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**SILENT CITIZENS:**  
**STATE, CITIZENSHIP AND MEDIA IN**  
**THE GULF**

BY

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B.A. University of Arkansas

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor  
of Philosophy, in the Department of Sociology  
and Social Policy,  
University of Durham

December 1992



12 MAY 1993

*To my father  
Mohammed Mattar and  
to the memory of my mother  
Latifa Al-Maraj  
who have hoped for justice  
in the Gulf and  
the Arab World*

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### **Note On Transliteration**

The system of transliteration used in this thesis is normally that used by the Library of Congress. However it should be pointed out that most Arabic terms have been transliterated according to the Gulf dialect.

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis attempts to unravel the essence of the state in the Gulf Arab countries. The study's main argument is that the Gulf Emirates have been able to manipulate the oil wealth and create what appear to be modern states. The Gulf ruling families were confronted, however, with the dilemma of introducing the kind of civil society that accompanies modernity. They have been able to survive and legitimate their dominion by exploiting religion as the state ideology.

Traditional patriarchal norms and cultures have been maintained by the ruling tribes in the Gulf. The issue of citizenship and citizens' rights has rarely been debated in regard to the Gulf. However, this is one of the main problems of the contemporary situation in the Gulf states. This study concentrates on this issue by means of a review of the media. The Gulf media have been utilised to promote the modern patriarchal structure of the state.

The main body of the thesis examines the media in relation to two main issues: foreign workers in the Gulf and Gulf women. The final chapter of the thesis, however, exposes the fact that Gulf journalists themselves have no rights and that at times of crisis the tenuous autonomy they enjoy withers. A major crisis occurred very recently to reinforce this argument. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990 and the deployment of foreign troops in the Gulf created a further complication for the Gulf ruling families. They were forced to allow foreign - mainly American and British journalists- to cover the war, but they compelled national reporters to use material which was filtered through the foreign press.

## **Acknowledgements**

Throughout the duration of this study intense changes took place in my life on both the personal and the professional level. At times it seemed that this thesis would never materialise. It is due to the encouragement, persistence, support and love of a handful of people that I have been able to complete it.

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From a distance two friends never refrained from sending letters of encouragement and love which sustained my stamina and morale. Malak Rouchdy's letters and tapes boosted my confidence and my immense gratitude goes to her and to Alexander Afouxenidis, a remarkable friend and companion whose expression of care and love knows no limits.



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## **Introduction**

The Gulf region has witnessed a drastic transformation during the last two decades. Some sort of change has been felt not only by the Gulf nationals, but also by many visitors to the region. Sociologists, historians, journalists and other scholars were interested in this transition and many have documented it. The relatively poor Gulf emirates have emerged as 'modern' states. In a brief period of time they have been able to construct their infrastructure. Schools, hospitals, motorways, television networks, radio stations, newspapers, luxurious supermarkets and shopping centres were established. These vast and rapid changes can only be compared with the tales in One Thousand and One Nights. The newly created states and governments were able to transform their countries because of the huge amounts of oil revenues following the discovery of oil in large quantities. The dependence on it as the main source of the world's energy increased oil prices. New modern cities were built on the rubble of the old shanty Gulf towns. In these newly constructed cities old crafts disappeared to give way to new professions and vastly higher standards of living. During the 1970s and 1980s the standard of living in most of these oil-rich Gulf states was among the highest in the world.

In their rush to construct their modern states, the Gulf governments needed all the expertise and help they could get. Professionals, skilled and unskilled labourers were imported from different parts of the world. In the fields of education, health, banking, services and construction expatriate workers were recruited. Thousands of white-collar and blue-collar workers rushed to the region to share the abundance of oil

wealth. Many Arabs from capital-poor countries were needed especially where mastery of the language was crucial such as in the education and media sectors.

Foreign expertise and labour together with the importation of advanced technology - possible due to the huge amounts of oil revenues - transformed the Gulf in line with the standards of most of the industrialised countries. This transformation, however, did not materialise in the creation of a civil society. The Gulf states are still ruled by the same dominant families or tribes. The ruling families have been able to maintain most of the traditional norms and have continued to govern by them. Traditional patriarchal structures have been combined with modern technologies. The Gulf ruling families utilised religion as the ideology or foundation which supported the system.

The Gulf monarchies tried to deliver prosperity and growth as part of their plans for development. Some of these leaders have projected themselves as the 'champions' of modernity and have fought to introduce advanced media outlets - such as television - and formal education for women that was condemned by many traditionalists. They were confronted, however, with the obstacle of introducing the civil society that usually accompanies such transformation. The traditional-patriarchal state structure survived all the drastic changes in the region.

Modernity 'Gulf style' did not bring about any changes in the relation between citizens and the newly created states. With a population that has been exposed to different cultures - through television or travel - and a large number of highly educated citizens, the Gulf rulers were faced with the problem of sporadic popular demands for political participation. Nonetheless, they have been able to overcome this difficulty by resorting to traditional religious values, together with their oil wealth to underpin their authoritarian regimes. Gulf citizens are bribed so as not to challenge the power distribution in society.

The absence of civil society in the Gulf can be clearly observed in the lack of citizens rights. Individuals are judged and treated according to their family or tribe in relation to the ruling elites. Individuals have no rights and there is no space for voicing opinions. Unlike most modern societies, the Gulf states have no outlets for popular representation. Parliaments do not exist and in the few cases of the short-lived ones - as in Kuwait and Bahrain - the majority of citizens were not allowed to participate. Gulf women, in particular, have no rights either social nor political. Freedom of movement, education or choice of husbands or career is denied to women and they are totally dependent on their male relatives.

The Kuwaiti ruling family, for example, have been promising to allow women to vote and participate in parliamentary elections. In October 1992 a small percentage of the Kuwaiti population was allowed to vote in the first elections since the 'liberation' of Kuwait. Kuwaiti women felt that they were betrayed by the ruling Al-Sabah family after all the sacrifices they had made during the invasion.

Although the media are highly developed, they too are completely confined by the state straitjacket. The idea of a fourth estate is a dream that Gulf journalists can not afford. Advanced media technology is used in the Gulf to promote the patriarchal nature of the state.

This thesis attempts to examine how the Gulf media behave towards two main issues, namely Gulf women and foreign labour. In undertaking this the writer seeks to find out how the Gulf media handle these two main issues in relation to the state and, in particular, the articulation of their aspirations. In the final chapter, However, Gulf journalists themselves become the main object of study in an attempt to discover how they fit into the argument about civil society. At this point Gulf journalists appear to be victims themselves of the state's authoritarianism just like the other two examples. Although some margin of liberty is tolerated in general, at times of crisis this freedom

vanishes. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait is used as an illustration of how the state manages the media in times of crisis.

It seems appropriate here to summarise the main argument of the thesis. A few scholars have articulated the oppression of the new Gulf states where the ruler has complete domination over all aspects of life in his emirate. Others have argued that the Gulf states have their own distinctive style of representation and democracy. The present writer puts forward a different argument, namely that the Gulf ruling families have been able to adopt most aspects of modern technology and have delivered them to their citizens, but they have not departed from their traditional patriarchal norms. Hence, they have not created a civil society to complement the modern state structure.

The thesis is divided into five chapters plus an overall conclusion. The first creates the framework for the argument by reviewing the literature on the role of the media in modern states, mainly focusing on the issue of the media and citizenship. The second chapter attempts to examine the Gulf states in relation to civil rights. The third and fourth chapters cover the fieldwork in which the writer monitored the media in four Gulf countries. This review of the media concentrates on two main issues: one social, namely the situation of Gulf women, and the other economic, namely the continuous dependence on foreign labourers who, like Gulf citizens, have no rights. The fifth chapter looks at the Gulf media, and how Gulf journalists - as a third example - also fall under the control of the modern patriarchal state. Although they act as one of the state's instruments for expressing its power and filter its ideology to the citizens, they too cannot escape its curbs.

In these three chapters content analysis was used though the writer is aware of its disadvantages and that it is an outdated method. However, the complicated Gulf societies and the restrictions and curb on the media made it the only useable and applicable method.



The writer is also conscious of the different sociological approaches that are used in each chapter. The thesis does not follow a single method, mainly because it tackles different interrelated subjects. There is a shift from media studies to development to gender, etc. One could argue that the study of Gulf media while utilising the citizenship theory necessitated this technique. Although the first reading of the thesis might suggest that the chapters are not associated, in fact there is a continuity throughout the study. To understand and be able to follow the argument one has to focus all through the thesis on the idea of the lack of a civil society in the Gulf. The Gulf ruling elites have never argued that they have a democratic system compared to that in many industrialised countries. They have, however, insisted on the argument that they have their own peculiar democratic system that is rooted in the culture and religion of the region. The writer in this thesis attempts to reveal that this whole argument about modernisation is a facade. Since these states have tried to concentrate on the media as the main element through which the Gulf ruling families project themselves as being modern, the writer tries to provide the opposite through a study of the media in general and journalists in particular. The first chapter, hence, attempts to prove that the Gulf media has nothing in common with media in Western countries - with all its problems - where a civil society exists. The second chapter is an attempt by the writer to present a different, and hopefully interesting, argument in the study of the Gulf, one that is different from the Orientalists or the radical sociologists and scholars. The Gulf societies as seen by the writer are very complex and a simplified argument such as that they are oppressive is not enough for the main debate in this thesis.

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Given that the thesis is based on empirical study I would like at this point to highlight another important factor, namely the obstacles faced by the writer. Firstly: being a female from the Gulf made it difficult to get access to many individuals and

officials. Also travelling around - especially in Saudi Arabia - was almost impossible without a male companion. Secondly: being a journalist did not help, because Gulf officials never trust local reporters and the public are fearful of revealing any information to the media.

When I started my fieldwork I had plans to interview information ministers in the four Gulf countries on which the study concentrates. My plans collapsed after the first telephone calls I made to the offices of these ministers to arrange for interviews. I sent many letters requesting an interview and explaining what I was doing and the specific information needed. I waited for more than six months with no answer. In the end the Saudi Information Minister's office replied. I received a phone call from the minister's secretary informing me that the interview was scheduled for the next day at 1 p.m. I had less than twenty four hours to find a 'mahram' (male companion) and arrange to fly to Jeddah where the minister was living at the time. In the end, my brother agreed to take leave from his job and travel with me. We left by car at five a.m. to be able to reach the city of Dhahran in Saudi eastern province where we could catch a flight to Jeddah. We spent more than half an hour at the Saudi customs after crossing the Bahrain-Saudi causeway. When the customs officials found out that I was a journalist they insisted on searching the car and took me to a special room where a body search was conducted by a female officer. I was interrogated by the female officer who also went through all my papers and read my notes carefully. In accordance with the Saudi restrictions on females I had to wear the veil and cover myself up completely.

Throughout our journey I was ignored completely and it was my brother who was asked questions such as the purpose of our visit to the Kingdom, etc. Whenever he replied that he had no business there except to accompany me the Saudis were surprised; at times they made jokes and laughed at him. When we arrived at the

Ministry of Information in Jeddah we were asked to wait because the minister had not yet arrive and the interview was delayed for more than an hour. The minister's secretary kept addressing my brother who continually repeated that 'You have to ask my sister because she is the one who is going to interview the minister, and not me.' In the end I was led to the Saudi minister's office. He gave me a lecture on how they (the Saudi government) were encouraging women to join the labour force and take up any kind of profession they chose. When I started asking him questions he stopped me and said that it would be better if he could have the opportunity to answer me in writing. My efforts to persuade him to go ahead with the interview failed and I left his office and took the same hectic journey back home. A few weeks later I received short formal answers from the minister which were of no use for my study. All this was more than two years ago and I am still waiting for answers from the other Gulf information ministers.

## CHAPTER I

### NEWS PRODUCTION: CONTROL OF NEWS OR CONTROL OF THOUGHT

*"Print is the best of God's inventions,"  
Martin Luther*

*"The endless cycle of idea and action,  
Endless invention, endless experiment,  
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;  
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;  
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the word.  
All our knowledge brings us nearer to death,  
But nearness to death no nearer to God.  
Where is the life we have lost in living?  
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?  
Where is the knowledge we have lost in  
information?" (ELIOT)*

*" But the biggest weapon wielded and actually  
daily unleashed by imperialism against  
collective defiance [for the oppressed and  
exploited is the cultural bomb. The effect of the  
cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief  
in their names, in their languages, in their  
environment, in their heritage of struggle, in  
their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in  
themselves" (Kenyan novelist, Ngugi Wa  
Thiong'o, 1986: 3).*

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION:

In this chapter I shall try to examine the media with regard to their nature, control, relation to the state, etc. In doing so I am attempting to find out why the media concentrate on certain specific issues and ignore others; why, for example, the story read or watched in London is at the same time read in other parts of the world such as Cairo for example. I should make it clear at the outset that I am not trying to find out whether the media are biased or not or why they are biased. I am simply trying to understand how they function and what elements influence the final news story we read or watch on our TV screens. It is important to note that most of the sociological studies of news production and the media in general have been conducted with respect to the industrialised countries. That is why when one attempts to study news production in the Gulf region, for example, one finds it difficult to follow one theory. (for more discussion on this subject see Schudson, 1991: 143-4).

Most of the studies on the mass media have concentrated on myths related specifically to news production, such as the myth of objectivity on which most journalists pride themselves. Before studying these myths, however, and the different schools of thought that have emerged, I shall try to define the relationship between the state and mass communications, principally the citizenship theory based on the ideas of Jurgen Hebermas. Hebermas argued that the development of capitalism was accompanied by the creation of a large space for a public forum. However, since the second half of the nineteenth century, this public space has been dominated by the state and economic interests.

*“A new corporatist pattern of power relations was established in which organized interests bargained with each other and with the state, while increasingly excluding the public. The media ceased to be an agency of empowerment and rationality,*

*and became a further means by which the public was sidelined. Instead of providing a conduit for rational-critical debate, the media manipulated mass opinion" (Curran, 1991: 83).*

By doing this the media have in fact transformed the public into 'passive consumers.' The development of any democratic political process requires knowledgeable citizens. Graham Murdock noted that in a democratic society, "it is not enough for people simply to possess citizenship rights. They must be able to exercise them, and this requires policies designed to guarantee access to the conditions needed for effective participation" (1992: 20-1). The concept of citizenship itself assumes that the public is informed and provided with channels of communication (McQuail, 1991: 72). Peter Golding and Graham Murdock have argued that the history of mass communication is also a history of how the media helped in infusing 'full citizenship' (1991: 22). "Citizenship is about the conditions that allow people to become full members of the society at every level." In an ideal situation, they wrote, the media or mass communication in general could contribute to this by:

- (i) providing the public with information and advice that would alert them to their rights and how to observe them.
- (ii) providing information and debate on areas that involve political choices and facilitating the means for the public to suggest changes.

The public sphere, however, is limited because of two main factors: first, the ownership and control of these media outlets, and second, the nature of the relations between state regulations and communications institutions ( *ibid.* 23). Some have argued that the development of the mass media has always been connected with the evolution of states. The mass media in all their forms have been used by the state to

circulate material and information that are of use to it, while at the same time restricting any critical news. As John Thompson put it (1990: 168):

*“..the history of the regulation of mass communication can be understood as the history of attempts by state officials to construct and impose mechanisms for the restricted implementation of symbolic forms. By suppressing information, monitoring output, controlling access to technical media and punishing offenders, state officials have devised a variety of institutional mechanisms which circumscribe the flow of symbolic forms and, in some cases, link the restricted implementation of symbolic forms to the pursuit of overt political aims.”*

The governments of most of the industrialised countries have dominated the media, and broadcasting in particular, the excuse given being the limited number of wave-lengths and television channels available and that these are public service outlets that ought to be protected. The main reasons, however, for such control were state fears of the power of these outlets if they were left unmonitored (ibid.: 204).

The development of mass communication has witnessed a more sophisticated method of state control, especially in the industrialised countries. Media outlets are increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few individuals or conglomerates and away from the direct control of the state, to the delight of the traditional liberalists who have always believed that once the media are removed from the state freedom of expression is secured. Recent experience and examples, however, have proved them wrong. Limitations on the public sphere have been imposed by the owners of these media outlets who have strong ties with the ruling elites. Governments, in most of the industrialised countries, have also been the largest advertisers in the media. In this way the state is actually able to influence the media's output (Golding and Murdock, 1991:

25). In fact, the power of these conglomerates and the pressure they exercise on their media channel is enormous.

*“The free market thus compromises rather than guarantees the editorial integrity of commercial media, and impairs in particular its oversight of private corporate power” (Curran, 1991: 87).*

James Curran has cited evidence that these conglomerates ally themselves with specific governments or ruling parties, their reasons for doing so being that their businesses will benefit in the end. He concludes that the media conglomerates are not independent ‘watchdogs’ serving the public; rather they promote their own interests. The role conglomerates play will be discussed later in this chapter.

In pursuing the argument of state domination over the public sphere, two examples might be quoted briefly, one from an industrialised democratic country where there is no direct government control over the media, the other from a non-democratic country ruled by a single family.

The first example is that of the deterioration of the British Broadcasting Corporation’s current affairs programme ‘Panorama’ which has always been thought of as being on the side of the public. The Weekend Guardian of 19 September 1992 published an article entitled ‘The taming of Panorama,’ in which the writer, Dave Hill, argued that the programme had been facing pressures not to be too critical of the Conservative Government, and that several Panorama episodes had been dropped, delayed or altered on the excuse that they contained controversial information. The article, traced the history of ‘Panorama’ and attempts by different governments to ‘tame’ it, the last instance cited being during the Gulf War when the episode ‘Project Babylon,’ in which Panorama produced evidence that the British Government had been



helping to arm Saddam Hussein's Government was postponed until the war was over.

Hill wrote:

*“The most alarming result, it is claimed, is that programmes critical of government policy stand in danger of being defused, diluted, or both.”*

The second example comes from a completely different structure, especially as regards to relations between the state and the media. In Saudi Arabia media outlets controlled either directly by the government (television and radio) or indirectly through private owners who have close links with the government. In 1991 the first Arab satellite television station, The Middle East Broadcasting Centre, was launched from London. Part of the reason for its being based in London was to distance it from the direct control and influence of any Arab government. The channel is privately owned by several Arab businessmen mainly Saudis; a main shareholder is a relative of the King Fahd of Saudi Arabia. During the first few months of transmission MBC concentrated on news in the style of the American cable network CNN. Later, however, news and current affairs editors came under pressure from the owners, especially the relative of King Fahd, who imposed the Kingdom's policy on MBC's news bulletins. Gradually MBC changed to become a mouthpiece of the Kingdom and all critical views were excluded.

## **1.2 DIFFERENT SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT:**

It may well be appropriate at this point to give a brief and panoramic view of the different schools of thought that have attempted to study and understand the media. Throughout history the media have taken different forms. In ancient Greece oral communication was dominant since the printing press was not yet invented. Print became the main form of communication in pre-industrial Europe, especially in

Britain. Communication centres (if we can use this term) shifted from East to West with the invention of the printing press and later of more advanced means of communication. Yet most of the rest of the world was introduced to the printing press during the colonisation period when many Western imperialists such as England and France sent their printing machines along with their armies. From this period on these countries were to continue to be dependent on the West for communication and information technologies. (This will be discussed briefly later in this chapter.)

To mention just a few, the major schools of thought that have studied the media were the following. First, the Frankfurt school composed of a group of social theorists who fled Nazi Germany in the late 1930s and settled in the United States, where they combined Marxian and Freudian ideas to develop a better understanding of society. They emphasised the limited effects of the media, but they criticised not only the media but all other aspects of life related to the newly created consumer society. The most prominent names in this school were Max Horkheimer, Erich Fromm, Theodor Adorno, Leo Lowenthal and Herbert Marcuse.

Another group of social scientists emerged in the United States in the post-Second World War period, led by Daniel Lerner, Wilbur Schramm, Ithiel de Sola Pool, Lucien Pye and others, and known as the Development school, because they advocated the development of Third World countries by means of advanced media or communication technologies. Their ideas spread widely, especially among scholars from developing nations. But in order to understand Lerner and his colleagues one must look at the emergence of the United States as a world power and the urgent need to create a single consumer market dominated by Washington. In saying this one needs to mention that the US exported programmes are not spreading American values or ways of living, but rather capitalist values which the United States truly depict (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1991: 130).

Consumerism was not a new phenomenon, at this time. The first newspaper advertisement appeared in 1658 (Hill, 1988:189). But consumerism as a world economy and a base for control developed after the Second World War. Lerner wrote: 'Development as an international ideology began with a communication-the State of the Union message delivered to Congress by President Harry S. Truman in January 1949' (Schiller, 1989: 138). It was not surprising to find Lerner repeating Truman's announcement that the age of imperialism had been ended. Lerner and his colleagues at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology advocated the idea that communication was a powerful promoter of social change that could be used in African and Asian countries as a means for development (ibid.: 137). They carried out a study of several Middle Eastern countries including Iran, Turkey and Lebanon, where they concluded that the establishment of advanced media had helped in developing the rural regions. Lerner has been criticised by several scholars from the region including Ali Mohammadi, who argues that modernisation as defined by Lerner, actually meant Westernization (Mohammadi, 1990: 273). He noted that the first television station in Iran was established by a rich Iranian who was also the agent for Pepsi Cola, and who became the sole agent in the country for TV sets. The TV station imported programmes and advertisements from the United States, which became common not only in Iran but also in most of the countries on the west bank of the Arabian (Persian) Gulf. Mohammadi regarded the argument that imported programmes were cheaper as insufficient in the case of Iran. He wrote that during the government of the Shah, National Iranian Radio and Television had a huge budget, but 'it seemed safer for the regime to allow lots of Western entertainment to be imported than to allow possibly critical homemade programs to appear' (ibid. : 276).

To return to Lerner's argument, Mohammadi found that Iran developed an artificial modernity, that is to say, people dressed in Western styles, their social lives

had changed, but no real political or economic changes had taken place. Nor did the government improve the health or education sectors. Iran was a police state, where freedom of expression, of speech or of the press, was not allowed. Westerners were favoured over the local population.

*“In Iran, as in much of the Third World, development was replaced by a mimetic Westernization, a copying of the superficial elements of the modern West without the fundamental political and social changes required. Economic dependency, as in the spread of montage industries that merely assemble consumer technologies developed elsewhere (thus not helping an independent economic sector to grow), was supported by cultural dependency, in which mass media broadcast news and cultural entertainment programs more attuned to the markets of industrial nations or regime needs than to the cultural habits of the Iranian people” (ibid. : 279).*

This criticism was widely raised by other Third World countries at the United Nations which called for a new information order. The main UN agency concerned with the issue was UNESCO which came under attack from the United States which finally abandoned it altogether. The call for a new information order fell on deaf ears among the developed nations and was ultimately dropped. The same developing countries who called for the new order found their own cultures being invaded by new concepts and ideas not to mention language. They lost the battle when they became totally dependent on the United States for technical assistance (Schiller, 1989: 144).

One example of this dependence is shown by the way most Third World countries are reliant on the industrialised nations for information and news about their region. One of the most urgent issues is the control over satellites by a handful of developed countries ( Demac, 1990: 214). The same could be said of almost all the

advanced communication technologies such as computers and computer software, telephones, radios, and television. UNESCO's 1989 statistics found that only 4 per cent of the world's computer hardware was owned by developing countries. Of the 700 million telephones in the world, the Third World had less than 10 per cent, while nine of the developed countries owned 75 per cent of the total. Among the developing nations, 39 had no newspapers and 30 others only one in comparison with the United States' has 168 and Japan's 125. Average radio ownership in the Third World was 142 per 1000 population as compared with 990 in developed nations and 2,100 in the United States. As for television, the world average is 137 per 1000, with 447 per 1000 in the developed countries but only 36 per 1000 in the developing nations. The gap between the two as regards TV programmes and films is even greater in most developing nations the flow is entirely one way.

These countries also depend almost totally on the major Western news agencies, namely the Associated Press and United Press International (American), Reuters (British), and AFP (French). Most news is about these Western countries unless events elsewhere affect them, such as the Iran-Iraq war or conflicts in other Third World countries. Other news which might attract the attention of the major news agencies is news of crashes of aeroplanes (that might have carried citizens of these nations), or natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes, famines etc. (Hamelink, 1990 : 223). The flow of news from Western countries is almost 100 times more than that from Third World countries to the West.

It is important to note here that the idea of 'Global culture' has been thoroughly discussed in the West and criticised by many sociologists because in fact it means that the less fortunate (mostly developing) nations will be inundated with new styles of living, fashions, music and other cultural elements that are alien to them. Studies not only in Third World countries, but also in many European states, have found that

programmes such as 'Dallas' can have an effect on viewers. Of course this is a subject of considerable disagreement among scholars. Believers in the so-called 'active audience' (see below) have found that individuals with different backgrounds interpret 'Dallas' differently; they have based their argument on a study by a graduate student on the effect of Dallas on Israeli society with all its differences.

Anthony Smith, one of the critics of the development theory and how it could create a global culture, has noted (1990: 176):

*"a global culture would operate at several levels simultaneously: as a cornucopia of standardized commodities, as a patchwork of denationalized ethnic or folk motifs, as a series of generalised 'human values and interests', as a uniform 'scientific' discourse of meaning, and finally as the interdependent system of communications that forms the material base for all the other components and levels."*

Schiller refers to it as 'cultural annexation,' or 'unrestricted commercial intercourse between nations.' He then makes the appeal, "...The technology of modern communications must be won away from its current custodians" (Schiller, 1969: 152).

During recent years we have seen the flourishing of so-called 'active audience' believers, who argue that the power of the media is balanced by the power of viewers or readers who make sense of the material being fed to them. Others argue that, with advanced technologies (i.e., videos, satellite dishes, cable channels), the individual has a large spectrum to choose from. Leaders in this approach are Katz, Ang, Liebes and others who concentrate on the individual interpretation of what s/he watches or reads. Schiller is one of many who disagree with the 'active audience' theorists. He has noted that, though audiences are important, they do not play an active role in choosing, ....etc: social and economic changes are much more important since they create new attitudes

and maybe even needs (Schiller, 1989: 153). John Fiske and John Hartley, however, have stressed the point that television programmes always carry the message of the dominant class (Fiske and Hartley, 1978).

A few scholars have also argued that the increase in media outlets has not led to more space for the public sphere. James Curran wrote recently that though there are now more television stations, these broadcasting centres are not producing different material or, for that matter following a new ideological perspective. CNN, he noted, does not construct news differently from the other three main American networks (Curran, 1991: 94). Fred Inglis has also argued that social theories are not like scientific ones. Unlike the clean-cut theories of science, social theories are 'messy' just like culture (Inglis, 1990: 173).

In trying to understand news production I shall try to avoid the argument that news is biased either to the left or to the right as many people claim. Instead, I shall try to interpret the media (and the news media in particular) as a complex social and cultural product that is produced under pressure at all levels. I shall attempt to combine the three main approaches to media studies:

- (i) Via the political economy which relates the outcome of the media to the economic structure of the media organisation and the state in general;
- (ii) Via the social organisation and occupational ideology;

(iii) Via the cultural approach which concentrates on the symbols rather than on relations between individuals or the organisational structure. For example, in reaction to minorities, racial problems, women, etc. the cultural approach concentrates on the culture rather than on the journalist who reported the story or the organisation he works for (Schudson, 1989: 266).

Each of the above approaches has its strengths and weaknesses. For example, the political economy approach, or what is also known as the 'conspiracy theory' or propaganda model, has been criticised by many scholars on both sides of the Atlantic. One of its major exponents, Noam Chomsky, recently replied to many of his critics in an important book (Chomsky, 1989). Yet even critics of such an approach cannot ignore its logic. Such was the case of Graham Murdock who did not agree completely with the idea that news production is influenced by the ruling class, yet admitted that 'The basic definition of the situation which underpins the news reporting of political events very largely coincides with the definition provided by the legitimated power holders' (quoted in Schudson, 1989: 268).

To understand news production, however, as based on organisational structures and pressures is not enough to give a clear idea of the reasons for the final product. The social organisation approach concentrates on the individual journalist and her/his relation to their superiors. It also takes into account such concepts as the reporter's objectivity.

The third approach to news production tends to see the news as part of a whole culture or maybe a reflection of this culture since it uses the same cultural symbols. For example, two scholars (Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge) found that reporters concentrate on individuals rather than on structures because Western culture tends to stress the power of the individual,....etc. Marshall Sahlins wrote that 'an event isn't just a happening and a given world, it is a relation between a certain happening and a given symbolic system' (Sahlins, 1985: 153).

The media, or to be precise the news, produced under different strains and pressures, direct pressures imposed by the profession itself or indirect ones such as the ideological considerations involved in the process of collecting, choosing and writing a news story. Editors and journalists are under pressure to beat deadlines, they are



always running against time. This has been known to many sociologists as a 'stop-watch culture' in which journalists are taught that to be obsessed about time is to be professional.

*"Time is the substance of which I am made. Time is a river which weeps me along, but I am the river; it is a tiger which mangles me, but I am the tiger; it is a fire which consumes me, but I am the fire" (Jorge Luis Borges quoted in Schlesinger, 1978: 83).*

A few people have been arguing that, because news is produced daily, it is impossible to give in-depth analyses and articles. That is why, they argue, news is so personalised; it concentrates on the individual rather than on the structure, the system or the society. One might ask why news is gathered on a daily base. Why is it (using Fred Inglis's term) a 'one-day best-seller'? Is it because of the human daily cycle, or the capitalist way of running business? As Tuchman noted 'News is not a report on a factual world; news is a depletable consumer product that must be made fresh daily' (Tuchman, 1978: 179). In trying to understand news production in general, one might perhaps be able to understand the different factors that enforce such restraints as time.

Journalists, in their rush to meet their deadlines or to get the story ahead of their colleagues, tend to turn to the more available information, such as statistics produced by the government or the official views on issues. They thus end up with a one-sided story. They also tend to report the story as it is, without any background; often this could do more harm to the story than not getting the facts straight.

Newcomers to the field will be assigned to beats that are usually government ministries or agencies connected to the government. They try to familiarise themselves with their assignments and of course start to build up connections. As I know from my

own experience, the most successful reporter is the one who has more prominent sources than his colleagues. I personally experienced this in most of the newspapers and magazines that I have worked for and even before that at the university. As students of journalism we were assigned to beats that were usually different college and departments. We start our daily work with a roundup of these departments; checking with professors or secretaries about activities that are going to take place. As all journalists we competed with each other for stories we get. When we got at the professional level we were prepared to be assigned for beats and instead of colleges we changed to ministries. Reporters are promoted to editors of specific sections of the newspaper or even editors in chief if they have proved that they were able to get the most senior official as their source. One reporter covering state government has been quoted as saying, 'The only important tool of the reporter is his news sources and how he uses them' (Schudson, 1989: 271).

Competition also plays a role in the kind of stories that we read or watch on our television screens. Journalists, rushing to beat their colleagues, try to get the story as fast as possible and this could be one of the reasons why there are so few in-depth stories. The economic side of news production plays a role also, since in-depth and investigative reporting costs more time and money. That is why we are now presented with less and less investigative reporting of the kind that became fashionable for a time, especially following Watergate. Journalists turn to official spokespersons, the police and so on, in the belief that they are more reliable and therefore the story they provide needs no second checking which, as noted above, is money and time-consuming. An example of this occurred in 1986 when President Reagan accused the Nicaraguan Government of being involved in drug trafficking. The American and British media reported it without checking, and when it was found to be wrong did not bother to report this (Herman, 1990: 81). Another recent example of the media's trusting the

officials was the second Gulf war, when the British and American media waited for the official spokespersons to feed them with the news (see Chapter 5).

As for international news, the barrier of language is of course one of the disadvantages facing reporters most of whom cannot speak a foreign language. The assumption that English is spoken fluently all over the world does sometimes fail the reporter who could be faced with a group of people who do not know a single word of English. This issue was raised by many critics of the media coverage of the recent Gulf War, who noted that all but a few of the reporters in Riyadh and Baghdad could not speak Arabic.

Language is not the only barrier that correspondents are faced with when reporting from foreign countries. The understanding of other cultures could be a much more difficult issue facing most Western reporters. Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi found that the high costs of covering foreign countries has forced many networks to close down their local offices and settle for a foreign correspondent or 'stringer' who travels from one place to another as required. Such an arrangement makes it even more difficult for a foreign correspondent to try to specialise in one country or area. According to Sreberny-Mohammadi, however, it is not only financial restraints that have affected foreign news reporting, but also organisational pressures. She cites the case of the ABC crew in Lebanon during the hijacking of a TWA aircraft in 1985. ABC had an office in Beirut before the incident took place and most of its crew spoke Arabic and had therefore been able to get a good story. Their editors, however, considered that they had got 'too involved' with the people they were covering and therefore took the decision to move them to another country.

It is also worth noting that a reporter for an American network during the negotiations for the Camp David agreement lost her job because in her reporting she concentrated on the anger felt by most Arabs towards President Sadat of Egypt and the

American Administration. She later wrote a book about the agreement which she called 'Frogs and Scorpions'.

### **1.3 NEUTRALITY THE BIG MYTH:**

News as a product is not at all neutral although most journalists believe that it is. Nor are the styles of writing the news or of broadcasting it neutral. News angles, or camera shots in the case of television, can sometimes twist the reality of what has happened. Even the lighting that is used in news programmes, the lenses ( the use of close-ups, long shots, etc.) the graphics, the length of a shot, all these are done in a very precise way to help the message that the producer or editor wants to get across to the viewer. We can still remember the huge portrait of Saddam Hussein that was used by BBC television during their continuous coverage of the Gulf War. It gave the impression of the Iraqi President being a dictator or a Hitler, as he was described by the British media. Since most viewers have become accustomed to the fast pace of television commercials, for example, the same fast technique has been adopted by news programme producers, in their continuous attempt to hold the audience in a highly competitive field. Television commercials usually last no longer than 30 seconds, and so news items are now composed of shots; each lasting a maximum of 7 seconds (Gruneau and Hackett, 1990: 290).

As regards to newspapers, the game is concentrated on where the news story is published and where in the story the most important or controversial element is hidden. Scholars like Hallin, Herman, Chomsky and Lipstadt, have written that although in most Western liberal societies news stories about controversial issues do get published in the newspapers, they could never make it to the front pages. Hallin takes the argument further by claiming that since Vietnam the style of writing has changed to

hide the truth as in a story as much as possible. He argues that there has been a 'reverse inverted pyramid' (Schudson, 1989: 272).

Each day reporters and editors have to choose from among the thousands of stories and happenings around the world a handful of news items to be published or broadcast. This is well known as the 'news values,' which in itself raises the question of which criteria these journalists use in judging stories or events, Stuart Hall has written:

*"news values' are one of the most opaque structures of meaning in modern society. All 'true journalists' are supposed to possess it: few can or are willing to identify and define it. Journalists speak of 'the news' as if events select themselves. Further, they speak as if which is the 'most significant' news story, and which 'news angles' are most salient are divinely inspired. Yet of the millions of events which occur every day in the world, only a tiny portion ever become visible as 'potential news stories'; and of this proportion, only a small fraction are actually produced as the day's news in the news media. We appear to be dealing, then, with a 'deep structure' whose function as a selective device is un-transparent even to those who professionally must know how to operate it" (quoted in Schudson, 1989: 277).*

Journalists have created their own vocabulary and terminology, with the use of words such as 'claimed' which can give a completely different feeling to the reader from the word 'said' which is mostly used when quoting an official, whereas 'claimed' is used when referring to unofficial sources. Specific words are used to describe other countries, especially Third World nations. The word 'terrorism' is used quite often by the media but only to refer to specific groups or nations (mostly Arab) but not to other countries which follow the same practices. Terrorism, for example, is used loosely

when referring to any Palestinian political group including, at some points, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), while the state of Israel, with all its human rights violations and expansionist attitudes, is never referred to as a terrorist state. Sreberny-Mohammadi lists a few examples with respect to Iran after the revolution and how the media changed its language and terminology, referring for instance, to Iranian women in black robes or veiled (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1990: 302).

Editors and journalists identify events and relate them to other events', for instance, 'another terrorist mugging attack,' another case of 'child abuse'. Hall and his colleagues in their book 'Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order' argued that reported events, as shown above, are thus placed on a cultural map of meaning; although these maps may vary somewhat between different organs of the mass media they all share a consensual image of society.

Correspondents will not report events unless they can be fitted into the existing framework. So news is not really new; instead it is old. This is also true if we look at what have become known as the 'staged events' such as press conferences, court hearings, etc. when editors and reporters prepare for the events. Even major events, such as the US bombing of Libya or the first day of the air bombardment of Baghdad by the allies, have been found to have been staged to coincide with the main news bulletins by the major US networks (on the Libyan attack see Chomsky, 1989: 272).

#### **1.4 OBJECTIVITY: ANOTHER MYTH:**

Journalists are obsessed with the idea of objectivity. One of the reasons for this obsession could be that they like to regard themselves as professionals with professional ethics. Yet journalists are not required to pass specific tests or to obtain a licence like other professionals, and this is what makes the idea so dangerous.

Objectivity as a basis for news production was first invented in the United States and has been taught in most schools of journalism all over the world. The objectivity myth was introduced by the Associated Press for commercial reasons in order to sell uniform wire service news to a large number of newspapers and television networks in different parts of the world. It has been criticised by different scholars for a number of reasons. Walter Lippman, for example, argued that ‘..the effort to state an absolute fact is simply an attempt to achieve what is humanly impossible, all I can do is to give you my interpretation of the facts’ (quoted in Schudson,1989: 271).

The argument in favors of the impossibility of objectivity can be seen through an understanding of human beings. Objectivity implies that journalists are different from all other people, that they can get rid of all their feelings, emotions or backgrounds when they sit down in front of a typewriter or a keyboard. This is, of course, unthinkable. Claud Cockburn, one of the last survivals of the radical press, wrote, ‘The humbug and hypocrisy of the press begin only when newspapers pretend to be “impartial” or “servants of the public”’. And this only becomes dangerous as well as laughable when the public is fool enough to believe it’ (quoted in Elliott, 1978: 191).

Objectivity, it has been argued, is also one way of legitimising the state since it gives officials certain rights and guarantees a positive reaction to what they say. Many studies have found that the media are actually biased towards official views, something that can be seen particularly clearly in times of war (Vietnam, Panama, Grenada, the Falklands and most recently the Gulf War).

News production, as noted earlier, is a highly selective process. It starts with choosing a specific incident to write about out of the hundreds of other things happening at the same time. Journalists also decide on the angle they are going to use in writing the story, which information to drop and which to concentrate on, etc. The last

step is for the editor to decide where to publish it, whether to put it on the front page or to hide it inside the paper.

*“The mass media and government can therefore make an event newsworthy' merely by giving it their sustained attention..By the same token, they can make another perfectly newsworthy event a nonhappening for the bulk of the population” (Herman, 1990: 85).*

Reporters are sometimes forced to cut a story or choose one rather than another simply because of the amount of space available in a newspaper or of time in a news programme. Imagine the situation where the journalist in charge finds out a few seconds before a news programme starts that s/he is 10 seconds short; s/he would definitely grab the story that fits this slot without thinking of its content. The same could be said about newspapers. In my own experience as a reporter, I have found that many stories are dropped at the last moment or added for the simple reason that the paper was going to press and the editor had to fill an empty space.

One of the most interesting and controversial areas in media studies is the question of how much journalists know about their audience. And do they really write and broadcast what their readers and viewers are interested in? One argument is that, since news is a commodity that is available in the market for sale (this argument will be pursued further in this chapter) then those who work in the media should know what their consumers want or need. To develop this argument, it could be argued that if people in Britain, for example, do not like page three of the tabloid newspapers then the circulation of these papers ought to be very low. But the statistics show that they have the highest number of readers among British newspapers. Could it be that the majority



of the British public escape from the problems of their daily lives by reading the gossip columns and looking at the page three girl?

Other studies have proved the opposite. For example, Herbert Gans in his study of news at four major US networks and magazines, found that journalists know very little about their readers. He argued that most of them are not really interested in knowing their audience and that they usually write for their superiors and colleagues (Gans, 1980: 230). Although readers think that reporters write for them, the evidence shows that Gans' finding is more accurate. Even though journalists will argue that their readers do not like this type of news or that, they do not actually know anything about their readers and do not even care to read reports which could give them more information about them, such as their ages, professions and interests or class backgrounds. Journalists have their own clubs or bars where they meet other colleagues in the business and each one of them passes judgment on the others. They have no time to socialise with other people who could be their readers.

*"I began this study with the assumption that journalists, as commercial employees, take the audience directly into account when selecting and producing stories; I therefore paid close attention to how the journalists conceived of and related to their audience. I was surprised to find, however, that they had little knowledge about the actual audience and rejected feed back from it. Although they had a vague image of the audience, they paid little attention to it; instead they filmed and wrote for their superiors and for themselves" (Gans, 1980: 229-30).*

Since journalists do not know anything about their audience they use their own judgment when it comes to story selection. They sometimes judge a story by its being new to them, although it might not be new to their readers. In saying this, one can not

overlook the fact that not all reporters and editors are ignorant of their audiences, otherwise this would be reflected in their circulations and ratings, which most journalists take seriously as an indication of their success or failure.

In their book 'Making the News,' Peter Golding and Philip Elliott argued that what researchers should concentrate on is the structure of newsmaking rather than the bias in the news. They say that even though news has to be comprehensive, it is in fact selective since the editor's job is to select a few stories out of hundreds. Or as Chief Justice Warren E. Burger has said: 'for better or worse, editing is what editors are for and editing is the choice and selection of material'. The term 'gatekeeper' has been used to refer to editors in their role of choosing from the daily stories produced or gathered by journalists. This term also shows how news is selective and not comprehensive. Editors usually choose the stories that will sell more, not copies but advertisements. Editors, after all, are also under pressure from the proprietors and the advertisers. They have to follow the policy that was set by their board of directors.

It could also be argued that editors, even if they are free from all the other pressures, are not free from their own prejudices, class origins, and sometimes even ignorance. The same thing could be said about journalists, who in most instances create the news and not just report it. Since they get their stories from sources such as news agencies and official spokespersons,

*"Processes or 'gatekeeping' in mass communication may be viewed within a framework of a total social system, made up of a series of subsystems whose primary concerns include the control of information in the interest of gaining other social ends" (Donahue, 1972: 45).*

Editors tend to enforce the ideology of the owner (or owners) of a newspaper or television network on all the journalists who work under their command. Beginners

get to know the roles of their papers and how to get their stories published from their editors during what is called the training period for new recruits. They also learn their paper's policies from reading it, and they know that if they fail to follow these policies they might not get promotion or might even lose their jobs. Edward Jay Epstein, who coordinated a seminar on organisational theory, found that individuals in these institutions alter their values so as to fit with those of the organisation they work for (Schudson 1989: 273).

When reporters start expressing different views from those their editors want, they could face dismissal; recent history has shown many such cases not only in Britain, but also in other European countries, and in the United States. Former Federal Communications Commissioner, Nicholas Johnson described this process when he wrote:

*“The story is told of a reporter who first comes up with an investigative story idea, writes it up and submits it to the editor and is told the story is not going to run. He wonders why, but the next time he is cautious enough to check with the editor first. He is told by the editor that it would be better not to write that story. The third time he thinks of an investigative story idea but doesn't bother the editor with it because he knows it's silly. The fourth time he doesn't even think of the idea anymore” (quoted in Schulman, 1990: 117).*

### **1.5 The Satanic Majesty of the Media:**

The Press and television in most Western countries tend to over-represent the royal families, the ruling parties and the rich and famous, while ignoring the news about minorities such as blacks or Asians, or even about majorities such as women, the working class, and trade unions. This makes the situation appear as a kind of conspiracy by the rich and powerful against the poor, whereas it could just be the way

the news is produced. In other words, a study of the factors that affect this kind of reporting could make it more understandable; for example, the proprietors and their class origins or the interests they represent, the pressures from advertisers (for an audience with a high purchasing power), the backgrounds of editors and journalists and the media ethics. The cultural approach to media study could be used here to understand this concentration on specific classes and groups of people. Paul Hartman and Charles Husband wrote as long as 1973:

*“The British cultural tradition contains elements derogatory to foreigners, particularly blacks. The media operate within the culture and are obliged to use cultural symbols” (1973: 274).*

The Media in most industrialised nations tend to be concentrated in the hands of a few individuals or conglomerates. Newspapers used to be owned by single families but as production costs have gone up many of these families have been forced to sell part of their shares; this introduced the era of the conglomerates, but there are still a few individuals who hold the largest number of shares. These individuals or groups can make their influence felt on the media content. Many have claimed that the new media owners are simply shareholders who are interested in profit rather than making a political statement. However, it has been found that most media proprietors are ideologically committed and not just neutral businessmen ( Curran, 1991: 95). James Curran has argued that the best example of this is Rupert Murdoch. Although Murdoch has at times accepted the judgment of his newspaper editors, there were many incidents where he imposed his own views against the advice of these editors.

Lord Beaverbrook, the then proprietor of the *Daily Express*, told the 1948 Royal Commission on the Press that he ran the paper ‘purely for propaganda and with

no other objective', but he added that a paper is not good 'for propaganda unless it has a thoroughly good financial position' (Royal Commission on the Press, 1948). Or as Ralph Miliband argued:

*"Making money is not at all incompatible with indoctrination...the purpose of the entertainment industry, in its various forms, may be profit; but the content of its output is not by any means free from ideological connotations of a more or less definite kind" (Miliband, 1973: 202).*

Antonio Gramsci noted a long time ago that after 1900, with the advanced technologies such as telephones and wire services, the press was faced with increased financial pressure and so had turned to local business 'these institutional shareholders then exerted pressure on the editors to follow a specific line' (Gramsci, 1985: 386).

The concentration of power in the media is greater now than at any time in history . Daily and Sunday newspapers, paperback books, records and commercial television stations are in the hands of a few firms or individuals; women's and children's magazines and cinema exhibition, for instance, are concentrated in two companies in Britain. Conglomeration in the media sector is very prominent, with the owners of newspapers or television at the same time holding shares in other companies and industries such as oil, gas and military technology. This, as Neal Ascherson has argued, leads to 'the increase of potential "no go" areas for critical reporting', due to the fact that newspaper proprietors tend to use the media to gain a favourable image for their other products (quoted in Gurevitch, et al., 1982: 140).

Even though many editors and reporters regard themselves as able to report whatever they think they should, it has been proved that they are not as free as they think even if there is no direct censorship or control exercised by the proprietor.

*"I believe that the suggestion of editorial independence is a romantic myth dreamed up by editors. There is no doubt in my mind at all that proprietors who, having spent a great deal of money on a newspaper, at the very least will not allow it to express views consistently with which they strongly disagree. Editors would rapidly find that if they wanted to do otherwise, they would be looking for a new job" ( Lord Marsh of Mannington, chairman of the Newspaper Publishers Association since 1975 in 'The Press Barons', BBC World Service, 23 Dec. 1984).*

The problem gets worse when journalists feel that they should avoid any kind of investigative reporting about a company if their newspaper proprietor has shares in it. In this case as Gurevitch, Bennett, Curran and Woollacott argue that reporters exercise self-censorship by not investigating areas that might be of problem for their employing organization. This practice of newspaper proprietors holding shares in other businesses has been criticised by proprietors themselves. For instance, Rupert Murdoch stated, in an interview conducted in November 1977, 'I don't think that a newspaper should own outside interests. By owning something outside journalism you lay yourself open to attack. And newspapers should be above that.' Nevertheless, two years later Murdoch, who owns four British national papers with a circulation of 11.2 million, bought 50 per cent of the shares of Ansett Transport Industries, and now has interests in offshore oil and gas, cable and satellite television, ranching, warehousing and the cinema industry (in Hollingsworth, 1986: 7-8).

Like most British newspapers except perhaps *The Guardian* Murdoch not only sets the policy of his papers and has control over their contents, but also has the power to appoint and dismiss their editors. This was clearly shown when Barry Askew, appointed by Murdoch in April 1981 as editor of *The News of the World* differed with

the proprietor over the De Lorean story and was dismissed by Murdoch. Askew later commented;

*"I don't think Fleet street gives a damn about ethics, morality or anything else. It gives a damn about attracting a readership that will attract an advertising situation which will make a profit which will make the press barons powerful politically"* (Hollingsworth, 1986: 20).

Another example of such pressures by proprietors on the content of their newspapers was cited by James Curran in the case of *The Observer* and the influence brought to bear on the editor by the proprietor who had large investments in Zimbabwe not to publish the story of the atrocities committed by the Zimbabwean army, for fear of offending the government of Zimbabwe and jeopardizing his business interest (Curran, 1991: 88-9).

The same thing could be said about other proprietors of British newspapers. Even in the case of Lord Rothermere, who lives in Paris, the situation is the same: 'I see myself as the king..mapping out the overall strategy my papers will take. My editors are the generals who carry them out' (Hollingsworth, 1986: 17-8).

Opponents have argued that this situation no longer obtains with big corporations and large numbers of shareholders. Big corporations can not be run by a single manager and each departmental manager has adequate freedom. But in most newspapers there are a few substantial shareholders who are able to dominate the meetings of the board of directors. Small shareholders have very little individual voting power and are unlikely to organise themselves to overthrow the large shareholders. The other important factor against this argument is that the board of directors decides on the company goals, policies and profits.

It could therefore be concluded that all the evidence has proved that newspaper proprietors have been using their power to influence the content of their papers in favour of their political views or to protect and promote their commercial activities. *The Guardian* stated on September 1984, 'One of the traditions of British journalism is that editorial content of a newspaper is independent of the activities of the groups which own them...now it has been shattered' (cited in Hollingsworth, 1986: 8).

Moreover, we have entered the age of conglomerates which are transnational. More and more newspapers, t.v. stations, satellite broadcasting, cable networks, book publishing, movie producing are concentrated in the hands of a handful of individuals all over the world. Murdoch and Maxwell - before his death - have been not only the owners of the largest numbers of newspapers and t.v. commercial channels in Britain, but extended their conglomerates all over the U.S. and Western Europe (after perestroika in Eastern Europe, the two moved fast to buy newspapers and even start commercial t.v. channels there). In Britain, France, Italy and West Germany, few men have been able to control as large a number of media outlets as Rupert Murdoch, Leo Kirch and Silvio Berlusconi.

*"...world broadcasting is more than ever before passing out of the hands of peoples and their governments, and into the hands of a quite new kind of tyrant, the Satanic Majesty of media, and alongside the star which he creates, the most potent character in this whole narrative" (Inglis 1990: 131).*

To take Murdoch again as an example the 'Magellan' of the information age, as he has been named, has recently purchased 20th Century-Fox's film stocks to be used by his Sky Movie channel as cheap films. Apart from the Sky channel, Murdoch controls two-thirds of newspaper circulation in Australia (his native country), half the



press in New Zealand, a third of the British press including *The Times* and *The Sun* (with the largest circulation) as well as his American empire. Murdoch was quoted by *The Guardian* as saying 'We are seeing the dawn of an age of freedom in viewing and advertising' (quoted in Schiller, 1989: 124).

In the United States with its enormous media market takeover bids have been going on for some time. Media outlets have become more and more concentrated in the hands of a few families, big businesses, banks and armaments manufacturers. To state but a few: CBS network is owned by one man, NBC is owned by General Electric (which has nuclear and electronic defence contracts and links with Citibank, Morgan Guaranty Trust, Toshiba and owns RCA). ABC is owned by the conglomerate Capital Cities (Inglis, 1990: 130). One of the largest publishing houses in the world, Gulf and Western, also owns Paramount Studios, Simon and Schuster, and Prentice Hall among other companies. The *New Yorker* was bought by the Newhouse Publishing chain which owns Random House, Alfred A. Knopf, Pantheon, Villard, Times Books and Vintage Books. The Gannett Company chain owns 90 newspapers among them *USA TODAY*.

As for Britain the same activity has been taking place, for example, the Pearson Longman conglomerate owns Penguin and Longman group aside from the *Financial Times* newspaper and Goldcrest films (Inglis 1990: 127).

Concentration also extends to the movie business. The main Hollywood studios have been purchased by many conglomerates which also own TV stations in various US cities and also cable networks. A Hollywood reporter wrote,

*"the buzzword in Hollywood is vertical integration. The major studios and even some of the minor ones, intend to make and distribute movies, manufacture and sell video cassettes six months later, then syndicate their films to their own television stations, by passing the networks and in*

*the case of Disney, play them on a studio-owned pay-cable channel” (quoted in Schiller 1989: 39).*

Most of these movies will be distributed all over the world. One can begin to see the case for the argument of the global culture being mostly concentrated in four capitals. Ben Bagdikian, author of a book titled ‘The Media Monopoly,’ noted in 1987:

*“In 1982, when I completed research for my book, The Media Monopoly, 50 corporations controlled half or more of the media business. By December 1986, when I finished a revision for the second edition, the 50 had shrunk to 29. The last time I counted, it was down to 26” (quoted in Schiller, 1989: 35).*

Most of these US programmes and movies will not only be dumped into Third World countries markets, but also in most of the European capitals which are desperate for cheaper programmes. A British government paper on the development of cable networks reported that an hour of old US programme could cost £2,000 while the same thing produced at home cost ten times more (Inglis 1990: 129). It is worth mentioning here that Japanese corporations have been moving into the US market with purchases of many media outlets.

Transnational corporations could also enforce their own rules in far-away countries and oblige governments to relax regulations on the media and communications in general. With their large investments (which are needed in many capitals) they could threaten to pull out from one country and move to another with less restrictions (Schiller 1989: 122).

Governments could also impose their will on others, as was the case (noted earlier) of the United States with UNESCO. The US Administration fought against UNESCO because it was protecting countries from the onslaught of transnational

corporations. A former US representative at UNESCO noted that Washington disagreed with the UN organisation because it was against the weakening of the public broadcasting which exists in many countries. The Business Roundtable in the United States, which is an organisation comprising the biggest corporations in America, has been encouraging the free flow of information because it helps business both nationally and internationally. In a statement it asserted:

*“In the past fifteen years, the flow of information across national borders has increased dramatically. This international information flow (IIF) includes everything from internal corporate information transfers to trade information-based products and services. IIF has expanded international markets and made possible the provision of new products and services to those markets. IIF has allowed multinational enterprises to improve their services to their customers, consolidate their resources, control their costs, and reduce their financial risks. IIF has transformed the way in which all companies, manufacturing or service, do business internationally” (Schiller, 1989: 119).*

Communication, as has been illustrated here, is becoming more and more business-oriented and is departing from its main responsibilities to the public. Chomsky noted in his 1989 book, that the main purpose of the media owned and controlled by the big corporations, was now to sell audiences to the businesses (Chomsky 1989: 8).

### **1.6 NEWS AS A MARKET COMMODITY:**

As communication in general has become concentrated in the hands of a group of businessmen who are trying to make as much profit as possible the news too has had to change to fit the new outlook. The same people who sell Pepsi Cola, diapers,

cereals, and arms also sell the news not only to the local market but to the whole world. News programmes on television have changed their rhythms to keep up with the commercials they are sandwiched between. In fact, most of the news programmes, in recent years, have been shifted to the entertainment departments of networks.

*“the creation of news is seen as the social production of “reality” on the other hand it is taken to be the social manufacture of an organizational product, one that can be studied like the manufactured goods “ (Schudson 1989: 273).*

News programmes are today mostly sponsored by products. In the United States most of the main news slots are sponsored, and the sponsoring company is usually announced at the beginning of the programme. In Britain, this is done in a more discreet way; the newscasters usually refer to the advertisement slot as a break so that the average viewer is tied to his seat waiting for the programme to continue and at the same time is fed with information about a new product in the market without really being aware of it.

Each and every news programme usually targets specific audiences. The morning ones are full of commercials for cereals, pet food, detergents, etc. since it is mostly housewives who watch them. The evening ones target a different category. Children too are not safe from the consumerist brain-washing technique. *The Wall Street Journal* (the bible of most businessmen) reported that today’s child is ‘highly brand-conscious’. It also quoted the publisher of *Marketing to Kids Report*, as saying that: ‘even two-years-olds are concerned about their brand of clothes, and by the age of six are full-out consumers’ ( quoted in Schiller, 1989: 34).

The Media have proved to be more profitable than most other consumer products. The largest capitalist countries depend on them to bring home large sums of money through overseas sales. Britain, for example, in 1984 earned £4 billion from

information exports, whereas its profits from cars, during the same year, was only £3.8 billion (Collins, 1989: 352). Britain is the second largest exporter of television programmes after the United States. In the US the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Technology and the Law stated that, in 1987, 'while other economic sectors show steady deficits, the makers of American books, computer software, recordings, movies and other copyrighted materials generated a 1.5 billion dollars trade surplus' (quoted in Schiller, 1989: 127).

While most sociological studies have concentrated on television programmes exports such as 'Dallas', very few have investigated the export of news programmes by both the US and Britain to other industrial countries. American television networks with their million-dollar newscasters have been broadcasting their version of the news to capitals such as Paris. Programmes such as 'CBS Evening News', with Dan Rather are seen by a French audience the next morning, while 'ABC World News Tonight' is exported to Japan which has invaded the American market with its high technology. ITV in Britain exports its news programmes to Australia, among other countries. Daniel Hallin has argued that news is business that sells both ideologies and commodities. He wrote, 'this gives television news a rather unique character: a key political institution as well as a seller of detergent and breakfast cereal' (quoted in Gruneau and Hackett, 1990: 284).

Edward Herman noted that the media during the 1980s have been mostly profit-oriented and their stocks have become 'market favorites'. Media proprietors have made large profits from enlarging their audiences beyond the national boundaries (Herman, 1990: 79).

*"The bourgeoisie knew how to make the people work, but it also narrowly escaped destruction in 1929 because it did not know how to make them*

*consume. It was content, until then, to socialize people by force and exploit them through labour, but the crisis of 1929 marked the point of asphyxiation: the problem was no longer one of production but one of circulation...mobilised as consumers, their 'needs' became as essential as their labour power" (Hill, 1988: 189).*

The advanced communications technology age, as this one is called, has shifted most journalists, writers, artists, film producers and others concerned with culture into professional salespeople. Newscasters do not qualify for their jobs simply on the basis of their ability as journalists but also on the way they look and dress. Even authors of books have been asked by publishers to write in a specific way that will make their book more attractive to the largest spectrum of audiences. They have been told that it is not enough to write a book but that they have to sell it too.

These journalists and writers are not only selling a way of life and commodities but are also feeding their readers and viewers with specific images and ideologies. The 1990s have brought a concentration of power in the hands of a very few countries, if not of a single country. The US and other Western media are advocating the image of democracy for other countries while labelling some as communist, terrorist, non-democratic. Democracy itself has been defined as being Western or more precisely American.

Countries in the South are now under continuous pressure to prove themselves to the Northern states and to show that they are practising democracy Western-style. Most of the eastern bloc countries that were labelled by the Western media as communists are now undergoing changes which take them off the media agenda. The media labels can be changed overnight, just as the Western governments change them. A country like Syria, which was dubbed a refuge for terrorist groups, became one of the allies during the Gulf

War. Libya, on the other hand, continued to carry the label even though nothing has been proved against it.

### **1.7 ADVERTISERS: THE MEDIA GURUS:**

Advertisers put more pressure on newspapers and television networks today than previously, since newspapers and TV networks depend increasingly on them to cover production costs. While a few people have argued that advertisers care about the readers and so in the last resort newspapers should cater for the readers in order to attract advertisers, it has been proved that advertisers are not really interested in all readers but only in the small group who have the money to buy their goods. The editors of most quality papers in Britain compete among themselves to create the best atmosphere for advertisers. Since the editorial content of the paper is important for advertisers, even the placement of the advertisement makes a big difference for them. Editors, for instance, will never publish a computer advertisement next to a story about a malfunction in computers or any other story that might discourage the reader from buying a computer. For example, James Curran has shown how advertisements for personal investment have been put alongside editorials focusing on share advice and stock exchange dealings which could give a misleading picture (Curran, 1978: 229-67).

*“Both newspaper and television stations carry ‘must stories,’ items that the business office, advertising staff, or front office say ‘must be carried’ to satisfy either advertisers or friends of well-placed executives in the news organization” (Tuchman, 1978: 175).*

Advertising also force editors to publish as many stories as they can on Saturdays and Sundays when their papers are crowded with advertisements. Editors

will also feel the power of the advertisers if they publish a story that is critical of the advertiser's company or an affiliate. For instance, in 1978 *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* published articles criticising cruises on luxury liners owned by the Cunard Shipping Company. The company sent letters to both editors complaining that the papers had offended 'the special relationship' between newspapers and advertisers, and even though both newspapers stopped their critical articles, Cunard withdrew £18,000 worth of advertising from them.

For newspapers such as *The Guardian*, where there is no pressure from the proprietors, the pressure from advertisers is even worse. *The Guardian* can not manage to survive without advertisers, and at some points it has had to change its political line to attract them. An article by *The Guardian* in *Campaign*, the advertising industry magazine, on 10 August 1979 stated that it was read by 'The thinking rich...85 percent of them are ABC (social class) which is a better percentage than *The Financial Times* or *The Daily Telegraph* can offer,' and that *The Guardian* readers were not 'down-at-heel extremists without a penny to bless themselves with. They have bank accounts full of lovely money.' *The Guardian*'s editors and managing directors went out of their way to stress the same points on other occasions, as for instance, the article by the managing director, Gerry Taylor, in the same publication which stated: 'To assume that *The Guardian* is only for leftwing trendies and dropouts is as outdated a view as the dinosaur.'

For all these reasons the power of the advertisers gets stronger and stronger. But, as was found by the Royal Commissions on the Press, not many editors and journalists will admit that they were pressured by advertisers to write in one way or another since this is against the ethics of journalism on which many of them pride themselves.



Most newspapers, magazines and networks depend on advertising. In the United States, for example, 75 per cent of newspaper revenues comes from advertising, while it is 50 per cent in the case of magazines and 100 per cent in the case of the television networks. Any independent newspaper or TV station that attempts to break this dependence will be forced to close down under severe pressure from advertisers (Herman, 1990: 80).

*“These advertisers will rarely sponsor programs that seriously criticize sensitive corporate activities, such as ecological degradation, the workings of the military - industrial complex or corporate support of and benefits from Third World tyrannies” (Herman, 1990: 81).*

The monopoly in advertising is even worse than in the media; most small advertising companies are unable to survive the pressures from the multinationals and the big advertising agencies are swallowing smaller ones all over the world. Advertisers in the United States and Britain are no longer catering for their own national markets but are producing commercials that can be shown and printed in many different capitals. *Business Week*, in an article on deregulation in Europe, stated, ‘As deregulation sweeps Western Europe makers of consumer goods are rethinking their marketing plans to reach mass audiences as never before. This could mean a heyday for international advertising’ (quoted in Schiller, 1989: 123).

In Britain advertising expenditure as a proportion of Gross National Product has shown only a very slight shift over the past three decades. It was 1.43 per cent in 1960 and dropped only to 1.34 per cent in 1985 (Inglis, 1990: 118). By the the end of the 1980s advertising expenditure in the United States had reached \$100 billion. Kellner noted that it was far more than the amount spent on education (Kellner, 1990: 254).

Like the journalists, advertising commercials are not only selling products but a whole way of life and set of values. Advertisers spread consumerism as a way of living freely. They also create ways through which the individual can become socially acceptable such as the advertisements for types of soap that could clear face spots and so make the young man attractive to women. Commercials for specific kinds of mouth washes, deodorants, perfumes and others all create the idea that for the young man or woman using these products is one way of drawing the attention of the other sex.

*“Advertising is persuasive, relying on emotional appeals, dramatic or comic images, and manipulation of basic fears and desire” (Kellner, 1990: 245).*

Many television programmes and articles in the newspapers and magazines indirectly advertise for specific products and even for social, economic and political values. In times of war many of them advertise tanks, warplanes, guns, etc. Television programmes (even news programmes) are used to promote styles and fashions. ‘in fact consumers pay for the programming through higher prices for the goods they purchase. Many television series, like Dallas, Dynasty, and other prime-time soaps, are themselves advertisements for wealth, luxury, fashion, and a high-consumption life-style’ (ibid.: 251).

The situation is even worse when such programmes are broadcast in Third World countries where standards of living are so low, and food shortages and children dying of malnutrition are part of daily life.

High-profile events such as major sports contests, political meetings, etc. are sought by advertisers in search of sponsorship. During the last few years even political organisations such as the United Nations have offered their major conferences and events for sponsorship. Terese P. Sevigny, UN Under-Secretary General for Public

Information, told the Eleventh Public Relations World Congress in Melbourne in 1988 that the UN's new approach was to 'explore corporate and institutional sponsorship.' He cited the 40th anniversary of the UN Declaration of Human Rights as a great opportunity for advertisers (Schiller, 1989: 133).

Television programmes in Britain have not in the past been available for sponsorship as they are in the US, but recently the independent network relaxed its regulations and offered programmes for advertising sponsorship. The first such programme was 'Rumpole of the Bailey,' scheduled for broadcasting in the Autumn of 1992. The sponsors, who paid £300,000 for the six-part series were to get a front credit of 15 seconds to 'convey an image,' and state that the programme was 'made in association with' or 'supported by' but not (as in the United States) that the 'programme has been brought to you by.' A spokesman for Thames television, announcing the deal, dismissed fears of advertisers influencing programmes by saying that the money was to be shared by all companies affiliated with ITV and that he was confident that the viewers would not 'object to the association with Croft port...it is a perfect mix' (*The Guardian*, 8 June 1991).

Advertisers are not the only ones who can influence the content of the media. Officials tend to use the media (directly or indirectly) to express the views of the government or of the ruling parties or families. Officials, with a clear understanding of the financial and time pressures on journalists, tend to spoon-feed reporters with information. They hold press conferences knowing that they are making the job easier for the journalists while at the same time getting their side of the story published. They also circulate press releases and written copies of statements to newspapers, and television and radio stations.

Government spokesmen usually held press conferences, and to make the job easier for the journalist who is usually running against time they will sometime offer a

written copy of what they want to announce. For example, Sir Gordon Reece who since 1975 held the job of personal media advisor for Mrs. Thatcher, has regular meetings with the editors and senior executives of *The Sun*, *The Daily Mail* and *The Daily Express*. His meetings had proven to be very useful for Mrs. Thatcher who got all the support she needed from these editors and their papers.

*“Because of the close and complex relationship between media organizations and other dominant social and political institutions, it is arguable that the mass media will essentially tend to reinforce - even though they may ostensibly, or in passing, challenge or question - prevailing social and political hierarchies. Examples of such reinforcement can be found in Britain, for instance, as far back as the general strike in 1926 and in current coverage, or lack of coverage, of events in Northern Ireland” (Gallagher, 1988: 161).*

Even though most British newspapers tend to favour Conservative Governments and will avoid any reporting that embarrasses them, a few crusaders can be found, who are prepared to publish stories that cause them to be faced with threats from government and to be excluded from government functions. Such was the case with *The Observer* whose editor Donald Treford stated in his Kenneth Alsop Memorial Lecture at Edinburgh University on 14 November 1985:

*“We have a government that rewards the journalists it favours as never before - arise Sir Larry, Sir John, Sir David, Sir Alastair (Burnett) - but takes its hostility towards papers that oppose its policies, or leak embarrassing information, to spiteful and vindictive lengths. When *The Observer* wrote about Mark Thatcher's business connections, for example, the Prime Minister's press secretary, Bernard Ingham, went so far as to threaten 'dirty tricks' against us. Mrs Thatcher clearly sees the press's task as to reflect faithfully her own vision*

*of the world. Anyone who doesn't do that is seen as ill-intentioned and irresponsible."*

Open censorship is not always needed in the so-called democratic states because journalists work in such close proximity to officials that they identify with the state. Editors and reporters mix with their official sources, dine and travel with them, join their sporting clubs and hang around in the same places. Mark Hertsgard, author of 'On Bended Knee: The Press and the Reagan Presidency,' commented that the media in the United States (and the same could be said for all Western democracies) were a 'palace court press' and that journalists adopt the same values and opinions as the people they write about (*The Guardian*, 4 February 1991). A reporter for *The Washington Post* trying to explain why journalists at the paper did not support the printers' strike of the 1970s, explained:

*"we eat lunch at the same restaurant as Henry Kissinger, and thus identify with those kind of people. We may work in the same building but the journalists work in offices; the printers work in a factory" (Schulman, 1990: 118).*

Media organisations faced with the high costs of advanced technologies and continuous competition to get the news to viewers and readers ahead of the others; have to cut their other costs and depend on cheaper means of news gathering. This forces journalists to depend heavily on what Boorstin has called 'pseudoevents' staged events such as press conferences and political conventions, etc. (Gruneau and Hackett, 1990: 285).

The use of the media by ruling parties or groups is not confined to capitalist systems. Non-capitalist states also use the media to legitimise the system, though the means whereby this is done may differ from one state to another. In the capitalist

system, however, the media, like all other aspects of culture, have been highly industrialised. Adorno and Horkheimer wrote that capitalism today:

*“ has moved to appropriate and industrialize all those domestic, leisure and cultural areas of life which earlier capitalist production left alone ”  
(quoted in Inglis, 1990: 114).*

One way in which governments manipulate the media is by creating media experts simply by financing research institutions such as the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, the Georgetown Center for Strategic and International Studies in the United States, and their equivalents in Britain. Even universities and academics are used by the state as one way of providing the media with specific information and expertise. In a crisis the media can draw on a handful of experts from these institutions to help explain events and situations. Other organisations have also been created by the state, to pressure the media to keep to the mainstream of thought and ideology (Herman, 1990: 83).

In times of war direct censorship is always practised in the Western democracies and is accepted as a ‘necessary evil in the national interest’ (Schlesinger, 1989: 286). Throughout history the British media have always succumbed completely to the state in wartime. Philip Knightley documented this situation in his book on war coverage from the Crimea to the Falklands. Media coverage of British involvement in the recent Gulf War certainly confirmed his argument (Knightley, 1989), as does this short poem by Humbert Wolfe:

*You Cannot Hope  
To bribe or twist,  
Thank God! The British journalist.  
But seeing what  
That man will do*

*Unbribed, there's no occasion to  
(Humbert Wolfe in Index on Censorship April-May 1991)*

Dissent in wartime is reported by the media only when it occurs among officials or different political parties. The Vietnam war set a clear example of such a situation. When a few congressmen or senators perceived that the US might lose the war and began arguing against it; the American media reflected this line clearly. During the recent Gulf War, on the other hand, the Labour Party in Britain joined the Conservatives in support of what it called a 'just' war against aggression, and the British media conformed to the official stand.

### **1.8 THE MEDIA LEGITIMATE THE STATE:**

With technological development and control over the press by big business, the news process has become like any other commodity. It starts from the putting together of small pieces to make a final product which ought to be attractive enough for the consumer to purchase. And with all this power being in the hands of a small section of society, it is no surprise that the media in most of the industrialised countries represent the elite.

Media study, of the press in particular, has always raised controversial questions among sociologists because of the power that the media hold.

*"Power which the media derive from their reality-defining capability is attributable largely to the service they perform in making us the indirect witnesses to events of which we have no first-hand knowledge or experience" (Bennett, 1982: 296).*

Bennett and many others have argued in favour of the power of the media, and the press in particular, as the means by which most people learn about the outside world or even their own society. Others have concentrated on the control over the press, or the press as an element of social control. In other words, how the press legitimises the political system and the ruling class and hence spreads this class's ideas. As Curran, Gurevitch and Woollacott put it 'the role of the media here is that of legitimation through the production of false consciousness, in the interests of a class which owns and controls the media' (Curran et al. 1977: 152).

Thus the media become a political element under the control of the class which possesses the means of material production. Or the media are, as seen by Connell, a megaphone through which the ideas of the dominant class are 'amplified and generalized across society' (quoted in Gurevitch, Bennett, Curran and Woolacott, 1982: 22).

Newspapers were the creation of the middle class to serve that class's needs. During the nineteenth century newspapers were used to report news of delays in the arrival of shipments or disasters that could affect the transportation of goods. This role of the press has changed with the changes in society and its class structure. Gerbner wrote that today's mass media 'are the cultural arm of the industrial order from which they spring,' while Enzensberger described the media as 'the consciousness industry' whose role is to sell the 'existing social hierarchy' to consumers (Tuchman, 1978: 156). Both proponents and opponents of state control of the media were concerned to ensure that they provided institutional support for the social order (Boyce et al., 1978: 61).

*"Essentially a comparative study of the mass media in any society is a study of power, and the means whereby it is held and legitimised without*



*recourse to coercion. While concentrating on the growth of institutions I have attempted to emphasise that their key function was to present texts to an audience which constructed the known world with its structure of domination and control" (Ward, 1989: 201).*

As seen here, the media's role is to reinforce the status quo and so to reinforce capitalism not only in the centre of production but also in other countries so as to sell this ideology to audiences and consumers everywhere. Individuals everywhere thus become slaves to one ideology, one culture, because they depend on the media to tell them how to think of themselves and of others, what to eat and drink and, most dangerous of all, how to interpret their own history and culture. Audiences lose the capacity to recognise the truth because their only way of knowing it is through communication channels which are all but instruments of the state. Audiences in distant countries have become totally dependent on news and views broadcast and published in Western centres of communication. Individuals in the Third World depend on the Western media to interpret the news from their own countries and region and to help them understand their own history and culture. The Western media, therefore, not only legitimate the state at home, but also throughout the world they create the basis for total hegemony by a single country.

Advanced communication technologies have facilitated this cultural invasion. Television programmes with the help of satellite dishes do not need visas or passports to cross borders and enter different countries. Individual human beings everywhere become targets for specific ideological messages, mere viewers not participants in any kind of decision-making. They are subjects for manipulation just like the characters in Orwell's novel 1984.

Newspapers, books, television and radio programmes are channels of entertainment for the ordinary individual, used by many people as a means of escapism from daily problems. At the same time, they are dangerous channels of entertainment for the simple reason that they are regarded by many simply as a way of passing the time. The most straightforward programme or article contains a message expressed directly or indirectly, which passes through different filters. Edward Herman has defined these under the following five heads:

- (i) Size, ownership and concentration of the media, also profit orientation.
- (ii) Advertising as the main source of income for the media.
- (iii) Dependence of the media on the information and news provided by officials and government spokesperson.
- (iv) What he calls 'flak' as a way of disciplining the media.
- (v) Anti-communism as an ideological control. It should be noted here that this last is no longer the case and the main ideology that is being carried by most Western countries (specially the United States) is the defence of democracy.

Noam Chomsky summed them up in his book 'Necessary Illusions' as:

*"The intimate relations between private and state power, the institutionally determined need to accommodate to the interests of those who control basic social decisions, and the success of established power in steadily disintegrating any independent culture that fosters values other than greed, personal gain, and subordination to authority, and any popular structures that sustain independent thought and action" (Chomsky, 1989: 131).*

While this chapter has concentrated on the study of the media specifically in relation to the state, the next one will try and set the grounds for the analysis of the media in the Gulf. To try and do that, however, one has to attempt to examine the nature of the newly created states in the Gulf region. The chapter specifically deals with the transformation of the Gulf countries and the absence of a civil society.

## CHAPTER II

### GULF SOCIETIES: TRIBALISM OR CLASS ?

*“Our grandfathers were riding camels, our fathers were riding cars and we learned to ride airplanes. But if the situation continues as it is I am afraid that our grandchildren will go back to riding camels again” (King Faisal of Saudi Arabia in Haikal, 1992: 93).*

#### 2.1 Introduction:

The societies, state structures and development of the Gulf have been a focus of interest for many sociologists, historians and political analysts. Most of these studies, however, have concentrated on the rapid changes that these societies have witnessed as a result of the oil surplus, and have emphasised their material transformation the foundation of an advanced infrastructure, the formation of state structures (ministries and specialised agencies), the adoption of advanced technologies in most fields, etc.

*“Most published work on the subject tends to consist either of theoretical generalizations based on statistical criteria such as educational and other infrastructure advances or else on pragmatic but narrowly focused fieldwork on such themes as, let us say, modifications in attitudes to exogamy among the bedowin of Ras al Kheima” (Balfour-Paul, 1984: 186).*

A few scholars, however, have been interested in the development of the state in relation to citizens' rights. The question of whether Gulf citizens have gained any rights in the process of this state formation has been put by many scholars. Three main discourses have dominated work on this issue. The first was the orientalist's approach which noted that these societies are completely dominated by the rulers who control all aspects of their states. These studies were the main theme of Edward Said's book 'Orientalism.' The Orientalists argued that the emir in the Gulf states controlled all aspects of life in his emirate, whether political, economic or social. Such an argument can be clearly seen in J.B. Kelly's book 'Arabia, the Gulf and the West.'

The second - mostly by Gulf scholars - argued that these states have their own particular type of democracy in which the 'majlis' plays an important role in citizens' representation. Civil rights, according to this argument, have been preserved and the ruling families are in no better position than their people. This argument recurs in most Arab writings on the Gulf, for instance in Sayf Marzouq Al-Shamlan's study of Kuwait and the relation between the ruling Al-Sabah family and their citizens. In his book 'Min Tarikh Al-Kuwayt' (From Kuwait's History), Al-Shamlan wrote that the Al-Sabah:

*"..were not privileged from most of the Kuwaiti population in any way. They were similar to the shaikh of a tribe. There was no distinction between the shaikh and members of his tribe. The power of the ruler was limited, and there were some Kuwaiti leaders who had more authority than the ruler himself" (quoted in Tim Niblock, unpublished paper).*

This belief that the ruling families are not more privileged than the rest of the Gulf population is widespread in most of these studies, and is commonly raised - especially by Kuwaitis - in discussions and conferences.

The third category of writings on the Gulf in relation to civil rights is that of the radical sociologists. Fred Halliday's 'Arabia Without Sultans' is one example. These scholars have asserted that the Gulf regimes are extremely oppressive and that their citizens have no rights whatsoever. They in fact do not differ from the orientalist's perspective on the Gulf, but argue that the Gulf rulers have a tight grip on their states and that there is no room for the expression of discontent.

However, I shall argue that the Gulf states can not be analysed satisfactorily by any of these approaches. They have their own particular kind of political system which I prefer to call 'a modernised patriarchal' structure. The Gulf ruling families and tribes have been able to combine traditional elements with some features of a modern state structure. Patriarchal and kinship organisations have managed to survive the transformation from tribal to state frameworks. In this process religion and the oil wealth were utilised to camouflage the absence of civil rights. This assertion will be analysed in the rest of this chapter. Part of the argument I am pursuing can be found in some interesting writings on the Gulf and the Arab world in general. For instance, Michael Hudson has noted that in most of the Arab world, 'monarchies, religion and kinship have been exploited to legitimize the ruling families. Many of the Arab leaders stress the point that they are the descendants of Prophet Mohammed' (Hudson, 1977: 25).

The Gulf monarchies are uniquely peculiar. They have been able to preserve most of their traditional patriarchal structures while adapting to modern technological developments. They have accomplished this through a process of legitimation whereby the king or emir becomes the father of his country. It is common in the Gulf

for leaders to use the word 'family' in reference to their states. Gulf children sing of the emir as their father; Baba Isa, Baba Fahd and Baba Jabber is how Gulf children have been taught to refer to their leaders.

*"The monarchical legitimacy strategy may be designated as patriarch in order to convey the character of the king's authority; in a fatherly way he govern each tribe and sect" (Hudson: 1977: 25).*

The modernised patriarchal structure of the Gulf required an ideology to support and legitimise it, and Gulf leaders founded this legitimising ideology in religion. Islam was manipulated in the process of the formation of modern states. Political, social and economic aspects were defined through the holy book, the 'Quran.' This is clearly seen in Ghasan Salame's study of Saudi society and its political system. In Saudi Arabia royal decrees forbid Saudis from embracing any ideology other than Islam; the punishment for infringement, according to the decree of 1961, for example, is imprisonment. Salame' also noted that the same decree calls for the execution of anyone who engages in violent action against the state or the royal family. Here, too, the accused has no right to see a lawyer or to undergo a trial (Salame', 1989: 86).

Religion is continuously exploited as the state ideology. Even in development plans the maintenance of religious values is mentioned, Such as, for instance, in the case of the Saudi second development plan of 1975-80. Glen Balfour-Paul noted that:

*"The fundamental goals for social development in the Second Development Plan were to maintain the religious and moral values of Islam, to increase the well-being of all groups within the society, and to foster social stability under circumstances of rapid economic change" (Balfour-Paul, 1984: 186).*

A further peculiarity of this modernised patriarchal structure of the Gulf is the absence of civil society. Social, civil and political rights have no basis in any of these modern Gulf states. Kevin Dwyer, in his study of the lack of civil rights in the Arab world, noted that:

*“on the level of love, on the level of sexuality, there is a modernist discourse but it only serves to camouflage a very traditional social psychological reality” (Dwyer, 1991: 94).*

Dwyer quoted most of the people he talked to as thinking that individuals had more freedom in the West than in the Arab countries. The most noticeable example of the lack of civil rights is the case of the Gulf women, which will be discussed in chapter 4 of this thesis. Michael Hudson remarked that apathy and alienation among Arabs, which are the result of this process of modernisation together with the maintenance of traditional patriarchal structures, ‘facilitate the manipulation of the individual by the state’ (Hudson, 1977: 13).

Kamel Abu Jaber has argued that, although most of the Arab states have expanded at the level of administration and socio-economic development, in the political sphere they have not.

*“Politically, however, that has not been the case, especially since popular, participatory political institutions have either been effectively harnessed or in many instances sterilized, emasculated, repressed, or banned and replaced by docile institutions with lofty sounding names” (Abu Jaber, 1987: 6).*

With the exploitation of their oil wealth the Gulf states have been able to develop their countries and to import the technology needed for such transformation.



A few people in the West thought that with the importation of technology these countries would be forced to shift and to create a civil society to replace the traditional norms. This idea did not materialise, however, and in many cases Gulf officials challenged it. In a British television programme on the transfer of technology, a Gulf official was asked, 'But do you not see that if you accept Western technology, you have to accept the culture that goes with it?' to which the official replied; 'if I buy your electric cooker, do I have to use your recipe for souffles?' (Balfour-Paul, 1984: 195).

The official's answer reflects the attitude of the leaders of these states who are ready to develop a modern state, but are not prepared to tolerate a civil society. In the modernised patriarchal structures of the Gulf states social, political and economic rights are missing

Ahmed Al-Rub'ai, a prominent member of the Kuwaiti opposition and an academic himself, has noted that economic and social developments in the region have not transferred citizens' loyalties from the tribe to the newly created state (Al - Rub'ai, 1989: 135). While interviewing different Arab intellectuals concerned with the lack of citizens' rights in most of the region, Kevin Dwyer discovered that individuals count for nothing; consequently their freedom vanishes in the midst of the group.

*"...the individual has no meaning. It is like in the traditional society, where you are always seen as a member of one group or another, where you always have to be attached to some collective identity. In effect, the individual has no right or possibility to express his own personal opinions, without being accused of being in the service of a group" (Dwyer, 1991: 87).*

Citizens' rights in the Gulf could also be extended to include occupations. Since most of these states have been able to provide free education up to university

degrees, individuals expect to find jobs appropriate to these qualifications. On the contrary, however, education in these countries bears no relation to the kind of occupation one obtains. Many individuals know the position they are going to fill even before they start their education; it is in fact a mere enhancement of the individual's stratum in society or his class structure (Schemeil, 1992: 47-8). Members of the ruling families or their supporting tribes are promised higher positions in the government ministries or even, in a few cases, in the private sector. Educated men and women have no voice in politics or even in business. Women are faced with even harsher measures in terms of any kind of participation. In Saudi Arabia and Qatar, for example, educated women are not allowed to choose their husbands, or to travel without a close relative. In the few short-lived incidents of parliamentary experience - as in Kuwait and Bahrain - women were not allowed to vote. In October, 1992 the Kuwaiti Government held the first parliamentary elections since the country's 'liberation.' Yet again, only 14 per cent of the population were allowed to vote - Kuwaiti males who had been living in the country since 1921. Women were not allowed to vote which led to their raid on the Al-Shouikh polling station in an effort to force the authorities to permit them to vote. They were forced, however, to leave by the Kuwaiti security men. Kuwaitis who are known as 'bedouin' meaning without nationality, were also prevented from participating in this election. Votes were bought for the price of 5,000 dinars (US \$15,000) (*AlSharq Al-Awsat* 6 October 92).

The rest of this chapter will attempt to highlight the modernised patriarchal structure of the Gulf states, and also to show the nature of the state structure in times of crisis. It will concentrate on the six member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council formed in 1981, since they share many common factors. Five of the six countries Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Oman, apart from Saudi Arabia, have been colonised at one point or another by the Iranians, the Portuguese,

the Turks during the Ottoman Empire or the British. Although the Ottoman Empire was able to control parts of Saudi Arabia (what was then known as the Arabian Peninsula), it was never in full control of the whole country. These countries also shared the same dependence on commerce as the mainstay of their economies before the discovery of oil and the socio-political changes that accompanied it.

The core of the argument here will be derived from the study by the Kuwaiti sociologist Khaldoun Hassan Al-Naqeeb. Although his analysis of the Gulf societies does not entirely correspond with the argument presented here, it is on the whole the closest to it. Al-Naqeeb has criticised most of the writings on the Gulf, especially those that he described as the 'scissors and paste,' historians and journalists.

*"Most of this type of writing is impressionistic and superficial, lacking intimate knowledge of the area. For non-Arabs, the lack of mastery of the Arabic language detracts greatly from the significance of these writings, added to the fact that generally they lack historical perspective and vision" (Al-Naqeeb, 1990: 2).*

He also commented on economists with only one perspective on the region, namely the pre-oil and the post-oil periods, mentioning specifically studies by Muhammad Sadiq and William Snavelly, Naiem Sherbiny and Mark Tessler, George Lenczowski, Benjamin Shwadran, Ragaai al-Mallakh and many others (ibid.). It should be mentioned here that the same perspective has been adopted by many scholars from the region, who either lacked the theoretical background or depended entirely on the documents and archival material available through the official institutions of the Gulf countries. It should also be noted that much of the history of the region has been tailored to suit the ruling elites in the Gulf. For example, the Bahraini Government held a conference in the mid-1980s to celebrate the 200 years of

Al-Khalifah rule under the title 'Bahrain Through the Ages,' at which historians from different parts of the world were invited to present papers related to Bahrain or the history of the region in general. The conference was organised and chaired by two members of the ruling Al-Khalifah family who obviously influenced not only its nature but also the contents of many of these papers presented. Many of the historians invited, did not dare to criticise the Al-Khalifah family or even to mention that they were not Bahrainis by origin and had conquered the island by force.

Al-Naqeeb has also argued against many writers who saw the collapse of the tribal role and the disappearance of the tribal mentality after the discovery of oil and its large amounts of revenue. In fact, tribal power has not yet been buried in the sands of the Gulf deserts, but that does not mean that new forces of power have not emerged. The Gulf today (as this chapter will try to demonstrate) is a combination of both tribal patriarchal (centralised) states and free capitalist economies. It is going through a complicated and difficult procedure which is unique to the region.

In saying this, one should not dispute that some of the information in these books could be used or at least referred to when necessary, but the reader will notice a great dependence here on the argument presented by Al-Naqeeb since he represents a different approach to the study of the Gulf states. This does not mean that there is complete agreement with his argument, especially when he refers to the current economic system in the Gulf as state-capitalism. This could be a correct description of a few Arab countries such as Algeria, Egypt (during Nasser's time) and Iraq but not of the Gulf.

The history of the Gulf region according to al-Naqeeb can be divided into four periods, namely:

- (i) The Portuguese hegemony (1509-1622).

(ii) The European struggle in the region - mainly between the British and the Portuguese - over the control of the area (1630-1839)

(iii) The British hegemony over the whole region (1839-1920)

(iv) The transformation from the rentier state to the authoritarian state- what the present writer prefers to call patriarchal (1920 to the present).

It is important to note that the fourth period, the contemporary history, witnessed the struggle between the British and the Americans over control of the Gulf which has ended in the Americans' favour. This period has been referred to by many writers as 're-flagging the Gulf,' when the Union Jack was replaced by the stars and stripes.

## **2.2 FROM TRIBES TO STATES:**

The main attraction of the Gulf for Western powers (historically speaking) was its location in the middle of the trade routes to the East. From 1515 the Portuguese had a few trading posts along the coastal towns of the Gulf. They conquered the region after long battles with the Safarid Persians and the Ottoman Turks. From this time on, the region faced tribal battles and the migration of many of these tribes either from the heart of the Arabian Peninsula to the coastal areas or from one trade centre to another (Graz, 1990: 4-5). Many tribes appeared and others disappeared or were scattered, all depending, according to Al-Naqeeb, on the fighting over trade routes or one tribe raiding another and forcing it to pay the 'khuwa,' which could be described as a protection tax.

The strongest of these tribes had always derived their power from either tribal affiliations or tribal militias known as 'Fadawiyah.' Al-Naqeeb noted that the tribes used these two elements to protect their trade, which meant that the same tribes would have complete control over trade and would enforce their authority over the coastal

towns (Al-Naqeeb, 1990:15). This could be seen in the emergence of the Al-Saud family in 1745 after the union of two tribes; Muhammed ibn Abdul Wahab (the father of the puritanical Wahabi sect of Islam) united with the emir of Al-Diriyya (a small town close to the present-day capital, Riyadh) (Graz, 1990: 112).

Until recent times trade in the region depended on 'al-Mudarabah,' a complicated process which can be translated simply as speculation, but involving much more than this. The trader who engaged in this, who was known as the 'Mudarib,' carried out many different transactions and travelled long distances that ended in large amounts of profit. One aspect of 'al-Mudarabah' in the Gulf was the commission charged to merchants for the protection of their trade. The rulers of the small Gulf emirates used 'organized violence to sell a certain kind of services,' such as this protection. They also received gifts and sums of money from the big merchants in the region. Bribery was a common source of income, especially during the Portuguese occupation of the Gulf ports (Al-Naqeeb, 1990: 11).

*"To die between my saddle bags as I travel through the land [i.e., as a trader] seeking God's bounty is preferable to me than to be killed fighting for the faith, because God has ranked those who travel over the land seeking his bounty above warriors for the faith, in accordance with His word: " And others travel [as traders] through the land" (ibid.: 146).*

The west coast of the Gulf has always been dependent on commerce as a vital sector of the economy. Historically speaking the inhabitants of this region relied on pearl diving, fishing and farming (in a few spots where soil and weather permitted) rather than on commerce. Pearl diving played a significant economic and political role until the discovery of cultured pearls by Mr Mikimoto of Japan (Graz, 1990: 14). The pearl diving industry was organised under the 'Zaba'nah' or patronage structure, as explained in many studies by Muhammed Al-Rumihi and others. The 'Zaba'nah'

meant that the workers (who were ranked in a kind of class structure) depended on the loans they obtained from their employers, the shipowners, during the winter season. Pearl diving was a seasonal occupation, from June to October. The divers spent their whole lives trying to repay their loans and if they died, then their sons had to take on the repayments. In other words the shipowners known as 'Al-Nokhadh' actually controlled the lives of hundreds of families, and not just their employees, as was depicted in the movie 'Bass ya Bahr,' (The Cruel Sea) by the Kuwaiti director Khalid al-Saddiq. The 'Al-Nokhadh' is still used by many playwrights to symbolize the cruelty and greed of the ruling elites to the extent that members of the ruling families are annoyed about it. The Bahraini Crown Prince, for example, at a meeting with local novelists and playwrights in the early 1990s called on them to stop depicting the 'Al-Nokhadh' in this way. Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifah told the gathering at his private 'majlis' that the 'Al-Nokhadh' was a distinctive feature of the region's history.

As noted earlier, the strategic location of the area in the centre of important trade routes was always the main attraction for most of the major empires. The British perceived control over the Gulf region -at the heart of their shipping lanes to India - as vital. In 1798 they secured their position in Muscat, (Oman) and thus controlled the main entrance to the warm waters of the Gulf, namely the strait of Hormuz. From there they penetrated the whole region under the pretext of fighting piracy and the slave and arms trade after they stopped taking part in this trade (Al-Naqeeb, 1990: 47). The concentration by Western -especially British - historians on piracy in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf gave this aspect the faked illusion of truth, to the extent that the Gulf was nicknamed the Pirate coast. The British adviser to the Sheikh of Bahrain, Sir Charles Belgrave, devoted a whole book to this subject 'The Pirate Coast' (Belgrave, 1960).

While no one can deny that piracy took place, but it was not on the same large scale as that by Western pirates. It was also carried out at times against the British presence in the region and their absolute control over trade and commerce. The ruler of Sharjah (one of the seven member states of the United Arab Emirates) devoted his Ph.D thesis to rebutting this argument (Al-Qasimi, 1986). Later, in the nineteenth century many ships owned by these small emirates would be forced to fly a flag designed by the British. A few kept the British-designed flag even after independence or adapted it as their national flag, as did Bahrain.

In succession following the first major treaty of 1820, Britain signed protection treaties with the sheikhs of the Gulf emirates, in 1861 and 1892 with Bahrain, in 1891 with Muscat (Oman) and in 1899 with Kuwait. By this time Britain had control over almost all the Gulf apart from Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has never been under direct British control, but this is not to say that Britain had no influence over the country. Initially the British were interested in the Arabian Peninsula only to secure their protectorates on its borders. Afterwards they wanted to curb the Turks who were controlling part of the Western province. To achieve this objective, Britain signed an agreement in 1915 with Abdel Aziz Al-Sau'd, in which the Saudi ruler pledged not to have relations with any foreign power and not to isolate any of his territory or to grant any concessions without consulting Britain first. He also guaranteed to keep open the pilgrimage routes to the holy places of Mecca and Medina (Lackner, 1978: 17).

Pilgrimage revenues were the main source of revenue for the Saudi monarchy prior to the discovery of oil. In 1941-42 the British government had to cover the deficit in the Saudi budget as a result of World War II and its consequences in the disruption of the pilgrimage to Mecca (Al-Naqeeb, 1990: 152). During the period of British control over the region they invented a new economic system in which each



emirate specialised in producing one product or dependent on one that is of use to the British empire. While Saudi Arabia depended on the pilgrimage revenues the other Gulf countries concentrated their efforts on pearl diving. Later in the century the ruling Al-Sau'd family would use the shrines in Mecca to legitimise its dynasty and create its powerful position, not only in the Arab world but also in all Moslem countries, as the protector of Islam and its most holy shrines (Graz, 1990: 8).

British hegemony over the Gulf region changed the whole political and economic atmosphere. For the British supported a few tribes or families against the others even to the extent of fratricidal conflicts. Often, if a sheikh was no longer of use to them, the British would remove him from power and replace him with his brother or son. An example of this was Britain's removal of Sheikh Isa Bin Ali, the ruler of Bahrain in 1922, and his replacement by his son Hamad who, as Muhammed Al-Rumaihi has noted, was more prepared to listen to British advice (Al-Rumaihi, 1984: 25).

This thesis will refer to the emirates in their relations with Britain as protectorates, although this is not the most precise description of them. Rosemary Zahlan noted that they were not protectorates, mandates or colonies and that they were referred to by Britain as being in treaty relations with it (Zahlan, 1989: 13).

The economy of these protectorates faced a great setback as a result of Britain's control over their trade. The local traders could not compete and were forced to become local agents or distributors for European commodities. By this time local handicrafts had begun to fade and the economy of many of the emirates depended almost exclusively on pearl diving. This does not mean that the whole inhabitants of these lands were in the pearl diving industry, there was also fishing and trade as referred to before. The essence of the income, however, was from pearl diving and the rest were only marginal as Table 2.1 show.

Table 2.1: Number of people and ships involved in the pearl industry (1906-7).

Country	Population	Ships	People+	% of popul	Income *
Bahrain	99075	917	17633	18	1260300
Oman	72000	1215	22045	31	8000000
Qatar	27000	817	12890	48	_____
Kuwait	37000	461	*9200	20	134700

Source: Al-Naqeeb, 1990: 56.

\* Income is in Rubees which was the local currency at the time.

+Referring to people involved in the Pearl industry.

There was, however, some farming and fishing. Many people in Bahrain, for example, were farmers who worked on the date-palm plantations which were mostly owned by members of the ruling Al-Khalifah family. As Niblock noted in his paper 'Oil Economy and its impact on Social and Political Structures in the Gulf Area,' control over the main economic resources was divided as follows:

*"...Pearl production was left in the hands of tribal majalis; much of the cultivation and exploitation of date palms was administered directly by the Al-Khalifa ruling family; nomadic agricultural production and fishing was mostly organised at a very local level" (Nibblock, Unpublished paper).*

In other parts of the Gulf cattle-raising was popular especially in Saudi Arabia which up to the 1940s was one of the biggest Arab exporters of livestock. Following the discovery of oil, however, it became one of the biggest importers, since most sheep-raisers abandoned their jobs for better paid employment in the oil industry. The Saudi Government itself, like many others in the region, abandoned all other resources and concentrated on oil.

In general, the economies of these countries prior to the discovery of oil depended mainly on pearl diving and other small businesses which were all controlled by the ruling tribes or families. The amount of direct or indirect control varied from one emirate to another; the Al-Khalifah in Bahrain had much more control than the Al-Sabah of Kuwait or the Al-Thani of Qatar. As for the political system, it continued to be a tribal patriarchal system in which the emir or sheikh would sit in his 'majlis' and listen to the opinions of other members of the tribe or of traders. The 'majlis,' however, was never the place for other groups in the population to raise complaints or seek to influence the sheikh or ruler. As Niblock put it in relation to Saudi Arabia:

*"..The ability to express views to the decision-maker is not equivalent to having a share in determining what decisions are made. The attitude of Abd Al-aziz bin Abd Al-Rahman Al-Saud towards advice offered to him is neatly summarized in a Koranic text which he frequently quoted to Philby: 'Take counsel among yourselves, and if they agree with you, well and good: but if otherwise, then, put your trust in God and do that which you deem best'" (Niblock, 1982: 89).*

In most of the Gulf states the tradition of the 'majlis' still exists; for example, in Bahrain Sheikh Isa Bin Salman Al-Khalifah still open his 'majlis' to the public, but only members of his own family, ministers and big businessmen go to see him. Occasionally, though, one might see a member of the public presenting a letter in which he asks the Sheikh for a house or a piece of land, since land, even after the discovery of oil and the change in the political and economic structure, is still considered part of the ruler's property. Ghasan Salame' noted in his book 'Saudi Foreign Policy since 1945' that Abdul Aziz Bin Saud in 1925 converted the tribal

lands (which constituted 80 per cent of the Peninsula) into the monarch's property. He also announced that all resources under the land of the whole country belonged to the state (quoted in Shararah, 1981: 132).

The absolute control of Al-Saud and most other ruling families in the Gulf had been achieved by means of the sword and British support, combined with oil wealth and religion. The use of force and the dependence on foreign powers (first the British, then the Americans) are still the main pillars supporting the Gulf dynasties today. The British intervened several times to save the Gulf monarchies, as was the case with the Al-Khalifah of Bahrain in 1871, 1895 and 1905 (Al-Naqeeb, 1990: 59). The support of foreign powers for the Gulf dynasties was clearly visible during the 1990-1 Gulf War; subsequent to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the six members of the Gulf Co-operation Council called on their American and European 'allies' to come to their help (this will be discussed later in this chapter). In 1924 King Abdul Aziz bin Abdulrahman (Known as Abn Saud) addressed the 'Akhwan' ,different from the Muslim brotherhood, by saying:

*"..don't forget that each one of you has lost either a father, a brother or a son by us....you have not obeyed us by well but by force and God help me I will use my sword (kill you) if you did not obey God" (in Shararah, 1981: 121).*

Wadah Shararah also noted that the British Government used to reward supportive Arab tribes and this in the end helped specific tribes to bribe others,etc. (Shararah, 1981: 119). While these tribal rulers tried their best to please the British many locals had their suspicion of these white men. Sheikh Ahmed of Kuwait once built a tennis court for his British guests in the gardens of his palace; where he sat to watch the game from a "carpeted mud hut" ( *The Observer*, 1990). The same article

"End of a desert dream," noted that small boys in Kuwait would sing " Englishman with a hat on your head we hope you die in bed tonight," when they see a western man in the streets of Kuwait.

Most of these mini states had no borders between them and many in fact did not exist as independent entities until the first World War when the borders were drawn. Nevertheless these borders would still be changed several times by the British to please one ruler as against another. The borders, nonetheless, were not important until the discovery of oil.

*"..it was not an easy task in a world where the territory of one or the other tribe was defined more by loyalty to a sheikh than by lines on a map" (Graz, 1990: 6-7).*

The whole picture of the region changed at the beginning of the present century following the discovery of oil, and the increased interest on the part of the Western powers, especially the British. Oil was first discovered in Iran in 1905 and from this time on it looked as if the region was sitting on a gold-mine which was oil. By this time oil had become an important source of energy and the oil companies, mainly those known as the Seven Sisters, proceeded to fight bitter battles to win concessions in the region (Sampson, 1975). The Gulf, however, apart from Kuwait under the 1927 Red Line agreement among the Seven Sisters, was reserved for British companies. This was why when Standard Oil of California gained a concession in Bahrain it had itself registered in Canada as the Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO). In Saudi Arabia the situation was different. Abdul Aziz Al-Saud had made a special agreement with Britain in 1927 and so Standard Oil of California got the concession there too (Lackner, 1978: 32). Oil was discovered commercially in many of the small Gulf emirates prior to the Second World War. It is ironical that Bahrain,

which is the poorest Gulf state today (compared with the others) was the first in which oil was discovered in 1932. In 1938 oil was found in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and in 1939 in Qatar. As for the United Arab Emirates, it was discovered much later, in 1966, in both Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

These dates are considered stepping-stones in the history of the Gulf. The discovery of oil added to the significance of the region. Thereafter the emirates were to suffer another coloniser in the form of the oil companies. Although the governments of the Gulf were to control half of these oil companies in accordance with agreements signed in the 1950's and 1960s, many companies would keep actual operations in their own hands. For example, Aramco still runs the oil fields in Saudi Arabia, although the Kingdom has acquired half its shares (Graz, 1990: 141).

In accordance with the concession agreements signed by the oil companies with the sheikhs, the former had to pay the rulers a percentage of the revenues, but a very small one. Since the Gulf countries were very poor and the pearl-diving industry was facing a serious setback due to Japanese competition from cultured pearls; the rulers were satisfied with the small amounts of money they obtained from the companies.

*“..the company was given the exclusive right to explore, prospect drill for, extract, manufacture, transport and export oil produced...The company agreed to build a refinery; supply the government (Saudi); and advance loans deductible from future royalties, which were fixed at four gold shillings per ton of crude oil” (Lackner, 1978: 34).*

Following the discovery of oil, the issue was raised of who should get the oil revenues, the ruler or the nation. Kuwait was the only one to settle it from the outset. The Government decided that the revenue was a national one; and that the emir

should get a fixed salary of 12 million Kuwaiti Dinars. The other Gulf ruling families, however, did not agree to share the profits with the population until the British intervened to persuade them that the people ought to have a share of the wealth. Only then did the rulers of Bahrain, Qatar and the smaller emirates agree on condition that they received no less than one-third of the oil revenues as a personal salary. As for Saudi Arabia and Oman the matter is not yet clear (Al-Naqeeb, 1990: 103).

Oil will continue to be the main source of income for these countries. Almost 90 per cent of their national income during the last half century has come from oil profits. It was obvious that the oil companies were indirectly ruling the emirates because of the increased amount of power they retained. They imported foreign expertise from Europe and America and labourers from India and other Asian countries. Many Gulf nationals were also attracted to work for the companies. Locally recruited workers, however, obtained lower salaries than the expatriates and lived in appalling conditions in the companies' camps. The famous Saudi novelist Abdelrahman Munif described the social and political changes that accompanied the discovery of oil in an unnamed Gulf country (undoubtedly Saudi Arabia). In his intriguing novel 'Cities of Salt' he captures the disruption of the bedouins' life when a group of foreigners arrive and start drilling for oil. In a discussion between the ruler and a prominent member of the tribe who was saddened by the drastic changes, Miteb Al-Hathal asks the emir about the foreigners:

*The emir: 'We invited them, and they have come to help us.'  
'What kind of help, your excellency?' he asked innocently  
'Under our feet, Ibn Rashed (how they call Miteb), there are  
oceans of oil, oceans of gold.'* replied the emir. *'Our friends  
have come to extract the oil and the gold.'  
'...by the end of the new year, God willing, you'll have money up  
to your ears.'  
'by God, your excellency, we were as happy as we could be  
before those devils came along.'* said Miteb. *'But from the first*

*day they came to our village life has been camel piss. Every day it gets worse.'*

The conversation continues until the emir loses patience with Miteb and threatens to use his sword against any 'troublemaker.' Miteb's only comment is to tell the emir that he (the emir) will get stronger after the foreigners extract the oil from the ground, but that he ought to recognise that 'the Americans aren't doing it for God' (Cities of Salt, 1988: 87).

The great rush by local inhabitants, whether farmers, beduins, craftsmen or pearl-divers, led to the decay of many old crafts and economic sectors. As for the few merchants in the Gulf who survived the competition with foreign - mostly Western - companies, they shifted to work with the oil companies as suppliers of goods and materials or as agents supplying the local manpower needed.

The population concentrated in the newly created oil cities and towns set up to accommodate the numbers of people moving in. Many local people working for the oil companies began to move towards consuming the different kinds of products imported from Europe which were available in the markets for the expatriates. They saw the comfortable cars driven by the oil company's senior employees and tried to imitate them. Furthermore, with Aramco's installation of the first television station in Saudi Arabia, many purchased television sets, and individuals in neighbouring countries such as Bahrain followed suit. The introduction of radio and TV stations in Saudi Arabia met with outrage from the religious institutions to the extent that the first television transmitter in Riyadh was burned down by them. Bahrain was to be the first of the emirates to be introduced to other modern technologies. The first printing press was established in 1937 and the first cinema opened its doors in 1939.



Even though the oil revenues multiplied with the increased dependence on oil as a source of energy, the Gulf countries did not utilize the oil wealth to initiate other sources of income for their economies. On the contrary, they diverted towards the services sector and failed to develop their industry or agriculture. For example, the only other economic activities that developed from the 1950s on were the banking sector and marginal workshops or factories producing inadequate quantities of foodstuffs that were not enough to satisfy the local market (Al-Rumaihi, 1984). As for the banking sector, from the one bank in 1920, the Eastern Bank in Bahrain, the number climbed to 10 by 1971 and thereafter snowballed.

In short, the period up to the Second World War witnessed the delineation of the Gulf emirates into small states by the Western imperialists. The first borders were drawn by the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 which divided the whole Arab World into French and British areas of influence. Thereafter more borders were created by the British. In fact, only one border was drawn by Arabs - that between Saudi Arabia and Yemen - the rest were defined by foreign powers. Al-Naqeeb argues that this delineation of borders had a destructive effect on the Gulf because of:

*“..the futile dispute about boundaries which had no historical basis; and the insoluble debate about the question of citizenship and its conditions among entities which were not separated by national, racial or cultural boundaries....the physical foundations were laid down for the fragmentation of the Gulf and Arab Peninsula society, not by means of foreign armies of occupation but by the weapon of national independence” (Al-Naqeeb, 1990: 63).*

Borders conflicts among the Gulf states have remained as one of the sources of instability in the region up to the present. One might usefully list the border disputes and the countries involved:

- 1-Saudi Arabia and Kuwait over the maritime boundary.
- 2-Saudi Arabia and Yemen over boundaries specifically in the al-Wai'a area.
- 3-Saudi Arabia and Oman over the Waterhole of Umm Zamol and the Buraimi oasis.
- 4-Saudi Arabia and Egypt - and later Israel - over the island of Sanafir and the Straits of Tiran.
- 5-Saudi Arabia and Qatar which might lead to the collapse of the GCC.
- 6-Kuwait and Iraq which led to two invasions by Iraq in the last thirty years.
- 7-Bahrain and Qatar over the Hawar islands group.
- 8-The UAE and Iran over the Greater and Lesser Tumbs islands and the island of Abu Musa.
- 9-Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al-Qawain and Iran over offshore waters.
- 10-Sharjah and Fujairah over boundaries.
- 11-Dubai and Sharjah over territory.
- 12-Ras Al-Khaimah and Sharjah over an area rich with deposits of phosphate.
- 13-Ras Al-Khaimah and Oman over the Musandum Peninsula.

### **2.3 EXCHANGING PALM TREES FOR OIL WELLS: (The emergence of the rentier state).**

The early 1960s encountered a new diversion in the oil industry that affected the world in general and the Gulf in particular. During 1959-60 the oil companies

reduced the price of oil twice without consulting the producing countries. This conduct alarmed the latter, to the ultimate danger of the companies. A Few of the producing countries met in Baghdad in the same year which witnessed the establishment of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec). Soon afterwards some Arab countries, mainly Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Libya, formed the Arab version of Opec which was later joined by the other Arab countries. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and later Abu Dhabi established their own national oil companies that were to take the place or at least to join the foreign ones.

In general this period, from the discovery of oil to the price war of the early 1970s, was characterised by the lack of heavy industry, the tremendous dependence on oil revenues, and the phenomenal expenditure on imported goods.

*“One study of oil revenues and expenditure in the Gulf states between 1950 and 1970 noted that in Bahrain as much as 92 percent of oil revenues went to cover current expenditure, while the figure was 90 percent in Kuwait. Another study showed that 99 percent of oil revenues was set aside for the ruling family in Bahrain and 82 percent in Kuwait. The study commented that similarly high ratios were found in the other oil emirates (Qatar and Abu Dhabi). It concluded that the factors determining the division of oil revenue are traditional and political rather than specifically economic” (Al-Rumaihi, 1986: 34).*

Owing to the spread of nationalist movements in the Arab world during the 1950s and 60s, and the great problems Britain was facing independence agreements were signed with the Gulf states. Kuwait was the first to gain its independence in 1961 and the rest, Bahrain, Qatar and the smaller emirates, followed ten years later. As for Saudi Arabia and Oman, as mentioned earlier they have never been colonised directly by Britain but had been partner to many agreements. None of these countries,

however, including Saudi Arabia and Oman, was fully autonomous even after gaining their political independence; they were wholly dependent on British, American, or European products. Although British soldiers left, American soldiers soon moved in with land and sea bases such as the Juffair base in Bahrain. The American empire, however, was not interested in protectorates or colonies. In fact President Wilson was one of the first world leaders to call for the end of colonisation. The US administration preferred independent states that were in reality totally dependent on Washington.

One way of distributing the oil revenues among the nationals was the land acquisition policy adopted by many of the Gulf states. Between 1957 and 1962 the Kuwaiti Government spent \$840 million on such a project (Zahlan, 1989: 37). Many Kuwaitis benefited from the land compensation which resulted in the emergence of a new class.

This period (1950s and 1960s) could be expressed as the rise of the rentier state in the Gulf. Ruth First argued that oil-producing countries that receive regular rents in the form of petroleum revenues could be described as rentier states. She described the characteristics of the rentier state as follows:

*“The oil revenues received by the governments of the oil-producing and exporting countries have very little to do with the production processes of their domestic economies. The inputs from the local economies other than raw materials - are insignificant” (First, 1980: 119).*

In most of the oil-producing countries -and the Gulf states are the outstanding example - the economy shifts towards the services' sector to serve oil production, while most of the other aspects of the economy collapse. In the Gulf, individuals

gradually abandoned their jobs and shifted to work in the oil industry. Although most of these countries did not have a large agricultural sector, after the oil rush it faced a huge setback and most of the foodstuff needed were imported. Dependence on foreign goods increased as did the need for imported manpower since most of these tiny emirates had only a small indigenous population. (see Table 2.2)

Table 2.2: The Gulf States, area and population in 1987.

Country	Surface area (sq.km)	Population (millions)
Bahrain	369	0.5
Kuwait	18,000	1.9
Oman	300,000	1.3
Qatar	10,360	0.4
Saudi Arabia	2,150,000	12.5
U.A.E	84,000	1.9

Source: McLachlan, 1989: 3.

Table 2.3: Percentage of population participating in different sectors of the economy in selected years.

Country	year	agriculture	industry	services
Bahrain	1971	7	34	59
Kuwait	1970	2	33	65
Qatar	1970	4	32	64
Saudi Arabia	1970	40	20	40
Oman	1971	83	4	13
UAE	1968	18	34	48

Source: I.L.O Yearbook of Labour Statistics, 1974.

An important characteristic of the rentier state is the creation of a mammoth public sector. A portion of the oil wealth was distributed by offering jobs to a large number of nationals, a policy which compensates for the lack of development projects which might absorb a large proportion of the workforce. It also camouflages unemployment and creates a large unproductive section of the population. Government offices in the Gulf are crammed with such examples. It is common to enter any of these premises only to find that many employees spend most of their working hours reading newspapers and sipping tea and coffee. Local newspapers in Bahrain, for example, have published articles in which the editors criticised the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs for employing nationals when there was no work for them. These articles revealed incidents of female employees spending their working hours doing aerobic exercises, watching video films or exchanging recipes. The inflated public sector policy helps the establishment by reducing the chances of any kind of public revolt or a call for democratic changes in the political system. (see Table 2.4)

Table 2.4: The increasing number of employees in the public sector in the Gulf states from 1971-81.

Country	UAE	Bahrain	Saudi Arabi	Oman	Qatar	Kuwait
1971	—	—	134,082 (82.4% Saudis)	3,112 (91.8% Omanis)	—	87,032 (40.3% Kuwaiti)
1975	—	—	184,741 (77% Saudis)	19,000 (78.9% Omanis)	10,820 (64% Qataris)	113,274 (40.1% Kuwaiti)
1981	197,935 (36% citizens)	37,758	252,898 (72.6% Saudis)	38,840 (60.4% Omanis)	37,587 (48.5% Qataris)	167,616 (34.6% Kuwaiti)

Source: Al-Naqeeb, 1990: 85.

The governments of these countries, while providing jobs for a large proportion of the population, failed to impose any kind of taxation. Gradually the governments took over complete control of the economy and indulged in lavish expenditure on the country's infrastructure, some of it ending up as white elephants. Most of these schemes were to serve the oil industry, such as large sea-port facilities, airports to receive the large number of foreign workers, etc. People in the region who suddenly shifted from rags to riches also adopted the same pattern of extravagant expenditure. Luxury items such as designer clothes from Paris and Rome, high-speed cars, expensive hi-fi systems, and the summer exodus to Europe became part of the Gulf nationals' way of life. This economic model and the way of life adopted by the governments of the Gulf states and their populations were properly defined as 'slave economies,' a term used by many economists. It simply refers to the idea of importing

goods and people to serve the locals who live like 'masters' without being involved in any kind of hard productive work (McLachlan and McLachlan, 1989: 6). Flora Sullivan noted in her study of Kuwait how nationals belittled hard work and gradually shifted to white-collar jobs only.

*"The resulting wholesale move of Kuwaitis out of skilled work signaled the beginning of a caste status for nationals. Thereafter a Kuwaiti's identity became tied up with white collar employment as even skilled labor soon held the taint of being associated with cheaper foreign workers" (Sullivan, 1987: 12-5).*

Another scholar remarked that in the advertisements in most of the Gulf media (or those targeting Gulf nationals) the theme was that Gulf nationals could possess what had been produced in the West without hard work. Yves Schemel wrote that the visual images in most of these advertisements carried a European (Western) person with a machinery, ranging from car or motorcycle to a food mixer or television set, which the Gulf man or woman was pictured as utilising without any trouble. He argued that the message in these advertisements was that the Gulf nationals did not have to work to obtain these luxuries. In this way the producers have captured the essence of the Gulf society's perception of work (Schemel, 1992: 54-6).

Per capita income in most of these countries (especially in Kuwait and the UAE) rocketed within a period of twenty years without going through the normal process of gradual economic and social changes. Until very recently, these countries were not obliged to improve their educational or training programmes in order to be able to replace foreign labourers and expertise with locals. This is a recipe for disaster in the long term. The education system in the Gulf states is tailored to producing government employees not skilled workers.



While most of the traditional crafts and professions vanished, new ones emerged after the exploitation of oil. The roles of the 'guarantors' surfaced after the arrival of foreign labourers (especially from the Indian subcontinent) to work in the oil production sector. Many locals accumulated wealth by simply working as agents for expatriate workers. Baqir Al-Najjar presented a list of famous guarantors in Qatar and Kuwait in an unpublished paper in Arabic entitled "Al-Hijrah ila al-Khalij al - 'Arabi: dirasah fi al-tarikh al-ijtima'i li-al-hijrah wa dawr al-sharikat al-naftiyah fi al - nisf al-awwil min al-qarn al-ishrin (Immigration to the Arabian Gulf: a study of the social history of immigration and the role of the oil companies during the first half of the twentieth century) (quoted in Al-Naqeeb, 1990: 85). A famous guarantor in Bahrain during the early days of oil production was Hussein Yateem.

In all the Gulf states the law requires foreigners to have a national sponsor or partner. Gulf nationals exploited this privilege by manipulating foreign workers, desperate for jobs, in order to attain wealth without making any effort. Flora Sullivan, in her study of the Kuwaiti society, noted that this system 'gave nationals a vested interest in the inferior legal status of foreigners' (Sullivan, 1987: 3).

Gulf governments have provided free health, education and social insurance. They also subsidised a few food items, electricity, water and other important public services. In many of these countries, people did not have to pay for their electricity or telephone. Recently, however, a number of Gulf states have enforced taxation because of the depletion of oil resources. Members of the ruling families are exempt from paying their utility bills. A large section of them primarily benefited from the construction and other projects that followed the discovery of oil.

*"Broad classes of the inhabitants have profited from this kind of transfer, but it is a benefit more like 'crumbs from the table'; for those who profit most are the members of the ruling family and the great merchant*

*families who possess extensive real estate holdings, enabling them to gain possession of the lion's share of public subsidy" (Al-Naqeeb, 1990: 83).*

The rentier states of the Gulf that emerged between the 1950s and the early 1970s were able to dominate the political, economic and social aspects of life. Their governments had a firm grip on all facets of the economy and were able to exploit it. Construction projects -under government control - were distributed among local agents for international construction companies. Individuals were encouraged to launch new projects such as food processing, shipping agencies, etc. with the support of the government. The power of the ruling and merchant families in the Gulf, which had been lost after the signing of treaties with the British, was reinstated with the emergence of the rentier state. This, of course, did not mean that these classes were acting free from any influence. On the contrary, they continued to act as agents for the international capitalists serving their interests in the region. Whilst the Gulf ruling families strove to accommodate to the new changes; they aimed to preserve the traditional relationships (Al-Naqeeb, 1990: 84).

Contrasts between the extremely rich and the relatively poor in the Gulf have been enhanced while the disparity between the wealthy Arab countries and the rest of the impoverished Third World has also widened. Many Arabs were attracted to the Gulf region. The same period witnessed a large influx of Arab professionals who were needed mostly in the education and other public sectors. Many less fortunate Arab countries benefited from the Gulf oil revenues through the remittances of their nationals who were working in the Gulf, though this by no means implies that the oil revenues were distributed equally among the Gulf population or the Arab world at large.

Around this same period nationalist feelings were spreading throughout the Arab world especially after the success of the Free Officers Movement in Egypt in overthrowing the monarchy. Many Egyptians and Arabs (Palestinians, Lebanese, Syrians, etc.) who arrived in the Gulf as teachers and professors at the few newly opened universities, promoted the Nasserite ideas of pan-Arabism. President Jamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt - himself a member of the Free Officers Movement - championed the notion of one Arab economy through which the oil revenues of the Gulf region could be used for the development of powerless Arab countries.

Many in the Gulf were influenced by the Nasserite movement and attempted to bring pressure to bear on their governments to abandon their strong affiliations with the West and establish powerful alliances with their Arab brothers (Shararah, 1981: 154). Nationalist movements were established in most of the Gulf countries. The strongest among them were in Bahrain and Kuwait. The Higher Executive Committee in Bahrain, for example, achieved a strong footing among a large section of the population. It managed to propagate its nationalist ideas through sports and cultural clubs. The committee had successfully called for strikes and demonstrations in the late 1950s against British control of the country and its economy. It also used the Arabic-language newspaper of the time 'Sawt al Bahrain' (The Voice of Bahrain), to promote its ideas. The Bahraini Government reacted by sentencing many members of the committee either to imprisonment or to forced exile. One of the exiled leaders of the committee, Abd Al-Rahman Al-Bakir, documented the events of the 1950s in Bahrain in his book, 'Min al-Bahrain ila al-Manfa: Sant Hilanah' (From Bahrain to Exile in 'Saint Helena').

Similar movements were inaugurated in other Gulf states where the same measures were deployed to spread Arab nationalist ideas. In Kuwait many sports and cultural clubs were the headquarters of the different factions of the movement,

whether Nasserite, Ba'thist or socialist. These movements gained strength after the attack on Egypt in 1956 by Britain, France and Israel following President Nasser nationalisation of the Suez Canal. People in the Gulf (as in many other Arab capitals) took to the streets setting fire to British establishments and calling for the unity of all Arabs against the Western imperialists' domination of the region.

According to Al-Naqeeb, the primary achievements of the Gulf nationalist movements of the 1950s and 60s were the splintering of 'tribal sectarian forces' and the embracing of nationalist ideas.

Egypt's defeat in the six-day war of 1967, nevertheless, transferred the leadership of the Arab world in favour of the tribal patriarchal regimes of the Gulf. This, combined with the tremendous increase in oil revenues after the 1973 oil price war, despatched the nationalist movement to its grave. The Gulf regimes managed to 'corrupt' most members of the opposition by the attractions of the luxury life that was extended among Gulf nationals. These regimes created the impression that anyone could make it to the top and enjoy all the bounty of life if s/he understood the system and worked with it. Members of the opposition, like all the others, rushed to grab their share of paradise and comfortable living.

It is also crucial to note that the Gulf rulers were never completely dominated by the foreign powers, whether British or American. Up to the early 1970s many Gulf leaders safeguarded their independence and dignity. One of these leaders was King Faisal of Saudi Arabia (brother of the current king Fahd) who in 1973 imposed an oil embargo on the United States and Holland in response to their unconditional support for Israel in the Middle East war. All the other Arab oil-producing countries followed suit and refrained from supplying oil to the two nations. The Arab oil embargo, which lasted for five months, revealed the concept of using oil as a powerful political weapon. Oil prices were to move sharply upwards from this time on which was to put

the foreign powers (especially the United States) in an uneasy position and hence obliged to increase their presence in the region to protect their interests, namely cheap oil. In the same year OPEC raised the price of oil by 67 per cent from 3 to 5 dollars per barrel and then by a further 133 per cent to \$11.65. Oil prices were to continue to move upwards so that by 1980 they had reached \$37 per barrel (The Middle East Magazine, May 1986).

*“The Economist (27 June 1987) estimated that after the 1973-4 price rises, Saudi Arabia and some of its OPEC allies were accumulating foreign-exchange surpluses at around \$115,000 a second; and that they could have bought the equivalent of the four British clearing banks every eleven days, or all the equities on the London Stock Exchange after nine months; and that in under thirteen years, they could have supplied every adult Arab with an annuity of \$115 per week” (Zahlan, 1989: 129).*

#### **2.4 THE OIL BONANZA (The emergence of the patriarchal authoritarian state):**

*“Within twenty years or less people have moved from desert tents with bushes as lavatories to villas with gold plated bath taps. The ideological confusion that arose from this contradiction is enormous. Western producers and local importers encourage the development of materialism and even King Faisal the religious ascetic favoured material modernisation” (Lackner, 1978: 17).*

The importance of the region, though, does not depend on the amount of oil it produces but also on its oil reserves. These jumped from 18 per cent of world proven reserves in the early 1970s to 42 per cent in 1980. Similarly oil revenues climbed drastically during the 1970s and 1980s until the drop in 1985 that will be discussed later. Tables 2.5 and 2.6 show the oil reserves in the 1980s and revenues during

selected years from the early years of the discovery of oil to the massive revenues of 1983.

Table 2.5 : Oil reserves in the six Gulf Arab countries 1980-84 (billion barrels)

Country	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	%change
U.A.E.	30.4	32.2	32.4	32.3	32.5	0.6
SA	167.5	164.8	168.3	168.9	171.7	1.7
Oman	2.3	2.6	2.7	2.8	3.5	25.0
Qatar	3.6	3.4	3.4	3.3	3.4	3.0
Kuwait	67.9	67.7	67.2	66.8	92.7	38.8
Bahrain	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	_____

Source: OPEC Annual Statistical Bulletin (1984).

Table 2.6: Increase in oil revenues in the Arab Gulf countries in selected years. (In \$m.) (-) Shows that information is not available

Country	U.A.E	Bahrain	SA	Qatar	Kuwait
1940	_____	1.0	2.5	_____	_____
1950	_____	3.3	57	1.0	11
1960	3	15.0	355	54,0	465
1965	33	22,0	655	69,0	671
1970	233	35,0	1200	122	895
1974	6306	170	31163	1970	4765
1977	9237	226,5	41114	1975	8819
1980	19456	254	102372	5387	17246
1983	12800	_____	46100	3000	9900

Source: OPEC Annual Statistical Bulletin (1982).

In 1986 Kuwait's oil revenues were \$ 9,200m. while its population in the same year was 600,000 which meant that the average oil income per head was about \$15,333 (McLachlan and McLachlan, 1989: 6). The largest oil field in the world, the Ghawar field in Saudi Arabia, lies in the Gulf region. The Gulf has four times as much oil as the United States and the former Soviet Union combined. In 1986, it was reported that 40 per cent of the world oil trade originated from the Gulf. Although not all the Gulf countries were blessed with such vast oil reserves as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, others had benefited from it. Bahrain, for example, which is the poorest compared with its neighbours has benefited from its oil refinery which is utilised by Saudi Arabia as one way of helping the small island. The government of Bahrain and its ruling Al-Khalifah family profited from the Abu Sa'fa oil field in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia. Qatar also does not have large amounts of crude oil compared with the other Gulf states, but it has the second largest reserves of natural gas in the world (ibid. : 14).

The Gulf economy has enabled large number of nationals to shift towards the commercial sector. Many merchants created empires of their own on the same scale as those of the Rockfellers and other business tycoons in the industrialised nations. Others were employed in the government sector; by the late 1970s and early 1980s there were more people working in the government ministries and offices than these could absorb. By 1981 the numbers of government employees in the six Gulf countries were 197,935 in the UAE, 37,758 in Bahrain, 252,898 in Saudi Arabia, 38,840 in Oman, 37,587 in Qatar and 167,616 in Kuwait.

Also new types of jobs or sectors continued to surface such as the middle men or local agents not only for merchandise but also for expatriates seeking a job in the Gulf as construction workers or as maids and nannies. The number of recruiting offices mushroomed. In general there was a shift towards the services sector and most

of the population switched from satisfying their own needs to living off the oil revenues. Fuad Khuri described the situation in Bahrain and the drift towards the services sector (which could be true of other Gulf countries).

*"...15% of the wage or salary earners (totaling 1,950) changed their profession --the tendency was for teachers, college graduates and engineers to become civil servants, free enterprisers, and merchants; technicians became taxi drivers and salesmen; craftsmen and tradesmen became shopkeepers, peddlers, or messengers. The high frequency of foreign labor in blue-collar jobs has pushed the Bahrainis to the more profitable "services" sector of the economy" (Khuri, 1980: 140).*

These enormous changes in the economic activities of both governments and people in the region created one of the biggest markets in the world. The Gulf countries, with their major dependence on oil revenues; imported all kinds of goods and foodstuffs from the United States, Western Europe, Japan and other Asian countries.

*"Oil income has made it possible for the country to live off imports of everything from wheat to private aeroplanes. This is happening partly through the creation of consumers: the state employs people at increasingly large salaries to work in the administration and services, imitating a consumer society. The other ways in which the regime has supported the development of a merchant class have been its own extravagant consumption and the tacitly acknowledged 'commission' system of agencies that has allowed a number of fortunes to be made with surprising speed" (Lackner, 1978: 214).*

This consumerist attitude produced new conceptions, ideas and expectations. The concept of fast money replaced the need and respect for hard work. A large



number of Gulf young people became unproductive and looked for easy short-cuts to becoming millionaires. They depended excessively on foreign workers and servants. Even children were left to be cared for by nannies from India, Sri Lanka or the Philippines. As a result, children knew English better than their native Arabic and learned traditions and habits that were foreign to them. Men and women alike spent more and more money on status symbols such as expensive cars, clothes and jewellery.

Holiday travelling during the summer became a necessity and a goal for those who could not afford it. The new bourgeois class that has been created since the oil boom spent more and more time on finding new ways to spend their millions of dinars and riyals.

*“Consumer spending became almost like a contagious disease spreading from home to home. To the point that even those who could not afford it, borrowed to keep up appearances.. the boom years created a supposed elite, who had the wealth without education, work or even cultural values. They rose to positions of influence, because their names were recognised both inside and outside their own country” (Azzam, 1988: 18 ).*

Even at the government level, officials were interested only in building artificial constructions that were alien to the local inhabitants such as the largest golf course in the world which has just been opened in the emirate of Dubai. Officials enjoyed reading in the foreign press that they had the biggest university or club or whatever, without being interested to know how useful it was to the future of the country or region and whether the amount of money spent on it was justifiable. The whole region, with the fast development of high-rise buildings, hotels, parks, shopping malls, etc., appeared like a huge Disney Land where everything is artificial.

Muhammed Rumaihi has compared these countries with the new towns built in the United States during the gold rush period and which have now become ghost towns. To some extent this could be true of the future of the Gulf region or this is the way many locals see the future. Table 2.7 demonstrates the percentage of household items consumed in the Gulf and how it has jumped in many of these countries over a period of 15 years.

Table 2.7: An estimate of ownership of consumer items in the Gulf countries between the years 1970-85

% of household items	1970	1985
Car	60	65
Deep Freezer	30	50
Washing machine	75	80
Refrigerator	90	95
Color television	30	65
Video	6	45
Food Processor	40	60

Source: Bahrain Chamber of Commerce.

According to their company reports, many of the famous brand names such as Nescafe', Tide, Mercedes, Lux, Pepsi Cola, Brylcreem, Lipton, Sony, etc. have a bigger share in Gulf markets than in any other market in the world. There are a few products, such as perfumes and soft drinks, where the per capita consumption is the highest in the world. It has been claimed that Gulf nationals are highly vulnerable to advertising, especially since the largest number of inhabitants, about 40 to 50 per cent, are below the age of 15. In Qatar, for example, over 44 per cent of its 60,300 population are less than 15 years old. In Saudi Arabia the figure is 48 per cent. In

1984 alone an estimated \$175 million was spent on advertising, most of it through television which is more effective in the Gulf because of the high rate of illiteracy.

Gulf nationals not only consumed material goods but also human beings in terms of the labour force. These countries with their small populations were unable to meet the needs of the huge construction and other projects. Combined with the elements already mentioned such as the locals lust for collecting money without hard work that has surfaced since the oil boom and the circulation of oil revenues this led to an increased dependence on foreign labour. The Gulf inhabitants had lost their respect for hard work and the younger generation looked for easy outlets or easy jobs with high salaries. Even those from poor village families left school early with no other ambition than to find easy employment in the public sector.

*“Work is not considered a sacred value as in other societies. The oil states are tending to become leisure societies handing out wages and allowances to the general public without demanding any work in return. This reduces the need to work and leads to large-scale absenteeism, evasion of responsibilities and duties, and abandonment of projects for no particular reason” (Al-Kawwari, 1981: 54).*

The number of foreign workers gradually increased to the extent that the nationals became a minority. According to the International Labour Organisation there were 6 million foreigners living in the Gulf in 1982, representing 46 per cent of the population. Table 2.8 and 2.9 gives the percentages of expatriates in the labour force in the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council, excluding Saudi Arabia, and the ratios of their participation in the economy.

Table 2.8: Percentage of expatriates in the Gulf countries during three different years

Country	1970		1975		1980	
	Total popul	% expatriat	Total popul	% expatriat	Total popul	%expatriat
U.A.E	220,000	54	656,000	70	1,043,225	75
Bahrain	216,078	17.5	282,000	24.2	358,857	32.4
Oman	600,000	7	811,000	20	900,000	30
Qatar	111,000	58.8	180,000	63.9	260,000	67.3
Kuwait	738,662	53	994,837	52.5	1,355,827	58.6

Source: Al-Naqeeb, 1990: 87.

Table 2.9: Expatriates participation in the economy in relation to the indigenous population in the year 1980 (percentage economically active).

Country	% Total population	% Nationals	% Expatriates
U.A.E.	52.8	29.3	67*
Bahrain	36.8	19.3	59
Saudi Arabia	_____	22.3	_____
Oman	28.1	18.4	_____
Qatar	45.7	23.7	61*
Kuwait	36	19.3	40.7

Source: Al-Naqeeb, 1990: 88.

(\*) Not reliable.

The conditions in which these foreign labourers live are not too far from the conditions of slaves during the Roman Empire, especially for the unskilled labourers. They are confined to isolated camps, crowded in rooms without any proper sanitary facilities. Often these rooms have no electricity or water and when there is not enough space workers have to sleep in shifts. In some Gulf countries there are labour laws

stipulating the amount of space and facilities that should be available, but unfortunately these laws are not always implemented and the inspection procedures are inefficient.

*“Anyone who travelled through the region in the heyday of oil will have seen the disparities between the rich and poor, the contemptuous treatment of the Palestinians, Pakistani, Egyptian, and other 'guest workers,' and the arrogance of rulers for whom oil was a family windfall rather than an opportunity and a responsibility for their people” (The Observer, 19 August 1990).*

With the increased dependence on foreign workers a labour market has been created in which many nationals act as agents for hundreds of foreign workers. They provide them with visas on condition that they supply the local agent with a stated amount of dinars or riyals monthly. The Gulf is also packed with recruiting agencies advertising for workers in the daily newspapers. Advertisements such as ‘A great opportunity...we now offer maids from Sri Lanka for the small amount of 30 Dinars, the Filipinas for 60....’ are very common and are accepted. These agencies have started using modern technology in their offices. One can visit their premises and watch videos of maids being interviewed, in which they answer questions about their credentials and then walk around to show their physical appearance to the Gulf clients.

Among the foreign workers who flooded the Gulf during the oil boom years were many Arabs, from poor Arab countries (Egypt, Yemen, Syria) and from the diaspora such as Palestinians and Lebanese. These labourers, especially the unskilled ones have created massive changes back in their home countries, where like many other unskilled workers from Asia, have transferred consumerist habits to their villages and towns. For example, many Egyptians have been able to buy a flat or a

house in their village such as many professional Egyptians could not afford, and many Pakistanis took television sets and videos back to villages with no electricity. (Birks and Sinclair, 1980: 342).

The major dependence on foreign labourers could perhaps be attributed to the absence of women's participation in their countries' development projects because of social, political and religious restrictions on women. In many of these countries, women are not allowed to work with men. The strict Islamic laws are not practised to the same degree all over the Gulf. For example, in Saudi Arabia there is strict segregation of the sexes. The country with the most relaxed segregated society is Bahrain (Niblock, 1982: 177).

The exclusion of women from the work force increased the need for imported labour. The Gulf countries failed to adopt any policies by which they could integrate women into the labor force and try to reduce the dependence on expatriates. On the contrary, many of these countries provided social security benefits for women who were divorced or widowed, etc. (Hijab, 1988: 20).

All the above mentioned elements indicate the shift in the Gulf economic and political systems from the rentier state to a patriarchal authoritarian structure. The latter is characterised by the centralisation of economic and political systems in the hand of the elite, which in the Gulf is the ruling tribes or families. The economies of these states depend totally on oil revenues, a small portion of which is distributed among the nationals. All other aspects of economic activity tend to cater to the main one, namely oil production and oil-related industries such as petrochemicals.

The patriarchal state structures of the Gulf are also characterised by dependence on foreign workers, and limited participation of women in the development projects and the economy in general, plus huge expenditures by the state or the public on luxury goods and projects. The superficial appearance of the Gulf

societies might convey the impression that the political systems are very liberal, that the economy is free and that the people are enjoying all the benefits of the good life. But this first impression could disappear the moment one takes an in-depth look and observes the real hidden situation. The facts that would strike one are that none of these countries has any kind of political representation. In fact the families that are ruling them are the same as those which signed treaties with Britain many years ago. Apart from Kuwait and Bahrain (for a short period) none of the other states has ever experienced any kind of an elected parliament. Freedom of speech, of expression and of the press is prohibited. Citizens of these countries could be imprisoned without trial for varying numbers of years for the simple 'crime' of holding views, beliefs or convictions that differ from those of the establishment. International human rights organisations have long been publishing reports of violation of human rights in these countries. Amnesty International representatives have frequently been prevented from attending trials of political prisoners. The (London) *Guardian* of 13 November 1990 published an article about the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, a London centre which specialises in the treatment of tortured political prisoners, which reported that many Saudi political prisoners had been treated at the centre.

Al-Naqeeb defines the nature of the patriarchal (what he called the authoritarian) state by its complete control of the political, economic and social systems:

*"In its ideal form, the state extends the tentacles of its domination to the economic system, monopolizing the ownership of the means of production; to the political system, monopolizing the means of organization; and to the social system, offering itself as an alternative to its institutions, substituting for competing ideologies the ideology of domination and terror, for its original values the values of hedonistic consumption, and for its culture the culture of fear and intimidation" (Al-Naqeeb, 1990: 117).*

Although the Gulf governments advocated free market policies, they actually maintained their firm grip on the economies of their countries. Most traders, merchants and contractors depended on the state or its agents -indirectly- for their livelihoods. A large number of the big projects during the oil-boom period were distributed by the state among a few individuals, mostly merchants or members of the ruling family or their front men. Many members of the ruling families conduct their business activities through agents who work as a cover for them. For example, the Prime Minister of Bahrain - who is also the brother of the sheikh and the real ruler of the country - controls most of the business transactions in the island and owns many of the big companies, through a few individuals one of whom is the head of his office.

Although some kind of development has taken place in most of these countries during the last twenty years or so, but this was done under full state control. The desert emirates of the Arab Gulf are not the same as those travellers wrote about years ago. They have been dressed in a new modern uniform. Most of the Gulf capitals could easily be mistaken for cities in the West. The ruling families, however, have maintained their traditional role through the use of terror and intimidation on some occasions and bribery on others. The newly created states are without doubt highly artificial and internally fragile. They have therefore depended on outside Western powers, and specifically the United States, for protection. A recent example of this fragility and reliance on outside powers came in August 1990 when Iraq invaded neighbouring Kuwait. Saudi Arabia and the other five members of the Gulf Co-operation Council immediately called on their Western 'friends' to come to their aid (the invasion will be discussed in more detail later).

A Few of these states are still run by the emir himself and not his government or ministers. Qatar is a vivid example of this situation. The emir of Qatar, Sheikh Khalifah bin Hamad Al-Thani, manages the state administration - its budget, foreign



and internal policies, etc. - by himself to the extent that when he leaves the country on vacation the whole government comes to a standstill until his return (Graz, 1990: 155 - 6). Sheikh Khalifah treats his country in the same way as his ancestors controlled the affairs of their tribe. Qatar is the Al-Thani tribe, since one out of every 15 Qataris is a member of the ruling family.

Though an extreme case, the example of Sheikh Khalifah and the Al-Thani is not unique. Most of the ruling families still believe that they own the land, what is on top of it and beneath it. Recent history has demonstrated that the tribes have been converted into corporate structures. These corporations derive their strength and power from: the tribal establishment, the merchant class, the religious establishment (al-Mutawa'h), the newly created middle class, the army and police and their powerful foreign 'friends,' though the army and police could also be identified with the tribal establishment since they are controlled by the tribes.

The national guards in many of these countries, in particular Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, all come from the tribes. Rules and regulations for joining the army and police have been relaxed in most countries during the last few years. Yet members of minority sects such as the Shi'its in Bahrain (minorities not in numbers or percentage of population but in power) have been forbidden to join. Most of the armies, navies and national guards of the Gulf states have been established with direct help from either Britain or the United States. A large chunk of the national budget is devoted to purchasing arms. In 1985 Saudi Arabia's defence budget was 64.09 billion Riyals (\$17.3 billion). Following the budget deficit due to the collapse of oil prices in 1986, the defence allocation was decreased to 60.8 billion Riyals and in 1988 to 50.8 billion Riyals (Graz, 1990:140). Saudi Arabia has the highest arms spending per capita in the world, exceeding even that of the United States (Salame', 1989: 75).



The recent conflict in the Gulf region has proved that these highly-equipped armies are solely for decorative purposes. The Americans, however, have used many of them for their own benefit, as was the case when the Saudi Government assigned \$330 million for the reinforcement of its national guard using American advice. Holden and Johns in their book 'The House of Saud,' revealed that this was used by the Americans to enable CIA agents to infiltrate the kingdom (quoted in Graz, 1990: 277).

Many ministers in the Gulf governments are actually members of the ruling families. Sometimes members of one family rather than the extended tribe hold three or four of the major posts in the government. Such is the case of King Fahd of Saudi Arabia and his brothers and sons. Three of his brothers (with the same mother, known as 'Al-Sudairian') control the ministries of defence, interior and the government of the capital Riyadh. Fahd's son Faisal is Undersecretary for the Ministry of Youth and Sports. His other son Mohammed runs a consultancy company that is the agent for multinational corporations such as Bechtel, Brown and Roots, Continental and others (Shararah, 1988: 155). Of the 18 members of the Bahraini Cabinet, eight are from the Al-Khalifah ruling family. To some extent the description used once by Tahsin Al-Bashir, an Egyptian diplomat, could still be correct: 'Outside Egypt, there is no nation in the Middle East; the others are only tribes with a flag' (Graz, 1990: 111).

The Egyptian diplomat could have made this statement in revenge for the role his country used to play in the Arab world being overtaken by the Gulf states, and Saudi Arabia in particular. The defeat of the Nasserite government of Egypt in the Arab-Israeli war of 1967 marked the end of the Arab nationalist movement that had swept the Arab World from the Gulf to the Maghreb. Thereafter power was to shift from Egypt to the oil-rich states of the Gulf. The Gulf Co-operation Council was to replace the Free Officer Movement of Egypt. Whereas Egypt managed to control the

Arab world through the spread of pan-Arab ideas; the Gulf leaders dominated the region with the ideologies of money, consumerism and greed.

Within twenty years, the Gulf leaders managed to manipulate the people and governments of most of the Arab countries, if not of the Third World. Saudi Arabia utilised its oil revenues to bribe and suppress nationalist and progressive movements in isolated areas. Intellectuals and others in most of the destitute Arab countries waited in line to obtain visas and jobs in the Gulf. Many Egyptians, Lebanese, Palestinians and others made fortunes from their jobs in the Gulf region. Countries like Jordan came to depend entirely on the remittances of Jordanians working in the Gulf.

By the end of the 1980s the whole imperialist plan for the region had been completed, thanks to King Fahd and his five-member clique. The Americans and other Western allies had eliminated the nationalist ideas and groups that had attempted to disrupt their 'grand' plan for the region. They had managed to accomplish all this without applying any kind of direct force or coercion. This was, of course, before 2 August 1990 when the Iraqi army moved into Kuwait and interrupted their plan by rekindling nationalist feelings that had faded with the temptation of the oil wealth.

This does not, of course, mean that during the past twenty years there were no attempts by individuals or movements to raise the issue of democracy and participation in the Gulf. But many of these attempts, failed and the Gulf regimes have rejected any idea of sharing power with their people. In Kuwait, for example, efforts to establish an elected parliament ended with its dismissal by the emir in 1986. In that same year a strict censorship was enforced on the media and many Arab journalists were deported from the country, the most prominent of them being Naji Al-Ali, a Palestinian cartoonist who was deported to England and assassinated a year

later in front of his London newspaper premises. The ruling Al-Sabah family were unable to tolerate any criticism even at the academic level. Khaldoun Al-Naqeeb, a professor of sociology at the University of Kuwait, was detained and interrogated after the publication in Arabic of his book 'Society and State in the Gulf And Arab Peninsula.'

Although these countries were united in the Gulf Co-operation Council pact, each tried to preserve a separate identity. The policies of Kuwaitisation, Saudisation, Bahrainisation, etc. were widely disseminated. Each government outlined its goals for replacing expatriate employees with nationals. They have also tried to force this policy on the private sector but without success.

Saudi Arabia's Five-Year Plan of 1985-90 targeted the substitution of foreigners by Saudi men and women whenever possible and proper (Graz, 1990: 131). In most of these tiny states with low populations, such a goal seemed unrealistic partly because of the lack of a full development plan and the lack of sincerity on the part of officials. At the same time, newspaper headlines were drumming up support for the plans, while businessmen were buying their way round the regulations by bribery and members of the ruling families were trading in visas for foreign workers.

Prior to the invasion of Kuwait three major events introduced the region to its first shock waves since the relative calm of the oil-boom years. The first was the outbreak of the Iraq-Iran war and the Gulf leaders' fear of its spreading. During the first few years the war was confined to inland regions far from the Gulf waters. Later, however, the fighting extended out through what became known as the 'tanker war.' Gulf shipping lines were continually under threat of attack from both sides. Many oil tankers were struck by missiles and this affected oil supplies worldwide.

Warships belonging to the United States, Britain, France, Italy, the Soviet Union, Japan and many other countries moved into the region to protect the shipping

lanes and clear the mines from the Gulf waters. Kuwaiti oil tankers were the target of most of these assaults. Kuwait's government requested aid first from the Soviet Union and then from the Americans. Later the Kuwaitis agreed with the Americans to re-flag their ships for protection. Nevertheless, ships and tankers flying the American flag were still raided.

In the initial stages of the war the Gulf states played the role -at least publicly - of neutral neighbours. Later they supported Iraq and supplied the Baghdad regime with money, oil, and arms. Clearly that the Iraqi army could not have survived without Gulf money especially from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, plus of course support from Western powers like the United States.

The second shock wave that coincided with the war was the Kuwaiti stock -exchange crash of 1982. The collapse of the Souq Al-Manakh affected the whole region and reminded many of the Wall Street crash of the 1929 in the United States. The crisis resulted in \$92 billion worth of unpaid cheques and created a tremendous dilemma for the Kuwaiti Government which was obliged to intervene (Darwiche, 1986: 94).

Many studies that have dealt with the Al-Manakh crash attributed the failure to the absence of any economic logic. They suggested that the oil wealth had created a new remarkably rich class. Many Kuwaitis who did not know what to do with the millions of dinars in their bank accounts thought of investing their money by establishing off-shore companies and banks, most of which were set up in Bahrain and Dubai both of which enjoy relaxed financial legislation.

It all started like a game or a fairy tale with individuals buying and selling stocks in companies that existed only on paper. The madness continued and spread from Kuwait to Bahrain and the other Gulf states, but, with a lesser intensity. Gulf nationals borrowed millions and billions of dinars from local and international banks

with no other guarantee than their well-known names. Others who could not afford to borrow pawned their houses, yachts and other property to buy stocks. Blank cheques were transferred from hand to hand as individuals bought and sold their shares without paying anything for them in real money.

Public employees, taxi drivers and others shifted their activities to buying passports from the poor to sell to stock buyers. Many made huge amounts of money through these transactions. At one point it was found that police and army officers were using the passports of political prisoners to buy and sell shares. Crowds queuing from dawn in front of the doors of the local brokers and banks were a common sight in many Gulf capitals especially in Manama. Sometimes fighting would break out over who was to get in first and police assistance was needed.

The madness extended beyond stocks and shares to cover the buying and selling of small shops in the newly-built marble premises of the Souq Al-Manakh. These shops were sold for a thousand times more than their real price. At one point brokers -bored with the same transactions every day - suggested betting on the water fountain in the middle of the Al-Manakh. Even fishermen who used to pass by the Souq on their way to the central market of Kuwait city, found themselves selling their day's catch for thousands of dinars after brokers started betting on it too. Graz noted that 'a visit to the Suq al-Manakh in full action was like stepping into a Fellini film' (Graz, 1990: 92-3).

Neither the Kuwaiti Government nor those of neighbouring states intervened to end the madness because many members of the government and the royal families were actually involved. The Kuwaiti Parliament questioned the Minister of Justice (who is a member of the Al-Sabah family) on his involvement in the Al-Manakh. A Kuwaiti businessman later told *The Financial Times* ('Charity begins at Home', 30 October, 1986),

*“This is a family affair. It is not a financial package but a political social package” (Zahlan, 1989: 76).*

The whole economic atmosphere in these Gulf states was highly artificial or, as John Maynard Keynes put it, ‘a Casino Economy’ (Keynes, 1970: 158-9). The Iraq-Iran war, the collapse of the Souq Al-Manakh and the drop in oil prices after 1985 (Kuwaiti petroleum fell to \$5 per barrel) changed the atmosphere in the region. The prices of crude oil took a sharp dive at the beginning of 1986. Oil revenues dropped to half those of previous years. The combined oil revenues of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates dropped from \$186 billion in 1982 to \$57 billion in 1985 and \$36.9 billion in 1986.

This was felt both at the official and the individual level. Almost all construction projects were frozen, government schemes were abandoned and many local companies went bankrupt. Foreign banks also experienced difficulties and a few closed down their offices, others left small operation outlets either in Bahrain or Dubai. Banks that had lent large sums of money to companies and individuals were confronted with the reality that these would never be recovered. British companies such as John Laing and George Wimpey had to pack up and leave Saudi Arabia which had been one of their biggest markets (Hirst, 1986).

As most of the major construction companies pulled out, many foreign workers, especially the skilled ones, were also forced to leave the region. Property rents plummeted as a result of the departure of many expatriates. In Saudi Arabia it was estimated that 150,000 houses and flats were vacant, and 30,000 apartments in Kuwait. A Kuwaiti economist commented, ‘We send the foreigners home to save money, but we need them to make it’ (Hirst, 1986). Shopping centres (the shrines of consumerism) that were built from marble during the boom years were now deserted.

The newly created wealthy class in the Gulf was faced with no other solution but to adjust to the changed circumstances, by not changing cars every year and cutting down on the number of trips to Europe and the amount of jewellery and other luxury items they used to purchase. A famous Riyadh jeweller recalled that in 1981 he had bought the famous \$5.1 million Polar Star diamond at a Geneva auction for a businessman's wife: '...now there is less buying of very very expensive items' (Roy, 1986). The very rich still bought private jets but they switched to fuel-efficient ones. Prince Fahd bin Khaled bin Abdullah said in an interview with a British newspaper 'Our people must realise that what happened is a dream which happens but rarely in history. That dream is over and we have to adjust to reality' (ibid).

Taxes were introduced for the first time in the recent history of the oil-rich Gulf countries. A Few states are considering reductions in subsidies on foodstuffs. Saudi Arabia, for example, has raised custom tariffs from 4 to 7 per cent on imported goods and has ceased to treat such goods as cars, jewellery, perfumes and electrical appliances as necessities.

In Bahrain, the government issued a memorandum to its ministries asking them to reduce expenditure by 13 per cent from 1985 to 1987. Many of these ministries announced to their employees the end of overtime, private telephone lines for high-ranking officials, and business trips abroad. Other countries were forced to devalue their currencies against the US dollar since most foreign revenue is received in dollars.

A Kuwaiti businessman was quoted as saying, 'We are like a child that has been born into a nice prosperous family and is trained to do nothing but spend. At the age of 30 it is difficult to change your habits' (A special survey by The Economist, 1986). Although the local press tried to comfort the people by reporting that the recession would not last long and that oil prices would rise again, events in the last



few years have shown that the situation may not change for years to come, if not for ever.

Al-Naqeeb argued that the problem with the Gulf was not only economic but also sociological and cultural, and has been seen only recently with the economic recession. He noted that the political system was dominated by the ruling families, but he argued that the growing number of educated citizens would exacerbate the problem of the political, economic, and social changes that are essential. Educated Gulf nationals who are not members of prominent families have less chance now of finding suitable jobs. In the future this might widen the gap between the rulers and the ruled.

He also argued that the Gulf regimes had been aware of the oncoming crisis and that they had exploited religion to annihilate change. During recent years fundamentalist Islamic movements have been mobilising public opinion around them.

## **2.5 TIMES OF CRISIS: The Establishment of the GCC and the Gulf War.**

In 1981 the Gulf Co-operation Council was established for the declared purpose of economic and social co-ordination. Security, however, was its real objective. The leaders decided to set up the headquarters in Riyadh and appointed a Kuwaiti ex-diplomat as the secretary-general. Abdullah Bishara was actually proposed and supported by the Saudis rather than the Kuwaitis since he had the ability to advocate the Saudi policies.

The first reaction by world leaders to the foundation of the GCC came from the United States. The American administration praised the Council and commented that part of the US interest in the region was to see the Gulf states united in one federation to act as a defence against foreign aggression (Al-Nifisi, 1982: 14). The British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, also welcomed the step by the Gulf leaders.

A few neighbouring countries such as Yemen and Iraq viewed the Council with scepticism. Newspapers in both countries raised the question of why the Council did not include all the Arab states in the Gulf. Iraq, which was excluded, argued that the new organisation would undermine the Arab League. In interviews with Gulf newspapers Iraqi officials remarked that their country had always supported unity among Arab countries so long as it did not introduce foreign dominance into the region (ibid.: 16).

The first step taken by the GCC leaders was the adoption of the 'Fahd Plan,' dealing with the problem of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Without going into the details of the plan, it marked the first time the Gulf leaders had recognised Israel as a state. Almost a year later the GCC General Secretary was to announce in an interview with the Sharjah-based *Al-Khaleej* newspaper that people in the Gulf should see themselves from now on not as Arabs but as 'Khaleejeen' meaning people from the Gulf, and that people from the Gulf were much better than their brothers and sisters in the Arab world. He also declared that the problem of Palestine was an issue for the Palestinians alone, etc. Abdullah Busharah denied that the whole interview had taken place after it was published and created an embarrassment for the Gulf leaders.

Initially the GCC was faced with obstacles such as the duplication of projects by every one of its members; every emir wanted to have an international airport, a dry dock, etc. in his country. Other problems surfaced gradually such as the border disputes between different members of the GCC. Saudi Arabia tried to dominate the Council and submitted different security proposals at different times. Kuwait and Oman were the only ones to disagree with the Saudis. When the Saudis proposed a security agreement, the Kuwaitis were the only ones who kept refusing to sign it. This, did not mean, of course, that the Kuwaitis did not have separate secret security agreements with their neighbours. For example in the mid-1970s, the Kuwaiti security

police channelled information about the activities of Bahraini students at the University of Kuwait. Later, under orders from the Bahraini Government, the security police embarked on a wide search for different members of the National Union of Bahraini Students and deported many of them.

Each of the GCC states had a dispute with its neighbours over its British - drawn borders. For example, the Saudis swallowed the Buraimi Oasis which angered both the emir of Abu Dhabi and the Sultan of Oman. Most of these disputes are over regions that are rich in oil reserves. Yet the biggest dispute that was likely to develop into an all-out war if Saudi Arabia had not interfered was the controversy between Bahrain and Qatar over the Hawar islands.

On 26 April 1986 Qatar sent in its troops to arrest a group of foreign workers who were building a coastguard post on a 10 sq.km. reef island known as Fisht al - dibal. Qatar perceived this action by the Bahraini Government as a violation of the agreement to freeze their dispute over the Hawar islands and the surrounding reefs. Later, both countries embarked on a war of words through the local papers (even though the newspapers were privately owned they were indirectly controlled by the governments). Saudi Arabia and other members of the GCC intervened to contain the situation. Although nothing has happened since that date, the Qatari Government has been raising the issue at every GCC conference.

The dispute between Bahrain and Qatar dates to the 1930s when the British Political Resident asked the two countries to submit their case. Both countries wrote lengthy letters but the Bahrain document was much more sophisticated because of the help of the British adviser to the emir, Sir Charles Belgrave. In 1939 the Political Resident gave the island of Hawar (only two miles from Qatar) to Bahrain (Zahlan, 1989: 140).

Saudi Arabia's border dispute with Kuwait would later be solved by the British through the establishment of the neutral zone in 1965. Before drawing the neutral zone region, the British had awarded chunks of Kuwaiti land to the Saudis, which had angered the Kuwaitis.

During September 1992 relations between Saudi Arabia and Qatar deteriorated owing to a border dispute. Qatar decided to pull its troops out of the GCC 'Peninsula Shield' forces. Immediately, though, efforts were made to control the rift between the two neighbouring states.

More than ten years after the establishment of the GCC, it is clear that most of the promises of change and unity in the social and economic fields have not yet been fulfilled. On the contrary, the only achievement of the Council has been the setting up of the Gulf defence force known as 'Peninsula Shield' (the Americans and their Western allies were later to call their forces in their war against Iraq 'Desert Shield'). Majid Al-Majid concluded that the Council had proved to be a security pact to maintain the power of the ruling families and to present a base for American forces to be used in the case of conflict in the region, etc. (Al-Majid, 1986: 35).

While the GCC governments were still trying to cope with the effects of the oil-price crash of 1985 and the deficit in their budgets, the Iraqi army invaded Kuwait on the morning of 2 August 1990. The first reaction by the Al-Sabah family was to pack their bags and leave only hours after the invasion and before Iraqi tanks reached the capital and the emir's palace. The Kuwaiti army put up no kind of resistance to the Iraqi soldiers; in fact many high-ranking officers fled the country the same day.

While a Kuwaiti newscaster was calling on all Arabs and world leaders to come to their help, the Gulf leaders did not even announce the news on their local radio and television stations. A few countries denounced the invasion and called on the Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to pull his troops out of Kuwait. A few days later

the Gulf emirs, kings and sultans decided to break the news to their citizens and to invite the US Army into Saudi Arabia. Only six days after the invasion American soldiers were arriving in the desert kingdom and their warships were heading towards Gulf waters. Later the British were to join them and a coalition of more than thirty countries was formed under the leadership of the United States.

Many Arab and Third World countries were to be bribed or promised some benefits on condition that they joined the allied forces. A Few did, but the Arab world was divided over the invitation of foreigners to solve an Arab issue. The American President wasted no time in setting a deadline for the Iraqis to pull out of Kuwait under threat of an allied attack on their country if they failed to do so. A number of peaceful initiatives were made by world leaders such as the French and the Soviet Presidents, but they were not given the time to produce a peaceful settlement to the conflict.

By mid-January 1991 the allies began bombing Iraqi cities and towns. The air war was to continue for a while, before the Americans decided to start the land battle. Thousands of Iraqis -civilians and soldiers- were killed or injured, the infrastructures of Iraq and Kuwait were destroyed and civil war erupted in parts of Iraq.

Gulf nationals lost the little freedom they used to enjoy before this crisis erupted. There was a curb on freedom of expression and thus the media in the Gulf itself were forced to take a back seat. Gulf journalists were not allowed access to the battle-field and had to depend solely on news mostly filtered through Western media outlets.

Saddam Hussein's action completely disrupted the Western plan for the region. For the first time in many years the house of Saud's leadership was challenged. For the first time also the Gulf countries and their leaderships were perceived as paper tigers and their dynasties as mere castles of sand. The complete

dependence of the industrialised nations on cheap oil from the Gulf -rather than on oil as a source of energy- was disrupted. Arab nationalist feelings -which had been buried by the petro-dollars- were revived. Many Arab capitals were stormed by thousands of demonstrators in support of the Iraqis.

The seven months period of the Iraqi invasion of neighbouring Kuwait revealed the true nature of this state. The members of the ruling family and later thousands of Kuwaitis left their country instead of staying on and fighting for it. As one Arab consular affairs officer told *The (London) Independent*,

*"...But only a few Kuwaitis were prepared to die for their country. Of course they faced overwhelming odds but they could have done more. They could have fought much more in the streets. The air force fired a few shots then fled with its planes to Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. If the army could have held out in the city for even three or four days there would have been enormous pressure ...etc" (The Independent, 7 August 1990).*

A major in the Kuwaiti airforce reported that on 2 August he waited for orders to come from his superiors, and when that order failed to materialise he decided to leave the country with his wife and children ( *The Observer*, 12 August, 1990). Many Kuwaitis who decided to stay (because they could not afford to leave) used to avoid the Iraqi soldiers by sending their foreign maids to buy the food they needed.

Large numbers of foreign workers -Arabs and others- also fled the country during the occupation. Of the 2 million inhabitants of Kuwait, 1.5 million were non - Kuwaitis mostly Palestinians, Jordanians, Lebanese and Asians. *The Independent* listed the number of foreigners in both Kuwait and Iraq after the invasion as follows: Palestinians, 300,000, Indians 167,000, Sri Lankans 90,900, Bangladeshis 59,800, Iranians 40,000, Filipinos 43,000 and Moroccans 6,000.

Most of the foreigners who escaped from Kuwait and Iraq went to Jordan. By the end of August 1990 there were around 100,000 refugees in Jordan, most of them Asians and Egyptians who had been working in the construction and service sectors or as domestic servants. It was these Asian and Arab countries that felt the pinch of the crisis more than the others, since most of them depended heavily on remittances from the Gulf.

Arabs who were working in the Gulf states were faced with interrogation and deportation because their countries were supporting the Iraqi regime. The Saudi police, for example, launched an arrest and deportation campaign against Yemeni citizens (the largest community in the Kingdom). Amnesty International reported that hundreds of Yemenis were detained and tortured before they were dumped on the borders.

*“One Yemeni said that he was arrested while arguing over a cab fare and the taxi driver told the police that he had criticised the Saudi government. He was arrested and taken to a detention centre where he was beaten and almost suffocated before being dumped on the Yemeni border” (The Guardian, 2nd of November, 1990).*

Saudi Arabia denied this report by Amnesty International and said that it was ‘totally fabricated and based on planted information’ (The Guardian, 2nd of November, 1990). Saudi officials told the world media that the Yemenis were leaving the country ‘voluntarily.’ This was not the first time that the Saudi authorities had denied reports of human rights violations; in fact the Saudi News Agency (the government’s mouthpiece) is well known among journalists as the News Agency of Denial. And as usual the Saudis turned to their fatalism attitude and dependence on Allah (God) to save them, that is, of course, after they had invited in the Americans.

During the actual fighting and the scares of chemical attacks, the local press started publishing advice to citizens in case of such attacks by chemical warhead missiles.

Robert Fisk of *The Independent* responded to this attitude by reporting,

*“Those who remember how King Fahd this year laid the responsibility for the death of more than 1,400 Muslim pilgrims in Mecca upon ‘God’s will’ will find the initial advice faintly familiar. ‘If you are outside your home and in the open, you cannot do anything except to accept your ‘destiny’, the article announced. ‘The chances are little for survival in the absence of an enclosed protective area.’ ‘Look out your windows,’ the paper exhorts its worried readers, for birds dropping from the trees, cats, dogs and people dropping and choking, cars crashing and general panic which are all signs of a gas attack. When you see such things happen, barricade doors and windows and let nobody in or out of the house” (The Independent, 15 August, 1990).*

The Crown Prince and some other members of the Al-Sabah family returned to the country a week after the Iraqi army was forced out. Nevertheless, life in Kuwait did not return to normal. Members of the ruling family organised gangs to arrest, torture and kill Palestinians and other Arabs who were accused of collaboration with the Iraqi army. Later the Kuwaiti Government set up special courts to deal with such crimes and many Arabs and Kuwaiti who are without nationality known as ‘bedoon’ were sentenced to life imprisonment or execution. These trials were criticised by many human right organisations as conducted without proper representation for the accused.

The war left many unsolved issues, principally the issue of democracy which the Americans and their allies were arguing as their reasons for fighting the Iraqis. The Iraqi Bath'ist regime survived and when the fighting stopped it turned against its own people. Kuwait returned to the same situation as that prior to the invasion. The



Al-Sabah are back in power and no democratic reforms are on the agenda. The Americans have established themselves in the region with no indications of their leaving in the near future. The other Gulf regimes have also returned to their previous treatment of their citizens. Practices of interrogation, torture and imprisonment without trial have been restored.

The future of the Gulf, or for these six members of the GCC, appears to be very gloomy. Although the superficial picture gives an impression of prosperity and peace, the truth of the matter is that this is all artificial. This prosperity does not reflect any kind of development of the economy or of society in general. Although many studies written about the Gulf have tackled issues such as, the small number of nationals, the influx of foreign workers, the segregation between men and women, the state's different treatment of Sunnis and the Shi'ites, an in-depth study of these societies could present a more controversial picture.

This chapter has tried to present a different perspective on the Gulf, though by no means presenting a new way of understanding these enigmatic societies. They represent a combination of many contradictory elements. Though they have free markets, they have kept their tribal alliances and practices. While many Gulf scholars consider the foreign workers as intruders, they actually could represent the working class. Not all foreigners, though, have taken blue-collar jobs; a few have made it to the top and become big businessmen which has allowed them to become citizens of their adoptive countries.

Wad'ah Shararah described Saudi society by noting that the Kingdom combines the strict Wahabi sect with American consumerism, tribal relations with those of classic capitalism, '...the ruling tribe with the state, the narrow enclosure on oneself with the international role; the execution by the sword with sensitive radars, the veiled women with thousands of imported laborers' (Shararah, 1981: 11).

Throughout the last twenty years or so the Gulf countries have been trying to play the role of leadership among the other Arab states, while at the same time trying to keep other Arabs away from their citizens. They have accepted the boundaries and borders which were drawn by the ex-British colonisers. The Gulf leaders were of the strong belief that they could develop their countries without the help of other Arabs. They invested most of their petro-dollars in foreign capitals and did not help in the development of other poor Arab countries.

These aspects combined -the small number of the indigenous population, the great dependence on oil as the fundamental source of income, the lack of one development plan for the whole region, the large expenditure sums which exceed income, the isolation of women from participating in any development plans, the use of terror against the local population, the dependence on foreign forces for protection, the lack of democracy - these are all signs of a gloomy future.

While many studies have portrayed Gulf women as being oppressed by the male population, they do not all represent a single case and a distinction should be made between women from the upper classes and those from the lower ones. Wealthy Gulf women can afford to practise some of their rights. They are also not as oppressed as their maids, for example, but they do not share the same rights as the men. Kuwaiti women have not been allowed to vote during the various parliamentary experiences. Saudi women, even those from the royal family, are not allowed to drive cars, though they can travel and study abroad, etc.

Gulf women just like foreign laborers and journalists will be used in the next three chapters as examples of the absence of a civil society in the region. Although foreign workers in the Gulf constitute a large percentage of the population, they are almost invisible. They only exist as numbers in the official books. Gulf officials try to ignore the fact that many of these laborers have been living in the region for years.

The contradiction is mostly noticeable when it comes to the Gulf media. On the commercial level, local television stations and newspapers cater for these foreign laborers. Government-owned television networks broadcast Indian and Pakistani films and soap operas. Likewise, a number of local newspapers have a whole section in Urdu the language that is spoken by the majority of workers coming from the Indian sub-continent. On the other hand, there are un-written (verbal) orders for local journalists to avoid raising the issue of foreign laborers in any of its forms as discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER III

### FOREIGN LABOUR: THE INVISIBLE MAJORITY IN A GULF WITHOUT IDENTITY

#### 3.1 Introduction:

A Kuwaiti writer produced a play in the mid-1970s that was a hit not only in the emirate but throughout the Arabian Gulf region. The play, 'One, Two Three Boom,' was a black comedy that projected a family suddenly faced with three relatives, who had died before the oil-boom era, and who returned from the grave and were shocked to see the changes not only in the structure of their country, but also in society itself.

The changes that have occurred in the Gulf in the last twenty years or so might well shock even those with the wildest imaginations. Enormous oil revenues has meant that these low-populated newly created states have had to start up their development plans. Huge cities have been created in the middle of the desert. International airports, industrial cities, highways, and commercial shopping centres have been built. To the people of the Gulf it was like a fairy tale come true. All of a sudden their camels were exchanged for flashy Mercedes, Rolls Royces, etc., their small mud houses for huge villas with swimming pools, and their tiny shops for large department stores. Most of the residents of the Gulf countries had never even dreamt of such changes.

The first problem that faced both the governments of these oil-rich states and the people themselves was the lack of the necessary work force since almost all of them had very small population. Unlike the case of Immigrant workers in Europe or the United States; the Gulf emirates invited huge numbers of expatriates be them from capital-poor Arab countries (i.e. Egypt, the Sudan, Yemen) or from the Asian subcontinent. The expertise needed was also recruited from Europe and the United States. From the late 1960s to the early 1970s -with the huge jump in oil prices - the foreign insurge began.

*“Immigrant labour usually came in wave elsewhere as permanent immigration, and displaced labour already there or pushed it into other categories, by virtue of accepting lower wages. In the Gulf, labour is directly hired from the world market as needed for specific purposes and sent out again, or replaced by others from the same source” (Hill, 1983: 131).*

With the increased amounts of oil revenues, the ruling Gulf tribes could afford to distribute a small part of them among the indigenous population. The Gulf governments offered free education, health and social insurance. People did not have to pay taxes; in fact, in some parts of the Gulf -Qatar is a striking example - only foreigners had to pay their telephone, electricity and water bills. In those countries - such as Bahrain - where these services were not free, members of the ruling families were still exempted.

Individual nationals were offered jobs not according to their qualifications but as their right as citizens of the country. They were able to rise in the employment scale without much effort. Personal relations played a big part and affiliation to a tribe or an influential family made an enormous difference in obtaining a job.

*"..Indeed, a logical extension to the role of emirs and sheikhs was that of formal employer so capital-rich governments provided employment, often sinecures, in ministries. Wages were often paid as of right rather than in return for particular services. This type of employment with growing oil wealth meant that transformation from traditional to modern economy occurred on a superficial level, remarkably quickly" (Birks and Sinclair, 1980: 23).*

In one way or another this situation increased the problem of the shortage of labour. As already noted in chapter 2, the indigenous population lost its appetite for hard work. The Gulf regimes were ready to offer jobs in the bureaucracy to a large number of their citizens as one way of redistributing the oil revenues.

*"Under this arrangement, paid salaries can be thought of as a 'rent' to the nationality certificate" (Ferjani, 1984: 162).*

Most of the workforce needed to build the infrastructure and industrial cities of the Gulf states were imported to the extent that the population of the six members of the Gulf Co-operation Council jumped in a short period of time see (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Estimate of population during the period 1962-1981.

Country	Year	population
U.A.E	1967	180,184
	1980	1,043,000
Bahrain	1965	182,203
	1981	350,798
Saudi Arabia	1962	3,300,000
	1980	9,454,000
Oman	1969	750,000
	1980	900,000
Qatar	1970	130,000
	1981	265,000
Kuwait	1970	733,196
	1980	1,357,952

Source: Al-Naqeeb, 1990.

Although most of the imported labour in the early days came from the capital - poor Arab countries, they were soon outnumbered by workers from the Indian subcontinent and then the Far East. Most of the Gulf states preferred to exchange Asians for Arabs for a number of reasons, partly economic but mainly political. Asian labour was cheaper than that of many Arabs and was prepared to accept poorer conditions, but Asians were also favoured because of their lack of interaction with and influence on the indigenous Gulf population.

Workers from the Arab countries were always seen by the ruling Gulf elite as a source of trouble- one element in spreading Arab nationalism in the region. Arab

workers have many common features that facilitate their integration into the Gulf societies; they share the same language, culture, history and background. The Gulf sheikhs were not the only ones who saw the large number of Arab workers as a troublesome element; this feeling was also shared by the Western capitalist powers. Sir Charles Belgrave, the British adviser to the sheikh of Bahrain, noted in his personal memoirs that the Egyptian teachers were spreading the 'dangerous' gospel of Nasserism among their Bahraini pupils (Belgrave, 1960: 145). He also wrote that it was Bahraini students who introduced strikes into the island. It was not therefore surprising that the then head of the educational sector, Ahmed Al-'Umran, changed government policy from providing scholarships to the University of Cairo to the American University in Beirut (Al-Rumihi, 1984: 151). Even though the majority of Arabs were repatriated from the early 1970s onwards, a few were still needed to carry out jobs that required a mastery of the Arabic language, such as those in the teaching and media sectors.

Many have argued that the influx of foreign workers into the Gulf was part of the new international division of labour. It started at a time when the markets of the industrialised countries had reached saturation point and when Third World countries with few resources were reaching the point of explosion. The numbers of unemployed in most of the capital-poor Third World countries were increasing daily and some kind of a solution was needed. Others have argued that the importation of a large amount of labour was of help to both sides. It helped the Gulf states in their development plans by providing the workforce needed, while at the same time solving the problem of lack of capital in the countries of origin.

It was a case of substituting human beings for goods. Egypt's Prime Minister in the mid-1970s noted that his country's goals in exporting labour ought to be as clear as its goals in exporting cotton and rice. He commented by saying 'Talk about



regulating emigration and not exporting human beings should be stopped' (Ferjani, 1983: 52). Like many other Third World countries, Egypt, which was desperate for income, used its only resource that was available at the time, and like the others had to pay for it. Most of these capital-poor countries depended heavily on remittances from their workers in the Gulf region and used these in place of real development plans. As Karl Marx wrote:

*"One of the prerequisites of wage labour and one of the historic conditions for capital is free labor and the exchange of free labour against money, in order to reproduce money and convert it into values in order to be consumed by money, not as value for enjoyment, but as the use value for money" (Marx, 1964: 67).*

As the Arab Gulf countries became huge markets for goods and human beings where everything could be bought and sold, the immigrant labourers were influenced by the consumption habits and soon themselves became a market force. Their needs and aspirations changed from those they had had at home. The Gulf region, with the largest oil reserves in the world, became a safe zone for the industrialised nations that depended on oil as a source of energy. With the importation of a large number of Asian workers, the Arab identity of the Gulf started to fade, and nationalist feelings and aspirations withered. The region was transformed into a vast supermarket for Western goods and ideologies.

Ferjani noted that the large importation of labour from non-Arab Third World nations had created a peculiar situation of extreme dependence on expatriate, largely non-Arab labour, an unhealthy relation between the expatriates and the indigenous population and lack of plans for the development of national human resources. He wrote, '...a financially rich country with a weak human resource base is in fact, poor no matter how high its per capita GNP' (Ferjani, 1984: 156). He argued that this

situation could hinder the development of these countries.

Most of the studies of the phenomenon of the Gulf's total dependence on foreign labour have tied it to the economic situation in the Western industrialised nations and how it could help world capitalism. Scholars from the region itself, however, viewed the importation of foreign labourers - especially non-Arabs - as a new type of colonisation. They wrote that most of these foreign workers could be used, in the event of political upheaval, as a reserve army or a fifth column, a situation that created more hatred towards them on the part of the indigenous population. The idea was supported by a number of political underground movements in the region especially after Korean construction companies started to build their labour camps isolated from the big cities.

Recent events in the region, however, have proved that foreign workers could be the real losers in such an eventuality. What happened in Kuwait after the Iraqi invasion of the 2 August 1990 to the large number of expatriates who found themselves in the midst of such a disaster with no help whatsoever proved the argument wrong. (This will be discussed in a different section of this thesis) This is not to say, however, that these events did not reveal the implications of the problem for the first time and revealed how vulnerable these countries are. This specific incident demonstrated that the huge number of non-Arab workers had changed the identity of the region and isolated it from its neighbours.

*"..Labour is a tool used by capital to generate profit and at the same time to underdevelop or distort the subjective socio-political and cultural realities of the societies with which it operates" (Glavanis, 1991: 23).*

During this period, it was evident that the Arab Gulf countries were becoming more dependent on the outside world, whether West or East. Food, consumer and capital goods, soft technology, armaments and labour were all imported. In their eagerness for rapid development, these oil-rich states introduced the most advanced technologies that were not available to their capital-poor Arab neighbours. This in itself meant an increased dependence on non-Arab expertise. The nationals meanwhile dodged into new easy jobs and occupations. A new system was introduced known as the 'Kafil system,' which in simple terms meant nationals working as middlemen for the importation of foreign labourers (Al-Najjar, 1985: 108).

The implications of this migration from capital-poor to capital-rich countries had their drastic effects on both sides. Problems started to emerge and dependence on the industrialised world increased both in the Gulf and in the labour-exporting Third World countries. Peasants in Upper Egypt, Sudan, Yemen, India and elsewhere abandoned their lands for the pot of gold that was waiting for them at the end of the rainbow in the warm Gulf waters. But the gold did not materialise for many of them and the land was lost for ever. They returned home with videos, refrigerators and color television sets and started up small businesses, since now they were no longer peasants, they were urban dwellers. An Arab writer noted that when he visited villages in Yemen, he found that all kinds of consumer goods were available for sale from 'Seven-Up bottles to fancy French neckties' (Houidi, 1979: 113).

In many Arab countries shortages of labour in specific jobs and occupations created another problem. There is evidence of such cases in Egypt, Jordan and even Yemen which is the poorest of them all. In some parts of Yemen children were used to carry out the jobs of the male adults who had left for the Gulf. Yemeni children between the ages of 11 and 15 were hired to perform intensive-labour jobs such as road works, etc. (Ferjani, 1983: 72-3).

The Gulf societies have never accepted foreign labourers even the Arabs were rejected by the nationals because they compete with them. Arabs working in the Gulf do not identify with their indigenous colleagues, which widens the gap between the two groups. There have been many such incidents, such as, for instance, the case of a group of nationals at the University of Kuwait who came into some kind of conflict with the University administration. Their Arab colleagues failed to take a stand and accusations were made by members of both groups (Sa'd Al-Din and 'Abd al-Fadil, 1983: 160).

Arab workers themselves compete with each other and jealousy divides them. As a group of scholars noted, in societies such as the Gulf immigrant labourers were not able to find welcoming hands. These tribal societies, they said, could not treat individuals according to their abilities but only to their family ties (Zahlan, 1982: 119). It could be argued that humane management is impossible in such an inhumane process, where foreign workers are kept in camps isolated from the nationals. Most of them are males who are not allowed to bring in their families; In a few countries those who earn higher salaries are the only expatriates who are eligible for such a right.

### **3.2 THE INVISIBLE MAJORITY**

While their cities, airports and ports were crowded with foreign labourers, the Gulf regimes ignored the problem altogether except for a few sponsored conferences on the effect of expatriates especially nannies, on indigenous societies. To officials these expatriates exist only as a problem over which they have no control. Most of the time they try to hide them from the eyes of visitors to the region. Most official figures on the number of workers entering the GCC countries are not all that accurate.

The Gulf media clearly reflected this attitude. Most of the government - controlled television stations avoided filming foreign workers; shots were removed from different programmes if they carried the faces of expatriate workers, especially

Asians. In the eyes of the television networks, these thousands of workers who constitute the largest proportion of the population, simply do not exist.

The local press, however, tackles the matter in a very low key. Even though most of the Gulf newspapers are privately owned, they are all under the Ministry of Information's indirect control. Self-censorship is practised not only among the local press and media, but also by the foreign press that is represented in the region.

Gulf newspapers are considered the only avenue through which nationals and expatriates can air issues and problems. With the lack of any kind of popular political representation, many people turn to the correspondence pages of the newspapers to voice their opinions, provided they are acceptable to the state. Unlike the case of letters to the editor in the Western industrialised nations, the Gulf leaders consider them the barometers of the local society. It has been reported that the Bahraini Prime Minister, Sheikh Khalifah al-Khalifah, starts his working day by reading the correspondence pages in the local press.

The English-language newspapers became the only means through which foreign workers could voice their problems and complaints. Ill-treated nannies, servants and construction workers write to these papers asking for help. They also write to know if there are any laws that can safeguard their rights. It is significant to note here that most reporters of these newspapers are from the Indian subcontinent and are themselves faced with the same problems.

A few Arab journalists have been interested in the problems of foreign workers. Their writings, however, have concentrated on the idea that expatriates are dangerous to the local society and most of the time they end up blaming them for all its difficulties. Even those who try to understand the problem of the large proportion of imported labour and its influence on the development of the region; participate in what they preach against. Most of them employ servants and nannies to take care of

their children and do the domestic work.

Over a period of six months in 1988-9 the present writer concentrated on monitoring two principal newspapers from each of four Arab Gulf countries selected, namely Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait. From each country an Arabic - language and an English-language daily newspaper was decided on. From Saudi Arabia, two sister newspapers that were published internationally were selected, namely *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* and *Arab News*. Bahrain at the time of the research had only one English and one Arabic daily *Akhbar Al-Khaleej* and *The Gulf Daily News*. From Qatar, *Arrayah* and *Daily Gulf Times* were selected. The two newspapers decided upon from Kuwait are published by the same publishing house: they are *Al-Seyassah* and *Arab Times*.

Although most of the analysis will concentrate on these six months, at some points there may be a few stories from other periods of time that were selected for their importance to the argument as a whole. It is worth noting that most of the Arabic-speaking staff of the Gulf newspapers are Arabs from the capital-poor countries. Bahrain is an exception, however, since the largest percentage of its journalists are nationals with only a few Arab expatriates. This situation creates a kind of uniqueness in the Bahraini press and media in general. Bahraini journalists are not faced with deportation like their Arab colleagues and can tackle issues that others would shy away from. In saying this, one should note that local journalists are still under threat; they could lose their press card or even be imprisoned.

Many of the news items related to foreign workers are given little space and are usually hidden in the inside pages. Such was the case of one news story published by the Bahraini Arabic-language newspaper *Akhbar Al-Khaleej*. It reported the sacking of a large number of Indian workers by a Bahraini company which was facing financial difficulties. The news item was published in a small box at the bottom of

page 4. *Akhbar Al-khaleej* usually publishes twelve pages only.

The *Gulf Daily News* carried a letter from an expatriate worker who had been in the country for six years and had not received his holiday pay for that period of time. In his letter he noted that the company he used to work for had been sold to a new group and said that he was afraid of complaining to the authorities because he might be sent back home. Many of the letters raise the same concern on the part of immigrant labourers of being deported, which is a common practice in the Arab Gulf countries. The replacement of workers is a daily occurrence since there are always people waiting for recruitment in most of the capital-poor Third World countries.

During the period of monitoring it was noticeable that daily advertisements about run-away workers were common. These advertisements usually carry a photograph of the laborer, his passport number and the date of his disappearance. Sponsors and employers urge the public - through these advertisements - to report these individuals to the police and not to employ them.

The Arabic-language newspapers usually carry letters from readers complaining about immigrant labourers. On 16 October 1988, a woman wrote to the Bahraini newspaper urging young Bahraini men to take up blue-collar jobs. She commented that most Bahraini men reject such hard work and that was why a large number of Indians and other Asians had been recruited to take such jobs.

Newspapers tend to emphasise crimes and disrespect to the indigenous culture on the part of foreign labourers. *Akhbar Al-Khaleej*, for example, on 17 October 1988 published such a story on its front page. It was a news item about 14 Indians charged with gambling, which is forbidden by Islamic law. The newspaper noted that it was not the first time that such an act had been committed by foreign workers. The fact that such an unimportant news item was published on the front page is an indication of the newspaper's policy of focusing on the misbehaviour of immigrant workers.

None of the journalists at the newspaper had ever raised the question of whether these expatriate labourers knew anything about the Gulf societies and their culture since they were so isolated from the indigenous population. Nor does anyone wonder why it is that when one of the Indian or Pakistani workers commits suicide, his story does not make the front page, but when he fails to understand the local culture it does.

A few days later the same newspaper published a feature about the social security system in the island. In it the reporter stated that foreign workers were the cause of the increase in the number of unemployed among Bahrainis. The same issue carried a letter from a reader who urged the deportation of all foreign labourers because there were shortages of jobs among nationals. He wrote, 'foreign workers should leave the country immediately and go back home since the economy is bad now and there are not enough jobs for everybody.'

Another long letter from an angry reader was published by *Akhbar Al-Khaleej* on 24 October 1988 dealing with maids who had run away from their employes while accompanying them on a visit to London. The reader complained that no one had been helping all these Bahraini families who were faced with such a 'tragedy,' and that something should be done to protect the employers of foreign maids.

While this reader called for the protection of nationals against their maids, another blamed the Asian workers for the lack of morals among Bahrainis. The same accusations can be seen from time to time in almost all the Gulf Arabic-language newspapers. Both journalists and readers write constantly about the bad influence of foreign workers on the indigenous population.

Reading the daily newspapers in the Gulf, one could not help noticing that most of the nationals' anger was directed against specific section of the immigrant labourers. Although the Gulf countries employ individuals from almost all parts of the world, the Indians are the worst treated, mostly because they come in large numbers



and are ready to take any kind of job, no matter how low the salary. But the main reason could be that most of those who come from the Indian subcontinent usually occupy manual jobs which are downgraded by the natives.

*Arab Times* in its issue of 27-28 October 1988 published a letter from a reader, praising the management of one of the local banks for banning its employees from using any language other than English or Arabic. The reader noted that this was a big blow for the Indians working at the bank who were accustomed to speaking their own languages. He also called upon all other banks and companies to follow suit.

On the same day *Akhbar Al-Khaleej* published a long article about the hotel sector in Bahrain, reporting that 87 per cent of the employees at the local hotels were foreigners and that Bahrainis constituted only 13 per cent of the total number. Although this article raised the problem of the increased dependence on foreigners in such a vital sector; it did not raise the question of the reason behind it and simply blamed the expatriate workers for snatching jobs from the nationals. The front page of the same newspaper a few days later also carried a news item about an Indian driver who stole 65,000 Bahraini Dinars from his employe's account.

The Saudi newspaper *Arab News* of the same date carried a discussion about foreign maids and nannies. The journalist and the people interviewed agreed that Saudi families preferred maids from Sri Lanka and Indonesia rather than from Thailand and the Philippines. They said that the Filipinos were not liked because they were 'highly educated, arrogant, expensive and rebellious.' They also stated that servants should always be Moslems because they had a great deal of influence on the children of Saudi families.

The last few years have seen the strengthening of the Moslem fundamentalist movement and this has had an effect on the people of the Gulf region. It influenced the increased number of maids being imported from countries such as Indonesia with

predominantly Moslem populations. Even those who are not Moslems have been forced by their employers to wear the 'Hijab' or head covering.

A daily column in the Bahraini newspaper *Akhbar Al-khaleej* which concentrates on local issues condemned a Pakistani worker who sexually assaulted a young woman. The journalist, in his column 'ala al tariq' (on the road), claimed that this was not an isolated incident and that immigrant single males were a threat to the local society. He noted that, although foreign labourers were cheap, they created great problems for the Gulf societies in general, and he called on the Ministry of Labour to put an end to such immigration.

In 1988 the Philippines Government banned Filipinas from going to work as nannies and maids in a number of Arab Gulf countries after incidents of ill-treatment by the nationals. Saudi Arabia was one of the states faced with such a ban. *Arab News* 31 October published a news item announcing the lifting of the ban by the Philippines Government. It stated that the Saudis had been putting pressure on the Philippines Government to lift the ban, by refusing visas for Filipino nationals and by offering to build a communication tower in the southern part of the Philippines, if the ban was lifted. The same issue of the newspaper carried a feature about the difficulties Saudi families went through in finding a suitable maid !!

*Arab Times* in Kuwait reported a denial by a Kuwaiti official of the rumour that his government planned to sack all its expatriate workers and replace them with Kuwaiti nationals. The denial was published on the front page of the newspaper apparently to calm the large number of foreign workers who were disturbed by the rumour. Expatriates constitute the largest percentage of the workforce in the emirate, so it was not surprising to find the Kuwaiti official announcing such a denial; otherwise the life of his country would have come practically to a standstill.

By 1988 the economies of most of the Gulf states were feeling the effects of the 1985 drop in oil prices. Most of the new development plans were abandoned for lack of finance. The number of unemployed began to rise and the governments in these oil-rich countries calmed their nationals by promising to reduce the number of foreign workers in their countries.

The Qatari newspaper *Daily Gulf Times* of 1 November 1988 reported that the Saudi Government was encouraging the private sector to replace foreign workers with nationals, while the Bahrain-based *Gulf Daily News* concentrated on the Philippines government's lifting of the ban on Filipina maids. Such contradictory reports are common in the Gulf media. A newspaper may report a government plan to reduce the number of immigrant workers on its front page, and inside the paper there could be a report about more importation of labour from the Asian subcontinent.

*Arab News* of 2 October 1988 published a story telling of the reaction of Filipino nationals to the lifting of the ban on Filipina maids. One of the people interviewed was the head of the biggest recruiting agency in the whole of South East Asia. He obviously praised his government's decision and said that his offices were ready to return to regular business because the people of the Philippines did not approve of the ban.

*Akhbar Al-Khaleej's* front page on the same day carried the news of a Pakistani construction worker who fell to his death on the site where he was working. The newspaper did not comment on the matter but preferred to treat it as a normal news item, despite the fact that many expatriate workers especially in the construction sector face their death every day in these countries because of lack of safety precautions on site. There are not enough accurate figures about such incidents, but news items such as this raise the question. It is important to note that not all such incidents are reported in the daily newspapers.

A letter by a reader complaining about the large number of foreign labourers who disappeared from their jobs was also published on the same day. The reader suggested that some kind of a law should be passed to punish these workers and that their deportation was not enough. The Kuwaiti newspaper *Arab Times* noted on its front page the Saudi Government's decision to replace expatriates with nationals.

Two days later *Arab News* published a letter from an Indian labourer working in the Kingdom in which he complained about the treatment of Indian workers in the Gulf by the Indian authorities. He stressed the point that it was they -the Indian workers in the Gulf- who helped their country's economy by the amount of money they sent home every month. He suggested that they ought to get better treatment back home in return for these remittances. It is well known that Indian workers in the Gulf face very harsh treatment at their country's airports when they go on home visits.

Now and then letters are published by Gulf nationals in which they complain about the way foreign workers -especially Asians - are treated by the locals. One of these was a letter in the Bahraini Arabic-language newspaper in which the reader condemned Bahraini families who forced their maids to wash their cars every day in the streets. It is a common sight in the streets of the Gulf in the early hours of the day to see the Filipina or Indian maid cleaning her employer's car. Most of the families in the Gulf own more than one car, especially in those countries where women are allowed to drive, as is the case in Bahrain and Kuwait, for example.

*The Gulf Daily News* 9 November reported the disappearance of a Filipina waitress after she had been dismissed from her job. Her employer, who was quoted by the newspaper as saying that he had reserved a seat for her on the first plane leaving the island for the Philippines. The Filipina waitress had had a disagreement with her sponsor, who decided to sack her and send her home. Although a handful of foreign workers disappear from their jobs every day, not all of them get the publicity that this

case had. A Few days later the same newspaper reported that the whereabouts of the waitress was still unknown and that a Sri Lankan maid had also been reported missing.

The headline of the same paper on 13 November reported the police investigation of an accident at a construction site where one Indian labourer had been killed and another injured. The paper noted that both were working on a project to renovate the Sheraton Hotel. What it failed to mention was that the renovation was for the forthcoming Gulf Co-operation Council summit meeting to be held at the hotel. The construction company that had the contract for the project was forcing its workers - almost all of them from the Indian subcontinent - to work day and night to meet its deadline.

Both *Akhbar Al-Khaleej* and its sister paper reported on 14 November that a Pakistani citizen had been sentenced to six months imprisonment for staying in the country without a visa. It also published a long letter by a reader who explained that foreign workers had been needed in the 1970s because of the large amount of construction work that was going on in the region, but that the 1980s with the drop in oil prices and its consequences for the construction sector, most of these Asian workers were no longer needed. He noted, however, that most of them remained in the region and had been able to survive by finding other jobs, which was a threat to the nationals. He then suggested that the Gulf governments should force them to pay taxes. In many of the oil-rich Gulf states, the tax system is not enforced.

A Qatari journalist, in his daily column in *Arrayah*, went to great lengths to explain the troubles that the Qatari face when sponsoring a foreign worker. On the same day *The Gulf Daily News* reported that an Indian had been accused of fraud when he stole the money that his employer had given him to deposit at the local bank.

In an article titled 'Maids on the run,' *Arab News* investigated what it called the 'phenomenon' of maids on the run. It reported that between 10 and 15 housemaids in Saudi Arabia abandon their sponsors every year. One of the Saudis interviewed by the paper said that his wife insisted on having a maid although they had no need for one. He remarked that it was becoming a kind of fashion for Saudi families to hire maids even if they did not need one. It is important to note that the majority of Saudi women do not participate in the workforce and that those who do are limited to specific jobs which society permits them to pursue.

*The Gulf Daily News* of 20 November reported that the body of an Indian worker who had died on a construction site had not yet been flown home for burial. The story, which was published on page 4, remarked that the Indian embassy in the island had commented that he was a runaway worker and there was therefore no one to meet the expenses of sending his body home. It was later reported that a group of Indians had donated the amount needed after more than two weeks.

A small news item on the front page of *Akhbar Al-Khaleej* narrated the story of an Asian male who jumped in front of a bus and killed himself. The paper did not comment on the incident nor did it follow it up. Small items about such episodes are published now and then but rarely do they get investigated.

Sensationalism is an international phenomenon among journalists, and the Gulf is no exception. Crime stories are at the top of the list since the newspapers in the region are not allowed to report gossip, prostitution or the private lives of celebrities. Even with crime, the newspapers never publish a story unless they receive prior permission from the police or the Ministry of Interiors. Crimes that are committed by foreigners, however, can be reported much more easily and at times without permission.

On page 2 of *Akhbar Al-Khaleej* of 23 November it was reported that an Indian man had been accused of breaking into the room of a Filipina. The Gulf press never reports the many known incidents of sexual assaults by native males on their maids. The same paper reported on its front page news about an Indian man who had been accused of installing a special device on his telephone to cut out the recording of his long-distance calls.

The number of foreign children taking up manual work in the Gulf was indirectly raised by the Saudi newspaper *Arab News* in a feature about child beggars who had switched to washing cars. The reporter interviewed many of the children who were all non-Saudis. One of the boys- a Pakistani- said that he had come to the country to visit the holy shrines of Mecca and Medina and had never left the country since then. He lived on the streets and worked as a car washer.

A peculiar letter appeared on the same day in the Kuwaiti newspaper *Al-Seyassah* in which a Kuwaiti male described how foreign maids had taken up the role of the woman of the house. He wrote that these maids cooked, washed, cleaned and even helped with the children's homework, and since most of the time they were 'prettier, better dressed, have nicer figures, etc.' the husbands had begun to compare them with their wives. He commented that the wives became jealous of their maids and started abusing them.

On 29 November *Akhbar Al-Khaleej* reported that a Pakistani male had been sentenced to a year's imprisonment for attempted murder. The paper noted that the sentence had been reduced because the accused was only 18 years old. Its English - language sister newspaper reported on the same day that the Philippines Government had also lifted the ban on maids to Bahrain, after doing the same thing for Saudi Arabia. The editor commented on the subject, indicating that Bahrain was blacklisted in the beginning because many Filipina maids in the country had been exploited. The

correspondence section of that day carried a complaint by a housemaid who wanted to change her job, but had her request rejected by the recruiting agency. She wrote that the agency told her that she would not get a release letter from her sponsor unless she paid him 200 Bahraini Dinars.

*The Gulf Daily News* devoted its whole Second page to a feature about the large number of expatriates who disappeared in the island. The article tried to discuss the reasons behind what it called 'the vanishing' expatriates, but failed to do so, concentrating instead on the figures and reactions by officials. *Akhbar Al-Khaleej* of the same day reported that four Filipinos had been imprisoned on the charge of stealing carpets from a mosque.

On 4 December the same paper published a coverage of a lecture on the workforce, in which the lecturer estimated the percentage of foreign workers in the private sector as 79 per cent of the total. On the same day the Saudi paper *Arab News* reported the arrival of the Philippines Minister of Labour on an official visit to the Kingdom. The paper noted that the latest estimate of the number of Filipinos working in the country was between 300,000 and 350,000.

*Al-Seyassah* in Kuwait published a letter of condemnation of a woman who had been beating her maid to the extent that she needed hospitalisation. The reader explained how this Kuwaiti woman had used sharp instruments and cigarettes against her maid who had had to take refuge at her country's embassy.

The imprisonment of a Filipino who stole an amount of money from the company he worked for, was published as the main news item on page 2 of *Akhbar Al-Khaleej* on 6 December. The man was caught while posting it to the Philippines and was sentenced to three months imprisonment and deportation. *Arab News* reported that four foreign workers who had been jailed for different offences were freed after each of them memorised the Koran and converted to Islam.



*The Gulf Daily News* reported that expatriates earning less than 4,200 Bahraini Dinars a month had been banned from hiring maids. The paper gave the reason for such a decision by the Bahraini Government as one way of reducing the number of imported maids, while at the same time discouraging expatriate wives from working.

It has been noticed that most of the highly paid expatriates in the Gulf tend to imitate the nationals in terms of recruiting domestic servants. Reports from capital - poor Arab countries such as Egypt show that many Egyptians who have worked in the Gulf take their maids with them when they return home. The same could be true of Europeans and others who were recruited to the Gulf for their expertise. This does not, of course, imply that most of the expatriates in the Gulf had maids, since the majority of them were manual workers.

While the Saudi newspapers were reporting that the government was planning to reduce the number of immigrant workers in the country and encourage the private sector to replace them with nationals; the same papers were reporting further recruitments. *Arab News* of 8 December reported that there were around 100,000 Bangladeshi workers in Saudi Arabia, and that the two governments had signed an agreement for more 'cooperation' in this field. In the same issue, the newspaper commented that 200,000 positions occupied by non-Saudis could be taken up by locals.

Another suicide incident by a foreign laborer was reported by *Akhbar Al-Khaleej* on 9 December. On its front page the paper published the story of an Indian worker who tried to commit suicide by stabbing himself with a knife. His neighbours took him to hospital immediately, which saved his life. *The Gulf Daily News* commented on the government's 'Bahrainisation' plan. It noted that the plan had not been successful because expatriate workers were ready to accept low salaries which made them cheaper for employers.

Most of the Arab Gulf states have launched plans to substitute nationals for immigrant workers. None of the practical steps suggested by these plans have materialised and all have remained as rhetoric to be used by officials when needed.

A well-known Kuwaiti columnist wrote on 12 December in *Al-Seyessah* that a number of maids faced cruelty from their employers and when they complained they were sent back home, while the employer could always recruit a new maid without much trouble. At the end of his column he advised that such employers should not be allowed to import any more maids as one way of 'punishing' them.

*The Gulf Daily News* of the same date claimed that Western expatriates would always be needed despite the 'Arabisation' or 'Bahrainisation' programmes. The reason for this, according to the newspaper, was the lack of expertise among nationals.

An Egyptian worker wrote to the Kuwaiti newspaper *Al-Seyassah* on 14 December, complaining about laws prohibiting immigrants from bringing their families to live with them in Kuwait. He described his loneliness and compared himself to a camel.

The finance section of *Al-Seyassah* of 15 December revealed that 21,000 work permits for expatriates had been issued by the Bahraini authorities between January and August 1988.

On the same date *The Gulf Daily News* also disclosed the case of an Indian worker who fell to his death at a construction site and the incident was not reported to the police by his employer. The paper asserted that the worker wasn't insured by the company he worked for although this is required by the labour laws. Another news item reported that five expatriates had been accused of selling rice after the expire date had passed.

*Arab News* published a study that was carried out in the Kingdom on both Saudi and immigrant workers. According to the study, the Saudi workers had the advantage of self-confidence and readiness for leadership, while foreign workers were distinguished by their efficiency and easy adaptation. The same study noted that expatriates constituted 56 per cent of the total labour force.

The increased dependence on foreign maids was criticised by a Qatari writer in one of *Arrayah's* daily columns. The writer explained how Qataris were becoming completely dependent on these maids to the extent that some families had one to carry their children's books to the university. He noted that this was a part of the changes in Qatari society, which was shifting towards more and more consumerist habits.

Although the Gulf societies are not considered violent in comparison with others, violence among families is usually not reported apart from the ill-treatment of servants. This, too, is only reported as scattered incidents or through complaints by the maids themselves. *The Gulf Daily News* of 20 December published three letters of this kind written by maids under false names. In one of the letters the housemaid reported noticing that her cousin, who also worked as a servant, had a black eye after she had been slapped by her employer and that she had not been allowed to see a doctor.

An incident of 22 Filipinos who were caught gambling at a private residence was reported by *Akhbar Al-Khaleej* on 22 December. Although gambling is forbidden by Islam, many Gulf nationals practise it but none has ever been caught or reported. The same newspaper printed a feature entitled 'Looking for a maid?' which revealed that, even during the period when the Philippines Government banned recruitment to the Gulf, many had managed to obtain them after falsifying the documents required. The article discussed incidents of ill-treatment of maids and said that many male employers demanded a beautiful maid.

A Bahraini journalist published a feature about an old part of the capital Manama, where all the Asian workers have resided since the nationals left the area. She said that she could not find a single Bahraini walking around in the streets of the district. She also reported that people were looking at her with suspicion because she was not wearing the 'Sari' the long dress worn by the women of the Indian subcontinent. She wrote with sadness that this was only one of the areas where 'strangers' had moved in to occupy the beautiful old traditional houses. At the end she blamed the Asians for these changes and never thought to question why the Bahrainis had left their beautiful old houses.

*Arrayah* of 25 December printed a letter by a Qatari remarking that the people of the Gulf always complained about their servants and that they (the expatriate servants) stole from their employers. He wrote, however, that no one wondered if this could be the result of their unjust treatment.

When a Bahraini raised the issue of unemployment among nationals and blamed the expatriate workers for it, he received a strong answer or comment from an official at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The letter and the reply were published in *The Gulf Daily News* of 27 December. The official commented that the number of unemployed was not so high and that expatriates would still be needed because of their qualifications. He also reminded the nationals that Bahrainisation ought to be gradual and not rapid.

Zahed Matar, a columnist on *Al-Seyassah* remarked that according to the new law an Asian worker would be allowed to bring his wife and family to live with him in Kuwait only after twenty years. He was referring to a new law that required expatriates to have a minimum wage of 410 Kuwaiti Dinars to be eligible to bring in members of their families. Since most of the Asian workers earn very low incomes and get no increases in their salaries they would probably reach the minimum wage of

KD 410 only after twenty years or so.

*The Gulf Daily News* reported that the Bahraini Chamber of Commerce had issued a plea to curb expatriate trade. It noted that the Chamber wanted to end the practice of Bahrainis who rent their trade licences to foreigners for a monthly payment and leave them to conduct business in any way they like. Many Gulf nationals have turned to this procedure as an easy way of making money. The licence is usually rented to a group of workers who have lost their jobs on a construction site and were looking for any kind of occupation, so they rent a licence and open a small shop or restaurant.

Foreign maids were attacked by a Qatari columnist on 1 January 1989. The writer directed her anger against male servants whom she described as 'monsters' who attack innocent young girls. She wrote that many Qatari families hired male servants who would take any opportunity to assault sexually young female members of the family.

The full story of an Indian laborer who committed suicide in Bahrain was disclosed by *The Gulf Daily News*. On 2 January 1989 it reported that an Indian worker who had hanged himself in his room three weeks earlier had been under severe stress. He had run away from his employer weeks before, but had been caught and forced to pay his sponsor an amount of money in return for his release letter. The paper did not elaborate on the subject.

*Akhbar Al-Khaleej* of 4 January reported that a group of foreigners had been caught violating the laws by turning parts of their homes into restaurants and shops. Many expatriates who were recruited in the 1970s and had been able to stay and bring their families into the country; managed to open such small businesses. In the same issue was a feature about workers in the island and how they were treated by agents. According to the article, this procedure applied not only to foreigners but also to

nationals, who worked for a specific company and obtained part of their salary through an agent who took the rest of it.

On 7 January, *The Gulf Daily News* revealed that the hotel sector in Bahrain would continue to depend on foreign labourers for the next ten years. Its Arabic - language sister newspaper reported two days later that the number of expatriate workers in the island had reached 107,000, 96,800 of whom were males and 10,167 females.

At least one foreign laborer gets deported every day in Bahrain according to a study published by *Akhbar Al-Khaleej*. The same study stated that the practice of 'free visa' was still going on. It was during the last few years that a handful of nationals, mostly members of the ruling families, had managed to get hold of a large number of visas which they distributed among expatriates in return for a specific amount of money paid to them monthly. Most of those trading in free visas use their status or influence to obtain the visas. There are rumours of officials being involved in these practices.

A group of Asian workers in Kuwait were faced with a situation in which they had not received any salary for months. The Kuwaiti newspaper *Al-Seyassah* reported that this was not due to the economic recession but to the simple fact that the Kuwaitis did not want to pay these Asians anything and preferred to delay the payment if possible. It stated that 50 per cent of the Asians in the country faced a delay in the payment of their salaries and 30 per cent had not been paid at all. According to the report these workers lived in overcrowded unhealthy accommodation.

In countries such as the Gulf where thousands of workers are imported annually, salaries are not always the same for a specific job. *The Gulf Daily News* published a study in which it proved that Bahrainis, Europeans, Filipinos and Indians

got different salaries for the same job. It disclosed that Bahraini nationals were paid less than expatriates in the high-level jobs in the private sector.

*Arab Times* of 4 March 1989 reported a strike by Indian workers at a camp outside Kuwait city. The workers told the newspaper that they had taken this action because they had not been paid their salaries for months. It is not common to see foreign labourers on strike in the Gulf because early experiences have taught them that they could be on the first plane back home if they go on strike.

Safety at work sites is one of the issues that foreign workers are faced with but can not complain about. A Bahraini newspaper reported the death of an immigrant laborer while working, because the machine he was using did not have a protection cover. In Qatar, *Arrayah* commented that many foreign maids tend to hurt the children of their employer either because of the way they are treated by the parents or because they are left with too much work.

On 6 March, *Arab Times* reported that expatriate workers in the Gulf especially those from Third World countries, contributed between \$6 to \$8 billion to their country's income every year.

Whilst most immigrant workers in the Gulf are always afraid of being deported; there are also cases of those who want to return home but have been forced by their sponsors to stay and work. Such was the case of a worker who wrote to *The Gulf Daily News* editor enquiring about the matter. He said that he wanted to go home and asked if his employer could force him to stay.

The same newspaper reported on 9 March that the bodies of three Indian workers had been flown back home. It revealed that the three had died when fire broke out at their house. Fire incidents such as this one are also very common, since most expatriate workers are forced to live in crowded accommodations. A handful of them usually rent a small room and use it for everything ,i.e. sleeping, cooking, etc.

House rents are very high in most of the Gulf states because of the high standard of living and also because of the large number of nationals who live off their real estate as one easy way of making money.

When the present writer visited many workers' camps in Bahrain for a feature article on the standard of accommodation for expatriates, she found that up to 10 people shared a room which they used for all their daily activities and needs. Water, electricity and sewage were not always available. At one of these camps the workers said that they had not had running water for months. At night most of them slept on the pavement which was cooler in the hot summer heat of the Gulf. They also reported incidents of fire since they used old stoves for cooking and coal for heating in the cold desert winters.

Many of the abused maids get their revenge on the children of the family they work for. *Arab News* of 11 March reported that a Filipina maid had been sentenced to death after being convicted of killing the daughter of her sponsor. The newspaper noted that the maid had had an argument with the mother who had accused her of stealing some money. It continued by saying that the maid became angry with her employer and got her revenge through the daughter. It also disclosed a separate incident in which a mother discovered that her maid had been abusing her children by kicking and beating them.

On the same day the Qatari newspaper *Daily Gulf Times* published on its front page the story of a Filipina woman who had been beheaded after being convicted of strangling a young Saudi woman. These are but a few of such events that get published; many others do not find their way into print but nationals always talk about them. Gulf nationals blame the maids and nannies they hire to take care of their children and never really think that they could be part of the cause of such tragic events.



Another suicidal episode was reported on 15 March by *Akhbar Al-Khaleej*. It is worth mentioning that most of the Gulf newspapers tend to ignore such events, and that only this newspaper publishes a few of them from time to time. It stated that another Asian worker had committed suicide by hanging himself from the fan in his room. As with the previous reports, it declined to comment on the matter.

A column in *Arrayah* remarked that nationals should think more positively about these foreign workers. He said that they came with the dream of making a fortune but, they face disappointment and misery because of the problems confronting them. One of these problems is the delay in getting their salaries. A few days later the paper published a letter by a reader stating that Qataris should not blame the maids for all the problems they faced with their children. He wrote, ‘..the truth is that they are here to help us in our homes and they have been doing that...the threat to our children doesn't come from the maids but from other things.’

The last week of March 1989 saw the opening of the Gulf Women's Conference. It was covered by most of the newspapers in the region except the Saudi ones. The conference will be discussed in a different section of this thesis; what is relevant here is the papers which were presented at the conference dealing with the issue of the effect of foreign nannies on the Gulf children. *The Gulf Daily News* of 20 March reported that a study conducted locally had found that children were held back by untrained maids. The newspaper's daily comment on the issue opened up a debate on the subject.

In less than two days another suicide incident was revealed by the same Bahraini newspaper. *Akhbar Al-Khaleej* reported that a Bangladeshi cook had tried to commit suicide but failed and had been hospitalised since then. The English-language newspaper on the same day published a letter by a reader complaining about the large

number of cheap foreign labourers imported while Bahrainis were unable to find a job.

*Arab Times* on 22 March devoted most of its front page to news items related to foreign workers. The first commented on the laws that had been passed to prevent expatriates from taking up two jobs at the same time or working for someone who was not their sponsor. The second one stated that immigrants were not allowed to invest in the country. The third exposed the dispute with a number of Indian workers who had not been paid for a long period by their Kuwaiti employer.

A Qatari writer expressed his deep sadness at the changes in the Gulf societies. He said that, following the discovery of oil, the people of the region had become interested only in material things. They were no longer concerned about work and had become totally dependent on foreigners to do everything for them even at home. He ended by urging people to go back to their pre-oil situation and start recovering from the material shock that the petro-dollars era had brought with it.

The story about the Indian workers who had not been paid by their Kuwaiti employer found its way into the rest of the Gulf press. *The Gulf Daily News* of 23 March reported the incident.

A Kuwaiti columnist noted that, instead of advertising about missing maids; the government should make it legal for any worker to change sponsors if he or she was not satisfied with their employer. He wrote on the front page of *Arab Times* that people should be ashamed of themselves for doing such a thing as advertising for their employees who had run away. His column was also published by both *Al Seyassah* and *Arab Times*

*Akhbar Al-Khaleej* raised a matter which was very sensitive to Gulf societies, namely the increased number of marriages between Bahrainis and their Filipina maids. There have been such cases, not only in Bahrain but also in most of the other

Gulf countries. Official statistics indicate that marriages with Filipinas comprise the largest number of intermarriages with non-national females.

On 1 April 1989 *The Gulf Daily News* disclosed that an Indian worker had died at a construction site. The paper did not elaborate on the matter, other than saying that there had been many similar accidents on the island. *Arab Times* of Kuwait reported a few days later a the second strike by the same Indian workers who were still waiting for their employer to pay them their wages. The news story revealed that an agreement had been reached the first time on condition that the Kuwaiti employer started paying their salaries gradually. Months had passed and the promises had not materialise and this forced the workers to take their second action, the newspaper noted. Later in the month it was to report that a second agreement had been reached between the labourers and their employer.

A few days later the same paper's front page carried accusations by a number of Kuwaitis that Filipino workers in the Gulf were working as agents for the Mossad, the Israeli secret service. The article was extensive out and tried to persuade readers that these were not mere speculations but hard facts. In Bahrain *The Gulf Daily News* carried the same news item. It noted that all Filipinos working in the Middle East were spies for different countries. This newspaper also published the news item on its front page.

Both the Kuwaiti newspapers studied reported on 5 April that the Kuwaiti Minister of Planning had announced that his country was going to impose taxes on 'unproductive' expatriates. The Minister continued by saying that the recruitment of a 'productive' work force would continue.

*Akhbar Al-Khaleej* later interviewed a group of local women who were working as cleaners at most of the hotels on the island. The women complained about cheap foreign labourers who competed with them. *Al Seyassah* on the same day

reported that two Pakistanis had been beheaded in Saudi Arabia after being convicted of drug smuggling.

*The Daily Gulf Times* of 10 April noted that the 1,000 Indian workers who had gone on strike in Kuwait had been sent home after months of arguing with their employer. The report stated that the Kuwaiti Government had intervened and paid their salaries and travelling expenses and that all the deals they had previously reached with the construction company they worked for had failed to develop. *Arab Times* also published the news about the striking workers and said that they had been paid their salaries for only two months. Discrimination among foreign workers can be observed from the different procedures that the authorities in these states adopt. One of these is the Bahrain airport authority which forbids Indians and Asians from entering the airport premises unless they are travelling. Most of them wait outside the airport building if they are expecting someone. An Indian worker was interviewed by *The Gulf Daily News* about his own experiences. He said that he was not allowed to enter the airport building to receive his visiting wife because of his nationality, whereas his British friend was able to do so. He revealed that while he was waiting outside the airport building others from different nationalities were going in. The Bahrain airport authority gave as its excuse that Asians go in large numbers to receive a relative or friend and this could disturb the others.

### **3.3 MORE DEPENDENCE, MORE IMMIGRATION:**

In general, for the local media the foreign workers do not constitute an issue or represent a problem. Even though the local newspapers and magazines have a considerable amount of freedom when it comes to this matter - compared with the television networks - they try to play down the numbers. Now and then small news items appear in the local papers announcing that yet another foreign worker has

committed suicide, died at a construction site or been deported or reported missing. These news stories are never followed up or investigated. Journalists and readers write about these immigrant labourers only as a threat to them and as the source of all the changes in their societies.

Whilst the Arab Gulf states remain dependent on oil revenues, the influx of foreign labourers will continue and more and more dependence on non-Arab workers will surface. For the capital-rich Gulf countries the lack of development plans, especially those that are aimed at developing human resources; means that the need for workers to clean, build, teach, etc. will persist. The capital-poor, on the other hand, will always encourage this migration of its manpower -what two Arab writers have called the 'lottery ticket' (Sa'd Al-Din and 'Abd al-fadil, 1983: 20) .

This lottery ticket has not only been purchased by labourers in most of the capital-poor Third World countries, but also by intellectuals and academics. Even Arab political dissidents -especially Egyptians - immigrated to the Gulf in the 1970s. Whilst the first Arab migration to the region influenced the indigenous population and stirred Arab nationalism feelings, the second one created more division among them. Those political dissidents who worked in the oil-rich Gulf states concentrated on making money and isolated themselves from any interaction with the nationals. This in fact helped both the Gulf regimes and their Arab counterparts. At home the Egyptian Government, to take one example, got rid of most of its political opponents and this weakened the whole opposition movement. In the Gulf too Arab nationalism started to fade out for the first time and the regimes were glad to see this.

*"The presence of Egyptian political dissidents in neighboring oil countries is a mixed blessing for (the) regime. In one sense, their absence from the Egyptian scene weakens the internal opposition. The regime would no doubt welcome such a development if these dissidents concentrated on*

*'making money' instead of 'making revolution.'*  
*Some of them have in fact turned away from*  
*politics and rechanneled their energies into*  
*business and professional activities outside Egypt.*  
*Quite a few, have been vocal in criticizing (the)*  
*regime and have found easy access to the mass*  
*media of the host countries" (Ibrahim, 1982: 94).*

Remittances from these labourers -Arabs and others - who worked in the Gulf have increased the dependence of most of the Third World capital-poor countries on the Western industrialised nations. It forced most of these states to abandon the development of their agricultural and industrial sectors and increased their importation of consumer goods. At the same time the emigration of most of the needed labour created shortages at home (Birks and Sinclair, 1980: 366).

Today, almost all of these Third World capital-poor nations are dependent on the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. They are forced to adapt their development plans to suit these two organisations. Even political decisions that could determine the future of these states are taken not at home but in Washington, London and elsewhere.

The Gulf states, on the other hand, are faced with an even gloomier future. The decline of the oil revenues and the lack of any substitute means that the dependence of these countries on the West and the East will persist. Countries like Saudi Arabia will be more dependent on foreign workers than all the others especially due to the continued isolation of women from participating in its development of these states. An official of the United Arab Emirates government once said :

*"...were the Egyptians to be removed, many of the*  
*school systems would have to close; were the*  
*Palestinians to be forced to leave, the media*  
*would cease to function; were the British,*  
*Jordanian, Pakistani and Baluchi soldiers and*

*policemen to be expelled, the defence and internal security network would collapse; were the Iranians, Baluchis and Pathans who make up the bulk of the labor force to be sent back to their homelands, progress of such vital projects underway as the building of roads, ports irrigation schemes, housing projects, schools and medical clinics would all come to an abrupt halt" (quoted in Al-Najjar, 1983: 16).*

It will take years before the people of the region themselves start to feel the need to take up more of the jobs essential to building their countries' future. By that time, the identity of the Gulf Arab countries will have disappeared in the midst of this invasion of labourers who do not share the same culture, language, heritage or history. The Arabic identity of the oil-rich Gulf states is already fading out. In most of the Gulf capitals; the Arabic language is rarely heard or spoken. On the local television screens, and in the cinemas and video shops, the dominant languages are English and Urdu. Local shops and supermarkets sell newspapers and magazines from India, Europe, Pakistan and the Philippines, to mention but a few. Even the names and signs of shops and restaurants are not written in proper Arabic.

In most of the Arab Gulf countries the indigenous population is a minority and will continue to be so. The Gulf states have no plans for reducing the number of immigrant labourers, and their media will continue to reflect the government line. Local newspapers reproduce the same statements all the time -that the Gulf states need to develop and can not do so without the help of foreigners. After the 1990 invasion of Kuwait, these newspapers began attacking all Arabs and reported the state policy of reducing the number of Arab workers in the region. The need for a few Arabs, though, will persist because of jobs that need the a master of the language. But the bulk of the imported labourers will be from Asia. In spite of the fact that the recent developments in the region emphasised the need for women's participation in

the labour-force, there are no indications of any changes in the status of Gulf women. Women still constitute a small percentage of the workforce and segregation between the sexes persist. The role of Gulf women and their treatment by these patriarchal societies is the main theme of the next chapter. It therefore links the issue of women to the thesis main argument namely the lack of civil society and citizens' rights in the Gulf region.



## CHAPTER IV

### GULF WOMEN: WESTERN OUTLOOKS AND TRIBAL VALUES

*“Tala' my dear ask any woman how many times she has been lashed in this life, and in each and every day. She is lashed from the day she is born, the moment they cry 'it's a girl' then through the the treatment she gets, and last through regarding her as a means for free services and pleasure!!”*  
*(from the novel by Abdulrahman Munif 'Now....Here: Or Eastern Mediterranean Revisited'.*

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION:

In his book 'Women and Socialism,' George Tarabishi wrote that there are one hundred million Arabs in Arab 'society,' but the figures indicate that there are only fifty million because women have been prohibited from taking any responsibilities in their societies (Tarabishi, 1961: 13). Many have thought that Arab women's emancipation would not only lead to changes in family structures, but also to the transformation of the whole of Arab society. (Berger, 1962) Sociological in-depth studies of Arab women, though, are a recent phenomenon. At the beginning of this century a few Arab intellectuals (mostly men who studied in European capitals) wrote about the situation of women. They advocated changes primarily in women's education. Most prominent

among them were Rifa Rafa Al-Tahtawi and Qasim Amin who published '*Tahrir al-mara*' (The Liberation of woman) and '*al-mara' al-jadidah*' (The New Woman) in 1899 and 1901 respectively. Qasim Amin's books became the bible for Arab feminists for years to come.

The first Arab feminists who burned their veils (the sign of women's oppression) were mostly influenced by these writings. They were not able to take their issue any further, however. Most of these women concentrated on education and political rights for women. The first movements encountered several setbacks. This is not to say that there were no gains. In fact, there were tremendous improvements in women's schools and education in general but the roots of the problem were left veiled or unstudied.

A few Arab feminist writers were to try later in the century to tackle the real issues and problems that face Arab women. Feminists such as Nawal Al-Sadawi (of Egypt) and Fatima Mernissi (of Morocco) were to suggest in their early writings that Islam was to be blamed for the segregation of women. Later they were to reverse these positions regarding Islam and women and to argue that it was not only religion that kept Arab women segregated. Arab women's emancipation, however, has become the subject of many books and articles not only by Arab feminists but also by their Western counterparts over the past twenty years. Both parties criticised each other for their approaches. Since the arguments and critiques in these studies are irrelevant to the present thesis I shall not go into them but shall try to draw up a framework through which one might be able to understand the situation of Arab women as it is today.

To try and define the position of women in Arab society one has to go back to the main unit of this society, namely the family. From there one could expand one's theory or ideas to cover the whole of society. Although most of the Arab countries have witnessed some transformations and changes, the family (which is the main pillar

of society) has managed to survive intact. Members of the family are still dependent on it financially even if not in a direct way. Female members are even more crucial to the family structure mainly because of their child-bearing role and their domestic work. In return, as individuals they have obligations such as maintaining the family reputation and wealth. Individuals always try to show their loyalty to the family, tribe and state (in this order) so as to avoid any clashes and/ or isolation from the group or in this case their society. It is extremely difficult for an individual to be independent in such patriarchal societies, especially if this individual is a female (Dhaher, undated: 57).

Male members of the family are responsible for female members even after the latter's marriage. Family pride, however, is based on honour which is related to female members only, not males.

*"..they represent a set of cultural constraints upon behaviour which serve as an extremely efficient form of control over social relations" (Minces, 1980: 17).*

Honour and shame are the basic cultural norms through which Arab women have been confined to the roles of mothers and wives only. These are the two main instruments that have maintained the segregation between males and females in most Arab societies. The *Sharaf* or honour of an Arab family depends mainly on its female members. That is why girls from the age of puberty are closely watched (mostly by older female members of the family) to make sure that the family honour is preserved. Virginity, which is the other side of the coin, is an important element of the family honour.

*"A girl's virginity is a family possession of considerable importance, even today. Young women of the bourgeoisie who have a relatively free life during their years at university usually have their hymen*

*replaced before marriage by accommodating surgeons whose fortunes are quickly made” (ibid.: 19).*

Many of these customs and cultural norms have been related to Islam by sociologists and scholars in their attempt to understand the inferior status of Arab women. The two - Islam as a religion, on the one hand, and cultural norms, on the other - have been mixed together to the extent that one finds it difficult to separate them. Juliette Minces, in her book ‘The House of Obedience: Women in Arab Society,’ argues against the idea that Islam is the main cause of maintaining women's inferiority in Arab society. She wrote that the Quran (the Islamic holy book) and the Shari’a (Islamic law) have been misused to provide the ideological grounds for the practices of patriarchal ideology and continue to do so in present-day Arab societies (ibid.: 17).

The Quran as interpreted by the ruling elites could provide the ideology for the male dominance in Arab societies. Admittedly there are passages in the Quran that could be interpreted in a patriarchal way, for instance:

*“Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient” (The Quran, Sura 4: 34).*

However, Ahmed Dhaher in his book "Women in the Arab Gulf States" agrees with Juliette Minces. He notes that, although Islamic law treats both sexes equally, these societies (referring to the Gulf but it could be true for all Arab societies) are patriarchal. He argues that even in the Arab male literature women are treated as a lesser humankind (Dhaher, undated: 30). In his fascinating study of sexuality in Arabic novels, George Tarabishi noted that in most of the novels written by Arab

males the relations between civilisations, countries, etc. are associated with relations between the sexes. It is, according to Tarabishi, a relation of power and control, on the one hand, and submissiveness and ordeal, on the other (Tarabishi, undated: 16).

There has been some evidence (not thoroughly studied, however) that in the most strict religious societies, such as that of Saudi Arabia, bedouin women have the same amount of freedom in choosing their partners as men. Such evidence was also found among tribes in parts of North Africa (Clement, 1982: 32).

It could be argued that in these patriarchal societies if Islam did not exist then other ideologies would have been created and used to legitimise the norms and structures that have controlled Arab society for years. Fatima Mernissi has argued that:

*“..If the Muslim family, with its territorial sexuality, did not exist, it would have been created. It is thus not difficult to understand the utility of the various conservative arguments advising women to return to the hearths their grandmothers occupied” (Mernissi, 1985: 160).*

One might study the role of patriarchal ideology in relation to women's status through the role that older women play in the family structure. Older women have different roles from younger ones. Although they continue to be dependent on their husbands or other male members of the family, older women (who have lost their sexuality) become important to the household and its inhabitants. They also gain respect and power not only among their own families but also in society as a whole.

*“At least she is universally respected; no longer a sexual being, she ceases to be that crushed and dominated object whose actions might detract from the honor of the family, arouse desire in other men or cast doubt upon her husband's virility and*

*manhood, which must constantly, be reasserted" (Minces, 1980: 20).*

The role of older women changes drastically and it is through them that the ideology of the patriarchal society is filtered to young girls. Older women also have the role of protecting the structure of the family and its honour. They become the moral guardians of the family and society in general. Their task as women changes with the changes in their role. They become responsible for choosing brides for the younger male members of the family. Contrary to their previous role, older women are consulted by their husbands, brothers or other male members of the family.

In most Arab societies females have their own space which is isolated and segregated from that of the males. A woman's space is confined to the walls of the home while males have the rest of space for themselves. Even at home there are specific areas or rooms which are strictly for male members to receive their male guests. Educated women (especially those who have studied in the West) try to break this spatial segregation but are often faced with anger and threats from older female members of the family and a rejection by society as a whole.

The concept of women as sexually provocative is a notion that is well described in the Quran and dominates most of the writings about Arab women. The media in Arab states reflect this in television soap operas, articles in the newspapers and magazines and also in novels and poetry.

There is no evidence in the Quran to indicate that Islam degrades women or treats them as the weaker sex. On the contrary, Islam has raised more concern about women and the power they hold. Muslim men find women difficult to control and make submissive without the use of force (Qasoub, 1991: 11).

*"And they [women] have rights similar to those [of men] over them in kindness, and*

*men are a degree above them” (Quran, 228 of Sura 2).*

#### **4.2 Gulf Women Prior to the Discovery of Oil:**

Before the discovery of oil and the boom years that followed, women played an entirely different role in the Gulf. Most of the emirates were poor and undeveloped both economically and technologically. People relied for their livelihoods on fishing, pearl diving and trade. For the purposes of this study we shall divide women into three categories or groups based on the class structure:

- (i) wives of fishermen, boat builders (the traditional boats in the Gulf are known as Dhows), and pearl divers.
- (ii) rural women (mostly in the Saudi desert)
- (iii) wives of pearl merchants and women of the ruling tribes or families.

Women in the first category were the poorest and so had to help in wage earning in addition to their domestic work. They raised chickens, sold eggs and worked as servants at the houses of the big merchants who were mostly pearl traders. The wives of the pearl divers had a harsher life than the others since their husbands spent at least six months a year away from home. During this period the women carried all the responsibilities on their own shoulders. If they were desperate for cash, they could ask the pearl merchant who employed their husbands for a loan which was added to their husband's debts. If the husband died at sea - while diving for pearls - then the wife had to pay his debts; in most cases young sons would be sent to take their father's jobs to pay these debts.

Al-Rumaihi noted that in a few cases the divers' wives had to dive themselves when they were desperate (quoted in Unesco, 1984: 19). These women, like their husbands, were the most exploited class in the Gulf before the discovery of oil. The hardship of their lives was reflected in poems and songs that are now considered part

of the Gulf cultural heritage. In one of the most famous songs to have survived, these women begged the pearl merchant to be merciful with their husbands because the sea was very harsh.

Bedouin women and those who lived in the rural regions of the Gulf (mostly in Bahrain and parts of Saudi Arabia) shared the same degree of oppression and suffering as the wives of the pearl divers and fishermen. In the rural regions women tilled the land, irrigated the farms, raised animals and sold vegetables. In the Bahraini villages, women participated in handicrafts mostly baskets for dates.

In the desert bedouin women herded animals and processed food from goats' and camels' milk. Their handicrafts mostly consisted of weaving tents and woollen bags to carry their belongings. Noura Al-Falah has noted that intermingling between males and females was not considered shameful because of the tasks that the women carried out (Al-Falah, 1988: 59-60).

The wives of the pearl merchants and the ruling clans lived a much more comfortable life. They had no obligations other than supervising their servants. They could afford anything they needed or wanted but they shared the same segregation and discrimination as the women of the other classes. In fact, their isolation was much harsher since they were not allowed to step outside their homes. The other categories of women had to leave their houses because of the hardships of their lives and the fact that their husbands were most of the time away from home. Merchants' wives, though, had servants and even slaves to do their shopping for them. A few of the poorer women sold goods to the houses to serve the richer women who were confined to their homes.

Education was not available for women except for younger women of the merchant families. A few of them were sent to the religious schools known as *Alkutab* or *Mutaw'a*, many of which were run by older religious females. Such schools were to be found in most of the Arab countries. Their main aim was to teach the Quran, the



Hadith (the Prophet's sayings) and other religious teachings to young girls. A large number of the schools for girls were at the homes of these older women while similar schools for boys were at the Mosques.

Proper schools for females were established later on. The first girls' schools in the Gulf region (which were in Bahrain and Kuwait) started in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In other parts of the Gulf such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar such schools are considered new phenomena and are only about twenty years old. The first girls' school in Riyadh (the Saudi capital) provoked riots mostly by male religious extremists. Most of the early schools only trained women to be good housewives and mothers. Illiteracy was much higher among women than it was within men.

After the age of puberty women were considered ready for marriage. Most of the marriages were arranged by the families and were usually between cousins. Thereafter women, even those with some education, were confined to the home while their husbands travelled for trade and business. The women took full responsibility for the household and were forced to have children while they were still very young. Women from the merchant class have the constant fear of their husbands marrying another woman. Older women advise younger females to have a lot of children so as to keep their husbands satisfied and busy.

Segregation between the sexes was not confined to outside the homes but even inside them. Women had their own section of the house commonly known as the *harem*. Men still refer to their wives, daughters, mothers and women in general as *harem*., which is derived from *Haram* in Mecca meaning sacred or taboo. In fact, it was not proper for men to refer to female members of their families in the company of other men. At the same time, it was not acceptable to ask about the condition of female relatives.

### **4.3 Gulf Women after the Discovery of Oil:**

The first few years following the discovery of oil did not witness any drastic changes in the structure of society, and particularly for its female members. A large number of pearl divers and fishermen shifted to work for the oil companies which meant that their womenfolk continued in the same role that they had played prior to the oil discovery.

The most visible changes for women were in the field of education. The Gulf emirates provided schools for girls and many families discovered the significance of education. There were more educational opportunities, for males than females, however. To most of the Gulf's inhabitants male education was essential, whilst female education was merely a luxury. Many Gulf families thought that some kind of education for their girls would make them more desirable wives and mothers, especially because males from the Gulf were being sent to universities in various Arab capitals. Although education was free for both sexes, many women thought that it was not a social necessity but rather a preparation for marriage.

Female members of the merchant class were more privileged than the others. They had the free time and the family wealth to enable them to join schools sooner than women from the working class.

In the 1950s and 60s the first Gulf women university graduates, mostly daughters of rich merchants, returned home from different Arab capitals. They were influenced by the women's liberation movement that was sweeping the whole world and wanted to spread its ideas around at home. Many of them took jobs as teachers and in government offices. The majority of them were graduates from the schools of arts and education, non had science or engineering degrees which remained male-dominated fields.

It is interesting to note that many of these women were influenced by the underground political movements that mushroomed during this period in Gulf history. A Few were members of the main political parties such as the Ba'ath, the Arab nationalists 'Al-qumeen' and the communists. Women joined forces in the struggle against colonialism. A Few women from various Gulf countries even joined the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Occupied Gulf which launched an armed struggle against the colonisers and the local regimes.

In some countries -mainly Bahrain and Kuwait - women participated in the many demonstrations that took place at the time. During these political demonstrations women burned their traditional dress, known in the Gulf as 'abbaya,' or the black garment usually made of nylon or silk that covers the whole body (Beck and Keddie, 1978: 176). The veil, that is widespread today in the Moslem countries, was not common in the Gulf at the time.

The oil boom years, though, transformed these societies very rapidly. The extreme wealth arising from the increase in oil revenues changed Gulf women, but, like other aspects of Gulf society, these changes were artificial and superficial. Gulf women became trade-mark conscious and dressed in the most fashionable clothes but at the same time they did not change the way they perceived their roles in society and its development. Girls' education was established in a way that would not disturb the common norms and culture (Dhaher, undated: 33). The oil revenues may have helped in the process of development in the material productive forces, but they did not lead to a development of human productive forces in general, or that of females in particular (Unesco, 1984: 115).

Kuwait was the first of the Gulf states to experience the changes, which corresponded to changes in the status of Kuwaiti women. The large increase in oil prices and the small number of Kuwaiti citizens meant that the distribution of wealth

changed the lives of even the poorest fishermen in the country. Early in the 1970s many educated Kuwaiti women were working and driving cars, and they did not face much rejection from older women. One of these women said:

*"At that time, there was so much excitement about the new wealth that the older generation could not decide which of the changes to accept and which to reject. New values were accepted along with the new wealth" (Beck and Keddie, 1978: 176).*

While educated Kuwaiti males joined the family business, educated females looked for jobs outside the family - an indication that education for women was one way of breaking away from the family, tribe or clan ties. At their conference in 1971 Kuwaiti women demanded the right to vote which forced the parliament of the time to assign three sessions for the discussion of the issue. These same women retreated, however, and in the early 1980s around 1,000 Kuwaiti women signed a petition endorsing the parliament's decision prohibiting the franchise for women (Al-Sadani, 1983). By the 1990 many women were leaving school at an early age to accept the position of a second or third wife. In most of the Gulf societies the institution of marriage provided women with much more respect and security than joining the workforce (Qasoub, 1991: 54).

The socio-economic changes in the Gulf countries have brought a few changes, especially in the field of education for women, but on the whole the traditional norms have persisted. In Qatar, for example, female university students who want to pursue a career in education are offered scholarships by the Ministry of Education. They are allowed to travel to the West to join universities there, but they must have a 'Mahram' or a male companion with them. The 'Mahram' - father, husband or brother - must accompany these student women for the duration of their university courses. The

Qatari embassies in the Western capitals confiscate their passports the moment they arrive to the country and return them when the women have finished their studies.

Although the majority of Gulf women are keen on education and obtaining high degrees, they do not have the same enthusiasm when it comes to work. Gulf males and females share the same perspective about work. To them work is only for those who are desperate to earn a living in states that reward their citizens with money and wealth in return for their unquestionable loyalty. Male members of the family think that it is an embarrassment for the family if female relatives work. Many women will say that they take jobs just to kill the boredom and to occupy their free time. A few of these wealthy states, such as Kuwait, have offered social security benefits to divorced or widowed women or simply to women with no job. Noura Al-Falah, in her study of social changes in Kuwait, noted that these measures made women less interested in joining the wage labour sector of the economy (Al-Falah, 1988: 69-70).

The absence of Gulf women from the labour market did not affect the development process of these states. Foreign workers and expertise were called in to take the place of Gulf women. The issues of the growing number of foreign workers in the Gulf states and incorporating women in the workforce went hand in hand. In fact, many of the plans that have been issued by different Gulf countries to curb the large number of imported labourers stressed the need for the participation of Gulf women. These plans were never taken seriously by officials, however. One Saudi official suggested that to solve the problem of the increased number of foreign workers, the state should issue a law forcing men to have four wives and should support these men financially (Dhaher, undated: 60).

A few studies have noted that measurements of GNP in many of the Gulf states do not include women's economic activities, no matter how small or big they are (Unesco, 1984: 24-25). Many women in the Gulf who joined the labour market

believed that they could not carry both jobs, domestic and wage-earning, and hired servants from the Asian subcontinent to do their domestic work for them. (see chapter 3).

Those who looked for jobs depended on their family's connections or importance in the country. Women depended on their clan and family ties not only for wealth and security but also for finding jobs and sometimes even for the grades of jobs. Some studies have argued that, in states like Kuwait and Bahrain, women have been hired for the sole purpose of camouflaging the real situation and creating an artificial modernist impression of Gulf society.

*“Many Kuwaiti women felt that they were not allowed to be promoted to the decision making levels and that they were kept as decorations in the offices, as signs of the modernizations of the country, just like high-rise building and fancy cars which substituted camels, and horses” (Nath, 1978: 183).*

Women's associations developed fast in the Gulf, mostly in the last twenty years. They represented women from the different class structures in society. Women from the merchant and ruling families established their own charity oriented associations, while younger educated women (a few of whom were feminists) had different ones. A number of these associations were used as platforms for different political ideologies. Nationalists and Leftists as well as Islamic underground political groups made use of these recognised and legal associations (Al-Bazri, 1989).

Most of the Gulf governments support such women's associations financially in return for keeping them under the umbrella of the Ministries of Social Affairs. All attempts to unite women's associations throughout the region were hijacked by the

governments, however. Officials use the threat of cutting off the financial aid to these associations in cases of conflict between the two.

With the help of the oil wealth Gulf women indulged in consumerist behaviour; it was their way of escaping the oppression at home. They travelled around the world and shopped for the latest products in cosmetics and fashions. Consumerist values were enhanced by the large number of imported soap operas, television programmes and films that were broadcast by the state-controlled television networks. These programmes introduced new perspectives and ideologies - that women must be special and attractive and that families ought to live in nice modern houses (Abu-Lughod, 1989, 10). A Kuwaiti leader of social change said:

*“Acceptance of Western patterns of living which were always considered superior and things to achieve) came immediately as we achieved Western standards of income” (Beck and Keddie, 1978: 178).*

The immense power of the media is all the greater in such secluded societies. Gulf women are more susceptible to television and the media in general than men. Television is the main pastime for women, especially in Saudi Arabia, reinforced by their confinement to the home; it is their mirror on the outside world. Videos also play an important role for these women.

The creation of a state structure in most of these emirates did not produce any changes in the status of women. State formation has repercussions on male-female relations (Charrad, 1990: 20). States could either enhance the existing tribal and patriarchal norms or break them. The facts indicate that in these newly created Gulf states tribal kinship has been encouraged and enhanced by officials. Loyalty to the family was expanded to include the state and the dominant tribes, primarily the ruling

family. The image of the ruler or sheikh has been enhanced by the media and in schools as that of the father. Children's programmes on the local television broadcast songs and plays in which the children call the emir 'our father'.

Tribal and traditional norms in the Gulf are reinforced by religion especially in Saudi Arabia and Qatar where the majority are followers of 'Wahabism' which is a strict and puritan Sunni sect. Religion in these countries legitimises the ruling elites or tribes.

*"The monarch's legitimation however, is still based on this ability to uphold Islamic principles, and the public separation of women is one which can still be enforced. Encouraging women's separation as a mandate ordained by divine law, therefore, becomes an instrument of legitimation" (Doumato, 1991: 35-6).*

In Saudi Arabia the segregation between the sexes is more visible than in the other Gulf societies. Women are invisible in the country. They are confined to their homes and to offices, schools and banks that are for females only. The Saudi monarchy (which derives its legitimacy from religion) allowed the religious institution to establish itself as a state within a state. The 'society for the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice' has its own police force. The religious police have the responsibility of making sure that women are completely covered when in public. Any exposed part of a woman's body is marked with marker pens. Magazines and books are also strictly scrutinised by censors. Segregation between the sexes is enforced not only on human beings but also on animals. The Riyadh Zoo cancelled family days because the religious police assumed that 'assignations' were taking place in the animal cages (Graham, 1991: 93).



Citizenship too in most of these states is related to the society's notion of women. Sarah Graham-Brown has written in her review of literature on women:

*"They agree that citizenship itself is a gendered construction, built on assumptions about the desired nature of the family and women's role in it" (1991: 30).*

Any changes in the status of Gulf women are seen as first step towards disturbing the structure of society and the state system. That is why when a group of 50 Saudi women met on 6 November 1990 and drove their cars through the streets of Riyadh, government officials reacted with harsh measures against them and their families. It was the religious police who arrested these women before the arrival of the state police and the state was then forced to act.

*"In Saudi Arabia, the ideology undergirding the monarchy defines the legitimate ruler as one who will enforce standards of Islamic conduct upon the individual for the good of the community as a whole" (Doumato, 199: 35).*

The Saudi monarchy (like any ruling class in the Arab world) uses the women's issue in times of crisis to unite the people under the banner of preserving religion and culture. The timing of the Riyadh demonstration, which coincided with the presence of large numbers of foreign troops in the Kingdom, was used to divert attention from the really crucial issues and to mobilise the whole society (ibid.: 37).

The rise of Islamic fundamentalist movements in the Gulf (as in most of the Arab world) might be interpreted as one reaction to the drastic changes that have taken place during the last twenty years. Young males and females today reject Western consumerist ideology by adopting what has been known as the Islamic dress and way of behaving. Gulf women have been the main target for most of these fundamentalist

movements. In the eyes of these fundamentalists or Islamists the sociocultural changes affected the position of women more than anything else.

The Gulf ruling elites faced with opposition from the unofficial religious movement or institution, have turned against women. The question here is not of an alternative between an Islamic society and a modern one, but rather of a particular kind of Moslem society. The media have echoed this curb on women and state repression directed against the female members of society. This is the main subject of the next section of this chapter.

#### **4.4 Advanced Media and Veiled Women:**

Transformation in the Gulf had its consequences for the media. Advanced media technologies were purchased from the developed countries. Computerised printing presses, satellite television networks and other technologies have been introduced in most of the Gulf states. Each country has at least two major television networks in both English and Arabic. Most of the television programmes are imported either from the West (mostly the United States and Britain) or from other Arab countries, mainly Egypt and recently from Syria and Jordan.

As is the case with cosmetics, cars and other consumer products, American soap operas are poured into the market. State-owned Gulf television stations shop around for the newest Western programmes, most of which are very popular among the younger people who constitute a large percentage of the Gulf population. In contrast, the same stations also broadcast a large number of religious programmes which are imported largely from Egypt or produced locally.

Gulf viewers adopt Western soap opera characters such as J.R and Bobby from 'Dallas' or Crystal from 'Dynasty.' Gulf women are fascinated by the women characters they watch on their TV screens. They try to imitate them in the way they

dress, but can they adopt their life-styles? That is part of the duality confronting people in the Gulf. Different programmes pass on conflicting messages. Personal liberty - especially that of women - is presented as the modern way of living. The religious programmes, on the other hand, preach that a woman's place is in the home and that Moslem women should not mix with men.

In her article about technologies and public culture, Lila Abu-Lughod interviewed several beduin girls from the Egyptian desert about the television programmes they watched. Her findings can not be far from the reality in the Gulf. One of the girls told her that she watches 'Dallas'

*"..of which she explained that she enjoyed it but found J.R. objectionable because of his illicit love affairs. Bobby, on the other hand was a good person whose conduct was close to Islamic behavior" (1989: 8).*

In 1989 during the holy month of Ramadan Bahraini television broadcast 'Dynasty' immediately after the evening prayers. Most of the women would break their fast, finish their prayers and switch on their television sets to watch it. Veiled women found it fascinating to watch the female characters in 'Dynasty' dressed in their extravagant dresses, drinking champagne and wine and involved in different love affairs. At the end of night's episode these same women would visit their neighbourhood mosque and listen to the Imam's lecture mostly about the conduct of Moslem women. Later on they would watch an Egyptian soap opera 'Helmiya Nights' (which was very popular all over the Arab world). The women characters in 'Helmiya Nights' represented a different life-style. Although they followed a life-style much closer to that of the Gulf women, they had an amount of personal freedom that many Gulf women can not even dream of.

Most of the Gulf television stations present programmes for women, especially during the month of Ramadan, almost all of which concentrate on cooking recipes and flower arrangements in a kind of home economics crash course. Women's grievances and problems are not presented or even considered in these specialised packages. Gulf women, though, (as is the case with foreign labour) have found their outlet in the local newspapers. Newspapers have a weekly women's page which is edited by women. It is through these pages and the correspondence section that Gulf women can expose their problems anonymously. In the following pages we shall try to review these newspapers in an attempt to crystalize the main argument in this study- namely the modern states with traditional norms and values. The modern Gulf media present this contradiction in the tribal and patriarchal norms that dominate their contents.

Issues such as women joining the labour market, gender relations, the treatment of women by their male relatives, are the most common themes in the local newspapers. On 10 October, 1988 a letter was published in the local Arabic-language Bahraini newspaper *Akhbar Al-Khaleej*, in which the reader expressed his support for working women. He wrote that he completely disagreed with the idea of segregating women. He also expressed the view that life had changed and that it was about time that Bahraini society accepted this.

The next morning the same newspaper published a letter from an anonymous woman, in which she pointed out that women refused to get married because most men did not treat them appropriately. On the same date, the Saudi newspaper *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* published a reply to a woman's letter in which she complained about ill-treatment by her husband. The newspaper editor wrote that a woman should always obey her husband and satisfy him, these were the sayings of Prophet Mohammed and Moslem women should follow them.

*Akhbar Al-Khaleej* of 13 October 1988 published a letter from a reader complaining about the treatment of women in secluded societies like the Gulf. The woman reader - who did not give her name - said that in most other Arab countries women had been able to break their chains and free themselves from tradition.

As mentioned before, Bahraini and Kuwaiti women have been able to lead a slightly different life-style from that of other Gulf women. This could be attributed to the early introduction of education for girls in the two countries. It manifested itself in the number of letters published in Bahraini and Kuwaiti newspapers.

A Bahraini woman wrote a sarcastic letter to *Akhbar Al-Khaleej* on 14 October. In which she expressed her anger with society's understanding of sex appeal. In her letter - published in a small box at the bottom of an inside page - she wrote '...if a woman works then she is raising sexual temptations.' She then concluded by ridiculing society's connotations of sex appeal, 'nothing is left untouched, they might even say that if a woman coughs then she might seduce men.'

The Qatari newspaper *Arrayah*, on 16 October, however, devoted a whole page to the issue of polygamy. A Qatari woman sent a letter advocating polygamy on the grounds that there were more women than men in the country. Many of the other letters agreed with her and very few raised objections to this idea.

On 19 October, the English-language Bahraini *Gulf Daily News*, published a news story about relations between males and females. Quoting a Saudi cleric, the paper reported that Gulf women should not watch wrestling on television. Such programmes, according to the cleric, showed 'too much flesh.' The same Saudi religious man was also quoted as saying that when a woman talked to her fiancé over the telephone she should wear the veil and have a male member of the family present.

Marriage as an institution and its success were the subject of the correspondence page of *Akhbar Al-Khaleej* of 20 October. One of the letters (written

by a woman) proclaimed that a really successful marriage was one between two strong believers in the Islamic religion. She said that the increase in the number of divorce cases was caused by the lack of such believers. On the same date, the Kuwaiti newspaper *Al-Seyassah*, published answers to questions raised by several women in letters to the editor. In one a woman asked if it was proper for her to refuse marriage because she wanted to complete her education first. The editor answered her by writing that it was against the Prophet's sayings to do so. A woman, he wrote, should not refuse marriage on any excuse. According to the paper, girls should marry and then they could finish their studies afterwards. Answering another query, the editor said that women should not go shopping without a 'Mahram' (or male companion). He then went on to say that if they did so then they should not wear any make-up or perfume which would provoke men.

Under the title 'Women's Role,' the Saudi English-language newspaper *Arab News* published a letter by an expatriate male. He started his letter by saying that the participation of Saudi women in the medical field was crucial to the country's development. The shortage of human resources, he wrote, could not be solved unless women were emancipated. He went on, 'Of course the question of the status and role of women in the development of a given country will have to be examined according to the social and cultural attributes of its people; each nation has to adopt means and measures in this direction which are in consonance with its religious and social climate.'

A week later the Qatari newspaper *Arrayah* returned to the subject of polygamy, devoting two pages to the issue. Most letters were in reply to the earlier letter advocating polygamy as a solution to the problem of large number of unmarried women. The majority of views were against this idea. Most of the women were angered by such a call coming from a woman. In one of the letters, a woman reader

said that the problem was much more complicated than it had been presented. She wrote that many of the Qatari men had been favouring foreign women over Qataris. As a result, many Qatari women had no chance for marriage. Another woman wrote that the real issue here was not the problem of unmarried women but that of forcing girls to marry their cousins even if they were already married. One of the readers accused Qatari women of rejecting marriage on the excuse of pursuing their education.

A reader wrote to *Akhbar Al-Khaleej* on 26 October complaining about veiled women driving cars. He said that he had seen a woman with her face covered and driving in the centre of the city. This, the reader noted, was very dangerous and should be prohibited by law. If women wanted to be completely veiled, he wrote, then they should not be allowed to drive.

An article on women's participation in the workforce was published by the same newspaper on 27 October. A number of women were interviewed. Most of them protested that in the 1960s they were asked to join the workforce but in the 1980s there were calls for them to stay at home. One of the women interviewed said, '...instead of blaming us for the increased number of unemployed, men should advocate the withdrawal of foreign workers.' Another woman noted that many of the banks and companies had stopped employing women. She went on to say that if a woman had a foreigner as her boss she was more likely to get promoted than was the case with Arab male bosses.

The following issue of the paper continued the investigation. Most of the women interviewed concentrated their discussion on women's rights. They said that there was an urgent need for a family law to protect women. Most of the Gulf states lacked such a law. They had family religious courts in which three or four religious men resolved disputes according to their interpretations of the Quran and the Hadith.

On the same day the Saudi newspaper *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* published a letter by a woman reacting to a previous letter from a man who accused women of 'snitching' jobs from fathers who were responsible for families. In her letter, the woman said that men tried to find any excuse to attack women and blamed them for the problems that men faced.

The front page of *Akhbar Al-Khaleej* of 30 October announced the passing of a decree by the Bahraini Government regarding women on night shifts. It stated that women were allowed to work at night if their jobs required it; otherwise it was prohibited for them to follow such occupations. The paper detailed the conditions required for women to work at night. The Qatari *Arrayah* discussed the controversy over working women. Many women wrote to the paper saying that they ought to be allowed to join the workforce. One reader quoted one of the Prophet's sayings in which he encouraged his followers to work.

Every now and then news items are published about the number of women suffering from psychological illnesses, but no discussion of the causes has been introduced by any of the newspapers or the television networks. The Saudi paper *Arab News* of 30 October referred to a study conducted in the Eastern province of the Kingdom, which found that the number of women suffering from hysteria exceeded that of men in the region. It also indicated that most of the sick women were housewives.

On 31 October, *Akhbar Al-Khaleej* carried a letter on the subject of equality between the sexes. The woman who wrote the letter said that Gulf men talked all the time about the need for equality. They said, she wrote, that women ought to be treated equally to men, but they themselves did not practise what they preached. She continued that at home men's behaviour to their wives was that of a superior being towards a lesser one.



The same newspaper published a feature on 1 November about consumerist behaviours among Bahraini women. The paper asked the question: are women the only members of society who overspend on luxury goods? When the question was directed at the public in general, most male readers complained about the consumerist habits of Bahraini women. Female readers, on the other hand, said that men too had been indulging in buying luxury goods. These women raised the question: who buys extravagant cars, yachts, perfumes and expensive prayer beads?.

A Bahraini woman sent a letter to the same newspaper which was published on 3 November in which she challenged the argument put forward by many people against women's participation in sports activities. She wrote that for the last few weeks many people had been writing that it was improper for women to take up any sports. The argument, she noted, that women lose their femininity and/ or virginity had no basis and in fact doctors advised women to play games. It is important to note that such arguments had drowned the Gulf newspapers at the time of the Olympic Games in Seoul.

On 4 November the Saudi *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* published a letter by a female reader, stating that Moslem women ought to know that lipsticks and other cosmetics contained 'pigs fat' and that they should stop using such products. She continued that they (Moslem women) should 'wash those places [lips and faces] seven times, one of them with sand' to remove their effect. Moslems are forbidden by their religion to eat pork.

*Akhbar Al-Khaleej* of the same date carried an article about women's rights in Islam. The journalist, who devoted a whole page to the issue, reported that Islam granted women all rights and privileges. A reader wrote to the paper saying that many journalists and readers had been concentrating on the issue of women. Who cares, he

commented, about these unimportant matters: why don't you write about the increasing prices of eggs and milk?

In Qatar *Arraya*, of 6 November published several letters all written by female Qataris. In one a woman criticised parents who forced their will on their daughters. She wrote: 'how could families still practise such backward activities?' and went on, 'Why don't they leave their daughters to decide for themselves what subjects they want to study and what kind of life they want to lead?'. Another reader reflected on the large number of unmarried women and that Qatari men preferred foreign non-Arab women, especially during the last few years.

Divorced women are treated very badly, according to one of the readers of *Akhbar Al-Khaleej*. The reader noted in her letter published on 7 November, that divorced women were the subject of gossip, especially among men. Society thought of divorced women, she wrote, as immoral citizens. She said that they were continually scrutinised.

The increased number of divorce cases was the main subject of the correspondence page of *Akhbar Al-Khaleej*, on 8 November. One reader attributed the large number of divorces to the 'dominance' of husbands over their wives. If a wife, she wrote, wanted to share things with her husband, he rejected her.

*Arrayah* in Qatar had the same issue as its main feature on 10 November. The journalist wrote that the number of divorce cases among Qataris was on the increase. He then elaborated by writing that husbands have the right to beat their wives if the latter had committed any mistake. He wrote that the Prophet Mohammed said that men should treat their wives fairly but if they misbehaved then they should punish them. Punishment, he noted, should be by 'not sleeping with them and beating them but not very hard.'

*Arab News* of 12 November interviewed the Secretary-General of the World Muslim League. The main questions raised concerned the role of women in the development of their societies. The Secretary-General, Dr. Abdullah Omar Naseef, said at the beginning of the interview that women had been neglected during the last few decades. He went on to say that they ought to retain the position they held during the Prophet's time. Answering another question regarding mixing between the sexes, he said that Islam 'recommends that women should be at a distance from men because mixing with men will cause problems...' Although Dr Naseef advocated the need for women to work, he noted that the main task for a woman was 'to take care of the family, create a healthy environment, and to ensure that her husband is satisfied so that the whole family is living in a healthy and happy home.'

The Bahraini English-language newspaper *Gulf Daily News*, commented on a report compiled by the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce about working women. The report advised women not to be choosy when it came to finding a suitable job. Women, the paper wrote, should accept anything available in the job market. It also noted that 48 per cent of the population were women but their participation in the labour force was no more than 17 per cent. Neither the report nor the paper attempted to tackle the reasons behind this low share of women in the labour force.

At this time, reports of a tape in which a conversation was conducted with a woman genie (a medium) were widely circulated in Gulf newspapers. The Qatari *Arrayah*, of 15 November carried the script of the conversation. In it a male voice asked the genie, whose name was 'Morjana' about the places she usually went to and the people she influenced. Morjana replied that she usually dominated women who wore make-up and listened to music - those, she said, who did not follow the preaching of Islam and who did not wear the veil.

A female columnist in the same newspaper wrote on 19 November that the government ought to abolish high-rise buildings which were constructed near to girls schools. She referred to a newly built girls school with a high fence, but close to it a higher building was under construction. The male labourers on the building site, she argued, could watch the girls in their school. According to her this conduct was against the cultural norms and religious instruction.

On the same date the Kuwaiti newspaper *Arab Times*, reported a threat by an official against men who 'tease women in public places or in front of girls schools.' In many of the closed Gulf societies, the most common places for teenagers to see each other is in front of girls' schools. Young males drive their cars around these schools to get even a glimpse of a female. The official, as quoted by the paper, said that those who were caught doing this would be punished by either 'imprisonment or whipping besides informing their employer or family.'

In Qatar the war over women's issues continued to surface on the pages of the leading newspaper *Arrayah*. On the 20 November a male reader condemned parents who forced marriage on their daughters. He called for families to allow their daughters to study and work. The same reader said, 'people can not stop modernisation and change.' Not many women, though, shared his views. In a letter published on the same date, a woman expressed her rejection of complete freedom of movement and choice for Qatari women. She said that, although she wanted to study abroad, she wanted a male member of her family to accompany her.

A man sent a letter condemning girls from the Gulf who left their country to study abroad. There, he wrote, 'they lose control and start going out with foreign men.' He continued by saying that when these girls graduated they brought back all these 'foreign' ideals with them and spread them at home.

*Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* received a query on 22 November from a woman who asked if it was necessary for her to wear the 'Hijab' (the head scarf) as well as saying her prayers. The editor said that the 'Hijab' was a must for Moslem women; otherwise even their prayers were not accepted.

Meanwhile, the battle between the sexes continued on the pages of the Bahraini newspaper *Akhbar Al-Khaleej*. A male reader sent a letter on 23 November accusing Bahraini women of being greedy. He wrote that many of these women were the real cause of high dowries, because women wanted more and more money. He went on to say that these women had no right to complain about Bahraini men marrying non-Bahrainis.

Two days later the Saudi English-language *Arab News*, published a news item about the number of non-Saudi women who were working in the Kingdom. It reported that 60,000 non-Saudi women were in jobs that could be taken by Saudi women. The paper quoted a Saudi official as saying that the government was trying to integrate Saudi women into the wage-earning sector. In the same issue one of the newspaper's reporters answered a query from a Saudi woman regarding her rights if her husband decided to marry another woman. The reader asked if her husband ought to consult her before doing so or even inform her. The journalist's answer was that a man did not have to tell his first wife about his intentions of marrying a second one.

On the women's page of *Akhbar Al-Khaleej*, of the same date, an in-depth analysis of the Bahraini society was published. The page's editor who is a female said that women's productivity was very low because society did not take their work seriously. Since women were discriminated against, she wrote, they took their revenge on society by neglecting their work and indulging in other less important matters.

This journalist's colleague in Qatar had a different perspective of women's role in society. Nora Rashid in her column in *Arrayh* of 26 November wrote that a

woman's voice was sacrilegious. She noted that, according to Islam, women were excluded from the call to prayer. She then went on to say that women ought not to sing, and that those who entertained at local female-only weddings should be banned.

In Kuwait, *Al-Seyassah* published a letter from a female reader expressing her grievances as a woman. She said that everything was forbidden to her just because of her sex. The suffering, she wrote, that a woman faced in Kuwaiti society was unbearable. In the same issue, a male reader wrote that women should not complain if men started chasing them. They, dressed in a provocative way and so men interpreted this as a way of attracting them.

On 27 November *Arrayah* published several letters from readers regarding the treatment of women by society. In one a woman complained about men who identified women with cows. She said that ‘..they think that our main role in life is like a cow to bear children and feed them.’ In another letter a woman complained about husband’s treatment of their wives. She noted that they thought of their wives as part of their property and that they could therefore do whatever they liked with them. One man sent a letter in which he criticised the ‘old fashioned’ way of marriage. He said that it was not enough for the bride and groom to be introduced through a photograph. It is an old habit in most Gulf societies for families to exchange photographs when introducing their sons or daughters who are eligible for marriage.

A Qatari female who writes frequently in the local paper *Arrayah*, published a column on 29 November in which she commented on several issues. One of these was a book fair being held in Doha (the Qatari capital) at that time, at which the government censors had banned a number of titles. She wrote that freedom of speech and expression ought to be allowed. In another part of her column she expressed her disagreement with female teachers who dressed up in the latest fashions and make-up

for work. The Ministry of Education, she wrote, ought to interfere and prevent these teachers from doing so.

It should be noted here that, although there are a few female writers and journalists who publish articles and columns in the local Saudi and Qatari newspapers; they work from their homes. Unlike the case in Bahrain and Kuwait where women journalists share newspaper offices with their male colleagues, in Saudi Arabia and Qatar they are not allowed to do so. The restrictions are upheld by both the families and society in general.

*Akhbar Al-Khaleej* of 30 November published a news item about a court case in which a wife accused her husband of ill-treating her. The husband, it was reported, attended the family court session on the day and said that his wife wanted to drop the case against him. He said that he had been going to bring his wife to do so, but there were no indications of why the wife had not shown up.

Two men wrote to *Arrayah* on 4 December, 1988, both of them reporting incidents of women who were seen in public uncovered (without a veil). They said that since these women were not veiled they provoked men to chase them around. Both letters ended with a message to women that if they wanted to be respected and not to be harassed, then they should show consideration to society and cover themselves.

A Kuwaiti reader also commented on women's dress in *Al-Seyassah* of 7 December. He wrote that Kuwaiti women were switching to wearing jeans instead of what he called their 'Islamic dress.' Women, he wrote, should not go out in public in trousers and jeans. According to him, they must cover themselves in public but could, if they wanted, dress in Western style while at home.

Under the title 'Banking On Women,' the Qatari English-language newspaper *Weekly Gulf Times*, published a news item on 8 December announcing the opening of a women-only section of the Doha Bank. It stressed that 'The women's section at this

bank has its own clearly marked entrance into the main branch building on Grand Hamad St, its own car park, and a lift exclusive to the section.' A Doha Bank official who was interviewed said that, once inside the bank, 'customers are hidden to the outside world because of decorative wooden screens, gypsum work and curtains.'

On 12 December, *Akhbar Al-Khaleej*, of Bahrain published a letter by a female reader, protesting at the treatment of female workers by society. She wrote that women work because they have to contribute to the family income. Then, she went on, they get blamed by society for the collapse of the family. 'A few of us -women- have no choice but to work to be able to survive,' she ended her letter by saying.

The issue of divorced women crops up very often in the local newspapers. For the Gulf societies this is a new phenomenon. In *Al-Seyassah*, of 13 December, a woman wrote that Kuwaiti society condemned divorced women, but failed to do the same as regards men. In fact, she wrote, divorced men continued their normal lives - they married another wife and started a new family with no difficulties. She finished her letter by raising the question 'Why does divorce mean the end of life for a woman?'

Discussions on birth control measures and whether they are allowed or not by the Islamic religion are sometimes discussed by the media. On 19 December *Arab News* touched on the subject by saying that any measures that could stop a woman from having babies were against Islam. The paper then said that it was only in specific cases that such procedures were allowed, and defined these circumstances as when the parents wanted to have an interval between two children.

A letter to *Akhbar Al-Khaleej*, raised a completely new issue in terms of female-male relations in the Gulf. A female reader drew attention to cases in which females received telephone calls and letters from men putting forward proposals of marriage. In all the cases reported, however, the men promised that the marriage would be in complete secrecy and would not last for longer than a day or two. The woman



asked, 'Why should I or any other girl agree to such an arrangement?' She then went on to say that women were not looking for 'physical satisfaction' alone, they wanted a partner with whom they could share their life.

The official attitude of the Gulf states towards women could be demonstrated by an interview with the Saudi Education Minister reported in *Arab News* of 24 December. In the interview he said that there were many opportunities for Saudi women. He then noted that, with imported technology and women's participation in the workforce, the kingdom could overcome the problem of dependence on foreign workers. The minister gave no examples of his government's plans for the integration of women into the wage-earning sector, however.

On 21 December, the Qatari newspapers carried several articles insulting a female university teacher. Apparently the teacher had condemned the treatment of women by Islam in one of her lectures. A woman journalist called her 'Satan.' and said that she had learnt all these foreign ideas from the 'communist countries.' Other male writers also attacked her and insinuated that action might be taken against her by the authorities.

In one of *Al-Seyassah*, sections called 'Diwaniat al-qura' (meaning the readers' gathering place) on 25 December a male reader noted that polygamy brought happiness to men. He wrote that, contrary to the widespread belief that men with more than one wife were miserable, they led a very happy life. His whole family, he said, including his two wives, were very comfortable and happy with the situation. He concluded by saying 'people should not condemn such marriages.'

*Arrayah* of the same date published a letter by a female on the subject of mixing with male servants. She wrote that many women forgot about their religion and did not cover themselves in front of male servants. Many of these servants took advantage of

the situation to have intimate relations with the female members of the family. She advised Qatari families not to hire male servants and to beware of them.

In Bahrain and Kuwait, where women are allowed to drive cars, the media warn the public against driving behind them. A feature published by *Akhbar Al-Khaleej*, on 26 December cautioned drivers by reporting, ‘..be careful if you are driving behind an Asian, a taxi driver or a woman driver.’ The reporter (a male) said that women were always nervous when they drove and could easily lose control. He quoted women who told him that they avoided specific areas where the traffic was very bad and that they preferred driving during day time only. He blamed this for the increased number of accidents in Bahrain.

The Saudi *Arab News* published a new law to reduce the number of marriages with non-Saudi women. Saudi men, according to the paper, complained about the increased amount of dowry that they had to pay for Saudi women. The officials interviewed said that restrictive measures had been taken by the state because such cases ultimately increased the burden on it. *Arab News* also noted that the law was stricter in regard to Saudi women marrying non-Saudi men.

In *Arrayah* the editor gave a piece of advice to newly married women, namely that they should obey their husbands. Maybe, he wrote, in this way we could save many marriages from facing difficulties which could lead to divorce.

The same newspaper on 8 January 1989 published a letter by a reader, stating that women dressed in ‘tight skirts could aggravate sexual urges in men.’ Women, he wrote, ought to be more considerate and decent; it was for this specific reason that Islam decreed that women must wear the veil and cover their bodies.

*Arab News* on 14 January published a long letter by an educated Saudi woman, Dr Rab’a Al-Khateeb, challenging polygamy as projected by a prominent figure in an interview with the same newspaper. She wrote that the interviewee had contradicted

himself at several points in the interview. At one point, he asserted that he was against polygamy. He then contradicted himself by saying: 'It is natural for a man to take a second wife. It is simply a matter of needs...marriage to a second wife is sunnah.' She disputed his ideas that prohibiting polygamy could lead to immorality in society. She also argued against his use of the term 'spinster,' about which she wrote that this word was no longer used in the West; 'perhaps we, too, should cross this word out of our vocabulary.' She also challenged him on the idea that women had no life if someone did not knock on their door. Women, according to her, could pursue their careers and develop their interests even if they did not have a husband.

It is important at this point to note that educated Saudi women cannot express such radical views in the local Arabic-language newspapers. It is only in the English-language newspapers or television networks that they have such freedom.

*Arab News* of 4 March 1989 interviewed the director of the Islamic Press Agency who expressed liberal views concerning women. He said: 'We cannot leave half the society (which is women) unproductive.' Women, according to him, should be used as one of the forces through which the country could develop.

On 11 March an editorial in *Arrayah* tackled yet another issue related to mixing between the sexes. This time it was on how male tailors take women's measurements. He wrote that this practice was against Islamic principles. Men and women, he noted, must not stay in the same room alone. 'It is even worse when the man (tailor) has to touch the woman's body while taking her measurements.'

The next day's issue of the same newspaper carried another harsh article against women. The journalist condemned women who tried to attract the attention of the opposite sex and those who had some kind of a relation with men as 'Satans.' He attributed his conclusion to the Quran and to the Prophet's sayings.

Women take their revenge on such articles every now and then through the letters they send to the editor. On 14 March a woman wrote to *Arrayah* saying that Qatari society treated its women with 'hatred.' Women, she wrote, were imprisoned by society which turned them into 'half human and half handicapped, it creates dead monuments out of them.'

Are Moslem women allowed to dance or not? was the subject of another column by one of the *Arrayah* female journalist. On 15 March, she wrote that parents should not let their young girls dance even at school functions. According to her, girls who dance while young grow up with no manners. She then directed the question to the readers: 'And you know what dancing does to girls?'

During March 1989, the 5th Gulf Women's Conference was held in Bahrain. The conference was ignored by almost all the Gulf newspapers except, of course, those of the country in which it was held. The state-controlled television networks did not even mention it in their local news bulletins. The Bahraini newspapers, on the other hand, competed in publishing coverage and discussion about the issues that were raised at the conference.

Like the previous ones, the conference was sponsored by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in Bahrain. Ministry officials had brief discussions with the organisers months before it was held to ensure that the subjects discussed would be in line with government policy.

A male reader, however, wrote a cynical article about the conference. He commented that it had avoided all the important issues and concentrated on the problems of families and children. He ended by saying that, even though the conference was obviously not going to change the status of Gulf women, he had hoped that it would alter the family institution. 'I am sure,' he wrote, 'that the conference's results will be kept in the drawers of those in charge.'

A male cartoonist followed this with a sketch published in the newly launched Arabic-language newspaper *Al-Ayam* in Bahrain, summarising the whole issue of women's segregation. In the cartoon one man was helping another to climb a wall to get a glimpse of what was behind it. Although the cartoonist was referring to the small number of male participants in the conference, his comment could be generalised to include the whole question of separation between the sexes.

*Akhbar Al-Khaleej's* issue of 21 March was also devoted to coverage of the conference and reactions to the issues discussed by the participants. One man commented by saying that the conference's motto or slogan 'A better future for the family and the child' in fact 'enhanced the subordination of women.'

The next day the same newspaper published a letter from another male reader drawing attention to a leaflet that had been distributed in different parts of the country. He said that his wife had discovered one of these leaflets attached to her car window. The leaflet, he wrote, advised women to wear the hijab or else they would suffer in hell. These leaflets were widely circulated during the Gulf Women's Conference and most of the participants found them tucked in their windscreens.

'Women in a Man's Law' was the title of *Akhbar Al-Khaleej* feature on 23 March. The reporter interviewed lawyers and women regarding Bahraini laws, and especially those concerning women. Most of the women interviewed said that these laws were written by men for men. One of the women commented that women, according to the country's laws, had no rights whatsoever. Almost all of them regretted that Bahrain had no family law. Lawyers also agreed that there was a need for such a law and that most of the efforts to push for one were not acknowledged by officials. The same newspaper carried a news item about a husband who had been taken to court after assaulting his wife. The court heard that the wife was furious when she discovered that her husband had married their maid a year earlier.

On 24 March a woman wrote to the editor of *Akhbar Al-Khaleej*, accusing Bahraini females of being 'too Westernised.' She asserted that these women had drifted away from their religious beliefs. They had been imitating the women they saw on television who are not Moslem women and did not observe Islamic dress and behaviour.

In Kuwait, *Arab Times* reported that many Kuwaiti women had expressed their readiness to be included in the compulsory military service which the government was trying to impose on men only. These women either wrote or telephoned to the editors of the newspaper to say that they wanted to be part of their country's defence forces. Nationalism, they said, was not restricted to males and should not be considered as such.

On 29 March *Akhbar Al-Khaleej* printed a letter on its correspondence page on the subject of honour. The female writer rejected the idea that society's honour was derived from its females. She said that such ideas had been maintained for years for the sole purpose of keeping women in submission. It was about time, she declared, that we changed these 'backward' beliefs and joined the modern world. She stressed that many of the women who gave way to the veil and the complete cover-up were leading double lives. They covered themselves up, she was convinced, while at the same time doing all kinds of things that were forbidden by their religion.

In one of its columns, the same paper commented that young women did not receive the same amount of attention as that provided for young men. During the summer vacation, the editor wrote, many of these girls found themselves stranded and confined to their homes. He said that there were no sports facilities or clubs for women, while men had many to choose from.

During the month of April 1989 a court case decision reported by *Akhbar Al-Khaleej* was to stir up a big row between officials on one side and lawyers and

journalists on the other. The whole of society was split over the issue and foreign correspondents found it very exciting for their hungry editors in Western capitals. It concerned a divorce case brought by one of the two wives at the centre of the issue. The wife complained that her husband slept with both his wives at the same time in the same bed. The Bahraini family court granted the wife the right of divorce. The husband, however, was not satisfied with the decision and went to Saudi Arabia and got a 'Fatwa' from the Kingdom's 'Mufti' who is the highest Islamic clergyman. The 'Fatwa' stated that men have the right, under Islamic law to have intercourse with their wives in any way they like. Based on the Saudi Fatwa, the Bahraini court decision was overruled and the divorced wife was dragged by the police back to her husband's home.

The consequences of reporting the case were drastic for the newspaper, the reporter and the source who was a female Bahraini lawyer. The Bahraini Minister of Information suspended the newspaper for two days (10 and 11 of April) and threatened the reporter with confiscating her press card. The Bahraini Minister of Justice and Islamic Endowments ordered the prosecution of the lawyer in a special court for the profession. Both the reporter and her lawyer source were unable to produce any evidence, as the case files disappeared the day after the decision was reported. A denial of the existence of the case by the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Endowments was published in all the local newspapers for two days. In the ministry's denial it was mentioned that the whole case had been faked by 'someone' and that no records of the incident had been found. The journalist and the lawyer were saved from imprisonment or other harsher measures because they were both members of the royal family. As for the editor of the newspaper, he was forced to publish an apology.

Foreign reporters based in Manama (the Bahraini capital) were summoned to the Ministry of Information where they were lectured on objective reporting, etc. They were also threatened by the Minister himself who told one of the correspondents (for

the German news agency DPA) that he could be deported immediately for such an offence.

The Gulf newspapers reported only the suspension of *Akhbar Al-Khaleej*, with no reaction or even discussion of the reason for such an action by the Bahraini officials.

Meanwhile, the other Gulf newspapers carried on their usual writings about women. *Arab News*, a few days later, noted in one of its columns that women ought to obey their husbands. The Saudi English-language newspaper stated that women must act and dress in the way their husbands liked. According to the Prophet Mohammed's sayings, the writer said, real Moslem women ought to please their husbands.

While the last two chapters have illustrated the way in which Gulf media handles the issues of foreign labor and women, the next one will attempt to study the media itself. Gulf journalists who adopt the modern-patriarchal nature of the state are themselves subject to its despotism. Although these journalists have an amount of autonomy, at times of crisis their freedom vanishes. Self-censorship, however, is a common practice among Gulf journalists. The next chapter will examine the lack of citizens rights in the Gulf in relation to those journalists and it specifically concentrates on the coverage of the Gulf War.



## CHAPTER V

### THE GULF MEDIA: VICTIM OF STATE CONTROL

#### The Case of the Gulf War Coverage

*“The media, the arena in which I work, has been both a major victim of and a collaborator in the narrowing of information and ideas, although it is misrepresented as the very opposite”  
(Pilger, 1992: 2).*

#### 5.1 Introduction:

Although the media in the Gulf - as seen Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis - sometimes avoid airing problems related to women and migrant workers, Gulf journalists themselves become the victims of state control. The importation of advanced media technology as a result of the huge oil revenues brought no drastic changes in the media contents. The Gulf media, just as is true of women and foreign workers, are unable to provide an independent outlet for the voices of intellectuals, especially in times of crisis. They are, however, confronted with the more difficult problem of exposing the duplicity of society and the state in general. From one side they have to project the modern media (state) and, on the other, they are confined to the traditional politics of the ruling tribes.

The Gulf sheikdoms (as discussed on chapter 2) have their own peculiarities. The tremendous oil wealth has transformed them into welfare states, but the traditional nature of the patriarchal structure has continued to dominate. These states have constantly exploited religion, tradition and kinship to support their legitimacy. In their attempt to adopt and project a more prosperous, developed and modern outlook for their states, the Gulf rulers have been faced with the dilemma of providing individual freedom for the mass of their populations. Michael Hudson noted that these rulers were:

*"..Aware of the more directly liberal, democratic, participatory values associated with modernity. Although they seek economic growth, they are reluctant to see the masses politicized and unwilling to permit significant mass participation or autonomous opposition groups" (Hudson, 1977: 27).*

The principles of modernity, as universally defined to require equality and individual freedom to express views and opinions that might not suit those of the ruling elite, are not observed in the Gulf. Kevin Dwyer in his book 'Arab Voices' discusses the lack of personal freedom and democracy in the Arab world, with a main focus on three Arab countries. While talking to different groups and individuals in Egypt he found that the exploitation of Islam goes beyond the Gulf boundaries and actually has its effect on other Arab countries. He found that Egyptians looking for jobs in the oil-rich Gulf states were told that if they condemned secular ideas and embraced Islam they might find it easier to get the employment they were desperate for.

It is worth emphasising what a Moroccan member of the Council of Religious Scholars told him concerning the issue of human right and individual

freedom. After criticising the West for its neglect of human rights, the Moroccan scholar noted that Saudi Arabia had not signed the UN Convention on Human Rights because it accepted 'atheism.' He continued:

*"And also, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was for complete equality between men and women. For us, women are equal to men in law, but they are not the same as men, and they can't be allowed to wander around freely in the street like some kind of animal" (Dwyer, 1991: 39).*

By relating the state structure in the Gulf to the issue of the media in the region one could understand the dilemma confronting the rulers. The Gulf states have promoted and, in fact, helped to develop their media. Advanced media technology as found in most of the developed countries is available in the Gulf and is used by local journalists and editors. However, this advanced technology was able to deliver the modernity principles discussed above and itself became a victim of state oppression and control.

In one respect the Gulf media were to give an impression of modernity and independence. Newspapers, magazines and television networks have adopted the most advanced media technologies that are available in the market. Like many other consumer products, these technologies have been purchased from the Western industrialised countries. The authorities have also sent reporters and editors to be trained in Western capitals. Gulf journalists, nonetheless, know very well that while they can use the technologies they have to forget about changing the contents of their media. Even though almost all the daily newspapers in the Gulf are privately owned, they have to function under the close control of the Ministries of Information. As one Saudi editor puts it: '...the newspapers are so similar they

might as well be nationalised.'

The amount of freedom available for the media to voice some kind of an independent critical opinion is limited in peacetime, but at times of crisis it disappears altogether. As is true in most developing countries, the Gulf media are completely dependent on information filtered through officials:

*"In developing societies, truth has always been considered divine in form as well as in content, to whatever god or prophet it is attributed. The knowledge of this truth is therefore considered a privilege, the privilege of one man or of a few men, who henceforth necessarily claim a monopoly of freedom—the freedom of those who know and have alone the right to tell the others what they must know and believe. A phenomenon accentuated by the sacred character of the written word, to be written in the most perishable fashion: in newspapers...in such a context, it is natural and logical that the press should assume a very particular role. Instead of being a "mass medium" in the sense commonly held, it becomes the instrument of transmission of the official truth, the media by which this truth is authoritatively communicated to the masses"*  
(Tuoni, 1971: 2-3).

Television stations in the Gulf are faced with tighter control since they are all government-owned. The harsher measures imposed on television are partly due to its effect on a population which is largely illiterate. News presenters have no freedom whatsoever and must repeat the news which the officials filter through to them. Local news consists mainly of the activities of the Emir, his Crown Prince and state ministers. International news is carefully scrutinised so as not to offend any 'friendly' country.

The Gulf media are also saturated with religious material. The Daily newspapers have at least a weekly section devoted to Islam. Television stations

start and end their daily programmes with a recital from the Quran. A huge amount of money is invested in religious programmes especially during the holy month of Ramadan. The relation between religion, state and media is so complex because, in their attempt at legitimacy, these states define the ruler as God's representative on earth (Dwyer, 1991).

During times of crisis, however, the Gulf media convert into a mouthpiece for the state. The last two decades have produced different examples supporting this argument. To name but a few of these crises: the 1979 seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca; the 1981 coup attempt in Bahrain; the 1985 bombs in seaside cafes and the assassination attempt on the Emir of Kuwait; the 1989 explosions in Mecca during the pilgrimage season. In almost all these incidents there was a complete blackout on the part of the media for the first few hours or even days until official statements had been released. The Gulf media were allowed only to voice the government line of accusation and condemnation.

A statement made by the Kuwaiti Prime Minister after the suspension of his country's parliament in 1976 illustrates how officials conceive of the role of the media. He said:

*“with unlimited freedom the press became irresponsible Giving it freedom without controls has made some papers obedient instruments in the service of objectives alien to our country, which work to corrupt society, propagate self-interested rumors and sow trivialities and sedition among our ranks” (Rugh, 1979: 106).*

Journalists in the Gulf are the most feared and watched by government officials and/or security personnel. In most of the Gulf countries, journalists are not allowed to have their own union or even a club in which to meet. Kuwait was the

only Gulf state that allowed the establishment of a journalists union, partly due to pressure from parliament when it was not suspended by the Emir. In Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Qatar such attempts by journalists were completely rejected by the authorities. It might be worth noting that other professions - lawyers, engineers, sociologists...etc - are allowed to set up such unions. The Bahraini Minister of Information in a meeting with a group of journalists bluntly revealed that they (meaning the government) could not allow such a union for journalists. Tariq Al-Moayed told the gathering that it was easier to handle individual journalists than a group of them.

A recent crisis, however, can be used as an illustration of how the Gulf media relinquish their autonomy to the state. As noted in chapter 2, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on 2 August, 1990 was ignored by most of the Gulf media. In countries like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the local media waited until the official reaction was made public. From 2 August onwards the media in the Gulf caved in to the state. They were forced into a situation where they had to cover their own local news (the Gulf War fought on Gulf deserts and Gulf waters) through the American and British media.

Since the Gulf officials succumbed to the American and British governments and armies, their media had to follow suit. Gulf reporters and editors, who were much better equipped to cover a war being waged on their own territory; were asked to depend on American and British journalists. The Gulf media repeated what the Western news agencies and/or television networks were reporting. In a few cases even comments that could be classified as racial towards Arabs in general were echoed by the Gulf media. Mustapha Masmoudi in an article about the Arab media and state in times of crisis commented on the Gulf media by writing:

*“But the Gulf countries most affected realized that in spite of their technological capacity for audiovisual and print communication, their media had not committed the necessary effort in terms of content and political information” (Masmoudi, 1992: 42).*

Gulf reporters were not allowed to participate in the pool reporting that was organised by the American and British forces. Even those who were confined to their own countries had no access to cover the military operations that were taking place there. Bahraini journalists, for example, could not talk to the Tornado pilots who were based in the island. Their Saudi counterparts were not allowed to talk to Saudi pilots who, according to the allied commanders, participated in Desert Storm. Saudi pilots just like the other Arab soldiers, were interviewed in English by American or British pool reporters with access to them.

Although Gulf journalists had all the tools for reporting the war, they were voiceless and completely marginalised. Gulf officials preferred the Western media, despite the ideological costs, to an independent media in the Gulf. One of the costs of this total dependence on the Western media was the example of unveiled Western females who had the freedom to travel around Saudi Arabia either as soldiers or reporters. The Gulf media had to depend for their account of the war on American and British journalists who were themselves only too eager to fall in as instruments of their states' propaganda machines.

In an attempt to clarify this point the present writer will use her own experience prior to the Gulf War as one example of how journalists in the region were pushed into the position of observers.

The last decade has witnessed an increase in the number of professional Gulf journalists who were not only acclaimed locally, but also by international media organisations. They were able to report both in English and Arabic and with their knowledge of the region's history, culture and norms were better equipped to cover its news events. At some points they were even sent to report on events that could not be described as Gulf, but rather as Arab or Middle Eastern events.

The present writer, as one of many journalists in the region, was hired as a reporter and then photo-editor by the Associated Press's Gulf bureau based in Manama, the Bahraini capital. On several occasions I had to travel around the Gulf to cover news events ranging from war to meetings between the European Community and the Gulf Co-operation Council. On many of these occasions the decision to send me instead of a more experienced AP reporter was based on the fact that as a Bahraini citizen, I suffered from no travel restrictions around the region, and I knew the language, the geography and the culture.

During the Iraq-Iran War, I was sent to the war-front in both the northern and the southern borders of Iraq and Iran. On one occasion the Iraqis took a group of journalists (including the writer) to the Kurdish region in the northern part of the country. The Kurds, fighting for their autonomy, had reported that a battle had taken place between their guerrillas and the Iraqi army. The Iraqis for their part wanted to prove to the journalists that such an incident did not take place. The writer managed to prove the Iraqis wrong after chatting to local Kurds in the northern town of Mangish.

Covering yet another war, my knowledge of Arabic proved be useful. During the 1986 civil war in Southern Yemen, I was sent by AP to Djibouti to interview refugees fleeing the inferno. South Yemen - as the only socialist country in the region - had strong ties with what used to be the Soviet Union and the



Eastern bloc states. Its relations with the West were poor, which was reflected by the few Westerners who were working in Aden, the capital. Almost all the refugees were non-Westerners who could speak no English. With no language problem and with my knowledge of the history of South Yemen, I managed to cover the story much more easily than my Western colleagues.

These are but a few examples of how Gulf journalists were equipped to cover the Gulf War. Yet they were pushed into the position of observers or mere ghosts who were present but in reality had no effect on the way the war was presented to their audiences. The rest of this chapter will therefore try to analyse how the Gulf War was covered by the local media through its American and British counterparts. To do this I need to examine American and British coverage of the war, which was, after all, used by the Gulf media.

## **5.2 Regulations and Pool Reporting:**

As the allied soldiers were moved swiftly from their bases to the Gulf Western reporters flooded into the region. Correspondents whom in the past had had to wait months to obtain visas, were confronted with few difficulties this time. It was not long, though, before they were faced with the regulations enforced by the Pentagon, the British Ministry of Defence and the Saudi authorities.

Correspondents were assigned to pools which excluded all non-American or non-British reporters, including Gulf journalists. This procedure angered many Western journalists who complained about it. French correspondents, for example, found such treatment appalling and at one point during the conflict threatened to leave Saudi Arabia and terminate their reporting. They were among the few who objected to such discrimination against non-Americans and non-British. On 12 February, 1991 a group of 300 journalists (all non-British or non-American)

representing 23 different countries sent a letter to King Fahd and the allied commanders in the Gulf complaining about road blocks established to prevent them from venturing into the desert (Taylor, 1992: 158). Gulf journalists, however, were not among those who dared to complain. In fact, throughout Desert Shield and then Desert Storm, these reporters and editors were far away from the action. While western reporters were allowed to stay in Riyadh and attend the military briefings, their Gulf counterparts were confined to their offices.

Western journalists who defied the rules were threatened with having their credentials confiscated and even being thrown out of Saudi Arabia. A French television team representing TF1 was confronted with such a case. The TF1 team filmed a group of French soldiers who said that they did not know why they were there, but they might be fighting for oil. These French correspondents were banned from coverage and this led to their protest (reported in *The Times*, 19 February 1991). Such a story did not find its way to the Gulf media which depended entirely on American and British coverage of the conflict.

It might be useful to mention that the American media, especial the television networks, had the greatest effect in the Gulf region, in particular Cable News Network (CNN). Most of the Gulf local television stations provided CNN with specific amounts of their broadcasting time. It was also reported that the Pentagon negotiated a deal with the Bahraini Minister of Information to provide CNN with a separate channel for continuous broadcasting. This was acknowledged by the Bahraini officials as a service to the American soldiers in the Gulf.

The first few days of the crisis witnessed a complete devotion to coverage of the war. The Western media -especially the television networks - bombarded the readers and viewers with information, most of it of no huge substance. As Sir William Deedes wrote in the *Daily Telegraph* of 19 January, 1991:

*“..the ceaseless sound, the plethora of voices, round the clock, sheds extraordinarily little light on what is actually going on” (quoted in Taylor, 1992: 66).*

Not all American and British correspondents were allowed to join the pools. Journalists were asked by the military to undergo physical fitness tests. Each reporter had to do 29 push-ups in two minutes and run one and a half miles in 15 minutes. The few who passed these tests were assigned to accompany a specific regiment. Pool reporting, as an army technique, was created by the Americans mainly after the Vietnam War and the invasion of Grenada (*Time*, 10 September 1990).

Journalists who did not qualify to join these pools were forced to stay in Riyadh and Dhahran waiting for their colleagues' dispatches.

*“Most journalists were left in the hotels...forced by Pentagon rules that limit coverage to small troops of combat pools designated to visit the war and send censored dispatches back to their jealous and miserable colleagues” (The Guardian, 28 February 1991).*

Many frustrated reporters who decided to take a chance and venture alone into the desert, found themselves threatened by the army with being 'kicked out' of Saudi Arabia. Others were faced with angry pool reporters who tried to attack them with the help of allied soldiers. Robert Fisk, the Middle East correspondent of *The Independent* told *The Washington Post* of the ordeal he faced when he visited the Saudi-Kuwaiti border town of Khafji. Fisk said that he was faced with an NBC pool reporter who started 'shouting abuse at me, telling me to go back to Dhahran and saying I would spoil it for the pool.' He expressed anger about these reporters who, according to Fisk, 'have lost their critical faculties and become part of the military machine. This is very sad and humiliating for all of us' (*The International*

*Herald Tribune*, 12 February 1991).

Reports, such as those by Fisk or other self-respecting journalists, did not find their way to the Gulf media which were confined by the state and military straitjacket. The Gulf media not only lost their ability to cover a war in their own region, but also had to depend on journalists who had identified with the military. These American and British pool reporters at some point found it acceptable to practice self-censorship. Philip Knightley, in an article entitled 'A Warrior Race Turns a Blind Eye to Battle,' noted that the guidelines enforced by the military enhanced the amount of 'voluntary' censorship by journalists (*The Independent On Sunday*, 13 January 1991). (For more on Knightley's account of war coverage see Knightley, 1989; also Glasgow University Media Group, 1976, 1982).

The policy of the carrot and the stick was practised by the allied commanders in relation to journalists. A Los Angeles Times reporter, for example, was kicked out of the pool after publishing an article in which he wrote that 50 US military vehicles were missing. His article passed the censor in his pool with no objections, but he was penalised for it later. From the early days of the deployment of allied forces in the Saudi desert, Pentagon press officers warned journalists that if they asked 'hard' questions that were seen as 'anti-military' they would suffer. The Pentagon officers explained that their requests for interviews with commanders would be rejected (*The New York Times*, 17 February 1991).

American and British pool reporters had close contacts with the soldiers. They shared the same facilities and at some points depended on them completely for their own safety on the battlefield. Many of them had identified themselves with the soldiers more than with their journalist colleagues. They even dressed in their uniforms and held back information which they thought might harm the allied troops. A very few resented this journalist-soldier image and preferred to keep their

distance from the army. They were the ones who criticised their colleagues and advised them to join the army if they were so fascinated with it. Robert Fisk, in one of his dispatches from Riyadh noted:

*“The reporters in uniform and the soldiers with journalism in their veins suggest a symbiotic, perhaps osmotic relationship. Half the reporters in Saudi Arabia it seems, want to be soldiers. Half the soldiers would like to be in the news business. No wonder fantasy has so strong a claim” (The Independent On Sunday, 9 December 1991).*

It is worth referring at this point to an incident where it was reported that a colonel commanding a US air base in the Gulf had given reporters small American flags as presents. The commander told these pool members that these flags had been carried in the cockpits of the first US jets to bomb Baghdad. He continued by saying, ‘you are warriors too’ (*The Independent*, 6 February 1991).

The Gulf media were saturated with images of American and British journalists dressed in military fatigues. To Gulf journalists these reporters represented the power not of the media but of the US and UK armies. The liaison between soldiers and journalists was so complete that many changed professions during the conflict. For instances there was the case of General Michael Dugan, the US air force Chief of Staff dismissed in September 1990 for revealing that the US were ready to bomb downtown Baghdad in order to kill Saddam, who was offered a consultancy job by CBS at a salary of \$1,500 per day (*The Independent*, 25 January 1991).

A *New York Times* journalist commented on this close relation between pool reporters and the army:

*"Each pool member is an unpaid employee of the Department of Defence, on whose behalf he or she prepares the news of the war for the outer world" (quoted in Taylor, 1992: 53).*

The outer world that Malcolm Browne was referring to included the Gulf region which in the end was forced to use material that was highly censored or influenced by the American and British armies. Every piece of copy and every television news rush was carefully scrutinised by the officers assigned to carry out such jobs for every reporter in the field. *The Guardian* of 28 February, 1991 quoted the famous Italian journalist, Oriana Fallaci, as commenting on the amount of censorship enforced:

*"..I was horrified by this....It was more than censorship it's like a cancer. Everybody in my family die of cancer. You say cancer, I shiver. You say censorship, I shiver. And that was my deepest experience in censorship and incapability, was North Vietnam. I am living the same experience again."*

American and British pool reporters did not, however, complain like Fallaci. In fact, many defended the military censorship and guidelines. American television network CNN - regarded by many as the most powerful media outlet during the war - reminded its viewers continuously of the restrictions imposed on the reporting. CNN presented the illusion of keeping its distance and that restriction was beyond its control. Yet the network correspondents who joined the pool reporting identified, like all the rest, with the military.

Charles Bremner remarked on the complete surrender of the American media to the army. He wrote that American journalists:

*“have followed a line of subdued loyalty reminiscent of reporting from Korea or during the Second World War” (The Times 23 January 1991).*

The Gulf War proved that the American army officers were able to set the agenda for the media to the extent that the two became one. It was very easy for the US army to control the media coverage of the war. By organising pools they managed to exclude many journalists who had to wait for their colleagues' copy. They bombarded the media with information that had no great significance for actual operations. At some points a number of correspondents in Saudi Arabia found themselves in the position of having to ask their editors to read them the wire copies which they then used as if they were their own (Taylor, 1992: 14). This war could have endorsed the Iraqi President's saying long before he ordered his army to occupy Kuwait that 'compared to tanks, journalists are cheap - and you get more for your money' (*The Guardian*, 23 February 1991).

Censorship, nonetheless, was not confined to dispatches from the front line, but was also imposed at home on programmes and songs that could harm war operations. In London and Washington programmes such as the documentary on the 'October Surprise' theory were completely banned or delayed until the fighting had stopped. The BBC (which was the most listened to station not only in the Gulf but in the whole Arab World) issued a list of songs which was 'inappropriate' to play during the war, including: 'Killing me Softly', 'Everybody Wants to Rule the World' and 'We Can Work It Out'.

In the Gulf any article or interview that attacked the American or British administrations was banned completely. Any mention of the Gulf as part of what used to be the British Empire was unacceptable, as was any linkage between the invasion of Kuwait and that of Palestine by the Israelis, Lebanon by the Syrians

and even the Saudi occupation of parts of Yemen, Qatar and even a Kuwaiti island, the island of Qarouh, which was occupied by the Saudi military in 1989 but abandoned a few days before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

The Gulf media were forced to disregard the history, geography and civilisation of the region. Journalists in the Gulf did not dare to link the invasion to the border problems in the ex-British colonies. They also had to publish and broadcast the lies that were circulated by the army and filtered through the American and British media.

American and British journalists were themselves subject to criticism for publishing propaganda information without verifying it. The media were used as part of the army propaganda campaign directed towards home audiences and the Iraqi authorities and military. General Norman Schwarzkopf admitted that they concealed most of the truth from the journalists. In an interview with David Frost after the war, he said:

*"Nobody knew everything that we were doing except for a very few people in Washington and it was even a limited group of people here in this headquarters that knew everything we were doing" (cited in Taylor, 1992: XI).*

A few - mostly British - journalists have declared that governments always lie to the media, but in times of war or crisis it becomes more evident. Hugo Young of *The Guardian* wrote:

*"Although the whole truth is no more available than it ever was, the illusion of truth is more strongly present than it has ever been. This is the achievement of wall-to wall television. Here is this powerful medium, uniquely the medium of the actual and believable, devoting so much time to the war that unwary viewers may be easily lulled into*



*the belief that their picture is complete” (The Guardian, 5 February 1991).*

Nik Gowing, the diplomatic editor of British Channel Four television, also confessed that information during the first few months of the crisis was a lot of ‘bluff’ and was not ‘accurate’ (*The Times*, 17 January 1991). A few examples could be classified as military misinformation. One such incident was the oil spill episode when the Western and Gulf media concentrated on pictures of dying birds and polluted sea water. The media blamed the Iraqis for creating such an ecological catastrophe and called Saddam Hussein an enemy of nature. A few days later it was discovered that these pictures were of an earlier oil slick, but neither the Western nor the Gulf media emphasised this fact. Philip Knightley commented on the incident by remarking:

*“what raid was this? How could Iraqi planes successfully raid a Saudi refinery at a time when the allies were claiming total mastery of the air? And, most intriguing of all, who had decided to release pictures of the dying bird and link it to the spill from Kuwait, thus creating a powerful propaganda image of special appeal to environmentalists - who, until then, were among the leading opponents of the war?” (New Statesman and Society, 8 February 1991).*

The Battle of Al-Khafji was another example of misinformation that went unquestioned by most journalists. During the allied briefing in Riyadh, reporters learned that the Saudi and Qatari armies had overcome an attempt by the Iraqis to occupy the border town of Al-Khafji. The information was also supported and confirmed by reporters in the pool. A Few of the journalists who were confined to Riyadh ventured out into the desert only to discover that the battle over Al-Khafji

was still going on two days later. Robert Fisk, for example, found that it was the American soldiers who had engaged in the fighting with the Iraqis. At the end of the fighting, Saudi and Qatari tanks were moved in to be filmed by the pool reporters as the heroes who had defended their borders.

There was another incident where Kuwaiti resistance representatives (for their own benefit) told foreign reporters that the Iraqi soldiers had removed babies from incubators in a Kuwaiti hospital that led to the babies' deaths. It was found out later that the story was completely fabricated but what is interesting is how the Gulf media ignored these reports.

Such misinformation was never corrected by the Gulf media, since it served the interests of officials who wanted to show their public that the huge military budget had not been wasted. It was also intended to calm down the few voices among the Gulf populace who were concerned about the presence of a large number of allied troops and were questioning the role of the Gulf Peninsula Shield project.

Both the Gulf and the Western media went down with total amnesia during the seven-month period of the conflict. Saddam Hussein, who had been hailed by the Gulf media up to 2 August as a great Arab leader, was now called a bloodthirsty dictator by those same media. He was the West's best ally in the region, but from 2 August he became 'the new Hitler.' The Iraqi regime's human rights violations, which had never been reported by the Gulf media, became the main theme throughout the war. Western media treatment of Saddam is depicted in Kellner (1992).

The Western media also criticised a few Arab countries which took a different stand from that of the allies, such as Jordan, Tunisia and Algeria. They were accused of being pro the Iraqi dictator, although these same countries had

been acclaimed a few months earlier for being the only Arab countries that were taking serious steps towards democracy (Masmoudi, 1992: 42).

Media terminology during the coverage of the war is itself a subject for separate study. It is interesting, however, to review a few of the words that were used by the Western media to describe the Iraqis, on the one side, and the allied forces, on the other. While the allies have Army, Navy and Air Force, the Iraqis have a war machine. The allies have reporting guidelines, but the Iraqis have censorship and propaganda. The allies soldiers are professionals, the Iraqis are brainwashed (*The Guardian*, 23 January 1991 ).

The American, British and Gulf media played with words and supplied definitions that well suited the military personalities. Norman Solomon, for example, wrote in *The New York Times* that he noticed that the American media were describing 'a dictatorship like Saudi Arabia as moderate.' He also commented on *Time* magazine's definition of collateral damage, a term that was widely used by the military and the journalist corps. Solomon wrote that it defined it as: 'a term meaning dead or wounded civilians who should have picked safer neighbors' (*The New York Times*, 25 May 1991 ).

President Bush on several occasions said that this was a war to stop the 'rape' of Kuwait. The American, British and Gulf media echoed this and kept using the word with all its connotations. In fact, it touched on the delicate side of the Gulf psyche by connecting the war with 'honour' and 'Shame' as referred to in the previous chapter on Gulf women.

Religious terminologies and insinuations were also used by both President Bush and his Gulf allies. The war was called a 'holy' war, a 'Jihad' for the Moslems. Bush on the first night of the fighting was filmed going to Church. General Schwarzkopf told his troops 'May God be with you.' King Fahd got the

Chief Mufti in Saudi Arabia to produce a 'Fatwa' in which he justified the presence of foreign 'Christian' forces to defend the holiest Islamic shrines.

Terminologies that were used by the American and British media were adopted by the Gulf media which were in desperate need to erase from the public memory all the previous glorification of the Iraqi regime and its military. The ideological cost of such coverage was tremendous, since previous experiences were forgotten as the propagandist media rewrote history. During the eight years of the Iraq-Iran war, the Gulf media had also been forced to support the Iraqis against the Iranians. The Gulf countries pumped huge amount of money to the Iraqis to launch a bloody war against revolutionary Shi'ite Iran. At that point the Gulf media were completely dependent on the Iraqi propaganda machine and American media coverage of the war. The Iranian side of the story was never heard by the Gulf populations, although some of them supported the Iranians especially in countries with a large percentage of Shi'ites.

A further cost of the coverage was the media advertisement for arms. The contradictions were tremendous. While the war was fought to create peace in the region; arms sales were taking place with the help of the media.

### **5.3 The Gulf Media Advertising For U.S. Arms:**

The Gulf War was used to advertise American and British arms. Reporters in the field, editors and commentators in London and Washington were obsessed with arms technology.

There were continuous reports about the accuracy of the Stealth planes or the Patriot anti-missile missiles. *The Independent* published an article in which it noted that the British government 'believe a key lesson of the war is the importance of investing in high-technology.' It quoted a ministerial source as saying 'you look

at these projects and think they will never work, and then look what happens, when they do. Everyone wants one' (*The Independent*, 2 March 1991 ).

Mark Latey, the BBC's correspondent in Dhahran, reported the Scud missile attack on this Saudi city which was intercepted by a Patriot. He said, 'Patriot worked very well, they will get a Christmas card this year from me, the makers of Patriot...it is incredible the only thing in the world that could do this' (BBC News Bulletin, 18 January 1991).

It was not unexpected to read a few days later that the Patriot manufacturers, who were facing difficulties selling their missile before the war, were flooded with orders, especially from the smaller Gulf states. Also the first private commercial contract to rebuild Kuwait went to the Patriot missile manufacturers, Raytheon. The contract was for rebuilding an airfield for the amount of \$5.7 million (*The Independent On Sunday*, 17 February 1991 ).

*The Guardian* of 2 March 1991 published an article in which it explained why the British forces were using the Challenger I tanks. It noted that

*"...the vital role of Challenger I tanks in the Gulf War is set to clinch a government decision to purchase a new generation of battle tanks and to choose the British candidate, the Vickers-built Challenger II, in preference to American and German rivals."*

Robert Fisk found Arabic-language sales brochures for the British Challenger tank on the desks of Saudi press officers at the Dhahran International Hotel, the headquarters of the Joint Information Bureau (*The Independent On Sunday*, 9 December 1990 ).

Newspapers, even the very few that were against the war, carried headlines such as 'RAF Tornados impress USAF and attract plane buyers,' 'Patriot rises above doubts of its effectiveness,' 'Pinpoint strikes vindicate 40 years of planning,' 'A War of the 21st Century'. *Newsweek* magazine in one of its issues before hostilities broke out explained that the situation in the Gulf raised the need for continuous arms development. It noted:

*"The nightmare vision of Saddam or some other Third world madman waving an ICBM tipped with a nuclear missile - not unthinkable in five to 10 years - could mean salvation for Star Wars"* (*Newsweek*, 10 September 1990).

A *New York Times* reporter expressed his fascination with the advanced arms technology by writing about, 'technology that guides cruise missiles so precisely that one fired from a battleship in the Red Sea clipped a communications tower in Baghdad neatly in two' (quoted in Taylor, 1992: 47).

Douglas Kellner explained this cosy journalist-military relationship by reminding his readers that the media in the West were owned by conglomerates, most of whom had relations with arms manufacturers. He wrote:

*"This pronounced bias points to the effects of ownership of the media by corporations like GE which are heavily invested in the military industries, and which have been strongly supporting the conservatives and pro-business Republican administrations for the past decade"* (Kellner, 1992: 53).

Ben Bagikian commented that these corporations had created what he called a 'new private ministry of information and culture' (quoted in Kellner, 1992: 49). The advanced media technology, after all, was developed under military control in

both the United States and Europe. In the United States research and development in the military and communications had been close ever since the Second World War (Schiller, 1971: 162). Armand Mattelart noted that television in Europe was developed under pressure from the military (Mattelart, 1984).

While journalists were expressing their fascination with the advanced arms technology and praising it for hitting its precise target, evidence after the war proved the opposite. The destruction of many civilian installations in Baghdad while the allied officers were saying that they were hitting only military targets, clearly contradicted Western media reports. It has been reported that, of the 88,500 tons of bombs dropped on Iraq and Kuwait, 70 per cent missed their targets (Taylor, 1992: 220). Also, when the media reported that all Scud launchers were destroyed reports later found that that was false. General Schwarzkopf admitted in an interview that the allied estimates of the number of Scud launchers were wrong.

*“One of the figures I read recently is they had 15 battalions of 15 launchers each, and that multiplies to 225- and that was a lot more than we thought because the maximum estimate that we had prior to the beginning was 48 and in fact, at one point right before we launched hostilities, we had pretty good intelligence that they had a maximum of only 18” (quoted in Taylor, 1992: 72).*

American and British correspondents' reports of the Scud attacks on Israel were played down by the Gulf media. The Saudi and Kuwaiti press (in exile) ignored these reports completely, for fears of provoking Arab nationalism among the Gulf public (Taylor, 1992: 70-1). Editors in other Gulf countries raised the question: 'Why did not Saddam start his war against the enemy Israel instead of invading Kuwait?' The Gulf media escalated their attack on Saddam as a dictator

with ambitions for the whole region.

When the first Scud missile landed in Israel, Western reporters were the first to reach for their gas masks. The CNN correspondent in Tel Aviv reported the news with his gas mask on. Viewers watched CNN reporters fixing each other's masks and interviewing one another. It was found later that the reports of Scuds carrying chemical warheads were a complete illusion.

This could be related to the exaggeration by the Western and Gulf media of Iraqi military strength. This particular presentation of the Iraqi regime, the might of its army and the strength of its Republican Guards, was used to justify the allies' continuous 'Carpet bombing' of Iraqi cities. When it became clearer that the allies were winning the war with no casualties, the media (American, British and Gulf) shifted to reporting the low morale of the Iraqi army and the large number of surrendering soldiers who were badly fed and armed. Reports by President Bush and other allied speakers that Iraq was only months away from producing an atomic bomb were quite unfounded. Two scientists disputed this theory in an article published by a specialised magazine. D. Albright and Mark Hibbs stated that Iraq was five to ten years away from creating such a bomb (quoted in Taylor, 1992: 280). Such a report, however, went unnoticed by the mainstream media that continued transmitting the same information even after the cessation of the hostilities.

There were a few exceptions to the general policy of submitting to the Western media, and a few examples were suppressed by the Gulf media. For example, the Gulf - especially Saudi - media played down the story of the Saudi pilot who had shot down two Iraqi F-1 Mirage fighters, whereas this story made the headlines in London and Washington. Also attributed to the Gulf officials' fear of anger among their masses was the suppression of the incident when an Arab



Moslem killed another Arab Moslem Iraqi. CNN's coverage of the story was not broadcast live in Saudi Arabia and was censored in all the other Gulf media (Taylor, 1992: 79).

#### **5.4 From War of Technology to War of the Dead:**

While journalists and officers were engrossing themselves in high military techniques in the beautifully decorated rooms of the Hyatt Hotel in Riyadh, thousands of Iraqi civilians were dying. The bombardment of the Al-Amiriyah air-raid shelter brought the facts of war home. It was the first time that completely burned dead bodies were shown on television screens and the front pages of British and American newspapers. Although many of the pictures and film footages were censored by the media in Washington, London and the Gulf for reasons of taste, what filtered through was enough to shock the audiences so that an explanation had to be put forward.

Military briefings in Riyadh, London and Washington tried to defend the attack as legitimate since Al-Amiriyah had been used by the Iraqi army as a communications centre. The media in these capitals tried to shift the blame on to the Iraqis themselves. The Gulf media commented on the incident by saying that Saddam had betrayed his people and used them as a cover for his military operational theatre. They insinuated that if the Iraqi regime treated its own people like this how was it going to treat people in the Gulf if Saddam has given the chance to move down and occupy other Gulf states?.

Even though American and British correspondents in Baghdad were clearly touched by the scenes of the charcoal bodies of women and children; their colleagues back home were not at all sympathetic. Journalists such as Richard Beeston of *The Times* wrote in an attempt to blame the Iraqis themselves for the

massacre:

*"In some cases the Iraqis have only themselves to blame for the loss of civilian life. Their policy of relocating staff from government offices to schools and other civilian buildings and of moving military hardware out of their barracks to better camouflaged wooded areas in the countryside near farms and villages frequently exposes non-combatants to attack" (The Times, 11 February 1991).*

The Al-Amiriyah incident was carefully treated since pictures of Iraqi (Arab) civilians massacred by the Americans and British could have angered many people in the Gulf. Gulf officials were careful throughout the war -via their media - to prove that Arab nationalism was only a myth, and this could explain the concentration by the Gulf media on anti-war demonstrations in other Arab capitals. These were interpreted as being pro-Saddam and anti-Gulf rather than opposition to Western interference in an Arab region.

Articles blaming the Iraqis for the incident and making excuses for the American pilots who did the bombing, were translated into Arabic and published in most of the prominent Gulf newspapers, for instance the one published by *Newsweek* magazine (which circulated in the Gulf). The article entitled 'What Really Happened,' reported that the magazine had learned that allied intelligence had discovered that the Al-Amiriyah was one of a dozen bunkers intended to shelter Saddam's 'inner circle, the leaders and families of the Revolutionary Command Council and the ruling Baath Party.' It went on to say that the shelter had been used by Saddam himself and that the PLO leader, Yasser Arafat, had a residence close by which he used when visiting Baghdad. *Newsweek* quoted a Gulf War planner as saying, 'You have to convince those around Saddam that, unless they stop him,

they personally are at risk' (*Newsweek*, 25 February 1991).

One might think that after such an incident the American and British media would have stopped advertising war without death and Smart bomb attacks, but the reality was that the reporting continued. John Simpson, the BBC foreign editor reporting from Baghdad, said on 18 January 1991 '...fears of carpet bombing and indiscriminate attacks on residential areas were unfounded...the bombs and missiles seem to have landed with pinpoint accuracy.'

Robert Fisk - one of the few British journalists who rejected the war-without-death phenomenon - had earlier written that the Desert Storm Joint Information Bureau was,

*"marketing war without death. This is not war as hell, but war without responsibility, in which the tide of information stops at the moment of impact. Easy-to-review, easy-to-support drama and light entertainment suitable for all the family...Baghdad supplies the reality which Dhahran denies" (The Independent On Sunday, 9 December 1990).*

Fisk's report, however, went unnoticed by the Gulf media desperate to sell a war story to the masses in which innocent civilians were untouched and only Saddam and his powerful army would be hurt.

The incident of the Falujah bridge where 'Smart' bombs landed in a residential area beside the bridge and many civilians were killed or injured could have complicated matters for the Gulf media. After Al-Amiryah, however, the media were careful not to produce more pictures of dead Iraqi civilians.

Dead bodies disappeared from television screens and newspapers after these two incidents and when the land battle started a complete blackout was enforced by the military. The media did not complain about such a situation, and in

fact blocked any criticism of it from being voiced to the public. Such was the situation when a BBC radio commentator asked Philip Knightley, the author of books on war coverage, about the reason for the blackout. When Knightley answered by saying that it was to prevent the world from knowing the 'ferocious' nature of the allied attack, the BBC dropped the programme (*The New Statesman and Society*, 15 March 1991 ).

The Gulf media were crippled throughout and did not comment on this; they kept on publishing and broadcasting official excuses and opinions. In fact, they completely ignored the massacre on the Kuwait-Basra highway where thousands of retreating Iraqi soldiers and civilians of different nationalities were wiped out by 'carpet bombing.' At this point Kuwait was 'liberated' and the media concentrated on reports from that state and comments at home about it.

American and British journalists for the first day or so after the liberation of Kuwait were busy interviewing Kuwaitis and driving around the capital. At the same time, allied soldiers were chasing the retreating Iraqi soldiers and shooting them down. When the pool reporters were taken to the highway many concentrated on the looting by the fleeing Iraqi conscripts. Kate Adie, the BBC correspondent assigned to travel with one of the British regiments, reported that these soldiers were running away with consumer products, cars and everything they found along their way.

A few journalists nevertheless painted a more accurate picture of what happened on 'highway hell.' The Iraqi 'Guernica' was horrifically painted by Robert Fisk of *The Independent* who drove up the road from Kuwait city to the Iraqi border town of Safwan. It is worth repeating what Fisk wrote;

*"..the dead are strewn across the road only five miles out of Kuwait city and you see them still as*

*you approach the Iraqi frontier...at one point on the highway. I saw wild dogs tearing to pieces the remains of Iraqi soldiers corpses lay across the highway beside tanks and army trucks. One Iraqi had collapsed over the carriageway, curled up like a foetus, his arms beside his face, a neat moustache beneath a heavy head, the back of which had been blown away...two carbonised soldiers still sat in the cab, their skulls staring forward up the road towards the country they never reached" (The Independent, 2 March 1991).*

At this point it is important to stress yet again that such a depiction of the war was never read or seen in the Gulf. Gulf officials did not want to raise sympathies for the Iraqi soldiers although almost all those who were massacred on the highway were conscripts.

When the media in any given society are suppressed and marginalised space is left open for rumours to circulate about incidents that are ignored by local journalists fearful of the repercussions. A few incidents were reported by journals published by the opposition to the Gulf regimes and were widely circulated among the people of the Gulf. For instance, there was the case of the younger religious leaders who opposed the presence of foreign armies and were against the war itself. Many intellectuals in the Gulf also voiced their fears of the results of launching a war against Iraq and not giving the opportunity for a peaceful settlement to the conflict. (See for example, issues of Al-Jazeera Al-Arabia, published in London by a group of Saudis who oppose the Al-Saud dynasty).

The liberation of Kuwait lowered the curtain, implying the end of the war at least for the Gulf media. After that date local journalists were sent to report only on the joyful Kuwaitis and the drastic damage that was inflicted on their country by the Iraqi army. The Gulf media concentrated on incidents of rape and torture to justify the war. The fate of the Iraqi population left with a huge amount of destruction

inflicted on their country was not a subject of interest to the local media. Incidents of torture and killing by Kuwaitis against other Arabs and Kuwaiti members of the opposition were also missing from the Gulf media. In fact, life went back to normal only a month after the 'liberation' of Kuwait. But was it really normal for the local media?

For the Gulf journalists the small amount of freedom they used to enjoy before the invasion of Kuwait disappeared. Official pressures and censorship continued, and the Gulf media went down on bended knee. Like other parts of the Gulf population (women and foreign labour) the Gulf media were faced with a complete lack of freedom and intensified state oppression. This will be the subject of the concluding chapter.

## CONCLUSION

*“While democracy sweeps the globe, from Latin America through much of Africa and Asia and now the former Soviet bloc, the Middle East, or at least its Arab core, has fallen off the curve of history”  
(Middle East Report Jan-Feb, 1992).*

As the previous chapter revealed, the Gulf War was a turning point in the history of the Gulf if not the whole Arab region. When President George Bush went on national television to announce the end of the war, the Gulf leaders knew that it marked the beginning of war on the home front. Although Gulf officials were able to control domestic events by bribery at times and oppression at others, the situation was no longer feasible.

The Gulf states had been undergoing economic difficulties before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Financing the war against Iraq increased the difficulties. Saudi Arabia, for example, was forced for the first time in years to ask for loans from local banks amounting to 24 billion Riyals (\$7 billion) (*Al-Jazeera Al-Arabia, May 1992* ). Other Gulf states followed the Saudi example and shopped around for loans. At the same time, however, arms purchasing by the Gulf states increased. The Gulf governments are the biggest arms purchasers in the world. Arms dealers everywhere cater for Gulf markets. Even specialised magazines such as *Janes Defence Weekly* are moving towards publishing an Arabic-language edition. Saudi Arabia alone has purchased \$15 billion worth of arms since the Gulf war (*The Independent, 11 June 1992* ). Bahrain, like all arms importers, had hosted an arms exhibition on May 1992 and it is scheduled to organize the Second Middle East Defence and Security Exhibition between 16 and 19 of October 1993 (*New Statesman and Society, 20 November 1992*).

The Gulf war exposed the vulnerability of the Gulf states patriarchal structure and the absence of a civil society. When female American and British soldiers arrived in the Gulf, religious men were appalled. The Gulf ruling families, who have always preached the preservation of culture and religion, were faced with unanswerable questions by their nationals. Two forces emerged during the actual war and continued to raise issues of representation and civil rights even when the guns went silent.

Small groups of religious fundamentalists mushroomed, especially in Saudi Arabia. Hundreds of tapes by imams of local mosques were circulating in the Kingdom. In general, these imams condemned the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, but they opposed the presence of non-Muslim forces. They specifically condemned the existence of female soldiers and noted that this would lead to chaos in society. The Saudi Government - other governments in the Gulf have done the same - reacted by banning these imams from preaching in the mosques. Others were arrested and interrogated while the security police went around and collected all the tapes that were circulating in the country. Robert Fisk noted:

*“Saudi religious police raided cassette shops to confiscate the tapes, most of which take the form of sermons, complete with cries of approval from worshippers. Sunni religious sources in Cairo say at least 20 fundamentalists behind the campaign have been arrested” (The Independent 11 June 1992).*

These young Islamic fundamentalists found fertile ground for their ideas. The Arab people in general have become disillusioned with the many ideologies that flourished during the 1960s and 1970s. Arab nationalism, Nasserism, Ba’thism and communism have all failed in the past to pull the Arab world out of its stagnation after liberation from French, Italian and British colonialism. The last ten years or so witnessed a vacuum in the political sphere and the Arabs were striving



to find their own identity. Many thought that going back to the roots of Islam and Islamic culture would solve their problem and restore their dignity that had been lost through a series of defeats. Ghassan Tueni noted:

*“Having resisted communism and socialism without assuming democracy...Arab politics has produced one innovation - so far more negative than positive -a movement of opposition rather than a system of government: religious fundamentalism” (Ibid.).*

Saudi fundamentalists took the law into their own hands and used force to propagate their ideas. At some points they searched houses and arrested whole families accusing them of organising mixed gatherings and parties. They announced that any kind of intermingling between the sexes, even among members of the same family, was contrary to Islam. Foreigners were also harassed by them, even those who were members of foreign diplomatic circles. The wife of the Tunisian ambassador to Saudi Arabia was whipped by the religious police in one of Riyadh's shopping centres, accused of not covering up properly. The Saudi Government apologised to the Tunisian ambassador and his government, but the religious police continued doing the same to other women.

The second force which found in the Gulf war a chance to call for the introduction of some kind of political representation was the young educated intellectuals. Their approach was different from that of the religious fundamentalists. They avoided any direct clash with the government and preferred to write petitions and present them to the king or emir. Saudi doctors, university professors, businessmen, lawyers and other liberal intellectuals met King Fahd and presented him with a list of issues that they thought needed to be tackled by the state. Their list included the right for Saudi women to drive cars and to work. Saudi women had their own way of addressing their civil rights. They took to the streets of Riyadh in a convoy of cars where they were harassed and arrested by the

religious police.

The Gulf ruling families had their own agenda and made use of the presence of foreign (especially American) forces in their states. Immediately after the end of the hostilities they announced cuts in subsidies and introduced taxes. At the same time the security police were arresting thousands of religious leaders and others. Even those who opposed the Al-Saud role from a distance were kidnapped and brought back home. In October 1991 the Saudi government kidnapped a Saudi opposition figure, Mohammed Al-Fasi, from his residence in the Jordanian capital Amman. All attempts by his brother-in-law (who is a member of the Al-Saud family) to free him or to learn the conditions under which he is imprisoned have so far failed.

An eminent Bahraini religious leader and academic was arrested at the airport on his return from 'liberated' Kuwait where he had attended a conference. He was taken to court where the Bahraini Government accused him of instigating the overthrow of the Gulf ruling families in a paper he presented at the conference on the future of the Gulf region after the war. Sheikh Abdul-Latif Al-Mahmoud was acquitted by the court, but the Bahraini Minister of the Interior ordered his dismissal from Bahrain University and he was prohibited from preaching in his local mosque.

In Qatar a petition was signed by members of prominent merchant families in the country and other liberal intellectuals. In December 1991 this petition was sent to the Emir. It called for political reforms and stated that citizens' rights and obligations in the Gulf emirate should be protected and respected by the government. All those who signed the petition were harassed by the security police and their passports were confiscated by the government. By May 1992 they were faced with no option but to turn to one of the foreign news agencies operating in the country. They handed their petition to the Reuters representative in Doha (the Qatar

capital).

The Gulf ruling families not only punished their own citizens; they also extended their retribution to other Arab nationals, mainly those who had opposed the war against Iraq. In September 1992, Abdallah Bishara, the Secretary-General of the Gulf Co-operation Council, announced that Arab intellectuals who opposed the war must be banned from all Arab media owned by the Gulf. His statement aroused alarm among Arab writers, artists and others who know very well that most of the Arab media are owned by Gulf proprietors (*The Independent* 19 September 1992 ). Abdallah Bishara's statement in fact reveals a lot about the state of the media since the war. Censorship has prevailed and the Gulf media went silent. Although many Gulf journalists thought that they might regain some of their freedom after the war, they now know very well that it has been buried in the sands of Desert Storm.

While tensions grew, the Gulf ruling elites were obliged to use the same old solution to appease their angry citizens. They had to introduce cuts in prices and abandoned their tax plans. King Fahd, for example, on 24 March 1992 announced huge cuts which included 37 per cent on petrol prices, 30 per cent on gas, 50 per cent on water, 5.28 per cent on electricity, and local telephone calls in the kingdom were made free. This will cost the Saudi Government 5 billion Riyals annually. Saudi debts will reach 30 billion Riyals with a budget deficit of 31 billion (*Al-Jazeera Al-Arabia*, April 1992 ). Many of the Gulf rulers promised their people the introduction of a consultative councils. King Fahd of Saudi Arabia announced at the beginning of 1992 a governing charter which was seen by many Saudis as merely a facade. In an interview with the Kuwaiti newspaper *Al-Seyassah* , King Fahd noted that Western style democracy contradicts with what he called 'the speciality of the Saudi society which is based on the Islamic religion.' He continued by saying that democratic elections do not exist in Islam (*Al-Seyassah*, 28 March 1992 ). Saudi

Arabia, like many other Gulf states, does not have a written constitution, while the constitution of such countries as Kuwait and Bahrain is not put into practice or respected by the state.

In other Gulf capitals tensions escalated between the ruling families and their citizens. Among their nationals there are signs of conflict between those who call for liberalisation and the end of the traditional norms and cultures and others who would like to see the creation of a real Islamic state. These religious fundamentalists are not united, however, and there are splits among their ranks. The views of an Islamic state differ also between Sunnis and Shi'ites. The Shi'ites represent an important element since they constitute 70 per cent of the population in a country like Bahrain and 20 per cent in Saudi Arabia, while their percentage in other Gulf states varies.

In short, the future of the Gulf region looks gloomier than it was two years ago when the Gulf war started. Many elements have aggravated the situation instead of calming it down. The continual presence of Western, especially American, forces in the region reminds many Gulf nationals of the old colonial period. Religious fundamentalists have utilised it to gather support, raising the fear of the threat to traditional norms from the presence of non-Muslim forces.

On the other hand, oil reserves are increasing to the extent that the smallest oil field in any Gulf emirate equals that produced by all the oil wells in the United States (*Al-Jazeera Al-Arabia*, May, 1992). This in effect means that the foreign forces will not pack up and leave as promised by the Western leaders at the beginning of the conflict. The Gulf ruling families depend on these forces for their own protection against any internal conflict. They will also continue to purchase weapons from the West even if they need to borrow in order to finance these arms deals.

Those Gulf liberal intellectuals who felt that the West might help them in their struggle for democratisation have found that they have to fight their battle on their own. It is not only a war against the ruling monarchies, but also a challenging battle against the religious fundamentalist forces that are gaining strength by the minute. Meanwhile, tensions will intensify and only the future will reveal who will win the struggle; those who are looking towards the future or those who would like to retreat into history.

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