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THE SHIA MIGRATION FROM SOUTHWESTERN IRAN TO KUWAIT:
PUSH-PULL FACTORS DURING THE LATE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH
CENTURIES

By

MOHAMMAD E. ALHABIB

Under the Direction of Ian Christopher Fletcher

ABSTRACT

This study explores the “push-pull” dynamics of Shia migration from southwestern Iran (Fars, Khuzestan and the Persian Gulf coast) to Kuwait during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although nowadays Shias constitute thirty five percent of the Kuwaiti population and their historical role in building the state of Kuwait have been substantial, no individual study has delved into the causes of Shia migration from Iran to Kuwait. By analyzing the internal political, economic, and social conditions of both regions in the context of the Gulf sheikhdoms, the British and Ottoman empires, and other great powers interested in dominating the Gulf region, my thesis examines why Shia migrants, such as merchants, artisans and laborers left southwestern Iran and chose Kuwait as their final destination to settle. The two-way trade between southwest Iran and Kuwait provided a pathway for the Shia migrants and settlers into Kuwait. Moreover, by highlighting the economic roles of the Shia

community in Kuwait, my thesis enhances our understanding of the foundation and contributions of the Shia community in Kuwait. Thus it fills a significant gap in Kuwaiti historiography. The research for this thesis draws from a variety of primary sources, including British government documents, the writing of western travelers, the Almatrook business archive, and oral-history interviews with descendants of Shia immigrants to Kuwait.

INDEX WORDS: Shia, Shia migration, Southwestern Iran, Kuwait, Kuwaiti Shia, Shia merchants, Al-Sabah family, British hegemony, Ottoman empire, Sheikhdome, Persian Gulf

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2010

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August 2010

DEDICATION

To all People who helped me to conduct this research

To my children Saleh, Hussain and Maria

To my wife

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Chapter One

Introduction

Topic and Background

Migration as an analytical framework to study groups that have departed from their homeland and settled elsewhere has received much scholarly attention in recent times. The study of the Shia migration in the Persian Gulf region has been part of this trend in recent years since the Shia community is an important population not only in Iran but throughout the Persian Gulf region.¹ The Gulf region is characterized by considerable economic and cultural interchange despite the political tensions among states. This has been true for a very long time and it is not just a phenomenon of contemporary globalization. Even though there have been a few scholarly attempts to study Shia identity in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia by Juan Cole, James Onley, and Nelida Fuccaro, no parallel study has yet been done on the migration of the Shias in Kuwait except one by Laurence Louër.² Louër's study, however, focuses more on the transnational politics of Shia communities in Kuwait, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia than on their history. Moreover, in the standard historical narratives of Kuwait, the Shia immigrants have escaped scholarly attention despite the fact that they constitute thirty-five per cent of the population and their contributions to building Kuwait as a modern state have been substantial.³

This thesis explains the migration of Shia from southwestern Iran to Kuwait in the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. It highlights the Shia migration in order to contribute to a historical understanding of the connections that shape and structure the Gulf region as an interactive zone.

¹Although the word "Persia" was more often used to designate Iran in the nineteenth century, I prefer to use the word "Iran" in this research.

²Juan Cole, *Sacred Space and Holy War: The Politics, Culture and History of Shi'ite Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002); James Onley, "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, 2005), pp. 59-89; Nelida Fuccaro, "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: Routledge, 2005), pp. 39-58; and Laurence Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

³For more details about the Shia populations in the Gulf region, see Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, pp. 6-7. Kuwaiti Shias' role in Kuwait will be discussed in the second chapter of this study.

The rationales that led me to conduct this innovative research are fourfold. First, no individual and independent study by either a foreign or indigenous scholar has yet been done to explore this topic. Second, the confusions about the causes of the Shia migration that the historical narratives of Kuwait have created still linger. As a result, no clear image of the causes of these migrations can be drawn from Kuwaiti history. Third, the increased availability of primary sources which shed light on the internal conditions of Kuwait from local, regional and global perspectives, now allow us to show how the process of migration took place. By contrast, Kuwaiti political history prior to the early nineteenth century mostly relied on the local legend narrated by those of Kuwaiti ancestry, with the exception of a few descriptions by western travelers.⁴ As British official J.A. Saldanha asserts, “The earliest account in our records descriptive of Koweit is contained in Major Colebrooke’s report about the Persian Gulf littoral, dated 10th September 1820.”⁵ Finally, although Kuwait had existed for three centuries as a tiny town located on the northwestern coast of the Gulf, it did not enter the whirlpool of Persian Gulf politics prior to the regime of Mubarak Al-Sabah (1896-1915). This, in fact, was a turning point in Kuwait history. Kuwait became a British Protectorate in 1899 and it remained a place of intrigue for the Ottomans, the Russians and the Germans interested in the Gulf region. At the same time, many artisans and merchants from southwestern Iran arrived in Kuwait from the late nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century. The developments in the relations between states and the flow of people were not unrelated. Kuwait’s attraction for Shia settlers from Iran arose from and further enabled the small country’s ability to maneuver among the great powers in the Gulf.

Who are the Shias?

Before looking into the conditions in southwestern Iran, it’s important to provide an idea of who the Shias are as a religious and political community. Indeed, although there are many Shia and Sunni scholars and theologians offering diverse interpretations, the common or traditional theory about the rise

⁴Those are Edward Ives, *A Voyage from England to India in the Year MDCCLIV* (London: Printed for E. & C. Dilly, 1773), pp. 204-223 and James Silk Buckingham, *Travel in Assyria, Media and Persia* (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley 1830), pp. 317-318.

⁵“Précis of Koweit affairs, 1896-1904” in J. A. Saldanha, *The Persian Gulf Précis*, (Calcutta and Simla: 1903-1908; reprint: Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire, England: Archive editions, 1986) vol. 5, p. 1.

of the Shias as a religious and political community takes us back to the seventh century.⁶ Even though Prophet Muhammad passed away in 632 A. D., which was a heartbreaking event for all Muslims at that time, divisions among Muslims had already started over the question of who would succeed the Prophet. The division eventually became the basis for the subsequent consolidation of two great traditions or sects- Shia and Sunni- within Islam. To the Sunni Muslims, Abu Bakr, the closest elder friend and father-in-law to the Prophet, is the successor and should be the first caliph for the Islamic community or *ummah*.⁷ This, however, conflicts with Shia creed, because Shias believe that the Prophet Muhammad had explicitly expressed on several occasions his preference toward the people of his household (*ahl-al-bayt*), thus legitimizing the importance and priority of his family rather than his friends (*al-sahabah*).⁸ Indeed, there are many sayings of Prophet Muhammad (*Alhadiths*) which corroborate Shia beliefs about the rights of *Imam* Ali to succeed him, according to Shia doctrine. For instance, Prophet Muhammad said “Ali is to me what Aaron was to Moses, Almighty God be friend to his friends and a foe to his foes, help those who help him, and frustrate the hopes of those who betray him.”⁹ Another decisive moment came when Prophet Muhammad had officially declared *Imam* Ali as his legitimate successor for leadership of the *ummah* on an occasion called *Ghadir Khum* during his last pilgrimage to Mecca.¹⁰ Thus, Shias did not accept any leadership after Prophet Muhammad’s death except the one related to the direct lineage of his

⁶The word “*Shia*” in Arabic means “friend” or “follower” and this term had been used to refer to those who followed *Imam* Ali (Muhammad’s cousin and son- in-law) and his descendants, who are called *Imams*. For more details, see Nadeem Hasnain and Sheikh Abrar Husain, *Shia and the Shia Islam in India: A Study in Society and Culture* (New Delhi: Harnam Publications, 1988), p. 23. Some people define the word “*Shia*” as unorthodox, heterodox or heretics of Islam. For more information, see Martin Kramer, ed., *Shi’ism, Resistance and Revolution* (Boulder: Westview Press. 1987), p. 21; and Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2006), p. 34.

⁷Nasr, *The Shia Revival*, p. 35.

⁸Shias are divided in three sub-sects. First, the majority are *Ithna-Asharia* or *Imamia* (believers of Twelve Imams), second, *Zaidia*, and lastly, *Isma’ilia*. For more details in this regard, see Hasnain and Husain, *Shia and the Shia Islam in India*, pp. 48-51.

Shias believe that Prophet Muhammad and his family, including all the descendents of *Imam* Ali Ibn Abi Talib, are *ma’soumen* (immaculate from sin). For more details in this regard, see Nasr, *The Shia Revival*, p. 35.

⁹Hasnain and Husain, *Shia and the Shia Islam in India*, p. 27.

¹⁰*Ghadir Khumm* is an occasion during which Prophet Muhammad appointed *Imam* Ali as his legitimate follower during his last pilgrimage or *Hajj* to Mecca by saying “whoever recognizes me as his master will recognize Ali as his master.” Nasr, *The Shia Revival*, pp.37-38.

family (*ahl-al-bayt*), and that was *Imam* Ali. In fact, this antagonism was not resolved during the Abbasid and Umayyad periods, contributions ultimately to the differentiation of the Shia and the Sunni communities. Shias believe that those two “Islamic Dynasties” which characterized Islamic history persecuted and oppressed Shia people. The *Ashura* incident in Iraq in 680 A. D. was, in fact, the best example of the oppressions and persecutions of the Shias that were practiced by the Umayyad dynasty.¹¹ Thus, Shia and Sunni trace their differences to a time 1400 years ago, according to the Islamic lunar calendar: “it was initially a legitimist movement born from a quarrel over the succession of Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century.”¹² As we shall see, however, cooperation as well as conflict has characterized Shia-Sunni relations in Kuwait.

Brief Geographical and Historical Background

Generally speaking, it is not a straightforward task to describe the Shia migration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Southwestern Iran formed part of the huge Iranian empire with its complicated administrative structure and internal affairs. Kuwait was a very tiny state at the northwestern end of the Persian Gulf region. It is necessary to go beyond both southwestern Iran and Kuwait to deal with its complexity. Indeed, the British, the Ottomans and the Gulf sheikhdoms should be part of this analysis for understanding the process of the Shia migration. Thus, it is relevant before moving further to provide a precise geography and political history of both regions.

The Persian Gulf connects the Mesopotamian heartland of the Middle East to the Indian Ocean world. It is bounded by lands of great religious, political and economic significance, such as the Arabian Peninsula on the southwest bank and Iran on the northeast bank. Long before the discovery and exploitation of oil, the Gulf was a bustling waterway for travel and trade in the Middle East and on its Mediterranean and Indian flanks. Rivers, marshes, and coastal sailing easily connected all parts of the northern ports of the Gulf, running from southwestern Iran to present day Iraq and Kuwait. More detailed

¹¹*Ashura* is the day when *Imam* Hussain, son of *Imam* Ali, and his family and fellows were killed because he refused to acknowledge the Umayyad ruler, Yazid Ibin Muaviyah, as an official and legitimate Islamic caliph for all Muslims.

¹²Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, p. 5.

descriptions of Kuwait city and southwestern Iranian provinces will be provided separately in the next two chapters.

In the late nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire and Qajar Iran no longer dominated the Gulf. The Gulf was increasingly an appendage of the British-dominated Indian Ocean trading world. Moreover, the Gulf had been eclipsed by the Red Sea after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Small powers typified by sheikhdoms and the emirates could assert themselves if they enjoyed outside, particularly British support. On the one hand, the rivalry and antagonism between the British and the Russian empires for hegemony and domination in the Gulf region helped Kuwait to be recognized as a political entity during the late nineteenth century. The Ottoman Empire continued claiming Kuwait as part of its empire and sporadically threatened British interests in the Gulf. Mubarak Al-Sabah (1896-1915), the founder of modern Kuwait, manipulated both the British and the Ottoman imperial powers in the course of establishing his modern state. On the other hand, Kuwait flourished economically and its harbor, *Khour Abdullah*, was considered the most important port facilities for trade within the Gulf and for trade linking Aleppo to the Indian Ocean. In addition, Kuwait's port during the late nineteenth century was considered the most efficient and prosperous compared to its neighbors. Regional merchants were attracted by tax-free status and the minimal fees that it charged. Furthermore, among its neighbors, Kuwait as a whole was one of the safest and most stable places where people could settle. Last but not least, there was already an established Shia community in Kuwait whose members had migrated from Bahrain, Al-Hasa (east Saudi Arabia) and Fars for a very long period of time.

In contrast, southwestern Iran in the nineteenth century had experienced considerable political, economic, and social instability. Iran became a victim of the Anglo-Russian rivalry for spheres of influence that has come to be known as the Great Game. The Ottoman Empire and Afghanistan also played a crucial role in this regard. Roxane Farmanfarmaian observes: "During the reign of the Qajars, pressures were being exerted upon the country from three directions: the north from Russia; the east from

British India and the new buffer state of Afghanistan; and the west from the Ottomans and the British in the Persian Gulf.”¹³

In particular, the southwestern regions were dominated by the British after the Herat War in 1856-57.¹⁴ From this war to the Anglo-Russian convention of 1907 and the partition of Iran into formal spheres of influence, Iran and the Gulf were part of a larger British strategic effort to secure India and bordering regions from Russian imperial expansion. India was the “jewel in the crown” and could not be lost. The Gulf was the background for British domination of southwestern Iran as well a key communication and trade route after the Suez Canal and the Red Sea.

In addition, even though Nassir Al-Din Shah (1848-1896) and his successor Muzaffar Al-Din Shah (1896-1907) had attempted to reform the state, the *A'yan* and the official governors of numerous provinces including Fars, embraced a contrary policy to serve their economic and political interests.¹⁵ Furthermore, natural disasters, floods, droughts and famines, particularly in Fars, increased the suffering of inhabitants of the region. Last but not the least, the expansion of two-way trade between the five major ports of Bushehr, Bandar Abbass, Bandar Ma'ashour, Bandar Dailam and Muhammerah in southwestern Iran and Kuwait had ultimately not only encouraged ordinary people to seek a better life in Kuwait but also attracted Iranian merchants and entrepreneurs for better business opportunities in Kuwait.

¹³Roxane Farmanfarman, “Editors’ Introduction,” *War and Peace in Qajar Persia: Implication Past and Present* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 5.

¹⁴There was an Anglo-Persian war over Herat, Afghani territory. It began in 1856 when the Shah announced that Herat was part of Iran’s territory and occupied it. Since this region which is located near Central Asia was very important to the British interest-- so that Clements Markham calls it “the key for India” --the British forced the Shah to withdraw from Herat and obliged him to sign a treaty approving Herat’s independence. After the Herat War, the British occupied southwestern Iran, including Fars, Khuzestan and the Persian coast. For details about the Herat War in southwestern Iranian provinces, see J. G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 1, Historical part 2 (Calcutta, India: 1908-1915; reprint Farnham Common, England: Archive Editions, 1986), 1691-1702; Hasan-e Fasa’i’s *Farsnama-ye Naseri, History of Persia under Qajar Rule*, trans. Heribert Busse (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1972), pp. 319-335; and Clements R. Markham, *A General Sketch of the History of Persia* (London: Longmans, Green, 1874), pp. 504- 509.

¹⁵For example, Nassir Al-Din Shah established justice-boxes or *sandugha-yi ‘adalat* for grievances and justice for his subjects but his endeavors never succeeded because they went against the provincial governor’s interest. For further details, see Vanessa Martin, *The Qajar Pact: Bargaining, Protest and the State in Nineteenth-Century Persia* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005), p. 25.

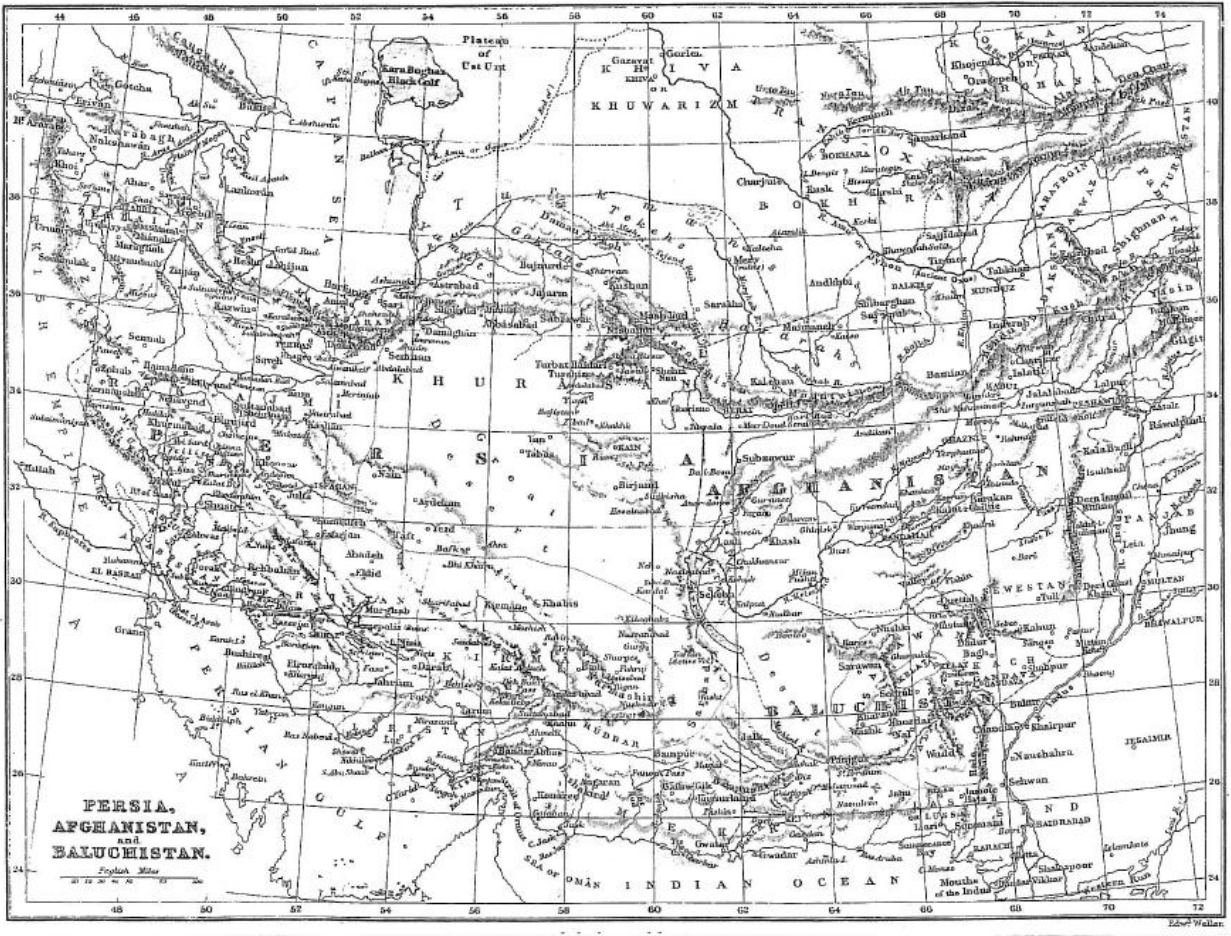


Figure 1: Map of Persia, Afghanistan, and Baluchistan. From Clements R. Markham, *A General Sketch of the History of Persia* (1874).

Scholarship

If we turn to the Kuwaiti historiographical literature that deals with the Shia migration to Kuwait, we encounter confusion over the main causes of the Shia migration and presence. Sami Al-Khaldei, an indigenous scholar, asserts that two important reasons for the Shia influx to Kuwait from the Gulf region were the search for a safer life and for commercial opportunities, especially when their original homeland experienced political disturbances, ethnic and tribal strife and the problem of sectarianism.¹⁶ Maymunah Al-Sabah, a local professor of history at Kuwait University, argues that both economic and political factors played roles in this migration. She rightly observes: “As a result of bad politics and economic conditions in Fars, Iraq, Najd and Al-Ehsah, many inhabitants of those areas, especially the wealthy among them, had migrated to Kuwait. Once there had been deterioration in trade in their home countries, the politically stable conditions and prosperous economy of Kuwait attracted the regional merchants to Kuwait, where they sought an outlet for their economic crisis. This movement helped them to continue their business in Kuwait. They gained privileges, such as opportunities for free trade and the same low rate of customs which indigenous Kuwaiti merchants paid, and these are the maximum benefits which merchants wished to obtain.”¹⁷

The role and achievements of the Shias are absent from standard Kuwaiti historiography.¹⁸ Abdul Muhsin Jamal, a scholar and previous Kuwaiti Shia member of the National Assembly of Kuwait or *Majlis Al-Ummah*, has made preliminary attempts to discuss Kuwaiti Shia history and Shia contributions throughout Kuwaiti history.¹⁹ To his credit, his work highlights the important roles of the Shias that generally are not discussed by either Kuwaiti or non-Kuwaiti scholars. Jamal, however, has

¹⁶Sami Al-Khaldei, *al-Ahzab al-Islamiyah al-siyasiyah fi al-Kuwayt* [Islamic political parties in Kuwait] (al-Kuwayt: Dar al-Naba lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzi, 1999), p. 91.

¹⁷Maymunah Al-Sabah, *al-Kuwayt, haḍarah wa-tarikh* [Kuwait is civilization and history] (Kuwait: M. al-Kh. al-Sabah, al-Tabah 1, 1989), pp. 286-287. My translation.

¹⁸Kuwait historiography, including the two major books by Ahmad Abu Hakima and Abd al-Aziz Rushayd, which are still taught in Kuwait, do not touch on the Kuwaiti Shia role and achievements in building the state of Kuwait. See Ahmad Abu-Hakima, *Tarikh al-Kuwayt al-hadith, 1750-1965* [The modern history of Kuwait 1750-1965] (Kuwait: Dhat al-Silasil, 1984) and Abd al-Aziz Rushayd, *Tarikh al-Kuwayt* [Kuwait's history] (Bayrut: Dar Maktabat al-Hayah, al-Tabah 2, 1962).

¹⁹He was a member of the National Assembly of Kuwait or *Majlis Al-Umma* between 1981-1985, 1992-1996 and 1999-2003.

failed to provide any explanation of Shia migration to Kuwait. He only shed light on the first Shia families, who settled down in Kuwait in the early eighteenth century and afterward according to traditional oral history.²⁰

Likewise, Laurence Louër, a foreign scholar and expert in Middle Eastern studies, has contributed to the study of the Shia migration in Kuwait to the context of Shia politics in the Gulf. To her credit, she pays closer attention to the Iranian context than do her scholarly counterparts in Kuwait, in order to provide a broader picture of the causes of Shia migration to Kuwait. She rightly observes: “Shia of Iranian descent(s) form the most important group demographically speaking. The first of them came around the second half of the eighteenth century, shortly after the Bani Utub’s settlement. Most of them were maritime traders from the coastal areas of Iran and were first and foremost motivated by developing their economic activities.”²¹

She correctly adds: “The flow of Iranians to Kuwait continues throughout the following centuries. It was influenced by internal Iranian developments as well as by the growing prosperity of the Arabian emirates as compared with the southern coastal regions of Iran. First, these regions witnessed regular harsh climatic conditions by the end of the nineteenth century, with a drought hitting the region of Bushehr which forced hundreds of families to the Arabian shore. Second, many Iranian merchants took up residence in Kuwait as well as in the other Arabian emirates to escape the new fiscal measures of the Iranian government. Faced with a severe financial crisis, the Qajar regime endeavored to enforce its effective control over the remote provinces which had become *de facto* autonomous areas, including the southern areas bordering the Gulf.”²²

Nelida Fuccaro, another foreign scholar on the modern Middle East and the Persian Gulf provides a wider analysis of the causes of the Shia migration in the Gulf, particularly in Bahrain. In *Mapping the Transnational Community*, she argues that several forces came into play, forcing a huge number of people

²⁰Abdul Muhsin Jamal, *Lamhat min Tarikh al-Shia fee al-Kuwayt: min Nash’at al-Kuwayt ela al-Esteglal* [Highlights from Shia history in Kuwait: From the establishment of Kuwait to independence] (al-Kuwayt: Dar Al Nab’a, 2005), p. 14.

²¹Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, p. 47.

²²Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, p. 48.

from the coastal regions to scatter into Arabian states including Manamah and Kuwait. According to her, the agricultural region of Busheher suffered from a scarcity of rainfall, which caused food shortages and famines in the late nineteenth century. New fiscal regimes established by the Iranian customs administration and managed by Belgian officials in the major coastal and commercial ports of southwestern Iran, such as Bandar Abbass, Busheher and Lingah also forced local merchants to switch to Arabian ports to escape high tariffs. Furthermore, crime, insecurity, and disease made Busheher unattractive.²³

It should be noted here that Charles Davies has produced an important secondary source of Fars' historiography.²⁴ His unpublished dissertation provides an analytical study of Fars from economic and political viewpoints. In fact, his innovative research is the only comprehensive study of Fars during the nineteenth century, and it has enormously helped to conduct this research.

It is thus seen that all previous accounts, whether by Kuwaiti or non-Kuwaiti scholars, present only part of the story about the causes of Shia migration to Kuwait. What has been accomplished by these scholars is very interesting and worth noting. However, the story so far narrated by them remains incomplete. In this light, the causes of the Shia migrations to Kuwait from its eastern boundary need to be completed in one individual and independent study by delving into different perspectives. By looking in great detail at Shia migration from southwestern Iran and using more primary sources that the abovementioned scholars did not consult, this thesis provides a richer account of that movement. This constitutes the most important reason for this research endeavor.

Concepts and Questions

Before discussing the migration process of the Shias of Iranian ancestry in Kuwait, it is important to provisionally characterize their presence in the Gulf region by categorizing their movement under either diaspora or migration. Stéphane Dufoix argues that migration phenomena can be classified into two

²³Fuccaro, *Mapping the Transnational Community*, pp. 45-46.

²⁴Charles Edward Davies, "A History of the Province of Fars during the Late Nineteenth Century" (Ph. D. diss., St. Antony's College, Oxford University, 1984).

categories, voluntary and involuntary, which, in turn, take place due to political and economic factors.²⁵ He also asserts that: “(a) diaspora must therefore have a number of factors involving the origin of the (voluntary or forced) migration; settlement in one or several countries; maintenance of identity and community solidarity, which allows people to make contacts between groups and to organize activities aimed at preserving that identity; and finally, relations between the leaving state, the host state, and the diaspora itself, the last of which may become a link between the first two.”²⁶ Although Dufoix’s concept of diaspora applies to the Shia community in Kuwait when sustaining the relationship either to its original homeland or to other diasporic communities elsewhere in the Gulf or the wider Middle East, the sources used in this thesis do not meet Dufoix’s criteria for a diaspora. Rather, for this study it is more appropriate to discuss the Shia presence in Kuwait simply in term of migration.

This leads us to emphasize Myron Weiner’s “push and pull” theory as a way to explain the “push and pull” factors propelling movement between southwestern Iran and Kuwait. According to Weiner, the concept of “push and pull” is the focal reason for migration from one community to another.²⁷ Accordingly, the push factor typified by difficult economic and political affairs in southwestern Iran from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries pushed large portions of the indigenous people. Southwestern Iran was then what we would consider a region of unrest. Those conditions played a crucial role in forcing people to migrate to Kuwait and many other places, such as Dubai, Sharjah, Abu Dhabi, Al-Doha, Basrah and Manamah involuntarily when they had the opportunity to do so. Weiner asserts, “Environmental degradation, droughts, floods, famines, and civil conflicts compel people to flee across international borders.”²⁸

Borders in the Gulf region had never been obstacles for migrations until physical boundaries were laid down by western imperial powers in modern times. Roxane Farmanfarmanian rightly argues that strict

²⁵Stéphane Dufoix, *Diasporas*, trans. William Rodarmor (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 59-60.

²⁶Dufoix, *Diasporas*, p. 21.

²⁷Myron Weiner, “Security, Stability, and International Migration,” *International Security* 17, no. 3 (Winter 1992-1993): 91-9.

²⁸Weiner, “Security, Stability, and International Migration,” 92.

borders in the Gulf were a creation of western imperialism and formed a part of its agenda for serving its interests in the region.²⁹ By contrast, the pull factors typified by the political stability of Kuwait from the establishment of the British Protectorate in 1899 to independence in 1961, and by its economic prosperity, attracted Iranian Shias. The fact that Kuwait was considered a safe region persuaded merchants to establish businesses under its rulers' protection in exchange for some tribute. Banditry, crime, high taxes and customs were much less in Kuwait compared to Iran. Tolerance of other religious faiths, such as Christian, Jewish and Shia, for the sake of building the state of Kuwait was another pull factor that helped Shias choose to settle in Kuwait. As Jill Crystal indicates, "In Kuwait, however, the unifying migration, the early sedentarization, better location, the large size of the settlement, the dependence on entrepot as well as pearling trade, the relative independence and the earlier political stability created a powerful and cohesive class of merchants. Kuwait entered the twentieth century with a settled and organized merchant class."³⁰ The migration paradigm has been applied here to investigate why the Shia migrations took place and continued. This will be elaborated in the two chapters that follow.

This thesis examines the interactional process of the Shia migration from southwestern Iran to Kuwait. It considers political, economic, and social dimensions of this process during the late Qajar period from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century (1880-1914). Thus it provides a micro-analysis of the Shia migration from southwestern Iran, including Fars, Khuzestan and the Persian Gulf coast place. My research seeks to answer the following questions about the situation in Iran. What were the internal circumstances of southwestern Iran, particularly Fars, that led people, especially merchants, from both the Shia and Sunni communities and from different classes, to migrate to Kuwait? Why did migration take place during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century? Did the causes include inter-tribal conflicts or family conflicts in southwestern Iran? Did the commercial endeavors of Iranian merchants to establish businesses in Kuwait play a part? Were there religious issues acting as a factor in the Shia migration? Were natural disasters and climatic issues, such as floods,

²⁹Farmanfarmaian, "Editor's Introduction," p. 7.

³⁰Jill Crystal, *Oil and Politics in Persian Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 33.

earthquakes and, drought-related famines, responsible for people fleeing their homeland? Did the spread of epidemic diseases, such as cholera and smallpox, also play a part? Did the tax policy of the Shah's government force Shia merchants to seek commercial fortunes in Kuwait? My research also considers conditions in Kuwait. What types of relationships had existed between the Sheikh of Kuwait and his subjects? Were the Shias welcomed or denied hospitality by the indigenous people and the Kuwaiti royal Al-Sabah family? What were the roles of the Shia artisans, laborers and merchants in building the modern state of Kuwait? Did the already existing Shia community influence the influx of the Iranian Shia in the late nineteenth century? Did the Shia immigrants contribute to the security and stability or generate conflicts in Kuwait? What were the challenges faced by Shia immigrants in Kuwait regarding their identity and sense of belonging? Did the Shia immigrants maintain connections with their original homelands and other Shia communities in the Gulf region? I hope that answering these questions in my research fill the lacunae in existing scholarship on the Shias in Kuwait.

Sources

Since this study sheds light on the causes of Shia migration from the eastern boundary of Kuwait in the late nineteenth century in the framework of the sheikhdoms, and the Ottoman and the British empires in the Gulf region, the primary sources that have been used in conducting this research are profoundly varied and numerous. This research relies on sources in two languages, Arabic and English, although a few individual archival Persian documents have been consulted as well. Numerous secondary sources in both Arabic and English are used in this research, but the primary sources are mostly in English.

Western travelogues, such as Clements R. Markham's, *A General Sketch of the History of Persia* (1874) offer an important view of Iran during this period. His book's appendix on the hierarchical organization of Iranian government is useful for understanding the administrative system of southwestern Iran. He also list important political incidents, such as the Babism movement and the Herat war during

the reign of Nassir Al-Din Shah.³¹ Likewise, Arthur Arnold in his memoir, *Through Persia by Caravan*, (1877) sheds light on Fars' sub-provincial divisions and its climate, the government tax system, and the various tribes who settled in Fars.³² George N. Curzon, who became Viceroy of India between 1899-1905, in his book *Persia and the Persian Question* (1892) highlights comprehensively the internal affairs of Iran in the late nineteenth century from political, economic, social, religious, and cultural perspectives. His analysis, particularly of southwestern Iran, provides an overview of the history of Fars within the framework of the Anglo-Russian division of the country into spheres of influence. He also visited Kuwait in 1903 and provided a positive impression about Kuwait's political stability. He gave credit to the port of Kuwait and its trade with southwestern Iran, specifically Muhammerah.³³ Many others, such as Edward Stack and S. G. W Benjamin, who had been to Fars during that time, have given us similar descriptions of Fars. However, some of the weaknesses of those sources are their inaccurate descriptions of provinces, districts and villages located in southwestern Iran. This was due to the complexity of Iran's administrative system.

Although these travelers provide insightful accounts of the regions they visited, it is important to remember Edward Said's concept of Orientalism. He cautions us about travel writing: "Many travelers find themselves saying of an experience in a new country that it wasn't what a book said it would be. And of course many writers of travel books or guidebooks compose them in order to say that a country is like this, or better, that is colorful, expensive, interesting, and so forth. The idea in either case is that people, places, experiences can always be described by a book, so much so that the book (or text) acquires a great authority, and use, even than the actuality it describes."³⁴ Thus not everything written by the travelers should be taken for granted. Thus I have also consulted *Farsnamah- 'i Nasiri* by Hasan Fasa'i which provides a history of Fars from an Iranian perspective. It is noteworthy that this source is still regarded as

³¹Markham, *A General Sketch of the History of Persia*, pp. 491-524, 558-559.

³²Arthur Arnold, *Through Persia by Caravan*, vol. 2 (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1877), pp. 78-81, 226-235.

³³George N Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 2 (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966), pp. 463, 575.

³⁴Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 93.

the most important source about Fars during the late nineteenth century.³⁵ By using available British, Iranian, and Kuwaiti sources, I hope to avoid the pitfalls of Orientalist representations of the Gulf region.

In addition, I have consulted British government records. Most of them have been republished by Archive Editions. The three most important sources are the *Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873–1957* vols. 2, 3, 4, 5; *The Persian Gulf Trade Reports 1905–1940*, vol. 1; and *The Affairs of Kuwait 1896–1905*, vols. 1, 2, edited by Robin Bidwell.³⁶ The first source describes the internal political and economic affairs of both Fars and Kuwait within the framework of two regional rival powers, the British and the Ottoman empires, and other imperial powers, such as Russia, Germany and France which were active in the Gulf during the period covered in this study. The second source documents the two-way trade between Kuwait's port and southwestern Iran's ports, including tables of exported and imported articles. Finally, the third source compiles the official reports and correspondence of British representatives, such as political resident (P.R.) and political agent (P.A.) in the Gulf, in the Busheher and officials in the British government of India regarding Kuwait's internal political, economic and military affairs. It also narrates the British strategic scheme against Ottoman, Russian and German influences in the Gulf region. Other comprehensive and important data on the geographical, political, and economic affairs of Kuwait and southwestern Iran can be found in *The Persian Gulf Précis 1903–1908* by Jerome Saldanha, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia* by J. G. Lorimer and *Record of Kuwait 1899–1961*, edited by A. de L. Rush.³⁷

In addition to British sources I have also used Arabic and Farsi language sources. Those are *Kuwait Political Agency Arabic Documents 1899–1949*, vols. 1, 2, and the business archive of the Kuwaiti

³⁵Fasa'i, *Farsnama-ye Naseri*, Heribert, trans, *History of Persia under Qajar Rule*.

³⁶*The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873–1947*, vols. 2,3,4,5 (London: Archive Editions, 1986); *The Persian Gulf Trade Reports 1905–1940: Bushire I 1905–1915* (London: Archive Editions, 1987) and Robin Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896–1905*, 2 vols (London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1971).

³⁷Jerome Saldanha and J. G. Lorimer were British officials in the beginning of the twentieth century. J. A.Saldanha, ed., *The Persian Gulf Précis 1903–1908*, vols. 5–7; J. G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, 14 vols (Calcutta, India: 1908– 1915; reprint Farnham Common, England: Archive Editions, 1986); and A. de L. Rush, ed., *Record of Kuwait 1899–1961: Internal Affairs 1899–1921*, vol. 1 (London: Archive Editions, 1989).

Shia merchant Haji Mohammad Alabdullah Almatrook.³⁸ Besides revealing the internal affairs of Kuwait from various perspectives, the value of this primary source is that it shows the correspondence between the Sheikh of Kuwait, Mubarak Al-Sabah and the British government regarding both countries' political interests, and the reports from the first Shia secret agent of the British in Kuwait, Ali ibn Gholam Rezza, to the British government. Almatrook's business archive contains documents about trade between Kuwait and Iran, Iraq, East Africa and India from the late nineteenth to the mid- twentieth centuries. It also indicates his specific relationships and partnerships in those regions with some Kuwaiti Sunni and Shia merchants, such as Nasser Abdulmohsin Al- Kharafi and Yousef Haider Marafie.

Interestingly, the value of Almatrook's archive is its numerous documents, such as transactions with banks, shipping agencies and insurance businesses as well as customs duties in Arabic, English and Farsi issued by the custom department of southwestern Iranian government and some other documents issued by the British government. This shows the interaction between Almatrook and the customs officials in southwestern Iranian provinces. In addition, there are price lists of different kinds of commodities which were exported and imported from India, East Africa and the Gulf region, specifically southwestern Iran. Lastly, the archive shows Almatrook's accounting system, illustrated by checks, transfers, and letters of credit between Almatrook and his clients and between Almatrook and other merchants in the Gulf region.³⁹ Although Almatrook passed away in Basra in 1958, his descendants had already settled in Kuwait and they are still considered one of the wealthiest Kuwaiti Shia families.⁴⁰

The Farsi documents I consulted for this thesis show Almatrook's license for trading in Muhammerah in 1895, his network with other Iranian merchants in southwestern Iran's districts, such as Shushter and Abadan, the duties that he owed to another Iranian merchant and finally his cable telephone bill for his commercial office in Muhammerah.

³⁸*Kuwait Political Agency* contains English reports translated from Arabic. *Kuwait Political Agency: Arabic Documents 1899-1949*, vol. 1 (London: Archive Editions).

³⁹*English Purpose: Website Purpose*, (accessed June 2, 2010); available from <http://bin-matrook.com/purpose2.html>.

⁴⁰For more details about Almatrook's individual business archive, see *Haji Mohammad Alabdullah Almatrook* (accessed April 14, 2010); available from <http://bin-matrook.com/index.html>.

My thesis also draws on oral interviews with members of several Kuwaiti Shia families. I conducted nine fruitful interviews with Kuwaiti Shia gentlemen in the summer of 2009 in Kuwait. The ages of the interviewees range between 60 and 90 years old and they belong to the same age-cohort. They were children of immigrants who came from southwestern Iran between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I am so grateful to all of them since they hosted me in their houses and offices to answer my questionnaires. The interviewees are: Abbass Haiat, a retired employee born in 1938; Jassim Ashkananei, a retired employee and recently an active journalist, born in 1948; Abduljalil Bouland, a business man born in 1945; Mohammad Mohammad Abd al-Hadi Jamal, born in 1942, a general consultant for the management of projects in the Industrial Bank of Kuwait, with several publications about the history and heritage of Kuwait and the Gulf; Habib Haiat, a former minister of communication in 1990-92, a former minister of state of housing in 1992-1994 and a former minister of public works in 1994, born in 1934; Kasim Abdulraheem, a businessman born in 1933; Yousuf Ali, an associate professor of sociology department at Kuwait University, born in 1950; and Mohammad Shamsah, a former businessman born in 1920; Abdulrasoul Behbehani, a law professor at Kuwait University and former dean of the College of Law and the head of the Fatwa and Legislation Administration in Kuwait. He is approximately 73 years old.

The interviews, which discussed the history of Shia migration from the establishment of Kuwait three centuries ago to the post-oil period, are very helpful. The interviewees discussed when, how and why their ancestors migrated from Iran, particularly from Fars, to Kuwait during the late nineteenth century. These interviews are also narratives based on an old oral tradition as to how and why the Shias began to migrate from adjacent regions of the Gulf. The value of their histories was to compare their cases studies with the primary sources I consulted in order to analyze the rationales of the process of Shia migration from their original homeland. Interestingly, these oral-history sources accord with much of what I have found in written primary sources. Thus, I have been able to integrate all my various primary sources to support my main argument.

My primary and secondary sources in Arabic, including the oral-history interviews, are translated by me. I am responsible for any errors and omissions.

Plan of Thesis

The next chapter is an analysis of southwestern Iran's conditions between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This period covers the reigns of Nassir Al-Din Shah (1848-1896) and his successor Muzafer Al-Din Shah (1896-1907) and shows how the province of Fars suffered many difficulties from official corruption to frequent natural catastrophes. These conditions pushed a large number of its people to the Gulf states, including Kuwait, once they had an opportunity to leave. Chapter three is an analysis of Kuwait's conditions between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It explores the internal political stability and economic prosperity encouraged by the Al-Sabah royal family, particularly during the reign of Mubarak I (1896-1915).⁴¹ It reviews the early history of the Shia migration from the time of the establishment of Kuwait in the early eighteenth century, as narrated in the old traditional history. It discusses some case studies of Shia families and the causes of their migrations from southwestern Iran, particularly Fars, to Kuwait in the late nineteenth century. Furthermore, it considers the two-way trade between southwestern Iran and Kuwait, including case studies of Kuwaiti Shia merchants, such as Hajj Mohammad Alabdullah Almatrook and some of the Al-Marafie family members. Lastly, it shows why these Shia families chose to migrate to Kuwait rather than elsewhere. The last chapter provides an epilogue and conclusion to this study.

⁴¹For more information about the Al-Sabah ruling family's genealogical history, see Alan Rush, *Al-Sabah: History and Genealogy of Kuwait's Ruling Family 1752-1987* (London and Atlantic Highlands: Ithaca Press, 1987).

Chapter Two

The Precipitants of Migration: Southwestern Iran during the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

This chapter examines the internal affairs of southwestern Iran from political, economic and social perspectives in the context of late Qajar decline and the rise of the Anglo-Russian spheres of influence (1880-1914). It is divided into three sections. “Geography and Climate” describes southwestern Iran’s provinces, districts and villages from which Kuwaiti Shia originally migrated. It also provides climatic information for the same region. “People and Government” describes the different ethnicities of the inhabitants in the region with estimates of their population in Iran overall and in some southwestern provinces, districts and villages. This section also discusses the structure of the administrative system of southwestern Iran and its inability to deter the instability of the region. Several examples show how governors of Fars failed to ensure a secure and decent life for their subjects. Rather, the governors and the *A’yan* exploited the inhabitants. Crime, banditry and plunder increased. Tax increases by the governors and merchants’ monopolies of the products challenged people’s ability to survive. “Disastrous Events and Deteriorating Conditions in Late Qajar Iran” describes chronologically environmental catastrophes, such as earthquakes, floods, famines and sundry kinds of fatal epidemics and diseases, such as cholera and smallpox, which contributed to the region’s instability and resulted in rebellions and flight of the indigenous people. Thus, the conclusion asserts that people who had an opportunity migrated either internally among southwestern provinces, districts and villages or externally to Kuwait and the Arab Gulf states. The two-way trade between southwestern Iranian ports and the Arab Gulf ports opened pathways for people pushed to the coast by the troubled conditions of the interior.

Geography and Climate

Before I proceed to discuss southwestern Iran's internal political, economic and social conditions, it is worthwhile to briefly describe the geography, climate and inhabitants of Fars, Khuzestan and the Persian Coast. However, it should be noted here that southwestern Iran is such a large and complicated territory that its borders are vague. In addition, understanding the geography of various subdivisions of southwestern Iran provides us a better picture of the original places from which the Shias migrated and how this migration took place. As a matter of fact, southwestern Iran can be divided into a number of provinces or *Oustans*, including Fars, Khuzestan and the Persian Coast. Each province has a capital and various counties or *Shahrestans* and every county has rural districts or *Bakhshes* and each district has big villages or *Dehestans*.¹

For Fars, there is no exact physical boundary separating it from Khuzestan, the Persian Coast and other provinces, due to Iran's complex administrative arrangements. Hence, it's difficult to determine the precise physical boundaries among the provinces.² However, Charles Davies describes Fars' geography in the late nineteenth century in his dissertation as follows: "Qajar Fars was a much larger entity than today, including not only the area inland round Shiraz but also most of Iran's Gulf littoral. Stretching from the west of Bushire to the east of Bandar Abbass, it was bounded to the north by Isfahan, Yazd and Kerman; in the west it adjoined Arabistan and in the east Baluchistan. The province was geographically and demographically diverse."³

¹All counties, districts and villages of Fars, Khuzestan and the Persian Coast from which the Shias migrated are including in this study. Fars province was divided into eleven *Shahrestans* according to *Historical Gazetteers*; Shiraz was the capital and Abadeh, Lar, Kazerun, Jahrom, Firuzabad, Neyriz, Fasa, Darab, Mamasani, and Estehbanat were major counties. Arthur Arnold, however, provides only six *Shahrestans*, such as Behbahan, Bushire, Lar and Salia, Bunder Abbas, Darale and Abadeh. For more details on these differences, see Ludwig W. Adamec, ed., *Historical Gazetteer of Iran: Abadan and Southwestern Iran*, vol. 3 (Graz-Austria: Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt, 1989), 240; and Arnold, *Through Persia by Caravan*, pp. 228-229.

²For example, sometimes many counties, such as Lingah and Bandar Abbass, were physically in the province of Fars but considered parts of the province of Khuzestan or the Persian Coast and vice versa, such as the case of Behbahan, which was a county located physically in Khuzestan but regarded as part of the Fars administrative system. Thus the sources often diverge on the jurisdictions to which specific locations belonged. For more information, see Adamec, *Historical Gazetteer of Iran*, p. 240.

³Davies, "A History of the Province of Fars during the Late Nineteenth Century," p. 5.

Khuzestan is the province west of Fars and east of Iraq. Shatt-Al-Arab and the Gulf Sea are in the southern of Khuzestan.⁴ In other words, it's a province located in the extreme southwest corner of Iran. Finally, the Persian Coast extends from Bandar Dilam on the northwest to Jashk on the southwest.⁵ J. G. Lorimer, however, provides a detailed description of the physical geography of the province of the Persian Coast, which comprises seven sections:⁶ "The Persian littoral tract is monotonous but not without variety of detail. It may be described in general terms as a narrow strip of flat land, situated between the sea and a great maritime range of limestone which runs parallel to the coast."⁷ As a consequence, a sort of barrier separates coastal and inland areas.

Generally speaking, the climate of Iran is varied. Southwestern Iran, in fact, experiences extreme heat with the soil almost burning during the summer from June to September and periodic rains and cold weather from December to the middle of February during the winter. Spring is usually moderate and pleasant. Fars can be divided not only according to its physical geography but also according to its climate. These are called *Garmsir* and *Sardsir* or the terrains of warm climate and cold climate. According to *Historical Gazetteers of Iran*, the former extends from the seaside to the latitude of Kazarun including districts of Laristan and Dashtistan. For agricultural produce, *Garmsir* terrains rely heavily on

⁴Khuzestan, or Arabistan, has eight districts: Dizful, Shushter (the capital of northern Arabistan), Hawizeh, Ahwaz, Mohammerah, Fellahieh, Deh Mullah and Ram Hormuz. For more details, see Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 2, p. 320.

⁵Adamec, *Historical Gazetteer of Iran*, p. 484.

⁶The first section consists of coastal districts of Liravi and Hayat Davud and the inland district of Shabankareh, the second section the districts of Rud-Hilleh, Angali, Dashtistan and Busheher with some smaller districts of Zira and Mazara'I, the third section the districts of Tangistan and Dashti, the fourth section Shibkuh and Lingah, the fifth section the sea-front of Bastak district, the sixth section the Shamil and the last section the district of Minab and Biyaban. Lorimer provides a detailed table of those districts which can be found in Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 2 B Geographical and Statistical, pp.1457-1463.

⁷Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 2 B Geographical and Statistical, p. 1457.

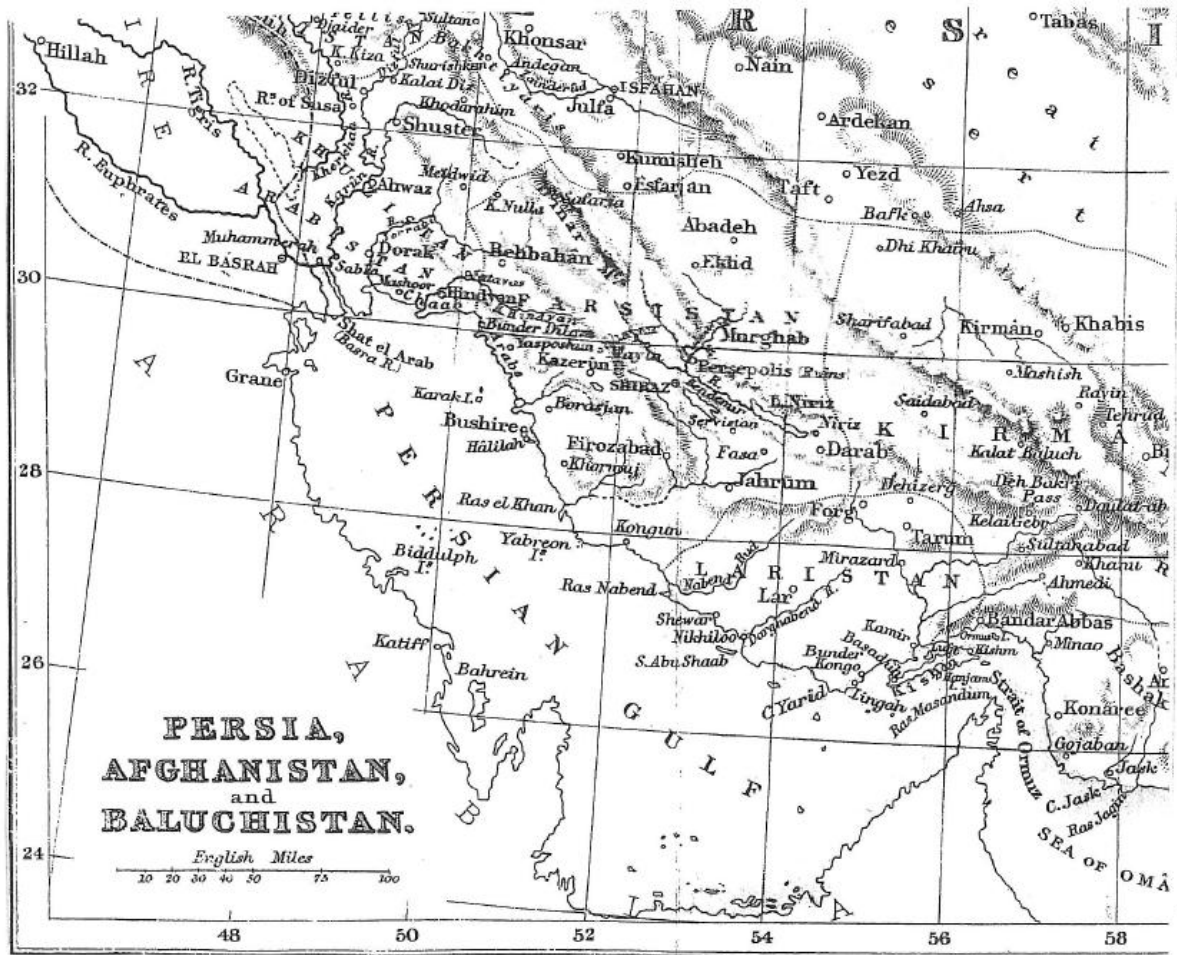


Figure 2: Detail map of Persia, Afghanistan and Baluchistan showing the Persian Gulf and surrounding territory. From Clements R. Markham, *A General Sketch of the History of Persia* (1874).

periodic rain and failure of rainfall usually caused draught, resulting in the lower productivity of agriculture and attendant famines. *Sardsir*, according to John M Kinneir, extends from the latitude of Kazarun to the Yezdekhash, which comprises most of the mountainous regions of Fars. In other words, the former is related to the lowlands and the latter to the highlands, as indicated by Arthur Arnold.⁸

For Fars, the upper section of the province, *Sardsir*, is cooler and healthier than the lower section, *Garmsir*.⁹ The climate of Khuzestan or Arabistan typically varies according to its subdivisions.¹⁰ Though northern Arabistan experiences high temperatures during the day, the night is usually cool during the summer season. The weather in the winter is moist, especially in the upper section of the region. Southern Arabistan has a warmer climate during both summer and winter. For example, the average temperature in Muhammarah during the year varies from 32 F. to 115 F.¹¹ The Persian Coast climate is typically similar to that of the lowland of Fars or *Garmsir*.

People and Government

The difficulty of determining an exact physical geography for the southwestern provinces could apply to their populations as well. Not only there was no official population census in the late nineteenth century, but also there were many environmental catastrophes, such as earthquakes, floods, famines, droughts and the spread of diseases which frustrated population estimated for Iran as a whole.¹²

However, an unofficial estimate of the overall population of Iran and those of some provinces, districts

⁸For more details, see Adamec, *Historical Gazetteer of Iran*, p. 242; John M. Kinneir, *A Geographical Memoir of the Persian Empire* (London: John Murray, 1813 reprint New York: Arno Press, 1973), pp. 54-55; Arnold, *Through Persia by Caravan*, p. 227.

⁹Usually the *Sardsir* region, such as Shiraz, has snow in the winter. However, the Shia migration took place from the *Garmsir* region and no records indicate that came from *Sardsir* region, including Shiraz, since the distance between Shiraz and the littoral region is too far.

¹⁰Khuzestan or Arabistan is divided into two parts, Northern Arabistan, which consists of the districts of Dizful, Shushter, Ramuz and Aqili, and Southern Arabistan, which is divided into the districts of Ahwaz, Fallahiyeh, Hawaizeh, Hindiyan, Jarrahi, Muhammarah, and Ma'ashour. The former is cooler than the latter and snowfall is experienced in the mountainous region. However, that is not the case in the Gulf Coast. For more details about Khuzestan's climate, see Kinneir, *A Geographical Memoir of the Persian Empire*, pp. 106-107.

¹¹For a more detailed comparison of Northern and Southern Arabistan, see Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 2 A, Geographical and Statistical, pp. 152-159.

¹²Mortality was incredibly high in 1886-87 in south Persia. "Administration Report on the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Maskat Political Agency for 1886-1887" in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947*, 11 vols. (London: reprint by Archive Edition, 1986), vol. 3, p. 11.

and villages has been suggested by scholars of Iranian studies.¹³ *The Cambridge History of Iran*, for example, states: “By the middle of the century the population increase was limited by periodic outbreaks of famine and cholera and by 1868 it was probably no more than nine and a half to ten millions. From 1869-72 there was a countrywide famine accompanied by cholera and other epidemics. This brought about a sharp decrease in the total population. Estimates of the loss of life vary, but the probable figure is about one and a half million. On this assumption the population would have been no more than eight to eight and a half million in 1873. In the last quarter of the century there was renewed growth and by the end of the century the population was probably about ten millions. Throughout the century there were considerable regional fluctuations in the distribution of population, due not only to famine and epidemics, but also to internal disorders and commercial movements.”¹⁴

Although there was no statistical population census of the Fars, Khuzestan and Persian Coast regions during that period of time, the *Historical Gazetteer of Iran* and *Gazetteers of Persia* provide some estimates of populations in several southwestern counties, districts, and villages during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries.¹⁵ In this respect, the population of southwestern Iran mostly consisted of both Arabs and indigenous Iranians or *Ajams* and a mixture of the two sects of Shias and Sunnis, although

¹³According to Lewis Pelly, an estimate of Bunder Abbas’s population in 1864 was 8,000 or 9,000. Lewis Pelly, “Visit to Lingah, Kishm, and Bunder Abbass,” *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 34 (1864): 251-258.

¹⁴Avery, Hambly and Melville, eds., *The Cambridge History of Iran: from Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), vol. 7, pp. 469-470.

¹⁵For example, the district of *Larsitan* in Fars province had 90,000 Arabs and Persians; *Lingeh* district had 12,000 souls which were divided into 5000 Arabs, 5,000 Persians, 1,500 Africans, 24 *Khawajas* or foreigners, 16 Hindus and three Europeans; *Girash* village in the district of *Laristan* in Fars province had 3,000 souls; *Avaz* in the same district and province had 3,000 in 1888, which decreased to 1,000 in 1914; *Shushtar* in 1914 in Khuzestan province had 21,999 souls; *Dashti*, a district of the Persian Coast or sometimes considered under Fars province had 20,000 Arab Shia; *Bastak*, a capital of *Laristan* district was comprised of 4,000 to 5,000 Sunni inhabitants; *Behbahan* a district in Khuzestan or Fars province was sometimes composed of a mixed blood of both Arabs and Persians totaling 39,874 souls; and *Bushire*, a district in the Persian Coast province sometimes considered part of Fars contained 251,920 inhabitants. For more details about the southwestern populations, see Adamec, *Historical Gazetteer of Iran*, pp. 485, 495, 284, 337, 65, 711, 194-5, 119, 126-7, 146 and India. Quarter Master General's Dept. Intelligence Branch, *Gazetteer of Persia*, vol. 3 (Simla: Printed at the Government Central Printing Office, 1885-1905).

the latter was a minority not only in the region but also in Iran overall.¹⁶ Members of other groups, such as Kurds, Armenians, Jews, Hindus and westerners, also lived in these regions in the late nineteenth century.

According to Frederick Shoberl, the population of Iran could also be classified into two categories, the stationary residents who usually settled in *Dehestans* and the wandering tribes or nomads, which constituted huge numbers of southwestern Iran's population, usually roaming in the different zones according to the season.¹⁷ During the summer, nomads temporarily settled into mountainous provinces, whereas during the winter they moved to mud villages on plains land with their flocks.¹⁸ For instance, some tribes, such as *Iliat*, settled in the *Sardsir* region of Fars during the winter season and in Khuzestan province during the summer.¹⁹

Not only southwestern Iran but also the whole of Iran witnessed hardships during the Qajar period (1780-1921), particularly in the nineteenth century. The Qajar dynasty had inherited the political, economic, social, religious and administrative mores and systems of the previous dynasty, the Safavid.²⁰ The Shah in Qajar Iran as in the Safavid dynasty was the shadow of the God on earth and "he has absolute command over the life and property of every one of his subjects."²¹

Accordingly, two factors disturbed Iran politically and economically. The external factor, which is the first factor as explained in the introduction, was that Iran in the nineteenth century came under the

¹⁶*Ajams* means people who don't speak Arabic and is usually a term used by Sunnis to indicate people who came to Kuwait from Iran.

¹⁷Frederick Shoberl, *Persia: Containing a Description of the Country with an Account of its Government, Laws, and Religion, and of the Character, Manners and Customs, Arts, Amusements, etc. of its Inhabitants* (Philadelphia: Grigg & Elliot, 1845), p. 19.

¹⁸S. G. W Benjamin, *Persian and the Persians* (London: John Murray, 1887), p. 136.

¹⁹For more details about different categories of the Persian population in 1884, 1888 and 1891, see Charles Issawi, ed., *The Economic History of Iran 1800-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 33.

²⁰Fasa'i, *Farsnama-ye Naseri*, Heribert, trans, *History of Persia under Qajar Rule*, p. vii.

²¹Curzon. *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, p. 391.

Anglo-Russian spheres of influence.²² The British were dominant particularly in the south and the Russians in the north. Both of them were disliked by the indigenous people. The Iranian people resented the British when the latter established their foothold in southwestern Iran with a view to expanding their trade worldwide and to establishing hegemonic control vis-à-vis the Ottoman and Russian empires after the second Herat War in 1856.²³ Furthermore, the advent of the steamship helped the British Empire to assert its control and prevent any European power, such as France and Germany, from dominating the Gulf region. Britain justified its intervention in the region in the name of eliminating the slave and arms trades. In fact, controlling the Gulf region was part of its policy and strategy to act as a superpower, because the Gulf was considered a vital link between London and India, the crown jewel of all the British colonies in the world. This policy was amply justified by Lord Marquis Lansdowne, a secretary of state for foreign affairs (1900-1905), in his official report: “This, I take it, is the ‘bed rock’ of our policy in the Gulf, and we shall pursue that policy, not in virtue of ambiguous understandings with local Chiefs, but as the predominant Power in Southern Persia and in the Gulf: the Power whose commercial interests in those regions far exceed those of the other Powers, the Power to whose efforts in the past it is due that the waters of the Gulf are open to trade of the world, and whose duty it will be in the future to protect the new trade route.”²⁴

Not surprisingly, Iranian people, supported by Muslim clergy or *ulama*, had resisted British invasion in southwestern Iran as part of the Holy War (*Jihad*).²⁵ The *ulama* were anxious about the rising

²²For more information about the Great Game in Iran, see Mansour Bonakdarian, *Britain and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911: Foreign Policy, Imperialism and Dissent* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006).

²³The first Herat War started in 1838. The first actual appearance of British power in the Gulf came at the beginning of the seventeenth century, specifically in 1617 at Jask, and at Qishm and the Hormuz islands, when the Portuguese were forced to leave the Gulf region. Percy Cox, “Some Gulf Memories,” *The Times of India Annual*, (Bombay, 1928) (No page); and James Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 43.

²⁴“Further Correspondence Respecting the Affairs of Koweit” (1902-1905), in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 2, p. 54.

²⁵For more details about the process of the Herat War from its beginning to its end, see “Précis of the Affair of the Persian Coast and Islands” (1854-1905) in Saldanha, ed., *The Persian Gulf Précis 1903-1908*, vol. 7, pp.49-56.

foreign presence and its influence on Islamic society. Therefore, they fought the British army in Busheher and many other districts, but sophisticated British weaponry and numerical superiority (5:1) over the Iranians helped the British to win and impose the terms of an unequal treaty to their benefit.²⁶ Merchants also joined this resistance movement to defend their homeland. Another ostensible purpose of their resistance was the rigid competition they faced from foreign merchants. Foreign trade around major Iranian ports had been in Iranian merchants' control at the beginning of the nineteenth century. However, European merchants, including the British, now overshadowed the Iranian merchants, who started complaining about the privileges given to outsider traders, which continued up to World War I.²⁷ As a result, the indigenous people of Iran came to believe that Iran had practically been divided into two regions, British and Russian, during that time period.²⁸ Although we should note that the Iranian tobacco protest in 1891-1892 and the Iranian constitutional revolution in 1906-1911 were important political events, my thesis does not address them because I am concerned with the condition of the peripheries rather than matters of the central government in Tehran.²⁹

As to the internal conditions in Iran, which was the second factor contributing to make Iran an unsettled region, poor communications between the central government in Tehran and its far-flung provinces, including the southwestern provinces, had helped provincial governors exercise autonomous powers and govern their subjects unjustly during the first half of the nineteenth century. However, after the construction of the first telegraph line in 1858-59 by the British administration, the Shah was able to extend his nominal power over the governors of remote provinces.³⁰ This new communication system also

²⁶Fasa'i, *Farsnama-ye Naseri*, Heribert, trans, *History of Persia under Qajar Rule*, pp. 326-334.

²⁷Avery, Hambly and Melville, eds., *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 7, p. 600. An approximate estimate of Europeans in Iran in the middle of the nineteenth century was 150 souls and by the end of the century it increased to 800 to 1000 souls due to trade. In that period, British subjects in Iran were 191 and British Indians were 754, constituting respectively, according to Charles Davies, 29% and 68.5% in Fars. Ann k S. Lambton, *Qajar Persia: Eleven Studies* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), p. 207, and Davies, "A History of the Province of Fars during the Late Nineteenth Century", p. 272 (footnote).

²⁸Edward Stack, *Six Months in Persia* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1882), vol. 1, p.80.

²⁹For more information about abovementioned incidents, see Bonakdarian, *Britain and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911*, pp. 12-17, and Martin, *The Qajar Pact*, pp. 3-4.

³⁰Other scholars, such as Nikki Keddie, assert that the first telegraph in Iran was established in 1862. Nikki R. Keddie, *Qajar Iran and the Rise of Reza Khan 1796-1925* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers,

enabled Iran to connect with the outside world.³¹ Charles Davies rightly observes about Fars: “In political terms the 1850’s were a turning point when for the first time Fars became a more firmly integral part of Iran, and after which centralization of various kinds went apace. In economic terms the 1860’s were the century’s turning point with regard to foreign trade and that conducted with other parts of Iran.”³²

Although the middle of the nineteenth century witnessed the beginning of the increase of the Shah’s power over his numerous provincial governors,³³ it did not eliminate the powerful local governors altogether because “governors always in practice enjoy a very high degree of autonomy in the conducting of provincial affairs, and directives from Tehran seem for the most part to have been worded in broad terms.”³⁴ George Curzon, later a viceroy of India (1899-1904), also emphasized the autonomy of the provincial administrations of Iran during the late nineteenth century by saying, “the Persian provinces and administrative districts at the time of my visit in 1889 probably exhibit a larger number of independent posts and functionaries than at any recent period of Persian history.”³⁵ Furthermore, the governors of the provinces only reluctantly showed obedience to the Shah from an economic perspective as well, although they were obliged to send the provincial revenues to the central government every year.³⁶ Thus the Qajar government was far from centralized as Lois Beck observes: “The Qajar central government maintained a weak hold on the provinces, and the Shah’s sons, uncles, and nephews who served as provincial governors often exercised relatively autonomous rule.”³⁷

1999), p. 34. The British recognized the importance of the telegraph to maintain worldwide communication as part of their imperial hegemony.

³¹Avery, Hambly and Melville, eds., *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 7, p.183.

³²Davies, “A History of the Province of Fars during the Late Nineteenth Century”, p. 2.

³³The administrative system of Iran is very difficult and complicated to illustrate. However, simply speaking, each province had its own governor with his own title, who was usually a relative of the Shah, and each district had its own governor too and each village had its own *Khan* or paramount chief.

³⁴Davies, “A History of the Province of Fars during the Late Nineteenth Century”, p. 7

³⁵Curzon. *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, p. 437.

³⁶Every governor had his administrative nickname according to his province or district. For more details about governor’s titles in Iran during the late nineteenth century, see the appendix of Markham, *A General Sketch of the History of Persia*, pp. 558-561.

For example, the central government was incapable of collecting taxes from its districts due to insecurity, riots and rebellions against the conditions in Fars in 1886. Davies, “A History of the Province of Fars during the Late Nineteenth Century,” p.442.

³⁷Lois Beck, *The Qashqa’i of Iran* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 62.

The autonomous rule exercised by governors of those assorted provinces was the second internal factor that contributed to make Iran, particularly the southern part, an unsettled region. In fact, those governors had created what Vanessa Martin called “their own militia”³⁸ in order to protect their own interest and power no matter what consequences it had for the welfare of their people, although it was not appropriate for a governor of Fars to interfere, for example, in Khuzestan’s affairs and vice versa.³⁹ Therefore, the best way to clarify the internal political, economic and social conditions in southwestern Iran during the late nineteenth century is by shedding light and elaborating on the bureaucratic and administrative corruption among the governors, such as bribery, raising the tax rate, which usually became a burden on the lower class, and many other cases of oppression, chaos, and rebellion by indigenous people in different provinces, districts and villages.

Since a huge number of Kuwaiti Shia migrated from the province of Fars, it is worthwhile to focus more on the conditions in Fars, although some cases from Khuzestan and the Persian Coast are included here. Politically, Fars’ official governor, stationed in its capital Shiraz, was the official in charge of the region and a few groups also participated in and influenced the political life of the region: the notables, or local *A’yan*, who were very powerful and wealthy families; the high ranking administrative officials, such as the *Khanei* or *Ilkhani*, who was responsible for collecting the tax; other members of the chancellery; and finally, the financial officials of the government or *Divan*.⁴⁰ The clash and antagonism among the *A’yans* themselves and with the governors was responsible for undermining any reforms and prosperity in the region due to their political and economic interests. The best example is the case of the vizier of Shiraz, titled *Mushir ul-Mulk*.⁴¹ According to Captain E.L. Durand: “It was the policy of the all-powerful Mushir to keep the province in a state of ferment for his own advantage. Several powerful

³⁸Martin, *The Qajar Pact*, p.14.

³⁹Historical sequences of Fars’s governors, from 1873 to 1904 in Busheher and Bandar Abbas are available in “Précis of the Affair of the Persian Coast and Islands” (1854-1905) in Saldanha, *The Persian Gulf Précis*, vol. 7, pp. 4-6, and Davies, “A History of the Province of Fars during the Late Nineteenth Century,” p. 545.

⁴⁰Davies, “A History of the Province of Fars during the Late Nineteenth Century,” pp. 9-10.

⁴¹He was a very powerful man of the region and through his networks he influenced the decision makers to do what he wanted them to do. For more details about his influence, see Davies, “A History of the Province of Fars during the Late Nineteenth Century”, p. 108.

Chiefs enjoyed his support and protections, and in return he obtained a large *madakhi* (outcome) out of the proceeds of their robberies. The end of this state of things was the recall of Yahya Khan as being unable to keep the province in order.”⁴²

Another indication of the weakness of the governor was apparent when he made alliances between the provincial government and different tribes to control the region due to the lack of military force in Fars. Otherwise, it was very difficult to preserve law and order.⁴³ In this respect, throughout the late nineteenth century, particularly from 1880 to the beginning of the twentieth century, all Fars’ governors except Farhad Mirza or *Mo’etemed-ul-Dowleh* (1876-81) were considered non-reformists and were unable to confront tribal plunder, banditry, *A’yan* influence, rebellions, tax burdens, crime, insecurity and many other problems in various districts and villages of Fars.⁴⁴ Mirza was the only governor who dared to challenge and restrict the *A’yan*’s influence and *Divan*’s political power in the region in order to ensure justice and welfare for the people. Therefore, there were attempts to overthrow Mirza by the *A’yan* and *Mushir ul-Mulk*.⁴⁵ They did not succeed and were jailed by Mirza. Another case also shows how Mirza imposed strict policy on the region: When *Shikh Mazkoor*, governor of Kangoon or Congoon, assaulted and plundered a village in the region and killed some people in 1879, Mirza arrested him, put in jail and executed him in 1883.⁴⁶

However, all reforms in the region initiated by Farhad Mirza during his short five-year reign were undone, because none of the later governors followed his example. This can be drawn from the following:

⁴²Report by Captain E.L. Durand quoted in Davies, “A History of Province of Fars during the Late Nineteenth Century,” p. 110.

⁴³R.M., Burrell and Robert Jarman, eds., *Iran Political Diaries 1881-1965*, (London: Archive Edition, 1997), vol. 2, p. vii.

⁴⁴According to different sources including the western ones, Fars’ administration was managed successfully by Farhad Mirza, who was able to unite different parts of Fars under his control. Unlike other governors, he was also not involved in hypocrisy. He encouraged education by awarding scholarships and promoting literacy. He also never disappointed his people when they asked him for help. For more details about Farhad Mirza’s reign and his reforms, see Fasa’i, *Farsnama-ye Naseri*, Heribert, trans, *History of Persia under Qajar Rule*, 386-413; Davies, “A History of the Province of Fars during the Late Nineteenth Century,” pp. 113-126; and “Précis of the Affair of the Persian Coast and Islands” in Saldanha, *The Persian Gulf Précis*, vol.7, p. 10; and *Gazetteer of Persia*, vol. 3, p. 232.

⁴⁵Davies, “A History of the Province of Fars during the Late Nineteenth Century,” pp. 125-126.

⁴⁶“Précis of the Affair of the Persian Coast and Islands” in Saldanha, *The Persian Gulf Précis*, vol.7, p 11.

“From the day of his arrival in Fars onward, he ordered independent people to inquire into the oppression of thieves and highway robbers and took notes of their names and features in his own handwriting; he appointed governors of the districts and tribes on the principal condition that they seize the thieves and evildoers. Every governor who arrested a thief or an evildoer was granted special favors and a robe of honor. When a wrongdoer (*moqasser*) was brought before him, he was punished in accordance with his crime; nobody’s mediation was accepted. By these means thefts, lies, crime, and oppression were eradicated in the province of Fars within a short period.”⁴⁷ After Farhad Mirza, Fars and other southwestern Iranian provinces witnessed backward conditions. The corrupt and greedy bureaucratic government system, for example, played a substantial role in preventing Iran from developing. The extortion of ordinary people by the governors, whether to cover the fiscal obligations of their provinces to the central treasury or for their own interest, which had been collected constantly as “governmental revenue,” also forced indigenous people to migrate to adjacent settled regions if there was any opportunity to do so. For instance, since the wages of government employees, including the official local governors, judges and other minor government representatives, were low and at the same time they had to give presents to the high officials in order to retain their positions every year, the outlet for this quandary was to increase the customs and tax rate on lower-class people, such as peasants.⁴⁸

Different kinds of “presents,” called *pishkesh* or *hadyiya* which was a form of a bribe, were exchanged between the official governors and their subjects, including the *A’yan*.⁴⁹ This could happen among the governors themselves as well. For example, the Shah received a *pishkesh* every year during Iranian New Year (*No Ruz*) from his provincial governors.⁵⁰ It is also evident that complaints of maladministration by the provincial governors could be raised by the subjects, including merchants and

⁴⁷Fasa’i, *Farsnama-ye Naseri*, Heribert, trans, *History of Persia under Qajar Rule*, p. 405.

⁴⁸Samuel Graham Wilson, *Persian Life and Customs: With Scenes and Incidents of Residence and Travel in the Land of the Lion and the Sun* (New York, Chicago: F.H. Revell, 1895), pp. 179-180; Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, pp. 440, 444; and Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 2, p. 485.

⁴⁹*Pishkesh* or *hadyiya* are equivalent to “gift.”

⁵⁰The Shah expected that this gift would be extracted from the provincial revenues that went every year to the central treasury. Avery, Hambly and Melville, eds., *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 7, p 496; and Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, p 445.

A'yans, if they could somehow succeed in passing the complaints through the higher ranked governors or the Shah. However, the best way to escape punishment and keep their jobs was by offering a bribe to the appropriate administrator or the judge under the name of *pishkesh*.⁵¹ Furthermore, a lot of timid people gave *hadiyah* to the official governors in order to be protected from false accusations.⁵² Due to the prevalence of this obvious and constant phenomenon there was a common proverb in Fars that said: "The teeth become blunt from eating anything acid, the teeth of the judge and governor become blunt from eating sugar cane."⁵³ This malpractice was usually exchanged under the table, and mostly the Shah was ignorant of it. Curzon observes: "The Shah, meanwhile, is quite unaware of, or is powerless to detect, the embezzlement practiced by his subordinates, upon whom, in the absence of responsible supervision from above or free criticism from below, it is impossible to keep a watch."⁵⁴

Not only did the provincial governors and *Ay'an* not welcome the reforms and prosperity of the region but also the *ulama* participated in this negative practice due to their vested interest, which is an added internal factor of Iran's backwardness. Since they influenced both the educational system and the judiciary throughout their tenure, they were afraid of losing their power and control over those two areas if the provinces were tied more closely to the central government in Tehran. Thus the Shah was unable to confront both *ulama* and *A'yan* who thwarted his planned reforms.⁵⁵

A further internal factor which made southwestern Iran an unpleasant place to live or work was insecurity, which was due to the weakness of the central government's control over its provinces, both militarily and financially. Moreover, the number of semi-autonomous tribes who practiced thievery, robbery, banditry and plunder had increased not only for the sake of booty but also due to the economic

⁵¹Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, p 445.

⁵²For more detail about different kinds of bribes practiced in Fars, see Fasa'i, *Farsnama-ye Naseri*, Heribert, trans, *History of Persia under Qajar Rule*, p. 375.

⁵³Fasa'i, *Farsnama-ye Naseri*, Heribert, trans, *History of Persia under Qajar Rule*, p. 375.

⁵⁴Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, p. 448.

⁵⁵Keddie, *Qajar Iran and the Rise of Reza Khan 1796-1925*, p. 40.

distress and “the structure of the society and social relations”⁵⁶ in the region at that time.⁵⁷ The antagonisms among themselves, which led sometimes to revenge, also contributed to the backwardness of the region. Curzon asserts, “One tribe has been pitted against another tribe, one chief against another chief; and thus the animosities of individuals or communities have served the purpose while relieving the purse of the sovereignty.”⁵⁸ Finally, the avaricious and corrupt government officials and soldiers cooperated with the regional tribes in looting and hustling travelers, pilgrims, natives, foreign merchants and local people, either for booty or revenge.⁵⁹

Though between 1850 to 1914 Fars was considered the Iranian province which experienced the most banditry after Khorasan and Azerbaijan, it’s hard to estimate the amount of robbery, banditry and plundering cases in each district and village, due to the scarcity of English sources in this regard.⁶⁰ However, all sources consulted in this research condemn the tribal interactions, which inevitably contributed to the backwardness of the area. For instance, Hasan Fasa’i in *Farsnama-ye Naseri* states the following about the internal conditions of Fars in 1875: “In the middle of that year, everywhere in the province of Fars, except Kuh-c Giluya, criminals began to rob the highways; wide stretches of the province were alarmed about stealing; raping, and plundering, and guilty and innocent people earned a bad reputation. The governorship of the districts of Fars were not altered.”⁶¹

Another case shows how merchants were extremely dissatisfied with Fars’s government. Charles Davies has commented on the conditions in Fars in the late nineteenth century thus: “In addition to the above and mishandling by government of certain commercial cases, the native merchants had always

⁵⁶Mansoureh Ettehadieh, “Crime, Security, and Insecurity: Socio-Political Conditions of Iran, 1875-1924,” in Roxan Farmanfarmaian, ed., *War and Peace in Qajar Persia: Implications Past and Present* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 181.

⁵⁷Usually the tribes paid a tribute or tax to the government treasury, in cash or in kind. *Gazetteer of Persia*, vol. 3, p. 84.

⁵⁸Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 2, p. 272.

⁵⁹Ettehadieh, “Crime, Security, and Insecurity: Socio-Political Conditions of Iran, 1875-1924,” 176-178; and Shoberl, *Persia*, p. 60. Some regional tribes’ names are the Baharlou, Qashqai, Bakhtiari and Fielhi tribes.

⁶⁰During 1875-1903, Fars had 168 cases of theft and 318 cases of banditry. For more details, see Ettehadieh, “Crime, Security, and Insecurity: Socio-Political Conditions of Iran, 1875-1924,” pp. 177-180.

⁶¹Fasa’i, *Farsnama-ye Naseri*, Heribert, trans, *History of Persia under Qajar Rule*, p. 385.

been aggrieved at the authorities' failure to combat insecurity. During the present period this became a particular issue in 1886, 1891-2 and 1896."⁶²

Not surprisingly, situations in both Khuzestan and the Persian Coast were not much better than those in Fars during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The tribes not only practiced robbery and banditry but also caused disturbances in the region. For example, Ka'ab's tribe, particularly the Al-Nassar branch, continuously disobeyed and rebelled against Sheikh Jabir Khan or *Nusrut-ul-Mulk*, governor of Muhammerah (1862-1881) and later his sons Mizal Khan or *Mu'azz-us- Saltaneh* in 1883 and 1887.⁶³ During the reign of Sheikh Khaz'al or *Muez-es-Sultaneh*, another son of Jabir Khan, Al-Nassar tribes declined to pay the annual tax in 1903 and an armed rebellion was attempted as a mark of disobedience to the governor.⁶⁴ In Fellahieh, another district in Khuzestan, Ka'ab's tribe succeeded in deposing its official governor Sheikh Abdullah Khan in 1893 and appointed Sheikh Ja'afir the new governor instead. Thus, the Khab's tribe was so powerful that sometimes they even challenged superior governmental control in the region.⁶⁵

As a result of a serious outbreak of insecurity and disturbance in the region, "a considerable gun running operation passed through Fars, and the majority of people, even simple peasants, were armed"⁶⁶ in order to protect themselves against any oppression or suppression caused either by the provincial tribes or the government representative, such as the *Khan*. The arms trade became more pronounced and increased during the late nineteenth century.⁶⁷

⁶²Davies, "A History of the Province of Fars during the Late Nineteenth Century," p. 407.

⁶³Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 1, Historical part 2, pp. 1684-1685; and "Administration Report on the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Maskat Political Agency for 1883-84 and 1887-88" in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947*, vol. 3, pp. 1883-1890 (England: Archive Edition, 1986), pp. 9, 12.

⁶⁴"Administration Report on the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Maskat Political Agency for 1893-94" in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947*, vol. 4, 1890-1899, p. 9.

⁶⁵Ettehadieh, "Crime, Security, and Insecurity: Socio-Political Conditions of Iran, 1875-1924," p. 178.

⁶⁷Davies, "A History of the Province of Fars during the Late Nineteenth Century," p. 363; and Fatimah bint Muhammad ibn Sulayman Furayhi, *Tijarat al-silah fi al-Khalij al-Arabi, 1297-1333 H/1879-1914 M* [Arms trade in the Arabian Gulf: 1879-1914m /1297-1333h] (al-Riyad: Darat al-Malik Abd al-Aziz, 2004), p. 124.

Another solution open to the indigenous people to escape exploitation and violence practiced by the arbitrariness of local governors or tribes was to migrate to another district or province in order to find a peaceful life, although some of them preferred external migration for good, especially for the purpose of avoiding revenge.⁶⁸ Shahnaz Nadjmabadi observes: “There was no control, and the population was exposed to the arbitrariness of the rulers. They did not possess legal means to defend themselves against exploitation and violence; their only option was to migrate from one place to another with the hope of being exposed to less exploitation elsewhere.”⁶⁹

Disastrous Events and Deteriorating Conditions in Late Qajar Iran

Not surprisingly, given its geology, Iran has historically been the most susceptible to earthquake among its neighbors. For example, a severe earthquake hit Shiraz, capital of Fars, on May 1853 and caused the taxes imposed by the Tehran government to rise, although mortality ranging between 4,000 to 10,000 people was recorded.⁷⁰ In the same province, Behbahan in 1879, Khunj and Firuzbad in 1885 and Fasa in 1893 were also hit by earthquakes.⁷¹ Likewise, Bastak, another town located in north Lingah port in the province of Fars, experienced an earthquake in 1880-81 which caused the death of 120 people and destruction of many houses.⁷² Busheher, which was the British Residency and the commercial and political center of British imperialism in the Gulf, had also been exposed to earthquakes in October 1883 and November 1887.⁷³ Kangoon ports and Asloo and Tahiri, other villages in Fars, were also subject to that catastrophe in 1883.⁷⁴ Finally, the Bander Abbass port experienced an earthquake in 1902.

⁶⁸Shahnaz Nadjmabadi, “The Arab Presence on the Iranian Coast of the Persian Gulf” in Lawrence G. Potter, ed., *The Persian Gulf in History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 134.

⁶⁹Nadjmabadi, “The Arab Presence on the Iranian Coast of the Persian Gulf,” p. 139.

⁷⁰Another earthquake occurred in the same region in 1824. See Davies, “A History of the Province of Fars during the Late Nineteenth Century,” pp. 52, 53, 168, 169, 171, 172, 517.

⁷¹Davies, “A History of the Province of Fars during the Late Nineteenth Century,” p. 173 (footnote).

⁷²“Administration Report on the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Maskat Political Agency for 1880-81” in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947*, vol. 2, p. 10.

⁷³“Administration Report on the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Maskat Political Agency for 1883-84 and 1887-88” in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947*, vol. 2, pp. 8, 14.

⁷⁴“Administration Report on the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Maskat Political Agency for 1883-84” in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947*, vol. 2, pp. 8, 14. For more descriptions of Fasa, Firuzbad, Kangoon and Tahiri, see *Gazetteer of Persia*, vol. 3, pp. 234, 242, 312.

Constant flooding was another environmental phenomenon that contributed to the tribulation, especially for people in the seafront regions.⁷⁵ Fasa, for example, suffered from flooding which followed the earthquake in 1893, rendering 15.000 inhabitants homeless with no food.⁷⁶ In Khuzestan province, Muhammerah suffered from a severe flood in 1896.⁷⁷ Ahwaz in 1893 and Ma'ashour and its adjacent villages, located in southern Khuzestan province, at the beginning of the twentieth century were also overwhelmed by floods.⁷⁸

Finally, diverse kinds of fatal epidemics and diseases, such as cholera, smallpox, and plague, were widespread in southwestern Iran, particularly in the major ports that had been linked through trade with the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean regions.⁷⁹ Indeed, cholera, the most common epidemic, spread through Iran during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, which sometimes affected the Iranian economy when trade with the Gulf and the Indian Ocean countries was suspended because of the contagious nature of this disease.⁸⁰

Although *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports*, the *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf Oman and Central Arabia*, and Charles Davies offer historical details of numerous outbreaks of different kinds of diseases, including cholera, in almost all parts of southwestern Iran from the beginning of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth centuries, I will only provide some cases which show that this region

⁷⁵For example, an attempt by Iranian merchants to build a sea wall in Busheher to prevent flooding in 1884. "Administration Report on the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Maskat Political Agency for 1884-85" in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947*, vol. 3, p. 8.

⁷⁶During this catastrophe, the government increased the tax rate. See Davies, "A History of the Province of Fars during the Late Nineteenth Century," p. 517 (footnote).

⁷⁷Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 2 B. Geographical and Statistical, p. 1264.

⁷⁸"Administration Report on the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Maskat Political Agency for 1893-94" in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947*, vol. 4, p. 10; and Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 2 A. Geographical and Statistical, p. 146.

⁷⁹Cholera appeared in Iran for the first time in 1821, transmitted from Baghdad via trade, although it had been confined to the Indian subcontinent at the beginning of the nineteenth century. R. M. Burrell, "The 1904 Epidemic of Cholera in Persia: Some Aspects of Qajar Society," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*. 51, no. 2 (1988): pp. 258-270.

⁸⁰For example, Sheikh Khaz'al, Amir of Muhammerah, temporarily forbade any vessels to travel between his region and Basra due to the outbreak of cholera in Basra at the beginning of the twentieth century. Burrell and Jarman, eds., *Iran Political Diaries 1881-1965*, p. 269.

was more vulnerable to diseases than its counterpart in Kuwait.⁸¹ Busheher experienced cholera in 1851, 1869, 1871 and 1893 and smallpox in 1879 and 1902- 1909. Dashti and Tangistan, two districts in the province of Fars, also experienced cholera in 1889 and southern littoral regions of the Persian Gulf witnessed the same disease in 1893.⁸² By the same token, cholera visited Arabistan in 1893 and Behbahan, Shushter in the same year.⁸³ Muhammerah, Ahwaz and Dizful were exposed to cholera in 1889 and smallpox visited Muhammerah in 1901.⁸⁴ Plague was recorded in Busheher in 1899 and in Lingah in the Persian Coast province in 1904.⁸⁵ Disease outbreaks forced the British Residency to establish a sanitarian station in Fars and “quarantine was imposed at Busheher and in the Gulf in 1869, 1871, 1876-7, 1878-9, 1881, 1883, 1889 and 1893”⁸⁶ in order to prevent disease transmission by trade or pilgrimage. In fact, different kinds of environmental catastrophes profoundly contributed to decrease public security in the region and it was logical for people to move as best they could, either temporarily or permanently, to survive.

Although agriculture all over Iran was very rich and productive due to the country’s fertile soil, the southwestern region usually relied heavily on periodic rainfalls for good harvests.⁸⁷ Scanty rainfall, on the one hand, could cause severe droughts and famines, such as the ones which occurred in 1871-72 and 1897-98, and too plentiful rainfall, on the other hand, could destroy the harvest, which occurred in 1884-

⁸¹Southwestern Iran’s ports were considered transnational centers of trade with Indian Ocean countries, Africa, Europe, and the Gulf ports. Unlike Kuwait, southwestern Iran was a highly productive agricultural area, exporting its agricultural produce to the rest of the world. It will be discussed in the next chapter.

⁸²Davies, “A History of the Province of Fars during the Late Nineteenth Century,” pp. 184-198; “Administration Report on the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Maskat Political Agency for 1889-90” in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947*, vol. 3, p. 17 (appendix); and Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 1 part 2. Historical, p. 2555.

⁸³Shushter and Dizful were exposed to cholera in 1904. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 1 part 2. Historical, p. 1739.

⁸⁴Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 1 part 2. Historical, pp. 1678, 2555; and “Administration Report on the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Maskat Political Agency for 1889-90” in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports. 1873-1947*. vol. 3, pp. 17, 18 (appendix).

⁸⁵“Administration Report on the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Maskat Political Agency for 1899-1900” in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947*, vol. 4, p. 2; and Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 1 part 2. Historical, p. 2539.

⁸⁶Davies, “A History of the Province of Fars during the Late Nineteenth Century,” p. 197.

⁸⁷For more information about Iranian agricultural production, see Wilson, *Persian Life and Customs*, p. 166.

85 and 1904-05.⁸⁸ Locusts also damaged crops during the years of 1890, 1893, 1895, 1896 and 1902 in different parts of the province of Fars.⁸⁹ Inadequate cultivation could affect merchants and paralyze trade in the region, because Iran relied heavily on the commodities produced in its various provinces.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, all the above scenarios occurred several times and therefore rebellions and riots by indigenous people took place not only due to natural disasters but also due to exploitation by the merchants, *A'yans* and governors, who raised the prices of essential goods, such as bread, grain, barley, etc. For instance, Fars and the Persian Coast suffered from scarcity of rainfall in 1879-1880. Dashtistan was particularly affected due to a poor harvest that year.⁹⁰ Though harvests between 1881 and 1884 were much better, they became worse between 1885 and 1888, according to the *Persian Gulf Administration Reports*, and the consequences were enormous in the sense that prices of foodstuffs increased as a result.⁹¹ The same authority reported insufficient rainfall during the years 1890, 1892, 1895, 1897, 1901 and 1902 in the province of Fars, and since poor harvests could cause famines, the Iranian government stopped exporting wheat and other grains.⁹² Even though grain was imported from India to compensate for the loss, merchants still raised their prices.⁹³

Gad Gilbar asserts that the price of goods doubled in Busheher between 1880 and 1890.⁹⁴ It was even more disappointing for the indigenous people when the central government in Tehran increased

⁸⁸“Administration Report on the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Maskat Political Agency for 1897-98 and 1904-05” in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947*, vols. 4 1890-1899 and 5 1899-1905, pp. 9, 1.

⁸⁹For more information on the abovementioned years, see *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947*, vol. 4, 1890-1899 and vol. 5 (1899-1905), pp. 9, 23, 7, 9, 1.

⁹⁰“Administration Report on the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Maskat Political Agency for 1879-80” in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947*, vol. 2, 1879-1883, pp. 6, 62.

⁹¹In all those years there were constant bread riots and revolts by hungry people against the provincial government. For more details, see “Administration Report on the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Maskat Political Agency for 1885-86, 1886-87 and 1887-88” in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947*. vol. 3, 1883-1890 (London, Archive Editions, 1986), pp. 7, 8, 11, 13.

⁹²See reports of abovementioned years in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947*, vol. 4 1890-1899 and vol. 5, 1899-1905, pp. 17, 23, 8, 5, 17, 20.

⁹³A.L.P. Burdett and A. Seay, eds., *Iran in the Persian Gulf 1820-1966*, vol. 2 (Slough: Archive Editions, 2000), p. 95.

⁹⁴He also provides a list of retail prices of basic commodities in Busheher between 1877 and 1900. See Gad G. Gilbar, “Trends in the Development of Prices under the late Qajar Iran, 1870-1906,” *Iranian Studies*, 16, no. 3/4 (1983):177-198.

taxes in the province, although the agricultural harvest during that time was insufficient.⁹⁵ The provincial governors also contributed to this price rise because they lacked decisive authority against the merchants' monopoly. Hungry and poor people were obliged to steal in order to survive, and different tribes took advantage of riotous conditions to loot numerous retail stores, such as bakeries, claiming it was necessary for their survival.⁹⁶ Another case shows how the subjects were dissatisfied with the governor of Fars in 1866 and 1867 during the second reign of Sultan Murad Mirza or *Hosam os Saltana*. The indigenous people assembled at the entrance of a government building and started shouting "Hosam os Saltana is the cause of the high price of bread. We are not content with him. He must leave the town," and they continued raising their voices and saying "We want either grain and bread or the governorship of *Hosam os Saltana*"⁹⁷ although the latter distributed grain among the bakers free of charge.

Chaos in the region could also be created by indigenous merchants, when the customs department of the Iranian government started imposing new customs duties. The merchants' resistance could result in rebellion, which might not only affect trade but also bring the region itself to a standstill. This happened in Busheher in 1900 when merchants rejected the new duty imposed by the custom house of Fars, although the government was finally successful in imposing the same customs duty later that year. This was explained by C. A. Kemball, British Political Resident of the Persian Gulf: "At first it was intended to impose a uniform import duty of 5 percent *ad valorem* on all goods imported into Persia by the native merchants instead of the hitherto prevailing specific rates. This proposal, however, was stoutly opposed, and the native merchants of Bushire and Shiraz refused to clear their goods from the custom house. For a month or more business was entirely suspended, and goods imported remained uncleared and it was feared that serious disturbances would occur. The Persian government, therefore, decided to introduce a new tariff on a sliding scale, which would be more favourable to the native merchants than the proposed 5

⁹⁵Davies, "A History of the Province of Fars during the Late Nineteenth Century," p. 515. Usually the tax rate differed from one province to another, from one district to another and from one village to another.

⁹⁶Davies, "A History of the Province of Fars during the Late Nineteenth Century," pp. 348-524.

⁹⁷Fasa'i, *Farsnama-ye Naseri*, Heribert, trans, *History of Persia under Qajar Rule*, p. 357

percent rate.”⁹⁸ Thus, rebellions and riots due to food price increases, tax rate increases and merchants’ monopolies show the instability in the region and highlight how Iranians were dissatisfied with their daily life due to a variety of political, social and economic factors. In other words, life was increasingly difficult for people in the region as conditions continued to deteriorate.

The increase in trade between Kuwait and southwestern Iran contributed to constant internal migration of artisans and laborers seeking job opportunities on Iran’s Gulf coast. Therefore, it is not surprisingly that the records of commercial interactions between both regions show that Kuwaiti and Iranian visitors and merchants were traveling back and forth either on Kuwaiti or Iranian merchants’ ships or on British ships. This was indicated, for example, by the British telegraphic reports such as the following: “Perseus at Koweit. Sphinx leaves Busheher today for same place, conveying residents.”⁹⁹ At first they migrated from their own districts and villages in the inland areas of southwest Iran to the rural districts adjacent to seaports.¹⁰⁰ This movement exposed them to interaction with the outside world, and gave them a chance to migrate overseas.¹⁰¹ Iranian merchants also left their original districts and sometimes settled at nearby seaports, either for trade or to work for high officials. For example, Hajj Muhammad Ali, who was originally a merchant from the Behbahan district, settled in Muhammerah to work as an advisor and minister for Sheikh Khaz’al during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁰²

⁹⁸“Administration Report on the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Maskat Political Agency for 1900-1901” in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873–1947*, vol. 5, 1899-1905, p. 3.

⁹⁹“Further Correspondence Respecting the Affair of Koweit” (1901), in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 1, part 3, p. 76.

¹⁰⁰In Busheher, for example, they worked as blacksmiths, goldsmiths, carpenters, masons, water carriers, and in many other trades. For more details about those jobs and their average wages, see *Gazetteer of Persia*, vol. 3, p. 145.

¹⁰¹Issawi, ed., *The Economic History of Iran 1800-1914*, p. 50; and Ettehadieh, “Crime, Security, and Insecurity: Socio-Political Conditions of Iran, 1875-1924,” p. 176.

¹⁰²Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 2, Geographical and Statistical, p. 161. Many other people migrated internally from the province of Fars to Muhammerah due to scarcity in their home region. “Administration Report on the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Maskat Political Agency for 1895-96” in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947*, vol. 4, p. 76.

Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, there is no doubt that southwestern Iran, particularly the province of Fars, experienced adverse political, social and economic conditions during the period under consideration. Charles Davies summarizes the situation in Fars: “Famine and diseases were ever-present dangers and life in general was always insecure. Even the richest and most powerful, like *Mushir ul-Mulk*, could lose everything at one blow and merchants or householders seldom expected full recompense for their losses. Life for the poor was especially uncertain. Punishment could often be merciless and quite horrifying. Corruption and the abuse of power were rife.”¹⁰³

In addition to the above external and internal factors in southwestern Iran which were part of the migration process, two-way trade between southwestern Iran’s ports and Kuwait’s port was also a key factor contributing to migration during the late nineteenth and mid twentieth centuries. Merchants and ordinary people increasingly sought to escape suppression and exploitation by their provincial governments and find a place where they could live peacefully. Thus merchants “were induced to leave the Iranian coast and shift their commercial centers to Arab countries, including Kuwait and the UAE.”¹⁰⁴ The role of trade in the migration process will be discussed further in the next chapter, which will show how Kuwaiti Shia merchants and their networks fostered trade between the two regions, contributing profoundly to the building the state of Kuwait.

¹⁰³Davies, “A History of the Province of Fars during the Late Nineteenth Century,” p. 543

¹⁰⁴Nadjmabadi, “The Arab Presence on the Iranian Coast of the Persian Gulf,” p. 140.

Chapter Three

The Attractions of Migration: Kuwait during the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

This chapter explores the internal conditions of Kuwait from political, economic and social perspectives within the framework of the Gulf sheikhdoms, the British and Ottoman spheres of influence and other foreigner powers between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is divided into three sections. “Kuwait: Geography, Climate, Population and Economy” discusses the physical location of Kuwait in the context of its relation to the Ottoman provinces, Iran, and the other sheikhdoms in the Gulf region. It deals with the climate, environment, and demographic profile of Kuwait. In addition, it sheds light on the major sources of revenue for Kuwait, such as pearling and fishing and trade between the Gulf states and with India. “The Rise of Kuwait under the Al-Sabah Dynasty” presents the origin and consolidation of the Kuwait state from its first ruler according to traditional history of Kuwait. This section emphasizes Mubarak Al-Sabah’s reign and his political and diplomatic efforts in manipulating the Ottoman and British empires to place the country under a British Protectorate in 1899 and build up the modern state of Kuwait. “The Shia Presence in Kuwait” narrates the early Shia presence in Kuwait according to Kuwaiti oral history and goes on to illuminate the Shia migration from southwestern Iran to Kuwait during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through some family histories. Finally, it examines the Shia contributions to the Kuwaiti economy and the state of Kuwait overall.

Kuwait: Geography, Climate, Population and Economy

The *Kut*, which means a small fort or castle, was the original historic place from which Kuwait derived its name.¹ The state of Kuwait comprises 6,000 square miles or approximately fifteen thousand square kilometers, although Kuwait lost Safwan and Umm Qasr to Iraq in 1913 and two-thirds of its terrain to Saudi Arabia in 1922.² Kuwait is located on the northwestern corner of the Persian Gulf. It is about eighty miles south of Basra, one of the provinces of the Ottomans, one hundred eighty miles west and slightly north of Busheher, and two hundred and eighty miles northwest of Bahrain.³ Al-Hasa, which forms part of the Arabian Peninsula is South of Kuwait. Finally, the Persian Gulf, and across it, the southwestern Iranian ports lie to the east of Kuwait.⁴ Of course, although southwestern Iran is directly across from Kuwait, it does not share a physical frontier with Kuwait. Iraq stands between them. The nomadic tribes or Bedouin of the Arabian Peninsula move back and forth throughout the Gulf region since no physical borders were drawn yet. They sojourned in different states grazing their cattle, trading with their caravans, and maintaining their tribal ties with far-flung relatives. Kuwait was of interest because it served as a trans-shipment point between the Gulf and Mesopotamia, on the one hand, and the Gulf and India, on the other hand. It was not controlled directly by the Ottomans, such as Basra or by

¹Some sources refer to the town of Kuwait or Koweit as “*Grane*” which means “horn” because the bay of Kuwait is similar to a horn in shape. Lewis Pelly, “Report of a Journey to the Wahabee Capital of Riyadh in Central Arabia” in *Journal of a Journey from Persia to India: Through Herat and Candahar* (Bombay: Printed for the Government at the Education Society Press, 1866), p. 10; and Charles Rathbone Low, *History of the Indian Navy 1613- 1863* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1877), p. 323.

²Khazal, *Tarikh al-Kuwayt al-siyasi* [Political history of Kuwait] vol.1, p15. “*Al Awazem*” *Estakaro Fee “Alkuwait” Kabl Ta’asees Al Kian Al seiasey* [Alwazem tribe had settled in Kuwait before founding of the political entity] *Al-Watan Newspaper*, March, 6 2010 (accessed May 18, 2010); available from <http://www.alwatan.com.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?Id=11999>. This happened in the *Uqair* conference, when Sir Percy Cox, the British agent in the Persian Gulf (1904-1913) tried to solve a border dispute between Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Cox gave a large portion of Saudi Arabia’s border to Iraq and compensated the former by ceding two thirds of Kuwait to Saudi Arabia in order to satisfy the latter. Major More, the British political resident agent who represented Kuwait during that time, kept silent and never objected. For more details about the *Uqair* conference, see H. R. P. Dickson, *Kuwait and Her Neighbours* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956), pp. 270-278; and Michael S. Casey, *The History of Kuwait* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), pp. 55-56.

³Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 2 B, Geographical and Statistical, p. 1048.

⁴Kuwait also possesses several islands, including Warba, Bubian, Makan, Failaka, ‘Auha, Kubbar, Qaru, Umm Alnamel and Umm al Maradim. Dickson, *Kuwait and Her Neighbours*, p. 30; and Rushayd, *Tarikh al-Kuwayt* [Kuwait’s history] pp. 32-33.

Iranians at the same time but it was governed and orderly unlike Arabian tribal areas to the west of Kuwait.

The climate of Kuwait has two extreme seasons, hot summer and cold winter. Kuwait experiences a moderate climate between March and May and another period of moderate climate between October and December.

Unlike other centers in the Persian Gulf area, Kuwait has a dry climate except for a few weeks only of humidity in May and September. Rainfall, scanty and irregular, is confined to the period between late October and early March. When showers are early, and occur at proper intervals of time, there is sufficient grazing for the flocks; and during seasons of ample rainfall the desert does veritably “blossom as the rose.” Not all plants put in their appearance each year, but well over 100 varieties have been identified. Temperatures reach 110 degrees Fahrenheit by June, climb rapidly, and maintain a uniformly steady level of 115 to 117 degrees Fahrenheit until late September. Higher temperatures have been recorded, but do not remain for long. Snow and ice are unknown as the thermometer seldom reaches the freezing point. The *shimal*, a northerly wind which blows steadily for some four or five weeks in early mid-summer, is welcomed as a breeze, but also dreaded, as the sandstorms it brings plague mariner, townsman, and Bedouin alike. However, the dry climate and lack of water serve the Kuwaiti, for malaria and fevers prevalent in other ports of the Persian Gulf and in the neighboring country of Iraq are not indigenous to the Kuwait area.⁵

Kuwait’s land is flat and sandy, covered by deserts. Most of its lands are barren due to the lack of pure water. Thus “neither Kuwait town nor its environs can boast of any agricultural resources.”⁶ The village of Jahra, which is eighteen miles west of Kuwait, had the most fertile land in the country compared to other parts of the state due to its soil composition and the availability of some wells and oases. Though a few agricultural products, such as date and vegetables, grew in Jahra, these were not enough to meet the food needs of Kuwaitis.⁷ However, Jahra was a transit point for Bedouin shepherds grazing their cattle. It was also a stopping place for Bedouin traders who came from the central Arabian

⁵Mary Cubberly Van Pelt, “The Sheikdom of Kuwait,” *Middle East Journal* 4, no. 1 (Jan., 1950): 12-26.

⁶Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 2 B, Geographical and Statistical, p. 1052.

⁷Sayf Marzuq Shamlan, *Min tarikh al-Kuwayt* [From Kuwait history] (al-Kuwayt: Dhat al-Salasil, 1986), p. 86; Khazal, *Tarikh al-Kuwayt al-siyasi* [Political history of Kuwait], vol. 1, p. 25; and Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 2 B, Geographical and Statistical, p. 1052.

Peninsula with their camel caravans to Basra or Aleppo in order to trade animal products, such as dairy and animal hides.⁸

For Kuwait's population there was no certified census registered by the government similar to southwestern Iran's. However, some estimates have been made by British officials and some scholars, although there are conflicts among them in this regard. Generally speaking, Kuwait's population consists of a mixture of immigrants Arab, Bedouins and *Ajam* of Iranian descent from both Sunni and Shia sects from adjacent regions. Jews also settled in Kuwait at times in the past.⁹ The Arabs and Bedouins, including the royal Al-Sabah family, had mostly migrated from the interior of the Arabian Peninsula, especially from the central Najd plateau. Sunni Arabs form what is considered the majority of Kuwaiti people.

A report by Stavrides, a British employee, in 1896 estimated that Kuwait's population was 50,000 people.¹⁰ J. G. Lorimer, an official of the British Indian Civil Service, provides minute details of Kuwait's population between 1908 and 1915. He indicates that the population of Kuwait was about 35,000 souls belonging to various Arab tribes and Iranians; the latter constituted approximately 1,000 souls.¹¹ For Iranian inhabitants, he observes:

The Persian community consists of about 1,000 souls; its members do not inhabit a separate quarter but are scattered through the town; nearly all of them are permanently settled at Kuwait, nevertheless they go and come freely between Kuwait and the parts of Persia to which they originally belonged. Persian merchants are about a score; over 100 Persians are shopkeepers; 200 of the remainder are penniless labourers who live from hand to mouth.¹²

⁸Batoul Hassan, "Ideology, Identity, and Linguistic Capital: A Sociolinguistic Investigation of Language Shift among the Ajam of Kuwait," (Ph. D. diss., University of Essex, 2008), p. 19; and Dickson, *Kuwait and Her Neighbours*, pp. 61-62.

⁹According to Lorimer, they were approximately 100 to 200 souls. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 2 B, Geographical and Statistical, p. 1051.

¹⁰"Correspondence Respecting Affair at Koweit" (1896-99), in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 1, 1896-1901, part 1, p. 1.

¹¹Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 2 B, Geographical and Statistical, p. 1051. Those estimates were only for Kuwaiti Shias who migrated from Iran. There were also Kuwaiti Arab Shias who migrated from Bahrain, Iraq, and Al-Hasa in Saudi Arabia. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

¹²Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 2 B, Geographical and Statistical, p. 1051.

Modern observers also provide demographic estimations of Kuwait during the same period. For instance, Sami Al-Khaldei indicates that from the beginning to the middle of the twentieth century Shias constituted more than 50 percent of the population but governmental policy of providing Kuwaiti citizenship to a huge number of people called “Bedouins” during the 1960s and 1970s had reduced the percentage of Shia population in Kuwait to 35 percent.¹³ Mary Cubberly Van Pelt also estimated that the Iranian inhabitants in Kuwait between 1915 and 1940 numbered about 10,000.¹⁴

From the establishment of *Kut* to the discovery of oil, the country relied heavily on the Gulf resources. Fishing and pearling were the main means to extract resources, and Kuwaiti sailors and their ships came to be considered the best in the Gulf.¹⁵ Fishing and pearling, a seasonal activity which usually took three to four months every year during the summer, and few local industries, such as wools and animal hides, were the major revenues of Kuwait. Unlike southern Iraq and southwestern Iran, Kuwait was considered a barren land and it was not possible to produce daily necessities, such as wheat, barley, rice, etc. Thus it relied heavily on importing those goods from Iraq and Iran in order to provide for its inhabitants.¹⁶ Therefore, trade either with the Gulf states and India through the Gulf, or through land routes with the central Arabian Peninsula, Mesopotamia and Aleppo was another important source of revenue for Kuwait. Kuwait imported some goods, such as dates, horses and camels from Basra and southwestern Iran, in order to trans-ship them to India. In return, Kuwait imported spices, grains, timbers, and ropes from India. Frederick Anscombe indicates: “Traders were the richest, most influential members of society, especially in ports such as Kuwait and Doha that had no cultivatable hinterland. They exported pearls, dates, date syrup, clothing (*abba* cloaks), camels, horses, donkeys and hides, importing in turn

¹³This was to increase the ratio of Kuwaiti Sunni against their counterpart the Shia since there was no significant ratio differences. Al-Khaldei, *al-Ahzab al-Islamiyah al-siyasiyah fi al-Kuwayt* [Islamic political parties in Kuwait], pp. 91-92.

¹⁴Van Pelt, “The Sheikhdome of Kuwait,” p. 13.

¹⁵Most of sailors, fishermen and pearl-divers were Kuwaiti Sunnis. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 2 B, Geographical and Statistical, p. 1053.

¹⁶Kuwait also imported and exported different kind of goods in trade with some cities in India, such as Bombay, Karachi and Calcutta. See tables no. 1 and 2 of imports and exports recorded by the British agent in Kuwait, S. G. Knox. “Administration Report on the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Maskat Political Agency for 1904-1905” in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947*, vol. 5. 1899-1905, pp. 157-159.

food, spices, coffee, textiles, and metals.”¹⁷ Thus Kuwait was a poor country compared to its big neighbors.

The Rise of Kuwait under the Al-Sabah Dynasty

All sources agree that the political foundation of Kuwait was shaped by conflicts.¹⁸ The traditional account states that one leader of the Bani Khalid tribe, a very powerful tribe which dominated most of the east Arabian Peninsula in the eighteenth century, built the *Kut* either in 1651 or in 1669, as a warehouse for weapons and ammunition due to constant wars with other tribes in the region.¹⁹ In the first quarter of the eighteenth century, Al Utub tribe, a branch of the great Anaiza tribe including Al-Sabah, Al-Khalifa and Al-Jalahima, migrated from central Arabia and settled in Kuwait in 1716 under the protection of Bani Khalid.²⁰ Those tribes paid tribute to Bani Khalid and the latter, in return, protected them. The root causes of Al-Sabah’s, Al-Khalifa’s and Al-Jalahima’s migrations from their place of origin are subject to disagreements among the scholars. One theory suggests that they migrated from central Arabia to escape the effects of drought occurring during that time. Another theory suggests that after they migrated from central Arabia, they were compelled to move by the Ottoman threat from Umm Qasr and Khor Zubair, which was close to Shatt-al-Arab, to *Kut* due to their ruthless practice of piracy and plunder. Another account suggests that they migrated from the interior of the Arabian Peninsula to

¹⁷Frederick F. Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Qatar* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 11.

¹⁸Some places in Kuwait, such as Failaka Island, or Icaros, as it was known to the Greeks, have an ancient past that goes back to the time of Alexander the Great. Icaros was a commercial way station for trade by Alexander’s sailors and army between the Mediterranean and Mesopotamia, on the one hand, and the Indus Valley, on the other. There, numerous Greek archeological artifacts and monuments, such as coins, pottery and temples, were discovered by a Danish expedition. For more details, see Buckingham, *Travel in Assyria, Media and Persia*, pp. 317-318; Casey, *The History of Kuwait*, pp. 15-20; and Al-Sabah, *al-Kuwayt, hadarah wa-tarikh* [Kuwait is civilization and history] pp. 14-45.

¹⁹Some sources indicate that he was Barrak Ibn Arai’ir and others believe that he was Muhammad Ibn Arai’ir. For Bani Khalid tribe, see Carsten Niebuhr, *Travels through Arabian and Other Countries in the East*, 2 vols., trans. Robert Heron (Edinburgh: R. Morison and Son, 1792), p. 168. For the *Kut*, see Shamlan, *Min tarikh al-Kuwayt* [From Kuwait history] pp. 101-102.

²⁰Maymunah al-Sabah believes Al Utub settled in *Kut* earlier than 1716. See Al-Sabah, *al-Kuwayt, hadarah wa-tarikh* [Kuwait is civilization and history] p. 82. There were Al-Sabah, Al Khlaifa, Al Jalahima ancestries and many other families, See Abu-Hakima, *Tarikh al-Kuwayt al-hadith 1750-1965* [The modern history of Kuwait 1750-1965] p. 25; and Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 1 part 1 B, p. 1000.

Qatar but were expelled by Qatar's Sheikh after residing there for no less than 50 years, because of a homicide case, and then migrated to *Kut*.²¹ However, Bani Khalid's rule over the east Arabian Peninsula weakened after the middle of the eighteenth century, due to internal conflict among family members and the expansion of the Wahhabi movement (1765-1800).²² This resulted in autonomy for most of the tribes that had controlled their regions on behalf of Bani Khalid, including Kuwait.²³ In other words, "The Bani Khalid decline left a vacuum that Kuwait could fill."²⁴ Though "how Kuwait was first administrated is not clear,"²⁵ the traditional story is that Sheikh Sabah I had been chosen either in 1752 or in 1756 according to the Arabic tradition of tribalism or *Shura*.

Since there was an influx of immigrants from adjacent regions to Kuwait, the native people were obliged to choose a leader in order to protect themselves from wrongdoers and oppressors.²⁶ According to a common tale, they chose Al-Sabah from among several wealthy Al-Utub tribes because "Al-Sabah were not engaged in maritime trade and remained oriented towards the desert."²⁷ Ever since that day, the Al-Sabah dynasty has ruled Kuwait. What enabled the Al-Sabah dynasty to continue with almost no disturbances and to the general satisfaction of their subjects was the nature of the relationship between the Sheikh and the inhabitants. It was based on what Yousuf Ali regards as a social contract.²⁸ This oral contract preserved the rights of both sides. The Sheikh promised to rule all his subjects justly and to

²¹For more details, see "Introduction" in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*. vol. 1, 1896-1901, xi; "Précis of Koweit affairs, 1896-1904" in Saldanha, *The Persian Gulf Précis*, p. 2; R. B. Serjeant and R.L. Bidwell, eds., *Arabian Studies*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), vol. 2, p. 62; and Khazal, *Tarikh al-Kuwayt al-siyasi* [Political history of Kuwait] vol. 1, pp. 40-42.

²²This orthodox, was puritanical religious movement initiated by Muhammad ibn Abdulwahab spread in the East Arabian Peninsula during the fourth quarter of the eighteenth century. According to Wahhabi doctrine, Shia Muslims are heretics. For more details about Wahhabi doctrine, see Abu-Hakima, *Tarikh al-Kuwayt al-hadith, 1750-1965* [The modern history of Kuwait 1750-1965] pp. 103-104; and Al-Sabah, *al-Kuwayt, hadarah wa-tarikh* [Kuwait is civilization and history] pp.134-137.

²³Abu-Hakima, *Tarikh al-Kuwayt al-hadith 1750-1965* [The modern history of Kuwait 1750-1965], pp. 26-27.

²⁴Jill Crystal, *Oil and Politics in Persian Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar*, p. 34.

²⁵Rush, *Record of Kuwait 1899-1961: Internal Affairs 1899-1921*, p 194.

²⁶Prior to Sabah the First's reign, one of the Bani Khalid Sheikhs called Sulaiman bin Ahmad ruled Kut and Al Utub had been paying tribute to him. Rush, *Record of Kuwait 1899-1961: Internal Affairs 1899-1921*, p 194.

²⁷Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, p. 52.

²⁸Yousuf Ali, interview by the author, 5 August 2009, Kuwait.

protect them from outside invasion, while the subjects allowed the Al Sabah dynasty to retain the sheikhdom as long as they could keep their promise. More than that, the Sheikh usually consulted his subjects, particularly the Bedouin chiefs, elites and the merchants, about the welfare of the state and never made any major decision unilaterally. In other words, the relationship between the two sides was based on what Maymunah al-Sabah has called a “paternal system.”²⁹ The British observer Lorimer described this amicable relationship between Sheikh Abdullah bin Sabah (1756-1814) and his subjects as a case in which he ruled “more as a father than as a governor.”³⁰

During the early period of Kuwaiti history, neither the British nor the Ottomans paid any attention to Kuwait since it was economically and politically less significant than other places, such as Basra and southwestern Iran.³¹ Moreover, as far as Britain was concerned, no action was necessary as long as the commerce of the East India Company increased, piracy did not disturb the Gulf and finally no other European power intervened in the region. As for the Ottomans, they were busy fighting the Wahhabi movement, which kept them distracted from Kuwait for a while. This strategic situation was advantageous to Kuwait because it helped the country to evolve without political instability due to foreign interference for much of the nineteenth century. The first contact between the British and Kuwait goes back to 1775, when the East India Company and their employees moved temporarily to Kuwait between 1775 and 1779 due to the occupation of Basra by the Safavid Empire. The second contact was in 1793-1795 when the employees of a British factory in Basra left and settled in Kuwait temporarily due to a conflict with Turkish officials. And finally, between 1821 and 1822 the same authority moved to Kuwait, possibly to Failaka Island, due to political and economic conflict between the British and the Turkish authorities in Iraq. This helped Britain to recognize Kuwait as an alternative place for the East India

²⁹ Al-Sabah, *al-Kuwayt, hadarah wa-tarikh* [Kuwait is civilization and history], p. 105.

³⁰ Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 1, Historical, part 1B, p. 1005.

³¹ Al-Sabah, *al-Kuwayt, hadarah wa-tarikh* [Kuwait is civilization and history], p. 10.

Company if it maintained its neutrality in the region, and at the same time, Britain helped Kuwait expand its trade opportunities since it was recognized as a new emporium.³²

This apparent indifference to Kuwait shifted in the late nineteenth century, when political tension between the British and the Ottomans reached a peak. The former started strengthening their foothold and protecting their political and commercial interests in the Gulf region from the Ottomans and other colonial powers by relying on two methods. First, Britain signed many agreements and treaties with most of the Sheikhs in the Gulf region, such as the Sheikh of Bahrain Isa Al-Khalifa, with whom they signed a treaty on December 22, 1880, in order to legitimize their presence in the Gulf. Second, Britain also used its unchallenged navy against the Gulf Sheikhs and rival foreign powers if it felt any threat that could disturb the stability of the region.³³ This was obvious from an official report written by a British official to the Viceroy saying that “we don’t want Kuwait, but we don’t want anyone else to have it.”³⁴

During the early sixteenth century, the Ottoman Empire had conquered the Arab states, including Cairo, Mecca, Jerusalem and Baghdad, and had been physically present in the Gulf prior to Britain. The Ottomans simultaneously claimed that theirs was the only legitimate power in the Gulf region. They also based their legitimacy on the claim that the empire was the protector of the holy places, Mecca and Medina, and was represented by the Sultan or Sharif of Mecca, who was, in turn, recognized as a legitimate leader by all Sunni Muslim states. However, Ottoman rule in the Gulf region had started to decline and was being challenged by the Wahhabi movement. The Ottoman Sultanate came to be known as a “sick man” during that time due to its weakness not only in the Gulf region but also in other regions, such as eastern Europe and the Mediterranean.³⁵

³²Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 1, Historical, part 1 B, pp. 1001-1005; Al-Sabah, *al-Kuwayt, hadarah wa-tarikh* [Kuwait is civilization and history], pp.191-195; and Abu-Hakima, *Tarikh al-Kuwayt al-hadith*, [The modern history of Kuwait 1750-1965], pp. 176-179.

³³“Correspondence Respecting Affair of Koweit” (1896-99) in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 1, p. 73; and Furayhi, *Tijarat al-silah fi al-Khalij al-Arabi* [Arms trade in the Arabian Gulf], pp. 34-35.

³⁴“Introduction” in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 1, p. xii.

³⁵“Introduction” in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 1, p. xi.

The antagonism between the two rival powers intensified, specifically when Mubarak Al-Sabah seized power in Kuwait after assassinating his siblings Muhammad Al-Sabah, the Sheikh of Kuwait who preceded Mubarak (1892-1896), and Jarah Al-Sabah in 1896.³⁶ Despite this combined act of fratricide and regicide, most Kuwaitis agreed that Mubarak was a legitimate successor to the Sheikh of Kuwait.³⁷ Mubarak had, indeed, elevated Kuwait politically in the wake of the Gulf affair and he had carefully played diplomatic games, manipulating both great powers in order to retain his power and establish the modern state of Kuwait. Mubarak first tried to legitimize his position to the Ottoman authority by receiving the title of *Kaymakam* via the *vali* of Basra Hamdi Basha, especially as the Ottoman Sultanate regarded Kuwait as part of the Ottoman Empire in the face of the British threat in the region.³⁸ However,

³⁶Although why Mubarak killed his two siblings has been a subject of dispute, most of the sources indicate that it was due to financial conflict among the siblings. It has been said that Muhammad rejected several times Mubarak's claims for advance money from their share of the income from their own agricultural land and date orchards in Faw in Iraq. For more details about various stories and interpretations of the original conflicts among the siblings, see B.J. Slot, *Mubarak Al-Sabah: Founder of Modern Kuwait 1896-1915* (London: Arabian Publishing, 2005), pp. 66-76; Salwa Al-Ghanim, *The Reign of Mubarak Al-Sabah: Shaikh of Kuwait, 1896-1915* (London, New York: I.B. Tauri, 1998), pp. 1-4; Abu-Hakima, *Tarikh al-Kuwayt al-hadith*, [The modern history of Kuwait 1750-1965], pp. 307-308; and Rushayd, *Tarikh al-Kuwayt* [Kuwait's history], pp. 235-242. Between 1793 and 1965 there were 35 coups and secessions in the Gulf Sheikdoms, but this was the only *coup d'état* that had taken place in Kuwait's history. James Onley and Sulayman Khalaf, "Shaikhly Authority in the Pre-oil Gulf: An Historical-Anthropological Study," *History and Anthropology* 17, no. 3 (September 2006):189-208.

³⁷Except for some opposition from a few people, including Mubarak's enemy Yousuf Al-Ibrahim. Al-Ibrahim was a wealthy Kuwaiti Sunni merchant and a relative of the Al-Sabah family and it had been said that he had influenced Muhammad and Jarah Al-Sabah in their political decisions regarding Kuwait's affairs. After the coup, he escaped to *Dawra*, a town located in Shatt-al-Arab in Iraq, and encouraged the sons of the murdered sheikhs to escape and depose Mubarak. Al-Ibrahim made every effort along with local and regional allies to overthrow Mubarak. For example, in association with Mubarak's nephews he petitioned and filed a lawsuit to the Ottoman authority to obtain their right to inherit and seize the power after the coup. Since the Ottomans could not do anything, Al-Ibrahim tried many times to invade Kuwait, but his attempts were foiled for a variety of reasons. Khaz'al, *Tarikh al-Kuwayt al-siyasi* [Political history of Kuwait], vol. 2, pp. 14-24.

³⁸*Kaymakam* means a representative. The Ottoman Sultanate had minimal influence on Kuwait for a short period prior to Mubarak's reign. This happened because Kuwaiti sheikhs recognized the Sultan of Turkey as the head of the Muslim world, especially after the fall of Bani Khalid, the dominant tribal power in the region. For example, Kuwait paid tribute to the Ottoman sultans and its sheikhs received the title *Kaymakam* and the sheikh raised the Ottoman flag over his residency. This, however, does not confirm that Kuwait was part of the Ottoman Empire, for the following reasons. First, the Ottomans did not have any official contract with the sheikh, as the British did, which confirms Britain's claim. Second, there were no official Ottoman deputies, guards, or garrisons in Kuwait, as there were in Iraq and Qatar, throughout Kuwait's history, although the Turkish authority had tried to place some there but had never been successful. For example, the Turkish authority tried to establish a naval station in Kuwait in 1899

the Ottoman claim had not been historically approved because there was no official treaty that recognized Kuwait as part of the Ottoman Empire. Mubarak intimated this fact to the British.³⁹

On the one hand, Mubarak showed his devotion and loyalty to Ottoman authority and sought its legitimacy at the beginning of his reign. There were several reasons for his actions. First and most important, he wanted “to win confirmation as the new *Kaymakam*, which would simultaneously seem to give an official, routine blessing to the change of ruler and secure to him payment of Muhammad’s annual stipend”⁴⁰ and avoids any armed attempt to overthrow him. Mubarak did not want the Ottomans to sense that he was following a path different from that of his ancestors toward them. Those Sheikhs were standing more to the Ottoman Empire side than British authority because the former represented the Islamic world as the official protector of the holy places, Mecca and Medina. He deliberately created a confusing picture to Istanbul about his accession to the throne, by bribing the most important Ottoman officials, such as Receb Pasha and Ebulhuda.⁴¹ Second, Mubarak intended to secure himself in power without any disturbance so that he would be able to confront his local and regional rivals. Third, Mubarak also feared that the *vali* of Basra might confiscate the date orchards that he and his siblings owned in Faw in Iraq, which was his only reliable source of income. Thus he continued the practice of hoisting the

and therefore sent a harbor master to Kuwait but the sheikh refused to let him land. Third, as for the flag, the title, and tribute, Mubarak continued the *status quo* by playing a political game with the Ottomans even after being under the British protectorate, not only because of his date orchards in Faw but also to ensure British protection, although the latter asked him to fly an ordinary Arab flag. Thus it can be concluded that Kuwait was under the Ottoman influence for a short time, but never its protectorate. For more details, see “Correspondence Respecting Affair of Koweit,” (1896-99) and “Further Correspondence Respecting the Affair of Koweit,” (1901) in Bidwell, *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 1. part 1, p. 82 and part 3, pp. 59, 66, 100; and “Précis of Koweit Affairs, 1896-1904” in Saldanha, *The Persian Gulf Précis*, vol. 5, p. 45.

³⁹“Correspondence Respecting Affair of Koweit,” (1896-99) in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 1. part 1, pp. 14, 20.

⁴⁰Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*, p. 94.

⁴¹The first was marshal of the army corps and the second was one of Sultan Abdulhamid’s advisors. Mubarak tried to bribe Hamdi Pasha as well but the latter rejected this attempt because he disliked Mubarak. Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*, p. 95.

Ottoman flag in Kuwait. However, Mubarak was not recognized as *Kaymakam* by the Ottoman Sultanate until 1897.⁴²

On the other hand, Mubarak sought a special relationship with Britain. He directly asked to be placed under British Protectorate status, especially when the Sheikh of Bahrain, Isa Al-Khalifa, sent an official letter to Mubarak encouraging him to ally with the British if he would like to “enjoy peace and quietness.”⁴³ The British hesitated to do so at first.⁴⁴ In 1898, however, Russia showed interest in Kuwait and the Ottomans increased their pressure on the country as well. The Russians wanted to establish a coaling station in Kuwait in 1898.⁴⁵ Russia also tried to establish its foothold when Abbas Aliof and Ovanessof, two Russian merchants and at the same time envoys of the Russian consul at Baghdad, visited Kuwait for both commercial and political purposes in 1899.⁴⁶ Indeed, many Russian vessels, such as the *Varyag*, continuously visited Kuwait between 1899 and 1903. Finally, the Russian consul himself visited Kuwait in 1902 and offered Mubarak the Russian government’s assistance.⁴⁷

Now it was in the British interest to deal with Kuwait. M. J. Meade, the British Political Resident in the Persian Gulf (1897-1902) sent an official letter to Lord Curzon, urging him to bring Kuwait under the British Protectorate before it was too late:

It is said that Russia wants a coaling station in the Persian Gulf and that she has her eyes on Koweit. I cannot, with the information before me, say for certain how far this is correct, but I fancy it is very likely. Generally, I should say that even if we are not

⁴²“Correspondence Respecting Affair of Koweit,” (1896-99) in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 1, part 1, p. 61.

⁴³“Correspondence Respecting Affair of Koweit,” (1896-99) in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 1, part 1, p. 23.

⁴⁴Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*, p. 102.

⁴⁵“Correspondence Respecting Affair of Koweit,” (1896-99) in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 1, part 1, p. 27.

⁴⁶Interestingly, two Iranian citizens, Hajj Abdul Reda and Hajj Ahmad, accompanied the Russian consul to Kuwait and landed before the consul in order to inform Mubarak of his mission. “Correspondence Respecting Affair of Koweit” (1896-99), in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 1, part 1, p. 58; and “report of Ali ibn Gholam Rezza” in Al Ghunaim, *Akhbar al-Kuwayt: rasail Ali ibn Ghalum Rida, al-wakil al-ikhbari li-Baritaniya fi al-Kuwayt, 1899-1904* [Kuwait news: Reports of Ali ibn Ghalum Rida, the informative British agent in Kuwait] (al-Kuwayt: Markaz al-Buhuth wa-al-Dirasat al-Kuwaytiyah, 2007), pp. 298-299.

⁴⁷“Further Correspondence Respecting Affair of Koweit” (1902), in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 2, 1902-1905, part 4, 3, pp. 13-14; and Al Ghunaim, *Akhbar al-Kuwayt* [Kuwait news], pp. 85-92.

immediately interested in getting hold of Koweit for ourselves, we cannot afford to let it fall into the hands of any other Power. We should, therefore, in my opinion, oppose any attempt by Russia or Turkey to get hold of the place, or increase any influence they have there already, and we ought to take advantage of readiness of the present Sheikh Mubarak to bring him at least under our influence, if it is not possible, at once, to bring him under our protection.⁴⁸

As a result, Kuwait became a British Protectorate on January 23, 1899. The Anglo-Kuwaiti agreement remained secret until 1912, which served the interests of both sides.⁴⁹ Britain did not want to confront the Ottomans politically and militarily, since the latter consented to the *status quo* in Kuwait, although they did know about the agreement. Mubarak also did not want to be embarrassed and lose his landed property in Ottoman Iraq. Meanwhile, he also asked the British authority to keep its promise to protect his family property in Iraq in case of any eventuality.⁵⁰ Although the British authority tried to help Mubarak in this regard, a British assurance was not included as an essential article in the Anglo-Kuwaiti treaty. Mubarak anticipated that the Ottomans could squeeze him by confiscating his family property in Faw.⁵¹

The Anglo-Kuwaiti agreement, which authorized Britain to protect Kuwait officially from any outside invasion and recognize Mubarak as an independent ruler of Kuwait, forbade him to:

Receive the agent or representative of any power or government at Koweit, or at any other place within the limits of his territory, without the previous sanction of the British Government; and he further binds himself, his heirs and successors, not to cede, sell, lease, mortgage, or give for occupation or for any other purpose, any portion of his territory to the government or subjects of any other power without the previous consent of her Majesty's Government for these purpose.⁵²

Interestingly, the one who assisted M. J. Meade in negotiating with Mubarak and who affixed his signature on the agreement was Agha Muhammad Rahim Safar, a Shia merchant, who was a close friend

⁴⁸“Correspondence Respecting Affair of Koweit,” (1896-99) in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 1, part 1, p. 28.

⁴⁹Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*, p. 113.

⁵⁰Mubarak tried to convince M.J. Meade to write into the document the British promise to protect his property, but it was not done. Therefore, Mubarak's brother Hamud refused to sign the treaty. “Correspondence Respecting Affair of Koweit,” (1896-99) in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 1, part 1, pp. 48-49.

⁵¹“Précis of Koweit Affairs, 1896-1904” in Saldanha, *The Persian Gulf Précis*, vol. 5, pp. 68-72.

⁵²To see the full version of the Anglo-Kuwait agreement, see “Correspondence Respecting Affair of Koweit” (1896-99), in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 1, part 1, p. 50.

of Mubarak and a British agent in Bahrain at the same time.⁵³ In order to assure that Mubarak would obey this agreement, the British appointed as a secret agent Ali Ibn Gholam Rezza, who was an Iranian Shia relative of Agha Muhammad Rahim Safar, who recommended the former to be the first person to act as a British agent in Kuwait.⁵⁴ The agent's job was to report all of Mubarak's political activities and plans either with the Ottomans or with other foreign powers.⁵⁵ The main reason Britain secretly appointed a trusted foreign agent in Kuwait was not to give any excuse to any foreign powers, including the Ottomans, to do the same in Kuwait. Rezza acted as a secret agent in Kuwait for Britain from 1899 to 1904 and sent many reports about Kuwait during that time before an official British agent, G.S. Knox, replaced him in 1904.⁵⁶

The Anglo-Kuwaiti treaty was a useful bargaining tool for both parties in the region. It helped Britain to legitimize its presence in Kuwait. Robin Bidwell asserts, it "kep[t] the Gulf as a British lake"⁵⁷ and eliminate any attempt by foreign powers, such as Germany, Russia, France and the Ottomans, to establish a foothold in Kuwait. For instance, Germany tried to establish a Baghdad railway in 1900, which was supposed to start from Berlin and go through Baghdad and Basra and terminate at Kathma Bay in Kuwait, because that was considered one of the best harbors in the Persian Gulf.⁵⁸

For Kuwait, the Anglo-Kuwaiti agreement confirmed its independence from the Ottomans and, most importantly, it committed the British to protect Kuwait militarily from local and regional rivals.⁵⁹

⁵³Onley, "Transnational Merchants in the Nineteenth Century Gulf: The Case of the Safar Family," p. 72.

⁵⁴He disguised himself as a merchant, which was his real job, so no one could harbor any suspicion about his status. Al Ghunaim, *Akhbar al-Kuwayt* [Kuwait news], pp. 11, 16.

⁵⁵Al Ghunaim, *Akhbar al-Kuwayt* [Kuwait news], p. 5.

⁵⁶Most of his reports were in Arabic and Persian and these were translated into English as well. To see some of his reports sent to the British political resident in the Gulf in Busheher and to the British agent in Bahrain, see "Further Correspondence Respecting Affair of Koweit"(1900); and "Further Correspondence Respecting the Affair of Koweit"(1901), in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 1. part 2, p. 34, part 3, p. 10; *Kuwait Political Agency: Arabic Documents 1899-1949*, vol. 1 (London: Archive Editions, 1994) R/15/5/2, p 3 and R/15/5/221, p 535 and most of them are available in Al Ghunaim, *Akhbar al-Kuwayt* [Kuwait news].

⁵⁷"Introduction" in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 1, p. xiv.

⁵⁸Britain rejected that scheme as part of its policy to prevent any other foreign power from dominating the region. "Further Correspondence Respecting Affair of Koweit," (1900) in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 1. part 2, pp.1-6; and "Persian, British and Russian interactions in the Gulf and with Gulf Arab Territories, 1887-1908" in *Iran in the Persian Gulf 1820-1966*, vol. 2: 1880-1917, eds., Burdett and Seay, p. 202.

The local enemies of Mubarak, such as Yousuf Al-Ibrahim and Mubarak's nephews, cooperated with other regional powers, such as the Ottomans represented by Hamdi Basha, the Sheikh of Qatar Jasim Al-Thani and the Amir of Najd, Abdul-Aziz Al-Rashid, in attempts to occupy Kuwait many times following Mubarak's ascent to the throne in 1896. Al-Ibrahim played an important role in inciting and providing funds for Mubarak's rivals in the region in order to lead military campaigns against Mubarak. He bribed the Ottoman officials and tribal powers, such as Al-Rashid, to overthrow Mubarak. It has been said that he aimed to obtain the Sheikhdome of Kuwait for himself.⁶⁰ After Mubarak ascended the throne of Kuwait, he anticipated becoming involved in tribal and regional wars. Therefore, he tried to kill Al-Ibrahim but the latter survived since he was not at Kuwait City during Mubarak's *coup d'etat*.⁶¹ At the beginning, Al-Ibrahim tried to occupy Kuwait in cooperation with Mubarak's nephews in 1897 in a campaign that included his own fourteen ships and seven hundred people but his attempt was not successful. He then sought the aid of the Sheikh of Qatar, Jasim Al-Thani because the latter hated Mubarak due to his cooperation with the Ottomans in attacking Qatar. Therefore Al-Thani along with Al-Ibrahim prepared a maritime campaign against Mubarak because he was interested in eliminating Mubarak from power. This, however, did not succeed too due to Mubarak's connection with Said Basha, ruler of Al-Hasa, who played a role in stopping this campaign against Kuwait.⁶² The hostility between them had intensified again in March 1898 when Mubarak attacked Howair tribe, who were under the protection of Al-Thani, which embarrassed the latter in the eyes of the Arab Bedouins in the region.⁶³ The ruler of Nejd Abdul-Aziz Al-Rashid's antagonism toward Mubarak was related to many factors including the tribal rivalries going back to 1892. Mubarak helped Al-Rashid's enemies Abdul Rahman bin Faisal Al-Sa'ud, the ruler

⁵⁹Mubarak, on the other hand, had two important regional allies, Sheikh Khaz'al and Sheikh Sadun, Amir of Muntifik Basra vilayet.

⁶⁰"Further Correspondence Respecting Affair of Koweit," (1901) in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 1, part 3, p. 131; and Casey, *The History of Kuwait*, p. 44.

⁶¹Khazal, *Tarikh al-Kuwayt al-siyasi* [Political history of Kuwait], vol. 2, p. 14.

⁶²Khazal, *Tarikh al-Kuwayt al-siyasi* [Political history of Kuwait], vol. 2, pp. 22-26; and Abu-Hakima, *Tarikh al-Kuwayt al-hadith, 1750-1965* [The modern history of Kuwait 1750-1965], p. 310.

⁶³"Précis of Koweit Affairs, 1896-1904" in Saldanha, *The Persian Gulf Précis*, vol. 5, p. 118.

of Riyadh, and his sons against Al-Rashid by protecting and hosting them in Kuwait for some years.⁶⁴

Mubarak also supported them during their military against Al-Rashid. Frederick Anscombe summarizes the major rationale that emboldened Al-Rashid to attack Mubarak. He states, "Several factors encouraged Ibn Rashid to become actively involved in Kuwaiti affair. Mubarak was strongly suspected of responsibility for robbing and killing Ha'il traders in a caravan from Kuwait while Muhammad Ibn Rashid was still alive. Mubarak's growing influence among the Bedouins was also worrisome to a leader surrounded by jealous rivals. Control of Kuwait would be very useful to Ibn Rashid, because it was the best port through which Ha'il could import arms and other supplies. Most importantly, Abd al-Rahman al-Sa'ud and his son Abd al-Aziz (Ibn Sa'ud) were living in Kuwait under Mubarak's protection."⁶⁵

Therefore, Al-Rashid showed interest in cooperating with Al-Ibrahim to destroy Mubarak's power in the region.⁶⁶ As a result, it is not surprising that in 1901 those rivals had decided to eliminate Mubarak for their own individual purposes when there would arise an opportunity to do so. This cooperation was mentioned in an official report sent by H. A. Phillipps, a British commander to Captain Filed, a British employee. He states: "The Governor of Baghdad has joined Abdul Aziz-bin-Rashid, Amir of Nejd, together with Sheikh Abraham, against Sheikh Mubarak."⁶⁷ However, they never succeeded, because the British used their powerful navy to protect Kuwait.⁶⁸

On the other side, Mubarak got involved in tribal warfare outside Kuwait, which the British often discouraged. This explains why the British never supplied him with weapons for this purpose.⁶⁹ The British adopted this strategy primarily to make Mubarak understand that the British would not always be

⁶⁴Précis of Koweit Affairs, 1896-1904" in Saldanha, *The Persian Gulf Précis*, vol. 5, p, 31.

⁶⁵Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*, p. 117.

⁶⁶Khazal, *Tarikh al-Kuwayt al-siyasi* [Political history of Kuwait], vol. 2, pp. 31-32; and Abu-Hakima, *Tarikh al-Kuwayt al-hadith, 1750-1965* [The modern history of Kuwait 1750-1965], p. 311.

⁶⁷"Further Correspondence Respecting the Affair of Koweit" (1901), in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 1, part 3, p 135.

⁶⁸It should born in mind that Al Ibrahim and Al Rashid had attempted constantly to invade Kuwait and their threat to Mubarak had stopped only when they passed away prior to Mubarak's death in 1916.

⁶⁹This became obvious when C.A. Kemball (PA) sent official reports from Busheher to the government of India, discouraging any military support for Mubarak against his enemy, the Amir of Najd. For more details, see "Further Correspondence Respecting Affair of Koweit" (1900), in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 1, part 2, pp. 63-64.

behind him and secondarily to avoid confrontations with the Ottomans. However, when Kuwait experienced threats, Britain never hesitated to protect Kuwait for the sake of the stability of the region. For instance, although the British did not get involved in the Sarif war in 1901 between Mubarak and Al-Rashid, it was prepared to send a warship to Kuwait when it suspected that Mubarak would lose the war and rumors spread about his death.⁷⁰

Another example can be cited in this regard. When the Ottomans and bin Rashid occupied Bubian Island, Safwan and Umkaser in 1902 with a view to invading Kuwait, the British sent weapons and its warships, such as the *Sphinx*, *Redbreast* and *Pomome*, to help Mubarak.⁷¹ The British frustrated all the efforts of Mubarak's enemies and the invaders finally withdrew from the region.⁷² Thus Kuwait was secured from its domestic and regional enemies and remained a British Protectorate until it gained its independence in 1961. It can thus be shown from Mubarak's diplomacy toward all foreign powers, specifically, the British and the Ottomans that "he told each side that he favored them, but that he would go to the highest bidder."⁷³ In this way, Kuwait and its people could live safely and peacefully, although it experienced threats from regional rivals, such as the Ottomans, the Wahabbi Ikhwan, Al-Rashid and Al Ibrahim.⁷⁴ Mubarak's ruthless policy toward neighboring tribes and his dream of extending his power and influence in the eastern Arabian Peninsula put Kuwait at risk. However, no serious assaults or plunders

⁷⁰"Further Correspondence Respecting the Affair of Koweit" (1901), in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 1, part 3, p 17.

⁷¹"Further Correspondence Respecting the Affair of Koweit" (1901), in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 1, part 3, pp. 140,144-148.

⁷²Although the British initially sent official letters to the Ottoman authority and to Ibin Rashid, warning them not to invade Kuwait and encouraging both sides toward a peaceful settlement, the former had prepared a war plan as a precaution to protect Kuwait from the invaders either by sea or by land. For more details about the warning letter and the plan, see "Further Correspondence Respecting the Affair of Koweit" (1901), in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 1, part. 3, pp. 136, 144-148.

⁷³ Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*, p. 141.

⁷⁴Mubarak also asked for protection from Iran through his close friend Sheikh Khaz'al, but his request was rejected. "Introduction" in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 1, p. xxi; and "Précis of Koweit Affairs, 1896-1904," in Saldanha, *The Persian Gulf Précis*, vol. 5, p. 27.

took place in the town of Kuwait.⁷⁵ Thus, according to Frederick Anscombe, Mubarak was “the man who gained the most in this period.”⁷⁶

The Shia Presence in Kuwait

Not surprisingly, the mystery of Al Utub migrations to Kuwait also applies to the early Shia immigrants to Kuwait. As mentioned before, borders were not obstacles to the dynamism of migrations until the middle of the twentieth century. Indeed, no official record has been found, particularly from the Kuwaiti point of view, of those early years. As J. G. Lorimer states, “For facts in regard to the history of Kuwait, we are not so entirely dependent as in the case of Qatar, Bahrain and Al-Hasa on official records and compilations.”⁷⁷ Therefore, it’s hard to estimate how many Shia families lived in Kuwait in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when Kuwait had not yet been recognized as a political entity in the Gulf.

Although it is difficult to identify all the Shia families who lived in the entire region of southwestern Iran, it can be seen from the surnames of some Shia families that their names are identical to those of their original districts or villages in their former region. It needs to be emphasized, however, that this study provides only a few examples of those Shia families and there are numerous Shia families who migrated from the same regions but didn’t carry surnames identical to their original land.⁷⁸ To illustrate, some Ashkananei families had migrated from Ashkanan village in the province of Fars and many other branches of Ashkananei came from the same and other villages located in the same province as well.⁷⁹ Girashi families, who are originally immigrants from Girash village, including my family and relatives,

⁷⁵When Mubarak left the town of Kuwait to go to war, he appointed his son Sheikh Jabir Al-Sabah, with 4,000 armed men, to protect the town from outside foes. “Further Correspondence Respecting Affair of Koweit,” (1900) in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 1, part. 2, pp. 27-28.

⁷⁶Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*, p. 141.

⁷⁷Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 1 Historical, part 1 B, p. 1000 (footnote).

⁷⁸For more details about the origin of Shia families in southwestern Iran, see Saleh Al-Saiedey “*Alkuwa Alseyaseia fee Al-Kuwait: Marez fee Khurfat AlEnaash* (8),” [Political forces in Kuwait: Patient in the recovery room (8)] *Alqabas Newspaper*, March 22, 2010 (accessed March 24, 2010); available from <http://alqabas.com.kw/Article.aspx?id=587608&date=22032010>.

⁷⁹*Tarekh Al- A’aeilah: Alnozoh Ela Al-Kuwait* [Family history: Moving to Kuwait] (access May 2, 2010); available from <http://www.kuwaitturath.com/family.html>.

are also from the same province. Larei families also migrated from the district of Laristan in Fars province, particularly from Lar village. In addition, Behbehanei or Bahbahanei families migrated from different districts including Behbahan, although many other Shia Kuwaiti families, such as the Khan and Yusufi families migrated from the same district. In Khuzestan for example, a huge number of wandering Arab tribes, such as Banu Ka'ab or Cha'b and Beni Lam, settled particularly in the southern districts of the zone of Shatt-al-Arab, which is located on the border between Iran and Iraq, such as Muhammerah, Ahwaz and Ma'ashour.⁸⁰ Al-Mahmeed and Al-Nassar Shia families, who were part of the Banu Ka'ab tribes, migrated from this province.⁸¹ The family of Shushteri also came from Shushter, a district of Khuzestan province.

In addition, some Shia families, such as the Dashti families, also migrated to Kuwait from the Persian Coast. They were originally from Dashit, a village and district of Dashitistan.⁸² Likewise, Bushehrey families came from the Busheher district and Charak families hailed from Charak village. Lastly, many Balucheis or Balusheis families migrated to Kuwait in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from Baluchistan province, an area east of Fars province, and different parts of Fars, Khuzestan and the Persian Coast. Indeed, most of them had migrated internally from their original province of Baluchistan to adjacent provinces seeking job opportunities, and thereafter a large portion migrated to Kuwait for the same purpose.⁸³

This line of reasoning is similarly applicable to some Kuwaiti Sunni families who carry surnames identical to those of the homeland they migrated from. For example, the Al-Awazei and Al-Ghabandei families had the same names as their former villages: Awaz, or Avaz, and Gavbandi. They migrated from

⁸⁰Shatt-Al-Arab was a confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. *Gazetteers of Persia*, vol. 3, p. 525.

⁸¹Banu Ka'ab, originally an Arab tribe, migrated from Baghdad in 1756-57. Another scholar, Ahmad Abu-Hakima, indicates that they were originally from Najd in Saudi Arabia. See Fasa'I, *Farsnama-ye Naseri*, Heribert, trans, *History of Persia under Qajar Rule*, p. 26 (footnote); and Abu-Hakima, *Tarikh al-Kuwayt al-hadith*, [The modern history of Kuwait 1750-1965] p. 69.

⁸²Some sources, such as *Historical Gazetteer of Iran*, regard Dashit as a village under Fars province and not in the Persian Coast. See *Historical Gazetteer of Iran*, vol. 2, p.192.

⁸³Muhammerah, which is located in southern Khuzestan or Arabistan, had 400 Belusheis serving as guards for the Shah, or, as they were called, *Baluch-i-Shah* for the Sheikh of Muhammerah. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 2 Geographical and Statistical, p. 164.

the province of Fars in the twentieth century. Bastakei families also came from the Bastak district of the same province. The Al-kanderi and Kankunei families had migrated from their original villages Kandar and Kangoon in the Persian Coast.⁸⁴

It should be borne in mind that the Shia migration to Kuwait took place from three regions adjacent to Kuwait between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries.⁸⁵ As a result, Shia families are categorized according to their ethnicity (Arab, *Ajam*) which relates to the region from where they originated. Although many Sunni families also came from southwestern Iran, *Ajam* refers exclusively to Shia families, such as Al-Marafie Al-Behbehanei, Al-Mazidi, Al-Safar, Larei, Ashkananei, Bouland and many others who originally came from southwestern Iran.⁸⁶ *Hasawiyyin* refers to Arab Shia families, such as Al-Wazzan, Al-Qattan, Al-Baghli, Al-Herz, Al-Saieg, and Bukhamsin, who migrated from Al-Hasa. *Baharna* refers to Arab Shia families, such as Al-Qallaf and Al-Matrook, who migrated from Bahrain.⁸⁷ Thus, it is easy to recognize the origin of the indigenous people (Arab or *Ajam*) and their faith (Sunni or Shia) from their surname.⁸⁸ The tradition of the influx of Shia immigrants to Kuwait began after the Al-Utub settlement in Kuwait due to political and economic circumstances during the second half of the eighteenth century.⁸⁹ Laurence Louër states: “Many Hasawiyyin and Baharna also settled in Kuwait in the

⁸⁴Some Kuwaiti Shia families carry meaningful surnames in the Persian language. For example, the *Bouland* family name means “tall or long family,” *Charak* “light family” and *Khourshed* “sun family.”

⁸⁵A small group of Shia immigrants came from Iraq.

⁸⁶Jassim Ashkananei, a journalist working for the newspaper *Alqabas*, who visited Fars in March 2009, asserts that more than 35 Kuwaiti families originated in Fars. Jassim Ashkananei, interview by the author, 27 July 2009, Kuwait.

⁸⁷Information about many other Shia families who came during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can be found in Jamal, *Lamhat min Tarikh al-Shia fee al-Kuwayt* [Highlights from Shia history in Kuwait] pp. 40-42.

⁸⁸It is also easy to distinguish between Kuwaiti Shias and Sunnis according to their first names. The Shias are usually proud to have names identical to those of the members of the Prophet’s household (*ahl- al-bayt*), such as Ali, Hussain, Hasan, Ja’afir, Sadek, Reda, Abbass, Mahdei, Fatima, Zainab, Hawra’a...etc because they are extremely admired in Shia tradition. The Kuwaiti Sunnis do the opposite by using names of the friends of the Prophet (*al-sahabah*) such as Omar, Othman, Aysha, etc. The old generations of Shias also have similar Iranian names, such as Gulam, Ghulom, Mirza...etc. which the Sunnis usually do not have. This, however, does not mean that both sects don’t share each other’s names at all.

⁸⁹Abdulrasoul Behbehani and Yusuf Ali believe that the early Shia migration, especially from Iran and Iraq, was due not to economic reasons but rather to political ones, since their original homeland was considered a very fertile region compared to Kuwait. The reasons which impelled them to migrate to

second half of the eighteenth century, either for commercial reasons or to escape persecution and/or political instability.”⁹⁰

According to Kuwaiti oral history, the Al- Shamsah, Al-Jamal, Al-Nagei, Al-Matakei, Al-Sadeg, Al-Marafie, Al-Behbehanei, Al-Mahmeed, Al-Wazan, Ben Shaibah, Eidei, Khan, Haiat, Al-Mazidi and many other families were the first Shia families to settle in Kuwait during the second half of the eighteenth century.⁹¹ By the same token, another radical account by Osamah Al-Munaweir, a Kuwaiti Sunni lawyer, asserts that the first Kuwaiti family which settled in Kuwait was Al-Marafie.⁹² This hypothesis has been supported by Zaid Al-Zaid, a Kuwaiti Sunni political activist, who is a co-owner of a daily newspaper in Kuwait called *Al-Aan*.⁹³ The Al-Marafie family had probably settled in Kuwait prior to the Al-Utub tribe in the early part of the eighteenth century.⁹⁴ Speaking of the Shia specifically, the Ajam resided in the eastern zone of Kuwait town called *Hay Sharg*. This enclave helped them to share the same mother language, Farsi, and to take part in religious rituals together.⁹⁵

Kuwait were Kuwait’s safety and the political disturbances in their original homelands. Abdulrasoul Behbehani and Yousuf Ali, interviews by the author, 4 and 5 August 2009.

⁹⁰Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, p. 49.

⁹¹Kasim Abdulraheem, interview by the author, 4 August, 2009, Kuwait; Jamal, *Lamhat min Tarikh al-Shia fee al-Kuwayt* [Highlights from Shia history in Kuwait] pp. 40-42; and Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, pp. 47-50.

⁹²*Munazara Zaid Alzaid wa Osamah Almunawir 1-23-2010 part 4*, [Debate between Zaid Alzaid and Osamah Almunawir 1-23-2010 part 4] YouTube (accessed May 18, 2010); available from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2vaO8_m6ZNw&feature=PlayList&p=79F322B5CC59469F&index=83&playnext=4&playnext_from=PL.

⁹³Another hypothesis indicates that Bedouin Sunni tribes called Al-Awazim had settled in Kuwait prior to the Al-Utub migration. Rush, *Record of Kuwait 1899-1961: Internal Affairs 1899-1921*, p. 194.

⁹⁴The Al-Marafie family state on their historical website that they migrated from southwestern Iran and settled in Kuwait in 1708 A.D. See, *The Marafie Family History: The Marafie History Family, Origin and Ancestry* (accessed May 18, 2010); available from http://www.diwanmarafie.com/En/Marafie_history_2.htm; and *Awraq Khaleijeia 5: Sayyed Adnan wa Alzaid- Tarekh Al-Shia*, [Gulf documents 5: History of Shia between Sayyed Adnan and Alzaid] You Tube (accessed May 18, 2010); available from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sfi79yTIZxc>.

⁹⁵Kuwait in the pre-oil era was divided in four parts, *Sharq* (east of Kuwait town), *Qibla* (west toward Mecca), *Wasat* (center) and *Murgab* (south). Shia families resided mostly in *Sharq* and *Murgab*. For more details about the surnames of Shia families who settled in those parts of Kuwait, see Hussain Al-Saidaley, “Sowar Men Al-madei: Hay Sharq Hay Murgab,” [Photos from the past: Neighborhood of Sharq, Neighborhood of Murgab] *Al-Shahed Newspaper*, August, 8 2009. vol, 257; and Hassan, “Ideology, Identity, and Linguistic Capital,” pp.16-17.

The Shia immigrants continued flowing into Kuwait after the establishment of a Shia community. Kuwait was stable politically, hospitable to Shia merchants and artisans and prepared to use them in ways that benefited them and the country at the same time. More than that, tolerance of different Islamic sects and traditions or *Mathhab* and other religions, such as Judaism and Christianity, was the main distinguishing feature of the state of Kuwait at that time.⁹⁶ Indeed, Shia immigrants were accepted, according to Myron Weiner, as long as they were not a threat to the security and stability of the host country.⁹⁷ Shia immigrants, such as merchants, artisans and ordinary people, contributed greatly to the economic, social, military, and educational development of Kuwait.

It should be borne in mind that the process of migration followed two paths, direct and indirect, whether by sea or by land.⁹⁸ On the one hand, the path of direct migration led from one of the southwestern Iranian ports, such as Busheher, Bandar Dilam, Bandar Abbass, Bandar Ma 'ashour, Muhammerah and Lingah, to Kuwait, while the path of indirect migration began in similar areas but sometimes led first to Bahrain, Dubai, Sharjah or Qatar. Thus, some of the Shias settled in these areas of the Gulf while others continued toward Kuwait. The main method of these movements was through sea trade between Iranian coastal ports and Kuwait. Merchant's ships and British steamer ships conveyed Iranian artisans, laborers and residents to Kuwait. Passing through Basra after crossing the Shatt-Al-Arab was the only way which Shia could migrate by land to Kuwait from southwestern Iran.

Even though many Shia families migrated between the late nineteenth century and the middle of the twentieth century, this research deals with only a few cases of Shia and Sunni families according to oral history. For example, the migration of the Bouland family was due to both economic and social reasons, according to Abduljalil Bouland. He indicates that although his relative (Hajj Mulla Ali) had

⁹⁶For example, the government gave a building license for the Shia community to build Huseiniyya in order to let them observe their religious tradition. The first Huseiniyya, the Huseiniyya Marafie, was built in 1905 by a Shia merchant, Muhammad Hussain Nassralah Marafie. Today it is considered one of Kuwait's historic buildings. Divan Marafie Mohammad Hussain Nasirallah Marafei (1870-1934), (accessed June 4, 2010); available from http://www.diwanmarafie.com/Family_Personal/Ar/Mohamed_Husain_3.htm.

⁹⁷Weiner, "Security, Stability, and International Migration," pp. 91-126.

⁹⁸Usually the migrations via land were through southern Arabistan towns, such as Muhhamerah, and Ma'ashour, and then to Kuwait or from southern Arabistan towns to Basra then to Kuwait.

migrated from Lamard, a village in the province of Fars, in the late nineteenth century, his family came to Kuwait in 1910 due to poverty and inter-tribal conflicts. His relatives were poor and had taken their revenge against other tribes before escaping to Kuwait.⁹⁹ This interpretation was also confirmed by Abduljalil Bouland's uncle, who was born in 1923 in Kuwait. "Ali Bouland, my grandfather, migrated to Kuwait due to the oppression and fighting among the tribes, and that migration started from 1850 A.D."¹⁰⁰

Dr. Yousuf Ali also provides a social rationale for his father's migration from Hiat Daud, a village in Busheher.¹⁰¹ His father had migrated along with his brothers to Kuwait in 1903 when he was three years old. Originally, his brothers had planned to migrate to Kuwait and they took him with them as well. He was disliked by his step-siblings since he was born of another mother. Fiscal and land inheritance also played a part, since his step-siblings would not allow him to inherit anything after their father's death. Thus, he stayed in Kuwait until he became seventeen years old and returned to his village to sue his step-siblings to regain his lost patrimony. He was finally successful in obtaining the legal portion of his patrimony and went back to Kuwait. Due to this family feud, he preferred to settle in Kuwait for good.¹⁰²

Another case of migration during that time concerns of the Ashkananei families. Though there are many of them and each of them has different reasons for their migration this research provides only two cases from this family, specifically, the family of Mulla Rajab Ashkananei and the family of Reda Ashkananei. Even though they were relatives, their rationales for migration were different. The former, on the one hand, indicates that his grandfather had migrated internally from Ashkanan to the port of Lingah and then to Busheher due to the drought that occurred in Ashkanan in 1901. From Busheher, his

⁹⁹ Abduljalil Boland, interview by the author, 27 July 2009, Kuwait.

¹⁰⁰ *Tarekh al-Kuwait: Rejal Men al-Kuwait: Hussain Hassan Bouland: Al-Mo'athen wa Qare'a al-Quran wa al-Do'aa* [History of Kuwait: Men from Kuwait: Hussain Hassan Bouland: The one who calls for prayer, and recites the Holy Quran and the prayer] (accessed May 21, 2010); available from http://www.kuwaitturath.com/articles/Hasan/alsr/08_05.pdf.

¹⁰¹ For more information about Busheher's villages, see the chart in *Gazetteer of Persia*, vol. 3, p. 142.

¹⁰² Although Yousuf Ali and his sibling still own those lands in Hiat Daud village, they donated them to their relatives. Yousuf Ali, interview by the author, 5 August 2009, Kuwait.

grandfather continued to Bahrain and thereafter to Kuwait as a final destination.¹⁰³ On the other hand, Reda Ashkananei, who was a Qajar tax collector in his village, escaped from Ashkanan when there was a revolt against the government. He feared assassination and therefore came to Kuwait between 1898 and 1899, after a short stop in Bahrain.¹⁰⁴

Kuwait, as mentioned before, was a very poor state. It relied heavily on sea resources and on trade within the region and India for survival. Kuwaiti port, *Khur Abdullah*, was founded in the middle of the eighteenth century and it was considered trans-shipment port to the Gulf countries and to India. Kuwait's ports flourished due to three advantages. It has a strategic location connecting the southeastern Gulf states, such as Manamah, Doha and Dubai, with the northeastern Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea. The minimal taxes that were charged compared to Basra and southwestern Iran ports also helped Arab and Iranian merchants to consider the port a transit point for trade in the region. Furthermore, unlike southwestern Iran and southern Mesopotamia, Kuwait was stable politically and was free from the sphere of influence, which made the country a neutral zone controlled by local rulers typified by Al-Sabah family which encouraged trade through Kuwait's port.¹⁰⁵

However, even though the Kuwaiti port, *Khur Abdullah*,¹⁰⁶ had been considered one of the thriving ports in the Gulf with nominal custom fees, commerce in Kuwait did not flourish until the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁷ This was due to two factors. First, other major ports in the region, such as those

¹⁰³ *Safahat Men Altarekh: Mulla Rajab Ashkananei Yarwee Thekraiat 105 Sanawat Men Umreh* [Pages of memory: Mulla Rajab Ashkananei narrates memory of 105 years of his age] (accessed May 20, 2010); available from <http://www.alqabas.com.kw/Article.aspx?id=472834&date=13022009>.

¹⁰⁴ *Tarekh Al- A'aeilah: Alnozh Ela Al-Kuwait* [Family history: Moving to Kuwait] (access May 2, 2010); available from <http://www.kuwaitturath.com/family.html>.

¹⁰⁵ Muhammad Abd al-Hadi Jamal, *Almawane'a Alkuwaiteya bain Alams wa Alyoum* [Kuwait's ports between the past and present] (Kuwait: Mo'asat al mawane'a al-Kuwait, 2002), pp. 22-24.

¹⁰⁶ Lorimer described the port as "An important inlet running north-westward, between the mouth of the Shatt-al-'Arab and Bubian island, from the head of the Persian Gulf to Warbah island. It is 12 miles wide at the entrance. The entire Khor could be traversed by the largest ships at high water; and there are good anchorages for large vessels, in any state of tide." Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 2 A, Geographical and Statistical, pp. 15-16.

¹⁰⁷ This does not mean that the trade in Kuwait was stagnant during the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries but rather that it fluctuated from time to time. One source asserts that Kuwait levied no tax until the end of the nineteenth century; others suggest that there was a tax of 1 to 2 percent on imported goods only during the early history of Kuwait, which increased slowly until it became 5 percent

in Iraq and Iran, had overshadowed Kuwait's port, which was considered an alternative in case of emergency, particularly by Britain, as explained before. Indeed, Kuwait was not discovered as a port of commercial importance during that time, although it was undoubtedly a port city. Second, the British Protectorate status in 1899 significantly increased Kuwaiti trade because British steamer ships now made regular calls to Kuwait and carried a growing variety of goods.¹⁰⁸ According to P. Z. Cox, who was a political resident in the Persian Gulf from 1904 to 1913, "As Sheikh Mubarak informed the Resident recently, the regular calling of the British India Steamers at the Port materially added to the prosperity of his territory and indeed the heavy cargoes carried there from time to time by the British India Steam Navigation Company's vessels demonstrate clearly enough that the trade of the Port is expanding considerably."¹⁰⁹

Mubarak recognized trade as a major source of revenue for establishing a modern state. This was obvious from the amicable relationships between the Sheikh of Kuwait and affluent Kuwaiti merchants who enjoyed some degree of political influence over the Sheikh during the pre-oil era.¹¹⁰ Al-Ibrahim during the reign of Muhammad al-Sabah (1892-1896) and Hellal Al-Mutairey, Shamlan Ibin Saif and Ibrahim Ibin Muthaf under Mubarak are examples of some of the most influential merchants.¹¹¹ Their influence was profound because: "A substantial portion of the rulers' revenues came from the merchants

during the reign of Mubarak, who also established a customhouse. Fattah, *The Politics of Regional Trade in Iraq, Arabia and the Gulf 1745-1900* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 68; Al-Sabah, *al-Kuwayt, hadarah wa-tarikh* [Kuwait is civilization and history], p. 279; and Abu-Hakima, *Tarikh al-Kuwayt al-hadith*, [The modern history of Kuwait 1750-1965], p.295.

¹⁰⁸Muhammad Abd al-Hadi Jamal, *Aswaq al-Kuwayt al-qadimah* [The old markets of Kuwait] (al-Kuwayt: Markaz al-Buhuth wa-al-Dirasat al-Kuwaytiyah, 2001), p. 22.

¹⁰⁹"Administration Report on the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Maskat Political Agency for 1904-1905" in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947*, vol. 5, p. 9.

¹¹⁰After the discovery of oil in the second quarter of the twentieth century, relationships between the Sheikh and the merchants changed, since the former became independent of the merchants. Crystal, *Oil and Politics in Persian Gulf*, p. 73.

¹¹¹In 1910 Mubarak increased taxes on the pearl merchants because he sought more revenues for his tribal wars. The merchants rejected his decision. Therefore, he prohibited them from pearling and fishing as a punishment although Kuwait heavily relied on those activities as valuable sources of income. As a result of this tyrannical decision of Mubarak, Al-Mutairey and bin Muthaf migrated to Bahrain while bin Saif left for Al-Hasa. Although Mubarak sent some messengers, including his son Sheikh Salim Al-Sabah, requesting that they come back, they refused. They told him that they would not come back unless Mubarak guaranteed that he would not harm them again. Although they had already received an offer

through customs duties, pearl boat tax, rents and other revenues that flowed from a prosperous *entrepot* economy. Rulers also depended upon occasional loans and financial gifts from the wealthiest merchants.”¹¹² However, no record shows that the Kuwaiti Shia merchants influenced the Sheikh of Kuwait politically, as their Sunni counterparts did during that period. They had only a positive influence on Kuwaiti trade, which will be discussed in this chapter.

Since Kuwait started to be known by outsiders as “one of the most thriving ports in the Persian Gulf”¹¹³ and the Kuwaitis were the best ship builders and sailors in the Gulf as well, the merchants of the region, such as the Arab and Iranian merchants, found Kuwait an attractive place for establishing businesses. These advantages of Kuwait and its harbor were noticed by most of the western visitors, such as Edward Ives, James Silk Buckingham, Lewis Pelly and George Curzon from early Kuwait history through the nineteenth century. Highlighting Kuwait’s importance, Colonel Lewis Pelly, for instance, made the following comment during his visit to Kuwait in the middle of the nineteenth century:

A clean, active town, with a broad and open main bazaar, and numerous solid stone dwelling-houses, containing some 20,000 inhabitants, and attracting Arab and Persian merchants from all quarters by the equity of its rule and by the freedom of its trade.... Under the fostering care of a succession of common-sense Rulers, and by means of a policy wisely originated and systematically pursued, an Arab band of pirates now appear as the master of the thriving port, the refuge of the oppressed and peaceful, free home of all.... On the Whole, and without endeavouring to change trade from any present channel, I would bear Koweit in mind as a convenient point for a telegraph station, for a coal depot, for the meeting of sea-going and river steamers and other craft, and as a possible future port of importance.¹¹⁴

George Curzon gave credit also to Kuwait’s port during the late nineteenth century. He states “The sole place of any interest on the coast-line between El Katif and Fao is the excellent and flourishing

from the Sheikh of Qatar to settle in his state, they returned to Kuwait, but only after Mubarak himself came to Bahrain once he recognized how much they had contributed to Kuwait’s economy. Mubarak vowed in front of Sheikh Isa that he would not harm them again. For more details of the full story, see Rush, ed., *Record of Kuwait 1899-1961*, vol. 1, Internal Affairs 1899-1921, pp. 543-561; Shamlan, *Min tarikh al-Kuwayt* [From Kuwait history] pp. 151-157; and Khaz’al, *Tarikh al-Kuwayt al-siyasi* [Political history of Kuwait] vol. 2, pp. 280-286.

¹¹²Onley and Khalaf, “Shaikhly Authority in the Pre-oil Gulf an Historical-Anthropological Study,” p. 197.

¹¹³Pelly, “Report of a Journey to the Wahabbe Capital of Riyadh in Central Arabia,” p. 11.

¹¹⁴“Report and Proceedings of a sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defense on the Baghdad Railway, Southern Persia and the Persian Gulf” *Iran in the Persian Gulf 1820-1966*, vol. 2: 1880-1917, eds., Burdett and Seay, p. 632.

harbor of Grane, or Koweit.” He also states that “Koweit would probably afford the best available harbor in neighbourhood of Tigris and Euphrates delta.”¹¹⁵ Therefore, it is not surprising that Kuwait harbor attracted not only regional merchants but also great powers, such as Germany, Russia and Britain, interested in dominating the Persian Gulf.

Although its trade within the Gulf region extended to all Gulf states, Kuwait traded most intensively with Basra in southern Iraq, Busheher, Bandar Abbass, Bandar Ma’ashour, Bandar Dailam and Muhammerah in southwestern Iran, Manamah in Bahrain, and Muscat in Oman.¹¹⁶ Not surprisingly, Kuwaiti Shia merchants, such as Hajj Mohammad Alabdullah Almatrook and members of the Marafie family, played pivotal roles in fostering Kuwait’s trade through their networks. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that there were ten Kuwaitis and ten Hasawis (people from Al-Hasa) in Busheher during the first quarter of the twentieth century.¹¹⁷ They were either traders or visitors, as Lorimer indicated. In addition, the director of customs for the port of Busheher arrested a Kuwaiti traveler who carried a cache of weapons and ammunition which he planned to send to Kuwait as well as to other Iranian ports, such as Muhammerah, in 1900.¹¹⁸ There was also correspondence between Capt W. H. I. Shakespear, who was a British political agent and a representative of the English Bolinkl Agency, and Mubarak, regarding a civil case related to Mirza Ja’afir, an Iranian merchant, on 10 October 1909. Shakespear asked Mubarak on behalf of Ja’afar to obtain his money back from Shaie’a, Mohammad Al-Kazmawei, Abdullah Al-Sameit and other Kuwaitis. Mubarak cooperated and asked those people to meet with Ja’afar and honor their agreement, but by swearing by God they denied that they owed money to Ja’afir. The latter left for Busheher because he did not have time to pursue his case in Kuwait.¹¹⁹

For example, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Kuwait imported coffee, madder root, nuts, gram and various kinds of carpets from Busheher and in return the former exported coffee,

¹¹⁵Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, p. 463.

¹¹⁶For more details about their locations, see *Gazetteer of Persia*, vol. 3, pp. 93-94, 136, 169, 471-472.

¹¹⁷Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, vol. 2 A, Geographical and Statistical, p. 344.

¹¹⁸Furayhi, *Tijarat al-silah fi al-Khalij al-Arabi* [Arms trade in the Arabian Gulf] p.112.

¹¹⁹“R/15/5/221 Civil Cases 1909-1913” in *Kuwait Political Agency: Arabic Documents 1899-1949*, vol. 1, pp. 543-551.

peppers and English cotton. Kuwait also imported numerous goods, such as grain, rice, oil, flour, sugar, vinegars, beers, fresh and dry fruits and vegetables, almond and pistachio sweets, candies, tobacco and many other consumer articles from Busheher between 1905 and 1915.¹²⁰ In return, Kuwait exported spices, wool sewing thread, thread made of imitation gold and silver, dates, gums, animal products, raw or dried skins, raw wool, tissues, metals, stones, fish and many other commodities.¹²¹ It should be noted that the ratio of imported to exported goods traded between Busheher and Kuwait fluctuated. For instance, Kuwait imported more goods from Busheher than it exported to the latter between 1905 and 1907.¹²² However, this ratio changed between 1908 and 1910, when Kuwait exported more commodities to Busheher than it imported.¹²³ By contrast, Busheher exported more articles to Kuwait than Kuwait exported to Busheher between 1911 and 1915.¹²⁴ Therefore, it can be concluded that Kuwait imported more articles from Busheher than it exported to the latter between 1905 and 1915.

Kuwait also traded with the ports of Bandar Dilam and Bandar Ma'ashour in southwestern Iran during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Kuwait imported from Bandar Dilam a variety of goods, such as wheat, barley, wool, grapes, dried fruit, gram, ghee and raisins and exported sugar, tea, iron, and cloth. Furthermore, Kuwait exported weapons to Bandar Dilam during 1892 and 1893. A. C. Talbot, a political resident in the Persian Gulf, notes that Bandar Ma'ashour also imported weapons from Kuwait: "The influx of arms into Arabistan still continues, and about a thousand Martin Henry rifles were

¹²⁰For more details about trade between both regions during that period and the average number of Kuwaiti vessels entering and leaving the port of Busheher, specifically in 1882, see *Gazetteer of Persia*, vol. 3, pp.150-154, 157.

¹²¹For more details about various types of goods exchanged between Kuwait and Busheher during that time, see "Report on the Trade and Commerce of Bushire for the Year 1906-1907" in *The Persian Gulf Trade Reports 1905-1940, Bushire I 1905-1915*, pp. 34-47; and "Report for the Persian Fiscal Year March 22, 1907 to March 21, 1908" in *The Persian Gulf Trade Reports 1905-1940: Bushire I 1905-1915*, pp. 26-57.

¹²²"Report for the Persian Fiscal Year March 22, 1907 to March 21,1908" in *The Persian Gulf Trade Reports 1905-1940: Bushire I 1905-1915*, p. 47.

¹²³"Report of the Consular District of Bushire for the Persian Fiscal Year 22nd March 1909 to 21st March 1910" in *The Persian Gulf Trade Reports 1905-1940: Bushire I 1905-1915*, p. 10.

¹²⁴"Report of the Trade of Bushire for the Persian Fiscal Year Ending March 21st, 1915" in *The Persian Gulf Trade Reports 1905-1940: Bushire I 1905-1915*, pp.8-9.

imported at Bandar Ma'ashour by native merchants from Kuwait.”¹²⁵ Bandar Ma'ashour exported wool, grain, wheat, barley, rice and sheep to Kuwait and the latter provided dates and cloth.¹²⁶ The exchange of goods with the port of Bandar Abbass was also registered in the trade record but it was less than the trade with Busheher. Kuwait imported only fruits, vegetables, grams, pulse, seeds, wool and some other articles between 1902 and 1904, and exports from Kuwait to Bandar Abbass were not registered at all.

The port of Muhammerah, however, was the commercial hub for Kuwait and a contact zone for Kuwaiti, Iraqi and Iranian merchants.¹²⁷ Indeed, Muhammerah was the closest Iranian port to both Basra and Kuwait. Therefore, Kuwait had more flourishing trade relations with Muhammerah than with any other southwestern Iranian port. The *Persian Gulf Administration Reports* and the individual archive of Hajj Mohammad Alabdullah Almatrook, who had a commercial office in Muhammerah from the beginning to the middle of the twentieth century, confirm Muhammerah's importance to Kuwait.¹²⁸ Both documents show constant trade relations between both regions from the late nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth centuries. As previously indicated, Kuwait and other Arab ports imported similar articles from various ports in southwestern Iran but Muhammerah was special because it exported horses, dates,

¹²⁵“Administration Report of the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Muscat Political Agency for 1892-1893” in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947*, vol. 4, p. 12.

¹²⁶*Gazetteer of Persia*, vol. 3, pp. 93-95; and “Report for the Year 1905 on the Trade and Commerce of Bushire” in *The Persian Gulf Trade Reports 1905-1940: Bushire 1 1905-1915*, p. 9.

¹²⁷For more details about different articles imported from Bandar Abbass and their values, see the tables “Comparative Statement of Total Exports from Bushire of all Descriptions into all Countries during the Year 1903 and 1904 Classified According to Customs House Tariff Value in Krans” in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947*, vol. 5, pp.105-108; and the appendix between 1899 to 1901, pp. 87-97.

¹²⁸There were different kinds of foreign currencies, such as the Maria Theresa dollar, Indian rupees, Persian krans and Turkish liras, which circulated in Kuwait. For details, see “Administration Report of the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Muscat Political Agency for 1904-1905” in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947*, vol. 5, p.10; and Pelly, “Report of a Journey to the Wahabee Capital of Riyadh in Central Arabia,” p. 11.

opium, spices, drinking water and other important goods to Kuwait.¹²⁹ In return, Kuwait exported some articles, such as limes and weapons to Muhammerah.¹³⁰

The role of Kuwaiti Shias' in developing the economy cannot be denied since "Kuwait extracted its living in every sense from the sea,"¹³¹ specifically from fishing, pearl-diving and trade, during the pre-oil era. Kuwaiti Shias dominated traditional crafts, such as weaving, goldsmithing, tailoring, cotton making, bead work, blacksmithing, brassware and so on.¹³² In this regard, the Shia artisans and merchants contributed enormously to building the state of Kuwait. The Shia artisans, indeed, were very skilful and professional in handicrafts or *al-heraf wa al-mehan*. Interestingly, their surnames, such as Al-Qalaf, Al-Ustad, Al-Hadad, Al-Karaz, Al-Safar, Al-Saraf, Al-Saiek, Al-Qatan, Al-Jazaf, Al-Atar, Al-Sabag, Al-Kaiat and the like not only indicate their faiths but also the types of jobs they performed.¹³³

In addition, Kuwaiti Shias controlled and dominated at least half of the Kuwaiti Market or *Sug al-Kuwait* since many of them were shopkeepers.¹³⁴ They owned stores in Kuwaiti Market and sold fruits, vegetables and dates which were brought from Basra and southwestern Iran. Muhammad Jamal indicates that seventy percent of vegetable sold in the markets was owned by Kuwaiti Shias.¹³⁵ Cloth, bakery and dessert markets were also dominated mostly by Kuwaiti Shias. To secure the Kuwaiti Market and

¹²⁹Unlike other provinces, a telegraph line and post office were established in Muhammerah between 1890 and 1892 by the British authority. This reflects its commercial importance. "Administration Report of the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Muscat Political Agency for 1891-1892" in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947*, vol. 4, p. 9.

¹³⁰From Muhammerah, Kuwait imported drinking water, which was brought from Shatt-al-Arab. Kuwait also obtained water from distant wells located outside of Kuwait City. Casey, *The History of Kuwait*, p. 39; Slot, p. 8; and Al-Hatem, *Men Huna Bada'at Al-Kuwait* [Kuwait started from here], p. 156.

¹³¹Alghanim, *The Reign of Mubarak AL-Sabah*, p. 18.

¹³²For more information about all traditional crafts in Kuwait, see Muhammad Abd al-Hadi Jamal, *Alhiraf wa-al-mihan wa-al-anshitah al-tijariyah al-qadimah fi al-Kuwayt* [The old crafts, practices and commercial activities in Kuwait] (al-Kuwayt: Markaz al-Buhuth wa-al-Dirasat al-Kuwaytiyah, 2003), pp.151-283.

¹³³For example, "Al-Hadad" refers to a person who works as a blacksmith, "Al-Karaz" to a person who does the beading work, "Al-Safar" who does the brassware, "Al-Saiek" to the one who works as a goldsmith and "Al-Kaiat" to a person who is a tailor.

¹³⁴The Kuwaiti Sunni families dominated other important professions as well, such as fishing, pearl-diving, butchering, knitting, spinning, trade and many others. For more details, see Jamal, *Alhiraf wa-al-mihan wa-al-anshitah al-tijariyah al-qadimah fi al-Kuwayt* [The old crafts, practices and commercial activities in Kuwait] pp. 285-293, 554-555.

¹³⁵Muhammad Abd al-Hadi Jamal and Habib Haiat, interview by the author, 29 July and 3 August 2009, Kuwait.

encourage business in Kuwait, the government put a twenty four hours guard inside the market place. Most of the guards were Shia typified, by Al-Baloushei family members who performed this task in order to protect the Market from theft.¹³⁶

Al-Qalaf and Al-Ustad families were responsible for building diverse types of ships for fishing, pearl-diving, trade and many other purposes. Al-Qalafs were the builders, while Al-Ustads were typically engineers, in the modern sense of the term. These families designed and built different ships for a variety of purposes. For example, for travel and trade, Kuwaitis used ships called Baggarah, Bagla, Boom; for diving, Sanbok, Showee, Baggarah and Boom; for pearl-diving, Boom, Jalee boat and Showee; for fishing, a small Showee and a small Jalee boat; for carrying sand, Douba, Ablam, and Boom alqata'al; for carrying rocks, a small Jalee boat and al-teshalal; for carrying water. Boom¹³⁷ Therefore, Kuwait, among its neighbors, was considered not only one of the best states for trade and commerce but also the best ship builder, with a supply of efficient sailors as well. This was confirmed by Lewis Pelly, a political resident in the Persian Gulf when he visited the Gulf States, including Kuwait, during the second half of the nineteenth century. He stated, "Kowaitees have a considerable carrying trade, and are perhaps the best boat builders round the Gulf."¹³⁸ He also considered Kuwaiti sailors the best in the region.¹³⁹ Without the ships designed by Al-Ustad and built by Al-Qalaf, Kuwaiti merchants, who were mostly Sunnis, would have been unable to travel for trade. As Muhammad Jamal said: "Building ships was a very old tradition. Ninety-five percent of the builders were Shia and Kuwait relied on ship building. They were proud not for who rode the ship and went to India but for whoever made it."¹⁴⁰ Not surprisingly, therefore, the ruler of Kuwait encouraged the influx of Shia immigrants with skills and capital.

¹³⁶ Muhammad Shamsah, interview by the author, 6 August 2009, Kuwait.

¹³⁷ For more details about different kinds of Kuwaiti ships and their purposes, see "Administration Report on the Persian Gulf Political Residency and Maskat Political Agency for 1880-81" in *The Persian Gulf Administration Reports 1873-1947*, vol. 2. part 3, p. 55; and Jamal, *Alhiraf wa-al-mihan wa-al-anshitah al-tijariyah al-qadimah fi al-Kuwayt* [The old crafts, practices and commercial activities in Kuwait] p.33.

¹³⁸ Pelly, "Report of Journey to the Wahabee Capital of Riyadh in Central Arabia," p.11.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Muhammad Abd al-Hadi Jamal, interview by the author, 29 July 2009, Kuwait.

that he preferred Muhammerah among other Iranian ports because this port was the closest one to his main office in Basra and at the same time the city had installed a telegraph early on. The communication facilities helped Almatrook not only to expand his trade network widely with the Iranian, Arab and foreign merchants in southwestern Iran, the Gulf and India but also to deal with them in a timely fashion on bills, claims and other issues. This is obvious from the above-mentioned documents, which exhibit his commercial ties with Iranian merchants.

Kuwait, by contrast, did not open a post office until 1904 and did not install a telegraph line until 1912. We can see the difficulty from a report sent by the Karachi Merchants' Association to the director general of the Post Office of India in 1904. These merchants complained about Kuwait's poor communication facilities and the obstacles that they faced while trying to contact their clients and co-merchants worldwide and urged action by the authorities:

I am directed by my Association to bring to your notice that, although almost every important port in the Persian Gulf has a post-office, the port of Daboi (Dubai) and Koweit, which are also becoming centres of trade with India, have none. The British India Steam Navigation Company's steamers have now been calling at these ports every fortnight, but in the absence of a post-office, merchants have to send their letters and shipping documents through passengers or their friends at other ports, the result being that they reach very irregularly or sometimes not reach at all. You are well aware that the very first and the most important factor in trade is the postal arrangement, without which it is almost impossible to develop it to any great extent. My Association requests that you will be good enough to give this matter your kind consideration, and arrange to open post-offices at the above-named ports, so that business arrangements with these places may be greatly facilitated.¹⁴⁵

Thus, when the post office was opened in 1904, Kuwait gained another commercial advantage.

Almatrook established partnerships with some Kuwaiti Shia and Sunni merchants, such as Saleh and Ibrahim Al-Fadhel in Karachi, Khaled Al-Fayez Al-Khamis, Nasser Abdulmohsin Al-Kharafi and his son Abdulmohsin Al-Nasser Al-Kharafi, Mohammed Al-Marzouq, Yousef Haider Marafie (Shia),

[matrook.com/PDFs/Ships%20and%20Customs/Shipping%20Agents/B%200006.pdf](http://bin-matrook.com/PDFs/Ships%20and%20Customs/Shipping%20Agents/B%200006.pdf). Finally, for trade with East Africa between 1933 and 1935, see http://bin-matrook.com/gallery/main.php?g2_itemId=10329 and

<http://bin-matrook.com/PDFs/Ships%20and%20Customs/Shipping%20Agents/B%200009.pdf>.

¹⁴⁵“Further Correspondence Respecting the Affair of Koweit” (1904), in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 2. part 6, p. 82.

Hamad Al-Saqer Al-Abdullah, Abdulatif Al-Ibrahim and his son Yousuf Abdulatif Al-Ibrahim, and Ben Sinan. He imported and exported various types of food and consumer products and was also involved in real estate.¹⁴⁶

Another example of the role of Kuwaiti Shia merchants is Al-Marafie trading family, whose members include Ismail Mohammad Ali Marafie (1870-1943), Mohammad Ali Haider Marafie (1842-1937), Yousuf Haider Marafie (1860-1939), Mohammad Hussain Nasirallah Marafie (1870-1934), Mansour Mohammad Zaman Marafie (1891-1964), and Abdullah Mohammad Hussain Nasirallah Marafie (1895-1966). During the peak of the Marafies' maritime trade, the family possessed approximately 40 ships, which had different names for various purposes.¹⁴⁷ Their trade mainly involved exporting and importing, such as arms and ammunition, timber, dates, spices, rice and many other products, with Basra, southwestern Iran, Muscat, and India. Thus, the volume of business they handled generated considerable revenues for the state. The Al-Marafie family has been involved in trade and private business from the early years of Kuwait up to the present. They are considered one of the oldest and wealthiest Kuwaiti Shia families.¹⁴⁸

After the Protectorate treaty with Mubarak in 1899, Britain signed many agreements with Mubarak to advance its interests in the Gulf and maintain its dominant status. Britain was concerned about the stability of the region because of the constant imports of arms and ammunition from Muscat to Kuwait, which could have made Kuwait a central port for the arms trade in the northwestern Gulf

¹⁴⁶His longest partnership was with Abdulmohsin Al-Nasser Al-Kharafi, whose family is nowadays considered one of the richest Kuwaiti Sunni families in the Arab world. *English Brief: Hajji Mohammad Alabdullah Almatrook* (accessed June 2, 2010); available from <http://bin-matrook.com/english.html>. Also another partnership between Kuwaiti Shia and Sunni merchants is typified by Mansur Al-Mazidi (Shia) and Khalid Al-Adsani (Sunni) in 1935. For official documents in this regard, see *Hajji Mohammad Alabdullah Almatrook: AlAdsanni AlMazidi* (accessed June 2, 2010); available from http://binmatrook.com/gallery/main.php?g2_itemId=10699.

¹⁴⁷For Marafie ships' names, see Carter, *Merchant Families of Kuwait*, p. 61; and Nega'at Marafei, *Fatin AbdulJabar Marafie*, [Sea spot of Marafei] (accessed June 4, 2010); available from http://www.diwanmarafie.com/Media_Pic/4.jpg.

¹⁴⁸For more details about the Marafie family tree and its eminent merchants, see *Divan Marafie: Shakhseiat men Al-Aaelah*, [Divan Marafie: Figures of the family] (accessed, June 2, 2010); available from http://www.diwanmarafie.com/Ar/Family_Personal_5.htm; and Carter, *Merchant Families of Kuwait*, pp. 57-61.

region.¹⁴⁹ Therefore, on 24 May 1900, the British authority signed an agreement with Mubarak prohibiting him from importing and exporting arms via Kuwaiti merchants.¹⁵⁰ Mubarak's involvement in tribal wars and his need to defend himself against the enemies who surrounded him prevented him from keeping his promise to the British.¹⁵¹ However, he pretended to warn Kuwaiti merchants and urge them not to smuggle arms between Kuwait and Muhammerah.¹⁵²

In this respect, since the Al-Marafie family had expertise in importing arms and ammunition from Muscat, they "have always contributed ships and arms when the need arose."¹⁵³ For instance, Mohammad Sadiq Marafie's ship smuggled arms and ammunition from Muscat to Kuwait for three other Kuwaiti Shia and Sunni merchants, Ali Naqi Ibin Mohammad Girashi, Mohammad Baqer and Hajj Meshtag. Though British ships were aware of the arms trade, the *nakhoda* or ship captain Abbass Abu Al-Nakhei, a Shia merchant, fooled British surveillance in Muscat and reached Kuwait ahead of the British ship that followed him. After Mubarak heard about Al-Nakhei's adventure, he asked the port authority to quickly unload the cargo and hide the merchants. In addition, Mubarak cleverly instructed the sailors to tow the ship from the port and paint her with oil. When the British ship came to the Kuwaiti port, those on board were not able to recognize Al-Nakhei's ship.¹⁵⁴ To help Mubarak with his tribal conflicts, Mohammad Ali Haider Marafie provided Mubarak with more than three hundred rifles with ammunition while

¹⁴⁹Furayhi, *Tijarat al-silah fi al-Khalij al-Arabi* [Arms trade in the Arabian Gulf], p. 87.

¹⁵⁰To see the agreement, see "Trade and Traffic in the Gulf, 1880-1906," in Burdett and Seay, eds., *Iran in the Persian Gulf 1820-1966*, vol. 2; 1880-1917, p. 80.

¹⁵¹Mubarak also relied on Russia and France to smuggle weapons for him. For example, a Russian ship imported 25 boxes of arms and ammunition to Kuwait from Muscat in 1905. In addition, a Kuwaiti dhow hoisting the French flag carried a cargo of about 400 rifles and 40,000 rounds of ammunition and unloaded at Kuwait in 1910. It was speculated that those weapons came from Mubarak's French merchant friend, Goguyer. See "Trade and Traffic in the Gulf, 1880-1906," in Burdett and Seay, eds., *Iran in the Persian Gulf 1820-1966*, p. 65; and Fatimah, *Tijarat al-silah fi al-Khalij al-Arabi* [Arms trade in the Arabian Gulf], pp. 88, 90.

¹⁵²In 1907 and 1908 Mubarak dispatched large quantities of arms and ammunition to his closest friend, the Sheikh of Muhammerah Kaz'al, to help him defeat tribal rebellions. "Trade and Traffic in the Gulf, 1880-1906," in *Iran in the Persian Gulf 1820-1966*, ed: Burdett and Seay, eds. p. 43 and Fatimah, *Tijarat al-silah fi al-Khalij al-Arabi* [Arms trade in the Arabian Gulf], p. 92.

¹⁵³Carter, *Merchant Families of Kuwait*, p. 61.

¹⁵⁴For more details about this story, see Fatimah, *Tijarat al-silah fi al-Khalij al-Arabi* [Arms trade in the Arabian Gulf], pp. 88-89; and Khaz'al, *Tarikh al-Kuwayt al-siyasi* [Political history of Kuwait], vol. 2, pp. 287-288.

Mohammad bin Ali, a Kuwaiti Sunni merchant, provided him with money. This partnership was the origin of a common proverb among Kuwaitis that “*al-flous bin Ali wa al-selah Mohammad Ali*,” which means the money came by bin Ali and the arms came by Mohammad Ali.¹⁵⁵ Ismail Mohammad Ali Marafie and Mansour Mohammad Zaman Marafie were also arms traders. Indeed Ismail had also smuggled arms and ammunitions from Muscat to Kuwait for Mubarak who trusted him.¹⁵⁶ Meanwhile, Mansour Mohammad Zaman Marafie used his own ships to transport water from Shatt-al-Arab to Kuwait. He also imported and exported tea and arms.¹⁵⁷

The Al-Marafie had significant stakes in other line of trade. Yousuf Haider Marafie helped to stabilize the price of grain in Kuwait during World War I (1914-1918). Although the price of grain had increased from two rupees to twenty-seven, he never took advantage of that and kept selling the grain at the ordinary price that he usually charged for imports from Basra and Bandar Ma’ashour.¹⁵⁸ Finally, Ismail Mohammad Ali Marafie and Mansour Mohammad Zaman Marafie also participated in developing the Kuwaiti economy. During the reigns of Mubarak and his son Salim, Ismail brought a huge amount of dates from Marafie date groves located in Arabistan (now Khorramshahr) every year and distributed them

¹⁵⁵ In 1914 Mubarak asked Najaf Ibin Galib, a cousin of Mohammad Ali Haider Marafie and a representative of Marafei’s commercial office in Muscat, to provide arms, ammunition and wheat to Kuwait. Furthermore, Mohammad Ali Haider Marafie also provided more than 130 rifles and ammunition to Kuwaitis during the Jahra War in 1920. *Al-flous bin Ali wa al-selah Mohammad Ali: Hekaia kuwaiteia qadema takshef mada al-ertebat belard*, Fatin Abdul Jabar Marafie, [Money came by bin Ali and the arms came by Mohammad Ali: Tales of old Kuwaitis reveal the link with the land] (accessed June 4, 2010); available from http://diwanmarafie.org/Media_Pic/3.jpg; and *Divan Marafie, Mohammad Ali bin Marafei (1842-1937)*, (accessed June 4, 2010); available from http://www.diwanmarafie.com/Family_Personal/Ar/Mohamed_ali_1.htm.

¹⁵⁶ *Alwath’aek Alberitaniah To’arekh le ‘aayat “Marafie – Behbehanei wa Nashateha Altejarey,”* [British documents register commercial activates for al-Marafei and Behbehanei families] *Alqabas Newspaper*, January 16, 2010, (accessed June 4, 2010); available from <http://alqabas.com.kw/Article.aspx?id=567203&searchText=يوسف%20الابراهيم&date=16012010>.

¹⁵⁷ *Divan Marafie: Mansour Mohammad Zaman Marafie (1891- 1964)*, (accessed June 4, 2010); available from http://www.diwanmarafie.com/Family_Personal/Ar/Mansour_Zaman_6.htm.

¹⁵⁸ *Al-flous bin Ali wa al-selah Mohammad Ali: Hekaia kuwaiteia qadema takshef mada al-ertebat bel ard*, Fatin Abdul Jabar Marafie [Money came by bin Ali and the arms came by Mohammad Ali: tales of old Kuwaitis reveal the link with the land] (accessed June 4, 2010); available from http://diwanmarafie.org/Media_Pic/3.jpg.

among the Kuwaiti poor as *Zakat*.¹⁵⁹ Even today they own a huge number of date groves in southern Iraq as well.¹⁶⁰ Before his death, Ismail forgave all merchants and other people who owed him money, as an act of charity to the Kuwaiti people.¹⁶¹

Historically, the relationship between Kuwaiti Shia merchants and Kuwait's rulers was very amicable, and it continues to be so even at the present. For instance, Murrad Behbehani was one of the closest friends and advisers to the Sheikh Jabir al-Ahmad Al-Sabah (1977-2006).¹⁶² In addition, Kuwaiti Sheikhs and Kuwaiti Shia merchants exchanged visits on various joyful occasions, such as the Kuwaiti National Day commemoration, Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr and even on sad occasions such as when they visit each other to express condolences for the death of their relatives. In fact, this shows the important roles of the Kuwaiti Shias in building the state of Kuwait under Mubarak, a fact that is recognized by his successors.

The "Kuwaiti Shia regarded themselves as a structural element of the state,"¹⁶³ of Kuwait from military, economic, educational and social standpoints. Thus, it is important to shed light on some historic roles of the Kuwaiti Shia in contributing to build the state of Kuwait from its early history. From the military standpoint, Sarif battle, between Mubarak the Great (1896-1915) and Abdul Aziz Al-Rashid, Sheikh of Jabal Shammar, took place on 17 March 1901, far away from Kuwait City. Mubarak was defeated in this battle and witnessed a severe loss of large numbers of Kuwaiti inhabitants, including his

¹⁵⁹Zakat is one of the five pillars of Islam and it is obligatory for every Muslim who can afford to do so to give a small percentage of his property as charity to the poor people. It is also applied to those who possess gold, silver, and cattle. For the percentages of Zakat according to Shia creed, see Yusuf Sanii, *Misbah al-muqallidin* [lamp of imitators] (Qum: Maktabat Mitham al-Tammar, 1998), pp. 322-344.

¹⁶⁰Carter, *Merchant Families of Kuwait*, p. 61.

¹⁶¹Usually charitable deeds for Kuwait and its inhabitants were inclusive to the Kuwaiti Sunnis merchants, such as Hellal Al-Mutairey, Yousuf Yagub Al-Badr, Yousuf Bin Sabih, Abdalatif Al-Atigi, Salim Sultan and Al-Ibrahim. See, Al-Hatem, *Men Huna Bada'at Al-Kuwait* [Kuwait started from here] p. 223; *Diwan Marafie: Ismail Mohammad Ali Marafie (1870- 1943)*, (accessed June 4, 2010), available from http://www.diwanmarafie.com/Family_Personal/Ar/Mohamed_Esmail_4.htm.

¹⁶²The Behbehanei family was also one of the wealthiest Shia families in Kuwait. They are relatives of the Al-Marafei family through intermarriages. In the twentieth century, there were some Behbehanei merchants who traded between Iran and Kuwait, on the one hand, and Iran to Iraq, on the other hand, such as the case of Yousuf Behbehanei. In the 1930s he was involved in the business of transporting Iranian corpses to Iraq via Kuwait for burial in a holy ground according to Shia belief. Crystal, *Oil and Politics in Persian Gulf*, p. 40; and Carter, *Merchant Families of Kuwait*, p. 31.

¹⁶³Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, p. 45.

brother Hamud Al-Sabah and his cousin Khalifah Al-Sabah.¹⁶⁴ Some Kuwaiti Shias were among the casualties as well, including Muhammad bin Eidei, Isa Muhammad Al-Matrook, Rashid Muhammad Al-Shimalei, and Jasim Al-Ramzey.¹⁶⁵

In the same light, Kuwaiti Shias also physically participated in building Kuwait's wall or *Sur al-Kuwait* in 1919-1920 to protect against any foreign assault, specifically by the Wahhabi Ikhwan movement.¹⁶⁶ Sayyed Jawad Al-Qazwini, the main Shia religious leader in Kuwait during that time, supervised the people who built Kuwait's wall. Furthermore, the Bo Sha'aboun family was one of the main families responsible for transporting rocks free of cost from a distant zone called Ushaireg.¹⁶⁷

With regard to education, since there was no school in Kuwait during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, *Mullahs* served as the primary instructors were the main tools to teach Kuwaiti children the Holy Quran, the Prophet's sayings or *Hadith*, basic reading, writing and simple mathematics for one rupee or less per child per month.¹⁶⁸ Accordingly, both Mulla Abdeen (1866-1950) and Amena Zillzila (1898-1993), who were members of the Kuwaiti Shia community, had great interest in education and sought to educate their compatriots.¹⁶⁹ After the first government school (*al-madrasa al-Mubarakeia*) was established between 1911 and 1912, Kuwaitis still kept sending their children to those private teachers. However, there is no evidence of tuition fees charged at *al-Mubarakeia* school. It is not also clear whether it was exclusively for Kuwaiti Sunnis or for Kuwaiti Shias as well.

¹⁶⁴ "Further Correspondence Respecting the Affair of Koweit" (1901), in Bidwell, ed., *The Affair of Kuwait 1896-1905*, vol. 1 1896-1901, part 3, pp. 44-45.

¹⁶⁵ Jamal, *Lamhat min Tarikh al-Shia fee al-Kuwait*: [Highlights from Shia history in Kuwait], pp. 47-48

¹⁶⁶ Abass Haiat, interview by the author, 21 July 2009, Kuwait and *Awraq Khaleijeia 5: Sayyed Adnan wa Alzaid- Tarekh Al-Shia*, [Gulf documents 5: History of Shia between Sayyed Adnan and Alzaid] You Tube (accessed May 18, 2010); available from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sfi79yTIZxc>.

¹⁶⁷ *Tarekh al-Kuwait: Nesa'a men al-Kuwait: Badreia Ramadan Qasim Bo Sha'aboun: Umm al-Kheir* [History of Kuwait: Woman from Kuwait: Badreia Ramadan Qasim Bo Sha'aboun: The mother of benevolence] (accessed May 22, 2010); available from http://www.kuwaiturath.com/articles/Hasan/alasr/07_05.pdf and Jassim Ashkananei, interview by the author, 26 July, 2009, Kuwait.

¹⁶⁸ Al-Hatem, *Men Huna Bada 'at Al-Kuwait* [Kuwait started from here], p. 77.

¹⁶⁹ Abdul Muhsin Abdullah Khirafi, *Murrabun min baladi* [Breeders of my country] (al-Shamiyah, al-Kuwayt: A.al-M.A.A. al-Khirafi, 1998), pp. 498-500, pp. 265- 268.

With regard to social life during that time, most Kuwaitis showed solidarity, cohesion and cooperation among each other not only as part of their religious duty but also as part of the overall Kuwaiti culture. Thus whenever Kuwait confronted any crisis, the inhabitants usually cooperated with each other to overcome the problem. This can be concluded from many examples, including the famine that occurred in 1868, which is called the year of *al-heilak* in Kuwait. Abdalnabi Al-Marafie, a Shia merchant, and many prominent Kuwaiti Sunni merchants, such as Yousuf Yagub Al-Badr, Yousuf Bin Sabih, Abdalatif Al-Atigi, Salim Sultan and Al-Ibrahim, opened their storehouses and distributed food and rice to the people for free.¹⁷⁰ In this way, Kuwait overcame its problem through social solidarity and cooperation and most of the Kuwaitis survived. Therefore, it can be concluded that from the establishment of Kuwait, “Kuwaiti Shias have been fully-fledged actors in the process of the state of Kuwait.”¹⁷¹

Conclusion

In 2007, a stunning filmed drama series containing twenty-seven episodes called *Asad Al-jazeera* or Lion of the Island, in which a mix of eminent actors from Kuwait, Bahrain, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates and Syria acted, showed Kuwaiti history during the reign of Mubarak the Great in the context of political rivalry between the great powers in the region, the British and the Ottomans.¹⁷² Although this drama shed light on the internal circumstances of Kuwait from economic, social and cultural standpoints, it was unfortunately banned by the Kuwaiti government without an explanation.¹⁷³ In fact, the whole drama series was worthy for two reasons. First, it highlighted the importance of Mubarak’s reign as a turning point in Kuwait history, because he is considered the founder of modern Kuwait, or *Mo’acess*

¹⁷⁰Carter, *Merchant Families of Kuwait*, p. 61; and Al-Hatem, *Men Huna Bada’at Al-Kuwait* [Kuwait started from here] p. 223.

¹⁷¹Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, p. 46.

¹⁷²The word “lion” is a metaphor that refers to Mubarak Al-Sabah and “Island” means the Arabian Peninsula. The drama was written and enacted mainly in the Arabic language but sometimes English and Ottoman (Turkish) words were used. To watch this movie, visit *Asad Al-Jazeera Al-Halqa Al-Uola Al-Joz’a Al-Awal* [The lion of al-jazeera- the first part of the first episode] YouTube (accessed May 24, 2010); available from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uz83Zu8CP54>.

¹⁷³It has been said that the drama series was banned due to the political questions which might affect relationships among the sheikhs in the Gulf.

Dawlat al-Kuwait al-Haditha. Second, it used primary sources that vividly showed both the internal and external conditions of Kuwait.

Kuwait during Mubarak's reign underwent a period of significant economic and political development. For example, the first hospital in Kuwait was an American hospital built in 1913. The medical crew who worked in this hospital, such as Dr. Eleanor Calverley, who carried an Arabic nickname *Khaton Halima*, Dr. Bent and Dr. Stanley Millry, were American. *Al-madrasa Al-Mubarakeia* was the first governmental school built between 1911 and 1912. The customhouse was also built during Mubarak's reign as well.¹⁷⁴ Indeed, this was a turning point in Kuwait history because it was recognized as an independent state by regional and international powers. According to Onley and Khalaf, the sheikhdom of Kuwait and other sheikhdom states in the Gulf relied on two factors to maintain the sheikhdom system. The first factor was the sheikh's relationships with the leading dynastic families, tribes, merchants and governors. The second factor was the sheikh's diplomacy towards the regional and international powers dominating the Gulf region. Mubarak tried to obtain full support from his family members, the tribal chiefs, and the merchants to legitimize his rule. His relationship with the merchant community was cultivated and maintained cautiously, leading him to limit his "abuse of authority"¹⁷⁵ toward them. This was not only because he depended on the merchants economically but also because of his fear of return migrations of those merchants and their employees to other Gulf states.¹⁷⁶ Mubarak relied in particular on the Shia community, especially Kuwaiti Shia merchants, in building the state of Kuwait. The Shia merchants through their networks in the Gulf supplied Mubarak with arms and ammunition as well as variety of goods from southwestern Iran. He developed such a mutually interdependent relationship with the Shia community that he could not afford to harm them. After

¹⁷⁴Al-Hatem, *Men Huna Bada 'at Al-Kuwait* [Kuwait started from here], pp. 78, 90-91; Khaz'al, *Tarikh al-Kuwayt al-siyasi* [Political history of Kuwait], vol. 2, pp. 294-296; Abu Hakma, *Tarikh al-Kuwayt al-hadith* [The modern history of Kuwait 1750-1965], pp. 335-338; and Al-Sabah, *al-Kuwayt, hadarah wa-tarikh* [Kuwait is civilization and history], p. 279.

¹⁷⁵Onley and Khalaf, "Shaikhly Authority in the Pre-oil Gulf: An Historical-Anthropological Study," p. 205.

¹⁷⁶Usually rulers of Kuwait opened their *majlis*, a council located in their residence, to the ordinary people, merchants and elites for suggestions and addressing grievances. Onley and Khalaf, "Shaikhly Authority in the Pre-oil Gulf: An Historical-Anthropological Study," p. 199.

Mubarak mobilized local support, he sought protection from the most powerful actors, regional and international who could counter any threats and thus guarantee the Al-Sabah dynasty as the ruling family in Kuwait.¹⁷⁷ As a result, the little town called Kuwait was transformed into the modern state of Kuwait.

¹⁷⁷Onley and Khalaf, "Shaikhly Authority in the Pre-oil Gulf: An Historical-Anthropological Study," p. 202.

Chapter Four

Epilogue and Conclusion

Many factors, such as religion, language, ethnicity, kinship and culture, play important roles in unifying immigrants in a host country around a shared identity. A shared identity can also cross borders and create what Dufoix calls “nonterritorialized links.”¹ This helps to maintain connections with other groups in a wider diaspora despite demarcations of nationality and citizenship. Kuwaiti Shias are similar to other minorities in many countries around the world in that they have two identities, their Kuwait nationality and their Shia religion. After settling in Kuwait, Shia immigrants united with each other under their religious identity, even though they had different ethnicities, Arab and Ajam. Furthermore, Shia religious identity is not circumscribed by the jurisdiction of Kuwait, but extends to other Shia communities in the Gulf region, such as Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, in Iraq, and, of course in Iran, the main global hub of Shias. Dufoix categorizes this mode as an “enclave mode” which is initially “based not on a formal link of nationality but on a shared identity.”² The living connections of a shared identity are personal and familial not just linguistic, doctrinal, or institutional. Many Kuwaiti Shia still maintain their relationships with their relatives, either in their homelands or in the Gulf states. However, it should be borne in mind that nowadays some Kuwaiti Shia or Sunnis pride themselves that their ancestors were originally from Iran while others deny their ancestral affiliation to Iran for political reasons. Thus some Kuwaiti families have kept connection with their relatives in Iran, such as my maternal grandfather’s family, and others have kept their connection with only their relatives who migrated to other Gulf states, such as my paternal grandfather’s family. These connections often stretch back to the beginning of a family’s migration history. Others have kept both connections as well.

From a religious viewpoint, the Kuwaiti Shias up to now have had a sturdy relationship with Iran. One reason is that “Iranian government is the only government in the world whose state religion (is)

¹Dufoix, *Diasporas*, p. 106.

²Dufoix, *Diasporas*, p. 63.

Shiite Islam.”³ Another is that Iran is a place of holy shrines for some Shia Imams, such as Imam Reza, whose shrine is located in Mashhad, and thus a destination of pilgrimages. Most of the Shia religious schools or *hawza* are located in Iran and in turn many eminent Shia clergy have graduated from the schools.⁴ Kuwaiti Shias who are interested in learning *al-sharia* must obtain such education from either Iran or Iraq since there are no schools that teach Shia doctrine in Kuwait.⁵ Even at present, Iranian preachers or *mullah* come from Iran to make speeches or *khutba* at different Shia ritual ceremonies in Kuwait throughout the year. Kuwait is but one stop in their circuit around the Shia communities of the Gulf. Furthermore, a portion of the annual donation which Shia believers give to charity, according to Shia creed called *Khoms*, goes to charitable organizations in Iran among other states.⁶ The strict policy of the Kuwaiti state and other Gulf states concerning the Shia community’s ritual institutions has forced Shia merchants to build charitable projects in Iran and other states as far away as Syria, Lebanon, India, and Pakistan. This is obvious if we compare the number of Sunni mosques with that of the Shia mosques. There are 1,000 Sunni mosques and only 35 Shia mosques in Kuwait.⁷

This policy came to the fore after the Iranian Revolution in 1979 because of anxieties about its influence on the Shia community in Kuwait and elsewhere. Indeed, although Kuwaiti Shias became more confident after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, their privileges declined in Kuwait.⁸ This was ultimately discouraging because according to Laurence Louër Shias believe that “[t]heir objective was not to export the Islamic revolution to Kuwait but to gain more political weight in the

³Hassan, “Ideology, Identity, and Linguistic Capital,” p. 24.

⁴According to Shia doctrine, every Shia must follow a Shia cleric or *Marje’a*. People consult the clergy for guidance about what is permissible and what is prohibited in religion and matters of everyday life. Hassan, “Ideology, Identity, and Linguistic Capital,” p. 24.

⁵For example, Sayyid Hussain Al-Qalaf, a Shia religious scholar who is currently a member of the National Assembly of Kuwait earned his degree from Iran. Also, Ali Al-Saleh recently announced himself the second highest Shia clerical official or *Marje’a* in Kuwait after Mirza Al-Ehqaqey. Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, p. 50; Hassan, “Ideology, Identity, and Linguistic Capital,” p. 31; and Ahmad Al-Sarraf, *Kalam Al-nas: Ayat Allah Al-Kuwaiti*, [People’s discussion: Ayatollah al-Kuwaiti] (accessed June 10, 2010); available from <http://www.alqabas.com.kw/Article.aspx?id=594129&date=12042010>

⁶Such as Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Pakistan, India. Ahmad Al-Sarraf, *Kalam Al-nas: Ayat Allah wa Tawteen Al-amal Al-kairey*, [People’s discussion: Ayatollah and nationalizing the charity] (accessed June 10, 2010); available from <http://www.alqabas.com.kw/Article.aspx?id=596776&date=20042010>

⁷Hassan, “Ideology, Identity, and Linguistic Capital,” p. 31.

⁸Hassan, “Ideology, Identity, and Linguistic Capital,” pp. 24-25.

framework of the pluralist political institutions, in order to pressure the rulers to restore the Parliament disbanded in 1976 and grant it more powers, but also to enhance the political and social relevance of the Shias overall.”⁹

Nevertheless, the social networks of Kuwaiti Shias among families and friends and through Shia religious institutions have enabled Kuwaiti Shias to maintain ties to homelands in southwestern Iran in the form of contributions to various endowment projects there. A combination of factors is at work, including official encouragement by the Iranian government and the simple fact that the building costs of charitable projects are lower in southwestern Iran than in Kuwait.¹⁰ Thus Kuwaiti Shia merchants and ordinary philanthropists have been at the forefront of building Shia mosques and other endowments in Iran and other counties.¹¹ For example, after the death of my maternal grandfather in 1998, my mother and her siblings decided to build a school dedicated to him in his ancestral village of Abassi in Busheher. With relatives’ cooperation, such as my mother’s uncles, the school was built in 2002 and has been providing an education to children of that village ever since. Other charitable projects made by this family include a mosque built in 2008 in the same village and another mosque built in 2004 in the village of Bahmyari in Busheher.¹² The example of my family is not uncommon. Some of my interviewees spoke of similar charitable endeavors, such as school building in Iran.

A notable example of Kuwaiti Shia charitable projects is the Bahman Foundation in the World, founded by Abed Al Hussain Bahman, a Kuwaiti Shia merchant. Indeed, this charity is responsible for several endowments projects, such as schools, orphanage, hospitals, and several *Husseiniyya* in villages in

⁹Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, p. 173.

¹⁰There was another trend provoked by some Shia clergies, such as Mohammad al-Shirazi to intensify Shia social prestige in Kuwait by diverting Kuwaiti Shia funds to build charitable projects inside Kuwait. Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, p. 131.

¹¹Although Kuwait’s parliament and government have decreased Shia privileges, it should be borne in mind that the Kuwaiti government “does not interfere in Shiite jurisprudence in family law and personal states at first-instance and appellate levels. [Shia] is allowed to practice their faith openly and observe important dates of the [Shia] such as ten days of *Muharram* and the climax of *Ashura* (the slaying day of Prophet’s grandson Hussein). There are also some 659 informal and unlicensed *Husseiniyyas* ([Shia] religious gathering place[s]) owned privately.” Thus, compared to the Gulf states, Kuwaiti Shias still enjoy more privileges than their counterpart communities in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Oman. Hassan, “Ideology, Identity, and Linguistic Capital,” pp. 30-31.

¹²See the table of the villages of the Busheher district in *Gazetteers of Persia*, vol. 3, pp.140-142.

southwestern Iran, such as Ashkanan, Abadan and Ahwaz's as well as Isfahan, Qum, and elsewhere in Iran. A roll call of these charitable projects would include Baathat hospital and Kindergarten of the martyr Faiad Bakhshy, established in 1994; Bahman's orphanage in 2001; Hadrat Maasouma High School, established in 1992; Fadak Primary School, established in 1995; School of Martyr Arasta, established in 1994; the Bahman 22 School, established in 1997; the Husseiniyya of Sayyed El Shuhada, established in 1996; the mosque of Imam El Kazem, established in 1999; and many other charitable projects throughout Iran, Pakistan, India, Syria and Lebanon.¹³

Kuwaiti Shia immigrants and their descendants have maintained social connections with their original homeland and with various Shia communities in the Arab Gulf states as part of the joyful and sorrowful occasions of family life. For example, when my paternal grandmother died in 2004, relatives of my father, such as uncles, aunts and cousins came from Qatar and the United Arab Emirates to Kuwait to convey their condolences. My Emirati cousin invited us to his wedding ceremony in 2009 in the United Arab Emirates, and my parents, uncles, and aunts from Kuwait attended this celebration. Moreover, marriages between Kuwaiti Shias and Shias from their original homeland or other Shia communities in the Gulf have been a common occurrence for a long time.¹⁴ Laurence Louër emphasizes this when she states: "The diasporic pattern is reflected in the strong family ties Kuwaiti Shias have kept with relatives settled in the regions their forefathers left, even when relocation dates back more than one hundred and fifty years. For example, it is not uncommon for 'Ajam to marry women they select in Iran from among

¹³The donation is not only for charitable projects. Some philanthropists also give money to admirable Shia figures, such as clergy and *Sayyed*. The latter are considered descendants of Prophet Muhammad and thus some Shias give them money as part of *sahm al-emam* or Imam Share. For example, some individual letters of Almatrook archive show Almatrook's donations in 1917, 1919, and 1922, to some Sayyid as part of charity. See http://bin-matrook.com/gallery/main.php?g2_itemId=12588; http://binmatrook.com/gallery/main.php?g2_itemId=12599; http://bin-matrook.com/gallery/main.php?g2_itemId=12584. For more details about Bahman's charitable projects, see *The Bahman Foundation in the World* (n.p, n.p).

¹⁴For example, my aunt from paternal side married one of our relatives in the United Arab Emirates more than twenty years ago. My uncle from the same side also married a woman originally from United Arab Emirates more than 35 years ago. In addition, my uncle from maternal side married his second wife of Iranian origin more than twenty years ago.

remote relatives.”¹⁵ This connection also applies to different Kuwaiti Shia ethnicities, such as Hasawiyyin and Baharna, which have kept their family networks with Al-Hasa in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and other Gulf states.¹⁶ Accordingly, it should bear in mind that most of those Shia relatives who are scattered among different Arab states carry identical family surnames. Interestingly, that does not, however, mean that all of them are relatives even if they have similar surnames.

In conclusion, my analysis of the “push-pull” factors to be found in political, economic and social conditions of southwestern Iran and Kuwait between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has shed light on the growth and contribution of the Shia community in Kuwait. The Shia migration from Iran to Kuwait was a search for a peaceful and better life abroad. Although Iran was a bigger and potentially richer country than Kuwait in terms of agriculture, trade, and the discovery of oil, Shia immigrants chose Kuwait as a final destination to reside because of its hospitality, security, and stability. While the Al-Sabah royal family’s openness to the settlement of Shia merchants, artisans and laborers from Iran may have been motivated by strategic and economic considerations, this opportunity nevertheless benefited the settlers as well. Thus the Shia community felt welcome and comfortable in the host country Kuwait; they never felt any necessity to return to their homeland, Iran.

There is much more to learn about the trade, travel, migration, and diaspora that have shaped Kuwait, Iran, and the Gulf region in modern times. As I continue to pursue my researches I especially encourage other scholars to delve into the parallel movement of Shias to other Gulf states and the comparable experiences of developing prosperous trades, building lasting communities, and maintaining religious commitments.

¹⁵Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, p. 47.

¹⁶Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, p. 47.

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