situation, necessitating the Consul to arrive with escorts borrowed from other places. Although the local guards seemed unreliable, Haworth subsequently explained company officials the necessity of retaining them “to mark the ultimate responsibility of the Local Government.” However, in order to take action, he suggested a guard of Indians to “strengthen the backbone of the Sheikh’s men.” This being their main task, the consul thought it more expedient, when referring the question to the Sheikh, to explain the necessity for additional guards to be present as a measure to control the Indian labour employed in Abadan. The Sheikh would certainly not object since he had complained about the Indians’ immoral conduct of drinking and gambling earlier. Given that Indian authorities would possibly object to taking up any such responsibility, the Resident suggested that the company’s agent in India could be introduced to Indian military authorities for help in recruiting.¹²⁰



Picture 2. Oil-pumping station at Tembi. Tents of Indian soldiers in foreground, about 1916.¹²¹

The company’s installations had to be further protected during the war, especially from repeating attacks of the Tangsir, Kashgai and other local tribes instigated and lead by the notorious German diplomat Wilhelm Wassmuss. These insurrections, probably consented to

¹²⁰ Consul, Arabistan to Political Resident, Bushehr, 25 Apr 1914. Political Resident, Bushehr to FPD, GoI, 10 May 1914. FPD, Extl., Jun 1914, 421-424 B. One APOC official stated that they would require five posts at different points of the works. Haworth suggested subsequently recruiting 37 men, including one jemadar and hawaldar, five naiks and thirty ordinary men. Retired soldiers of Punjabi regiments, preferably Punjabi Muslims, who were to be private employees of the company, were seen as most desirable.

¹²¹ BP Archive, University of Warwick. Archival Ref. 170431_019.

by German authorities, addressed the company’s installations as well as sites of British local authorities in the region. While rewards were offered for his capture, Wassmuss rose to particular fame as ‘Britenschreck’ and was ultimately termed the “German Lawrence of Arabia”.¹²² Primarily in response to these activities, Indian authorities agreed to send Brigadier-General Percy Sykes, member of the Indian Army and British diplomat in the Gulf, to Persia in order to raise the South Persia Rifles in 1916. This special force consisted of some British officers, several hundred Indian soldiers and to the largest extent of locally enlisted men, that fought the aggression and captured Wassmuss at war’s end.¹²³ As alluded to above already, concerns of the company from its earliest history surely found somewhat equivalent positions of concern within British and Indian government authorities. This was even more so after the British government had acquired a majority stake in the company in 1914 when the importance of securing a continuous fuel supply to the Admiralty became a major issue in British politics. The circumstances signalled that the British Empire would eventually go to war in order to secure the uninterrupted stream of this commodity.

2. Indian Expeditionary Force ‘D’ and a War Theatre Managed on Indian Lines

Unlike before, the eve of the war signalled a new departure from previous interventions. Imperial oil interests were perceived under threat as the political situation in Europe forecasted the beginning of a worldwide conflict. War broke out in Europe at the end of July 1914, and the presence of the German cruiser *Emden* plying in the Indian Ocean in September alarmed British and Indian authorities. Subsequently, authorities in India despatched the Indian Expeditionary Force ‘D’, initially consisting of the 6th Pune Infantry Division, to Bahrain in October, ordering them to wait for further orders. Within one day after war had been declared on 5th November, these pre-positioned and reinforced Indian troops advanced to the head of the Persian Gulf, taking Fao and APOC’s installations. Immediately afterwards, British and Indian forces marched towards Basra, occupying the city on 23rd November. From thence on, the city became the hub for all future advances of the occupying British and Indian forces towards the north. Reinforcements and all other supplies of various sorts from Bombay were landed at the city’s harbour. Subsequently, the cityscape transformed technologically, but also culturally by the supplies trickling in and the large garrison stationed there. Ostensibly, at least, the advance’s purpose was to take the Shatt-el-

¹²² For accounts of Wassmuss see Sykes, Christopher (1936) Wassmuss “The German Lawrence”. New York: Longmans, Green and Co. And von Mikusch, Dagobert, (1937), Waßmuß, der deutsche Lawrence. Auf Grund der Tagebücher und Aufzeichnungen des verstorbenen Konsuls, deutscher und englischer Quellen und des unter gleichem Titel erschienenen Buches von Christopher Sykes. Leipzig: Paul List Verlag.

¹²³ Sykes, Percy (1969), A History of Persia. Vol. II. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, chp. 85-90. Wynn, Anthony (2003), Persia in the Great Game - Sir Percy Sykes: Explorer, Consul, Soldier. London: John Murray.

Arab and to secure the territory of and surrounding APOC’s refinery installations at Abadan and the oilfields in general. With troops soon reaching and securing the company installations, the task set out for was nominally accomplished. But what had started as advance of not more than several thousand troops in November 1914 soon transformed into the Mesopotamian campaign, a full-fledged war with its theatre being shouldered and operated considerably from India and by Indian resources, human and material.¹²⁴

As time passed, the changed political status in the territories hitherto occupied by the advancing forces became noticeable. Soon after seizing Basra, the Chief Political Officer, Percy Cox, another officer of the British Indian Army experienced in several pre-war Gulf assignments, issued a proclamation, announcing the future conduct under British occupation:

The British Government has now occupied Basra but, though a state of war with the Ottoman Empire still prevails, yet we have no enmity or ill-will against the population, to whom we hope to be good friends and protectors. No remnant of Turkish administration remains in this region. In place thereof the British flag has been established under which you will enjoy the benefits of liberty and justice both in regard to your religions and secular affairs.¹²⁵

It was true that now British reigned supreme at least in Basra and that the administration was put on a new footing. Yet, instructions from London were clear in ordering to maintain as much of the pre-war local administration as possible, and not to make any attempt to transform the occupied territory into an Indian district.¹²⁶ But the latter virtually took place, despite the warnings and apprehensions. Especially Percy Cox and his deputy Arnold Wilson seemed to favour such course, starting to extend British Indian legal codes to Mesopotamia, organising administration and revenue systems on an Indian basis, and drawing into the occupied territories a large number of Indians of different backgrounds to run these systems. In fact, only rarely was Turkish civil law applied; instead several justifications existed for applying Indian laws, the most cogent being “the underlying desire to pave the way for the painless absorption of lower Mesopotamia to India.”¹²⁷

While British authorities never agreed to any such undertaking officially, thus keeping the future of Iraq and the question of its administration undecided for the time being, the bureaucracy in the occupied territory was largely Indian-run, with Indian bureaucrats

¹²⁴ Moberly, F. J. (1925), *History of the Great War: The Campaign in Mesopotamia, 1914–1918*. Vol. 1. London: H. M. Stationery Office, 127-128, 130-131. Wilson, Arnold T. (1930), *Loyalties: Mesopotamia, 1914-1917: A Personal Record*. London: Oxford University Press, 10-11. Buchanan, George (1938), *The Tragedy of Mesopotamia*. London: William Blackwood & Sons, 4-5. Visser, Reidar (2006), *Britain in Basra: Past Experiences and Current Challenges*. Accessed at <http://historiae.org/cosmopolitanism.asp> on 16 Sept 2009. Bush, Britain, India and the Arabs, Chp. 1.

¹²⁵ Meyer, Karl E./Shareen Blair Brysac (2008), *Kingmakers: The Invention of the Modern Middle East*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 138.

¹²⁶ SoS for India to Viceroy, 5 Oct, 16 Dec 1914, FO 371/2143-44, quoted in Bush, Britain, India and the Arabs, 22.

¹²⁷ Ireland, Philip W. (1938), *Iraq: A Study in Political Development*. New York: Macmillan Company, 83-85.

regulating different questions according to English models.¹²⁸ The new authorities introduced the Iraq Occupied Territories Code, which replicated Indian civil and criminal laws, in August 1915 along with courts, judges, and magistrates from India and under the administration of the Indian political department. The code even declared explicitly the Iraqi territories to be the equivalent of “a district [...] of Bombay.”¹²⁹ Even in other areas, the influence from India was furthermore felt, and seen by the local population. Indian rupees substituted the earlier Turkish money that had been banned by proclamation. Indian banks opened up branches in the occupied territories and the forces as well as the local population used Indian postage stamps.¹³⁰ The authorities also imported Indian policemen, several hundreds in number, to keep order by patrolling streets and running jails, or enforcing order in critical localities such as the Basra docks.¹³¹ All this more and more seemed to suggest that Mesopotamia had been morphed into “an Indian appendage.”¹³² Even after the war, in 1919 a trade report advised, “Stress must be laid upon the organic connection which already exists between Mesopotamia and India.”¹³³

Yet, there was another important factor in all these considerations. It was more exactly an intention never officially outspoken, but desired by some and nourished by the connections arising during World War One of annexing the newly occupied territories to India. Plans of this sort had been voiced already in the early 1900s, for example by the engineer William Willcocks, but took on a totally new meaning under circumstances of the ongoing war. It seemed almost a necessity and desirability in the eyes of many. Shortly after the occupation of Basra in November 1914, Wilson privately wrote about a possible repopulation of the occupied territory by Indians:

“I should like to see it announced [...] that Mesopotamia was to be annexed to India as a colony for India and Indians, that the government of India would administer it, and gradually bring under cultivation its vast unpopulated desert plains, peopling them with martial races from the Punjab.”¹³⁴

In fact, developments after 1914 and throughout the war campaign somehow professed to this idea, as Indian migrants indeed poured in to a very large extent for the development of the occupied territories. However, this migration system once initiated was brought to an end

¹²⁸ Bush, *Britain, India and the Arabs*, 50-51. Wilson, *Loyalties*, 290. Ireland, *Iraq*, 74-75.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 81-84.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 81-82, 87-89. Wilson, *Loyalties*, 283-284, 321-322.

¹³¹ Ireland, *Iraq*, 81. Wilson, *Loyalties*, 66-67.

¹³² Ireland, *Iraq*, 72.

¹³³ ‘The Prospects of British Trade in Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf’, 1919. quoted in Black, Edwin (2004), *Banking on Baghdad: Inside Iraq's 7,000-year history of War, Profit and Conflict*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 203.

¹³⁴ Arnold Wilson private to Col. C. E. Yate, 28 Nov 1914, copies in L/P&S/10, 3136/14, no. 4717/14, quoted in Bush, *Britain, India and the Arabs*, 22.

when political decisions were taken on Iraq’s future, which would not lie within the Indian Empire.

3. Indian Labour during the Mesopotamian Campaign

Well-acquainted with British India through his professional experience there in the pre-war period, the correspondent Edmund Candler seemed not at all astonished to bump into a crowd of Santal coolie labourers on the Bridge of Boats in Baghdad in 1917. In a later article he understood the group’s occurrence almost as a natural implication of British India’s subservient role to empire.¹³⁵ A British officer, who supervised this group here, spoke about the process of their procurement. Raised in their districts, they had been paid a month’s wage in advance and made to go to the nearest railway station. Contrasting other coolies who slacked off if not properly watched, these Santhals would “go their own pace, but do their day’s work all right.”¹³⁶ The pensioned Indian officer then in charge of the group spoke very fondly of their generally good conduct, instigating Candler to immediately contrast the Subedar’s earlier experience as staff member of a convict labour corps. Candler was quite uncritical of coolies being employed in this theatre of war, unlike many others in Britain and India at the time voicing discontent over such engagement overseas.¹³⁷ After all, it was not so easy to keep coolies away from the firing line and prevent them from being killed or getting hurt. Candler seemed oblivious to the kind of duties Santhals would have to perform if engaged on a contract in India. A pay of twenty rupees a month, received back home in family allotments, was also not enough for family members to prosper. The bits and pieces of Candler’s report depict but a smaller clipping of a much larger effort of the colonial state during the war to mobilise various parts of the subcontinent’s labour resources for the war.

Extent and sources of labour

Overall, the extent and amount of labour necessary for and during the campaign was tremendous. Arguably then, people from the hill-tracts of eastern India were only one group among many of coolies and other labourers, whether considered unskilled and skilled, recruited internally and externally for the ongoing war efforts in Mesopotamia. Unskilled labour was employed in the building of roads, bunds and houses, loading and unloading of

¹³⁵ Edmund Candler, *The Model Coolie in Mesopotamia*. *The Times*, Wednesday, 20 June 1917, 5. He also evoked extensively the alleged naïve character of Santals and their future fates.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Speculating about the trajectory of his personal and political position, we might recall a résumé given in Candler’s autobiography, published two years before his death: “Personally I have come to look upon racial incompatibility as something chemical or psychological, apart from reason, which is only called up among the supports of our self-respect in a losing battle. Reason and logic in these debates are generally the disciplined reinforcements of instincts.” Candler, Edmund (1924), *Youth and the East: An Unconventional Autobiography*. Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 56.

steamers and trucks, supplying carpenters, smiths, and masons, improving communications and the like. Even works considered menial jobs such as sweeping, latrine cleaning et cetera required labour. On the other hand, a diverse quantity of skilled labourers, including carpenters, blacksmiths, riveters, drivers, were employed in different occupations and sites such as workshops. The workforce of these various types of labour requirements came from a variety of origins and with different skills. A diverse amount of internal coolie and corvee labour, sometimes contracted from tribal leaders or obtained as forced labour, provided large contingents throughout the time of occupation and after.¹³⁸ While Chinese, Egyptian and Persian immigrant labour figured prominently during the time of occupation as well, authorities reverted to Indian labour heaviest among all migrant workers. All in all, besides 295,565 Indian soldiers employed in the war campaign, non-combatants to the amount of 293,152 including camp followers, skilled and unskilled labourers were as well engaged there.¹³⁹ This high amount of Indian non-combatants being employed is magnified by the fact that they derived from different regional sources and from different ends of the Indian labour market with backgrounds in a variety of professions. In this regard, one could effectively speak of an India-wide engagement of the Mesopotamian campaign, including all sorts of labour from unskilled to skilled and professional/office work and from different regions in British India.

¹³⁸ Such native labour was from different ethnic backgrounds, according to region, such as Bedouin tribes, Arabs, Persians, and Kurds. With the increase of work projects, authorities felt obliged to draw agricultural labour away from palm gardens and arable lands, where the surplus available was smaller than the supply called for. A later administration report admitted that the grievances to the population had been more serious, although the campaign made it necessary. While the organisation of labour, begun under civil auspices, was converted in 1916 into a military department, since most of the work required was for military purposes; but the task of providing labour through the sheikhs by persuasion or demand remained with the local Political Officer, who, while he recognised the inevitable requirement, sometimes groaned under it. Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia (during the British military occupation to the summer of 1920). London, 1920, Cmd. 1061, House of Commons (HoC), Parliamentary Papers (PP), 19-20. For corvee labour in Mesopotamia, see Ulrichsen, *Logistics and Politics of British Campaigns in the Middle East*, 20. Singha, *Finding Labor from India for the War in Iraq*, 43.

¹³⁹ It seems Indian labour ranked second in terms of sheer number thereby constituting the highest share in immigrant labour, followed by either Egyptian or Chinese. Singha, *Finding labour from India for the War in Iraq*, 412 quoted in *India's Contribution to the Great War (1923)*, Calcutta, 78, 96. For recruitment of Chinese coolies, see Griffin, Nicholas J. (1976), *Britain's Chinese Labor Corps in World War I*. *Military Affairs*, 40, 3, 104.



Picture 3. Indian military engineers in Mesopotamia, no date¹⁴⁰



Picture 4. Indian sappers with diving equipment recovering Turkish war materiel which had been dumped in the Tigris River, Mesopotamia¹⁴¹



Picture 5. Giving out winter clothing to Indian Followers, between 1917-1919¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ The Imperial War Museum, Collection ID Q 24739. Accessed at <http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/collections/item/3707?CISOBOX=1&REC=2> on 25 Sept 2009.

¹⁴¹ The Imperial War Museum, Collection ID Q 24585. Accessed at <http://www.wewerethere.defencedynamics.mod.uk/ww1/india.html> on 25 Sept 2009.

Authorities also tried to procure labour whenever necessary and possible from various levels in subordinate relations to the Indian government, whether Indian princely states or authorities in close connection to the administration, such as, for example, the different regional sections of the Indian railways under the Railway Board or Port Authorities. In 1916, approximately 250 artillery-riding drivers to drive army wagons and 65 mule drivers for pack transport were badly needed in Mesopotamia. With no reserves of either of these two classes available in India, the Adjutant-General’s branch was considerably pressed by overseas demands for these men. They ultimately asked the Foreign and Political Department to assist in the matter and to address Indian native states.¹⁴³ Punjab was quick to answer, with the Jind Darbar offering to lend 12 artillery and seven mule drivers for war service. Even *sawars* (mounted orderly, escort or guard) of the local cavalry volunteered for service and the Maharaja was willing to lend them in case government was in need.¹⁴⁴

Concurrently, the Indian Railway Board informed agents of different railway companies throughout the country to ascertain whether any of their staff would volunteer for duty in Mesopotamia, showing especial interest for drivers, guards and subordinates for workshops. They wanted to be prepared and be able to send labour as soon as possible for work on the Baghdad Railway, just in case advancing military forces were able to obtain its control and put it back to work. Pitching to the agents that Mesopotamia was “nearer to India and more like their own country than East Africa”, the Railway Board thought to “have less difficulty in inducing Indians to go [...]”¹⁴⁵ Railway companies responded with apprehension, especially because the Board had not supplied any terms and conditions of service in Mesopotamia, a matter that companies’ agents complained was absolutely necessary to bring to the staff’s attention.¹⁴⁶ While Board officials themselves seemed not quite sure about circumstances of employment, they probably knew that services in the country would be only of a provisional and short-term character, thus holding back as much information as possible.

¹⁴² Photograph album of Captain W. Harold Morgan: Mesopotamia, p. 7. The Great War Archive, University of Oxford Accessed at <http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/gwa/document/9242/5810> on 25 Sept 2009. Captain W. Harold Morgan was an electrical engineer and stores master, serving in Mesopotamia during the First World War.

¹⁴³ Note, Adjutant-General’s Branch, 29 Mar 1916. FPD to Assistants to the Governor General in Council, Rajputana, Central India; Residents at Mysore, Baroda; Chief Secy, Government of Punjab (GoPun), 11 Apr 1916, Ibid. FPD, Internal (Int.), Nov 1916, 121-154 B. While authorities knew that trained artillery-riding drivers could only be obtained from the local forces of states, which maintained field artillery, they were nevertheless grateful for any assistance Darbars were able to render. Especially from the Punjab, they wanted to obtain the necessary mule drivers. The Inspector General of the Imperial Service Troops noted, “in view of past experiences it would probably be advisable to omit Mohammedan States.” Note, FPD, 7 Apr 1916, Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Chief Secy, GoPun to Dy. Secy, FPD, GoI, 28 Apr 1916. Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Railway Board (RB) to Railway Agents (RyA) of Indian railway companies, 4 Dec 1915. RB, Establishment (Est.), Apr 1916, 47/E.1-19 B. Earlier, the Board had tried to obtain men for Force ‘E’ in East Africa, but had received little or no response from railway companies. Note, RB, 29 Nov 1916. Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ RyA to RB, 7, 8 Dec 1916. Ibid. The agent of the East Indian Railway Co. reported that those men who had already gone to East Africa and Mesopotamia had gone in the dark as regards conditions of work, and he had no doubt that more candidates might have applied if fuller information had been available.

After all, inducing civilian labour and staff to volunteer for a war zone with circumstances and duration of employment highly insecure proved difficult enough. With the Board finally issuing some of the conditions, adding that these would be the maximum concessions allowed and where possible staff may be promised less, one agent understood it as request for heads of departments “to haggle with the men”.¹⁴⁷ Officials denied the latter of course, explaining instead that the directive’s intention was to give railway authorities some discretionary power in arranging the terms, making it thus not a “question of haggling with the staff, but of offering only what the recruiting officer considers to be sufficient.”¹⁴⁸ Arguably, authorities knew that some men would not volunteer without incentives being given, over which the recruiter could decide on the spot, while others probably took terms of service at face value.

In fact, the Indian railways proved very crucial throughout the war period in transporting troops and material, as well as in manufacturing and supplying tracks, locomotives, wagons, rail, and ammunition. They were largely responsible for supplying adequate resources for the functioning, maintaining and administering of its counterpart in occupied Iraqi territory. After the end of the war, the Indian railway system – drained off so many of its resources while not being invested into – and needed time to replenish.¹⁴⁹ Besides material advanced from Indian resources, the contribution included substantial numbers of railway staff at various levels.¹⁵⁰ Even in December 1920, authorities in Mesopotamia were sure that their “[...] railway policy in the future will be vitally affected by our arrangements with the Government of India in regard to recruitment of labour.” Trying to abstain from unskilled labour from a certain point, they knew that in regard to skilled labour they were “[...] unable to dispense with it for many years.”¹⁵¹ The labour supply was to last even after the occupation and long into the 1920s, when the Iraqi railways for want of trained staff still employed thousands of Indians in their services.¹⁵²

At Empire’s instant service: war demands and the mobilisation of labour

Above, I have addressed some of the ways in which Indian labour found its way to the Mesopotamian war theatre. It is important to note here that the labouring or, for that matter,

¹⁴⁷ RB to RyA, Oudh & Rohilkhand Railway (O&R Ry.), 22 Dec 1915. RyA, O&R Ry. to RB, 18 Jan 1916. Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ RB to RyA, O&R Ry., 18 Feb 1916. Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Awasthi, Aruna (1994), *History and Development of Railways in India*. New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 181-246.

¹⁵⁰ Overall, regional Indian Railway companies set free some 380 officers and engineers, and over 2,000 subordinates for theatres of war, including East Africa and Mesopotamia. *Railways in India: Administration Report, 1915-16*. Simla: Government Central Press, 6. Another report noted that “in addition to setting free staff of all kinds for employment, railways assisted very largely in the recruitment of men from outside their own establishments and to this end have in many instances set free one or more of their superior staff to act as Recruiting Officers for the Military Railways which draw upon India for personnel.” *Railways in India: Administration Report, 1916-17*. Simla: Government Central Press.

¹⁵¹ High Commissioner (HC), Baghdad to SoS for India, 17 Dec 1920, FPD, Sec. Ext., Aug 1921, 199 B.

¹⁵² See also chapter 3. After the war, the newly found Iraqi Railways also had a recruiting office in Bombay.

non-combatant population imported from India had diverse backgrounds and arrived in Mesopotamia under different auspices. The line between combatants and non-combatants or followers, who were nominally part of the Indian Army and by far the largest contingent of non-combatants, seems to blur during course of the war. They carried out works in the soldiers’ vicinity and quite close to acts of war. On the other hand, further labouring groups were present that mostly executed works not directly connected to war proceedings, but tasks in the wake of advancing military forces providing infrastructure, including construction, maintenance and operating services. These had usually not been part of the Indian Army before, but were recruited as civilians to work under military authorities in Mesopotamia.

It was especially in regard to vast requirements of the latter group that colonial authorities had to find ways and means for addressing respective segments of the Indian labour market in order to mobilise and obtain them. This happened every now and then by sidestepping those regulations and procedures originally designed to protect emigrants. Being considerably involved in the campaign and perceiving of certain stakes in Mesopotamia’s fortunes, the colonial government was willing to make exceptions in regard to emigration procedures during the war economy. Arguably, there were several reasons for this. Despite the extensive use of local and other external labour, military authorities reverted to Indian labour in case of urgency, when requiring special amount and nature of skills, or when local labour was insufficient, either as a result of former reasons, or because the area of work was scarcely populated. Indeed, military authorities were able to convince authorities in India. With labour requirements becoming urgent during 1916, the Home department suggested that local governments approach emigration agencies in order to assist in labour recruitment. As the Secretary stated:

“Under ordinary circumstances Government of India would not favour anything which gives direct patronage to emigration agents of this kind but the needs in Mesopotamia are so urgent that if local Government find labour not otherwise procurable resort to these agencies under such control as local Government can devise becomes matter of necessity.”¹⁵³

The colonial state adhered to making readily available labour when demands arose and its import became necessary in situations of urgency. Often, labour was recruited only for very short periods on contracts of a limited time, even less than the usual contract for other services in Mesopotamia, for works that had to be speedily done, after the execution of which the labourers were sent back by authorities.

¹⁵³ Secy, Home Department (HD), GoI to Chief Secy, Government of Madras (GoM) and Government of United Provinces (GoUP), 15 Sept 1916. CI, Emi., Oct 1916, 2 B.

Take, for instance, the difficulties growing more and more serious in Basra during February 1916 of coping with the number of river crafts that had been rendered useless because of the lack of facilities for overhaul and repair. The crafts, often of Indian make and commandeered by Indian troops or drivers, were heavily used throughout the campaign, and very important for the supply of troops over the waterways in Iraq.¹⁵⁴ The continued use of such crafts seemed absolutely essential for any future war plan. But with labour sparse on the Basra docks, many crafts could not be attended and actually broke down. The General-Officer-Commanding Force ‘D’ reported that another one and a half month time would pass before new personnel, then already being collected, would arrive to deal with works of repair of the existing fleet and fitting out additional craft and barges. Every other source of supply already drawn upon and insufficient to cope with the situation, he requested the Railway Board and Port Trusts of Bombay and Karachi, the nearest possible sources for such labour, to spare some fifty carpenters, riveters, boilermakers and blacksmiths for this crucial period in order to assist him during the coming weeks. The men were to be despatched immediately, bringing tools with them. Without such temporary reinforcements, the Commandant saw little hope that expected crafts could be fitted out and put to use in time.¹⁵⁵ The Railway Board once more informed their subordinate companies throughout India and necessary labour was despatched to Basra.¹⁵⁶

The colonial state used other methods as well to ensure that labour was obtained. One was to keep labour, especially all available military labour resources, constantly ready to be shipped out to Mesopotamia. This was to be the case even in 1920, when the war campaign had already faded out. In Madras, for example, the local Chamber of Commerce demanded that to avert grave problems to the city’s electricity and telegraphic infrastructure labour corps coolies be employed in works of public utility.¹⁵⁷ The Army department did not object at all to the employment of labourers from the local Pallavaram Labour Corps Depot, amending only that all personnel of that particular depot had to “remain available at any time for despatch as reinforcements to units in Mesopotamia at short notice.”¹⁵⁸

There was even more at stake and the Indian government had yet many more devices to ensure a constant labour flow from India. Once more, Indian emigration laws became the centre of such considerations and afforded a particularly intriguing device to use migrant

¹⁵⁴ During the earlier campaign, problems arose with the provisioning of such crafts. After the War Office had taken over the campaign in 1916, they were successfully supplied under the Inland Water Transport Department stationed at Karachi and Bombay. Satia, *Developing Iraq*, 234-240.

¹⁵⁵ General Officer Commanding, Force ‘D’ (G.O.C.), Basra to Chief of the General Staff, Delhi, 19 Feb 1916. RB, Est., April 1916, 47/E.1-19 B.

¹⁵⁶ RB to RA, 21 Feb 1916. Embarkation Commandant, Karachi, to Base Commandant, Basra, 13 Feb 1916. Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Secy, Madras Chamber of Commerce to Secy, HD, GoI, 30 Jun 1920. HD, Pol., Aug 1920, 298 B.

¹⁵⁸ Dy. Secy, Army Department (AD), GoI to Adjutant-General, 5 Aug 1920. Ibid.

labour, either by applying or by sidestepping the provisions laid down. In order to strengthen the supply of labour, the Indian government had curtailed all emigration from India in 1917, except to war theatres and minimally also to Ceylon and the Malay States. However, this was not sufficient to attract enough labour. In addition, authorities had decided earlier to put a military cloak over labour recruitment for Mesopotamia and to sidestep the formalities of the Indian Emigration Act of 1908. This dealt several advantages to authorities. While labourers came under military command and were subjected to military discipline and punishment, sidestepping the formalities of the Emigration Act resulted in subtler execution of labour recruitment, distant from the Indian public’s criticism, which it would have otherwise gotten. In this regard, one has to keep in mind larger contemporary political situation and demands. The overarching issue confronting authorities during these years was the question of indentured emigration under which emigrants were bound to contracts for longer periods and liable to penal provisions. The Indian nationalist movement agitated against further practice of this institution and increasingly campaigned during the war years. Thus, whenever the public claimed such, authorities were able to distance themselves from any form of indentured emigration with the new regulations.¹⁵⁹ Hence, labour requirements, whether for military or civil purposes, were treated outside the scope of the Indian Emigration Act and described as war necessity.

Clear evidence in the following case corroborates this argument very well. In the middle of December 1915, irrigation officers at Basra had started flood prevention work on the local protective bunds. With some 400 Arab coolies already engaged on this work in January 1916, more local labour could not be obtained and the existing Arab labour was allegedly not very good at earthwork. The Basra authorities aimed at completing the bunds before March of that year when floods were expected, making the speedy import of coolies an imperative necessity.¹⁶⁰ Later that month, the Commerce and Industry Department in the face of Mesopotamian demands finally decided to arrange for the recruitment and shipment to Basra of some 4,000 coolie labourers from the United and Central Provinces. Informing the responsible authorities about the arrival from Basra and recruitment activity in India of the officer in charge, the Commerce and Industry Department stated in this particular case that the coolies’ recruitment and embarkation

“[...] technically come within the scope of the Indian Emigration Act, 1908 [...], but it has been decided by the Government of India to treat the recruitment of coolies as a war

¹⁵⁹ This argument is advanced in Singha, *Finding Labour from India for the War in Iraq*, p. 415-422.

¹⁶⁰ Note, Military Works Branch, 3 Jan 1916, CI, Emi., Mar 1917, 17 B. Some of the labour was to be obtained through contractors from the Gorakhpur District of a class not accepted as recruits. Note, Emi., 7 Jan 1916, *Ibid*.

measure and allow them to proceed to Basra without relaxing the provisions of the Act by a Notification under Section 107.”¹⁶¹

This decision had been arrived at, mindful of the two options that the authorities cited in such cases, i.e. either to declare coolie emigration as a war measure, in which case nothing had to be done, or publicly notifying and thus exempting the coolies’ recruitment from any provisions of the Indian Emigration Act. Some officials of the Commerce and Industry Department were quite sure that a notification had to be issued to relax the provision of the Act in the case of Basra, which could not be regarded as part of British India being merely in military occupation and therefore definitely coming into the scope of the Emigration Act. One was even personally convinced that it should be notified because otherwise “and if any question arises subsequently, it will be rather difficult to explain exactly why the Act was ignored.”¹⁶²

However, a decision was taken towards the opposite. One officer in strong support of treating the recruitment as a war measure had two intriguing arguments. One was the undesirability, for political reasons, to draw attention to the fact that “we are recruiting a large number of coolies from the very unwarlike tracts of Gorakhpur and the East U.P. for work in however safe a portion of the war area.” And second, it seemed “undesirable to treat these coolies as emigrants thereby putting them in a position to make afterwards complaints of a nature which may be troublesome.” Confident that everything else had been done by him and his colleagues for the coolies’ well-being, he was quick to present answers to possible objections raised in future as regards disregarding the technical position of coolies. Among his alibis one finds especially evocative argument that coolies were only technically emigrants and sent out as war measure, that whatever emigration law one would have relaxed, enough would have remained to give military authorities some trouble, and lastly the desirability of maintaining secrecy that was impossible if gazetting these notifications.¹⁶³

Thus, colonial authorities in British India willingly avoided the provisions of the Indian Emigration Act to be able to respond to urgent needs from military authorities in Mesopotamia without much bureaucratic haggling and without publicly announcing their efforts. While Willcocks’s pre-war requests to obtain Indian coolie labour for irrigation works had received equivocal answers, the war engagement and pressing labour demands in Mesopotamia made colonial authorities bypass the laws hitherto held up, at least technically. However, the measure alluded to was just one of many that Indian authorities applied in

¹⁶¹ Secy, CI, GoI to Chief Secys, GoBomb, GoUP, and Chief Commissioner, Central Provinces, 19 Jan 1916, Ibid.

¹⁶² Note, CI, 3, 4 Jan 1916, Ibid.

¹⁶³ Note, CI, 11 Jan 1916, Ibid.

obtaining labour for employment in war theatres. In fact, Mesopotamian labour requirements were satisfied throughout the war and after by tapping into a variety of sources from different ends of the subcontinent’s labour market, whether already existing or to be ‘discovered’.¹⁶⁴

After Kut-al-Amara: the campaign’s reorganisation and its impact on British India

Shortly after the occupation of Basra in November 1914, various military authorities already discussed the possibilities of further advances of British Indian forces. Authorities in Britain sanctioned going up to Qurna, a city just 50 miles north of Basra, but objected to anything beyond, while especially Indian officers at the head of the forces were eager to push forward, as far as Baghdad. The latter group of highest-ranking army personnel and political officers, comprising inter alia field commander General John Nixon, Percy Cox and Arnold Wilson allegedly acted upon signals from Viceroy Hardinge and particularly from the Commander-in-Chief, General Harry "Beauchamp" Duff. They ultimately succeeded in pressing for further advances, sanctioned by British authorities.

Following the fall of Amara in June and Nasiriya in July 1915, Kut-al-Amara was taken by September of that year. Despite lengthening lines of communication and reinforcements wanting, General Nixon felt strong enough to push further to Baghdad. Especially impressed by the sheer prestige of capturing the city and relying on Indian opinion in regard to possible reinforcements, authorities in Britain finally sanctioned the advance to Baghdad. This decision played out as fatal. Set out to capture the city, the 6th Indian Division under General Townshend lost thousands of soldiers and had to fall back on Kut-al-Amara in November 1915 in order to rest and await reinforcements. Surrounded by several ten thousand Turkish troops under command of the German Field Marshall, Goltz Pasha, in early December, their situation had turned into a trap. While British attempts to relief the encircled troops failed thrice, this was the beginning of a five month long siege. At its end, some ten thousand remaining soldiers of initially thirty thousand British Indian forces that were not killed or starved to death surrendered to the Ottoman Army in April 1916.¹⁶⁵

Already before the fall of Kut-al-Amara, it seemed clear that “India was incompetent to conduct an overseas campaign of this scope”,¹⁶⁶ and the War Office in February 1916 took over responsibility from Indian military authorities for the ‘Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force’, as it was now called. When the defeat became fact, authorities in Britain instituted the Mesopotamia Commission Inquiry during the same year, which extensively interviewed those

¹⁶⁴ Labelling coolies as ‘war measure’ was just one of many methods. The Indian jail population offered another resource of labour. Singha, *Finding Labor from India for the War in Iraq*, 424-437. HD, Jails, Nov 1916, 42-48 A.

¹⁶⁵ Bush, *Britain, India and the Arabs*, 23-35, 49, 94, 103, 110 f.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

involved and collected material. Its aim was to report on the defeat’s causes and to find culprits for the plight, but also to make suggestions as to the further project of the campaign. The report made unmistakably clear that Indian authorities were to be blamed for the events, in particular Viceroy Hardinge and General Duff, who allegedly showed “little desire to help and some desire actually to obstruct the energetic prosecution of the war.”¹⁶⁷ Both were relieved from their positions in India soon afterwards. Furthermore, the report critiqued Indian authorities for the ill advised decision to advance on Baghdad as much as for inadequacy of supply to the force and a policy of economy especially displayed in sectors of river and rail transport and port facilities. Overall, the mobilisation of resources was regarded as insufficient.



*Picture 6. An Indian Army sentry stands guard at one of the gateways to Baghdad, c. 1917.*¹⁶⁸

Especially after the capture of Baghdad in March 1917, a lot changed in the way India contributed to the war effort. Already earlier, the Indian government and industry seemed to have absorbed the commission’s critique and accomplished the tasks set out in the project of developing Iraq. Especially the supply of adequate river transport improved considerably besides other sectors of supply obviously functioning better. Antedating these developments, a tremendous transformation took place in certain sectors of India’s industry specializing in certain fields of war requirements. Henceforth, war engagement in Mesopotamia also became

¹⁶⁷ Report of the Commission appointed by Act of Parliament to enquire into the operations of war in Mesopotamia, with a separate Report by Commander J. Wedgwood, D.S.O., M.P., and Appendices. 1917, Cd. Paper No. 8610, HoC, PP, 123.

¹⁶⁸ National Army Museum, Ref. No. 1965-10-209-43. Accessed at <http://www.national-army-museum.ac.uk/exhibitions/fall-OfBaghdad/page2.shtml> on 25 Sept 2009.

a way of proving “progressive Indian imperialism in the region as a mark of India’s growing independence from and parity with the metropole [...]”¹⁶⁹

Despite these important contributions, mistrust and uneasy feeling arose on the side of Indian authorities. The Commander-in-Chief in India, General Charles Monro, complained in October 1917 to the War Office about steadily increasing requirements of the force for personnel for inland water transport. Demands of marine ratings had in effect reached such high levels that authorities anticipated severe difficulties in maintaining current figures and meeting future demands. Particularly the Indian shipping industry suffered for want of men, while ship owners pressed for having lascars made available for winter service in the north Atlantic and other routes. The circumstances had a devastating effect on private shipping already in that vessels with undersized crews were detained in Bombay, or setting sail with some amount of untrained men. General Monro accused establishments in Mesopotamia of miscalculating the amount of required labour, inefficiently utilising the personnel sent, not substituting marine ratings when other labour was equally available, and overall of a lack of co-ordination among the various labour employing directorates not resulting in economy of resources. In order to look into these matters and to advise whether demands of such personnel could be reduced, he proposed to enlarge a commission under General Freeland already set up to enquire into and advise on the more efficient utilisation of railway personnel, by three members with experience in river transport.¹⁷⁰

The commission’s final report produced only partly the results hoped for by Indian authorities. Especially in regard to staff and labour for the railways it questioned – despite accomplishments so far of regional railway companies – whether “more cannot be done by them in persuading and sparing their skilled Indian employés to serve in Mesopotamia [...] [and that] steps should be taken to ensure pressure being brought to bear on him [the Indian] by his immediate superior officers.” Arguably, the overall situation still had an air that “the urgent necessity for greater effort is not fully appreciated.”¹⁷¹ The separate report of the Government of India Mesopotamia Transport Commission by the same team responded at least somehow to the complaints of the Commander-in-Chief. It finally recommended that sea-going marine ratings were to be returned to India and steps undertaken to prevent their recruitment. An officer should also be appointed to a position for co-ordinating and supervising all transportation directorates as to ensure economical utilization of labour. The

¹⁶⁹ Satia, *Developing Iraq*, 234.

¹⁷⁰ Commander-in-Chief, Simla to Secy, War Office, 5 Oct 1917. FPD, Sec. E., Feb 1921, 56.

¹⁷¹ Report by Major-General H.F.E. Freeland on the Working and Future Development of the Port of Basra and of the River and Railway Communications in Mesopotamia, April 1918, 5. *The Middle East Online Series 2, Iraq: 1914-1974*. Cengage Learning Historical Archives accessed at www.tlmea.com/iraq/index.htm on 14 Sept 2009.

report recorded that authorities in Mesopotamia had no ground for complaint in regard to the number of labour; only the quality of some categories of personnel could be improved, and this should be frequently brought to the notice of all employers in India and more care was to be exercised when carrying out trade tests of skilled labourers recruited from India.¹⁷²

Of course, this indicated the unabated need for Indian labour. In fact, it was more in demand than ever before, despite attempts of Indian authorities to pull out these resources. The War Office then in charge of the campaign seemed better able to obtain and actually procured more labour from India compared to the campaign being Indian-led, possibly because they made Indian authorities adhere more to military needs and apply war principles even more strictly. The number of Indian labour even overtook the amount of locally procured labour at one point, as labour returns between 1917 to 1919 show.¹⁷³ (Cf. table 2)

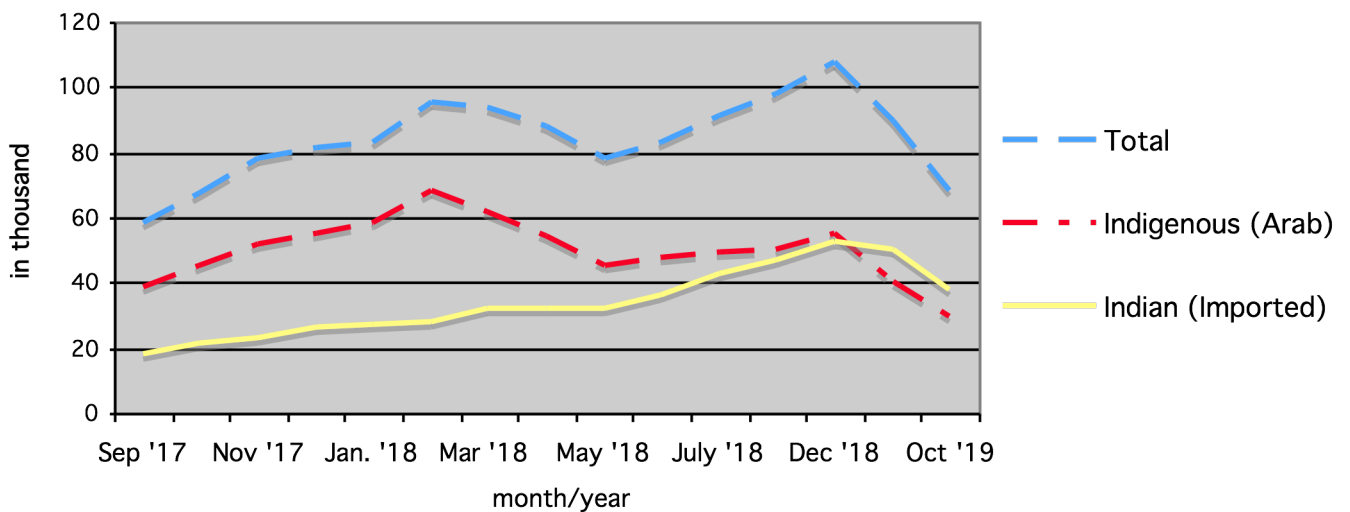


Table 2. Labour Returns, Total, Indigenous and Indian, Sept 1917 to Oct 1919

¹⁷² Ibid., Appendix B. Conclusions and Recommendations from the Report of the Government of India Mesopotamia Transport Commission, 31. The report is not attached in full length.

¹⁷³ Following a peak in February 1918 of some 100,000 in total labour returns, both indigenous and Indian labour decreased in numbers, but Indian labour was more in use henceforth than indigenous, continuing until the end of the period under review when 38,000 Indian faced 30,000 indigenous labourers. Numbers collected from: Review of the Civil Administration of the Occupied Territories of Al'Iraq, 1914-1918. Compiled in the Office of the Civil Commissioner, Baghdad, Nov 1918. In: Jarman, Robert L. (1992), Iraq Administration Reports, 1914-1932. Vol. 1. Archive Editions, 80. Civil Commissioner (CC), Baghdad to Under SoS for India and Foreign Secy, GoI, 23 Nov 1919. FPD, War, Mar 1920, 126-127 B.

4. Undoing Indian Immigration into Iraq

Developments came forth with war activities drawing to a close towards the end of October 1918. Questions then evolved around how labour could be secured from India under the impression that war had ended and thus military necessity lapsed, and concurrently whether or not and under which circumstances Indian immigration would have any future. Although overall labour returns had drastically gone down, the need for labour forces continued to prevail. Establishments connected to the military occupation dismantled their operations and set labour free, but establishments of further importance to the country’s development in the post-war period continued to rely on external labour. The railway and irrigation departments especially comprised Indian menial, skilled and office labour. Showing a continued interest in external labour supply from India, the Irrigation Directorate disposed of some 465 subordinates and clerical staff and 515 menials and followers, including artisans, mates and khalasis, with some exceptions exclusively Indian towards the end of 1918. In fact, long delays in the further arrival of subordinates and menials from India meant that in many districts Irrigation officers had little or no establishment to assist them.¹⁷⁴ On the other side, authorities were not able to retain certain sections of the hitherto diverse labouring population. Convict Labour Corps, for example, whose duty was to last only “for the duration of war”, were increasingly withdrawn and despatched to India.¹⁷⁵ Authorities respond to these developments by securing a further continuous source of labour supply, for example, in regard to labour that had come on contracts for the duration of war. These were released from the old contracts and given new one-year contracts.

Another pressing issue in need of settlement was the future immigration of Indians into Iraq, which seemed connected also to the larger question of demobilisation. Already in September, Wilson reminded authorities in London in a note that a definite policy in this regard was necessary on the termination of war. He especially foresaw a possible demand of certain classes in the Indian Army for grants of land to enable them to remain in the country after the war as cultivator. While a notable influx of Indian Hindu, Muslim and Parsee shopkeepers and small traders into Basra had already taken place, he had no doubt that Arab

¹⁷⁴ Administration Report of the Irrigation Directorate, Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force for the period from 6th February 1918 to 31st March 1919 including reports on the Flood Seasons 1918 and 1919, 1-3. FPD, Ext., Sept 1920, 511-512. In India, the Army Headquarters in Simla were responsible for recruitment. They initially faced some difficulties. Many men did not volunteer because of the length of contracts, which was hence reduced to eighteen months. They even tried to contact subordinates from the Indian Public Works Department who were known to officers in the Directorate, but this method of recruiting met with little success.

¹⁷⁵ The last convict labour corps left for India in January 1920. Singha, *Finding Labor from India for the War in Iraq*, 440. This also points to the difficult circumstances under which labour corps were finally released from services.

opinion was opposed to Indian immigration of any sort.¹⁷⁶ Yet, for the time being, nothing was undertaken in this regard, also because labour requirements were so large that immigration could not be totally dispensed with and the country’s political future had not been decided.

However, this changed slightly when authority in Mesopotamia passed into the hands of the Civil Administration in February 1919. Arnold Wilson expressed the view that the country would continue to rely – for want of labour surplus – on imported labour for development purposes and was prepared to accept responsibility for supplying all the labour by the civil administration after the peace declaration, provided that he was allowed to take over the present labour organisation. He therefore proposed to Indian authorities a notification under section 7 of the Indian Emigration Act as to enable the civil administration to further obtain labour. Several Indian officers rejected the advanced proposals outright since obtaining labour on a civil basis would not function without resorting to the indentured system. The matter of labour immediately tied into the question of the future administration of Mesopotamia and the policy towards Indians, the Indian authorities pleaded for some time of consideration, while preferring in the meantime a continuation of the labour system on military footing.¹⁷⁷

Illustrating the large dependence of Mesopotamia on India in regard to those 138,000 labourers at present in the country and some 30,000 labourers as proposed post-war establishment, Viceroy Chelmsford voiced the same contentions vis-à-vis the India Office. He opposed any plan of a civil labour establishment considering that “Indian opinion would not tolerate any form of indentured labour in Mesopotamia, especially if it were combined with any sort of restriction or even discouragement of free Indian emigration.” Nonetheless, knowing that “Mesopotamia will not be able to get the labour it requires without some form of indenture [...]”, Chelmsford agreed to the army continuing “to recruit labour corps for duty nominally as part of the garrison of the country, though that duty may be of a purely civil character.” Moreover, he interpreted the dependence nonchalant as sufficient reason to claim a larger Indian say in the matter of Mesopotamia, as it seemed to be impossible “for Mesopotamia to claim administrative independence of India when she is dependent on the

¹⁷⁶ CC, Baghdad to Under SoS for India, 28 Sept 1918 and enclosure, Dy. Adjutant General, General Headquarters to CC, Baghdad, 26 Sept 1918. FPD, Ext., Jun 1921, 1-3 B. The latter observed that if the Indian was to be introduced in the country he should at first be confined to areas newly brought under irrigation and where Arab or other population is either very scanty or does not exist. It appeared however more advisable in the first place to encourage more Arabs to settle on the land.

¹⁷⁷ CC, Baghdad to Foreign Secy, GoI, 21, 31 Jan 1919. Notes, 3, 4, 7, 13, 14, 18 Feb 1919. FPD, Sec. E., Mar 1921, 46-54. This suggestion, however, necessitated offers of discharge to those recruited under a contract that had already expired or was to expire on the declaration of peace, and a refill of arising gaps partly by re-enlistment in Mesopotamia and partly by fresh Indian recruitment. Note, 4 Feb 1919, Ibid.

latter for almost everything she requires – even unskilled labour.”¹⁷⁸ London responded positively. The War Office had agreed on the proposals for the transition period, solely amending that additional labour should be enlisted only up to a limit of civil administration’s estimated requirements, and the India Office assured that the labour supply by India was “conditional on grant of reasonable facilities for Indians to settle in Mesopotamia.”¹⁷⁹ Soon afterwards, recruitment for labour corps to the extent of 32,000 men started over again, with depots receiving about 5,000 a month.¹⁸⁰

As shown above, labour issues also bore witness of and were closely connected to questions picking up simultaneously regarding future Indian immigration into the country. Obviously, there was a cleavage between the restrictions on Indian immigration into Mesopotamia versus the demand of Mesopotamia for Indian labour. But with the peace process and respective talks over the future of the country starting in 1919, it was decided to leave, for political reasons, the question of free Indian immigration for settlement until after the future of Mesopotamia was decided. Instead, Mesopotamian authorities drew up Passport Regulations in 1919 for immigration control, under which no person could enter the country without permission from local authorities. The Civil Commissioner had, for example, informed the Foreign Secretary early on about Indian and Chinese labourers desiring to settle down in Basra. With “considerable local prejudice” against them, he professed that population would soon demand immigration restrictions. For the time being, however, their movements were restricted by military passport regulations in place, which could deny travel permission to all persons neither connected to the force nor residents. Indian officials, on the other hand, were reluctant to act upon such information, and instead decided to wait until questions regarding the country’s future administration and the policy to be adopted towards Indian immigrants were settled.¹⁸¹

As late as April 1920, the Indian Government responded officially to the changed environment in Mesopotamia, thus adapting its emigration devices and supplementing pre-existing modes to obtain labour. Alleging that military needs were still predominant in Mesopotamia, Viceroy Chelmsford issued an ordinance consenting to the continued recruitment of military labour corps in India and their employment by Mesopotamian civil authorities. Subjecting the regulation to four conditions, the government aimed at foregoing problems and critiques that had surfaced earlier. Thus justifying and sanctioning continued

¹⁷⁸ Viceroy private to SoS for India, 19 Feb 1919, *Ibid.* Repeating officially, Viceroy, to SoS for India, 21 Mar 1919, *Ibid.* Given this important leverage, other officials demanded higher political stakes for India as well, hoping that “the arguments in favour of Indian control will become cogent however much it may be desired to avoid it.” Note, 4 Feb 1919, *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ SoS for India to Viceroy, 11 July 1919, *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Note, 22 Jul 1919, *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ CC, Baghdad to Foreign Secy, GoI, 4 Feb 1919. Note, 7 Feb 1919. FPD, Sec. E., Mar 1921, 46-54.

labour emigration to Mesopotamia, the government addressed the sentiment of Indian nationalists’ and the broader public as well, expressing that “no form of indentured emigration to Mesopotamia can be allowed (...).”¹⁸² It served to exclude, rhetorically, the occurrence of any such form of emigration, while labour overseas was recast primarily as military labour. The ordinance furthermore proved to be applicable to an astonishingly wide spectrum of labour, having a decisive impact especially on the railways. General Lubbock, Director of Railways in Baghdad, was sure that the term “military labour corps” covered all forms of unskilled labour, whether formed into labour corps or not. But he desired intimation from the Indian authorities as to the further extent of the term and was informed that it applied “to all subordinate personnel, or labour (skilled and unskilled) recruited in India for the Mesopotamian Administration.”¹⁸³ Eventually, the provisions were so broad as to easily satisfy diverse labour requirements under one singular heading.

While this measure helped in securing a further labour supply from India, actual recruitment in substantially high numbers went on only for a short period. It was to be a matter of a few months until Indian immigration into the country was set on an altogether different footing. Important developments in the international system were about to effect the administration of the country, and hence issues of immigration in general. Negotiations over the future of the country began at the Peace Conference in Paris during 1919, taking definite shape only after the San Remo Conference in late April 1920. Among other League of Nations mandate, the conference decided on the terms of the British Mandate over Iraq. This was entrusted to Great Britain with the Treaty of Sèvres of 10th August 1920 finally dividing the Ottoman Empire.

When initial arrangements of Arab administration began to take shape, first notices were received already in July 1920 that recruitment was to “be confined within narrowest possible limits if not stopped at all.”¹⁸⁴ The Civil Commissioner responded that substitution of Arab for Indian personnel was proceeding rapidly in many departments, but several works were still so vital in importance that he begged recruitment be permitted to continue, assuring this would not include unnecessary additional recruitment.¹⁸⁵ He felt impelled only shortly afterwards to comment on recent debates in the House of Commons and a leader in the *Times*

¹⁸² Order in Council, 30th April 1920. HD, Pol., Jan 1921, 21 B. These four conditions included, 1) the temporary nature of the measure, 2) that recruited labourers remained Government servants and were not employed by private contractors, that Indian labour was not to be recruited by Mesopotamian authorities, and that labourers would be given the option to return to India when military occupation ended.

¹⁸³ Director of Railways, Baghdad to Sir G. Barnes, Member of Commerce, 9 Sept 1920. FPD to Director of Railways, Baghdad, 1 Nov 1920. FPD, Ext., Dec 1921, 242 B.

¹⁸⁴ SoS for India to CC, Baghdad and Viceroy, 19 Jul 1920, FPD, Sec. E., Feb 1921, 93-214. Immediately referring to fifty motor mechanics that were recently asked for from India, they asked whether any reduction could be made in their numbers.

¹⁸⁵ CC, Baghdad to SoS for India, 24 Jul 1920, Ibid.

regarding the alleged unpopularity of Indians in Mesopotamia. Offering a multi-sighted observation of different classes, he tried to attenuate the picture that had been created, finally stating that he would further pursue the policy of replacing Indians by Arabs wherever possible, but that his experiences emphasized the “necessity of training Arabs before they are replaced in such positions and indicates desirability of cautious rather than drastic reduction.”¹⁸⁶ Wilson, an old and experienced Indian hand and important in various stages for decisions favouring his connections to India, was not yet willing to let go of this connection.

Insurrection

In fact, drastic reduction in recruitment and setting free of labour became the order of the day when internal constraints following the country-wide insurrection from the summer until the end of 1920 proved too cumbersome, and the following political development of a mandate system by Great Britain prohibited a further de-nationalized state character. Thus, government officials were increasingly in favour of breaking off the ties with India. Whether it was the actual awarding of the mandate to Britain, or the high-handed nature of Wilson’s administration during his office as Civil Commissioner is not clear. But in the ensuing months, the situation in the country became quite difficult with Shia and Sunni, different tribes and other Arabs staging protests and attacking British and Indian officers directly in several districts.¹⁸⁷

This necessitated preparing for further withdrawals under the assumption that disorder would become general, and employees of civil departments were sent back to India in large numbers. Authorities in India decided not to send any more personnel for certain directorates, asking whether that held true for other directorates as well, since they were anxious to avoid sending men who would be immediately returned. But Wilson wanted them to supply further unless specifically cancelled. The situation in Mesopotamia got more and more difficult. Also installations of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company at Naft Khan had been looted, with

¹⁸⁶ CC, Baghdad to SoS for India, 26 Jul 1920, Ibid. The Article by ‘A Student of Politics’, The Times, 24 June 1920, 16, reported of the debate in Parliament of the preceding day in which representatives had pleaded that the British government should work for a “Mesopotamian civilization, and not an Anglo-Indian civilization.” A general feeling was “that if Mesopotamia was to be manageable at reasonable cost we must get rid of the Indian mortgage”, also observing that “Arabs and Indians (...) cannot get on together.” According to him, Arab prejudices existed on religious grounds against non-Muslim Indians, “against certain backward races and classes of Indians whom they regard as inferiors in civilisation and to whose general conduct they take exception”, and against Indian petty shopkeepers in Basra, who had been able to secure trade, otherwise gotten by Arabs. Wilson cites murders of Arabs by Burmese motor drivers in the Kirkuk division to be responsible for their prejudice against “backward classes”. However, there was no racial prejudice against Indian troops, whose conduct was said to be exemplary allowing many of them to visit principle shrines in the country, nor against Indian Muslim officials employed in executive positions in the Civil Administration. When Wilson met a number of notables and chiefs of the Baqubah district, they complained of the insufficiency and corruption of Arab subordinate staff who had replaced Indians in the irrigation department, and asked for more Indians to be sent again in order that loss and unfair division of water might be prevented.

¹⁸⁷ Haldane, J.A.L. (1922), *The Insurrection in Mesopotamia, 1920*. London: William Blackwood & Sons.

employees being safe. However, to Wilson’s surprise, no Indian officials of any kind had been murdered, except when connected to raids on railways. Instead, several Indian officials had been captured and were in enemy hands, but were not treated badly by the tribes irrespective of their religion.¹⁸⁸

With troop requirements in Mesopotamia quite severe during the revolution and reinforcements from India still on their way, also members of labour corps were enlisted as combatants. This was to be another case for the Indian nationalist movement to pick on. A letter was published in the ‘Young India’ issue of 10th November 1920 that contained a resolution passed in Baghdad in honour of the inauguration of Gandhi’s non-cooperation movement, addressing the alleged compulsory enlistment and sending of labour corps to the firing line as “lawless butchery” by military authorities. Also the order prohibiting Muslims in the force to visit country’s sacred places found objection. Gandhi criticized the British lust for wealth and their desperate trying to keep up a tottering privilege. The information seemed correct, although the military authority’s perspective was quite different. Accordingly, they had called for volunteers from former soldiers now in labour corps to enlist as combatants while waiting for reinforcements from India. Reportedly, the rush of applicants was so large all trying to improve their status and pay, that several garrison battalions were raised from the source and hence employed.¹⁸⁹ Later on, several thousand Indian troops arrived in Mesopotamia again in order to subdue the riots. By late 1920, the country returned to a state of ongoing, but not open revolution.

January	1868	July	2944
February	2956	August	2132
March	2301	September	951
April	1520	October	127
May	1096	November (1 st half)	86
June	1735	Total	17,716

Table 3. Numbers recruited for Labour Corps in Mesopotamia during 1920, per month¹⁹⁰

By this time, continued Indian immigration into Iraq had merely come to a halt and recruitment of labour had been put on halt. (Cf. table 3) According to an official census, the

¹⁸⁸ CC, Baghdad to SoS for India, 13 Aug 1920. AD, Simla to CC, Baghdad, 19 Aug 1920. CC, Baghdad to AD, Simla, 21 Aug 1920. CC, Baghdad to Foreign Secy, GoI, 26 Aug, 5 Sept 1920. FPD, Sec. E., Feb 1921, 93-214.

¹⁸⁹ Extract from the Bombay Fortnightly Report, 1st half, November 1920. Memorandum, Col. Nevill, 4 Dec 1920. HD, Pol., Jan 1921, 21 B. During 1920 the number of Indian Labour Corps units employed in Mesopotamia had drastically decreased from 31 to 12, thus eliminating those which were used for civil purposes. The number of Indians recruited for the Labour Corps also came down sharply and halted almost in November 1920, since the “period of war” men had been replaced by then.

¹⁹⁰ Memorandum, Col. Nevill, 4 Dec 1920. HD, Pol., Jan 1921, 21 B. He stated: “The recent fall is due to the completion of demand for replacement of “period of war” men.

number of Indians living in Mesopotamia by mid-1920 had not changed in contrast to the numbers of the pre-war period, the number amounting to some 3,000 excluding those connected to the military force and civil administration.¹⁹¹ Nonetheless, the Indian Government expressed at a meeting in September 1920 that the Mesopotamia Passport Rules should be modified so as to meet their objections to existing restrictions on Indian immigration. If it was not adhered to the continuing recruitment in India of military labour corps and their employment could not be continued much longer because of opposition by a growing mass of Indian opinion. They repeated their demand of complete withdrawal of the embargo on Indian immigration in December 1920, to which the High Commissioner in Baghdad complied in July 1921, removing the restrictions on immigration of Indians by issuing an Immigration Proclamation. Awaiting the approval of the British Government, the Indian government thought it necessary to declare by notification that Mesopotamia was a country to which emigration was henceforth lawful.¹⁹²

During the course of a lecture to the Central Asian Society in London, Arnold Wilson, recently retired from his position of Civil Commissioner and immediately afterwards employed as APOC’s resident director in the Persian Gulf, dwelled on immigration issues pertaining to Mesopotamia. Turning to India, he expressed his contention that country itself offered greater attractions to the “stalwart Mohammedan cultivator, who alone could make a successful settler.” Citing “national prejudice in the minds of Arabs in Mesopotamia [...] against any alien who seeks to settle in his ancestral acres”, he assured the audience that “immigration might have been possible before the war, but not now.”¹⁹³ Once a strong supporter of Indian immigration into Mesopotamia and of generally high Indian stakes there, Wilson’s opinion had finally turned, at least in regard to this country.

With the army of occupation and those establishments and labourers connected with it gradually retreating, authorities largely stopped importing Indian labour and effectively curtailed undesired Indian and other immigration into the country. While the future of Indian immigration into Mesopotamia was thus decided, labour migration to the oilfields in southern Persia witnessed a notable transformation positing itself interestingly against the developments in neighbouring Iraq. Newly employed by APOC, Arnold Wilson was to play yet again a decisive role in maintaining the imperial connection with the Indian subcontinent in all matters of the company’s interest, especially the supply of labour.

¹⁹¹ Census in Mesopotamia. FPD, Ext., Aug 1920, 382-286 B. Accordingly, the highest number of Indians (2,524) lived in the former Baghdad vilayet, most prominently in the Baghdad and Dulaim divisions. The other major division with Indian emigrants was Basra (493).

¹⁹² Foreign Secy, GoI to HC, Baghdad, 21 Oct, 11 Dec 1920. Note, FPD, 16 Jul 1921. FPD, Sec. E., Dec 1921, 1-179.

¹⁹³ Wilson, Arnold T. (1921), ‘Mesopotamia, 1914-1921’, lecture to the Central Asian Society, London, 15 April 1921. *Journal of the Central Asian Society*, VIII, Pt. 2, 151.

5. Employment of Indian Labour by APOC

The Anglo-Persian Oil Company employed Indian migrant labour right from the outset of their Persian operations in 1908 until the 1950s, reaching a high in the years during and immediately after the war. This comprised mostly skilled labour for work in the Abadan refinery and clerks for office work, but to a limited extent also skilled labour for the oilfields, and probably as well unskilled labour to considerable extent. During the time under review here, i.e. from 1908 to 1921, most migrant labourers were engaged directly from the subcontinent through offices of the company's India agent, Shaw Wallace & Co., who had offices in all major cities, such as Bombay, Calcutta, Karachi and Madras. They took on the task of seeking and directly recruiting Indian labour, engaging them mostly on three-year labour contracts. For their initial operations, APOC also received experienced British and Indian technical staff and labourers on secondment from its Burmese parent company.¹⁹⁴

The stated and implicit or hidden reasons for this overall recruitment from India are tricky, though. Most importantly, they do not disclose whether the company actually used both unskilled and skilled labour for its operations. The company itself professed and most accounts hitherto written about its labour force state that it employed only skilled labour for reasons of the local labour market. While a continuous employed of unskilled labour is open to question, archival evidence suggests that they did so at least during the war that was about to close in and in its aftermath. A division between forms of unskilled and skilled labour was quite arbitrary and as we shall see the company and colonial authorities used certain discretionary measures to allow also the recruitment of unskilled labour. One reason for claiming to use only skilled labour was afforded by the nature of the company's operations in Persia. Contrary to Burma, where the BOC was not liable to any concessions or treaties with a country's government since it belonged to British India at that time, APOC ran operations in a territory that was not part of the Empire, and therefore liable to the wishes of the country's authorities, stipulated in the first oil concession agreed to in 1901. This was also true in case the company wanted to recruit and employ foreign labour. According to stipulations, the company was nominally allowed to revert only to external skilled labourers in case the local labour market lacked of the quantity and skill of such labourers.¹⁹⁵ Nominally, this left in turn only local labourers to fill positions of unskilled work. Under pressure from the Persian government to use if at all only external skilled labour, the company prepared internal audits from a certain point to be sent to local authorities. These observed whether the company's

¹⁹⁴ This agent also undertook the recruitment for BOC as well as the marketing of its petroleum products until 1927. Townend, *A History of Shaw Wallace & Co.* See also Ferrier, *The History of the British Petroleum Company.*

¹⁹⁵ Seccombe/Lawless, *Foreign Worker Dependence.*

conduct adhered to the treaty. Hence, Indian labour found entry into statistics and occurred only under the skilled category while it possibly included unskilled workers as well.

Apart from such basic considerations, one can find several further reasons for the company’s recruitment of Indian labour during the early before the inception of World War One. The British Minister to Persia, Sir George Barclay, noted that given the unsatisfactory nature of local labour the company had been compelled in early 1910 to import foreign labourers, considerably from British India, regardless of a provision in the concession stipulating that only Persian subjects were to be employed for other than technical work. While labour forces existing locally were said to be “under no pressing necessity to look beyond their crops and flocks for employment and a living”, the import of almost all artisans and labourers from elsewhere seemed a virtual necessity. Still, British officials felt relieved not to have attracted too much attention to the circumstances, after the responsible British consul at Mohammerah had reportedly expressed anxiousness as to the attitude of the Persian Imperial Commissioner.¹⁹⁶ The latter’s ambiguous position and task was provided for in Article 11 of the D’Arcy concession. Being appointed by the Persian Government but paid £ 1,000 sterling annually by the company, his office included providing consultancy and information to APOC as well as establishing “by agreement with the Concessionaire such supervision as he may deem expedient to safeguard the interests of the Imperial Government.”¹⁹⁷ That the company paid the Commissioner for his services may have been contradictory to the supervisory role he simultaneously performed for the Persian government.¹⁹⁸

Reporting in late May 1910 about the local labour situation, Arnold Wilson, then employed as British consul in southern Persia, concluded that no local resentment was “[...] likely to be caused by your importing foreign labour to fill vacancies which, it is universally accepted, cannot be filled locally.”¹⁹⁹ However, with the Imperial Commissioner objecting especially to the employment of Ottoman subjects, Greenway projected “serious difficulties unless [...] the employment of so many aliens” was satisfactorily justified. He pressed and finally convinced APOC’s initially tenacious managing agents to compile comparative labour

¹⁹⁶ Annual Report on Persia for the year 1910. In: Bourne, Kenneth/Watt, D. Cameron (Eds.) (1985), *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print. Part I, From the Mid-Nineteenth Century to the First World War. Ser. B: The Near and Middle East, 1856-1914. Vol. 14: Persia, Britain and Russia, 1907-1914.* Frederick: Univ. Publ. of America, 115.

¹⁹⁷ For the concession’s text see Appendices, Ferrier, *The History of the British Petroleum Company*, 642.

¹⁹⁸ Imperial Commissioners were in late 1901 Vincent Kitabgi, and Sadigh al-Saltana who replaced the former in March 1905 and in September 1907. Farid al-Saltana succeeded his brother in 1918. See Ferrier, *The History of the British Petroleum Company*, 92-94, 366. Sadigh al-Saltana raised issues in April 1909 in regard to European and Canadian staff. *Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 153 f.

statements according to nationality, the first appearing in January 1911.²⁰⁰ Thereafter, these statements in regard to the nationality composition of the company’s labour forces were used forthwith. However, this seems to have been used as a tool to justify further recruitment of Indian labour of various sorts, which was allegedly not obtainable locally. Indian labour had two advantages, which included higher skills at a time when Persia’s national labour did not dispose of it yet, and also that this labour was easier to let go off during times of low production. All this ultimately created a circulatory migration from the Indian subcontinent towards the Persian Gulf.

Given experiences in oil exploration as well as in minor operations such as farming grain and experimenting with vegetable and cotton growing on their own model farms, company representatives knew in general that “the Persian was [...] a good labourer, but [that] he had too many irons in the fire, and could not be relied on to remain with anyone during the whole year, especially when the date and grain seasons came round.”²⁰¹ In addition, the company claimed that of skilled labour practically none was available, so that even before the war, the import of much needed labour from India was necessary. The company’s clandestine policy of importing labour had an astonishing effect. Over the four-year period up to 1914, the absolute number of Indians employed increased seven-fold compared to the first year, which equalled a relative increase from nine percent to a quarter of all employees within the company.

Year	Persians	Indians		Others	Europeans	Total
		No.	%			
1910	1362	158	9,3	146	40	1706
1911	1801	379	16	127	56	2363
1912	2449	553	17,6	97	43	3142
1913	2899	917	22,7	175	44	4035
1914	2744	1074	25	395	64	4277
1915	2203	979	28	187	80	3449
1916	2335	1366	35	104	120	3925
1917	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1918	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1919	3979	2641	39	47	117	6784
1920	8447	3616	29	35	244	12342
1921	9009	4709	34	51	271	14040

Table 4. Anglo-Persian Oil Company staff and labour in Persia, 1910-1921, in absolute numbers, and share of Indian employees²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 154.

²⁰¹ Trade Openings in Persia – Labour the Greatest Difficulty. The Times, 23 Oct 1919, 11. The APOC representative C.A. Walpole addressed the Persia Society at London on issues pertaining to trading prospects.

²⁰² Ferrier, The History of the British Petroleum Company, 276, 401.

The colonial state and labour for APOC during wartime and after

Apart from the special relationship between company and colonial state as described initially in this chapter, another crucial aspect of the intersection between the government’s imperial oil policy and APOC emerged in respect of labour emigration to southern Persia and the way in which the Indian government assisted in this process. While the government’s attitude was helpful even before and after the war, it was especially during this period that the assistance was of quite an extraordinary nature. There were two reasons: on the one hand, obtaining local labour proved allegedly quite difficult for the company during the war-period, especially as the demand for labour in wartime Mesopotamia affected and drained the local labour market of southern Persia. These constraints of labour supply all around the region necessitated external supplies. On the other hand, the prefix of a war economy allowed for exceptional decisions in regard to a sensitive topic such as emigration. This resulted in the company’s rhetoric of increasing demand for Indian labour.

At times, the government’s assistance took the shape of physical engagement in processes of recruiting and conveying labourers to Mesopotamia or Persia. In fact, Indian military authorities occasionally agreed to transport labourers on warships frequently plying between Indian ports and the war region.²⁰³ The same authorities stunningly suggested as well to recruit and maintain APOC’s labour on a basis and on terms similar to Labour Corps in Mesopotamia, for “discipline can be better maintained amongst men enrolled under military law than amongst men on purely civil contract.”²⁰⁴ However, the Indian government’s assistance was most markedly in technically allowing for and facilitating labour recruitment in the first place. This implied a convulsion of various modes at different stages. Sometimes, valid laws were not enforced or observed to the extent they provided for, resulting in quietly allowing the company’s action to bypass even if it was not lawful. At other times, the Indian government consciously took appropriate legal decisions to accommodate an outcome that was hoped for. The company, on the other hand, was actively seeking to bypass regulations designed to protect migrant workers. Overall, they made great use of their status in imperial politics, of the war exigencies and the connected legal weaknesses to import Indian labour.

The company perceived of the Indian Emigration Act of 1908 as one of the biggest detriments to the supply of Indian labour for the company’s works in southern Persia. APOC’s chairman, Charles Greenway, proposed already in March 1915 an exemption from

²⁰³ Shaw Wallace & Co., Karachi to Embarkation Commandant, Karachi, 3 Nov 1917. Quartermaster General, Delhi to Embarkation Commandant, Karachi, 27 Nov 1917. FPD, Ext., Jul 1918, 23-25 B.

²⁰⁴ Note, AD, 6 Nov 1917. CI, Emi., Mar 1918, 6-13 A. It is not clear whether military authorities were actually involved in this process or not. Another official doubted that the company would use any other recruiting agency than their own, because of experience and comparative cheapness. Note, CI, 16 Nov 1917, Ibid.

the operations of that Act of areas occupied by the company’s installations at Abadan, Mohammerah and the oil fields. According to him, the restrictions and formalities prescribed by that act unduly magnified in the emigrant’s imagination and acted as serious deterrent to obtaining and inducing men to leave for Persia from such ports as Bombay, Rangoon, or Karachi. It also resulted in very high rates of pay in order to obtain any men at all, while the labour was not of the best quality. The ultimate aim of the act being to safeguard Indian emigrants, Greenway enumerated provisions for its further assurance in case the company was actually exempted. The Persian Coast and Islands Order of 1907 afforded one provision, according to which British Indian subjects in the Persian littoral were allegedly entirely under the jurisdiction of local British officials and liable to British Indian laws. The company’s Indian employees would thus be under the direct supervision of Consuls at Mohammerah and Ahvaz. Pending legislation in regard to the act, he proposed a general permission be given once for all ports for the company’s recruitment and the need for appearance before the Protector of Emigrants to be dispensed with. The proposals met with little sympathy in the concerned department. Officials did not see as clear a connection between the provisions of the act and the reasons of emigrants not opting for the Gulf, and suspected the company of trying to obviate troubles for themselves rather than freeing possible emigrants from these formalities.²⁰⁵

To Bombay authorities the act did not appear to deter any of the labourers of that Presidency from taking up employment in Persia. The formalities imposed were in fact very slight, while labourers reportedly recognised them to be prescribed in their own interests. APOC’s general assertion of the act’s negative effect was rejected as unfounded, and arguments advanced for the exemption from the Emigration Act were not convincing. For the purpose of this question, Persia as a foreign country could not be compared to Ceylon or the Straits Settlements, that were under the administration of the British government, as the company proposed. In regard to the general permission for the company once for all ports to engage labourers, the Bombay authorities did not see any material assistance in the recruitment of labourers, but were willing if considered desirable to grant a general sanction to the engagement of artisans up to a certain definite number to local firms acting on APOC’s behalf. On the other hand, they objected totally to any alteration of the procedure for emigrants to appear before the Protector of Emigrants, as it constituted the principal safeguard

²⁰⁵ Chairman, APOC to Secy, CI, GoI, 17 Mar 1915. Notes, 3, 23, 29 Apr 1915. CI, Emi., May 1915, 3-6 A. Originally, Charles Greenway had been a partner of Shaw Wallace & Co. in Bombay, when representatives of Burmah Oil asked him to join the company during the start-up phase in 1909. He was important for most of the company’s early history, serving as its president until 1934. Ferrier, *The History of the British Petroleum Company*, 691.

for the emigrants’ interests. The company was duly informed, also receiving back a slightly amended form of agreement for engagement of labourers.²⁰⁶

While the government had rejected APOC’s representations in 1915, they arrived at decisions to the contrary under allegedly aggravating conditions of labour supply during the latter stage of the First World War. In February 1918, the Indian government finally agreed to experimentally suspend the Indian Emigration Act for the areas of the company’s works in Persia in case of both artisans and labourers required by APOC. They considered it inadvisable, however, to issue a notification under section 107 of the act.²⁰⁷ This effectively treated emigration of both artisans and labourers for the company as war measure. Such a differentiation between ‘artisans’ and ‘labourers’ was also another way of blurring boundaries between skilled and unskilled labour. While the company used both to describe skilled labour, those coming under the category of ‘labourers’ were probably unskilled coolie workers.

The tangled ways of government to finally decide in this manner were quite noteworthy. Company officials had responded neither to government’s rejection of their earlier request for exemption in 1915, nor to the amended form of agreements to be used henceforth for recruiting labourers.²⁰⁸ Instead, they moved the then Deputy Chief Political Officer at Basra, Arnold Wilson, to represent to Indian authorities on their behalf how emigration laws continued to negatively affect the company’s labour supply. Fully aware of the strategic importance of APOC production to the war effort in general, Wilson favoured an exemption on lines earlier proposed. He displayed the extent to which security and legal order prevailed under local British officers, to whom emigrants had always access, while pointing to the presence of many unskilled and skilled labourers at Basra, hired by different firms, contractors and departments of which none had recourse to the Protector of Emigrants. APOC, on the other hand, had to deal with provisions of the act and especially with an attitude of the Protector of Emigrants being generally “unhelpful and calculated to encourage a litigious spirit in a class who usually already possess it in the amplest measure.” Thus, with the company objecting to the formalities, “irksome” to the labourers and the company, for good reason, Wilson expressed his hope that the Indian government would be able to reconsider its standpoint on the issue and accede to the company’s request.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ Secy, GD, GoBomb to Secy, CI, GoI, 30 Sept 1915. Secy, CI, GoI to Chairman, APOC, 23 Nov 1915 and enclosure, Form of agreement for labourers. CI, Emi., Nov 1915, 14-19 A.

²⁰⁷ Secy, GD, GoBomb to Secy, CI, GoI, 13 Feb 1918. Secy, CI, GoI to CC, Baghdad, 19 Feb 1918. CI, Emi., 6-13 A.

²⁰⁸ The draft agreement with APOC in regard to supply of labour was not brought into force, as the company neither replied to nor accepted its form. Secy, GoBomb to Secy, CI, GoI, 24 Jun 1916. Secy, CI, GoI to Secy, GoBomb, 7 Jul 1916. Note. CI, Emi., July 1916, 4-5 B.

²⁰⁹ Dy. Chief Political Officer, Basra to Foreign Secy, GoI, 23 Aug 1917. FPD, Gen., June 1918, 79 B. This was common practice also in relation to labour forces needed for the war effort. Singha, Finding Labor from India for the War in Iraq, 419.

Fully aware of the strategic importance of oil operations, the Indian government requested the views of Bombay authorities on the whole question, and especially if they were to stay with their verdict given some two years earlier that in fact the emigration act did not hamper the company in recruiting Indian labour. Referring to the report from Basra, they suggested however that the Protector of Emigrants would be of greater assistance to the company if he exercised his functions more sympathetic, without at the same time neglecting his duties in the interests of emigrants. Given the company’s acute labour shortage, Percy Cox, Political Resident at Baghdad and first High Commissioner of Iraq a few months later, pushed in December 1917 for early action in that regard as well. Apparently, labourers originally brought out to the Gulf by APOC for performance of government contracts had been taken over by military authorities, thus coming under military rules. The Foreign Office had approved in October 1917 of an emergency King’s Regulation to be issued by the responsible Consul General providing for the continued service under the APOC of their employees in Persia. Cox pointed out that this regulation already conflicted with the provisions of the Indian Emigration Act, making labour liable to stay in Persia. He urged authorities in India once more in late December 1917 to act on proposed lines as the “spirit of [the] Act and manner of its operation are wholly unsuitable for war conditions”. Difficulties in obtaining labour, under which he subsumed present Indian emigration laws, had resulted in a shortage of tinned kerosene oil used primarily for pumps in the agricultural sector that would soon be adversely affected if this situation were to remain.²¹⁰

In what followed, namely the handling of labourers as war measure, the Indian government not only fulfilled the company’s demands, but also exceeded them considerably, allowing for an exceptional status of the company in regard to labour supply from India for years to come. British authorities in London had somehow superseded the Government of India earlier in its decision over the emigrants’ status by issuing the King’s regulation. Thus, there seemed no reason to keep regulations in force that were undermined anyway. By late September 1917, the sentiment in concerned government departments was of a decidedly different nature than earlier. Despite dissonances, officials now largely reclaimed that the company should not be hindered in the smooth working of their operations by receding from the position taken up two years ago, especially as the political conditions had altered, and to allow freer recruitment of labour without imposition of the Emigration Act. Even in regard to procedure to be followed, the officers agreed quite soon that they could not do it by means of a notification under section 107 of the Act. Citing earlier precedence of recruitment of coolies

²¹⁰ Secy, CI, GoI to Chief Secy, GoBomb, 26 Nov 1917. PR PG, Baghdad to Foreign Secy, GoI, 13, 26 Dec 1917. FPD, Gen., June 1918, 79 B. FO to Dy. Chief Political Officer, Basra, 9 Oct 1917. FPD, Gen., April 1918, 53 B.

for flood prevention work at Basra and for railway work, they decided to treat labourers for the APOC as war measure, and not go through the form of exempting their recruitment from any provisions of the Emigration Act. As in the cases mentioned earlier, a formal relaxation would have given a certain amount of trouble to the exercising institution, this time the company, and maintaining secrecy about the procedure was better than letting the public know.²¹¹ Ignoring provisions was easier than to address them, with labourers coming under military rules hence.

When suspending the Emigration Act for the company as war measure, authorities reserved their right to insist on its re-introduction should it be found necessary. Discussions as to the discontinuance of the act’s suspension began already towards the end of the war, but authorities actually decided for its re-introduction only in 1920. Instead of placing emigration on regular footing then, authorities allowed the company to henceforth recruit labour in India under Chapter XI, “purely as a temporary measure”, while not notifying it as lawful under section 4 of that Act.²¹² This decision, in fact, continued once more a practice of both, company and colonial state, of the last several years to forego provisions contained in emigration laws such as the appearance of labourers before the Protector of Emigrants.

There were several reasons to finally change the footing on which emigration took place. Authorities increasingly received complaints from Indian labourers as to their treatment by the company. In August 1918, for example, seven employees engaged by Shaw Wallace & Co. one year earlier and hence engaged on the oil fields reported to be prevented from returning to India after expiration of their contracts. Accordingly, their notice had been rejected by pointing to the “Munition Act of Abadan of 1917”, being hence first threatened with imprisonment and then actually interned for 18 days.²¹³ Inquiries into the case, however, soon silted. The concerned departments did not receive any report in regard to labourers’ allegations until November 1919, while Bombay authorities received several further complaints from other employees. The Protector of Emigrants was not capable to interfere with these and other cases of emigrants as long as the exemption continued. With complaints becoming thus frequent, officials also voiced the desire to bring the company back again

²¹¹ Notes, CI, 27, 28, Sept, FPD, 16 Oct 1917, CI, 20 Nov, 19 Dec 1917. CI, Emi., Mar 1918, 6-13 A.

²¹² Secy, Commerce Department (CD), GoI to Secy, GD, GoBomb, 9 June 1920. Secy, CD, GoI confidential to Secy, GD, GoBomb, 9 June 1920. CD, Emi., Jul 1920, 1-12 A.

²¹³ Secy, GD, GoBomb to Secy, CI, GoI, 28 Sept 1918 and enclosures, Protector of Emigrants, Bombay to Commissioner of Customs, Salt, Opium and Akbari, Bombay, 31 Aug 1918. Petition from Isaac Benjamin and six other employees to Protector of Emigrants, Bombay, 4 Aug 1918. Ibid. One official remarked that they only agreed to relaxation of emigration laws on an understanding that the interests of employees would be looked after. Another speculated that it affected not only these few men, but probably thousands. Notes, CD, 10 Oct 1918, AD, 17 Oct 1918. Ibid. Only in December 1919, the Civil Commissioner forwarded a statement, showing that as the men could not be replaced they were detained under King’s Regulation No. 1 (Abadan Munition Factory Act). The case was referred to the Political Officer, Ahvaz who decided that they must stay with the company until additional men arrived. Inspector General of Communications, Basra to Chief of the General Staff, Delhi, 22 Nov 1918. Ibid.

within the operation of the act, especially since necessity of the company’s exemption was over with the termination of war.²¹⁴ The Civil Commissioner at Baghdad strongly opposed any alteration of the present form, owing to extensive works going on to increase existing refinery capacities, which were to satisfy oil demand also of the Indian government and the railways. Instead he displayed that shortage of labour was acute and that the company would gladly employ another 2,000 or 3,000 men, besides the fact that they already utilized the services of Labour Corps as special concession. Indian authorities could as well constitute the British Consul at Mohammerah a sort of Protector of Emigrants at that place, so to safeguard their interests. In any case, the Indian government had to refer to the British government before taking action, as national interests would be seriously endangered by the act’s re-introduction. Other officials in India acknowledged these apprehensions, knowing simultaneously that existing law was effectively disregarded. With Bombay authorities favouring a discontinuance of the current practice as well, the Indian central authorities decided to disallow the wartime practice of foregoing laws, and to bring it back under the Emigration Act. However, they were willing to allow continued recruitment in India of both labourers and skilled artisans, purely as temporary measure and in order to give the company time for other arrangements.²¹⁵ In November 1920, the Foreign Secretary of the Government of India finally addressed APOC’s chairman on the issue of exemption from emigration laws acquiesced in as war measure. Given labourers’ widespread complaints as to alleged ill treatment and since war necessity no longer existed, the company’s current practice of importing unskilled and skilled labour without reference to the emigration act would be dispensed with. The Indian government would hence notify January 1921 as the date from which emigration was brought under respective laws, and that those forms of agreements had to be accepted by the company that were sent already in 1915.²¹⁶ Arguably, the government could no longer tolerate this illegal position and practice of the company.

However, the next chapter shows that the company was virtually exempted from the operation of the emigration act until 1925, when it was found, almost accidentally, that emigrants were not properly treated according to emigration laws. While Indian immigration into Mesopotamia was more and more curtailed during 1920, Indian labour migrants were greatly in use by the oil company, albeit under different circumstances.

²¹⁴ Chief of the General Staff, Delhi to G.O.C., Force ‘D’, Baghdad, 23 Oct 1918. Secy, GD, GoBomb to Secy, CI, GoI, 20 Nov 1919, and enclosures, Protector of Emigrants, Karachi to Commissioner in Sind, 21 Aug 1919. Six petitioners to Port Officer, Keamari, 13 Aug 1919. Santa Sing, Mistri to Protector of Emigrants, Karachi, 20 Aug 1919. Note, CI, 2 Dec 1919. CD, Emi., Jul 1920, 1-12 A.

²¹⁵ Secy, CI, GoI to CC, Baghdad, 10 Dec 1919. CC, Baghdad to Secy, CI, GoI, 15 Dec 1919. Secy, CI, GoI to Chief Secy, GoBomb, 19 Dec 1919. Secy, GD, GoBomb to Secy, CD, GoI, 22 Apr 1920. Secy, CD, GoI to CC, Baghdad, 9 June 1920. Note, CD, 4 May, 3 June 1920. Ibid.

²¹⁶ Foreign Secy, GoI to Chairman, APOC, 25 Nov 1920. HD, Pol., Jan 1921, 21 B.1922.

III. British India and Post-War Gulf Developments

The Gulf region still experienced the immediate after pains of the First World War up until the early 1920s, but important changes were already under way. Especially after the Iraqi uprising during 1920 and the subsequent rise of Arab nationalism, the British government decided to run the mandate over Iraq without the former Indian contribution, and in the following decade before the state’s independence in 1932 also to withdraw its own political stakes from the country as soon as possible. For the British government found itself in a role of having to conform to international norms in regard to the mandate, while it needed to reduce expenditure because of its weakened strategic and economic position. Publicly devolving power to the country’s politicians thus seemed a prerogative, while keeping in view its economic stakes and position under the mandate. This resulted in an “Arab façade” of government under the mandate, which more and more switched from the former Anglo-Indian to an Iraqi administration.²¹⁷ After its independence in 1932, the Iraqi state aimed to establish those laws usually connected to a modern nation-state. These addressed the nationality of its inhabitants, the state’s sovereignty in regard to its boundaries, but for example also in regard to the labour market.

The First World War ushered a diversity of foreign troops all over the territory of neighbouring Persia as well. While it had the political implication of widening the long-standing rift in Iranian politics, it also laid the basis for a severe political transformation.²¹⁸ In 1925, the Pahlavi dynasty came to power starting a programme of nation building and national development. This included a strong, centrally led government that would no longer accept Great Powers rivalry over the country.²¹⁹ It had also the effect that APOC came increasingly under critique for its practices in regard to royalties for the Persian state as well the employment of foreign labour. The coming into power thus started a period in which the country divested itself of the earlier informal influence of the British and Russian Empires.

While the two states bordering on the northern Gulf were able to increasingly divest themselves of subordination to British power and interests, the states in the southern Gulf became new objects of late British imperial power, which was to stay for several more decades to come. The post-war Gulf saw the rising oil economy of Iraq and the smaller Arab Gulf states, where British and American companies started operating. The earlier Turkish Petroleum Company, which had received a concession shortly before World War One, was

²¹⁷ Dodge, Toby (2006), *The British Mandate in Iraq, 1920-1932*, The Middle East Online Series 2: Iraq 1914-1974. Reading: Cengage Learning EMEA Ltd. accessed at www.tlmea.com/iraq/index.htm on 24 Sept 2009.

²¹⁸ Atabaki, Touraj (2006) *The First World War, Great Power Rivalries and the Emergence of a Political Community in Iran*. In: *Ibid.* (Ed.), *Iran and the First World War. Battleground of the Great Powers*. London: I.B. Tauris.

²¹⁹ Ghani, Cyrus (2000), *Iran and the Rise of Reza Shah*. London: I.B. Tauris.

renamed Iraq Petroleum Company and started operations under a consortium of several European and American stakeholders, among them also APOC. By the late 1920s, several companies started operations in the southern Gulf, and APOC had important stakes especially in Kuwait. The British Empire therefore continued to have large interests in the Gulf States especially for these countries’ large natural resources and as interstation for imperial air communication between Britain and India in keeping up Empire.²²⁰

These developments again transformed interregional relations between India and the Gulf countries, in which some of the earlier links sustained, while others broke off and new links emerged. This chapter is about continuity and change in the relations earlier depicted that had accrued over pre-ceding decades, accounting for where continuations existed and discontinuations occurred.

1. ‘Persianization’ of Anglo-Persian’s Labour Force?

Within the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, labour unrests and strikes of local and Indian labour, at times separate from and sometimes with each other, occurred on quite many occasions during the early 1920s. The company history records that especially Indian labour expressed their discontent during this time, with “many of the predominantly Hindu Indian clerks, artisans, orderlies and cooks [...] [finding] the Persian ambience unsympathetic to their customs which contributed to their discontent”.²²¹ Yet, instead of blaming contemporary social relations on Indians’ alleged “cultural claustrophobia in an alien and not always sympathetic environment”²²² and thereby divesting the company’s management of all responsibility, one can retrieve arguments of what actually unsettled the labour force. Arguably, resentment sparked for political reasons as much as for discontent over working and living conditions.²²³

According to company sources, a semi-organised political agitation had broken out among Indian labour consequent to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar during April 1919. This together with anger over high cost of living, poor living conditions and low

²²⁰ Silverfarb, Daniel (1986), *Britain’s Informal Empire in the Middle East: A Case Study of Iraq, 1929-1941*. New York: Oxford University Press. Omissi, David (1990), *Air Power and Colonial Control: the Royal Air Force, 1919-1939*. Manchester University Press. The Trucial states were particularly important in these imperial designs, with the first Imperial Airways plane inaugurating the Arabian route and landing at Sharjah on its way to India in October 1932. Abdullah, Muhammad Morsy (1978), *United Arab Emirates: A Modern History*. Taylor & Francis, 57.

²²¹ Ferrier, *History of the British Petroleum Company*, 402.

²²² *Ibid.*, 275.

²²³ The company’s housing conditions seemed not only particularly bad, with real improvements coming about only in the early 1930s. A policy of spatial allotment of residential areas for the fragmented working population, consisting of European, Persian and Indian labour, was moreover a means to transfer hierarchical structures of labour relations into everyday life, thus segregating according to different nationalities. Seccombe, Ian/Lawless, Richard (1987), *Work Camps and Company Towns: Settlement Patterns and the Gulf Oil Industry*. Occasional Papers Series, No. 36. Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, University of Durham, 55-57.

remuneration resulted in a strike in early December 1920 of some 3,000 Indian labourers. The company conceded to their demands, increasing wages by 80 per cent as well as sanctioning other improvements. Persian and Arab labour struck the following day, and their demands were likewise accepted. Another strike of Indian labour in May 1922 yielded no solution, and some 2,000 men were hence repatriated to India in early 1923. Arguably, this provided Persians an opportunity to fill vacancies, as the refinery was undermanned and the company decided not to fill these posts with Indians anymore. When Indian labour struck work yet another time in 1924, the company was allegedly better able to handle the situation, for it had built up a resource in Persian labour. The company history asserts that this reduction of Indian and increase of Persian labour led to a much more satisfactory state of affairs.²²⁴

Obviously, the strikes had various effects. Earlier the company conceded to labourers’ demands for better remuneration or living conditions, while repatriating disobedient Indian labour later. Most importantly, it was alleged that the company decided on the basis of such re-occurring strikes during this period for the more extensive use of local labour, and to henceforth implement training and educational programmes for Persians. Thus enabling the company to rely less on external labour, it is interpreted as seed for nationalizing the labour force that ultimately resulted in a diminishing share of Indian labour during ensuing decades.²²⁵ This chain of argumentation is problematic in several ways. Firstly, it views the several conjunctures in such a process of nationalization as constant, as if the implementation of training programmes and the decision to nationalize the labour force were immediate effects of the increasing use of local labour. Secondly, it bases the decision to increasingly use Persian labour only on the occurrence of strikes during this time without scrutinizing the environment of external labour supply from India. Thirdly, by magnifying the early impact of nationalization it neglects and cannot explain the continued use, albeit on a small-scale, of Indian labour for almost three decades to come.

When reviewing available data in regard to its labour situation, one recognizes that the company continued to employ Indian labour, besides other external labour, extensively even after the period between 1920 to 1922 and in the time under review. In fact, the share of Indian labour drastically decreased from 1921 onwards after the Indian government had curtailed the wartime allowance of recruiting labour from India, but continued to be above 10 per cent before 1929. From then on, it fell below 10 per cent and decreased even more during the 1930s.

²²⁴ Ferrier, *History of the British Petroleum Company*, 432 f. Dobe, *Industrial Education and the Containment of Nationalism in Anglo-Iranian and ARAMCO*, 29-31.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, esp. Chp. 2, ‘Origins of Persianization in the Replacement of Indian Labor’, 29-42.

Therefore, the argument expressed here is that the company continued to use Indian labour throughout the 1920s extensively and that the relative share of Indian labour was continuously below 5 per cent only after the agreement of a new concession with the Persian government in 1933. (Cf. table 4 and 5) The first concession had obliged the company already to employ only Persians for unskilled jobs, but this new agreement also extended to employment of skilled labour as far as possible:

The company shall recruit its artisans as well as technical and commercial staff from among Persian nationals to the extent that it shall find in Persia persons who possess the requisite competence and experience.²²⁶

Year	Persians	Indians		Others	Europeans	Total
		No.	%			
1922	18441	4285	16.4	2940	490	26156
1923	20762	4715	17.5	849	644	26970
1924	18384	4731	19	648	738	24501
1925	15820	4890	17	7201	994	28905
1926	15843	3588	13.5	6042	1020	26493
1927	17887	3272	11	7009	1055	29223
1928	16382	3050	12	5365	1000	25797
1929	15245	2518	10.5	5273	980	24016
1930	20095	2411	7.7	7549	1191	31246
1931	14797	1675	8	3178	989	20639
1932	10343	1420	9.6	2346	744	14853
1933	15941	795	4.5	277	749	17762
1934	22020	925	3.8	254	901	24100
1935	25240	954	3.5	119	1035	27348
1936	24948	779	3	76	1055	26858
1937	30779	786	2.4	66	1185	32816
1938	45978	1342	2.7	84	1524	48928

Table 5. *Anglo-Persian Oil Company staff and labour in Persia, 1922-1938, in absolute numbers, and share of Indian employees*²²⁷

Only the company’s nationalization in 1951 totally dispensed with employing Indian labour. Taken together, many more reasons seem to exist in order to explain the declining number of Indian labour engaged following the early 1920s. It was certainly not the case that the company itself charitably aimed all of a sudden of training local labour, but that exigencies required their action. The company’s need for continued use of Indian labour is

²²⁶ Finnie, D. (1958), *Recruitment & Training of Labour: The Middle East Oil Industry*. Middle East Journal, 12, 2, 132.

²²⁷ Ferrier, *The History of the British Petroleum Company*, 401. Bamberg, *The History of the British Petroleum Company*, Vol. 2, 81.

evident not only from such numbers, but also from the company’s representations towards and discussions with Indian authorities.

New agreements for clerks and artisans after 1922

The company’s need for a further and continuous supply of certain labour types from India, under the changed environment, exemplified during 1922 to 1925 when Anglo-Persian’s agent in India, Shaw Wallace & Co., was eager and proposed to amend considerably the forms of contracts for future recruitment of Indian clerks and artisans. Authorities in India consented, for example, to the company’s suggestion of expanding the type of work recruited under the agreement for clerks, professing the extent to which they still employed Indian clerical and comparable labour. The agreement was henceforth so broad as to cover as well sub-assistant surgeons, dressers and compounders, shift engineers, switch board attendants, refinery foremen, draughtsmen, overseers, permanent way inspectors, telegraphists and the like occupations hitherto not expressly covered. One further witnesses in similar undertakings the company’s wish to conclude contracts in their favour, and in disfavour of Indian employees. The company aimed for example at and succeeded in blurring the boundaries between skilled and unskilled work in respect of artisans, for whom they were able to change the duration of contracts from one to two years. Allegedly, technical work in the oil industry was of a nature that it took even qualified artisans about six months to become really useful to the company, and if the present clause was to remain in force, they would loose the greater part of their skilled labour just as the men were becoming efficient in their various occupations. Basically arguing that even skilled labour was not skilled enough yet for their occupations, they were able to seize a binding contract and to ensure the labourers presence in one place for an extended period.

Yet another issue arising in respect of clerks was the duration of notice being stipulated in respective agreements. The company succeeded in lowering the time of notice to one month from three months for both contracting parties, and in stipulating that they did not have to given any reason for dismissing. Their desire for such action would only be enforced by the company in the event of a seditious employee attempting to disaffect his fellow employee by the continual recitation of imaginary political or other grievances, but committed at the same time no overt act that justified his dismissal under another clause of the agreement. Thus, the company tried to obtain forms of agreement favouring its rights over the rights of employees, and to implement in contracts ways to let go off unnecessary or seditious employees.

In times of a generally decreasing number of Indian workers for various circumstances this was a way to put into action the company’s wishes. According to company concerns, the clause in its present form allowed an employee to sign an agreement in Bombay with a deliberate intention of exploiting the company. In such a case it would be possible for an employee to give one month’s notice immediately on his arrival in Persia, thereby putting the company to the expense of engaging him, of a second class return passage to the Gulf and of paying him two months’ salary for one month’s work. The first month’s work of a newly engaged hand would be seldom of great value to the company as it took some time for new men to accustom themselves to the altered conditions of life and work. Thus, the unaltered clause would place undesirable powers in the hands of a class, many of which would not hesitate to exploit the company for their own hands. On another note, the company was not willing to employ a dissatisfied man a day longer than was absolutely necessary, while three months notice would necessitate their keeping the employee in Persia for three months or discharging him at once giving three months’ wages.

In this case we also witness that while Bombay authorities were willing to endorse the company’s request without much ado, the Indian government was not willing to let go at least of the most minimal rights of employees. The central authorities objected, for example, to the company’s wish of stipulating the cessation of paying a labourer’s salary from the date of notice being given should his length of service not amount to twelve months service. Recognizing that the effect of ceasing the pay from the date of such notice would practically deprive the employees of the right of giving notice, the central authorities wanted the company to fully omit this sentence.²²⁸ Such lamenting over terms of engagement for Indian labour was one example showing the company’s paradigm. While decisions had been taken to reduce Indian labour, their presence was still a necessity. Arranging contracts in such a way as to allow the company to easily discard labour seemed imperative then. We witness another instance of how the company was still affected by supply from India in the early 1920s.

Labour for Persia and the Indian Emigration Act of 1922

As described in chapter 2, APOC had been exempted from the operations of the Emigration Act of 1908 experimentally in 1918, with the agreement officially rescinding again towards the end of 1920. However, APOC’s recruitment in India for its Persian

²²⁸ Shaw Wallace & Co. to Secy, GoBomb, 29 Aug 1922. Secy, GoBomb to Secy, FPD, GoI, 12 May 1923. Secy, FPD, GoI to GoBomb, 20 Jun 1923. Secy, GoBomb to Secy, GoI, 9 Feb 1924. Secy, GoI to Secy, GoBomb, 10 Mar 1924. Secy, GoI to Shaw Wallace & Co., 14 Apr 1924. General Manager, APOC to Secy, GoI, 21 May 1924. Shaw Wallace & Co. to Cowasjee Jehangir, Member of Council, Bombay, 28 Jul 1924. Secy, GoI to Secy, GoBomb, 1 Sept 1924. Secy, GoBomb to Secy, GoI, 29 Nov 1924. Secy, GoI to Secy, GoBomb, 15 Jan 1925. Secy, GoBomb to Secy, GoI, 6 May 1925. Shaw Wallace & Co. to Secy, GoBomb, 20 Mar 1925. Secy, GoI to Secy, GoBomb, 29 May 1925. FPD, Middle East (M.), 1923, 142 II.

operations was effectively exempted until 1924 from the operations of the Indian Emigration Act. The latter had been amended in 1922, which resulted in constraints on Indian emigration following protests of the Indian nationalist movement against indenture especially during World War One. Emigration of unskilled labour was prohibited henceforth except to such countries and on such terms and conditions as the Governor General specified by notification and both chambers of the legislature approved of. Skilled emigration was still permitted on the lines of the former law. The act further provided for the appointment of protectors of emigrants with advisory boards in the various provinces of British India and for agents to look after the interests of emigrants in places outside British India.²²⁹

Already in 1923, a report clearly mentioned Shaw Wallace & Co.’s activity of recruiting skilled labourers from Karachi and Bombay on the basis of an exemption from the operation of the emigration act. According to the Protector of Emigrants action had to be taken to enforce the provisions of the act in regard to Indian employees of the company, of which roughly 2,000 were dispatched in 1923, laying bare that the present position was actually illegal and highly irregular. While the new act did not appear to provide for any exemption, the company was still allowed to continue to enjoy an exemption granted before that act had come into force. There were thus no valid grounds for continuing the exemption. Officials in Bombay, however, recognized the exemption’s continuance only in October 1924, reporting that the provisions of Act VII of 1922 had not been applied to employees of the company until recently, allegedly owing to oversight. Indian government officials noted that this oversight had no doubt resulted in a loss to central revenues; one estimated a sum of around 16,000 Rupees, expressing his desire to compel defaulters to make good such losses.

For the future, the application of the act was to be extended to employees of the company, which would involve an enormous increase in the work of the Protector of Emigrants, who had to deal with ten times as many emigrants as before given the high amount of labour sent to the company from Bombay under the skilled category. This number had actually increased greatly since 1918. Therefore, the Indian government sanctioned the posting of an additional Assistant Collector of Customs, to whom the duties of the Protector of Emigrants were to be entrusted. Henceforth, the company had to pay a fee of three rupees per emigrant proceeding from Bombay to the Gulf.²³⁰ This juncture not only shows that the

²²⁹ Muddiman, Alexander (1924), *British India. Journal of Comparative Legislation and International Law*. 6, 3, 135-145.

²³⁰ A report from Bombay mentioned the following numbers of skilled labour migrants for respective years. 1918: 382, 1919: 843, 1920: 1505, 1921: 1928, 1922: 1749, 1923: 1731, Jan-Oct 1924: 1513. Extract from the Report on the working of the Indian Emigration Act, 1922 for the year 1923 from Bombay. Protector of Emigrants to GoBomb, 7 May 1924. Secy, GD, GoBomb to Secy, Education, Health & Lands (EHL), GoI, 1 Oct 1924. Note EHL, 25 Oct 1924. Secy, EHL, GoI to Secy, GoBomb, 13 Nov 1925. Note, EHL, 26 Nov 1924. Secy, GoBomb to EHL, Overseas (Ov.), 22 Nov 1924. EHL, Ov., Nov 1925, 19-28.

company profited until 1924 from the exemption in that no emigrant appeared before the necessary authorities until that year. This non-appearance could eventually lead to the company importing whatever labour it wanted. In this regard, the steep rise in numbers from 1918 to 1923 either suggests that the company actually employed only more labour under the skilled category, or that it was able to recruit under the skilled category also labour nominally under the category of unskilled labour.

Jurisdiction and labour

Besides an interest in further labour supplies from the Indian subcontinent, the company also perceived of the importance to control and maintain the Indian labour force already present in Persia. British jurisdiction over its Indian subjects was very important in this regard. As explained earlier, jurisdiction and capitulatory rights in Persian territory had prompted the Indian government to permit, at least rhetorically, emigration to these parts. However, extra-territorial rights and jurisdiction received another important facet in disputes between the Anglo-Persian Oil Company and its Indian employees. While cases with Persian labour were most probably referred to local courts, British Consuls or Vice-Consuls at Mohammerah and Ahvaz handled civil and criminal cases involving APOC’s Indian employees, either against other Indian employees or against the company itself, from around 1911, after the two posts had come into the orbit of the Persian Coast and Islands Order in Council of 1907.²³¹ Invested with magisterial powers and presiding over the local British consular court, the Judicial Assistant of the Ahvaz Vice-Consulate tried seven criminal cases involving Indian employees during 1920. Out of these, he served two sentences of rigorous and one of simple imprisonment between a month and a year for breaches of contract and trust, and the payment of fines from either of the parties in the other four cases according to the Indian Penal Code.²³²

In addition, the company tried in fact to obtain for themselves rights usually reserved for certified consular officers. During 1923, they proposed to Indian authorities through the Political Resident at Bushehr that some of their British employees be invested with consular and magisterial powers. The company allegedly “volunteered to undertake gratuitously” in helping out British political officers with registration tasks, increasingly constrained by the

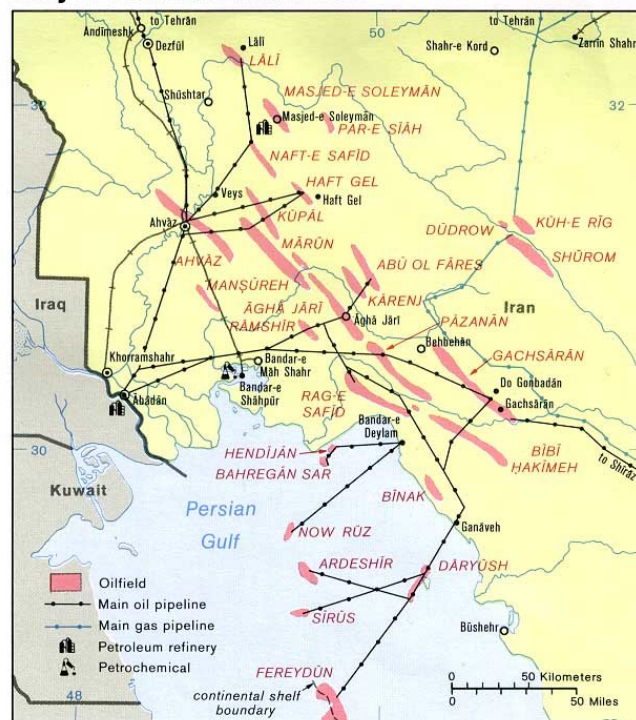
²³¹ Proposed transfer of Mohammerah and Ahwaz from the sphere of the ‘Persia Order in Council, 1889’ to that of the ‘Persian Coast and Islands Order in Council, 1907’. FD, Sec. Gen., Jul 1911, 1-15. The immediate reasons for the transfer are less clear. Under the latter OiC, the registration fee was lower (1 Rupee) compared to the former. Later reports on the working of the PCIOiC prove that both were actually transferred. Report on the operation of the PCIOiC, 1907 for the year ending 31 Dec 1913. FD, Gen., May 1913, 6-7 A. Report on the operation of the PCIOiC, 1907 for the year ending 31 Dec 1919. FPD, Sec. Gen., Jun 1920, 1-2. During the latter year, four criminal cases were tried at Maidan-i-Naftun, in which Indian employees were convicted according to the Indian Penal Code and punished and/or repatriated to India.

²³² Report on the operation of the PCIOiC, 1907 for the year ending 31 Dec 1920. FPD, Sec. Gen., May 1921, 3-4.

number of British subjects employed and their scattered whereabouts all over southern Persia, if senior British employees were authorised to act as Vice-Consuls or the like. The Indian government and the British Minister had no objection to this proposal. Moreover, the Indian government considered another proposal to invest these officers with magisterial powers. As per the Minister in Tehran, conferring such powers was a strong desire, so to enable the company to deal promptly and legally with fracas occurring “among the heterogeneous elements of which the Abadan population is composed” or at the oil fields where the “presence of a number of extremely rough American and Polish drillers” rendered the position even more difficult. The Foreign Office judged the proposal out of proportion and disagreed to grant consular ranks to employees, especially since British subjects would not understand that “holders of the title were not officials to whom they could carry [...] grievances which such persons are in the habit of referring to regular consular officials.”²³³

Admittedly, at this stage I can neither finally judge the circumstances leading to such proposals, nor their effects if instituted. While the consular rank was probably denied to company employees, the archive does not share evidence whether magisterial powers were granted or not.²³⁴ However, this incidence somehow reveals the multiple ways and means of the company in trying to get a better grip over its employees, that would finally result in a more disciplined work force under contemporary constraints of the oil industry. One such constraint probably lay in the nature of the region’s oil operations. Exploration sites and pumping stations were often far away from the company’s refinery installations at Abadan. (Cf. map 3. Major Iranian Oilfields,²³⁵ for a contemporary view) This necessitated the circulation of labour over vast tracts, but resulted at the same time in the undesirable condition of a fragmented labour force, already

Major Iranian Oilfields



²³³ Political Resident, Bushehr to Foreign Secy, GoI, 17 Mar 1923. Foreign Secy, GoI to Secy, Industries and Overseas Department, India Office and British Minister, Tehran, 7 Jun 1923. British Minister, Tehran to Foreign Secy, GoI, 26 Jul 1923. FO to Under SoS, IO, 24 Aug 1923. IO to Foreign Secy, GoI, 13 Sept 1923. FPD, Gen., 1922-23, 1209.

²³⁴ Grant of magisterial powers to employes of the APOC. FPD, M., 1922-23, 950. Not traceable.

²³⁵ Accessed at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/images/iran-map2.jpg> on 25 Sept 2009.

regarded as unruly, whose maintenance became even more difficult. Legislation in the proposed manner would have been quite advantageous to the company. If state institutions and company interests overlapped, migrant labour may have had a limited choice to present their grievances to the state under whose purview they nominally fell and to the company for whom they worked.

Even if the above proposals did not work out, there were other provisions to ensure a smooth and uncomplaining functioning of Indian labourers. From December 1920 onwards, all agreements between the company and employees included an arbitration clause inserted as to discourage litigation by employees on return to India. This clause stipulated that “Any dispute arising in this agreement shall be submitted to H.B.M.’s Consul at Ahwaz for arbitration, whose decision shall be accepted as final and binding on both parties.”²³⁶ Some of the arising cases discussed in the following show that decisions of local British political officers invested with judicial powers were rarely advantageous to Indian employees, but confirmed more to company’s interests. One case deserves special mention in this context. In June 1926, the Consul-General at Bushehr instructed the Vice-Consul at Ahwaz to arbitrate in the case of C.H. Abdullah versus the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. Re-engaging the former after earlier employment as clerk in December 1924, the company had discharged C.H. Abdullah in February 1926 under clause 10 of the respective agreement for clerks on the basis of an anonymous letter written to the company that accused the petitioner of certain malpractices. Although the letter was found being forged with its author admitting his action, the Vice-Consul arbitrated the employee’s discharge to be lawful. As stipulated by clause 14 of the agreement between company and employee, any decision of an officer of the British government exercising judicial powers was final and conclusively binding on the parties in case of any difference or dispute between them. Thus, he also rejected all claims of the company’s former employee in regard to payment due to him for the time under contract and compensation for injury to character and career, amounting to some 13,000 rupees altogether.

The case developed only with the employee’s lawyer bringing it to the attention of the central authorities, and especially to the department responsible for emigration. Officials here protested vehemently against the company’s utilization of clause 10 of the agreement. This

²³⁶ Following the introduction of a revised form of agreement in early 1925, the clause was altered to: “If any differences or dispute shall arise as to the true intent of this agreement, or any part there or in any way connected with or arising out of the same, the decision of which is not herein before provided for, the matter shall be submitted to the arbitration of the British Consul-General for Fars or if he is not willing to act then to that of such nearest officer of the British Government exercising judicial powers as he shall appoint and the decision of the Consul-General or such officer shall be final and conclusively binding on both parties.” Political Resident, Bushehr to British Minister, Tehran, 31 Jan 1929. FPD, Near East (N.), 1929, 105. With the abolition of capitulations in 1928, officers of the British government exercising judicial powers disappeared. It affected the clause’s operation only in so far as the cases were to be submitted if not to the Consul General for Fars ‘[...] to the nearest Consular officer of the British Government’. Foreign Secy, GoI to British Minister, Tehran, 3 Apr 1929. Ibid.

clause had been common to all agreements concluded with skilled personnel, recruited in India, for employment in countries abroad, conferring upon foreign employers a wide discretion to dismiss their employees, provided due notice was given. However, the clause was not intended to dispense with the moral obligation resting upon all employers to exercise this power only for good and sufficient reasons. It was clear to officials in the emigration branch that the company had been guilty of the gross misuse of that clause. They further referred to the Vice-Consul’s drawing attention to the comparative frequency with which the company had been availing themselves of this clause to discharge certain of their employees. It seemed therefore necessary for them that something had to be done to stop the company from these quite frequent acts of injustice towards Indian emigrants. They went so far to propose the issuance of a warning to the company through the Bombay authorities that if any more cases of discharge under clause 10 without good cause were brought to the local government’s notice they would be compelled to make use of powers invested into under the Indian Emigration Act to withhold permission to the further emigration of skilled labour for employment under the company. Addressing the arbitrary character of the company’s action, the department’s Secretary thought a warning would perhaps not suffice and proposed to amend the clause with a phrase that expressed the employer’s necessity for good and sufficient reason in their actions of dismissing employees.

In turn, the Foreign Secretary suggested disposing of the matter and securing some compensation for the injured man by preliminary action through the Resident in Bushehr who was in close contact with the company. The resident in turn informed the company that harm would result to the company from publicity being given to a case of this nature, emphasizing the necessity of preventing the occurrence of such cases and suggesting that the claim of C.H. Abdullah should be disposed of out of court. The company agreed and reportedly requested their Bombay agents Shaw Wallace & Co. to arrive at a settlement with their former employee. Central authorities hoped that the company had learned a lesson and that no further instances of such nature would arise.²³⁷

Indian Employees’ claims against the Company

In yet another case one observes the kind of relations between the company, labourers and officials of the colonial state in a time of increasing employment of Persian, but

²³⁷ P.S. Krishnaswami Aiyar, High Court Vakil, Calicut to Protector of Emigrants, Bombay, 25 Apr 1926. Order, Vice-Consul Ahvaz, 21 Jun 1926 in the case of Mr. Hassan Abdullah vs. the Anglo-Persian Oil Co. Protector of Emigrants, Bombay to Aiyar, 18 May 1927. Aiyar to Secy, Judicial Department, GoI, 30 May 1927. Note, EHL, 12, 14 Jul 1927. Note, FPD, 2 Aug 1927. FPD, to PR PG, 4 Aug 1927. Political Resident, Bushehr to Foreign Secy, GoI, 6 Jan 1928. Foreign Secy, GoI to Aiyar, 23 Jan 1928. Note, FPD, 27 Jan 1928. FPD, N., 1928, 165.

continued dependence on Indian labour that seemed to considerably define working conditions in Persia’s early oil industry. Dissatisfied by the general nature of treatment the company had meted out to him and other Indian employees, S. Muthuswami resigned from his clerical services in December 1930. The kind of free accommodation provided, leave rules and indirect enforcement of labour on Sundays and holidays without compensation were further reasons for his cancellation, apart from the alleged insecure and intolerable position of Indians in the company. Allegedly, neither the company nor the responsible Vice-Consul at Mohammerah was willing to change these circumstances or redress grievances. After the notice being served, Muthuswami accused the company of not paying overtime due for clerical work exacted from him on Sundays and holidays continuously for a period of more than two years. While not able to gain redress during his remaining stay in Persia, he addressed authorities in India regarding the issue only on return thereto.



Picture 7. *Electrical Squad with Indian Foreman Hana, 1926*²³⁸

Officials in the concerned government department deemed him not legally entitled to receive payment for overtime, as the forms of agreements entered into with clerks stated nothing in this regard. His continued representations to the Indian government however released an official enquiry from APOC on the circumstances of this case. Company officials, in turn, stated that the position of Indians in their services was not so secure anymore due to a severe depression in the oil industry, and given that the Persian government brought increasing pressure to bear upon the company to replace Indian nationals by Persian subjects.

²³⁸ BP Archive, University of Warwick. Archival Ref. 30471_002.

Despite such factors making it difficult for the company to guarantee continued employment of Indian nationals, they boasted themselves to still employ five hundred Indian clerks and one thousand skilled Indians. In fact, they cited accusations in the Persian press of treating Indians preferentially at the expense of Persians. In respect of overtime work they argued that the practice of calling upon personnel of the First and Second Class to work on Sundays or holidays without extra pay when exigencies of the company’s business made it necessary was a known condition of service. From the company’s perspective, Muthuswami had always been treated and paid well throughout his service, being surprised at his attitude then seeming to be biased by political views and opinions. Finally, government officials did not see any right to claim extra-remuneration for overtime. If at all, he would have had to demand redress while in the company’s service. In addition, the agreement did not stipulate any limitation of working days or hours. Peculiarly, colonial officials saw also no necessity to include such provisions for hours of work in future agreements, as relations between APOC and their Indian employees had allegedly seen considerable improvement in recent years.²³⁹



Picture 8. Knocking-off time at Abadan Refinery, c. 1926²⁴⁰

²³⁹ S. Muthuswami, Madras to Secy, FPD, GoI, 5 Apr 1933 and enclosures. Notes, FPD, 3, 6 Jul 1931. S Muthuswami to Secy, FPD, GoI, 24 July 1931. Political Resident, Bushehr to Secy, FPD, GoI, 4 Sept 1931 and enclosures, Vice-Consul, Mohammerah to General Manager, APOC, 27 Jul 1931. General Manager, APOC to Vice-Consul, Mohammerah, 8 Aug 1931. Notes, FPD, 8, 11, 27 Oct 1931. Muthuswami to Foreign Secy, GoI, 24 Oct 1931. FPD to S. Muthuswami, 2 Nov 1931. Muthuswami to Foreign Secy, GoI, 23 Mar, 9 Aug 1932. FPD, N. 1932, 312.

²⁴⁰ BP Archive, University of Warwick. Archival Ref. 5384_5.

Taken together, one can establish that a number of reasons served the fact of the company employing less Indian labour during the 1920s. The existing literature on the early Persian oil industry has mostly emphasised either the company’s decision to switch to Persian labour as a result of increasing strikes of Indian labour, or the Iranian state’s increasing demand for employment of nationals. Both arguments merely address the nexus of local circumstances within the company and arising nationalist politics, without assessing the nature of labour supply from India and developments in its labour market and policy. Further reasons for the company’s policy change might therefore include the changing nature of contracts, the stop of exemption from Indian emigration laws and overall a change in the Indian government’s approach to the company’s use of Indian labour. After the new concession agreement in 1933, the company adhered to the demand of the Iranian state. Besides the obvious change to its new name Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in 1935, it also increasingly dispensed with the employment of Indian labour.

2. Reminiscences of Indian Staff and Labour in Iraq

In Iraq, the developments taking shape in late 1920 continued. By 1921 at the latest, decisions had been taken and brought into effect of lowering the number of Indian officers alongside the number of artisans and labourers working in Iraq’s military and civil administration. This development materialised in all sectors and in various employments. In regard to employment of government officials, Iraqi authorities increasingly discarded Indian officers during the time of the mandate. While some 2,000 Indian officials were still employed in the government in 1920, this number came down to some 36 in 1931. Obviously, the Iraqi government prepared for independence and being handed over authority at the end of the British mandate in 1932.

	1920	1923	1926	1929	1931
British Gazetted Officers	364	181	148	130	118
British Nursing Sisters	23	27	23	17	14
British Non-Gazetted Officers	484	361	53	35	28
Indian Officials	2,035	1270	250	53	36
Total	2,906	1,839	474	234	196

Table 6: Total number of British and Indian officials in the employ of the ‘Iraqi Government, 1920-1931’²⁴¹

Especially those departments, which were formerly heavily using Indian expertise, such as the Irrigation, Surveys, Veterinary and Health Department still employed Indian officials in

²⁴¹ Special Report by His Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Council of the League of Nations on the Progress of Iraq during the Period 1920-1931. In: Jarman, Robert L. (Ed.) (1992), Iraq Administration Reports, 1914-1932. Vol. 10: 1931-1932. Archive Editions, 292.

1931 for want of locally obtainable staff.²⁴² These numbers show how drastically Indian employment in the civil and military authorities was cut down between the years 1920 and 1931. But developments were less abrupt than one thinks them to be, and Indians were needed and employed in the development of Iraq even after decisions had been taken to largely stop Indian recruitment in the early 1920s. Therefore, the decrease in numbers does not adequately represent the extent and processes behind the fact of Indians, though few, still being employed in various positions in the country. Nor does it say anything particular about the fates of those who had once decided to participate and had come in the wake of war as officers, soldiers, labourers, policemen, et cetera, to the country, making it their home for several years with some hoping to settle down eventually.

A series of three articles in the *Bombay Chronicle* in 1926 voiced similar apprehensions, mostly in regard to Indian officials but also slightly referring to other labour then still employed in Iraq, by recounting how the contemporary situation had been arrived at.²⁴³ Accounting for the large number of Indians serving in different positions during the war, they argued that many had come out to Iraq with the aim of settling and under the impression that the Indian government’s policy was to develop the country and to find an outlet for Indian immigrants. Allegedly, Indians were later on considered in the British Parliament to be the cause of disturbances in Iraq during 1920, from which date on Arabs learnt to hate Indians for the first time, hatred being the “consequence of a policy to throw the blame for local disturbances on the Indianisation of Iraq during the period of the Civil Administration”, while the administration was actually British-run.

With the great dismissal and repatriation of large numbers of Indians, Arabs even began to demand the dismissal of the remaining few Indians. This policy of lowering Indian participation however did not enable the British or the Iraq government to send away those “technical” Indians, whose services were badly needed in several technical departments, sometimes giving tuition to those Arabs who were to replace them later. While needed by the state, their situations became increasingly insecure, as assurances of further employment were not addressed in any treaty, such as the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1922, and their contracts largely disappointing. All this included other forms of labour beyond Indian officials. The article especially referred to Indian personnel employed with the Royal Air Force in Iraq, most of whom were followers enlisted for technical and other kinds of labour. Reportedly, they had been recruited by military authorities in India on definite military agreements that were more

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 293. The respective numbers then were: 11 (Irrigation), 6 (Surveys), 4 (Veterinary), 8 (Health).

²⁴³ ‘Indians in Iraq - Discarded Tools of British Imperialism’ by G.K.N., *Bombay Chronicle*, 17, 19 Mar 1926, 9 Apr 1926. *EHL*, Ov., Jan 1927, 95-122 B.

disadvantageous than those of civilians. It argued that these personnel were not soldiers but civilians attached to the RAF, and deserved better treatment than was currently given to them. Asking rhetorically whether India was to be the source of labour supply for all colonies where derogatory terms of service are to be offered to Indians and citing provisions of the Indian Emigration Act, the article called for agitation to revise these derogatory terms of Indians’ employment.

Continued use of Indian labour in Iraq

From October 1922, the Royal Air Force had taken over command over all remaining troops of the Air Force and British and Indian Army troops in Iraq, and was to remain in charge until the early 1930s. These troops were actually employed in several small-scale skirmishes in the country, and air forces were used to facilitate the policing of large areas by air, for bombardments of villages and tribes when necessary, and for imperial air communication.²⁴⁴ These troops’ employment resulted in a network of air bases, camps and barracks that necessitated several maintenance and operation services.

For a long time, Indian labour continued to be employed in different occupations in these places, for example as dhobis, khalasis, sweepers, bhistis, coolies, peons and orderlies. The labour was recruited under the orders of the Adjutant General in India continuing arrangements first adopted during the war until December 1925, when its control was directly transferred to the Air Officer Commanding at Baghdad. The forecasted number of unskilled labour then required by the force was 213 persons during 1926 and 1927, while skilled labour amounted to some 1,238 during both years. However, it was this change in responsibility of recruitment, which resulted in a new discussion of the topic, as the recruitment for forces in Iraq was to be executed by a private firm in Bombay. This posed certain problems in the way of supplying this labour. It was illegal in regard to unskilled labourers, as no notification existed under the provisions of the new Emigration Act of 1922. Hitherto, its recruitment had been carried on continuously ever since the war and the change in the legal position brought about by the new act was allegedly not noticed. Thus, authorities had to find a way of dealing with the issue.²⁴⁵

While skilled labour could be organized and despatched through the agency of Messrs. Ashton & Company under control of the Bombay government in accordance with chapters 4 and 5 of the emigration act, the Indian Army Department requested the Air Officer

²⁴⁴ Satia, Priya (2006), *The Defense of Inhumanity: Air Control and the British Idea of Arabia*. *The American Historical Review*, 111, 1. Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control*, 128.

²⁴⁵ Secy, EHL, GoI to Secy, GoBomb, 31 Dec 1925. AD, GoI to EHL, GoI, 4 Feb 1926, and enclosure, Air Officer Commanding, British Forces in Iraq to Secy, Air Ministry, 27 Oct 1925. EHL, Ov., Jan 1927, 95-122 B.

Commanding at Baghdad in March 1926 to obtain any unskilled labour locally for the time being, as the procedure of obtaining such labour from India had changed. The latest amendments of the Indian Emigration Act stipulated that emigration of unskilled labour was illegal until notified by government and approved by the Indian legislature, which was to convene again only six months later. Indian central authorities therefore started earlier gathering information on requirements in Iraq to be laid before the Governor-General in Council and both houses of the Indian legislature for consent. The High Commissioner in Iraq explained that unskilled Indian labour was necessary to certain classes of employment, for example local khalassis and watermen for the were found unsatisfactory.²⁴⁶

However, in later discussion it was found out that the forces in Iraq needed only a limited number of this unskilled labour. Despite of bringing the issue in front of the legislative chambers, where such a proposal could have been denied, the Governor General in Council at the end of 1926 declared the occupations of khalasis and watermen – usually regarded as unskilled work – as skilled work for the purposes of the Indian Emigration Act, and authorities hence allowed their recruitment through the recruiting agency in Bombay as well.²⁴⁷ This example shows that the Indian government still had some discretionary power to evade stipulations in force in that they simply designated unskilled workers under the skilled category. In such a way they were easily able to send labour overseas, even without consent of the legislative chambers that was necessary according to the new emigration laws.

As shown above, the fact that a vast number of Indians had been released from services in Iraq elides that recruitment of the Iraqi government in India continued unabatedly, albeit on a comparatively small scale. Whenever new Indian men were needed for the Iraqi railway or port directorate, they were acquired through offices of their agents in Bombay established there after the administration of Iraq had been handed over to civil authorities. Being newly appointed in 1933, the agent for the Port of Basra Directorate requested permission from Bombay authorities to continue recruiting activities of skilled Indian labour for service under that directorate in Iraq, on the same lines as the former agent for the Iraqi railways had recruited labour. The application effectively implied that the agent and the Iraqi government were freed from payment of any security deposit for the due observance of the agreement and the proper treatment of the person recruited, the only requirement being an assurance to the latter effect. The Iraqi government agreed on this.²⁴⁸

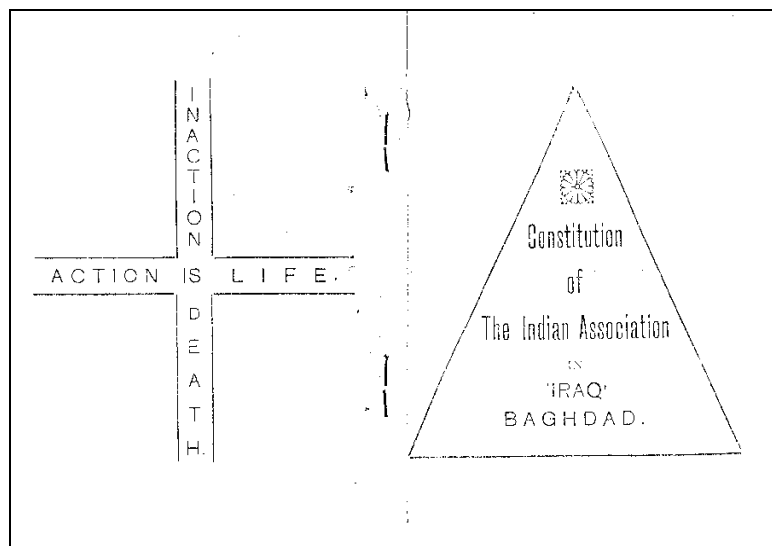
²⁴⁶ EHL, GoI to Secy, GoBomb, 11 Feb 1926. HC, Baghdad to EHL, GoI, 1 Mar 1926. Secy, Army Department, GoI to Air Officer Commanding, Baghdad, 25 Mar 1926. EHL, GoI to HC, Baghdad, 3 June 1926. Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Note, EHL, 22 Dec 1926. Notification, EHL, GoI, 30 December 1926. Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Rao Sahib C.P.S. Menon, Agent for the Port of Basra Directorate c/o Messrs the Anglo-Persian Oil Co. Ltd, Bombay to Chief Secy, GoBomb, 11 Jul 1933. The office of the Port of Basra Directorate had been closed down on 31 March of that

Indian Association in Iraq

During these years, some of the Indians remaining in Iraq reacted to their changing environment Under the impression of the earlier British Indian administration in Iraq breaking off and the number of Indians in government services and elsewhere ever decreasing, the more a sense of community and belonging seemed emerge of those few staying behind and not returning to India, with community activities becoming a special meaning. When becoming clearer that Iraq was to be an independent state with British Indian presence in Iraq receding ever more, members of the Indian community established the Indian Association in Iraq in 1921. As the only recognized body of Indians in Iraq, the association’s objects were, among others, to promote the spirit of union amongst Indians in the country, to develop social and moral advancement and to encourage temperance through a library, reading room and recreations, and to watch the welfare of Indians.²⁴⁹



Picture 9. Cover of the constitution of the Indian Association in Iraq.²⁵⁰

The Indian government had first heard about the association in connection with its fourth annual report for 1925 being sent to them in 1926, allegedly because the community was under attack from local inhabitants.²⁵¹ In April during that year, some five hundred Indians attended the association’s anniversary in its premises on Baghdad’s Residency Road. By that time, the association already had branches in several towns throughout Iraq such as

year, with APOC’s Bombay branch temporarily acting on behalf of the port directorate until a new agent was appointed in July. Protector of Emigrants to Chief Secy, GoBomb, 13 Jul 1933. Chief Secy, GoBomb to Secy, EHL, GoI, 31 Jul 1933. FPD, GoI to Ambassador, Baghdad, 26 Sept 1933. Iraq Ministry for Foreign Affairs to Ambassador Baghdad, 2 Dec 1933. Baghdad Embassy to FPD, 8 Dec 1933. FPD, N. 1933, 477.

²⁴⁹ Constitution of the Indian Association in Iraq. FPD, N., 1927, 737.

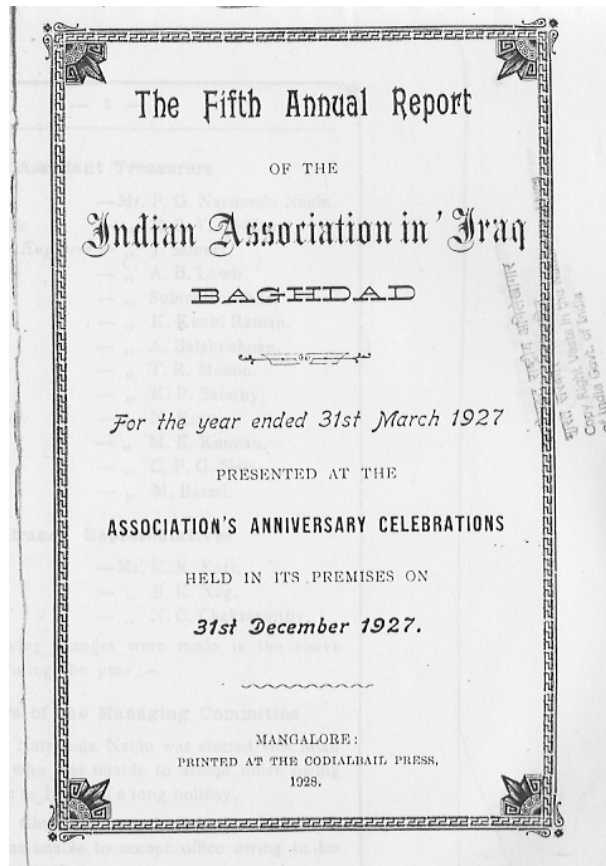
²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Note, FPD, 28 May 1926. Ibid.

Mosul and Kirkuk, enlisted thirty life members from India who occasionally came for visits, and had immensely widened its activity. They maintained a school for Indian children in Baghdad, assisted in the repatriation of destitute Indian subjects, made representations for the provision of regular passports to British Indian subjects, and overall tried to obtain better conditions of service for Indians employed in government service in Iraq. They had also assisted in Iraqis in the recent floods. The Association was also integrated into larger social networks, with several British and Indian officers in the employ of the Iraqi government facilitating its establishment. During the ceremony for the opening of the association’s premises, the High Commissioner Sir Henry Dobbs, advised its members to ignore any attacks on the good works of Indians from irresponsible quarters.²⁵²

In its report for the year 1927, the Association had to concede to the strong reduction and repatriation of Indian personnel in various civil and military departments, which affected the membership numbers. (Cf. Picture 10.

Cover of the 1927 report of the Indian Association in Iraq; on the right)²⁵³ With 120 members leaving to India during the year, only through strenuous efforts by members to keep up these numbers and promote new enlistments, the strength in March 1927 was at 226. The future did not look particularly bright, with the subscriptions dwindling in the same speed as the community strength. Affects for some of the community activities were feared, such as the school, which was attended by 20 boys and 2 girls only. Nonetheless, the association still made progress in some areas. It arranged for example with local authorities in Baghdad a



cremation ground for Hindu and Sikh members of the community and deceased Hindu soldiers of the Royal Air Force authorities. The association’s welfare activities furthermore organised meetings that aimed to counter allegations made in the press in India and Iraq in regard to the mode of living of certain Indians. To this effect, they convened people of various occupations in order to eradicate or mitigate any social evils existing in the

²⁵² Baghdad Times, 1 May 1926. Ibid.

²⁵³ Fifth Annual Report of the Indian Association in Iraq for the year ended 31 March 1927. FPD, N., 1928, 47.

community. When Indian workmen employed in the Salchiyah workshops of the Iraq Railways were about to be fired in September 1926, the association brought about an amicable settlement between both, with a reduction in wages of the workmen. In addition, they engage in efforts to grant facilities to British Indian subjects, who wished to bring their families to this country. As reported this time, the association was not the only club that represented interests of Indians, but it cooperated with the Jamiat el Islamia, the Arya Samaj, the Central Sikh Committee, the Christian Brotherhood in Iraq, the Indian Railway Institute, the Palm Dale Club and the St. Antony’s club. The association’s strength continued to decrease, making up only 68 members including 16 life members by 1936. While actually a good number of Indians lived in Baghdad and its vicinity at that time, they rather deliberately kept out of the institution. The association kept on making representations on behalf of the Indian community employed on the Iraqi Railways, and again in the case of proposed laws that were to negatively affect Indians in Iraq. Finally, the association appealed to their countrymen in Iraq, to think only in terms of Indian Nationality, as “a man’s religion or creed is after all a thing between himself and His Maker and not an excuse for bringing about faction and unending strife and misunderstanding among mankind.”²⁵⁴

3. Nationality and other legislations in Iran and Iraq

Decreasing numbers of Indians in the region, as above bemoaned by the Indian Association in Iraq, were part and parcel of several larger transformations at work during this time. Between the mid-1920s to mid-1930s, nationality laws and related legislations came into force in Iran and Iraq following increasing nationalist demands. After long periods of occupation and foreign dominance in these countries, which had prompted many immigrants in the first place to come for work and sojourn, such laws marked the beginning of newly emerging territorial states that demanded control over its national population and overall tightened the basis for foreigners to stay on. As I will show, these legislations somehow affected Indian residents in these countries adversely and lead to a decrease in their overall numbers. While the number of Indians resident in Persia amounted to some 3,900 in 1922, there were around 500 (exclusive Indian employees of APOC) in the country at the end of 1933. Of the once numerous thousands of Indians in Iraq during the war campaign and under the occupation, 2,596 Indians were left in 1932, 60% of which were considered permanent

²⁵⁴ Twelfth Annual Report of the Indian Association in Iraq for the year 1935-36. FPD, N., 1936, 498.

settlers.²⁵⁵ In both countries, the specific environments had a peculiar outcome affecting Indians resident in these countries in various ways to which I refer in this section.

Developments in Iran

Already in 1923, the Persian Nationality Law that had existed for several decades already seems to have been more effectively and stringently enacted by Persian authorities. In this way, authorities on both sides came to claim several subjects whose nationality was, for example, in the interstices of Persian and British Indian nationality due to their moving lives in between these realms. One such example was Mirza Ibrahim Isfahani, a partner of the British Indian firm Messrs. Isfahani and Sons of Calcutta, then representing the company in Persia. British authorities claimed him to be a British-born grandson of a Persian naturalized British Indian resident in India, and the nationality of the firm apart from that of the individual appeared undoubtedly to be Indian according to British authorities. However, according to the Persian Nationality Law, the Persian government was not able to recognize the claim of British subjects of Persian origin or descent to enjoy their rights as British subjects in Persia because they had not obtained the permission of the Shah to change their nationality. The Government of India’s view was quite laid back on this, admitting that the said man could not in Persia claim the status of a British subject, unless his grandfather had attained his status as British Indian subject by permission from the Shah. However, British officials in Persia were not willing to let go off this case so easily, as suggested by Indian authorities, knowing that it would have far-reaching effects and would enable the Persian government to lay claim to British subjects who for many generations may have been born in British territory. Finally, the British Foreign Office decided that the claims of Mirza Ibrahim Isfahani to the status of British Indian subject in Persia were lawful, and that authorities in Persia and India were to act accordingly.²⁵⁶

Despite such decisions, several others had to further deal with hardships when facing Persian Consuls in India or when travelling as British Indian subjects to Persia. In 1926, a member of the Persia Society in Bombay informed the corresponding body in London about circumstances in that place. He referred to a large colony of Persians settled especially in

²⁵⁵ Waiz, S.A. (1934), *Indians Abroad Directory*. The Imperial Indian Citizenship Association, Bombay, 154, 159. Among several associations that had sprung up in the wake of Indian nationalist elites’ aiming to promote the well-being of Indians abroad, the Imperial Indian Citizenship Association owed its existence to the South African Indian Fund instituted by Gopal Krishna Gokhale in 1914 that was raised to help Indians in South Africa in their fight against the Asiatic Registration Act. After the campaign’s success, the organisation was instituted as a permanent body to safeguard the rights of Indians abroad.

²⁵⁶ British Minister, Tehran to Secy, FO, 18 Dec 1923. Foreign Secy, GoI to Under SoS for India, 19 June 1924. British Minister, Tehran to Secy, FO, 16 Aug 1924. Under SoS, FO to Under SoS for India, 18 Sept 1924. Secy, Economic and Overseas Dept., India Office to Foreign Secy, GoI, 7 Oct 1924. Foreign Secy, GoI to Under SoS for India, 4 Dec 1924. FPD, N., 1924-1926, 3.

Bombay, who all proceeded to Persia under very irregular arrangements, some as British subjects and some with two passports, while others dealt with each port of entry according to circumstances of the day. Under such circumstances, the local Persian Consul made himself somewhat unpopular by his rigid adherence to some rules whereby children born in India of parents born in Persia were regarded as Persian subjects and that the Persian visa on their British passport was refused to them. Instead they were asked to proceed to Persia under the Persian passport.²⁵⁷ In late 1926, the action of refusing to affix visas to British passports of naturalized British subjects of Persian origin wishing to visit Persia went on. Allegedly, this action of Persian consular officials was in line with a circular to Persian officers in India by the representative of the Persian government in India. The circular warned consuls in India to abstain from issuing such visas by any means, and to warn everybody who did so of a fine to be paid according to law, and of being disallowed to enter or being expelled from Persia.²⁵⁸

In May 1928, the system of capitulatory rights, which had existed for several centuries under different auguries and to the detriment of Persia especially in the later stage, was finally abolished. Then, all special privileges hitherto enjoyed by foreign nationals lapsed, and all foreigners became, *inter alia*, subject to the jurisdiction of Persian Courts. This resulted in different amendments in turn affecting British Indian subjects. One such issue concerned the Compulsory Arbitration Law passed during the same year, under which arbitration was compulsory at the request of either of the parties concerned in a dispute. The law stipulated that the respective parties appointed one arbitrator each, and the local court appointed as third arbitrator a Persian subject. The British Indian mercantile community, especially of the provinces Seistan and Kain and of Khorasan, objected to this law, fearing to be put at great disadvantages and being prevented from satisfactorily settling their claims. The majority of the cases involving British Indian traders were claims for money in connection with commercial transactions against Persians. Under these circumstances, two Persian arbitrators would oppose one Indian arbitrator, thus making a fair award in such cases almost impossible.²⁵⁹ Despite changes in regard to jurisdiction, British and Indian authorities were able to secure guarantees to safeguard the interests of foreign nationals after the termination of the capitulations. One of these safeguards entitled British non-Muslim nationals to have matters relating to personal status, property and family rights to be decided by courts in British India. As far as jurisdictional arrangements were concerned only cases of

²⁵⁷ Persia Society, London to FO, 27 July 1926. *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ GoBomb to FPD, GoI, 23 Nov 1926 and enclosure, Circular 474 issued by the Representative of the Persian Government in the whole of India. To Persian Vice-Consulate, Karachi, dated 25 Mihr Mah 1304. *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ Consul-General, Meshed to Foreign Secy, GoI, 18 July 1928. Consul-General, Meshed to British Minister, Tehran, 10 May 1928. British Minister, Tehran to Consul-General Meshed, 9 June 1928. FPD, N., 1928, 158.

non-Muslim British Indian subjects settled or residing in Persia and domiciled either in British India or in Persia were to be provided for. Overall, it concerned 1,589 and 57 non-Muslims respectively, and the court in British India under consideration for cases to be referred to was the Court of the Judicial Commissioner in Sind.²⁶⁰

In ensuing years, these and other laws became even tighter and constrained the stay of foreigners generally, and of British Indian subjects, ever more. From around late 1928, the Persian government interpreted and enforced more strictly a section of the Nationality Law, hitherto loosely applied, that effectively limited ownership by foreigners of landed property in Persia. To paraphrase: Whoever possessed landed property in Persia was recognized as Persian subject and any claims to foreign nationality were rejected. The new Persian Nationality Law passed by the Majlis in September 1929 aggravated the situation of those persons considered in India as British subjects but in Persia as Persians.²⁶¹ In 1931, the Majlis passed a law to the effect that all foreigners had to obtain authorisations to enter, reside and pass through the country from a competent Persian authority. Inter alia, permission to remain in Persia permanently or temporarily had to be obtained from police authorities in the district in which the person wished to reside. All foreigners were compelled within a certain period to notify their address and register their names with police to receive a certificate.²⁶² The latter law affected many British Indian subjects in Persia adversely, and in several cases Indians were actually expelled from the country without any reasons.²⁶³ While its stipulations mentioned several classes to whom entry was to be denied, the law allegedly came to be applied even to persons who had been resident in Iran for years. The Consul at Meshed reported, that “Although most British Indian subjects realise that they may at any time be expelled and are reducing their liabilities as far as possible, there are still many who have been for years in the country and have capital sunk and for whom sudden expulsion is a serious matter since they cannot collect debts due, or dispose of property except through third parties and at great loss.”²⁶⁴

²⁶⁰ FO to IO, 30 July 1928. Foreign Secy, GoI to SoS for India, 24 Sept 1928. FO to IO, 28 Aug 1928. Charge d’Affaires, Tehran to FO, 16 June 1928. FO to Charge d’Affaires, Tehran, 27 Sept 1928. Circular No. 55, British Minister, Tehran to Consular Officers in Persia, 18 Dec 1928. Secy, HD, GoI to Secy, HD, GoBomb, 12 Apr 1929. Ibid.

²⁶¹ Circular No. 1, British Minister, Tehran to Consular Officers in Persia, 3 Jan 1929. British Minister, Tehran to FO, 14 June 1929. British Minister, Tehran to FO, 4 Sept 1929. British Minister, Tehran to Teymouratche, Minister of Court, 24 Aug 1929. FPD, N., 1929, 52.

²⁶² Law governing the Entry, Residence and Passage of Foreigners in Persia. FPD, N., 1931, 374.

²⁶³ Expulsion from Eastern Persia of Hazaras (Berberis) who are British Indian subjects and also certain British Indians. FPD, N., 1935, 369. It mentions the precarious situation of several Berberis, who were employed in British consulates and otherwise protected and considered as British subjects. Expulsion of British Indian subjects from Iran. FPD, N., 1935, 506. At least eight British Indian subjects were expelled from Iran at this time, among them traders but also motor drivers. These lived mostly at Zahidan, a town frequented by Indian traders on their routes to the interior of the country, and from 1918 connected by railway to Quetta.

²⁶⁴ Consul-General, Meshed to Foreign Secy, GoI, 27 Aug 1935. Ibid.

Developments in Iraq

Similar issues arose in Iraq following the end of the war and especially after the end of the British Mandate over Iraq. The situation of foreigners in the country in general had become increasingly constrained already in 1923 after the issuance of the Iraq Residence and Passport Laws, the latter superseding the Mesopotamia Passport Regulations of 1919. These regulated the entry into, residence in and exit from Iraq. For all these stages, a permit of travel or a passport was necessary in order to document identity. In addition, any person allowed to enter had to register at the police headquarters of the district of residence within fifteen days of arrival.²⁶⁵

But at that time, government service, to which several of the Indians then living in Iraq belonged, was still possible for non-Iraqis. However, only three years later at some point in 1926 the Iraq Government seemed to have promulgated a notification or law restricting non-Iraqis from service with the Iraq government. In order to obviate their dismissal from services, many Indian nationals actually opted for changing their nationality into Iraqi nationality. We can trace details of their lives such as names, places of birth, numbers and dates of their naturalisation certificates, proof of British origin produced on applying for Iraqi nationality as well as their sheer numbers from official archives. Between 1926 and 1935, the colonial state received for the duration of almost ten years lists of British subjects that were granted Iraqi Naturalisation Certificates. These lists include 221 individuals altogether. Among them were several persons who had lived in Iraq their entire life, while most of them were born in India. Some had actually come to Iraq on pilgrim passes, while others were able to prove their identity with passports issued in various places of origin all over India or by producing witnesses testifying to the applicants’ former nationality in sworn statements. While most individuals were Muslims, also Hindus and Christians opted for Iraqi nationality. The lists abruptly end with certificate number 1396 in November 1935, when opting for Iraqi nationality was either not possible any longer, or no foreigners left in government service.²⁶⁶

In case Indian nationals were not willing to change their nationality, they had to terminate their services immediately and were repatriated to India. One such case was afforded in mid-1929, when the services of eight Indian policemen working in the Basra Police Force for durations between eight to thirteen years were dispensed with. They had

²⁶⁵ Iraq Passport and Residence Laws, 1923. FPD, Ext., 1923, 118.

²⁶⁶ List of British subjects granted Iraq Naturalisation Certificates up to the 31st December 1929 and during the year 1930. FPD, N., 1931, 31. List of British subjects granted Iraqi Naturalization Certificates during the year 1931. FPD, N., 1932, 150. Return of British subjects granted Iraqi Naturalisation Certificates during the year 1932. FPD, N., 1933, 302. Return of British subjects granted Iraqi Naturalisation Certificates during the year 1933. FPD, N., 1934, 228. Return of British subjects who were granted Iraqi Naturalisation Certificates during the year 1934. FPD, N. 1935, 124. Return of British subjects who were granted Iraqi Naturalisation Certificates during the year 1935. FPD, N., 1936, 135.

decided not to accept Iraqi nationality, but instead to revert to India on agreement with superiors that their legitimate claims and rights in Iraq were settled before being put back into the positions employed in prior to war. The promises not being upheld in regard to outstanding pay, the policemen did not leave the country. The Iraq government agreed only after several petitions to pay the amount due, after which the policemen started reverting to India.²⁶⁷

In Iraq, nationality legislations further aggravated after the end of the British mandate and following the state’s independence. Towards the end of 1935, the Iraqi government was about to legislate a new law for the protection of certain trades to Iraqis. Besides defining several trades, such as printing, photography, barber’s work, carpentry, masonry, tailoring, painting, services of motorcar drivers, steam engine and carriage drivers, as exclusively for Iraqis, the law was to include also a prohibition to do selling transactions in shops. Only those labours were exempted in which the government had special treaties with companies, or according to special arrangements and contracts, those services in foreign consulates, and private servants in homes.²⁶⁸ The issue soon aroused great fracas in public opinion throughout India, expressing fears that such law would harm the interests of Indians resident in the country. Some thought the Iraqi government’s approach to be contrary to current international law. With the termination of the British mandate over Iraq and the state’s admission to the League of Nations in October 1932, the Iraqi government had given guarantees to all foreigners in the country that their status would henceforth not be interfered with, and that their property and rights hitherto acquired were protected. These stipulated that all foreigners had to be allowed to stay in Iraq on the basis of their positions, even when Iraq was to become independent.

Under the fresh impression of several Indian shop-owners and tradesmen having received notices to leave Iraq shortly, one Indian merchant at Basra, M.N. Dean, reported about even greater grievances for Indians to be expected from such legislation to protect certain labour and trades. On the one hand, he accounted for how India had and continued to benefit Iraq more than vice versa, through economic and religious ties bringing money thereto and sacrifices of Indians during the war in throwing off Turkish rule and thereby only allowing Iraq’s status as independent state. Referring on the contrary to Iraqis that were allowed to live freely and without any restrictions and harassment in India, unlike Indians in Iraq, he expected the Indian government to secure by all means for its own people the same

²⁶⁷ Two of the men were recruited directly from the Delhi Police and two others from Karachi and Peshawar. The other four came from India for occupations with the railways, ports and transports and were subsequently enlisted as policemen. Petitions from eight Indian Policemen dismissed from the Basrah Police. FPD, N., 1929, 383.

²⁶⁸ Ambassador, Baghdad to Foreign Secy, GoI, 16 Nov 1935. FPD, N., 1935, 592.

freedom and privileges it granted to Iraqis in India. He went so far as to suggest reciprocal treatment, and that if India were to put similar restrictions on Iraqis, the Iraqi government would have to think twice before launching out such suicidal policy.²⁶⁹

Following this, the Indian government received questions from individuals and institutions taking up the cause of Indian diasporas as to the action they contemplated taking in the matter with a view to safeguard the legitimate interests and rights of Indians lawfully domiciled in Iraq.²⁷⁰ Soon afterwards, newspapers filled with articles concerning procedures in Iraq, often citing or repeating in full M.N. Dean’s letter to several important political figures in India.²⁷¹ The topic seemed to be a very sensitive one, with Indian public opinion allegedly voicing loud demands for retaliatory action, forecasting grave consequences for Iraqi nationals and trade relations in case the Indian government were forced to take such action.²⁷² Furthermore, between December 1935 and early 1936, almost a dozen notices of questions in the Legislative Assembly over this matter poured in, with government responding to a number of them. They basically stated over and over again that notices on Indians in Iraq had nothing to do with the new labour legislation but with the Iraqi Residence Law of 1923, to which some Indians had not adhered to correctly, and that the new law was not against Indians only, but foreigners in general.²⁷³

²⁶⁹ M.N. Dean, Indian merchant, Basra to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, 22 Oct 1935. *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ Jagannat Prasad Varma, Secy, Nagpur Nagar Hindu Sabha to Secy, FPD, GoI, 10 Oct 1935. JK Mehta, Secy, The Indian Merchant’s Chamber to Secy, FPD, GoI, 16 Oct 1935. Gandhi to S.A. Waiz, Imperial Indian Citizenship Association (IICA), Bombay, 30 Oct 1935, S.A. Waiz to KPS Menon, EHL, 1 Nov 1935. IICA to Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas, undated, *Ibid.* Following an early career in his uncle’s cotton business in Bombay, Thakurdas founded the East India Cotton Association in 1921 and became an influential man in a number of institutions, such as the Indian Merchant’s Chamber and Indian Reserve Bank. Markovits, Claude (2002), *Indian Business and Nationalist Politics 1931-39: The Indigenous Capitalist Class and the Rise of the Congress Party*. Cambridge University Press, p. 212 f. The Indian Overseas Association, London (IOA) addressed the GoI and India Office on the issue as well. H.S. Polak, IOA to Bajpai, EHL, 11, 27 Dec 1935. IOA to India Office, no date. FPD, N., 1935, 592.

²⁷¹ ‘Fears of Indians in Iraq’, *The Statesman*, 7 Nov 1935. FPD, N., 1935, 654. ‘Indians in Iraq asked to leave country’, *The National Call*, 9 Nov 1935. This article cites a letter sent to Rabindranath Tagore that is equal to M.N. Dean’s letter cited above. ‘Indians in Iraq’, *Eastern Times*, 7 Dec 1935. ‘Iraq’s New Labour Legislation’. *The Statesmen*, 23 Dec 1935. FPD, N., 1935, 592. This article actually disputed allegations that the law was against Indians only, also citing that the Iraqi government had agreed to amend parts of the law. ‘Lot of Indians in Iraq’, Letter from an Indian Abroad to the Editor, *Sind Observer*, 15 Dec 1935, FPD, N., 1936, 59. The author illustrates how difficult it was to enter Iraq compared to India, with Indians having to obtain permissions to enter and a resident permit to sojourn in Iraq, while none of these things were necessary in India for Iraqis. Finally, Indians were requested to boycott the purchase of Iraq exports and to stop pilgrimages to that country.

²⁷² Note, FPD, 7 Dec 1935. FPD, N., 1935, 592.

²⁷³ These questions and resolutions were partly disallowed by officials according to legislative rules as they affected the relations of the British government with a foreign state. Resolution in the Legislative Assembly by Seth Haji Abdoola Haroon to safeguard the interests of Indians in Iraq and promulgate reciprocity laws. Disallowed. FPD, N., 1935, 644. Question in the Legislative Assembly by Mr. C.N. Muthuranga Mudaliar enquiring if it is a fact that Iraq Government are turning out all the Indians settled in Mesopotamia and the steps the Government of India propose to take to safeguard their rights. FPD, N., 1935, 653. Question in the Legislative Assembly by Sardar Mangal Singh as to whether the attention of the Government has been drawn to Dr. Rabindra Nath Tagore’s communication relating to expulsion of Indians from Iraq and what action the Government of India propose to take. FPD, N., 1935, 654. Question in the Legislative Assembly by Seth Haji Abdoola Haroon regarding quit order on Indians in Iraq; their number in Iraq; the number of Iraqis in India, and the steps the GoI propose to take in the matter. FPD, N., 1935, 656. Questions in the Legislative Assembly by Mr. M Ananthasaganam Ayyangar and Dr. Ziauddin Ahmad, regarding Indians in Iraq and the steps taken by the Government of India to safeguarding their interests. FPD, N., 1935, 674. Questions in the Legislative Assembly by Mr. Lalchand Navalrai and Seth Govind Dass in connection with the restrictions imposed on Indians in Iraq and other details connected thereto. FPD, N., 1936, 59.

With Indian sentiment running thus high on these questions, Indian officials about that time took seriously the demands of those pleading for retaliation in case the law would pass. Officials in the Foreign and Political Department proposed and actually started getting information as to the number and professions of well-to-do Iraqi Arabs living in certain Indian districts, knowing that the Iraqi side would interpret this action as preliminary to retaliation once they heard about it and possibly make them think about their procedures. Despite receiving information on the point, officials seemed to understand in mid-January 1936 that there was no necessity any longer for retaliation plans.²⁷⁴

After all, the Iraqi Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs had professed earlier already that the law was not meant to be against Indians at all. Rather, they understood it as necessity to enable their government to oblige numerous Iranians living in Iraq, and in their eyes a fruitful source of political trouble, to become Iraqis or quit the country. The Iraq government thus not willing to abandon the law fully, they showed efforts to incorporate a new article excluding from the law’s provisions subjects of those states in whose territory Iraqi subjects were allowed freely to practice their crafts and trades. India was such a state, and officials seemed satisfied with such an amendment, knowing they were not able to stop the whole law from passing. The law, including the proposed amendments, was finally passed towards the end of February 1936.²⁷⁵ Public uproar in India calmed down for the time being.

However, further reports on the alleged maltreatment and expulsion of Indians from Iraq trickled in after some time. A newspaper report later in 1936 alleged that the situation of Indians in Iraq had actually turned to the worse. The article cited another letter written from an Indian in Iraq to Rabindranath Tagore, stating that every possible occupation was closed down to foreigners, and especially to Indians, as no protective treaty had been agreed between India and Iraq about the future of their nationals in the country. On another note, in case an Indian would leave Iraq for private affairs in India, he would not be allowed re-entry into the country, which meant “when any Indian leaves the country he has to leave it for ever.”²⁷⁶

Questions in the Legislative Assembly by Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant asking if certain laws and orders prejudicial to Indians have been passed in Iraq and whether Government of India intend to withhold facilities given to Iraqis in India. FPD, N., 1936, 97.

²⁷⁴ Viceroy to SoS for India, 11 Dec 1935. Notes, FPD, 9, 20 Dec 1935. FPD, N., 1935, 592. They actually wanted individuals to report it to their friends in Iraq so that it came to the ear of the Iraqi government. One even suggested the quickest way would be to ask the Iraqi Consul General to furnish a list of Iraqis in India. Director of Intelligence Bureau, 4 Jan 1936. Ibid. A preliminary survey from the Indian census was not sufficient, so they actually wrote to different governments to obtain through police or other agency a comprehensive list. FPD, GoI to GoBomb, GoBeng, GoPun, Government of Burma, 13 Jan 1936. Chief Secy, GoBeng to Foreign Secy, 19 Feb 1936. Chief Secy, GoPun to Foreign Secy, 26 Feb 1936. Chief Secy, GoBeng to Foreign Secy, GoI, 4 Mar 1936, Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ambassador, Baghdad to FO 11 Dec 1935, 13, 21 Jan, 26 Feb 1936. IO to Foreign Secy, GoI, 6 Jan 1936. Viceroy to SoS for India, 20 Jan 1936. Ibid.

²⁷⁶ ‘Plight of Indians in Iraq’, *The Statesman*, 2. Aug 1936. FPD, N., 1936, 474.

There was more evidence on the worsening situation for Indians in Iran and Iraq. The Indian merchant Alimohamed Dawoodbhai of Abadan reported in July 1936 about the stiffening of trade relations in Iran, especially since exchange of foreign currency was disallowed. On trying to visit Kuwait for possibly developing his trade there, the merchant was refused a visa by the British local official. In July 1936, the Political Resident remarked that Indians were being driven out of Iran and Iraq and were hence keen to try their luck in Kuwait. Allegedly, this problem had not come up before, because it was only recently that exclusion of Indians had become a serious part of the policy of these countries bordering on the northern shores of the Gulf.²⁷⁷ While laws in Iran and Iraq were probably promulgated against all foreigners, the laws affected particularly Indian migrants. Arguably, some left these countries therefore, instead trying to anchor on the Arab side of the Gulf.

4. New Prospects for British Indian Engagement in Smaller Gulf States

Seemingly, a new field for Indian engagement opened up in smaller Gulf States. In this particular instance, however, the Sheikh of Kuwait himself was eager to keep out prosperous Indians desirous of setting up as merchants, for he “was afraid, that owing to their ability to live more cheaply than his own people and to their greater business capacity, they will drive many of his own merchants out of business. Moreover, much of the profit that the Indians would make they would remit home.”²⁷⁸ The Political Resident speculated on his reasons to take such position. After all, Bahrain, Muscat or the Trucial Sheikdoms had not placed any obstacles in the way of Indians desirous of going there, and they profited from the merchants’ capital in tow, which might happen in Kuwait as well. However, he envisaged that Kuwait had no need of Indian capital and rather denied them entry for they would create economic and political trouble from competition with the ruler’s subjects. The number of Indians in Kuwait was approximately some half a dozen in 1936 only, which is why the argument of saturation seemed not at all viable.²⁷⁹ In other states the number of Indians was higher. According to census data of 1933, Indians in Bahrain numbered some 500, roughly half Hindus and half Muslims, and 441 in Muscat, the latter number not including “hundreds of Indian Muslim devotees permanently settled”.²⁸⁰ Towards the end of the 1930s much of this settlement changed due to the oil economy.

²⁷⁷ Alimohamed Dawoodbhai to Consul-General, Fars, 1 Jul 1936. Note by Political Resident, Bushehr, ‘Exclusion of prosperous Indians from Kuwait’, 16 Jul 1936. IOR R/15/5/201 cited in L. Rush, A. de (Ed.), *Records of Kuwait, 1899-1961*. Vol. 4: Economic Affairs. Archive Editions, 1989, 710, 716.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 710.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 711.

²⁸⁰ Waiz, *Indians Abroad Directory*, 653.

In all matters oil, many of the precedents set out in southern Persia from the 1900s emerged also in other constituents surrounding the Gulf during the 1920s and 1930s. While APOC’s main investment and operations remained in southern Persia until the company’s nationalization in 1951, their activity became quite diverse by the 1930s. Besides operations of the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC), APOC’s further interest applied considerably also to prospects in smaller Gulf States.²⁸¹ Supported by local British residents and diplomats, the company was able to obtain oil concessions from several Arab Gulf rulers during the 1930s, finally establishing companies and starting to operate there under patterns similar of southern Persia. In Kuwait, APOC and the US Gulf Oil Company jointly instituted the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) in 1933, striking oil before the inception of World War Two. APOC, or Anglo-Iranian Oil Company as it was called then, subsequently obtained concessions in Qatar (1935), the Trucial States (1936) and Oman (1937) and worked them under the Petroleum Concessions Ltd. (PCL).

With APOC’s increasing interest in these countries’ resources, also those legal aspects were transferred to the southern Gulf, which had become important earlier in Persia. Already in October 1921, Arnold Wilson drew the Political Resident’s attention to the desirability of the Indian government issuing an Order in Council for Kuwait. If APOC’s contemporary drilling in that territory would turn out successful, he foresaw employment of a large number of British and British Indian subjects. Their employees’ jurisdiction being a source of anxiety, he referred to the immunity from serious trouble with labour in southern Persia because of that particular legal institution and expressed his desire for similar safeguards in Kuwait before large-scale exploration started. While the Resident endorsed these views repeatedly, the Indian government was not in a position to act. For the time being, Kuwait was not under Indian administration, but under the High Commissioner in Baghdad, Percy Cox, until the British government’s further decision on its future political control. With Cox’s office ending in 1923, the British and not the Indian government assumed direct political control over the Arabian Gulf littoral. Further considerations of issuing and maintaining an Order in Council for Kuwait were therefore left to the Colonial Office, which finally promulgated a respective ordinance in 1925.²⁸² From then onwards up until 1961, the British and not the Indian government formally handled jurisdiction over British subjects, including Indians, in Kuwait.

²⁸¹ The inception of war prevented any further prospecting of the Turkish Petroleum Company, established by APOC together with other shareholders in 1912. The discovery of major oil resources in Kirkuk in 1927 initiated a new formation of capital. By 1929, the company’s name had changed to IPC, with most major oil companies in the world having a stake. IPC’s labour force consisted mostly of Iraqi labour and to some extent of Indian labour. Metz, Helen Chapin (Ed.) (1988), *Iraq: A Country Study*. Washington: GPO for Library of Congress. Accessed at <http://countrystudies.us/iraq/53.htm> on 21 Sept 2009.

²⁸² Resident Director, APOC, demi-official to PR PG, 21 Oct 1921. PR PG, demi-official to FPD, 28 Oct 1921. PR PG, demi-official to FPD, 28 Oct 1922, 25 Feb 1923. CO to IO, 17 Aug 1923. IO to GoI, 30 Aug 1923. PA, Kuwait to Shaikh Ahmad

Indeed, such jurisdiction was now defined and determined by the British government. It had already earlier emerged over British and foreign subjects at Bahrain, where APOC did not explore oil. Instead, the Standard Oil Company of California (SOCAL) was able to establish its British subsidiary, the Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO), and solely work Bahrain’s oil resources. With British and not American presence still reigning supreme in Bahrain, the company had to adhere strictly to all prerogatives of being a British company. Hence, all their activities and the British and Indian labour mostly employed by BAPCO besides Bahraini labour came under British jurisdiction. This was also true at least for Qatar, where government officials directly connected APOC’s oil exploration with the establishment of extra-territorial jurisdiction in 1935 for the smooth operation of future oil fields.²⁸³ Following oil strikes in ensuing decades and comparatively late commencement of large-scale production in some of these countries, a new inflow of Indian workers into Arab Gulf states began connected to these companies. Theoretically, oil concessions in these places again obliged them to certain provisions, such as the use for the most part of local labour. Applying similar arguments of overall scarcity in labour and skills, APOC’s subsidiary companies simply disregarded such provisions and employed labour from the Indian subcontinent.²⁸⁴

As expressed earlier, these developments in the southern Arab Gulf shores were nothing new, but built on previous patterns of labour migration and consumption proving crucial to the exploitation and marketing of Persian oil from the early 20th century. In fact, oil operations attracted more Indian labour to Iran than to all other Gulf countries taken together until 1947, a fact altered only by the onslaught of KOC’s large-scale oil exploration during 1948, when some 3,000 Indians were employed.²⁸⁵ With large-scale production in several countries, Indian labourers continued to be used in the oil industry until these were in turn nationalized during the 1960s and 1970s, with local labour substituting Indian labour.

From around the late 1930s, however, other sectors in the southern Gulf increasingly started employing Indian labour as well, and with mercantile connections becoming ever stronger between the Indian subcontinent and the Arab side of the Gulf an increase in the overall presence of Indian merchants and labourers followed. Increasingly, countries in the Arab Gulf became a market for Indian products and a field of employment. Especially Bahrain and Kuwait took a lead in this expansion of Indian employment and trade. Large remittances were sent to India from these places. The overall number of British Indians

Al-Jabir As-Subah, Ruler of Kuwait. 24 Oct 1925. Notes, FPD, 19 Nov 1921, 26 Jan 1922, 14 Mar 1923, 16 Jun 1924. FPD, N. 1926, 210.

²⁸³ IO to FPD, 19 Jul 1935, and enclosure, FO to IO, 18 July 1935. FPD, N., 1935, 483.

²⁸⁴ Seecombe/Lawless, *Foreign Worker Dependence in the Gulf*, 548-574.

²⁸⁵ BAPCO employed some 300 Indian labourers on average during the 1930s and early 1940s. PLC employed Indian labour increasingly from 1947. *Ibid.*, 563.

registered in Bahrain, for example, grew from some 450 in 1930 to 1,550 in 1938.²⁸⁶ By this time, different companies and stakeholders on the Arab side of the Gulf broadly conceived of Indian labour as valuable and important resource, and Indian merchant capital was able to foster in these regions, finally laying the basis of a migration system continuing – although under different pretexts – to this very day.

²⁸⁶ Bose, *A Hundred Horizons*, 94-97. Seccombe, Ian J. (1983), *Labour Migration to the Arabian Gulf: Evolution and Characteristics 1920-1950*. *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies*, 10, 1, 8.

IV. Conclusion

I have tried to analyze and describe in this paper a system of migration and exchange as it evolved between the Indian subcontinent and the Persian Gulf region during the period of transition from empires to nation-states between the late 19th and early 20th century. While strong connections existed already in the earlier period, the transition amplified especially in the massive expansion of interconnections between British India and the countries bordering on the northern Gulf shores, i.e. Iran and Iraq, during the First World War. With these countries increasingly voicing and reverting to nationalist claims and starting to reject foreign influence, migration and exchange processes once set into motion reverted strongly. Only the emergence of oil economies and the growth of labour demand in the Arab Gulf States contributed again to this interregional system and resulted in a resumption of connections.

While the system’s inception predated the period under review, the ascendancy of British industrial and Indian merchant capital in the Gulf region from the late 19th and early 20th century maintained connections of various sorts with the Indian subcontinent and over and over again invigorated the lines on which the system ran. Apart from securing resources and fostering empire, the First World War was a watershed event in that it mobilised – under the prefix of a war economy – the Indian subcontinent’s labour resources to an unprecedented extent. The peculiar exigencies materialised in a large-scale emigration of labour for the purpose of developing the infrastructure and resources of occupied territories, thus adding a new component of labour migration into this interregional system. It also prepared the ground for the technical and political infrastructure in turn enabling the inception of large-scale oil exploitation during ensuing decades. At the same time, it was under this military complex that Indian labour became first agreeable to and used to a large extent by one British Oil Company. As a result from further British influence in the region, the company’s subsidiary operations enlarged throughout the Gulf during the 1920s and 1930s, when it again favoured Indian over other labour for various reasons and willingly employed it.

As for actors participating within this emerging system, one can definitely establish traders, pilgrims, and labourers as important stakeholders. Various reasons and circumstances attributed to these actors’ migrating or partaking in exchange. For Indian traders and pilgrims, the emergence of Anglo-Indian commercial influence in the Gulf since the late 19th century facilitated to some extent their circulation. In connection to this, they had a certain privileged position because of the system of capitulatory rights to which they could revert in case of economic loss or in matters relating to personal law. Apart from this, they were often fully inserted into their host societies and at times freely opted for a change in nationalities. This

changed during the later period in regard to traders and shopkeepers, when emerging nation-states and rulers of other state formations resented their positions.

Labour migration during the later period took place on an all-together different note. While I could speak only to a limited extend about labourers’ motives for and environments of emigrating from India to the Gulf region, I was able to show that assumptions of ‘free’ migration got disturbed time and again throughout this period. This was connected on the one hand to certain measures of the colonial government of inducing labour emigration by special legislations, or the lapse thereof, which had once been instituted for the protection of emigrants. In addition, rights of labour migrants during this period were subordinate to demands of military discipline or the specificities of the oil industry. Labourers were not able to move freely about the place. Instead, they were confined to work camps and liable to binding contracts that allowed for penal action if labourers defied orders or claimed better conditions.

The oil industry influenced politics and social relations in the Persian Gulf and increasingly also in India during the 20th century. During the time under review, and for many more decades until the inception of nationalization programmes, labourers from the Indian subcontinent proved quite crucial to the countries’ oil industry, of which India itself had only a small resource. Developments during the late 1930s already indicated that the importance of Indian labour supply to the Gulf increased also in sectors apart from oil. While oil companies were soon nationalized in the Arab Gulf as well, the developments described in this paper built a precedent to future systems between the Indian subcontinent and the Persian Gulf proving important during the massive oil boom of the 1970s and after.

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ERKLÄRUNG

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