

Transformations of Manama: Equations of Demography, Islamization and Commercialization⁽¹⁾

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This study explores how many factors, beginning with the recession of the pearl trade and the discovery of oil to the oil boom since the mid-1970s, contributed to the rapid urbanization of the Bahraini capital Manama. It looks at how this growth has opened the door to the arrival of large numbers of foreign workers, including the poor, unskilled or middle class, who have been inching towards having the dominant presence in much of the old city and the surrounding area. The study found that in the midst of these transformations, the political arena witnessed new, unprecedented dynamics, the most important of which was the growth of political Islam currents after the decline of nationalist and leftist trends, the emergence of cultural challenges related to the Bahraini identity, and the attempt to transform old Manama into a popular destination for domestic and foreign tourism.

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In 2004, the Indian Sikh community decided to build a temple in the city of Manama. Land was leased for the purpose, and construction works were launched. However, construction was halted suddenly following objections by local residents. A “local cleric, Sheikh Baqir al-Hawa, and some local residents met with representatives of the temple to be built and told them the project was unacceptable to the locals, who submitted a letter of complaint to the mayor of the capital”⁽³⁾. Sikh leaders agreed to suspend the construction, out of respect for the sentiments of the locals, according to a (newspaper) report.

Yet a question here is this: Where were the sentiments of the locals a hundred or two hundred years earlier, when a Hindu temple, Christian churches, and the Jewish synagogue were built in the heart of Manama? Why did the city dwellers of yesteryear coexist with Hindus, Christians, and Jews, and yet today, the residents of Manama see the construction of a Sikh temple as an affront to their sentiments? This reveals just how much things have changed in Manama and in the attitudes of its residents, a change that is the result of many contributing factors. Here I will attempt to reconstruct the course of this change, by focusing on its social, political, economic, and demographic manifestations.

1. Electoral memory: From a merchant city to an Islamist city

The history of elections, that is, municipal and parliamentary elections, and elections to the boards of some government departments such as the Health and Education Councils, can help reveal the extent of social and ideological transformations in Manama society. The history of elections in Manama

(and Bahrain more generally) can be divided into four main phases:

Phase 1 – Municipal elections in Manama were first held in 1919 and were later incorporated into the Electoral Law of 1926. Municipal elections would be abolished in the late 1960s.

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³ Haidar Mohammad, “As-Sikh Yuwaqqifūna Binā’ Ma ‘bad fi’l-Manāma,” *Al-Wasaf*, Issue 673, 09/07/2004 (accessed on 10/04/2019 at: <http://bit.ly/2J3UFpF>).

Phase 2 – Popular representation without election based on obtaining a popular mandate from mass assemblies, signature collection campaigns, or even elections to the Health and Education Councils, during the time of the National Union Committee in the mid-1950s. This experiment would be suspended after the National Union was abolished.

Phase 3 – Ushered in with the election of the Constituent and Parliamentary Council in the early 1970s.

Phase 4 – Parliamentary elections starting from 2002. Here we are concerned particularly with the elections of 2006 and 2010, in which opposition parties that had boycotted the 2002 elections participated.

Municipal elections in Manama often produced power-sharing arrangements representing the main communities in Manama, namely: The Baharnah, Arabs, Awadhiya, Najdis, Ajam, Indians, and Jews⁽⁴⁾. Later on these elections would reflect more local dynamics, with representation focusing on neighborhoods such as Al-Fadhil; Kano; Al-Hura; Harat bin Anas; Al-Gudaibiya; Al-Makharqa; Al-Hamam; Abu Surra; Al-Nu'a'im; Az-Zarari'; As-Souq; Ras Rumman; and Al-Awadhiya; as shown in map (1).

These elections, however, were primarily elections meant for the merchant elite in Manama society, who always managed to get the most votes, winning all election contests since the first round was held (See Table 1).

Map (1) - Detailed map of old Manama



Source: India Office Records, File: IOR / L / PS / 12 / 2160B, f58, Naval Intelligence Division of the British Army (January 1933).

⁴ These were the main groups making up the social fabric of Manama in the 20th century. Baharnah is used to refer to Shia Arabs; Arabs refers to Sunni Arabs; Awadhiya refers to Sunnis of Persian origins; Ajam are Shias of Persian origin; Najdis are of mainland peninsular origin (i.e. from Najd in modern Saudi Arabia).

Table (1)
Electoral alliances comprised of merchant elites who won Manama municipal elections

Year	Winning alliance
1926	Three Arabs; three Baharnah; one Najdi; one Ajami; one Awadhi; and one Indian Muslim
1934	Two Arabs; two Baharnah; one Awadhi; one Nadi; one Ajami; one Jew
1938	Three Arabs; three Baharnah; one Awadhi; one Ajami; one Najdi; two Indians (one Muslim, one Hindu); one Jew

Source: Author research

This merchant class continued to yield the most influence, winning all municipal elections in Manama from their inception until the mid-1950s. However, the 1950s overturned these dynamics, with an elite of a different kind entering the fray: a political elite characterized by nationalistic ideological fervor, made up of the ‘petty-bourgeoisie’⁽⁵⁾ that formed the rank and file of the National Union in the mid-1950s.

What was truly odd is that the 1950s had begun with a crisis of representation in the Manama municipal council and some local councils. According to Charles Belgrave, adviser to the government between 1926 and 1957, Sheikh Salman bin Hamad, then ruler of Bahrain, met on 21 April 1951 with “the leaders of the Baharnah, to discuss their resignation from the municipality [...] over their demands to have a larger number of representatives in other councils”⁽⁶⁾.

The resignation of the three Baharnah representatives in question from the council (Mansour al-Areedh, Hassan al-Medeifei, and Muhsin al-Tajer) was a sign that the situation was quite serious, according to Belgrave. Indeed, the situation would subsequently deteriorate prompting a row over Sunni and Shia representation in the municipality in late 1952. The row would set off a chain of events that would trigger a change in representation quotas and distribution. The National Union represented a turn away from a

society represented by its merchant class towards one represented by an emerging new urban middle-class elite with Nasserite nationalist tendencies.

The General Assembly of the National Union (1954–1956) was composed of 120 members representing a mixture of these two elites: the merchant class and the petty-bourgeoisie. It should be noted though that the crisis of popular representation within the National Union had in fact started at an earlier time. Abdul-Rahman al-Bakr, Secretary-General of the National Union, describes his first successes in the formation of the National Union and overcoming the ‘Muharram Fitna [sedition]’ of 1953 – a meeting in Ramadan 1954 at the home of Hajj Hassan al-Aradi in Ras Rumman. The meeting brought together ‘Shia leaders’ as Bakr called them, and ‘Sunni youths’ who Bakr said “represent various segments of the people and enjoy a respected position among all groups”.⁽⁷⁾ However, this claim, that these youths represented ‘various segments of the people’, was not accepted by ‘Shia leaders’, specifically Muhsin al-Tajer, who insisted on knowing who exactly they represented. Muhsin al-Tajer and Abd al-Ali al-Aliwat were both elite Baharnah, a group that had had an important political presence since the submission of a petition listing “the Demands of the Baharna” in 1934 and the National Demands Movement in 1938. This

⁵ This class designation is used in May Mohammad al-Khalifa, *Charles Belgrave: as-Sira wa'l-Mudhakkirāt (1926-1957)*, (Beirut: Arab Institute for Research & Publishing, 2000), p. 424.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Abdul-Rahman al-Bakr, *Min al-Bahrayn ilā'l-Manfā: Saint Helena*, (Tehran: Manshurāt-e Ismāiliyān, 1994). P46.

latter movement was led by elite Manama notables, primarily Ali bin Khalifa al-Fadhil, Mansour al-Areedh, Khalil al-Muayyad, Abd al-Ali al-Aliwat, Mohammed al-Fadhil, Yousef Kano, Muhsin al-Tajer, Mohammed Ali al-Tajer, Abdul Rahman al-Zayani, Sayyid Saeed bin Sayyid Khalaf, Saad al-Shamlan, Sayyed Ahmed al-Alawi, Ahmed al-Shirawi, Haji Ahmed bin Khamis, and Sheikh Abdullah bin Mohammed Saleh (a Jaafari Judge at that time).

It seems that Muhsen al-Tajer during the initial foundational meeting of the National Union believed they were on the cusp of something similar to the demands movement of 1938 and expected to see the same old elite of Sunni notables. He was thus surprised by the absence of al-Muayyad, Fakhro, Musallam, etc. But this was met from the other side by a provocative assertion that those present represented “all segments of the people. As for those you called notables, they are only so to themselves, but now represent no one.”⁽⁸⁾ It is clear then that this was a crisis of representation, indicating that the city was on the verge of a major social transformation, from the old class of elders and notables to an emerging class of ‘petty bourgeoisie’. The National Union was not elected by the people, but obtained its legitimacy through a kind of general popular mandate, manifested through mass rallies (according to Baker’s estimates, one rally at Al-Eid Mosque was attended by more than 20,000 people), or through signature collection campaigns which “collected 25,000 signatures, an exceptional number relative to the size of the indigenous population of Bahrain who numbered no more than 80,000”⁽⁹⁾ at the time.

This does not mean that the National Union did not contest the elections and did not win the right to represent the people legitimately. On the contrary, the National Union monopolized this right almost exclusively in all elections were held during the time. On 9 February 1955, the National Union called for a boycott of the municipal elections, but it did participate in elections for the Education and Health Councils. The government had approved the formation of two eight-member councils, five elected

and three appointed. The National Union’s candidates subsequently won all five seats on both the Education and Health Councils on 10 February 1956.

The National Union was abolished, its leaders arrested or exiled, and its cadres scattered in November 1956. In 1971, Bahrain gained its independence, which was followed by the election of the Constituent Assembly and parliament. Surviving members of the National Union subsequently returned from exile, and leaders and figures who had been absent made a comeback and stood in the Constituent Assembly elections. In Manama’s districts alone, 3 out of 120 members of the National Union ran in the Constituent Assembly elections of 1972. However, the real surprise came when all three lost in the election, and badly at that.⁽¹⁰⁾ The first received 171 votes in the first district, the second 134 votes in the fourth district, and the third 65 votes in the fourth district. This all meant that the socio-political context was on the verge of a new transformation which would this time bring about another political elite of mixed and divergent secular tendencies, led by Baathists, leftists, and secular independents. After the dissolution of the National Union, three clandestine political movements had become active: Baathists, pan-Arabists, and communists. These three movements would participate in the March 1965 uprising through the Nationalist Forces Front and the Progressive Forces Front. The elections to the Constituent Assembly in 1972 were the first test of their strength and popularity after the suppression of the March 1965 uprising.

The results of the 1972 Constituent Assembly elections gave mixed messages, especially since they were boycotted by leftist forces (the Bahraini Liberation Front and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, the successor to the pan-Arab Nationalist Movement). Eight candidates won in Manama’s electoral districts, but perhaps the most notable victory was that of Rasul al-Jashi, a Baathist leader, who snatched 885 votes in the first district, the highest number. But it was the election to the National Council in 1973 that truly revealed the depth of the transformation that had taken place in

8 Ibid, p.46.

9 Ibid, p.68.

10 Our analysis of the Constituent Assembly elections is based on data mentioned in Emile Nakhleh, *Bahrain: Political Development in a Modernizing Society*, (Lanham: Lexington Press, 2011).

Manama.⁽¹¹⁾ To be sure, the People's Bloc and the Center Bloc (Leftists and Baathists) won most of the votes, taking eight out of ten seats allocated to Manama's seven districts.

Interestingly in the short-lived elections in the 1970s, secular, nationalist, and progressive movements that promoted a national identity moving beyond sectarian identity had a massive showing. This allowed a Shia candidate (Rasul al-Jashi) to win in a Sunni district (Al-Fadhil); and a Sunni candidate (Khalid al-Dhawadi) to win in a Shia district (Ras Rumman). While these movements had a remarkable presence, the other side – religious movements – were notably absent in Manama. One revealing indication of this was that in An-Na'im district in Manama, a candidate from the People's Bloc, Mohammed Salman Hammad, defeated the candidate of the religious movements, Sayyid Abdullah al-Gharifi, who would later become a prominent leader in the Shia Islamist movement.

But those days are long gone. Nothing remains of them except memories and nostalgia among those who witnessed the elections of the 1970s. If those

names were to run in the same districts today, the result would be completely different owing to the major transformation, and the shift in the balance of power, centers of gravity, and demographic distribution that have taken place since the dissolution of the National Union in August 1975 throughout the early 2000s.

These are really big shifts, and their implications were reflected in voting trends in Manama in the 2006 and 2010 parliamentary elections. In the 2006 parliamentary elections, Islamist Al-Wifāq candidates won five of the eight seats⁽¹²⁾ reserved for the capital, while the Islamic Society itself won six seats in the 2010 elections.

Here, we are faced with three fundamental shifts: The first was the shift in support among Manama's people from the merchant elite to the National Union; the second was from the National Union to the secular political elites, including the Baathist nationalists and the Communist leftists; and the third was from this secular political elite to candidates from Islamist groups (especially Al-Wifāq). In what follows we will try to explain this last shift.

2. The attempt to Islamize a city, with immediate effect

Mohammed Abd al-Malik's⁽¹³⁾ short story *Abbas*, published in his first collection *Death of the Cart-Owner* (1972), concerns the paradoxes experienced by villagers visiting or relocating to Manama. The eponymous Abbas is a young man from the Bani Jamra clan, the son of a farmer forced to retire because of his illness. Abbas has to manage his affairs and find a way to support his family. For him, Manama is the city of dreams and opportunities, but for the father, it is a strange place, the antithesis of his quiet village: the village was a safe, quiet place for prayer and devotion, while Manama was dangerous and wicked, decadent, and deviant. In the words of Abbas's father to his son: "Don't drink alcohol Abbas... in Manama they drink alcohol... don't fornicate with women... in

Manama they fornicate with women... don't speak to a woman... in Manama men speak to women... don't go to cinemas, but look for a mosque and prostrate yourself before God with humility!"⁽¹⁴⁾

Perhaps this was a valid piece of advice in the 1960s and 1970s, when urban youths were far removed from religious tradition, especially in Manama. Indeed, many of these youths would have looked down with contempt at the likes of Abbas, religious young men who spent their time in the mosque or frequented the General Library for Islamic Culture built in downtown Manama in 1969. It was clear that there was mutual support between the movement for personal liberties among Manama's youths and the

11 Fouad al-Khoury notes that with the exception of one member, the members of the People's Bloc did not belong to the traditional notable families, "but came from ordinary social roots in the Sunni and Shia communities that inhabit the cities of Muharraq and Manama". See: Fouad Ishak al-Khoury, *al-Qabīla wa'd-Dawla fī'l-Baḥrayn: Taṭawwūr Nizām as-Sulṭa wa-Mumārāsātihā* (Beirut: Ma'had al-Inmā' al-'Arabī, 1983), p. 334.

12 It should be noted that Al-Wifāq did not field any candidates in the seventh district of the capital in the elections of 2006, although it backed Abdul-Aziz Abel, the independent liberal candidate close to Al-Wifāq at the time, who won in the district thanks to this support.

13 A Bahraini author from the first generation of "pioneers" (*ruwwād*).

14 Mohammed Abd al-Malik, *Mawt Ṣāhib al-'Araba*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Manshūrāt Dār al-Mashriq al-'Arabī al-Kabīr, 1979), p. 38.

left-wing and nationalist wave sweeping the city in the 1970s.

Things changed in the 1980s, however. The times went full circle; the advice of Abbas's father was not much different from the culture war launched by *al-Mawāqif*, an Islamist-leaning magazine, against the movement for personal liberties. But Abbas's father was above all else concerned about the morals of his son. Abbas had never seen the likes of the city's daring women who wore dresses that stopped above the knee, and let their dyed blonde hair flow freely, except in pictures "in magazines that reached the village, or in cars speeding away on the big road" north of the village.

This was the danger that preoccupied Abbas's father, but he would not have thought that Abbas was also at risk of "deviant" ideas permeating Manama at the time. Yes, these "deviant" ideas could infest the minds of Manama's youths, but not the mind of Abbas, the simple peasant who could barely read – let alone understand communism, class struggle, the bourgeoisie, the proletariat, the Baath, or secularism and the separation of religion and state. But that which did not occur to Abbas's father, did occur to the magazine *al-Mawāqif*, which devoted itself from the beginning to fighting these same ideas (even more violently than it fought the movement for personal freedoms). For Abdullah al-Madani, "the Arab masses are opposed to the secular state,"⁽¹⁵⁾ or more dramatically, "secularism is atheism", as he put it in one of his editorials published in the magazine. In the same article he advocated for a religious preaching and education movement inspired by the famous Muslim Brotherhood slogan "Islam is the solution," writing: "There is no savior for humanity save for the true Islamic religion."⁽¹⁶⁾

Indeed, communism was the biggest foe for *al-Mawāqif*. The confrontation between *al-Mawāqif* the religious movement and the Communists in the 1973 Parliament mimicked the struggle in Iraq between the Islamist Da'wa Party and the Iraqi Communist Party that had begun with the victory of the 1958 July Revolution. In many ways that struggle

was a direct reaction to the revolution and its fallout, including the collapse of the dominant class (including prominent clerics) and the growth of a Communist base in Shi'a areas. While the Bahrain of the 60s and 70s was in many respects a very different place from Iraq, the form that the confrontation between the religious and secular factions took was similar to the Iraqi experience. But while the ICP was a key partner in Iraq's new republican system, leftist movements in Bahrain were stranded in opposition and largely active as clandestine dissident organizations.

In the parliament of 1973, for example, the leftists proposed adopting May 1 as a public holiday. However, the religious faction blocked the proposal, arguing that "[Celebrating] May Day [as a holiday] is an explicit violation of the constitution" because it "fuels class struggle", and more importantly, it was a holiday inspired by a history "that is alien to our nation and history".⁽¹⁷⁾ Things even reached the point at which the government was urged to strike down "destructive Communism" and uproot all communists. In a discourse reminiscent of Joseph McCarthy's, *al-Mawāqif* exhorted the government to purge state institutions of all communists and "alien and subversive" elements.

According to *al-Mawāqif*, "communism is a crime in itself", and had to be eliminated and rooted out. What was to be done then? Should the government arrest all those who embraced communist ideas? While most would answer no, *al-Mawāqif* did not merely answer in the affirmative: according to the magazine, "fighting communists must not be limited to detaining them for some period of time before releasing them, as this would make them appear to average citizens as heroes and freedom fighters." If the state really wanted to fight communists, then it had to "implement many, many measures." The following is a sample of the proposed new McCarthyistic measures: "The state should purge its most sensitive and important bodies of proven communist elements. The state should monitor university students who have become prey to alien and destructive ideas. The state should monitor the activities of clubs, libraries, and social institutions and eliminate destructive elements."⁽¹⁸⁾

15 *al-Mawāqif*, Issue 137 (5 July 1976).

16 *al-Mawāqif*, Issue 133 (7 June 1976).

17 *al-Mawāqif*, Issue 78 (28 April 1975).

18 *al-Mawāqif*, Issue 97 (8 September 1975).

These sharp and belligerent attitudes seemed to reflect a sort of quest to settle scores or a belated revenge for the left's success in attracting a broad popular base, specifically within Manama. This base allowed the secular political elite (communists and Baathists) to win the elections of 1972 and 1973 in most Manama districts, suggesting that the religious faction, of which *al-Mawāqif* was the mouthpiece, was absent or weak at the time, having failed to win even one seat in Manama. Nevertheless, these elections exposed the contradiction that was emerging in Manama's social fabric, namely, the state of "deep sectarian polarization between Shias and Sunnis"⁽¹⁹⁾ as Emile Nakhleh noted. We should point out that this was, at the outset, just a case of socio-sectarian polarization rather than political sectarianism in the style of Islamist movements, as the predominant trend was social coexistence in the Manama of the 1960s and 1970s. Although old Manama was little influenced by Sunni political Islam (the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafi movement), whose main arena of activity was the city of Muharraq, it was not immune to the Shi'a equivalent, which began to take hold in Manama in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The beginnings (of the religious movement) seem to have been small and their impact limited. Religious youths may, at first, have been the subject of ridicule in light of the widespread popularity of secular (nationalist and leftist) movements and the hippies. The nucleus of the first Islamic association in Manama, a group of religious youth, was formed in 1969 as the Islamic Guidance Youth Association (*Jam'iyyat Shabāb al-Irshād al-Islāmī*).⁽²⁰⁾ This group organized public religious and cultural activities (ceremonies and religious festivals). This was followed by the establishment of the "Husseini Fund" in central Manama in 1972, which initially operated under the umbrella of the General Library of Islamic Culture before becoming independent in 1976, rebranding itself the "Husseini Social Fund" headquartered in Matam al-Qassab.

The Fund embarked on a grand mission, derived from its broad political and social imagination: that of Islamizing society or "building an Islamic society."⁽²¹⁾

In pursuit of this goal it benefited greatly from the involvement of the energetic activist Sayyid Hadi al-Madrasi, leader of the Shirazi Movement, until he was deported in 1979. In that same year, the "Husseini Social Fund" was shut down by the government and dozens of its cadres were detained. In late 1981, the Shirazi movement led a failed coup attempt, at a time when it still had strong relations with the fledgling Islamic Republic, before the relationship collapsed and was replaced by complete estrangement in 1987.

Interestingly here, at a time when the Da'wa Party and the religious bloc had represented a rural Shia phenomenon, the Shirazi movement represented in contrast an urban Shiite phenomenon, albeit not a purely urban one. Indeed, the first nucleus of the movement was established in Manama by members of the venerable Alawi family, especially Sayyid Mohammed al-Alawi (and later Sayyid Jaafar al-Alawi) who visited Karbala in the late 1960s and met with Sayyid Mohammed Hussein Shirazi and Madrasi, his young and enthusiastic nephew. "He was profoundly inspired by this young cleric, who was the same age as him, as he spoke about the corruption of society under growing foreign exploitation."⁽²²⁾

Laurence Louer recalled that Sayyid Mohammed al-Alawi, upon his return to Bahrain, established the first Islamic association for the Shirazi movement, the Islamic Guidance Society (*al-Irshād al-Islāmī*), which attracted 200 members. Alawi also arranged for Madrasi to visit Bahrain in 1970, accommodating him in central old Manama. Madrasi's activism and powerful revolutionary rhetoric were broadcast from the heart of Manama, from Matam al-Ajam, Al-Hura Cemetery Mosque, and even from Bahrain TV, which screened some of his lectures; equipped with this rhetoric some of his listeners would eventually go on to found the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain (*al-Jabha al-Islāmiyya*), whose creation was announced in 1979. During this period Manama was a magnet for many Shirazi symbols. In April 1973, Sayyid Hassan Shirazi, brother of Sayyid Mohammed Hussein Shirazi, visited the religious leaders of the Shirazi movement and gave lectures at Matam

19 Nakhleh, p. 250.

20 Fallah al-Mudayris, *al-Ḥarakāt wa'l-Jamā'āt as-Siyāsiyya fī'l-Baḥrayn, 1938 - 2002* (Beirut: Dār al-Kunūz al-Adabiyya, 2003), p. 96.

21 Ibid, p.97.

22 Laurence Louer, *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf* (London: Hurst, 2008), p. 129.

al-Ahsa'iyin, Matam al-Qassab, and Matam al-Ajam al-Kabir.

What does all this mean? The conclusion reached by Fuad Khoury was that the "religious bloc" had a rural Shi'i character, a conclusion supported by Laurence Louer in her comparison of the Da'wa Party and the Shirazi movement in Bahrain. Louer notes the paradox: while the Da'wa Party should by rights have been an urban party, having cut its teeth fighting secular nationalist and leftist movements in the cities of Iraq, in Bahrain it began as a rural phenomenon, only expanding into the cities later. The Shirazi movement, on the other hand, spread in the opposite direction, from cities to the countryside⁽²³⁾ – from Manama to villages like Bani Jamra, which became a major Shirazi recruiting-ground.

With the 1980s came another turn that changed things for both movements. The late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed two important events, which blurred the urban-rural boundaries between the two major Shia movements, and brought sharp and unprecedented tensions in the relationship between Shia Islamism and the government. This first event was the triumph of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, influencing Shia Islamist groups in Bahrain, be they conservative, Da'wa-affiliated, or Shirazi-affiliated. The interaction with the Iranian revolution would lay the foundation for what would later become known as "the Imam's current" or the "Loyalist" (*walā'īyyīn*) movement that backed the Islamic Revolution, the idea of juristic rule (*wilāyat al-faqīh*), and Imam Khomeini, who until then had kept a distance from the Da'wa movement.

Less than a year after the triumph of the revolution in Iran, Shia religious movements, in April 1980, were caught by surprise when Saddam Hussein's government in Iraq executed the Da'wa Party's spiritual leader, Mohammed Baqer al-Sadr, and his sister Amna bint al-Huda. Initially news reports were contradictory. The Kuwaiti newspaper *al-Qabas* quoted informed sources confirming that he had been executed, while the Iranian Information Ministry said that this was unconfirmed news. Other sources, also in Tehran, reported that he had not been executed and was still alive in Baghdad. Under these muddled

circumstances, *al-Mawāqif* published a telegram sent by Bahraini scholars described as "supporters of Sayyid al-Sadr" calling on the world to intervene to save him, "who was arrested by the Iraqi authorities with his family on Saturday 08/04/1980."⁽²⁴⁾ The magazine also appealed to officials in Iraq to protect his life. Tensions within the Shi'i religious scene reached unprecedented levels, with the confirmation of Sadr's execution bringing them to the brink of explosion.

Immediately after the news was confirmed, religious scholars gathered in Bahrain, mostly from the Da'wa Movement, and issued a statement condemning the Iraqi government and calling on the people to declare a period of mourning. The cover of Issue 323 of *al-Mawāqif* was emblazoned with Sadr's portrait; its brief coverage of the explosive situation in the country stated that "all Bahrain's *māātīm* [Shia congregation halls] have opened their doors" to mourn his martyrdom, "and some marches have gone out into the streets of cities and villages, denouncing and protesting the execution of Imam al-Sadr and his sister."⁽²⁵⁾ The magazine also quoted an official source in the Ministry of Interior who regretted that "some demonstrators deviated from the planned route of these protests." But the euphemism used in this coverage was misleading. A wave of unrest had swept over the Shi'i villages – but the largest and most important demonstrations were those that took place in the neighborhood of al-Makharqa in central Manama, which were followed by mass arrests. A young man, Jamil al-Ali (1957-1980), was one of those arrested in Manama; only days later, it was announced that he had died in custody. This was the beginning of a series of confrontations that lasted until the end of the 1990s.

The religious scene was contested by the three main Shi'a movements. The Shirazi Movement's activities focused on Mat'am al-Qassab and the mass funerary processions held there. The Loyalists' operations centered on the Mu'min Mosque and the Mat'am ash-Shahid Procession (until its cancellation and absorption into the Bin Salloum Procession in the early 1990s). The Da'wa Movement, in turn, made al-Khawaja Mosque at the centre of Old Manama

23 Ibid, p. 140.

24 *al-Mawāqif*, Issue 322 (21 April 1980).

25 *al-Mawāqif*, Issue 323 (28 April 1980).

into its central base, with Sayyid Ahmed al-Ghuraifi becoming the Imam there from the early 1980s until his unexpected death in 1985 in a traffic accident. Al-Ghuraifi was replaced by Sheikh Issa Ahmad Qassim, and then – after Qassim left for Qom in the 1990s – by Sheikh Ali Salman, a prominent religious and political leader during the tumultuous events of the 1990s (which lasted from 1994 until the political reforms launched by King Hamad at the turn of the new millennium).

Ironically, the events of the 1990s shifted the center of gravity of Shia political Islam from Manama to other areas, such as the villages of Bilad al-Qadim, Bani Jamra, As-Sanabis, An-Nuwaidrat, Sitra, and

others. Manama subsequently received less attention from the Islamist movement, as the city lost its luster and importance.

The story of the Islamization of Manama, which had begun so quickly in the 1980s, ended just as quickly in the 1990s. There were many reasons for its short life, not least the government's firm determination to spare Manama, the country's capital, any unrest or turmoil. Other reasons, however, are directly related to demographic shifts. The demographics of Manama changed so rapidly and comprehensively that many of its neighborhoods were emptied of their original inhabitants, who began a great exodus out of Old Manama.

3. The Great Exodus: Migrating to the southern suburbs of Manama

Even as Manama was becoming a major arena for political activism, from the National Union period through to the Shi'a Islamists, three demographic shifts were taking place on the ground. Although they began quietly, their accelerated progress was ultimately to completely change the face of Manama.

The first shift began with the baby boom and post-oil population increase of the 1930s, which, together with limited internal migration from the villages to the cities, put considerable pressure on state-provided services in Manama, such as health and education. These two sectors were the subject of much complaint in the 1950s, forcing the government to form a committee to look into these complaints. The government would eventually approve the formation of an Education Council and a Health Council in the autumn of 1955.

Education did not suffer a severe crisis until the late 1940s. Before that, the education system was developing reasonably well. The government's annual report of 1942 stated that there were only 425 students in Manama (45 of them in secondary school) in the first semester, and 485 (55 of them in secondary school) in the second semester. But starting from the late 1940s, pressure began to increase on the sector amid growing demand. Ahmed Omran (1909-2007), then director of education, in the Education Report of

1947-1948, describes pressure suffered by the city's schools, to the point that the Department of Education could not "admit 600 new students for lack of places in schools."⁽²⁶⁾

In the 1950 - 1951 Education Report, he also pointed out that one-third of Bahrain's population lived in villages, "but over time Manama and Muharraq have become more crowded than the villages, as people moved there because of the village's limited ability to accommodate them and expand."⁽²⁷⁾ The crisis continued until 1958. In April of that year, Ahmed al-Omran made a statement to the Education Council, commenting on the significant increase in the number of students enrolled in secondary education, saying all plans and solutions made earlier to overcome this problem were no longer working, given the steady increase in enrolment. This led to "overcrowding of students in classes in a way that is inconsistent with educational standards and norms".

The second shift, which began in the 1950s and then accelerated was the emigration from Manama by merchant families and community leaders, including Shias, Sunnis, Ajam, and even Indians, who were the historical groups that once gave the city its diverse and distinctive identity. These merchant families left Manama for modernized areas, away from the overcrowded and noisy Old City and its growing

26 Mai Mohammed al-Khalifa, *Mi'at 'Ām min at-Ta'lim an-Nizāmī fi'l-Baḥrayn: as-Sanawāt al-Ūlā li'l-Tāsīs* (Beirut: Arab Institute for Research & Publishing, 1999), p. 391.

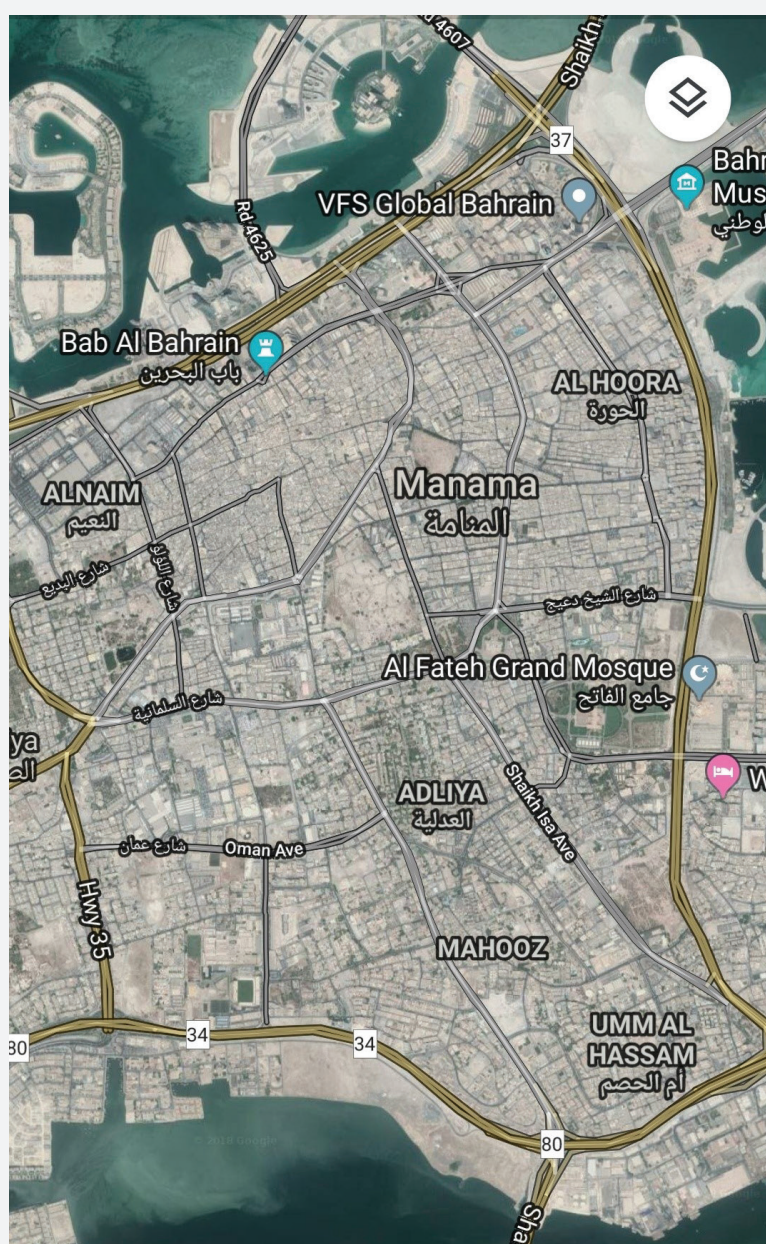
27 Ibid, pp. 422 - 423.

politicization. The 1950s, which transformed Manama from a city of merchants to the city of the National Union, and made it the beating heart of pan-Arab nationalism in Bahrain, was only the beginning of a major population shift that completely changed the face of the city.

The shift began when Jewish families fled outside Manama, some of them out of Bahrain as events escalated after the partition of Palestine in 1947.

The process then expanded into a massive and accelerated exodus of key merchant families out of Manama, initially into the southern suburbs such as Al-Gudaibiya, Al-Qafoul, Al-Adliya, As-Salhiya, As-Saqiya, As-Salmaniya, Al-Juffair, Al-Mahouz, Umm al-Hassam, Abu Ghazal, Abu Ashira, or to the new residential areas close to the villages of Jirdab, Janusan, North Sehla, or Riff ash-Sharqi, Madinat Isa, and even Awali, see map (2).

Map (2)
A modern map of Manama showing the new suburbs



Source: Google Maps, retrieved on 10/2019/04/, at: <http://bit.ly/2V119bg>

Al-Gudaibiya was the first area to be developed, the first suburb to be built south of Manama. Historically, as Mohammed Ali al-Tajer wrote, it had been “a summer resort for pearl traders from Al-Muharraq.”⁽²⁸⁾ In 1909, a quarantine zone was established there. But the area began to gain prominence later when in 1927, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa built the old palace there (Sheikh Hamad Palace or Manama Palace). This would become the building of the Institute of Teachers in the late 1960s. Edward Skinner, a known actor at the time, also lived there. His home is well known among Manama’s residents, and today it sits on the premises of the National Council. At the time, it directly overlooked the sea.

Al-Gudaibiya quickly transformed from “an arid sandy area, a swampy land where mosquitoes bred,” as James Belgrave described it in the early 1950s, to “the first popular suburb in the new Manama,” “rapidly evolving into a residential and entertainment hub.” Since the 1950s, it has been a vibrant area, having become a major hub for the entertainment industry in Manama at the time with “six cinemas, modern cafés, and football fields.”⁽²⁹⁾ Salmaniya was more recently developed compared to Al-Gudaibiya, and was given this name on 2 December 1957, following a visit by Sheikh Salman bin Hamad, then ruler of Bahrain, in conjunction with the inauguration of Salmaniya Hospital.

Salmaniya soon became a desirable residential area for many expats living in Bahrain, wealthy families, as well as many young Bahrainis whom James Belgrave described as “the younger generation who abandoned the traditions of living in spacious homes with their parents and grandparents, and decided, instead, to live independently in their own homes,”⁽³⁰⁾ a clear reference to the beginnings of small nuclear families in Bahrain.

Al-Qafoul was an area rich in orchards, and it became a desirable location. It was transformed into a residential area as the wheel of urbanization rolled on during the 1960s. It was given a grid layout, with every plot of land surrounded by four roads from all

sides, with a main road 20 feet wide, two roads 30 feet wide from north to south, and another from east to west.”⁽³¹⁾ In 1970, “the northern part of this area up to Budaiya Street was re-divided into 70 plots.”⁽³²⁾ Civil engineer Mohamed Nour al-Nabi recalled that the original blueprint for Manama was prepared by Engineer A.M. Monroe and included plans to transform private gardens and orchards between the north of the water park to Budaiya Street into a public park. Monroe’s proposal was based on the fact that “about 40,000 people lived in the heart of old Manama at the time, with no open recreational space.”⁽³³⁾ Later, Mohamed al-Nabi presented with a blueprint proposing that half of the space be allocated for the expansion of the water park, and proposed building a school, and two other small open spaces with a road network for the area. When the plan was submitted to the Planning Coordination Council at the time, Sayyid Majed Jawad al-Jishi, then the Director of Planning at the Ministry of Development, objected to the proposal to expand the water park on private property, but the proposal was approved by a majority of the Council members. Owners of private property within the area concerned were compensated with land plots in Al-Hura.

But, surprisingly, by Mohamed Nour al-Nabi’s arrival in Bahrain in 1971, the population of Manama had more than doubled. While the Monroe proposal was based on a Manama population of 40,000 in 1968, the fact was that Manama had nearly 90,000 people in 1971 (specifically 89,728). Without expansion outside Manama the city would simply have exploded. And so the city grew outwards.

In fact, this urban expansion was only the beginning of that major exodus and a migration pattern for Manama’s main merchant families into the south, to the new suburbs of Manama. It is difficult to determine the exact time this large movement of population started, but it must have started in the 1950s, and then intensified in the 1960s and 1970s. It was a large wave of migration, which some attribute to the need of many of these families, most of which

28 Mohammed Ali al-Tajer, *‘Aqd al-Lā’l fī Tārīkh Awwāl* (Manama: Mu’assasat al-Ayyām li’š-Šaḥāfa wa’ṭ-Ṭibā’a wa’n-Nashr, 1994), p. 29.

29 James Belgrave, *Welcome to Bahrain*, 8th ed. (Manama: The Augustan Press, 1973), p. 146.

30 Ibid, p.145.

31 Mohammad Nour Al-Nabi, *The History of Land Use and Development in Bahrain* (Manama: Information Affairs Authority, 2012), p. 35.

32 Ibid, p.80.

33 Ibid.

were merchant families, for security and tranquility, and the need to expand residential areas after the increase in the number of family members.

However, this great displacement may have been an indication of the dramatic transformation that unfolded in Manama. These shifts would accelerate with another large wave of displacement this time involving middle class demographics, who embarked on a major exodus outside Manama and settled in Madinat Isa and other new housing projects in the new villages and cities at the time (Iskan Jidhaf, Sanabi, Aali, Diraz, etc.), from the mid-1980s onwards. The relationship of many of these families to Manama became seasonal and occasional, almost limited to weekly social visits to their few remaining relatives in old Manama (mostly elderly women), or during religious occasions (Ashura, Ramadan, deaths, births, holidays). Manama put a centrifugal pressure on its residents to the extent that many of its neighborhoods were emptied of their inhabitants, from Al-Fadhil⁽³⁴⁾ to Kano, Ash-Shuyukh, Al-Awadhiya, Abu Surra, Az-Zarrayat, Mushabar and even Al-Hura, Sankaki and others.

This major exodus involves three stark paradoxes, the first of which has to do with the volatility of

affairs in Manama. Indeed, in contrast to the large inwards migration that the city witnessed from its emergence until the first half of the 20th century, when people flocked to it for housing, trade, and bureaucratic matters individually and collectively, it saw a reverse and large-scale outward migration. The second paradox concerns the strangeness of the migration pattern compared to what was going on globally, as countries typically experience migration from villages and rural areas to cities, while Manama experienced migration in the opposite direction, out of the city, into suburbs, villages and new towns. The third paradox involved the new waves of settlement, spreading into all districts of old Manama, and even its outskirts, where merchant families settled for the first time in areas such as Al-Gudaibiya, Al-Adliya, Al-Qafoul and As-Salmariya. Indeed, as residents of Manama migrated outside the city, the capital was being settled by large numbers of Asian low and middle-income communities (Indians, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Thais, and Filipinos). At the weekend, Manama often appeared as if it had turned into a twin of Bombay or a 'little India', marking Manama's third demographic transition.

4. Census / overcrowding of the city

The major transformations that have swept over Manama, taken as a whole, seem to constitute a process of total replacement. Manama has been emptied of its people, whose place has been taken by huge numbers of foreign workers from the Indian subcontinent – mainly from India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, the top foreign nationals in terms of number in the labor market in Bahrain. There are some 223,998 Indian, 154,740 Bangladeshi and 45,346 Pakistani workers in Bahrain, coming to a total of more than 424,000 out of a total private sector

workforce of 597,465 people according to statistics issued by the Labor Market Regulation Authority.⁽³⁵⁾

The population imbalance is at its height in Manama, whose population in 2017 exceeded 400,000 (411,200) people, according to UN data.⁽³⁶⁾ The proportion of Bahraini citizens residing in Manama has meanwhile fallen, and according to Abdul Majeed al-Sabaa, representative of the 7th district of the capital's Municipal Council in May 2010, does not exceed "12 percent, while the foreign population

34 In an interview on 8 June 2018, with a number of members of the family of the late Mahmoud Hammoud, one of the few Bahraini families still living in Al-Fadhil neighborhood, the family informed me that the number of Bahraini families still residing in Al-Fadhil district did not exceed 20. In an interview on 23 June 2018, Jaafar bin Hassan Rajab told me that the number of Bahraini families still residing in Al-Hatab neighborhood is only a handful now. Issa Amin told me in an interview on 27 June 2018, that almost all of the original families no longer reside in the neighborhood of Al-Awadhiya. One of those who supervised the election campaign of one of Manama's candidates in the 2010 elections also told me that the two residential compounds (301 and 302, Al-Hamam and Al-Mukharaqa) were the most populous and still had the largest number of Bahraini families, according to an estimated voter survey they adopted as a guide in their campaign at the time. The interview with the supervisor, who declined to be named, took place on 16 June 2018.

35 See: Aref al-Husseini, "al-Miṣriyyūn Akbar Jāliya 'Arabiyya, 161 Jinsiyya 'Āmila fī'l-Mamlaka... wa's-Ṣadāra li'l-Hunūd," *al-Ayyām*, 29/01/2018 (accessed on 10/04/2019 at: <http://bit.ly/2GM34LI>).

36 See Bahrain data on the UN website (accessed on 10/04/2019 at: <https://bit.ly/2I6QgCw>).

is no less than 88% - of whom 75% are single – and is rising continuously.”⁽³⁷⁾ According to the representative, Manama has become home to about 450,000 foreign workers, with An-Na'im area alone hosts some 200,000 foreign workers.

A quick comparison of the population of Manama in 1904, 1923, 1941, and 1981, and the current state of affairs reveals the magnitude of the shifts that have taken place in this city, as shown in Table (2).

Table (2)
Population of Manama according to various estimates

Year	Population of Manama	Notes
1889	8000	Theodore Bent estimates
1896	10000	Samuel Zwemer estimates
1904	25000	Lorimer estimates
1923	25000	Nasser al-Khairi estimates
1941	27835	Official data
1950	39648	Official data
1959	55541	Official data
1965	79098	Official data
1971	89728	Official data
1972	100000	James Belgrave estimates ¹
1981	121000	Encyclopedia of Islam estimates ²
2001	153395	Official data
2010	394386	Official data
2013	383595	Official data
2017	411200	UN data

Source: Prepared by the author

¹ According to James Belgrave, the population of Manama in 1971 was 88,785, rising to 100,000 in 1972, see: Belgrave, pp. 16, 144.

² C.E. Bosworth et al., “The Encyclopaedia of Islam,” vol. 6 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), p. 358.

Theodore Bent and his wife estimated the population of Manama in 1889 at 8,000. In 1896 Samuel Zwemer estimated Bahrain's population at 60,000, including 10,000 living in Manama.⁽³⁸⁾ A few years later, in 1904-1905, John Gordon Lorimer estimated that Manama had a population of 24,800 and 200 non-Muslims,

or a total of 25,000.⁽³⁹⁾ This number did not change much until 1923, when Nasser al-Khairi, writing in his History of Bahrain, estimated the population of Manama at 25,000 people, including 20,000 citizens and 5,000 foreigners including "Arab Najdis, Iraqis, Ajamis, Indians, and others.”⁽⁴⁰⁾

³⁷ Mohammed al-Qassas, “‘Udw Baladiyyāt al-‘Āšima: al-Ajānib Yumaththilūn 88% min Sukkān al-Manāma”, *Akhbār al-Khalīj*, 17/06/2010. It should be noted that the data of the municipal representative diverge from those of the Central Informatics Organization, which we mention below.

³⁸ S.M. Zwemer, *Arabia: The Cradle of Islam* (New York, Chicago and Toronto: Fleming H. Revell company, 1900), p. 99.

³⁹ See: J.G. Lorimer, *Dalīl al-Khalīj: al-Qism al-Jughrāfī*, Part 1, (Doha: Maṭābī‘ ‘Alī bin ‘Alī. n.d.), p. 300.

⁴⁰ Nasser al-Khairi. *Qalā'id an-Nahrayn fī Tārīkh al-Baḥrayn* (Manama: Mu'assasat al-Ayyām li'ṣ-Ṣaḥāfa wa't-Ṭibā'a wa'n-Nashr, 2003), p. 432.

All these were unofficial estimates, but the first official census took place in 1941. The 1941 census revealed that Manama had a population of 27,835 out of 89,970 of Bahrain's total population. The population of Manama was distributed between 17,815 Bahrainis and 10,020 foreigners, the vast majority of whom Iranians (7,547 people). This is while the number of Indians, in all of Bahrain, did not exceed 1,424. The population of Manama then began increasing steadily every decade at an accelerated pace,⁽⁴¹⁾ rising by 43 percent in 1950 to 39,648 of a total population of 109,650. The population doubled after 1941, increasing by 40 percent in 1959, to 55,541 out of a total population of 143,135. The number continued to rise reaching 79,098 in 1965.

In 1971, the year of independence, the population of Manama reached 89,728, or almost the entire population of Bahrain in 1941, distributed into 59,496 Bahrainis and 29,903 non-Bahrainis. The number then jumped in 1972 to 100,000. It passed the 100,000 mark in 1981, reaching more than 121,000. According to data from the Central Informatics Organization⁽⁴²⁾ of Bahrain, in 2001, Manama had a population of 153,395, divided between 45,452 Bahrainis and 107,943 foreigners. The number doubled in 2010 to 394,386 people, distributed into 67,861 Bahrainis (17%) and 326,525 foreigners. In 2013, the number rose to 383,595, distributed into 64,575 Bahrainis (17%) and 319,020 foreigners.

The table shows that the population of Manama began increasing rapidly after the census of 1941, but the number jumped significantly in 1981, as part of the effects of the oil boom, which turned Manama into a regional hub for many large banks and companies,

especially after the civil war in Lebanon in 1975. Since the 1980s, the population of Manama grew at an accelerated and atypical pace, reaching 411,100 in 2017, the vast majority of whom foreigners, mainly Asian labor. This is a very large increase by all accounts, and is more than Manama could absorb, as it would lead to a general deterioration in living conditions and the quality of services and facilities in Manama, now overpopulated and overcrowded.

More importantly, this dramatic increase highlighted a complete transformation of the ethnic composition of Manama's population. It would appear that Manama, a cosmopolitan city of merchants, had been lost, and with it the pan-Arab city dreamed up by the National Union in the mid-1950s and its key leaders. Rather, Manama became the "Little India of Bahrain" as the Authority for Culture and Antiquities titled one festival organized in the Market of Old Manama in December 2015. So, what was it that happened to turn Manama from a "merchant city", a "world city", and then a "pan-Arab city" led by the National Union, into "Little India in Bahrain"?

It should be recalled here that Manama, despite all these transformations, did not experience major clashes and unrest among its population. However, the large presence of poor Asian laborers in difficult living and health conditions has opened the door to grievances, and these grievances became a frequent theme in the conversations of people as well as on the pages of daily newspapers. The grievances range from issues such as prostitution, unlicensed alcohol factories, and sexual harassment to assaults, and fears of the loss of national identity.

5. From the fantasy city paved with gold to the reality of "Little India"

In his memoirs, Charles Belgrave noted that the discovery of oil in the 1930s in Bahrain opened the labor market for foreign laborers. For them, "the streets of Bahrain...were paved with gold!"⁽⁴³⁾ These expatriates dreamed of quick wealth, especially Indians,

and began to multiply in number gradually until the era of the oil boom came after 1973 and the rise in oil prices, which was accompanied by tremendous shifts in the economies of the Gulf States and their social and political structures, lifestyles, and value systems.

41 Manama population data from 1950 until 1971 compiled from:

Penelope Tuson (ed.), *Records of Bahrain, 1820-1960*, vol. 8 (Slough: Archive Editions, 1993), p. 733; Mahdi Abdalla Al-Tajir, *Language and Linguistic Origins in Bahrain: The Baharnah Dialect of Arabic* (London: Kegan Pual International, 1982), pp. 6, 7, 177.

42 See: "Demographic Statistics and Social Security", Bahrain Open Data Platform, 17/3/2019 (accessed on 10/04/2019 at: <https://bit.ly/2WRBSS6>).

43 Al-Khalifa, *Charles Belgrave*, p.206.

Manama's relationship with the population of the Indian subcontinent has passed through three major phases. The first phase lasted throughout the entire pearl era until this trade collapsed after the late 1920s, while the second phase extended from the discovery of oil in the 1930s to the oil boom in 1973. The third phase began in the mid-1970s and continues today.

Manama and Bahrain as a whole, were, in the first phase, "the Cyprus of the Gulf" as Theodore Bent and his wife put it in 1889.⁽⁴⁴⁾ It was also the primary hub of the Arab elite who had extensive and deep contacts with Bombay, which was, "for the Arabs of Bahrain, the center of the civilized world", as Samuel Zwemer wrote in 1896.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Indeed, the second half of the 19th century and first three decades of the 20th century witnessed extensive contacts between Bahrain and Bombay after Manama was established as a key link in the colonial trade network extending from Bombay to Basra.

Manama, in short, was a Mecca for the many Indian merchants who settled there. These merchants established a long-lasting temple (the Krishna Temple) at the heart of the city, and had an elected representative on the Manama Municipal Council. These merchants played a major role in "modernizing the place", with the Western goods and supplies they imported into Bahrain and the Gulf in general, such as shoes, socks, umbrellas, cutlery, mirrors, and other items. Throughout this period, they were highly respected among people in Manama and the Gulf in general. This is evident in the letters sent by Hindu merchants in Manama to Lord Curzon in 1903, when they wrote: "We in the Gulf generally enjoy respect and prestige."⁽⁴⁶⁾

On the other hand, Bombay was also a Mecca for Bahraini notables and merchants in Manama and Muharraḡ for study, trade, tourism, healthcare, and even as a political exile. India was for a long time a

destination for Bahraini and Gulf dignitaries, traders, and scholars, with trade relations between India and the Gulf rooted in ancient history.

In the modern era, these relations expanded in conjunction with the flourishing of the pearl trade and transit trade, especially since Bahrain was, and had been since the 19th century, a major pearling hub. "The people of Bahrain at the time almost completely dominated the pear trade in the Gulf. Their revenues from India at the time were estimated at 10 lacs [or 100,000] rupees every year"⁽⁴⁷⁾, which encouraged mutual migration and expatriation between the two regions' peoples.⁽⁴⁸⁾ A long list of Bahraini merchant families and notables resided in or visited India, to the point that in 1914, the missionary and doctor Peursemer complained about the emigration of Bahraini students to American missionary schools in India or Beirut for further study.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Bombay was a destination for many Manama residents who studied, lived, were born, and died there from 1858 until the 1920s.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Suffice it to mention that one of Bahrain's most famous poets (Ibrahim al-Aridh) was born in Bombay in 1908. His mother died "when he was still an infant, and he was raised by Indian nannies, receiving his education and culture in the schools of Bombay in India."⁽⁵¹⁾ He would not settle in Bahrain until he was a young man, in 1922.

Indian influence was also evident in Bahraini cuisine and in the dialect of the people of Bahrain since ancient times. Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafei stated that when early Arab linguists visited the Arab tribes in the heart of the desert to compile the grammatical rules of the Arabic language, they ignored the languages of the tribes in Bahrain and Oman "such as Abdul-Qays and Azad Oman because in Bahrain they mixed with Indians and Persians."⁽⁵²⁾ The linguistic influence was evident in the 19th century, with Samuel Zwemer

44 Theodore Bent & Mrs. Theodore Bent, *Southern Arabia* (London: Smith Elder and Waterloo Place, 1900), p. 9.

45 Zwemer, p. 109.

46 See: J.G. Lorimer, *Dalīl al-Khalīj: al-Qism at-Tārīkhī*, Part 7, (Doha: Maṭābi' 'Alī bin 'Alī, n.d.), p. 3871.

47 Noura Mohammed al-Qasimi, *al-Wujūd al-Hindī fī l-Khalīj, 1820 - 1947* (Sharjah: Manshūrāt Dā'irat ath-Thaqāfa wa'l-I'lām, 1996), p. 31.

48 Residence in India was common among Gulf traders from Kuwait to Oman. See: Ibid, pp.35-40.

49 G.J. Van Peursemer, "The Geography and Climate of Bahrein," *Neglected Arabia*, no. 88 (January-March 1914), p. 7.

50 See: Abdul-Karim al-Aridh, *Nāfidha 'alā l-Tārīkh: Bayt al-'Arid* (Manama: al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li'l-Tibā'a wa'n-Nashr, 1999), pp. 35,40,56,60,71,86,104,132.

51 Mohammed Ali bin Ahmed bin Abbas al-Tajer al-Bahrani *Muntaẓam ad-Durraẓn fī Tarājim 'Ulamā' wa-Udabā' al-Aḥsā' wa'l-Qaṭīf wa'l-Baḡrayn*, v. 1 (Beirut: Mu'assasat Ṭayyiba li-l-Ḥyā' at-Turāth, 2010), p. 33.

52 Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafei, *Tārīkh Adab al-'Arab*. Edited by Abdullah al-Manshawi and Mahdi al-Baḡqiri. Part 1. (Al-Mansura: Maktabat al-Imān, n.d.), p. 283.

noting that this close connection to India had had a clear impact "on Arabic dialect in the island, which, even if it did not constitute a particular dialect, became rich in Indian vocabulary."⁽⁵³⁾

This movement ground to a halt with the collapse of the pearl trade, the advent of the oil age, and the subsequent independence of India. This turned the attention of Bahrain's elite merchants away from India and towards the industrialized capitalist countries of the West (the United States, England, Italy, Switzerland, France, Germany, Sweden, etc.), and the industrialized east beyond India, such as Japan after the industrial boom of Japanese manufactured goods after World War II. It is worth mentioning that the first shipment of oil from the Bahrain Petroleum Company ("Bapco") was exported to Japan. It is enough to take a quick look at the brands of goods that Bahrain's merchants were importing from these countries in the 1940s and 1950s to verify that the major capitalist industrial countries had become the main source of most consumer goods in the country. Trade with India did not end, but it did decline and was now limited to basic foodstuffs (rice, sugar, flour, etc.). However, this transition was only the beginning of a clear class transformation that was altering the composition of Manama and the composition of the Indian community coming to Bahrain after the 1930s. Once a Mecca for traders and the trained Indian administrative class who settled in the center, Manama became, after the 1930s, a Mecca for the Indian middle class, consisting of workers in the Bahrain Petroleum Company or in the post offices, customs offices, or shops. However, the influx of so many trained Indian laborers given the rising unemployment of young Bahrainis made the relationship with these expatriates very tense. From the 1930s to 1971, these expatriates continued to cause anger among local elites, lasting through the eras of the National Demand Movement in 1938, the National Union (1954-1956), and the March 1965 uprising.

While this class change within the Indian community was taking place and expanding over time, Manama, as a cosmopolitan city, was shifting from being the

"Cyprus of the Gulf" and the "Arabian Bombay" to being the "City of Pan-Arabism". This change peaked in the 1950s, but its roots date back to the 1930s after the discovery of oil and, in particular, to the National Demands Movement in 1938. One of the demands of this movement was that Bahrainis should be prioritized for employment in the Bahrain Petroleum Company and government departments. The movement also demanded full equality between Bahraini and foreign workers, and Indians in particular, in the Bahrain Petroleum Company, including equal pay and all other rights given to foreigners such as transportation allowances, drinking water, fuel, lighting, paid leave, education, compensation, and protection against arbitrary dismissal. Many of these demands continued to resurface until the National Union era and the March 1965 uprising.

However, the oil boom in 1973 structurally changed the labor market in Bahrain and the Gulf in general, and with it the composition of the Indian community. This now consisted mostly of the poor untrained workers who came to dominate the labor market, representing by the 1970s "more than 60% of the country's entire workforce,"⁽⁵⁴⁾ and was particularly concentrated in the construction sector.

The 1971 census showed that the government was the largest employer in the country. The government had "more than 10,000 employees, followed by the oil refinery which employed 6,940 workers. The other important business sectors were construction employing 8,328 workers,"⁽⁵⁵⁾ the majority of whom were Asians. However, these figures changed radically after the oil boom and after the launch of large-scale urban planning projects during the 1970s and 1980s, which required cheap labor in large numbers to undertake all these projects that were restructuring the entire country at the time.

This cheap labor came from the Indian subcontinent, and it settled in Manama, and then began to expand into most districts of the city that were being abandoned by its native residents in the direction of the new suburbs, luxury residential compounds, and

53 Zwemer, p. 109.

54 Al-Khoury, p. 341. The phenomenon of population imbalance is a general dilemma in the Arab Gulf countries. This dilemma worsened rapidly after the oil boom. In the period of 1975-1985, the population growth rate of Gulf nationals was 3.9 percent, while the annual growth rate of expatriates reached 11.1 percent, almost three times the rate of native citizens' population growth; expatriates accounted for nearly 70 percent of the region's labor force in the mid-1980s. For more, see: Omar al-Shihabi (ed.), *Iqtilā' al-Judhūr: al-Mashārī' al-'Iqāriyya wa-Tafāqum al-Khalal as-Sukkānī fī Majlis at-Ta'āwun li-Duwal al-Khalīj al-'Arabiyya* (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2012), pp. 57 - 64.

55 Belgrave, p.16.

new cities and housing projects. The laborers began to expand even into the suburbs that during the 50s and 60s had been upscale residential areas home to many of Bahrain's notable and merchant families.

In the context of these recent developments, in December 2015, the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities (BACA) launched a project called "Little India in Bahrain" in the Souk and Bab Al Bahrain areas. The event was a multicultural festival featuring Indian performances and various Indian foods. In 2016, this festival celebrated special Hindu events such as the Holi holiday celebrated by Indians in preparation for spring. Although the festival is part

of a campaign to promote Manama as a capital of Arab, Asian, and Gulf tourism, it is also a clear sign of Manama becoming a "little India".

The census could also be a revealing indicator of the size of the transformation in the composition of the Indian community in Manama; when the Indian community was composed of elite merchants its size was very small and did not exceed three figures. After the discovery of oil, the number jumped to the thousands, rising in 1959 by 179% compared to 1941. A huge population boom followed after the oil boom, with the size of the Indian community crossing the 100,000 mark as shown in Table (3).

Table (3)
Number of expatriates from the Indian subcontinent in Manama according to various estimates

Year	Number of expatriates from the Indian subcontinent	Source/estimates
1825	400	Captain George Brooks
1904/1905	200	Lorimer
1941	1424	Official data
1950	3043	Official data
1959	6762	Official data
1971	12034	Official data
1980	69950	Various sources
2002	150000	Various sources
2004	170000	Various sources
2015	374734	Official data
2018	424084	Official data

Source: Prepared by the author

Manama today appears to be a stark example of volatility and dramatic shifts. After a time in which the National Union leaders, in the mid-1950s, attempted and fought to Arabize the city so that Bahrain would be part of the Great

Arab Homeland, and after the Arabization efforts of the government, Manama today has become, thanks to the overwhelming Asian presence on the ground, a 'little India', but without streets paved with gold!

Conclusion

This study has attempted to chart the historical course of the social, economic, political, and demographic transformations that a Gulf capital, Manama, in the Kingdom of Bahrain, has gone through over the span of a century. It has also sought to put all these transformations in their broader context, shaped by many factors, from the collapse of the pearl trade in the late 1920s to the discovery of oil in the 1930s, followed by the oil boom of the mid-1970s, and the large population increase that forced large-scale and

rapid urban growth. In parallel, there was a large influx of foreign labor, which has become the biggest force in the labor market since the mid-1970s, settling in the greater part of the Old City and its suburbs after its original inhabitants migrated to new cities and suburbs. This is combined with the growth of the Islamist movements after the decline of the nationalist and leftist tide, and the transformation of old Manama to a historic city, with attempts to turn it into a major destination for domestic and foreign tourism.

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