

**IN THE HOUSE, AROUND THE HOUSE: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF HADAR
HADRAMI MIGRATION TO KUWAIT.**

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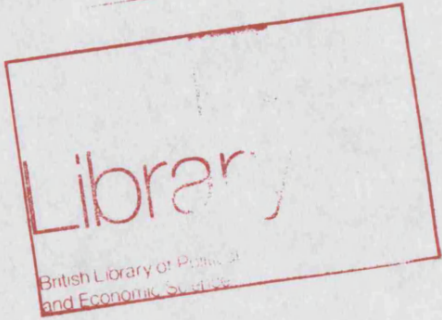
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ABSTRACT

The study of Hadrami migration has largely been focused on the experiences of prominent Hadrami figures. This scholarship has generally not documented the lives of more modest migrants. By contrast, this thesis studies the migration of Hadar Hadramis to Kuwait, thus broadening our perspective on the varieties in patterns, practices, and histories in Hadrami migration. In the case of Kuwait, we can observe a paradox in the migration, which continues in spite of acute changes in the sociohistorical and economic dynamics that led to Hadar Hadramis' original movement to Kuwait. Hadar Hadramis re-immigrate persistently to Kuwait despite the following factors. First, Hadar Hadramis are aware that their close association with Kuwaiti affluent houses ties them to Kuwaitis through unequal social and moral exchanges. Second, Hadar Hadramis remain economically unsuccessful and politically unprivileged in comparison with other Hadrami migrants elsewhere and Arab immigrants in Kuwait. Lastly, the Kuwaiti state has experienced political disasters that have had cruel effects on Hadar Hadramis in particular. While Hadar Hadramis were initially absorbed in the domestic sphere of Kuwaiti houses, today the majority no longer actually work as family servants. Nevertheless, the thesis argues that the domestic character of the work of migrants is central to understanding the Hadar Hadrami migratory context in Kuwait. It is suggested that the Hadar Hadrami experience in Kuwait developed its own propelling force—a 'culture of migration'—which endures in a complex of social value, economic preference, personal and family connections to Kuwaitis, and travel practices. A prominent feature of this culture of migration is *dependency* as a value and as a practice, which tends to encourage total dependence on Kuwait as a source of income, to emphasise the importance of goods and consumption rather than wealth accumulation and investment, and to personalise every aspect of the migration process.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This is a study of a Hadar Hadrami migratory experience in Kuwait. Hadrami migration to Kuwait contradicts the widely observed patterns of substantial economic achievement, political influence, and levels of social assimilation with which Hadramis overall are identified in the Arab Gulf States, Southeast Asia, and East Africa. Hadar Hadrami movement to Kuwait was contemporaneous with the mass Hadrami migration to other Gulf States in the 1950s during the oil boom era. Additionally, Hadrami immigrants in Kuwait shared common cultural and sociohistorical links with many of their affluent counterparts in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Despite these parallels, however, the Hadar Hadrami experience in Kuwait significantly diverged from other Hadrami migrations elsewhere. It differed in terms of the derivations of its socioeconomic links with Kuwait, in its expressions in the daily practices of immigrants and their association with Kuwaitis, and in terms of its cultural and economic consequences for the immigrant community as a whole. Therefore, the Hadar Hadrami experience poses several paradoxes.

Hadar Hadrami migration to Kuwait started with some individuals' link with an economic resource, but migratory links between two places must always prompt a milieu of unique contextual interaction between two social universes. Therefore, a dichotomous perspective on migration as an economic or political connection between a receiving and a sending society or states is just a curtailed description of all the social and moral arrays that the first Hadrami immigrants in Kuwait incited, or were part of. A dichotomous explanation normally bases its premises on the push-pull factors of migration and does not take into account cultural economies and sociohistorical trajectories as essentials in peoples' movement. Under the push-pull model of analysis, Hadar Hadrami migration to Kuwait would have been encouraged by some ecological shortage of subsistence in Hadramawt and lack of labour in Kuwait. Hence, the Hadrami movement towards recourses in Kuwait would have ended with the economic reasons that initiated it. However, this study urges a move away from such an approach, since there have always been economic factors working against Hadar Hadramis' presence in Kuwait, yet their migration has persisted as an economic and survival choice and, as this study will argue, as a durable cultural practice. In this regard, one may ask the following question: why do Hadar Hadramis

move to Kuwait seeking work and residence even when such movement is not socially or economically rewarding?

There are indications that Hadrami migration to Kuwait did not begin, as is usually characteristic of labour migration, in response to an imbalance in labour power between two regions. On the whole, Hadrami migration to Kuwait was neither the subject of a deal between 'receiving' and 'sending' bordering political entities nor the outcome of a pressing economic need for skilled workers by Kuwaiti merchants or rulers. In this respect, there were striking differences between Hadar Hadramis and other immigrants in Kuwait. Asian and Arab immigrants were clearly attracted by work in the oil industry, urban construction, and state building processes in Kuwait in the middle of the last century. On the other hand, most Hadar Hadrami immigrants were adolescents or children, semi-literate, unskilled, and hesitant to carry out demanding jobs in the industrial or construction sectors. Accordingly, analysis in this thesis will examine the ways in which Hadar Hadramis were 'enmeshed' with certain local socioeconomic and cultural matrixes in Kuwaiti society, as well as why. In brief, the socioeconomic role that Hadar Hadramis once fulfilled, and now identify with, was, to a large extent, a Kuwaiti imposition designed for this immigrant group. The Hadrami role, a house *siby* (a house male-servant), may not be an actual vocation for the majority of Hadar Hadramis, but it is contextually performed in daily relationships with Kuwaiti houses and sponsors.¹ I will argue throughout this thesis that although the *siby* experience preserves a solid Hadar Hadrami migratory presence in Kuwait, it nonetheless renders members of this group devoid of opportunities and hence serves no significant economic objectives in Kuwait's migration economy. Significantly, the *siby* experience made Hadar Hadramis almost totally *dependent* on Kuwait as the only source of income and connected them in unequal and hierarchical relationships with Kuwaitis.

The question, however, is that if Hadar Hadramis perform no crucial economic activities, then why do many Kuwaitis sponsor and support them, and what are the consequences of the relationship between Hadar Hadramis and Kuwaitis? To account for such phenomena, this thesis examines the sociohistorical foundations and social expressions of the Hadar Hadrami domestic experience and how they relate to expectations and behaviour in the present migratory context.

¹ The legal sponsor and the *mu'azzib* (social sponsor) are discussed in Chapter 5.

As will be seen, Hadar Hadrami immigrants usually refer to their experience in Kuwait today in relation with their past connections with the place. The present study, reflecting this concern, will proceed in a roughly sequential manner. Chapter 2 starts with the early Hadrami contact with the Kuwaiti context in the mid-1940s. It delineates the dynamics of the economic history of Kuwait and the role of Kuwaiti merchant families in shaping the state's 'migration reality', hence the association between locals and foreigners, including Hadar Hadrami immigrants. I also introduce the 'house-to-house' migration pattern or the socioeconomic path of Hadar Hadrami association with Kuwaiti families and sponsors. Chapter 3 considers a case of a Hadar Hadrami village's migration since the 1950s and 1960s to East Africa, Saudi Arabia, and finally Kuwait. Patterns and variations of movement from al-Qarah village are shown in relation to debt practices and the social identity and economic background of the immigrants. Chapter 4 continues with the al-Qarah case, looking, in this instance, at the connections between the village and Kuwait through immigrants' actions. The chapter considers the ways in which Hadar Hadramis conceptualise their domestic experience in Kuwaiti houses. That experience characterises the Hadrami migration in Kuwait; analysis is aimed at explaining the ways it shapes individuals' lives and activities in daily contexts. Chapter 5 considers the development of the Kuwaiti sponsorship system in the early 1970s and how Hadar Hadramis interact with it in their daily relationships with Kuwaitis. In this chapter, I differentiate between two categories: one is legal—the sponsor (*kafil*); the other is what I call the 'social sponsor' (*mu'azzib*). These categories are then related to the concept of 'moral debt', which is central to an analysis of Hadar Hadramis' view of their association with Kuwaiti sponsors. The chapter illustrates the characteristics and consequences of the personal long-term bonds between Kuwaitis and Hadrami immigrants and how these are reflected in their daily interactions. Chapter 6 uses life histories of immigrants and ex-immigrants from various Hadar villages. The chapter examines individuals' experiences of migration and how they evaluate the decisions of movement and return. Also of consideration here are the implications of the Hadrami mass return home (or 'catastrophe') during the Gulf War in 1991. In this chapter, we see divergent perspectives from Hadrami immigrants and non-immigrants on the reality and meaning of this 'catastrophe'. From this point, Chapter 7 goes on to account for the immigrants' intra-community relationships after the Gulf War in 1991, when Hadar Hadramis began to return to Kuwait. I examine how the structural positioning of

Hadramis relative to their Kuwaiti sponsors is reflected in Hadrami-Hadrami personal relationships. Particularly, inequality with a Kuwaiti sponsor generates status inconsistency amongst individual immigrants. This, as will be argued, establishes the grounds for intensive patterns of social comparison amongst Hadramis, which lead to fear of envy and competition. Envy shapes the forms of Hadramis' interrelationships in Kuwait, and it also leads to the perpetuation of certain cultural values and practices in the immigrant community.

The Community and Area of Study

The long tradition of internal migration within the Arabian Peninsula has attracted very little interest among ethnographers. In Arabia, societies of varying socioeconomic and political origins have developed different practices of migrating, settling abroad, networking, and maintaining a connection with the homeland. Movement, for some social groups, has been a significant technique for the reproduction of social structure across space. Of all these groups, the Hadrami Yemenis of South Yemen are known as the most active throughout the history of Arabian migration. Hadrami Yemenis are known among scholars as having a long tradition of migration out of and within the Hadramawt region itself.² Migration has corresponded to cultural and social values regarding movement, home, and work among Hadramis. Movement has been an essential element in the “behaviour and psychology of [Hadramis]”; it is “the life style and culture of the region” (Redkin 1995: 7, 11). Hadramis distinguish themselves from other Yemenis by their penchant for constant movement. Anthropologist Abdullah Bujra, who carried out fieldwork in Hadramawt in the 1960s, identified (but never elaborated on) the development of a characteristic *Hadrami culture of migration* (see Boxberger 2002: 39, 258).³

Despite a significant body of historical literature concerning nineteenth-century Hadrami communities and personalities abroad, namely on Hadrami *Sayyids* in East Africa and Indonesia, the massive migration of Hadramis within the Arabian peninsula since the late 1940s has never been studied ethnographically, nor have there been any precise accounts of its patterns or consequences (Freitag 1997a: 319). Although Hadramis are known to be among the Arab immigrant groups that settled in

² Between the Mahra and Aden city, Hadramawt is in the southeastern area of today's Arab Republic of Yemen and is the largest municipality.

³ The term *Hadrami culture of migration* was used by Abdullah Bujra in the workshop “Hadramawt and the Hadrami Diaspora, late 18th century to c. 1967” (SOAS University of London, April 1995).

pre-independence Kuwait, virtually no systematic data exist about the nature or the history of the phenomenon. This is despite the fact that the Kuwaiti population censuses of 1957 and 1961 distinguished between Hadrami, Mahri, 'Umani, 'Adani, and Yamani (perhaps Northern Yemenis) as national groups.

However, Hadrami migration to Kuwait can be analysed in terms of three overlapping patterns: chain, circular, and career migration, where individuals move voluntarily and do not lose connections with their sending networks and political structures (Tilly 1990). Hadrami chain migration engages a series of related individuals or households, who aid each other through the process of choosing a destination, timing their movement, and organising settlement. Circular migration involves an establishment of a regular path in which immigrants move back and forth between receiving and sending countries to perform certain economic or social activities. Career migration is associated with immigrants who move in response to more favourable work opportunities abroad through their positioning in state or corporate structures.

The range of this migration has rested upon the various political and economic links between Kuwait and Yemen, among other factors. Nonetheless, in Kuwait, Hadrami immigrants have maintained a constant, though comparatively small, presence. This is despite the fact that the Kuwaiti state has experienced political disasters, territorial insecurity, and socioeconomic instability, which have had cruel effects on its massive immigrant populations (Assiri 1990; Crystal 1995; Shah 1999). Additionally, the diminutive geopolitics of the Kuwaiti context have made those damaging instabilities even more prevalent in Hadrami immigrants' lives, as well as in those of their kin back in Hadramawt. As some scholars have shown, the prospects for Hadramis to flourish in neighbouring states such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were greater and more secure. While Hadramis have relatively easy access to an advantageous citizenship process in these two countries, only a handful of Hadramis are now Kuwaiti citizens (see Freitag 1997a: 323). Additionally, in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Hadramis were ubiquitous in the large-scale financial sector, state politics, and intellectual activities. In Kuwait, on the other hand, Hadramis were observed by some scholars as domestic servants, shop assistants, and couriers (see al-Kaf 1990: 128-131). The Yemeni government's pro-Iraqi position during the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in 1990 hardened Kuwaiti immigration policies towards Yemenis in general. By contrast, such migration restrictions were not imposed on

Hadramis in Saudi Arabia or the UAE. More than two-thirds of returnees to Hadramawt during the Gulf War came from Kuwait (Van Hear 1994: 26). Thus, the Hadramis of Kuwait experienced the harsh process of re-migrating back home during the Gulf War, the majority empty handed.

Political disasters, insecurity, and legal restrictions have had little effect on Hadramis' in-migration to Kuwait, in contrast to a general reasoning in migration studies on the significance of such problems in limiting migration flows to a certain destination. Data in this study show that Hadar Hadrami ex-immigrants who fled Kuwait in 1990 continued to choose it as their first destination. Of course, such unrelenting attachment was related to chain migration, where individuals of the same socio-spatial background connect with a place through their already established networks in both countries. To demonstrate how this was the case, I sought to examine the nature of the relationship between what I propose as the Hadar Hadrami *culture of dependency* and the desire of some Hadramis to be attached to or to live and work in a foreign yet vulnerable economic and political environment. The achievement of this research objective required a comparative understanding of the variations in the experience of Hadrami migration in terms of factors causing migration, its relation to the host society, the timing of migration, and immigrants' social origins and personal experience.

Background: Hadrami immigrants, before and after 1990:

The Gulf War influenced many aspects of Hadrami life in Kuwait. Unlike Hadramis' congregative settlement before 1990, and in contrast with some Hadrami communities in the Arab Gulf or East Africa, the Hadrami 'field site' in Kuwait was not a well-defined or territorially demarcated space, as Hadramis live in a more or less dispersed manner over the 6 Kuwaiti municipalities. Initially, I did not think of any specific rationale behind the Hadrami settlement pattern in Kuwait. I thought an obvious factor in Hadramis' dispersion had to do with the geography of Kuwait. The whole area of Kuwait is about 16,918 km², less than half of which is composed of populated urban areas. Thus, commuting, and therefore maintaining social contacts, from one area to another was not so much of a problem to many Hadramis. This may have contributed less to any congregation of Hadramis in one locality. Later, I received different explanations from informants. They related the Hadrami settlement pattern to their political and legal status, which was shaped by Kuwaiti authorities'

designation of Hadramis as one of the 'non-desirable Arab nationalities' after 1991.⁴ Hence, Hadramis developed a tendency to live as a 'hidden population' (Singer 1999: 169) to remain invisible within Kuwait's huge immigrant population. This explanation may be reasonable and may be related to the known Hadrami tendency, particularly among immigrants, towards peacefulness and political neutrality. Other reasons, however, began to surface when I examined the extent to which Hadramis chose to interact with the host society; which of the society's classes they associated with; and the manner in which they sought to network with fellow immigrants, particularly returning members and newcomers. It became obvious that there was a connection between the ways Hadramis arranged their socio-spatial interaction among themselves and with Kuwaiti sponsors, on one hand, and the emergence of new Hadar Hadrami intra-community forms of relationships after 1990 (Chapter 7), on the other.

As shown by scholars of similar movements (Rubenstein 1979: 27-28; Swanson: 1979: 52), when one is dealing with circular, chain, and career migration, one problem is how to make a more or less precise estimation of the population of the group under study. In the Hadrami case, the problem is even more significant. Hadrami immigrants in the Arabian peninsula have constantly moved between receiving and sending countries, and they have usually received visitors who have upgraded their visa status in order to work and settle for a while before taking the journey back to Hadramawt. The fact that these immigrants have moved frequently has led some scholars to assess the difficulties of estimating Yemeni immigrant numbers abroad (see for instance Birks Sinclair et al. 1990). A Yemeni researcher recently estimated that 20,000 Yemeni families returned from Kuwait following the 1991 war (al-Hawwati 2001: 30), but this source does not specify how many Hadrami families may be included in that figure. In all, there is no reliable information about the number of Hadrami immigrants prior to the Gulf War. However, Yemeni official censuses have estimated the returnees from Kuwait to Hadramawt's villages and towns as being around 25,000.⁵ Today, an official at the Yemeni embassy in Kuwait estimates that the whole Yemeni community would be approximately 4,000 to 6,000, the vast majority of which are Hadar, namely coastal, Hadramis.⁶ This figure includes

⁴ Besides Yemenis, included in this category are Palestinians, Jordanians, Iraqis, and Sudanese. These nationalities were accused of supporting the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

⁵ Source: Central Statistical Organisation, Yemeni Ministry of Planning and Development: "The final results of the returnees after 2-8-1990." Sana'a, 1991.

⁶ 'Abd al-Muhsin al-Harazi, personal communication, 2003.

visitors and short-term and long-established immigrants, and it is a reasonable approximation when compared to Hadramis' own estimations of their numbers in Kuwait, which round out to 4,000.

Before the formation of modern Arab states, Hadramawt was connected with Kuwait through the activities of the seafarers' trade. In addition to those involved in trade, intellectuals and religious scholars travelled in both directions, perhaps more than ordinary people (Eickelman and Piscatori 1992: 5, 16). One of the earliest ordered contacts was in 1929, when 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Rushayd (b. 1887-d. 1938) wrote in his *al-Kuwait* magazine an article titled "Hadramis Abroad", in which he referred to the known dispute between different Hadrami religious factions in Indonesia. Subsequently, al-Rushayd (known as the Historian of Kuwait) was sent to Indonesia by King Abd al-'Aziz of Saudi Arabia to act as a mediator between Hadramis. Al-Rushayd's mission did not conclude in any desired way, and he lived among Hadramis there, married a local woman, and stayed in Indonesia until his death (see al-Hajji 1993: 275-289). Al-Rushayd is referred to by Hadrami intelligentsia and Yemeni officials when they want to emphasise the 'uniqueness' of the relationship between Kuwait and Yemen. Such a unique relationship may be attributed to the fact that Kuwait has always been a major Arab financial donor for Yemeni infrastructure projects, and has intervened as, in Dresch's words, an "honest broker" (Dresch 2000) in the internal Yemeni political scene, which is frequently violent.⁷ However, what has made the role of Kuwait in Yemeni politics distinctive from that of other Arab states must also be seen in the context of its overall reconciliatory foreign policy. Kuwaiti *Shaykhs* used to negotiate—more specifically, buy—their security within the region (protecting themselves from Saudi, Iraqi, or Iranian pressures) by having as many deep and far alliances with other parties as possible (see Assiri 1990). Hence one can understand the present Kuwaiti-Yemeni exchanges that aim at a revival of that Kuwaiti role through the signature of new financial aid, education, and culture protocols between the two.

Still, most of my Hadrami informants, including old people, did not recognise al-Rushayd and the Indonesian Hadrami dispute but were familiar with the Kuwaiti political and financial role, which was reflected in how they conceptualised Kuwait as a political and social entity. Hadramis' view of Kuwait was rather ambivalent. On the

⁷ See also Lackner (1985) on the Kuwaiti role in Yemeni politics.

one hand, Kuwait represented an 'ideal' of the economic progress of an independent country whose society resembled the 'Hadrami peaceful and merciful nature'. On the other hand, such an image of Kuwait contrasted with Hadramis' moral perception of the corruptive effect of what they called the 'Kuwaiti disease' resulting from a long stay in Kuwait or personal interaction with Kuwaitis.

Just before the 1991 war, Kuwaiti authorities allowed only Yemenis to work and settle in Kuwait without the need for entrance and residence visas or legal sponsorship. Presently, though, Yemenis, including Hadramis, must have a Kuwaiti legal sponsor, *kafil*, who guarantees that the immigrant is working legally in the place and job designated in the work visa. A sponsor must also ensure that those he sponsors are 'behaving properly' according to the moral standards of the country. However, young Kuwaiti migration-department officials with whom I conversed made an important distinction between Hadramis and other Yemenis, particularly Northerners, who were identified with the Yemeni ruler,⁸ himself a non-Hadrami. Most Hadramis in Kuwait detach themselves from the activities of their embassy, for they think of it as part of an imposed political entity that does not represent their interests. The implications of the transformation in the history of Kuwaiti-Yemeni political relations and the resulting change in the size of the Hadrami community in Kuwait are not insignificant. They reveal how politics between nation-states and migration policies have affected individuals' and whole families' materialistic standing and social relationships in Kuwait and Yemen.

The majority of Hadar Hadramis who now migrate to Kuwait are men, and these migrants usually travel alone. Most, but not all, Hadar Hadramis are minimally educated. A great proportion of their income is remitted to families in Hadramawt, either in cash or goods. On average, a Hadrami immigrant earns somewhere between US\$400 and US\$600 a month.⁹ A Hadrami in Kuwait today might have an occupation such as courier (*mandub*), postman (*murasil*), office peon (*farrash*), guard, shop assistant, or domestic servant (most in this category work as cooks or coffee pourers for Kuwaiti men). Any Hadrami, however, who works near a Kuwaiti *mu'azzib* is typically referred to as *siby* (Chapter 5). Based on such specialisations, Hadramis of Kuwait are not, as generally depicted, 'money players' keen on wealth accumulation,

⁸ Kuwaitis in general loathe the Yemeni president 'Ali 'Abdullah Salih for being supportive of, or even responsible for, Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait.

⁹ US\$600 = 180 Kuwaiti Dinar = 150,000 Yemeni Riyal

as are their counterparts in Saudi Arabia or the UAE. Al-Kaf (1990: 130) made a similar, though very brief, distinction between the Hadramis of Kuwait and those in the other two states. The present Hadrami economic specialisation in Kuwait may be attributed to their being a hidden population that is minimally educated and therefore avoidant of conspicuous and competitive commercial activities with Kuwaitis. But as will be seen, these occupations have past connections with, and represent an extension of, the dependency values prominent among Hadar Hadramis which shape the economic culture of immigrants regarding the meaning of saving or the justification for long-term investment. The traditional concentration of Hadramis in specific jobs was part of a Hadrami process of socioeconomic reading (i.e. an immigrant approach which guides movers to an understanding of a foreign situation). Economically, the process involved an examination of the Kuwaiti economic map to locate gaps or changes in it and then present immigrants' labour as an alternative. Hadramis came during changes in services in the Kuwaiti domestic realm. With regard to the social aspect of the Hadrami migration, the process was more complex, but 'family-*mu'azzib*-friend' capital was prominent. This capital provided information, connections, assistance, security, stress coping, crisis management, and the circulation of cultural values and views about the place and the people in Kuwait. There was yet another very important factor that preserved the Hadrami economic specialisation in menial and quasi-domestic activities. This was the development of Kuwait—first as a state, and then as a receiving society of immigrants.

The Kuwaiti Context

J. E. Peterson (1977) traced the general political development of the Arabian states, including Kuwait, by dividing the period into three parts: first (ca. 1760-mid nineteenth century), the appearance of certain power polities or *Shaykhs*; second (ca. nineteenth century-1920), the accumulation of an autocratic form of power among these *Shaykhs*; and third (ca. 1930-present), the eventual rise of the territorial oil-state in a bureaucratic framework. Oil created what some scholars have called a *rentier* economy and state (Mahdavi 1971: 428; Crystal 1995; Ayubi 1995). In such an economy, the state is deeply involved in the distribution, allocation, and circulation of all oil revenues. The rentier economy, Ayubi observed, separates the state from its socioeconomic base; its main function is to distribute and allocate income through public expenditure, recruitment into the state bureaucracy, and specific public policies

such as economic subsidies and land allocation for loyal families (Ayubi 1995: 224-230). Throughout these periods, Kuwait was the centre of settlement and resettlement for different social groups. The current ruling family is said to have migrated from west-central Arabia 200 years ago. State territorial sovereignty meant the integration of large populations that came from other parts of Arabia, including large Persian and Bedouin segments. The composition of Kuwait's population clearly points to such a history and has led some scholars to characterise Kuwait's national development as a history of migration (see for instance Longva 1997).

With the expansion of the oil industry and state sectors in the 1940s, the state attracted many, particularly Arab, immigrants—Palestinians, Lebanese, Iraqis, and later Egyptians. Migrants of these populations were mostly technocrats who operated, among other sectors, education, health, and the oil industry; thus, the state's processes became dependent on migration. There is a substantial body of literature on these and other populations' migration and life in Kuwait before and after the war of 1991 (Longva 1997; Ghabra 1987; Seccombe 1985; Arzuni 1994; al-Musa and McLachlan 1985; al-Najjar 2001; Farjany 1983). A common feature of these studies is that they provide only some or no hints about Southern Yemeni (not specifically Hadrami) migration to Kuwait. For example, Farjany, an economic statistician who wrote an important volume on development and migration in the Arab World, devoted no more than 4 pages to the whole experience of Southern Yemeni migration in Arabia (Farjany 1983: 91-95).

In Kuwait, reliance on immigrants did not go unnoticed, particularly by the long-established local merchants, who traditionally led the opposition to the ruling family. In 1938, a rebellion against the ruler pressed for a constitution that would guarantee 'nationals' precedence in state employment and exemption from taxation (Crystal 1995). These demands were met, yet the meaning of 'Kuwaitiness' was not clearly established until 1948, when two decrees were issued by the Amir (the ruling *Shaykh*) founding a legal basis for Kuwaiti nationality. In 1951, the government issued a plan for development and urban growth in which residential areas segregated Kuwaitis from non-Kuwaitis. Migration continued, however, and in 1957, the first Kuwaiti census counted 92,851 non-Kuwaitis—almost half of the population—and reported that only one-third of the workforce of 83,378 was composed of nationals.¹⁰

¹⁰ Source: Kuwait Ministry of Planning: review of the 1957 census results.

Kuwaitis were concentrated in government office work, the police and army, and private trade. In 1959, a more rigid nationality decree was issued, which considered the 'original' Kuwaitis to be the descendents of only those who had resided in Kuwait since 1920 (Chapter 2). There have been several amendments to the 1959 decree, but the overall policy has always remained restrictive regarding citizenship. Significantly, migration became a national problem, shaping the discourse of Kuwaiti identity. From 1951 to the present, Kuwaiti urbanisation plans have led to a concentration of most immigrant communities in specific areas of residence and certain occupations. Thus, the meaning of 'Kuwaitiness' has become connected not only with the possession of citizenship, but also with where one lives and works. After the changes of the 1950s, "[t]he benefits available for Kuwaitis had grown significantly. Nationality now had a real economic worth" (Crystal 1995: 79).

Throughout Kuwait's political development, the nation's territorial insecurity has been connected, in the official argument, to its internal social security: Kuwait is insecure because there are many outsiders within. Such a discourse, while accepted by many ordinary Kuwaitis, represents a dilemma. While the country cannot function without migration and immigrants, there are continuous political demands for a systematic process of 'Kuwaitisation' of all sectors. The success of this process is questionable and will probably remain so for a while because of its usefulness as a subject of political manipulation in national elections. However, it also indicates the extent to which migration as a problem is a 'Kuwaiti product'.

Kuwaiti society is marked by more or less clear social, cultural, and sectarian boundaries. Generally speaking, there are large populations of Bedouins or *qaba'il* (mostly *Sunni* Muslim), '*ajam* Kuwaitis of Persian origin (*Shi'a*), *hasawi* from al-Ihsa'a East Arabia region (mostly *Shi'a*), and finally *Najdi* Arabs of central Arabia (*Sunni*) and other smaller groups. Within each of these social categories, there are sharp divisions and various identity markers. These boundaries and divisions have long conflicted and have become more obvious in national elections, employment, and the system of citizenship. For instance, the ruling family came to be seen at some point as preferring the Persian Kuwaitis for higher governmental posts and citizenship, while the *Najdis* have been perceived as dominating financial processes and the state's land distribution. Bedouins are depicted as newcomers whose loyalty is to the tribe rather than to the state. Such divisions are expressed in daily talk and jokes and are reflected in marriage preference. They are also framed by a distinction

between “those who came first and those who came later”. In relation to the state’s immigration policy and Kuwaitis’ attitudes toward immigrants, these divisions may be seen as more than part of Kuwaiti identity construction in a ‘crowded’ geopolitical context. Kuwaitis conceive of the immigrant as yet another possible competitor for the state’s economic resources and social and political benefits. This perception explains why a hierarchy of inequality is strongly upheld by many Kuwaitis and reproduced in their daily interactions with immigrants. As argued by Russell (1984), Kuwaiti migration ideology and policies rest not only upon labour demands, but also upon internal domestic issues, regional events, demographic factors, and how these interact with each other (1984: 40-43). To understand how Hadramis have fitted into such a complicated national context, they have to be situated first in perspective with overall Hadrami history and Hadrami migration in the world.

Hadramis Abroad

Writings on Hadramis can be divided into three major types: 1) general studies of colonial and travel accounts of Hadramis living in Dutch and British colonies; 2) Yemeni documentation on the region, particularly texts written by Hadrami *Sayyids* (religious male descendents of the Prophet Muhammad), jurists, modern historians, tribal historians, and Yemeni political activists; and 3) ethnographic-ethnohistorical records that explore the Hadrami experience abroad. These three types of writing converge in their focus on Hadrami communities in two major historical destinations: East Africa and South-East Asia. I reconsider these works as I develop two main themes: 1) patterns of Hadrami migration and 2) the socioeconomic identity and culture of migration.

The majority of current research on Hadramis builds on three classic but significant works that date back to the 1880s and 1930s: Van den Berg (1886), Van der Meulen and Von Wissmann (1932), and Ingrams (1937). In the nineteenth century, Hadrami migration quickened as a result of steam shipping and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. During that period, the majority of immigrants headed to India, the Malay, and East Africa. Van den Berg, a Dutch official, provided detailed accounts of Hadrami settlements and communities in the Netherlands’ East Indies. He also demonstrated the general pattern of Hadrami migration and incorporation into the Arab community in Java. In addition, he described the trading activities of Hadramis working as middlemen between the Chinese merchants and European importing

companies. Assimilation of many Hadramis into East Indies societies was made possible through marriage between Hadrami men and indigenous women. Thus, Van den Berg talked about the new social category of *muwalladin* (children of mixed marriages) and provided important statistics about their proportion to the Hadrami population in the Indies. Unlike later scholars who suggested that the majority of Hadrami immigrants to the Indies were either descendants of *Sayyids* (Bujra 1971) or *masakin* (lower classes; Kroef 1953), Van den Berg did not clearly identify the social origins of the majority of Hadrami immigrants (Mobini-Kesheh 1999: 26). Van den Berg observed changes in the original Hadrami social stratification, particularly the *Sayyids'* authority in the Indies in relation to other groups and personalities that began to acquire similar social titles (e.g. merchants) as a result of their economic affluence.

The works of Van der Meulen and Ingrams differ from Van den Berg's in that the former authors carried out their work in Hadramawt and showed interest in Hadramawt's connection with the outside world as a result of migration. Van der Meulen took a 3-month journey from Aden to major towns in Hadramawt's interior valley and wrote rich descriptions of valleys, villages, archaeological and religious sites, tribes, and *Sayyid* personalities. He showed much interest in the life of *Sayyids* and their power, as he was received and guided throughout his travel by *Sayyids* and their allied tribal guards. Although he did not elaborate on the impact of remittances on Hadramis at large, he noticed the significance of migration on the economic well-being of *Sayyids*. In all, Van der Meulen was less interested in the process of Hadrami travel than in unveiling Hadramawt's mysteries, as his book's title indicates.

Despite its age, the report by British colonial officer H. Ingrams (1937) on Hadramawt's socioeconomic conditions is an excellent investigation of significant issues, some of which continue to influence Hadramis in many places. The report contains sections addressing topics ranging from geography to the early history of Hadrami social organisation. An important section dealing with Hadrami migration provides statistics on Hadrami populations in the East Indies and East Africa, remittances coming to Hadramawt, occupations, and Hadramis' attitudes toward politics in the receiving countries. Ingrams used other colonial administrative records and the works of European geographers (Snouck Hurgronje 1891; Lee Warner 1931; Stark 1936) to reveal economic and social aspects of Hadramis' trading networks. Genealogies of prominent families and tribes and their occupations and property ownership are also included in his report. Significantly, Ingrams described ways in

which Hadramis reacted to other cultures, as in East Africa, and connected these responses to the varying social origins of Hadrami immigrants.

Yemeni scholars coming from a variety of sociopolitical backgrounds have contributed to the general history of Hadramawt. On many occasions, Yemeni works on Hadramawt have reflected the social identities and the political interests of their writers. Ba-Matraf's works on Hadramawt history (1974) and migration (2001) were written under the auspices of the socialist government in Aden. Al-Hamid (1968) and al-Shatiri (1983) reconstructed the political history of Hadramawt from the *Sayyids'* perspectives. Salah al-Bakri (1936) wrote his two-volume *Political History of Hadramawt* (1936) from the perspective of *Yaf'i* tribal interests, while Ba Wazir (1958) wrote from the point of view of the *Mashayikh* (a morally authoritative religious group but not descendents of the Prophet). Al-Bakri and Ba Wazir wrote in a period of religious reformism among Hadramis at home and abroad—a movement which was centred on questioning the political authority of *Sayyids*. Thus, in their writings, al-Bakri and Ba Wazir explicitly questioned the *Sayyids'* genealogical precedence and rejected their monopoly on religious education. Much of the reformist movement took place amongst Hadrami immigrant communities in Indonesia, India, and East Africa. All of these and other histories (al-Haddad 1926; al-Hibshi 1976; al-Kaf 1990) provide important perspectives on the interrelationship between Hadrami local politics and the wider economic activities and religious teachings of Hadrami individuals in these particular destinations.

The last group of works on Hadramawt is composed of the writings of ethnographers and ethnohistorians, probably starting with the research of Robert Serjeant in the 1940s. Serjeant wrote extensively on South Arabia's archaeology and medieval history, but he was also interested in Hadrami trade networks, customary laws of Hadrami fishermen, and the religious and poetic life of *Sayyids* in the seventeenth and twentieth centuries. In an article, Serjeant (1996) traced the Hadramis' economic connections in the region from the thirteenth century up to the 1950s and 1960s, when a flood of Hadrami immigrants was attracted by the oil economy in Arabia.

Anthropologist Abdullah Bujra carried out distinguished fieldwork in the interior Hadrami town of Huraydah and studied social stratification (1971). Bujra neatly divided Hadramawt society into three social strata (*Sayyids*, *Mashayikh*, and *masakin*), a classification which has recently been challenged by other ethnographers

for its excessive generalisation (Camelin 1997: 147-156). Although Bujra's ethnography might seem to revolve around the activities of *Sayyids* and tribes in Huraydah and to generalise these activities as descriptive of the whole Hadrami social system, he presented a detailed account of a small town's relation to the outside world through its people's different connections. The ethnography provides not only a synchronic analysis of what was going on in the field, but also a political history of Hadramawt and major transformations in the economic and political positions of different social groups. In addition, Bujra analysed data on marriage and the economic activities of the people of Huraydah and the ways in which these were affected by the migration process. The statistics given in the ethnography on population, marriage patterns, distribution of income in Huraydah, pre-Second-World-War and post-war patterns of migration, and remittances are significant for any comparative perspective on Hadramawt.

Most of these published works deal with the Hadrami migratory history of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the Indies and East Africa. Noticeably, historians have been prominent in this area of research and have shown great interest in the period from the 1880s to the 1940s (Boxberger 2002; Mobini-Kesheh 1999; Mandal 1994; Dale 1980). The editors of the most comprehensive volume on Hadrami traders and scholars in the Indian Ocean during the 1750s-1960s raised concerns about the absence of research on Hadramis after 1967 (the year of independence for South Yemen) and in areas such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait (Freitag and Clarence-Smith 1997, particularly the conclusion).

Patterns of Hadrami Migration

Mobini-Kesheh (1999; 1997), Talib (1995), and Dale (1997) traced general patterns in the relationship between Hadrami communities and different hosting societies, including pertinent details. "[T]he character of the host societies was often decisive in the type of transformation imposed on the Hadramis and the success of their integration" (Le Guennec-Coppens 1989: 190). In the Comoro Islands, for example, Hadramis intermarried with the local noble or royal families and have been regarded by locals as representing an authentic Arab-Islamic identity. Thus, Hadramis, in such cases, have been completely integrated into their host societies, have no longer spoken Arabic, have adopted new cultural and social values, and have "lost their own identity" (Le Guennec-Coppens 1989: 93).

Taken together, however, comparative works on Hadrami migration show that the Hadrami experience in the Comoro Islands and most other places contrasts sharply with their existence in Kuwait. But as said before, such literature does not provide any direct information on the Hadrami migratory experience in the Arab Gulf States, not to mention Kuwait. Hence, while research should explore the general pattern of Hadramis' migration and settlement abroad, it should equally account for other possible variations resulting from their specific relation with certain economic and nationalistic developments. The vast majority of research on Hadramis abroad has come from historians, the majority of whom have adhered to a world-system model that concentrates on macro structural factors and who have therefore neglected cultural and political economies of migration in their ethnographic contexts. Historians (see Boxberger 2002; Mobini-Kesheh 1999) have utilised archival sources and structured interviews but have thereby failed to document important social contexts of the Hadrami migratory experience.

Nevertheless, migration is, and should be, "multidisciplinary in its theory and methodology" (Castles and Miller 1993: 30). Relying on ethnographic data alone will not always suffice, given that past and structural relationships shape every aspect of the Hadrami migratory present in Kuwait. Ethnohistorical sources and methods were essential in my account of this migratory experience, as discussed below.

Bujra differentiated between two periods of Hadrami migration: pre- and post-Second-World-War. Migrants of the first period moved mainly to India and the Malay, while those of the second period migrated to Aden and the Arab Gulf States. Bujra suggested that the Hadrami *masakin* group (artisans, servants, farmers, etc.) only migrated within Hadramawt and Aden, while wealthy people (*Sayyids* and *Mashayikh*) migrated to distant countries across the Arabian Sea. Before the Second World War, most people hoped to make one or two journeys abroad, spending 10 to 15 years away before returning to Hadramawt for a visit or a permanent stay. Since the early 1960s, Bujra argued, most Hadramis have aimed at Saudi Arabia and the surrounding Arab Gulf States. In this period, the number of Hadrami immigrants has increased and the pre-war prolonged pattern of migration has been replaced with 2 years away and a 6-month home visit. Bujra argued that although each of the two periods of Hadrami migration took place in different political and world-economy contexts, their effects on Hadramis were the same. In other words, they did not change the traditional social organisation in Hadramawt (1971: 81-83, 87-88).

Swanson (1979) also distinguished between two phases of Yemeni migration in general: 1) from the 1880s to the early 1970s to Aden and overseas; and 2) starting from the late 1960s to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and, to a lesser extent, other Gulf States (1979: 50). Redkin (1995) used informants' accounts to show the main directions of Hadrami migration: migration abroad, migration to major cities like Mukalla and Aden, and micro-migration within the valley of interior Hadramawt. Redkin gathered information from about 60 villages in Hadramawt to trace the destination of immigrants before and after 1967. Of all the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait figured prominently as the preferred destinations for Hadrami immigrants after 1967. Normally, the majority of Hadramis who migrate first are men, tending to congregate in their settlement abroad according to their social or regional backgrounds in Hadramawt (Boxberger 2002: 42; Le-Guennec-Coppens 1997). The bulk of Hadrami immigrants over the centuries have come from the three main valleys of the interior of Hadramawt. For instance, Singapore has hosted individuals from Shibam and Tarim towns, while East Africa has hosted many Tamimi Bedouin tribesmen. Hyderabad has received mostly people who originate from *Yaf'i* tribes and other nomadic populations. Inhabitants of *Wadi* Du'an have headed mainly to Saudi Arabia (Lekon 1997: 268; Boxberger 2002: 42-44).

However, coastal Hadramis' migration (at some point comprising a majority of immigrants in East Africa, for instance) has attracted very little, if any, interest among scholars. I believe that this lack of scholarly interest originates from a dominant research tendency to rely upon conventional wisdom when dealing with Hadramawt and the Hadrami as immigrant. There is a clear propensity to think of Hadramawt as mainly comprising the interior *wadi*, namely Tarim and Say'un cities. The coastal world is thought of as a transient station for Hadrami entrepreneurs and travellers. There is a prevailing view in the literature that there is an almost fixed Hadrami immigrant personality and pattern of travel. This is a 'standard view' which has led some to suggest, for example, that "[w]herever they settled, Hadramis involved themselves in commerce, the means to acquire the best economic position" (Le Guennec-Coppens 1997: 171); or that "wherever there was money to be made ..., Hadramis were there among the leaders" (Ewald and Clarence-Smith 1997: 296; see also Clarence-Smith 1997: 297-314). Such an understanding is refuted by the experience of Hadramis in Kuwait. For example, all my informants who worked in East Africa before migrating to Kuwait were neither involved in commerce nor

capable of mobilising or achieving any form of socioeconomic power in the two destinations. This 'standard view' of Hadrami immigrants stems from what I believe to be an established predisposition in scholarship on Hadramis, which mainly pursues prominent personalities (i.e. *Sayyids*, *Mashayikh*, and merchants) and their experiences in their classic Asian and African migratory destinations (see Mobini-Kesheh 1999; Dale 1997; Mandal 1997; Azra 1997). A recent Yemeni collection of autobiographies (Al Shumayri 2002) of more than 40 Hadrami immigrants contains exclusively *Sayyids*, merchants, or religious scholars who travelled overseas in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Indeed, I started my fieldwork under the strong impression that I would find Hadramis as entrepreneurs, traders, or active religious persons. The prominence of Hadrami *Sayyids* in relevant writings may be understandable, for it is known that this segment of Hadrami society has always possessed important economic means and politico-religious influence. *Sayyids* have enjoyed greater access to education, through which they have retained the necessary knowledge to produce migration records and historiographies (Ho 2000). All of these aspects make the Hadrami *Sayyids* important research collaborators, but they may not guide one's ethnographic research on the life of another Hadrami social class, particularly if the latter is one of the most disenfranchised segments of Hadrami society. Engseng Ho's insightful ethnography on the *muwalladin*¹¹ may not be read without the guidance of the *Sayyids*' historiographical constructions such as genealogies and all that represented the typicality of Hadramawt and the Hadrami identity, including the particular skin colour and purity of race.

Sayyids' migratory experience, then, needs to be examined in relation to that of Hadramis from other socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. A number of my informants whose first trip was to East Africa joined *Sayyids* in their destinations, worked for them, and even lived in the same settlements abroad. These people's histories have been muted, even in general Hadrami scholarship. In migration, *Sayyids*' objectives have differed from those of the majority of immigrants, namely farmers and less fortunate individuals of modest social backgrounds. Boxberger (2002) and others (Lekon 1995; 1997) have argued that the primary reason for

¹¹ A problematic socio-ethnic category which refers to individuals born outside Hadramawt, or who are descendents of mixed marriages between a Hadrami man and a non-Hadrami woman. In some cases, Hadrami *muwalladin* are socially excluded or degraded by 'pure' Hadramis, by their peers, and even by their own parents. See Ho (1997) on this particular group.

Sayyids' migration has not been missionary activity, but money. Although not all Hadrami *Sayyids* have achieved wealth or have been concerned about its accumulation, the intentions and the objectives of migration have been clear as a shared vision: the systematic accumulation of wealth through intensive networking, with an eye to return to Hadramawt, and to send youngsters back to reclaim, or rework and buy more land. Of course, money-making is the declared objective for poor farmer immigrants. Still, the culmination of these people's migration, on the whole, has not been the prosperous formation of financial capital that one finds amongst some of the well-off Hadrami classes. The Hadramis of Kuwait are just one aspect of such an experience. At certain times (the 1940s and 1950s), many ordinary Hadrami farmers and labourers, specifically from the coast, have made it to East Africa (or as they called it, the 'Java of the poor', as opposed to the real Java of the rich Hadramis). To these poor Hadramis, however, migration was a sort of a refuge from a ruthless inequality. I interviewed individuals whose fathers sent them to work for someone in a grocery in Tanzania because they wanted them merely to be fed in order to reduce some of the household expenses. Their experience marks a departure from the 'standard view' that has dominated Hadrami migration literature, even amongst Hadrami scholars themselves (see for instance al-Kaf 1990).

Socioeconomic identity and the culture of migration

Writers maintain that, besides household production, Hadramawt's economy has always depended on remittances from abroad, whether in cash or in goods (Bujra 1971: 76-92; Boxberger 2002: 39-41; Lekon 1995: 265). Most authors agree that a major reason for Hadrami migration is economic necessity. Hadramawt's natural environment is parsimonious, rainfall is scarce, and agricultural production is insufficient for a densely populated area (Van der Meulen and Von Wissmann 1932; Boxberger 2002). Thus, the tradition of migration has played a vital role in sustaining many families' economic welfare, not to mention its effect on individuals' lives and the social values of the community. Debate has taken place over the possible destructive aspects of migration, such as the constant loss in labour power, negligence of agriculture and other productive activities, and the emergence of a rentier mentality and new consumption values among Hadramis (Dostal 1984; Swanson 1979).

There exists research on Hadrami properties abroad and the role of remittances, particularly funds transferred from the Indies and East Africa, in

financing two Hadrami sultanates and their principal towns in the early twentieth century (Talib 1995; Lekon 1995, 1997; Ingrams 1937). Bujra (1971) drew attention to the impact of remittances coming from the Gulf States on consumption behaviour among villagers and the non-agricultural activities those remittances encouraged. Lekon (1997: 274) showed that, at specific points in time, remittances from immigrants were used to extend irrigation, and that this practice was associated with political stability in Hadramawt. However, the debate over the virtues or vices of migration is still unresolved, particularly amongst Hadrami scholars and officials. As shall be seen, the amounts and the kind of remittances sent by Hadramis of Kuwait points to a pattern of quick consumption and lack of long-term investment. As a result, it will be argued that Hadar Hadrami migration in Kuwait did not lead to any substantial economic processes in village life (e.g. an expansion in agricultural activities).

Hadrami trade networks have been the subject of several publications on Zanzibar, Java, and the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden (Barendse 2002; Warburton 1995; Talib 1980; Ewald and Clarence-Smith 1997). Hadramis have been known to have easy access to owning land as private property, or in the form of Islamic *waqf*, in the Indies (i.e. Indonesia and Malaysia) and East Africa, and in the Arab Gulf States. This has not been possible in Kuwait for reasons related to the original socioeconomic path on which Hadramis were engaged in Kuwait. Hadramis in Kuwait have been confined to the servitude realm of Kuwaiti society, even when they have worked for or near powerful Kuwaiti people involved in intensive trade and finance activities.

Migration, in its time and space dimensions, has contributed to the Hadrami consciousness of economic identity. Java has had two meanings—one for the poor and one for the rich—both of which acquired their denotation during specific periods in Hadramawt's migratory history. Hadramis of Saudi Arabia, such as those from *Du'an*,¹² are seen by Hadramis of Kuwait as lucky and successful money makers. Hadramis of Kuwait see Saudi Arabia as a money pool, a place which allows Hadramis from similar backgrounds to be affluent. In contrast, Hadar Hadramis see themselves as being 'trapped' in Kuwait, living a pathetic, spoiled, aimless, and marginal lifestyle. The time when a Hadrami could make a fortune in Saudi Arabia or Indonesia has passed; thus, travel for money is no longer possible. 'Real migration'

¹² A *Hadar* town in the interior Hadramawt. Many affluent and large-scale Hadrami businessmen in Saudi Arabia originated from *Du'an*.

times, or 'the times of Java', are gone forever. Statements and attitudes of misfortune and failure are recurrent amongst Hadramis of Kuwait and occupied a significant part of my conversations with informants. However, while Hadramis in Kuwait associate their disadvantageous position (relative to Hadramis of Saudi Arabia and, recently, the UAE) with their inferior relationship with Kuwaitis, they also connect their situation with their own social identity. In other words, they are what they are because they are Hadar Hadramis, not Bedouins, not *Sayyids*, and not even *Du'anis* (Chapter 3).

Boxberger, following Bujra, used the phrase 'culture of migration' to refer to a peculiar feature in Hadrami experience of living and working abroad. It is "the ability of Hadramis to maintain their sense of identity with their homeland and affection for it at the same time that they were able to adapt to their adopted homelands in the *mahjar* [abroad] and thrive in them" (Boxberger 2002: 44). It is not clear, though, to which segment of the Hadrami society Boxberger and Bujra were referring when they noticed this cultural pattern, or under what historical circumstances it took place. To a large extent, Boxberger harmonised, if not romanticised, the Hadrami migratory experience. There were whole communities of Hadrami immigrants who have neither adapted to, nor been adopted by, their host societies (e.g. Hadramis in Kuwait). Other Hadramis have been completely integrated into the receiving society (e.g. Hadramis in the Comoro Islands). Still others have experienced a mix of both (e.g. Hadramis in Saudi Arabia and recently the UAE). Each of these immigrant communities has developed through certain historical and socioeconomic trajectories which might not allow for a homogeneous understanding of the whole Hadrami migration. I show in this study that a specific culture of migration emerged among Hadar Hadramis and was articulated in certain practices and forms of relationships with Kuwaiti society.

Data sources and Methodology

The majority of Hadramis in Kuwait are *Hadar* who came from coastal Hadramawt. *Hadar* is a spatial, socioeconomic, and cultural identity. My informants generally define themselves as townspeople, as 'settled families', as village farmers or fishermen. They, for example, distinguish themselves from Hadrami Bedouins and tribes (*qaba'il*), slaves (*'Abid*), and a very marginalised socio-ethnic group called *subyan* (discussed later on). They also distinguish themselves by their 'historical neutrality' in local conflicts. Unlike Hadrami Bedouins, *Yaf'i* tribals, and some *Sayyids* and *Mashayikh* religious classes, Hadar Hadramis were known as non-carriers

of weapons, as they were protected under the authority of religious figures (*Sayyids* or *Mashayikh*), who were influential in resolving conflicts and in preventing nomadic attacks on towns (see Bujra 1971; Boxberger 2002). The Hadar Hadramis with whom I interacted rarely used genealogies to describe their social identity or its past connections. The life histories I collected revealed different conceptions of genealogy and its significance within the Hadrami immigrant community. For example, only *Sayyids* preserved and offered me a copy of their '*Alawi* (a descendent of the Prophet Muhammad) family tree. Hadar Hadramis, however, recalled vague or very short genealogical lines of their families, as many did not have any precise knowledge of who was who in their ancestry. In all, though, one can see that family and village-based friendship networks strongly shaped the massive flow of individuals to Kuwait in the 1950s. Because of this, I found that in the immigrant community, memory and past connections were mainly structured around certain family members and effective persons, and mostly since the time of their migration.

Hadar as a term, however, can be broad and thus needs further explanation. The Hadrami society may, though arbitrarily, be divided into seven major social groups: *Sayyids*, *Mashayikh*, Bedouin tribes, *Yaf'i* tribes, *Hadar*, slaves, and *subyan*. Each social group has its own subgroups and subdivisions, but I only illustrate the *Hadar* because of its centrality to the subject matter. The term *Hadar* in the coastal region of Hadramawt is slightly different from the *Hadar* of the interior valley. In the coastal region, *Hadar* is more inclusive, referring to village and town dwellers like traders, landowners, shop owners, craftsmen, builders, service providers, and farmers and fishermen (Boxberger 2002: 31; also Camelin 1997: 155). The last three *Hadar* subgroups, as rightly noticed by Boxberger (2002: 31), historically occupied a lower status within the *Hadar* society itself. Thus, farmers and fishermen were, at some point in the history of Hadramawt, referred to as *du'afa* [literally, the weak]¹³ not only because of their 'historical neutrality', but also due to their economic vulnerability throughout the history of the towns of Hadramawt (discussed in chapters 2 and 3). These two subgroups (i.e. farmers and fishermen) comprised the vast majority of Hadar Hadrami immigrants in Kuwait. Obviously, the term *Hadar* is not limited to economic occupation; it also denotes a cultural identity. This is because

¹³ In an interview, Hadrami historian 'Abd al-Rahman al-Mallahi insisted that the term *du'afa* was only common in the 'old days' of the sultanates, when it was used to refer to villagers, even to townspeople in general, who were levied by the rulers or their allied tribes.

slaves and *subyan* had always been part of the *Hadar* town's socioeconomic life but carried out harsher work and were more socially degraded, and were thus 'weaker' than farmers and fishermen (on this particular distinction, see Al-Mallahi 2000: 13; Boxberger 2002: 18, 31-37, 101). Thus, most of my informants refused to categorise slaves and *subyan* as *Hadar*. In fact, my Hadar Hadrami immigrants in Kuwait believe that slaves' and *subyan*'s ethnic 'impurity' made them non-Hadramis and unmarriageable. In spite of this clear dissociation with *subyan* which Hadar Hadramis uphold, the Hadrami intellectuals (particularly the Bedouins and *Yaf'is*) I spoke with mixed all of these social groups together in one category (i.e. *Hadar*). A problem with this approach is that it led many Hadramis to the erroneous view that Hadar Hadrami immigrants who performed domestic services and menial work in Kuwait were either *subyan* or slaves. I show in this study that such an impression is not accurate. Therefore, following historian al-Mallahi on the meaning of coastal 'Hadar Hadrami immigrants' to East Africa (2000), I use my informants' own classification and use the term *Hadar* throughout.

In Kuwait, the distinction between *Hadar* and other Hadramis is played out in this ethnographic context in the culture of migration and usual economic activities. This is most noticeable in the small number of Hadrami Bedouin immigrants (with famous tribal names like al-Jabiri, al-Zubaydi, al-Bahsani, al-Manhali, and al-'Amri), who specialise in retail and redistribution activities. I did not find anyone of this Hadrami group who worked with a *mu'azzib* the way *Hadar* did, or who even interacted systematically with Kuwaitis. This was perhaps because Bedouin Hadramis in Kuwait did not have to have a work visa and hence a sponsor, as all had Saudi citizenship.

Data for my research came from three major sources: published and unpublished materials specific to the Hadramis, comparative ethnographic studies on immigrant communities, and personal ethnographic field research. Published materials included written Hadrami descriptions of Hadramawt and Hadrami people abroad. The latter included private papers, letters and personal diaries. Hadrami immigrants consistently preserve documents, particularly letters from home. A few of my key informants wrote diaries which contained their reactions to events in their villages, in Kuwait, and beyond. The significance of these types of documents is that they provide sociological and cultural information that might have been limited if published by prominent personalities or official institutions. Another type of

document that informants usually preserved was albums and souvenirs from Kuwait and other places. These articles, of which other anthropologists have shown the usefulness, provide insights into family relations and friendship patterns (Obeyesekere 1967; Hammel and Laslett 1974). To examine transitions or continuities in the value system of Hadar Hadramis, I looked, for example, at an immigrant's different occupations and possible changes in his lifestyle. Inventories helped me in interrelating occupation and lifestyle; thus, I analysed changes in the quality and quantity of objects kept or discarded by individuals (Mageean 1984; Brown 1988; Barber and Berdan 1998).

The unsettled political and economic relations between nation-states have always shaped the inter-Arabian migration flow, yet no published evidence has precisely acknowledged how Hadramis have managed with these structural quandaries and maintained a presence in Kuwait. My attempts to obtain information from an important entity such as the Kuwaiti Ministry of Interior were unsuccessful. Access to such official data is not easily given to an independent researcher like myself who is not affiliated with the Ministry of Interior body or the ruling or powerful merchant families. Such is a well known fact in Kuwait's research field, and there is always a risk of receiving, through various sources, information on immigrants and state's policy towards migration that can easily be interpreted as illegal act and hence subject for prosecution. Therefore, I had to rely on another set of data, which I pursued from Kuwaiti and Yemeni official records, particularly the Ministry of Planning's annual surveys. The most significant set of official data came from employees at the Kuwaiti Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (Chapter 5). Another important source of data was Kuwaiti families and sponsors who employed Hadramis. In all my fieldwork experience, gathering this type of data was the most difficult undertaking and might not be described as very productive. There was a problem stemming from a noticeable sensitivity that Kuwaitis in general (especially the affluent) showed when another Kuwaiti like me dealt with their servants or even other immigrants as more or less 'equal'. It is important to point out the difficulty a native researcher faces when working among a marginal population, particularly in a foreigner-sensitive national context like the Kuwaiti one.

I met Hadramis either at work, at their private homes, at their *mu'azzibs'* homes, or at my own place. In all of these contexts, I had to negotiate my own identity and justify my interactions with both Kuwaitis and Hadramis. Liminality, to use Van

Genep or Turner's term, characterised much of my field relations. Kuwaitis, including some members of my family and friends, did not understand—and some did not accept or like—my relationship with Hadramis. I was expected not to 'hang out' with 'low people' and dirty, aimless Yemeni workers. "What will Kuwaitis think of you?" was a frequent comment I heard. In Kuwait, as perhaps in other parts of the Arab world, an academic professional should behave like one and thus confine his or her interactions. Some of my friends and family members explicitly told me that they would not come to visit my place whenever there were Hadramis there. They said it was difficult for them to find any topic in common with my Hadrami friends. Not even my attempts to explain ethnographic fieldwork to them helped.

Even some Hadramis did not understand why I would be interested in their lives. Rarely did a Kuwaiti come to interact with Hadramis in their places. A visit by a Kuwaiti was not something Hadramis normally expected, unless there was a very specific and prearranged reason for it. Hence, on more than one occasion in the early stages of my fieldwork, I was advised to look for information and life stories from the 'real Hadramis' of Saudi Arabia: "they were the rich and the knowledgeable people". During my visits to Hadramis at work, I was asked by my informants and their Kuwaiti bosses, sometimes directly, to leave and meet them outside the workplace. Some Hadramis told me that they did not want to look as if they were 'butting-heads' with their *mu'azzibs*. At certain points, my presence created anxiety for Hadramis as well as Kuwaitis.

At the beginning of my fieldwork, all of the Hadramis I knew avoided any statement about Kuwait or Kuwaitis that might be seen as nasty. However, with time and more contact, daily interaction, and social activities, things became easier. My Hadrami friends began to talk about topics like Kuwaiti regulations and how these directly influenced their lives, or what it meant to be working for a Kuwaiti *kafil*. But during these discussions I had to broach what Kuwaitis, and even some immigrants, thought of as unmentionable topics. One of the least popular topics in daily talk, in the press, or even in educational research in Kuwait is the nationals' relationship with immigrants. This is particularly evident where power is clearly asymmetrical, as in a relationship between a domestic female servant and her legal sponsor or a Hadrami and his Kuwaiti *mu'azzib*. Some Hadramis looked upon me as unwise, and perhaps exaggerating, when I discussed these topics.

However, one of my closest Hadrami friends informed me that perhaps my own social identity helped to encourage Hadramis to talk to me about themselves and their Kuwaiti contacts. An element of that identity was that I belonged to the Kuwaiti Bedouin population—recently naturalised and recent settlers (Chapter 2)—rather than to any of the privileged Kuwaiti classes with whose houses Hadar Hadramis maintained strong connections. Additionally, my professional identity as an independent researcher who did not work for the government and was not affiliated with any official Kuwaiti or Yemeni institution prompted people to talk to me with confidence and some trust.

There was a subjective and personal element that made my fieldwork on migration in Kuwait challenging. For me, as perhaps for most Kuwaitis, immigrant workers—in fact, all foreigners—had been almost invisible, taken for granted as always there to serve or to do something for ‘us’. It had never come to my mind that I would sit with non-Kuwaitis and listen for hours to what they had to say, not only about themselves and their lives but also about me and about Kuwait as a society. Through Hadramis, I began to see a different side of who I was. To learn to accept this in a context like Kuwait was a very difficult exercise. Some of our Friday night gatherings (in the *‘izbah*, a Hadrami socialising place) became open-group discussions about what it meant or how it felt to be an immigrant in Kuwait. On those occasions, I heard vehement criticism and comments on how Kuwaitis treated immigrants and Yemenis in particular. One person who had worked in Kuwait for more than 35 years said: “This country (Kuwait) makes sure that whenever you wake up every morning that you look at the mirror and know that you are not a Kuwaiti, you are an outsider. You can easily fit after a while in all other countries, you can smoothly be just one of the people in those countries, but you can never be so in Kuwait.”

Any research on immigrants necessitates a sufficient understanding of the community’s labour and family history. I adopted a qualitative (ethnohistorical) method suggested by anthropologists who have used it to expand information and increase evidence validity in similar cases (Mintz 1979; Vansina 1985; Brettell 1998; Gulliver and Silverman 1995; Besteman 1993; Taylor 1983; Radin 1933). Ethnohistorical techniques, such as the life histories of key, mostly old, informants yielded data on individual networking, significant events, connections to the host country, and variations in the social composition of the immigrant community and its history. The ethnohistorical research was critical for my analysis of the diachronic

interrelations between movement and social organisation. The life history revealed not only how immigrants lived and survived the experience of movement as individuals, but also how particular individuals interpreted that experience as a collective act of their community. The data gathered from the 12 audio-recorded life histories were dialogically related to information gathered from written records. This, I believe, broadened the perspective and made possible a comparison of migratory phases, individual interpretations, and varying social interests (Rogers 1992: 25; Poyer 1994). In addition to unstructured and semi-structured interviews, I chose to conduct 'episodic' interviews (1- to 2-hour meetings) in order to expand upon information extracted from the community.

Unlike a life history, which is a full-scale biographical account of the immigrant from childhood to the present, an episodic interview compresses questions asked in 5- to 7-hour life history session into 1 to 2 hours or less. Here, the interview is shorter and the interviewee is not specifically asked to extend his or her memory to childhood. In the episodic interviews, I targeted all ages but mostly spoke with individuals who were more mobile and had to be met at their workplace or another place of their choice. The 30 or more episodic interviews I conducted consisted of relatively predetermined formal questions that concerned certain aspects of migration. My objective here was to obtain more cross-generational information and to describe continuities and changes in economic and personal behaviour and cultural forms regarding movement and work. More specific topics discussed included the social origin of the immigrant in Hadramawt, family size, previous work before migration, reason for migration, living and job conditions in Kuwait, relation to Kuwaitis, other immigrants with whom the Hadrami interacted in Kuwait, the experience of movement itself, and visa problems.

Evidence and data that generated from the above qualitative methods (i.e interviews and life histories) paralleled with three quantitative surveys I conducted amongst Hadar Hadramis in Kuwait and Hadhramawt. These surveys differ in terms of size of their sample and their focus. The first is an attitudinal survey amongst 41 Hadar Hadrami immigrants in Kuwait. Here certain socioeconomic and cultural values are examined using the immigrant's point view on issues like the meaning of money, saving, consumption, and future planning. Also, the immigrant is asked about his view of the Kuwaiti *mu'azzib*, Kuwaitis and Hadramis relationship, and specific attitudes towards envy, extravagance, and the like (see Chapters 4 and 7). The second

survey is an overview of the demographic characteristics of the Hadrami community in Kuwait. In the survey, 116 immigrants responded to questions about home of origin in Hadhramawt, age, work, salary, marital status, education level, and settlement in Kuwait (see Chapters 2 and 4). Finally is the historical survey, which I conducted in al-Qarah Hadar Hadrami village (see Chapters 3 and 4). Following, I use this survey to show the ways in which my overall quantitative and qualitative data interacted to produce ethnographic analysis of Hadar Hadrami migratory experience in Kuwait.

During my one-month stay in al-Qarah, I interviewed prospective immigrants, ex-immigrants, and non-immigrants and recorded some observations of key life affairs in the village. I also conducted a historical survey of 462 immigrants to Kuwait and elsewhere from 1936 to 2004. The survey contains historical as well as current information, including the immigrant's full name, marriage affiliation, year of departure, destination(s), time of return, type of work during and after migration, and, if possible, the name of the immigrant's Kuwaiti *mu'azzib*. Prior to the survey, I collected audio-recorded life histories from three al-Qarah immigrants in Kuwait who represented different experiences and generations.¹⁴ In Kuwait, my daily interaction with al-Qarah immigrants took place in their *'izbah*. I chose al-Qarah village as a case study for several reasons. First, al-Qarah is known for its longstanding connection to Kuwait, with different generations of immigrants travelling and settling together. Second, the intensity of al-Qarah's connectivity with Kuwait and Kuwaitis is seen by other Hadar Hadrami immigrants as an indication of the success of its people. It is believed that the first Hadrami who returned to Kuwait after the 1991 war came from al-Qarah. Finally, many—but not all—al-Qarah immigrants were attached to the Kuwaiti domestic life working as *sibyan* (domestic servants) and thus were consistent

¹⁴ I will refer to these life histories in Chapter 4. There, however, I only use the experiences of Abu Ayman and 'Awaḍ because these two individuals live in the 'White House' *'izbah* and are thus relevant to that chapter's focus. As will also be seen, the relationship between these two people in the *'izbah* setting is also important with regards to family and kin relations abroad. Additionally, they are important because they show continuities in the dependent relationships that Hadar Hadramis across generations have experienced in Kuwait. A third person, 'Ashur, lives alone and assumes a more individualistic lifestyle that does not resemble the *'izbah* social context. His life history is revealed as a transcript in the appendix. I decided to offer 'Ashur's life history in detail, for I think it provides a further individual perspective on al-Qarah, its people, and Kuwait's migration processes, and how all of these may be evaluated from an immigrant's personal viewpoint. I also deal with other individuals, from different villages, who live outside the *'izbah* in Chapter 4 through Chapter 7.

with a general Hadar Hadrami pattern of movement to Kuwait (discussed more in Chapter 3).¹⁵

In order to integrate the different sources and types of data in a useful way, I approached them in a complementary and dialogical manner. For instance, information that came from life histories of immigrants in Kuwait was tested against daily observations and non-immigrants' accounts. In the same way, historical survey information regarding who went where and when was scrutinised by key informants and older people. At the same time, my ethnographic materials on Hadar Hadrami village migratory experience resulted from an active exchange between the different blocks of data. Hence, significant moments in the socio-political history of al-Qarah made the observable pattern in its migration more plausible and accountable. The significant moments in al-Qarah history corresponded with trends and shifts in immigrants' destination and the intensity of people's movement during specific periods. All were expressed in numbers in the historical survey (see Chapter 3). I found that individuals' accounts of being a dependent *siby* on a *mu'azzib* (whether in an actual vocation, in an expected role, or as an old experience) were informed by the ways through which Hadar Hadramis collectively perceived their economic and social identity. To analyse this, I relied on individuals' perspectives (expressed through life histories and interviews) and evaluations of their own and others' economic acts and social relations before and during migration (expressed in their response in the attitudinal survey).

While al-Qarah data showed certain migration patterns and variations in the Hadar Hadrami experience, they also had limitations. One natural constraint on my information on al-Qarah 'village life' is related to the topic and focus of my research, which is mainly concerned with immigrants *in* Kuwait rather than in their places of departure. Yet, it is important to note that my stay in al-Qarah was not at all intended for fieldwork, but rather for selective data collection to support the ethnographic evidence in my main research area on al-Qarah and other Hadar Hadrami immigrants at the Kuwaiti end. Therefore, the bulk of my material on al-Qarah 'migratory history' came from prearranged interviews and the historical survey.

¹⁵ Nonetheless, although dependency continues to characterise al-Qarah immigrants' relations with Kuwait, some variations may not be ignored in this respect. A few individuals who initially worked as *sibyan* for known Kuwaiti houses became affluent and very independent of their Kuwaiti bosses. Two of these individuals are discussed in Chapter 4.

Of course, my focus on immigrants in Kuwait does not inhibit the analysis of data coming from the immigrant locality itself. However, one needs to recognise that some aspects of village life may not be spoken about with authority because of the short period I spent there. This short stay did not allow for deep ‘participant’ interaction with the people there. However, I attended weddings, markets, mosques, and social gatherings which enabled me to get a sense of the daily life in al-Qarah. I also visited and interviewed ex-immigrants in neighbouring villages (see Chapter 6). Another probable constraint on certain data was related to the nature of the information I collected from Hadar Hadramis. For instance, all of the al-Qarah historical survey data were gathered from male key informants, ex-immigrants, and seniors in al-Qarah and Kuwait, whose information sometimes conflicted or in some cases could not be verified at all. This limitation was prevalent with regard to the duration of some individuals’ stays abroad. This, I think, resulted from the fact that there were individuals who assumed sporadic activities abroad for long periods of time (referred to by locals as *ghuyyab*, absentees). I was told by a friend in al-Qarah that some seniors did not want to mention the names of specific immigrants who had been intentionally dropped from memory because of some wrongdoing they had committed when they were young in the village or abroad. This was chiefly clear during the early phases of al-Qarah’s migration, particularly to East Africa, the ‘fun playground for the young and the purposeless’, as old Hadar Hadramis used to describe it. However, the majority of the surveyed immigrants were not lacking information, as were those ‘absentees’, whom I had to leave as ‘unknown’. As such, they are not included in the data of this chapter.

In many cases, my informants could not make a clear distinction between different types of work that they performed in Kuwait. For example, in all phases of Hadar Hadrami migration, there were individuals who were simultaneously *sibyan* in Kuwaiti houses and shop assistants for their *mu‘azzibs* or their *mu‘azzibs’* relatives. There were individuals who worked in the postal service (*murasil*) of the government but lived with and worked as drivers and cooks for Kuwaiti families. I knew a Hadar Hadrami who had come to Kuwait to work officially as a courier for a Kuwaiti company, yet in reality worked as a driver and poured tea and coffee (i.e. as an office peon, *farrash*) for his old *mu‘azzib* in a government office. A small number of Hadar Hadramis lived with their *mu‘azzibs* performing no significant activity, although they were legally there based on one or another type of work visa (Chapter 5). In all of

these cases, *siby* was a common answer when I asked these immigrants about the nature of their work. Among some other Hadar Hadramis in Kuwait, another common answer was *shaghal 'ind jama'ah Kuwaytiyyin* (working for Kuwaiti fellows); the specific nature of the job performed was completely unknown to these individuals. In the work categories of all the surveys I conducted, however, and to avoid the confusion that the overlap of social and economic statuses created amongst immigrants, I followed the legal designation of the immigrant, regardless of the fact that some of these Hadramis were disposed to carry out, or did perform, a *siby* role.

Most Hadramis do not clearly distinguish between three occupations for which they are also known in Kuwait: *murasil* (postman), *farrash* (office peon), and *mandub* (courier). In daily practice, almost all Hadar Hadramis have performed one or more of these jobs interchangeably. In Kuwait, there has never been a clear definition of each of these rather immigrant-specific vocations. However, although employees in these vocations are paid similarly, one can still make a simple, practical distinction between them. *Murasil* is a postman who, unlike the *mandub* (courier), does not execute paperwork, while a *farrash's* main job is confined to the workplace. I also noticed that some Hadar Hadramis conceptualised the difference between these jobs in terms of hierarchy. *Mandub* is higher than *murasil*, which is higher than *farrash*. But because of the resemblance between the first two vocations, I considered them both as representing one work category in the survey (i.e. *mandub*).

The interview types described above and the subsequent data and methods were associated with the units and level of analysis used in this case. I chose the 'community' and its 'culture' as my two main units of analysis. The first unit included categories such as individual Hadrami immigrants, friends, family, and all other daily relations with the Kuwaiti society and state. The examination of these categories generated data on how Hadramis interrelated and performed as an immigrant society interacting in a different social and political context. My focus here was on how an individual's role might have fluctuated during migration. In the community, I looked for forms of individual and group action, as well as for how social relations or crises were managed. At first glance, Hadramis appeared to be peaceful, avoidant of Kuwaiti politics, and phenomenally devoted to work. I explored this image in relation to the Hadramis' own evaluation of their position in Kuwait and the connections that developed between the two societies. Conversely, I examined the ways in which the development of the Kuwaiti nationalist context motivated and shaped the Hadrami

migration in this part of the Arab Gulf. Hence, I used comparative works when I approached these data to account for the structural aspects of the Hadrami migratory experience. Comparisons of Hadramis with other immigrant groups studied by ethnographers helped in understanding both “the structural constraints and individual cultural choices framing the migration experience” (Green 1997: 58).¹⁶ The comparative perspective helped in making the connection between the general and the particular in Hadrami migration, and in comprehending how Hadramis in Kuwait compared themselves with other Hadramis abroad.

My second unit of analysis (culture) included values and beliefs on travel, immigrant behaviour, social skills, material culture, and verbal and non-verbal genres. A few scholars have pointed at the richness, but not the role, of Hadrami oral traditions in communicating the values of work and travel (Boxberger 2002). As shown by Vansina (1985) and Barber and Berdan (1998), oral tradition can enable accurate accounts of events, particularly when people intentionally circulate information by oral means, either as part of socialising and orientating the members of their group or out of fear of political persecution. I gathered evidence from proverbs, poetry, narratives, autobiographical histories, and other oral accounts that reflect the Hadrami culture of migration. The examination of oral traditions is important, as it can show how and why a socioeconomic practice such as dependency is reproduced through a cultural communicative system. Oral genres (poetry and proverbs) occupy an important place in Hadrami daily socialisation. In order to understand exactly what my informants were referring to or meant during interviews, I had to gather as many proverbs as possible and record poems from popular Hadar Hadrami poets who had become heroic cultural figures amongst villagers. I utilised these genres as sources of information because many accounts of significant events and conditions were recalled by my informants but never were committed to any form of writing.

Because migration connects three levels of interaction (structural, relational, and individual), approaching the process of migration only at a macro or micro level of analysis does not allow for a comprehensive explanation (see Chapter 6). I used a meso-level analysis suggested by historian of migration Dirk Hoerder (1997; also

¹⁶ See also ethnographic monographs: Foner 1979 on Jamaicans in London; Eades 1980 on the Yoruba in Northern Ghana; Gonzalez 1992 on Palestinians in Honduras; Werbner 1990 on Pakistanis in England; Watson 1975 on Chinese in Hong Kong and London; and Chavez 1992 on Mexicans in the United States.

Faist 1997; Brettell 2000) to achieve a better understanding of the migration process. At this level, the migratory action is seen as consisting of emotional and spiritual needs, economic rationales, and cultural norms and practices (Hoerder 1997: 76). I also examined structural factors like the receiving and sending states' political and economic relations and immigration policies to analyse their influence on the size and nature of the Hadrami community in Kuwait. At the same time, I attempted to understand how state structures and policies were, in Hoerder's terms, 'segmented' by immigrants (that is, managed, adapted to, appropriated, manipulated, or controlled). There is a characteristic link between the Hadar Hadrami culture of dependency and Hadar Hadrami migration flow. Therefore, my analysis of Hadar Hadramis' socioeconomic roles and their consequent cultural norms in the migration process was also aimed at showing how these could have perpetuated each other.

CHAPTER 2: KUWAIT AND HADRAMAWT: HISTORY, POLITICAL ECONOMY, AND THE REALITY OF MIGRATION

Introduction

Any study of migration ideally comprises an analysis of data coming from two or more societies. Hadrami migration to Kuwait may be understood in relation to sociohistorical conditions in Hadramawt at the time of the move, as well as in relation to the economic and regional backgrounds of the immigrants; however, for a broader perspective, the phenomenon should also be approached by examining the nature of the receiving society and its national socioeconomic context. In this regard, Hadrami migration to Kuwait reflects the economic history of the region and the political economy of Kuwait, which have determined not only trends of movement in and out of Kuwait, but also the ways in which different immigrant groups, including Hadramis, have been culturally perceived and economically categorised by the host society itself. It is in this interaction between the immigrants' and locals' worlds that the 'migration reality' of Kuwait can be identified as a specific event in time and space on which the formation of Kuwait as a modern state has been based. Equally, the meaning of 'Kuwaitiness' as an identity and the emergence of nationalist political ideologies have been shaped by in-migration.

The 'reality of migration' in Kuwait encapsulates several contradictions. These contradictions inform the state's economic planning and the political authorities' legal reactions to regional politics. From a Kuwaiti perspective, migration is an existential and social problem, as the immigrant is seen as a competing economic element for the state's resources. At the same time, however, house-serving immigrants, for instance, are considered among the necessities of today's Kuwaiti households. An immigrant's existence in the family is also related to emerging cultural values of family success, satisfaction, and even the unity and well-being of the individual home. Migration is depicted by some Kuwaitis, particularly within political and intellectual circles, as a threatening sociocultural problem (al-Jardawi and al-Tarrah 1988: 89-93). Nonetheless, migration remains a subject of economic and political manipulation for prominent Kuwaiti merchants, landowners, working

permit agencies, and even many ordinary Kuwaitis.¹⁷ In the everyday life of most Kuwaitis, the need for immigrants becomes fundamental in the conceptualisation of basic needs, social space, and locals' symbolic power. Yet the immigrant discloses the degree of dependence and vulnerability of many Kuwaitis tied to a foreign 'someone' who resides in the house as a servant, who cleans the street, who teaches a son, or who medicates a mother. The ordinary Kuwaiti who complained, "I can't live with them and I can't live without them" was just articulating the fact that the state's policy vision on migration has always been based on a paradoxical process of *inclusion designed for exclusion*. This is a process that marks every aspect of Kuwait's social life.

It is, however, too simplistic to view the relations that evolved in this migratory context as being composed of just two opposing universes (immigrants and natives), given that in Kuwait there are more than 150 nationalities. The latter represent varying sociocultural milieus and have differed in their historical connections to Kuwait. Certain immigrant populations have expanded, diminished, or held steady their presence in Kuwait according to a complex of factors related to local economic issues, regional politics, immigrants' networking processes, and personal relations with Kuwaitis.

Additionally, the majority of today's Kuwaiti citizens are the result of waves of population resettlement, mainly after the development of the oil industry in the 1930s and the urbanisation and growth plans of the 1950s. Kuwaiti society itself, as described below, is based on conflicting ideas of historical precedence and separation that are reflected in the classification of Kuwaitis by time, space, work, marriage, dress, and the various degrees of Kuwaiti citizenship. Kuwait's migration reality identifies strategies of control, manipulation, construction of political legitimacy and identity, and mutual dependency between locals and foreigners.

Where do Hadramis fit into such a context? What are their social and economic origins? And how have they connected with Kuwait throughout the history of their migration? Hadrami migration to Kuwait has always been a 'quiet movement' for important reasons that relate to the receiving society's role. Hadrami migration to Kuwait started as a sequence of real-life events in which individuals' and families'

¹⁷ I mean by 'ordinary' the majority of the Kuwaiti population who totally depend on the state's employment for their incomes and who are not economically related to the ruling family or to the merchant class. Ordinary Kuwaitis in this sense may include non-elite *Hadar*, Bedouins, ex-slaves and other poor segments and dominated groups, and the *'Ajam* or Kuwaitis of Persian origin.

decision making was a reaction to material necessities both at home and at the destination. Hadrami immigrants' choices, expectations, and experiences not only have shaped their households' material situations at home, but also have reflected relationships within the immigrant community itself. Hadrami migration has also developed its own values of movement and social connectivity with Kuwait and Kuwaitis. These values have, in many ways, sharply contrasted with the original Hadar Hadramis' economic aspirations, and even needs, in migration. This is a paradox that is central to the analysis of the Hadrami presence in Kuwait (see chapters 3 and 4). Below, I sketch a few historical and economic trajectories of Kuwait, examining the role played by its long-powerful merchant elite in the 'production' of the nation's migration reality. Then I address the Hadrami experience, discussing the context of the move and the significance of the early attachment of Hadramis to the Kuwaiti house.

Merchants, locals, and immigrants: creating categories and control

Since the late eighteenth century, Kuwait's economic life could be described as one that has frequently experienced dramatic shifts yet has smoothly absorbed dangerous political outcomes. A depiction of this sort must be understood in relation to the position of Kuwait in the world economy from that period onward. Before the development of the oil industry in the early 1940s and for more than three centuries of life under colonial powers (the Ottomans and then the British), as a coastal urban settlement, Kuwait played a transit-oriented role in the economic history of the region. The most important mercantile activities in Kuwait evolved around the sea trade, pearling, and merchandise caravans. Traders from as far away as India transferred commodities through Kuwait to areas like Basrah and Aleppo. It has been shown that at some point Kuwaiti merchants dominated the date trade within the Arab Gulf and beyond (Boxberger 2002: 112). Kuwaiti dhows also used to redistribute goods to Hadramawt and East Africa. Unlike neighbouring urban centres such as Qatar and Dubai, the growth and relative stability of Kuwait's socioeconomic relations was related to more open and far-reaching contacts with the outside world. Kuwaiti merchants played a vital role in this regard, for their economic standing was critical in setting conditions for the development of Kuwait as a modern political unit. Merchants in Kuwait have formed a distinctive, powerful, and cosmopolitan elite, especially since the British support of al-Sabah ruling family as an absolute authority

early in the twentieth century. Like some segments of the population, including the al-Sabah, merchants are called *Hadar* (urbanites). *Hadar* as a social identity has always been used not only to indicate opposition to Kuwaiti Bedouins and groups of Persian origin, but also to affirm merchants' historical claims of precedence in Kuwait. Merchants also distinguish themselves from the al-Sabah, who only migrated to Kuwait some 200 years ago and who were received by the prominent families and shared with them the administration of the town.

A significant point here is that merchants gained their power through direct domination over the urban populace of the town of Kuwait. Merchants controlled every aspect of trade and the pearling industry. Moreover, the nature of trade and pearling activities created powerless local groups who became totally dependent on the jobs and terms of contracts offered by merchants. The so-called 'diving law', mainly formulated by merchants, indicates that coercion was part of the system of work orders. In that system, debts were heritable, and the social relationships that emerged as a result were based on domination and patronage through debt-bondage. Wealth was concentrated in the hands of merchants through endogamous marriage, a shared political vision, and a strong network (Crystal 1995: 37-39).

It is true that Kuwait experienced dramatic changes related to world wars I and II, which resulted in a general recession in Kuwait as well as other trading centres. But merchants' trade and status were not strongly affected by these factors, outside the scope of this research. It is important to note, though, that while early in the 1940s the Kuwait oil industry began to take shape, dhows traded in and out of Kuwait, defying frequent closures and bans on movement during the periods of war. In fact, as we shall see through the Hadramis, the dhow trade continued throughout the 1960s; however, it shifted from the transfer of goods to the people trade. During the periods of war, labour demand in the oil sector remained a problem, yet it was compensated for through two main channels. First, a labour importers' guild recruited seasonal Bedouins, Persians, and Iraqi workers on dhows and in town. Second, there was a recrudescence in the slave¹⁸ trade, mostly from Persia and Baluchistan but also from East Africa, continuing well after 1945 (Seccombe 1983: 4-5). These two channels laid the foundation for the earliest systematic migration to Kuwait.

¹⁸ It is known in Kuwait that slaves traditionally carried out domestic work, but they were also used by *Shaykhs* and the powerful classes to guard property.

With the collapse of pearling and the dhow trade in the 1950s, many semi-skilled local labourers began to seek employment in the booming oil industry of Kuwait. Soon, however, the local supply of skilled or semiskilled labourers did not meet the increasing labour demands in the oil sector. Since its modern formation in the 1950s, the Kuwaiti state has faced the problem of how to organise and manipulate continuous in-flows of foreigners, who became a majority not only in the labour force but also in the population as a whole. In 1948, for instance, the British Political Agent reported that “The great increase in the foreign population at Kuwait is giving rise to many problems” (FO 371/68319). Initially, Kuwait’s productive labour force was composed primarily of Indians and Pakistanis, who formed the bulk of semi-skilled labourers and junior staff in the oil sector in the early 1950s. Soon afterwards, thousands of Arab immigrants, including Jordanians, Lebanese, Egyptians, and the recently uprooted Palestinians, replaced the Asians and joined the government sectors. These Arab populations practically established the educational and bureaucratic structures of Kuwait. Many newly settled Bedouins also began to be recruited into the Army and police services, and most were granted citizenship. Persians were concentrated in construction and manual work, while ‘Umanis specialised mostly in domestic and non-skilled occupations.

Although the *Shaykhs* and the merchants were politically concerned about the influx of labourers, they calmed their own anxieties by espousing a future vision: foreign workers were needed to help implement urbanisation and oil industry plans, and when the time came, locals would have sufficient training to replace them. This vision continues to this day, and the many 5-year development plans that exist revolve around how to reach a population balance between Kuwaitis and expatriates. Notwithstanding these plans, expectations and recommendations about population balance have reflected a declared policy but have never culminated in any actual steps.¹⁹ Kuwaiti concern over immigrant populations has been reflected in the design of the national censuses since 1957. Compared with the records of other Arab Gulf States, Kuwaiti censuses contain the most reliable information on nationals and non-nationals. Kuwaiti planners obsessively over-record data, including personal

¹⁹ Occasionally, however, and under political and security threats, the political authorities have been selective in the reduction of specific immigrant populations, as was the case in the 1980s with many *Shi’a* Iraqis, some Palestinians, Lebanese, and Syrians. Individuals from these populations were systematically deported. Such measures followed a bombing campaign targeting sensitive state institutions and an assassination attempt on the Amir of Kuwait—acts foreigners were accused of committing.

information, about all of Kuwait's residents. Such an obsession with 'who's who, how many there are, where they came from, when they came, and what they do' resonates in Kuwaiti officials' plans to control, though not totally eliminate, the various populations living in a minute geopolitical space. This has always been achieved through several strategies: categorisation, redistribution, and spatial containment and exclusion.

The first Kuwaiti population census of 1957 was a turning point that underlined the state's systematic reaction to migration. A first priority for the state's elite was political legitimacy and support, which were attained mainly through strategies of allocation of economic and employment resources among the masses, as well as through citizenship. A strong distinction between nationals and non-nationals began to appear with the emergence of a citizenship system in 1959. The system granted the Kuwaiti citizen numerous economic advantages and social rights, including free housing, secure employment (mainly in state bureaucracy), and free health and education services. Kuwaitis were encouraged to pursue education and to participate in industry and other sensitive economic sectors. In reality, however, they were absorbed into governmental offices for less hours' work and easy social pensions after retirement. In 1957, non-Kuwaitis formed 66% of the labour force, while in 1985 non-nationals formed more than 63% of the population and dominated the productive sectors of the country. In the last national census of 1995, 41.5% of the entire population was composed of Kuwaitis, 90% of whom worked in the public sector holding positions of office.²⁰

A division of labour began to outline a meaning of 'Kuwaitiness' in which Kuwaitis distinguished themselves from foreigners by the type of work they assumed. The state encouraged such a division systematically, with Kuwaitis taking on governmental office work and non-Kuwaitis mostly performing the 'hard' jobs. For Kuwaitis, working for the government came to equal national service and an identity linked to the work place and the symbolic power of the state. However, it is a well-known fact that Kuwaitis of all social and cultural backgrounds used to take on work that demanded physical involvement, particularly in the oil industry, road construction, and so forth. Rapid social change in Kuwaiti society after the oil boom complicated the understanding of work, prioritising consumption over production in

²⁰ Kuwait Ministry of Planning 2004: Annual statistical abstract; see also *al-Qabas* Kuwaiti newspaper, May 2004.

meaning, value, and justification. Thus, Kuwaitis began to refrain from taking on the above occupations, leaving them to immigrants. Those Kuwaitis who remained in jobs that demanded manual labour began to be stigmatised, due to such jobs being depicted as, for instance, the vocation of those with no authentic origins (tribal or familial) or as the work of 'status-weak' groups that were incapable of accessing state employment.

Oil expanded tremendously the power of the merchants and the ruling *Shaykh* family. It created a rentier political structure and economy in which those already in power in society obtained property in the form of land and the distribution of oil revenues, as well as legal rights (Ayubi 1995: 27-28). Through such undertakings, the meaning of 'Kuwaitiness', within the Kuwaiti system of differentiation, came to be based on two concepts: the time or the duration of a group's citizenship and, subsequently, their proximity and access to the state's wealth. Current citizenship law places individuals who have been established residents of the town of Kuwait since 1920 or are descendents of such residents in a separate category called *original Kuwaitis*.²¹ Individuals known to have arrived long after that date have become Kuwaitis as well through a process of naturalisation but have never enjoyed the same degree of legitimacy (Longva 2000: 187). The famous phrase uttered by merchants and attached *Hadar*, 'We are the sons of its [Kuwait's] belly, and the others are *lafu*'²² (recent comers who were helped to survive) indicates not only the significance of spatial centrality in the identification and categorisation of Kuwaitis, but also the temporal dimension of relatedness. Kuwait is seen *a priori* as a place where 'others' simply work and probably find refuge. The categorisation of Kuwaitis through citizenship is framed by the spatial conceptualisation of social groups, a point that deserves some explanation.

Urbanisation plans reinforced this meaning of 'Kuwaitiness', which is today reflected in the spatial distribution of 'those who came first, those who followed, and all the rest'. The sedentarisation of the population in Kuwait was not an arbitrary process; it had a very clear objective: the use of space based on ideas of precedence

²¹ This is the year when a protective wall was built around the town of Kuwait under the instructions of the ruling Sabah Amir. The wall was built during a time of regional instability and was intended to protect Kuwait from nomadic raids. Those who participated in the fortification of the town referred to themselves as *ahal al-sour* (people of the wall). For more discussion of the role of the wall in Kuwaiti identity politics, see Longva's (1997) *Walls built on sand: Migration, exclusion, and society in Kuwait*.

²² *Lafu* (pl.), from the classical Arabic verb *alfa* (became) and *lafa* (came or arrived).

and separation. As the state began executing its urbanisation plan in the 1960s, there were thousands of newly settled Kuwaitis and foreign labourers living in shantytowns around the city of Kuwait. These shantytowns were later demolished, replaced by housing projects for Kuwaitis which officially came to be called 'limited-income-houses' (al-Musa 1976). Today, these neighbourhoods, referred to as 'external areas', are mainly home to Bedouins, low-income *Hadar*, and expatriates. They now form a belt around the capital and the affluent *Hadar* 'inner areas'.

The categorisation of differences among Kuwaitis is not usually made public, but these differences have always been signifiers of social origins and have constituted factual limitations on who holds economic and political power. Since these distinctions were institutionalised, the original Kuwaitis (merchants, ruling *Shaykhs*, as well as some of their allied client families) have controlled the most significant commercial activities and financial wealth of the state. Additionally, they have controlled access to the society through citizenship. To other ordinary Kuwaitis, this structure is common knowledge and in fact shapes many of the narratives about injustice. Kuwaitis see this hierarchy as a reality of their society that may not be easily or seriously challenged due to several factors.

Once gained, a person's citizenship privileges stand always on the brink, for citizenship can be withdrawn easily, under many circumstances and legal and political justifications.²³ But there is also a binding cultural and ritualistic aspect of citizenship transmitted in daily language and practices. After it was developed, the concept of Kuwaiti citizenship became part of the political rituals relating to identity and to the symbolic power of the state in the figure of the ruling *Shaykh*. It is interesting to see the great emphasis on the ritualistic aspect of gaining citizenship in the local political culture. One is expected to show respect to the citizenship document itself and to never throw it away or desecrate it publicly, as some individuals have been prosecuted for such acts in the past. It is usually locked up in a safe place and protected from physical damage. A person must endure long and tiresome procedures in order to be re-issued a citizenship document that has been lost.

²³ Those citizens who have recently been naturalised or who depend on citizenship for their employment and income are the most vulnerable. In other words, the majority of the Kuwaiti population is potentially subject to citizenship withdrawal. Lawful citizenship withdrawal is very difficult in procedural terms. Realistically, however, this is the Kuwaiti political authority's most powerful and threatening apparatus against political opponents whose actions are seen as explicitly or directly challenging to the autocratic rule of the al-Sabah family.

In Kuwait, the discourse regarding citizenship is an arena of social competition, exclusion, and precedence among and between groups. Thus, citizenship has become not only an avenue to belonging to Kuwaiti society, but also a vehicle of higher culture and higher status. The concept of citizenship in Kuwait is more than a form of political identification and control. Citizenship is interestingly similar to, and perhaps ideologically originates from, the earliest Kuwaiti experience of the reception, recruitment, and resettlement of labourers. This is perhaps why members of prominent Kuwaiti families were the earliest labourers and are still very active in the realm of writings on the early experience of Kuwaiti labourers. Writings have ranged from popular texts and newspaper articles to university-based research. Ghanim S. al-Ghanim, a member of one of the oldest merchant families who worked as the director of the *Daily News* (in English), wrote in a rather nostalgic tone:

Many thousands came to Kuwait ... I saw late 1930s slaves brought in, they were weak ... some of them begged the Kuwaiti buyer to buy them and to take them to his house to be fed and clothed ... they were lucky because they had been accepted to live under those who would take care of them and treat them like their own sons even more, and who would eventually help them marry other slaves in Kuwait. And when they were settled and asked by their fathering-carer to go back to where they came from, they replied: how can we leave prosperity and go back to misery!? ... Our Kuwaiti fathers inherited kindness, they were merciful ... Hundreds of thousands seek refuge in the town of Kuwait in times of starvation and wars. Bedouins, neighbouring Hadar, and from places in the Arab Gulf, and everywhere they came searching for a bite, Kuwait opened its heart to them. I saw in the 1920s and 1940s all sorts of immigrant people who came from Africa and the coasts of Arabia; some were married, others were single. They settled for a year or two, made some fortune, and went back home carrying money to their kin before returning to Kuwait again ... During many migrations to Kuwait many were vulnerable and orphaned because of disease or poverty, but Kuwaitis did not turn away from them; they were generous and merciful, thus they adopted them, took care of them, taught them ... in the past Kuwaitis' houses were open day and night for the needy. (al-Ghanim n.d.: 105-109)

The mere act of merchants receiving workers has been represented, through cultural, political, and social means, as an act of *generosity* by the powerful on behalf of those in need. This idea has been transmitted through daily relations, education, and writings as a conventional form of *patriarchy* which was delivered as an act of care, adoption, and protection of the weak. It is not uncommon in Kuwait to see those who were granted or who regained their citizenship express gratefulness and praise (through poetry or an announcement in newspapers or the streets) to a member of the elite or a *Shaykh* who helped them do so. The scene of a returning immigrant offering

a gift to his Kuwaiti boss is also a familiar one. Gift giving is expected by some Kuwaitis and perceived by the immigrant to be an act of paying back the generosity of those who were kind enough to offer work. Generosity and patriarchy are decisive elements in the construction of relationships not only among merchants and their local or foreign dependents, but also between some ordinary Kuwaitis and their sponsored Hadramis.

The cultural and political categorisation of Kuwaitis was a reproduction of the experience of labour reception by urban Kuwaiti merchants, but this categorisation has also been incorporated by ordinary Kuwaitis as a model for interaction with foreign immigrants. The process of migration in Kuwait suggests that the determinants of the reception of immigrant populations have included not only labour demands, but also domestic events, demographic changes, and the relative positions and expectations of powerful actors in Kuwaiti society. From the beginning, merchants as a socioeconomic and political force have engaged in maintaining the migration flow, in shaping the production of migration and its policy tools, and in constructing a dominant ideology of difference and claim. Today, the same few merchant families (and recently, the ruling *Shaykhs* as well)²⁴ who are involved in the sea trade control some of the most powerful firms dealing with importing labourers. I will discuss the financial gains of the process of importation later; for now, it is important to note that foreign labourers in Kuwait live in privately rented estates, many of which are owned by members of the traditional economic elite.

Therefore, despite a recurrent local political discourse, particularly during elections, concerning the necessity of the 'Kuwaitisation of employment', the in-flow of skilled and, usually, many types of 'lumpen' immigrants has persisted. This is significant because it is through this historical control over movement in and out of Kuwait that the earliest policy tools to direct the movement of the population rested in the hands of traditional powers. It is no coincidence that the Nationality Law appeared in the same year as the Alien Residence Law of 1959. These two laws constituted the original framework of the actions and policy of the powerful elites in all existing

²⁴ To name a few, *Shaykh* 'Ali Jabir al-Sabah, the son of the current Amir of Kuwait, owns *al-Shahin al-Dhahabi* company. *Wa'il al-Nisf* company is owned by Wa'il al-Nisf, son of one of the richest *Hadar* families, also known as the state decision maker, who influences the general policy of the country as a whole. These two firms bring thousands of cheap labourers from countries like Egypt and Bangladesh to work in services like guarding, cleaning, and couriering. Companies like these usually contract with the state, which buys these services from them. Here the state is approached as an economic source of generating and preserving wealth for the *Shaykh* and the merchant.

populations. The Ministry of the Interior, rather than any other entity in the country, enforces the regulations of both laws; control over the Ministry has always been shared between the *Shaykhs* and the rich. Policy tools like the country's many security checks (Good Conduct Certificate, No Objection Certificate, Residence Permit, and Declaration and Undertaking) have been employed since the 1930s; merchants had a monopoly on them and issued them frequently on personal bases. For example, the so-called National Preferences are a group of policies that "accord preference to one or another nationality or group [and] range from laws to verbal directives" (Russell 1984: 45). State policy tools also include the implicit and explicit categorisation and allocation of Kuwaitis and immigrants in the labour force. Thus, "Differentiation between Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis is also acknowledged policy, embodied in law. Diversification of the non-Kuwaiti population to prevent concentration of any one nationality is undocumented but widely reported" (Russell 1984: 45).

This may explain why even Kuwaitis themselves have been involved mainly in jobs of a bureaucratic nature, while others have performed virtually all of the 'hard jobs'. In such a situation, the state presents itself as a generous entity that seeks the prosperity of its citizens, suggesting to them that they are its first class and are served by others and spared the hardship of demanding work. However, this is the very aspect that Kuwaiti state planners and labourer importers have been manipulating politically and economically. The distinction between Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti occupations is a process emphasised in the educational system, the media, and the official political ideology of the nation, which depicts Kuwaitis as an original minority dominated by a majority of non-nationals who control the labour force. For example, state planners manipulate the situation by presenting the state as a neutral entity that struggles to meet its citizens' demands (for example, to have more immigrants to work for them). At the same time, the state is depicted as being threatened by an external 'subversive' body of foreigners, who compete with locals for state resources. Moreover, the extent to which authorities are sensitive to or concerned about migration and immigrants is even reflected in Kuwaiti nationalist political ideologies, right or left. Even the most independent intellectual critics of the government's policies on migration, stating how it does not reach a socially and culturally secure balance between Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis, avoid mentioning the

historical and economic powers involved in the process.²⁵ Yet again, so far Kuwaiti research in this regard has echoed the declared official agenda on population balance.

Through the strategies of compartmentalisation and their daily enactment have emerged definite relations, expectations, temperaments, and conceptualisations, which have become integral in the consciousness of Kuwaitis and immigrants alike. This consciousness, however, is not totally homogenous in character or in the exchanges that result from it, but keeps creating itself according to many interacting elements. It is difficult to discuss each of these elements in detail, as some are indirectly relevant in this regard. Therefore, I will only outline them and provide one illustrative example. The elements are as follows: the socioeconomic background, skills, and expectations of the individual immigrant; the cultural proximity and physical appearance of a specific immigrant population relative to Kuwaitis; any specific experience or event related to an immigrant community in Kuwait; immigrants' attachment to one segment of Kuwaiti society or another; local political and economic issues; regional politics and state reactions; the time of the contact and length of the immigrant community's settlement; and the size of the immigrant community.

For example, in my conversations with Kuwaitis about how they viewed groups differently, Egyptian and Palestinian immigrants were mainly cited for comparison with Hadramis or other immigrant communities. Since 1991, Egyptians have been widely employed in courier services in the Kuwaiti government and private businesses, occupying roles that Hadar Hadramis, and perhaps other Yemenis, have been carrying out for years. When I asked Kuwaiti employees about their views on how Hadramis might be distinguished from Egyptian couriers, they depicted the latter as liars, money oriented, and not easily satisfied. Kuwaitis feel that Egyptians take other jobs in addition to their original work, hence 'violating' the law in order to make more money. On the other hand, Hadramis are seen as loyal, patient, polite, humble, and peaceful. Kuwaitis depict Palestinians as subversive, tricky, economising, and mean, while they describe Hadramis as poor, kind, and easily satisfied. The Kuwaiti perception of Palestinians is influenced by the fact that during the era of Kuwaiti modernisation, the sensitive technocratic, financial, and even some state consultancy positions were occupied by prominent Palestinian families (Longva 1997).

²⁵ See for example *Malamih min tarikh al-kuwayt al-ijtima'i* (1988), a book produced by the Kuwaiti Society of Social Scientists on the social history of Kuwait. The same society also produced another book, *Waqi' al-amn al-ijtima'i fi al-mujtama' al-Kuwayti* (1996), on social security in Kuwaiti society.

Additionally, there are more Palestinians with Kuwaiti citizenship than there are Yemenis or other Arabs (Longva 1999: 20). As mentioned previously, there are various elements that shape Kuwaitis' stereotypical perceptions of these groups. Hadramis, besides their longstanding and particular interaction with the Kuwaiti domestic sphere (i.e. Kuwaiti households), usually present themselves to Kuwaitis as sharing the body values of Kuwaiti society, wearing the Kuwaiti *dishdasha*,²⁶ eating similar food, and, to a certain degree, having in common with Kuwaitis some political history in the Arabian peninsula. Hadramis, unlike Egyptians and Palestinians (and, later, East Asians), are seen as having always been distanced from the greedy business of workers' importing agencies, in which bribery and oppression are common practices.

A sudden change in the Kuwaiti house

The oil economy resulted in the vast growth of urbanisation, which did not rest on substantial growth in other sectors of production. Urbanisation has been accompanied by obligatory education and free health services, which to a great extent have improved the life affairs of the Kuwaitis. In addition, urbanisation has exerted a profound effect on the growth of the area of services. Services such as the maintenance of the police, clerking, expansive domestic services, and so on characterise the cultural economy of Kuwait to this day. The appearance of new categories of services in this context is problematic yet very significant in the attempt to explain the nature and outcomes of rapid and unprecedented socioeconomic and cultural changes among Kuwaitis and how Hadramis have related to them. Of interest here are the changes in the Kuwaiti domestic services realm, the earliest social context into which Hadramis were pulled as working immigrants. Hadramis, of course, had been in contact with Kuwaitis through the sea trade in Hadramawt or even East Africa, where contracts had been mostly short-term, particularly prior to the 1950s. However, as discussed below, Hadrami planned movement for employment and the resulting social and economic associations are to be viewed as a manifold event that entails replacement and dependency.

²⁶ The Kuwaiti popular dress, which became a symbol of national belongingness. Kuwaiti dress—along with type of work, place of residence, and time of obtaining citizenship—has been decisive in the distinction between Kuwaitis and foreigners.

Since the late 1950s, education and employment have been dramatically imposed as part of the new social reality within the Kuwaiti household. At that time, Kuwait was the only country in the Arab Gulf to have made primary and intermediary education mandatory for boys and girls. Education influenced the household's structural relations; children and females, who used to perform important domestic tasks, began to be drawn out of the house into schools during the time of the day when most domestic activities were organised. However, education did not immediately lead to female work outside the house. Moreover, these developments did not strongly influence the figure of the male parent, who is still seen as the financial provider for the family, despite the fact that a few women in those days worked alongside their husbands. We also learn from the Hadrami experience in this domain that in many houses, when men became totally dependent on the state for their families' livelihood, headwomen too became more dependent on their husbands for their material needs. With children at school, household tasks began to decrease, at least in their peak time; thus, many women began to have more free time for leisure and shopping. These activities meant that women were in need of money, which mainly came from their husbands' salaries. When women went out, toddlers and other vulnerable members of the family were taken out or given to a *siby* (male servant) to watch.²⁷

Through this seeking of education, the Kuwaiti household experienced a shortage in domestic labour; however, the introduction of new 'members' of the family (servants) not only reshaped the division of labour within the house, but also became a structural and consumptive value in itself. Official Kuwaiti TV often broadcasts a famous musical about the 1950s in which a woman says to her fiancé, "I want a car, complemented by a *siby* ... and I want you to let me know how much money you make." Interestingly, this musical is seen by Kuwaitis as representing an era of easiness, openness, and growth, and they express a longing for that time. To many Kuwaitis, the house with a car and a servant came to be equated with family well-being and to represent a measure of satisfaction, achievement, and responsibility for the individual household. Hadramis came as immigrants to fill that gap in

²⁷ This is still the case in Kuwaiti houses, though the *siby* in most instances has been replaced with an Asian female servant. However, leaving children with servants is now publicly discussed as 'destructive' of society's values and disintegrative of the Kuwaiti family structure.

domestic services.²⁸ This is the socioeconomic path which shaped the Hadar Hadrami experience and reproduced the expressions of dependency.

Hadramis arrived during dramatic shifts in the conditions of domestic work among Kuwaitis. Here, Hadramis were replacing not only family members, but also a whole stratum of a local group known for its domestic services or its economic and moral reliance on powerful Kuwaitis, particularly affluent *Hadar* families. Unfortunately, the role of the domestic segment in Kuwaiti society or its attachment to powerful Kuwaitis is not well researched. In fact, it is a dangerous area for many Kuwaitis, just as investigations are unpopular that deal with merchants' practices of their power in public or domestic life. Nonetheless, it is not totally impossible to achieve some critical reconstruction of the role of those groups based on the fact that traces for their connection with prominent Kuwaitis are to be seen even today in a continuing pattern of societal relations. Hadar Hadramis came at a time during which many subordinate Kuwaiti groups (ex-slaves, the poor, and other marginal and dominated groups) had begun to withdraw from domestic work, particularly cooking, nursing and child rearing, wedding-singing, escorting, and other menial vocations related to the activities of the affluent houses.

It is important to note here that these groups had never existed without being part of the activities of a main house, which tended to have a more or less clear patriarchal organisation, a point discussed below. The domestic role of these disenfranchised groups began to weaken when they became Kuwaiti citizens. With citizenship, they became relatively independent; many enrolled in educational institutions or gained employment in bureaucratic sectors, thereby decreasing the number of individuals available to take on house-related activities. Hadramis were the most economically similar available group that was systematically directed to replace those disenfranchised Kuwaiti groups in such jobs. Most, if not all, Hadar Hadramis are similar in physical appearance to those marginal locals. Indeed, Hadramis frequently joke about the saying that 'many Kuwaitis think that we are *'Abid*

²⁸ Hadar Hadramis were also replacing 'Umanis, who were known to have carried out domestic activities in Kuwaiti houses. I was told by Hadramis who worked with 'Umanis, and a Kuwaiti who recruited two 'Umanis in the 1960s, that 'Umanis' mass return home coincided with major development and urbanisation projects in 'Uman. At that time, 'Umani immigrants in Kuwait were called for by the Sultan of 'Uman, who threatened those who did not return by stating that they would not be considered nationals and would hence lose their rights to citizenship, housing, and state employment.

(descendants of African slaves), but we are not, we are just brownish because of the heat of Hadramawt.’

Hadramis’ integration within the house allowed for a revitalisation of an urban Kuwaiti system of ‘social adoption’. Because the term, the concept, and the practice of adoption are highly controversial, I use the word ‘adoption’ here for analytical purposes only, although I, and some Hadramis as well, do not accept such a categorisation. For reasons I discuss, Hadar Hadramis were not literally adopted, nor did Kuwaitis want them to be part of the social life as adoptees more than immigrants who would be always ‘available servants’ or were ‘look alike’ of ‘freed ex-slaves’. To be sure, most Hadar Hadrami servants who reached adolescence were smoothly pushed out of the house and maintained jobs around their *mu‘azzib*’s residence. In other words, Hadramis in Kuwait remained immigrant wage-workers. On the other hand, slaves and adoptees in the Kuwaiti practice maintain attachments to their adoptive well-to-do families forever. This is why many African ex-slaves have obtained Kuwaiti citizenship, as many carry the names of their adoptive families or nicknames given to them by their patrons.

Anthropologists Weismantel (1995), Schrauwers (1999), and Creed (2000) noticed that in contexts of poverty and movement of people, adoption discourse is “easy and usually reflects the movement of children from poorer households to wealthier ones in need of cheap labor” (Creed 2000: 346). Adoption in these contexts, however, means vulnerability to exploitation and reinforces hierarchical values and inequality. The Kuwaiti ‘adoption’ system is embedded in the symbolic practice of dominance through a reassertion of social powers not only between Kuwaitis and Hadramis (who were available to fulfil a disappearing cultural and economic function) but also among Kuwaitis themselves. Ethnographic data show that Hadar Hadramis’ contacts with Kuwait’s migration reality began mainly through the prominent Kuwaiti households that attracted them to work in domestic life as the local domestic labour pool dried up. But Hadramis also came during a phase of what I call *symbolic loss* of status among the well-to-do Kuwaiti families. The existence of domestic workers and slaves was the ‘face’ of the house; it confirmed its patriarchal power as *the* social reality and also justified any resulting economic or gender stratification.²⁹ Many

²⁹ See also Dickson (1951) on African slavery in Kuwait and Longva’s (1997: pp. 69, 75) brief account on the symbolic worth of slaves in well-to-do Kuwaiti *Hadar* houses in the pre-oil era of Kuwait, particularly for the patriarchal outlook of the family.

Hadar Hadramis were embraced accordingly as a face-saving group and were swiftly pulled (by Kuwaitis) and pushed (by their own families) into the sphere of the house. This probably illustrates why some Hadramis and Kuwaitis alike talk about their association not in terms of an employer-employee relationship but in terms of a father-son bond. And it may explain why new forms of social adoption have emerged between Hadramis and Kuwaitis more frequently than between Kuwaitis and any other immigrant group (as discussed in detail in Chapter 5 on the *mu'azzib* and Chapter 6 on life histories). This system of social adoption and its domestic symbolic dimension are not disconnected from the context beyond the house, namely the formation of an all-encompassing tendency of the Kuwaiti state power.

The dramatic rearrangement of political, social, and symbolic power came about when the al-Sabah Amir (the ruler) became an absolute ruling figure. The Amir began to be conveyed in the official propaganda in the media and in educational curricula as the *father*, with Kuwaitis as his *sons* and Kuwait as a whole as one *family*. Powerful Kuwaitis like merchant families had been the only group in Kuwait's history that had been capable of sharing and, on specific issues, challenging the power of the *Shaykhs*. But with the symbolic restructuring of the whole nation's concept of moral and political authority, these Kuwaitis began to imitate, redefine, or resist the new definition of power and the insertion of the Amir's figure as an icon for the whole Kuwaiti family. This was done by reasserting the father figure who took care of his servants and thus looked more capable and independent. During a visit to a Hadrami friend and informant who works for and lives with a rich Kuwaiti *Hadar*, I asked about the constant appearance of three or more Asians standing before the house where he worked and whether they did any tangible labour. His reply was shocking: "They work for our father's house but they don't do anything, just being around. There are three others inside!" Even Asian servants, whether they work for prominent or minimally established Kuwaiti families, refer to their guarantor or boss at work as *Baba* or Father.

Exactly how Kuwaitis, as sponsors, use such a model of the house is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. However, for now it is useful to point out the astonishing ease of the legal application procedures for ordinary Kuwaiti citizens seeking to

import someone as a servant.³⁰ It was through this ease that the inclusion and exclusion and thus control over immigrant populations have been possible and to a large extent successful. Unlike the normal practice in other countries, where expatriates deal with and come through official state channels, in Kuwait any foreign worker must be called for by either a Kuwaiti citizen or an institution. The Kuwaiti Alien Residence Law (the law active today) places much power in the hands of the Kuwaiti guarantor for the transfer or the cancellation of an immigrant's permit and his or her subsequent deportation. The state, in a more-or-less calculated way, has distributed legal power into the hands of Kuwaitis, who exercise different modes of that power through manipulation, domination, and coercion. However, as mentioned previously, the ordinary citizen's dependence on the state does not diminish with the possession of such powers. This is due to the fact that citizenship is just one institutionalised way of reasserting the total authority of the state over a subject whose own 'national consciousness' is compromised by the fact that he or she was once a 'comer' whose life might easily be transformed into an expatriate existence. Thus, while the Kuwaitis are afforded certain legal tools and freedoms in importing labourers, the resulting process (i.e. the production of migration) has enabled the Kuwaiti state to establish a multilayered basic system of checking and controlling foreign immigrant populations. But the state continues to use that process of migration as a politically threatening issue during its political manoeuvres to gain support from Kuwaitis. This could be one of the reasons why very few Kuwaitis have been held responsible for the illegal trade of work permits. Evidently, the 'distribution of

³⁰ A Kuwaiti citizen over 21 (who is employed or who has a private establishment, or who can show proof of need, which is an easy task) is, by law, entitled to guarantee three, or even more, foreigners. The proof of need is a permission that the Ministry of Social Affairs issues based on an on-site evaluation. The proof of need has been a subject of fraud and manipulation, and it has virtually become another source of income for many Kuwaitis. Many desperate immigrants pay huge amounts of money to their Kuwaiti sponsors to issue or to reissue expired visas. This illegal practice has become known as an independent business sector among Kuwaitis called 'trade of residence permits' (*tijarat iqamah*), through which some Kuwaitis have made enormous amounts of money. It is widely known that Kuwaitis and other established non-Kuwaitis take cash from immigrants in order to issue them working visas (*iqamah*). This is an illegal practice, yet prohibitions against it are frequently violated by *Shaykhs*, businessmen and ordinary Kuwaitis. There are hundreds of cases at courts, for example, against Kuwaitis who have taken money from foreigners but have refused to complete the procedures of the work residency permit, yet no Kuwaiti has been legally pursued to a serious extent in this regard. Mainly Egyptians and other Asian workers are known to pay large amounts of money to Kuwaiti guarantors to be able to work. Many do not work for the same guarantor (i.e. the money taker), although the law says that they have to. I am aware of very few cases in which Hadramis have been involved in bribery to gain *iqamah* in Kuwait. This is because unlike Egyptians and Asians, Hadramis do not come through firms that are devoted to importing cheap labour. Hadramis use social channels and *mu'azzib* connections, which have kept them away from the bribe business.

corruption' is at play here and may also be used to explain one of the techniques through which the state has managed to display an impartial yet competent power among its citizens and expatriates.

A House-to-House Migration

In this section, I illustrate the sociocultural and economic background of the Hadramis who have migrated to Kuwait. I also describe their actual movement as immigrants and the different phases of their migration. I propose here that it was the relationships they initially developed as servants in the Kuwaiti house, and the peculiar Kuwaiti reception and conceptualisation of Hadramis that became characteristic and determinant of the current Hadrami connection with Kuwait.

More than Hadramis in any other place, Hadramis of Kuwait are almost exclusively *Hadar* who came from agrarian and coastal towns of Hadramawt. Hadrami migration to Kuwait may be divided into three phases: late 1940s-1970s, late 1970s-1990s, and 1990s to the present. Each of these phases may be characterised by the travel techniques Hadramis employed to reach their destination, by variations in employment and networking patterns, and by political events in Kuwait and Hadramawt. *Hadar* Hadramis initially specialised in domestic house service from the 1940s to the 1970s; they later worked as shop assistants and government sector employees from late 1970s to the 1990s. From the 1990s onwards, they have functioned as menial office workers in private Kuwaiti companies (see Chapter 3).

Hadramis have primarily migrated from villages and towns like al-Hami, al-Shihr, Ghayl Ba Wazir, al-Qarah, and two other *Hadar* villages in the interior of Hadramawt, 'Inat and Qasam.³¹ The ethnohistorical information gathered shows that the dhow trade of people rather than goods flourished after the late 1940s, reaching a peak in the 1960s, mainly following employment opportunities in Kuwait, as described earlier.³² However, events in other parts of the world, specifically East Africa and Saudi Arabia, also stimulated migration to Kuwait.³³

³¹ This does not mean that Bedouin Hadramis are absent in Kuwait, particularly those who come from the area between Hadramawt and Mahrah (Sharq area including Eastern Raydah and Sarar), but the empirical data show that from the late 1960s onwards, *Hadar* Hadramis have comprised the majority of the Yemeni community in Kuwait. In the general demographic characteristics survey I conducted among Hadramis in Kuwait, more than 85% of the 116 respondents came from *Hadar* towns and villages of the coast.

³² This is the period I address primarily in this chapter. The other two periods will be discussed in the following chapters.

³³ The retreat of Arab migration from East Africa as a result of the East Africanist national movements and policies of the early 1960s is prominent in the literature (al-Mallahi 2000; Boxberger 2002; Le

The transfer of labourers from Hadramawt to Kuwait was carried out by Hadramis from similar *Hadar* backgrounds.³⁴ Men were the primary immigrants during that era. However, men were also accompanied by numbers of children removed from their families to work as servants (pl. *sibyan*, sing. *siby* in the Kuwaiti term).³⁵ The *Hadar* migration pattern is intimately related to the agrarian nature of these people, which must be described briefly here. The literature offers little information regarding the relationship between Hadrami migration and the structure of the *Hadar* villages, let alone concerning family, friendship, and household relations.³⁶ These latter inseparable socioeconomic domains account for the broader context of *Hadar* life, for they played the most important role in the design of each individual experience abroad. *Hadar* household economies revolved around members' recruitment in various or any available occupations, yet such a practice remained typically seasonal and temporary.³⁷

It was not uncommon that children from *Hadar* villages had to work for others, even before their move to Kuwait, through forms of what might be called 'soft slavery'.³⁸ This is evident in the internal type of peripatetic 'migration' of Hadrami children from villages like Qasam and 'Inat to work the lands of others in the Du'an valley, or in Ghayl Ba Wazir for al-Qarah. Others worked in their own villages

Guenec-Coppens 1997). Some of these policies were directed against expatriates, including Arabs, though very few Hadramis who came to Kuwait from East Africa at the time said that they were directly affected by the reactions of the local populace. Informants told me that upon returning from East Africa, they spent a short time at home before joining hundreds of Hadramis who were heading to Kuwait by sea.

³⁴ The famous Salim and his younger brother 'Ali Hubayshan of al-Hami were probably the most active dhow captains in the sea trade of people to Kuwait. In 2004 I met with Dr. Muhammad Hubayshan, the son of 'Ali in al-Hami. He told me that prior to their trips to Kuwait, his uncle Salim had primarily been involved in the trade of goods to and from East Africa and the Red Sea. Bin Gornah and Husain 'Idid were also well-known dhow owners and captains who not only used to ship people but also worked to encourage people to migrate.

³⁵ I am not sure that the word *Ṣaby* in classical Arabic can be used in this context, for it does not cover the whole range of the pragmatic application of this root word. I examine this category in more detail in Chapter 4.

³⁶ Though Bujra (1971) was one of the earliest ethnographers to identify some of the dynamics of Hadrami movement (particularly among the *Ṣayyid* class to South-East Asia) and their role in the reinforcement of the existent political structure in the town of Huraydah, the focus of his study was neither migration nor immigrants who returned from Kuwait.

³⁷ Such behaviour is very well researched in peasants' studies, but, as I show in Chapter 3, it has been significant in Hadar Hadramis' shifts towards different resources in different migratory contexts, such as the quick transition in their migration from East Africa to Saudi Arabia and then to Kuwait.

³⁸ I use the term 'soft slavery' to characterise this pattern of child recruitment, which was part of fulfilling family obligations resulting from debt or part of the ultimate usage of members to meet basic material needs. Here there is always a potential for postponement, negotiation, and rejection of the recruitment of a child into the labour process. The other pattern, where force is used directly and where all family members may be confined and reserved as an economic unit in an unequal production process, was not evident among the *Hadar* immigrants in this research.

alongside their fathers either to repay debts or merely to be fed. Before migrating to Kuwait, some individuals were sent by their families to East Africa for a period of time to reduce their household expenses by serving in Hadrami shops almost for free.³⁹

Traditionally, Hadramawt's fertile lands were owned by powerful families, mainly those of the *Sayyid* class, or those affiliated with the *Qu'ayti* sultanate at the time. Hadar Hadramis in Kuwait are mostly landless or small landholders. Very few *Hadar* people have owned productive lands in Hadramawt. Others have owned small plots as part of communes (*masha'*) still known in Hadramawt, which were usually the least productive ones. Many worked and were paid on a daily or seasonal basis. Before the establishment of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) in 1967-1990, most Hadrami cultivable lands were owned or controlled by the sultan and his tribal kin from *Yaf'i* tribes, by *Sayyids* or *Mashayikh* (affluent religious groups), or by settled nomadic groups. After the 1967 revolution, agrarian reform programs designed by the Yemeni Marxists granted landless villagers farming plots on the condition that all production be sold at the socialist co-operatives at a predetermined state price.

Before socialist rule, sharecropping practice was ubiquitous in Hadrami village agrarian relations, but it was also paralleled with another practice that became widespread in times of recession and was the long-term effect of frequent famine (which Hadramawt has experienced).⁴⁰ This was the food-for-service practice,⁴¹ which was not limited to farming but also applied to guarding plots (*Sharaha* system), house building, shop keeping, poetry composition and singing at social occasions, as

³⁹ In life histories and interviews, Ahmad Bin 'Umar, Sa'id Ba Shahwan, Muhammad Ba Faraj, 'Umar 'Ashur, Mubarak Ba Hindi, Hasan Bin 'Ubayd, and other Hadar Hadramis expressed that were not aware of how much they had earned during their work for others or under what agreement they had been sent. Much information concerned their relationship with their fathers or the *'aqil* (discussed below), who supervised their work or their migration to work for someone. This will be made clearer in the following discussion of the figure of the *'uggal* (senior or knowledgeable people) in the family and the village.

⁴⁰ Hadramawt experienced several periods of famine: one in the late nineteenth century and another in 1943, when many families moved from interior Hadramawt to the coastal areas, expanding the coastal population. The families moving came mainly from villages in the interior. Hadramawt has a parsimonious environment with few natural resources and very little farming area. In cultural lore, Hadramawt is sometimes referred to by Hadramis as 'starvation Hadramawt', and there are many poets who describe it as 'unfortunate', who love it but always have to leave it, for they can only be faithful to it at some distance by being away from it.

⁴¹ Food is now replaced with cash, and a landowner may recruit farmers for specific jobs. But the landowner may also lend the farmers money to buy seeds to be grown on his land; the produce is then sold by the owner, who pays the farmers according to his calculation of profit or loss.

well as many other activities. In shop service, for example, a child or an adult worked for a shop owner by carrying and selling; by the end of the month, the servant (*khadim*)⁴² received flour, oil, rice, dates, clothes, and kerosene for his family to consume. Debt payment was possible through service, but not all services delivered were due to a debt relationship. However, when they occurred, debts were very significant in *Hadar* life because they maintained the flow of economic activity in the village. Debts also shaped Hadrami social relations outside the village itself. Debts were collected by the creditor through 'sending out' one or more members of the debtor's family or kin; that is, through migration. The immigrant continued to remit as long as his family was in debt.

In comparison, the migration of Hadar Hadramis to Kuwait started as a house-to-house relationship in which a web of familial structures and friendship patterns was important. The house-to-house migration, as I argue below, endures as a constituent element that characterises every aspect of Hadramis' movement to Kuwait. Other characteristic features include the supremacy of personal and familial morals, cultural connections with Kuwaitis, and Hadramis' economic expectations and planning in both places.

Within the domain of Hadar Hadrami family and friendship, seniority predominates as the ideology of social order which shapes the extent of individuals' choice. A significant socio-prestigious status has always been attached to the '*aqil*' figure, whose honorific role has been extended to the context of migration. The '*aqil*'⁴³ is usually any senior person (a father, a big brother, a relative, a friend of one's father, or anyone with some role of control) within his own family and kin; he may also be informally chosen by villagers to oversee and settle minor disputes.⁴⁴ The role of the '*aqil*' is very central in the organisation of relations, so much so that it even defied the authoritative socialist system of the PRDY, which in many cases eradicated local

⁴² *Hadar* use the word *khadim* (lit. Arabic for servant) in that context but fervently reject the comparison of this position with the work of the *subyan* in the Hadrami social classification, who mainly worked in house cleaning and cooking for prominent families. This theme (i.e. how *Hadar* reconcile the origin of their social standing and beliefs with the variation in jobs they assume during migration) is dealt with in Chapter 4.

⁴³ The plural in classical Arabic is '*uqala`a*'. Hadrami pronunciation is '*agil*' and plural '*uggal*'. Since Hadramis do not use the '*uqala`a*', and since there is no equivalent to the word '*uggal*' in classical Arabic (like '*uqqal*'), I use the '*uggal*' in writing here as pronounced by Hadramis.

⁴⁴ The '*aqil*' should not be confused with the *muqaddam*, for the latter is a relatively clear position with more direct authority within the larger urban quarters of Hadramawt. Yet it is not uncommon to hear the word *muqaddam* referring to a senior individual in informal settings. In all, Hadramis use these terms interchangeably, but the most common term I encountered was '*aqil*' (i.e. the respectable, wise senior) amongst Hadramis of the coast and *muqaddam* among *Hadar* of interior Hadramawt.

forms of the *Hara* (neighbourhood) leadership present in larger urban places like al-Mukalla city. In many ways, the *'uggal* system adapted to the new political context. In fact, although they changed the name to *mukhtar*, the socialist officials legitimised the role of the *'aqil* because it is historically and deeply entrenched within the reality of daily life in the villages and towns of Hadramawt. Muhammad Ba Nusayr, of al-Shihr coastal town, who was one of the oldest Hadar Hadrami immigrants in Kuwait, explained:⁴⁵

The *'aqil* is responsible for settling local disputes before they reach the official authorities. Also, during marriages the *'aqil* manages all demands needed during the weddings, like cooks, and he also contacts the *mughanniyin* (singers). Even today we have *'uggal*, who are usually the old people, but not always—we respect them. And a man becomes *'aqil* not because he owns a lot, but because he is liked and respected because he is wise and known for a long time as honest and brave when it comes to 'tough situations' that people face, and he must have been known for that in order to become an *'aqil*. But the *'aqil* doesn't control everyone's behaviour and he cannot order people to do things. Anyone who is old enough may be called *'aqil*; I am the *'aqil* of my family now.

Thus, the concept of *'aqil*, in the Hadrami understanding, is not similar to the 'Big Man' or 'chief' model known in political anthropology literature, where such figures control individuals' actions and have a monopoly over resources. However, equally, the *'aqil* should not be seen as resulting from an egalitarian tendency, particularly when examined in the context of the Hadrami migration process. Many Hadar Hadramis have bitter memories of their youth, and many suspiciously remember the actions of their *'aqil* as being oppressive and manipulative. Some Hadar Hadrami immigrants recounted how they handed their money to an *'aqil*, who, they say, falsely claimed to have sent it to their fathers in Hadramawt. Yet migration added a new dimension to the *'aqil* and, in a way, has reinforced the legitimacy of the social order even today. In this Hadrami migratory experience, the *'aqil* has become someone (with or without seniority) who is entrusted by a father or the relatives of a young immigrant to oversee and orientate him. The *'aqil* could be someone responsible, because of his personality or friendship, to a youngster's father for recruiting and collecting the income of the young immigrant abroad. He is also responsible for ensuring the payment of debts when collecting that income. In many cases, older debts that originated at home have been repaid through transactions

⁴⁵ This quotation was selected from a 7-hour life history session with Muhammad Ba Nusayr (2004).

between two *'uggal* or more in the destination before being transmitted to their final proprietor. However, most importantly, the *'aqil* may also be someone who is already established as an immigrant—a person who knows travel routes and people at the destination, and who is mobile enough to move back and forth with youngsters during returns or visits home.⁴⁶

The *'aqil* appeared in nearly every individual testimony I gathered relating to the period from the late 1940s to the 1960s, performing jobs ranging from purchasing dependents' 'passports'⁴⁷ to actual travel to the termination of stays abroad. The move from Hadramawt to Kuwait in that period was collective in nature and was described by Hadramis as a rash of departures of youngsters leaving their families behind without a clear vision of where exactly they were going.

When dhows shipping Hadrami immigrants to Kuwait arrived, they were directed by Kuwaiti coast guards to stations in one of several locations on the shore called *niq'ah*, which have an important role in this context. *Niq'at* al-Hamad, *niq'at* al-Shamlan, and others that carried prominent Kuwaiti names, were famous places owned or managed by local merchants that were used for stationing dhows and handling goods. But they also contained dwellings for sailors and temporary workers. The *niq'ah* system worked as a series of labour redistribution points for Hadramis and others, as they were directly connected through roads leading to the main markets and commercial activities of Kuwait merchants. Today, the remnants of *niq'at* Al Shamlan, for example, which contain some very old dhows, have been reconstructed by the state and preserved as a symbol of 'old Kuwait' and of pure Kuwaiti success in facing the harshness of the pre-oil era. Through these places developed a system of

⁴⁶ I am not aware of any financial rewards paid as a result of such a service. The *'uggal* whom I talked to, however, who have been involved in observing others in Kuwait, talked about gifts and a better reputation as the rewards. This is something that is common not only in this situation, but also in the case of virtually any service rendered among Hadramis.

⁴⁷ The passports were *Mahri* (adj.) of *Mahrah*, the immediate neighbouring region of east Hadramawt. *Mahrah* is a distinct cultural and linguistic region. Though there are similarities, differences are prevalent between Hadramis and *Mahris*. Besides language, there is the long tradition of Hadrami literacy and Islamic education and mercantilism in East Asia and Africa. The majority of Hadramis who came to Kuwait at the time were issued with so-called *Mahri* passports. The document itself was one page, with a stamp of entitlement of the *Mahri* Sultan. Hadramis used this document intensively for two or more possible reasons. First, unlike the *Qu'ayti* sultanate passport, which involved lengthy procedures and required travel to al-Mukalla to issue the document, the *Mahri* passport was cheap and could be bought and filled onboard the dhows, or could be purchased in Kuwait itself through *Mahris* there. Second, in the 1960s, the Arab nationalist movement in Southern Yemen began to threaten the stability of the sultanate's political power. Therefore, it was possible that Hadramis wanted, as they generally did, to stand neutral in that conflict by carrying a *Mahri* identity that indicated that they were not directly involved in the conflict in Aden or other parts of Yemen.

taxation in which dhows' captains were tolled for their shipments. This was done through an informal agreement between the guards and the holders of the *niq'ahs*.

The length of Hadramis' lodging in those shore stations varied, but most were quickly removed to another significant place called the *'izbah*. There were tens of Hadar Hadrami *'izbahs* in Kuwait at the time. The *'izbah* is a house which functions as a gathering and living place for Hadrami males. Normally, but not always, each *'izbah* received people who came from the same village or region. Newcomers, or returning immigrants or visitors, from Hadramawt were received in the *'izbah*, provided with temporary settlement, and swiftly directed to available houses and jobs. Each *'izbah* had at least one *'aqil*, whose main job was to distribute activities such as cooking, cleaning, and rent among inhabitants. Through the *'aqil*, the *'izbah* had a window into Kuwait in general, as it is clear that some *'uggal* were more involved than others in Kuwaiti life and in socialisation with Kuwaitis. The *'aqil* was assumed to be an individual who was long-established and who knew about work opportunities not only in Kuwaiti houses but also in the government sector. Many *'izbahs'* *'uggal* in Kuwait had themselves been servants and were employed in the private or government sectors through their Kuwaiti 'fathers'.

During the first phase of migration, the largest Hadrami *'izbah* in Kuwait could accommodate 40 to 50 persons living in 8 to 10 rooms. In the *'izbah*, daily duties and rent were divided amongst the long-term residents. However, in several cases mentioned to me, some temporary settlers or even visitors had to pay and work in the *'izbah*. Though now smaller and far fewer in number, *'izbahs* still operate as social spaces for Hadramis in Kuwait. Such establishments include the so-called 'White House' for al-Qarah village immigrants in Kuwait (chapters 3 and 4) and 'al-Shihr house' for people who come from al-Shihr town. The *'izbah* was previously rented either as a separate part or a whole Kuwaiti house, but this is no longer the case in Kuwait for several reasons. First, since the mid-1970s, Hadrami males' domestic roles in Kuwaiti houses have diminished as they have been replaced by Asian female servants, who have been so deprived that they would work for much lower salaries than Hadramis. The same period has witnessed a dramatic increase in Kuwaiti *khadam* agencies specialising in importing cheap Asian labour. Simultaneously, in the 1970s, the socialist party of PDRY began a mandatory conscription and schooling system, followed by tightened regulations on the departure of citizens under the age of 18 for purposes other than education or accompanying a working father. In the

meantime, established Hadramis were allowed by the Kuwaiti government to bring their families and dependents for schooling.⁴⁸ The presence of wives and their subsequent re-domestication in this migration process has led to men's withdrawal from 'izbah bachelor life. Women who accompanied their husbands to Kuwait did not normally work outside the home; thus, Hadrami women had the opportunity to remit to their own relatives through their husbands. However, to what extent this migration has changed the role of women 'in' the household or the structure of power within the family is something about which I do not have sufficient information. I had no access to the Hadrami females' world, except for interviews with one or two women (see Chapter 6).

With more and more spatial exclusion of immigrant populations in purpose-built flats owned by real estate companies in residential areas like Khaytan, Farwaniyyah, and Hawalli,⁴⁹ the numbers of 'izbahs decreased. The reduced importance of the 'izbah as a Hadrami recruiting place for Kuwaiti domestic work and the relative elevation in Hadramis' economic standing raise the following question: did such changes mark the ways in which Hadramis related to or were viewed by Kuwaitis? Answering this question requires listening to individual experiences in the hope that they reflect social patterns for the whole of Hadrami migratory life in Kuwait. Ahmad Karamah, from 'Inat village in interior Hadramawt, remembered:

I was 8 years old, my mother cried when she knew that I was finally going to be away; she even had bleeding of some sort. My father used to be a tanner and a porter carrying stuff for others. There were 400 of us in 1963, all about my age; everyday we would gather in the village before some of us were taken away in cars to the coast on their way to Kuwait. We were sent in batches—mine was 50 to 60 children of 'Inat alone, all in one car. I didn't know why I had to leave my mother, but I remember that they handed us to the 'aqil Karamah Ahmad Mus'ab to watch over us. I didn't know what or where Kuwait was. We stayed in al-Shihr, where we were issued Mahri passports, then to al-Hami, and from there to Dubai on our way to Kuwait in a fully packed engine-dhow. When we arrived in Kuwait, the Kuwaiti coastguards

⁴⁸ At the time, those who worked for the government sector had more secure salaries than those who worked in houses or companies. When accompanied by a wife, the Hadrami's government salary was raised by 30 KD, with 10 KD added for each child. This system is no longer applicable for occupations that Hadramis traditionally took on in the 1980s like *murasil* (postman), *mandub* (courier), *farrash* (peon), or driver, apart from some professions and personnel in high demand by the government.

⁴⁹ Kuwaitis are a minority in these areas. There are two or three areas built by the state which came to be called 'bachelors' areas' populated by workers from East Asia—mainly Bangladeshis, Filipinos, Pakistanis, and others. Hadramis never lived in bachelors' areas. Currently, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Planning, Ministry of the Interior, and Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour are setting up committees to discuss the establishment of new but spatially more isolated bachelors' areas following concerns that the proximity of immigrant populations to Kuwaiti residential areas will create cultural, economic, and political crises (*al-Qabas* Kuwaiti newspaper, May 2004).

asked us to name a Kuwaiti personal reference; we were told by the 'uggal to say 'Ali al-Wazzan.⁵⁰ We went to a Hadrami 'izbah near the shore. Of all ages, the 'izbah was full. There, Kuwaitis would come and ask one of the 'uggal: Do you hire? Can I find someone who serves? The 'aqil ordered me to go with a Kuwaiti man, not very rich though, to work as a siby in his house. There I cleaned the house, and held babies when they cried, and the like. But I myself would cry a lot, every night. The family made me do much work when my cries became more frequent; I guess they had a feeling that I was about to tell the 'aqil that I wanted to go back to the 'izbah or anywhere else. Then I was moved to work for another Kuwaiti house. I liked this house, for I had the opportunity to see Mickey Mouse stories for the first time, and I had Kuwaiti children of my age to play with. After a dispute of some sort between the 'uggal people, I was attached to a new 'aqil, Salih Bin Nasir, who told me that my father had ordered me to be with him and that I had to change house yet again. So I did; from 1967 to this day I have worked for Husayn Mulla.⁵¹ He treated me like one of his sons; I see him as my father. I lived with him, he took me to the office, where I also cleaned and prepared tea. He encouraged me to go to school, but I didn't continue my studies, for at the age of 18 I found playing football with other Hadramis in Kuwait more appealing than school. We didn't make a fortune like Hadramis in Saudi Arabia—here Kuwaiti merchants are known that they don't allow anyone to compete with them. But we still call Kuwait the 'Land of All Arabs' for its generosity and embracing of us. We always think with ambition about being in Kuwait, but one's problems only accumulate by being an immigrant. Relatives and friends back home think we are rich and blame us for not sending them money all the time. After the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 I fled home, but when Kuwait was liberated my same mu'azzib made me a work visa, as a special servant, to come back and have my job with him. Today, I do all sorts of works for my mu'azzib—I am his house driver, his house shopper, and a courier and clerk for his company.⁵²

Ahmad's experience is not uncommon among Hadar Hadramis, but it shows that house-to-house migration laid the grounds for specific cultural and economic links for the Hadrami presence in Kuwait. These links were to become essential for the emergence of forms under which Hadramis continue to interact with Kuwaitis. Ahmad's life story reveals several important nuances that indicate a significant constituting form of the Hadar Hadramis' migratory experience in Kuwait. I conclude by outlining this form because it will be present throughout the chapters to follow.

⁵⁰ One of the long-established Kuwaiti *Hadar* merchants, who at some point dominated the money transactions that *Mahris* and Hadramis transferred home through his agents in Aden during the 1950s and 1960s. Today, the al-Wazzan family is known in catering and other commercial businesses.

⁵¹ One of the traditional merchants and one of the earliest to have introduced fans, milkshake makers, and other machines to Kuwait.

⁵² This was a selected quotation from a 4-hour audio-recorded life history of Ahmad Karamah, recorded in 2004.

Conclusion

Central here is the Hadar Hadrami form of relatedness through personal *dependency*. The content of this form is the very strong, if not total, Hadrami faith in the endurance of Kuwait as a source of income. As will be discussed later on, dependency may be seen as an exchange between a disposition to serve on the Hadrami side and an aspiration for social control on the Kuwaiti side.

This Hadrami movement represents a point of departure from other migratory experiences in Kuwait (Asian domestic workers, other Arab immigrants, even other Yemenis and Hadramis elsewhere) that remained informed by the conditions of larger economic and political structures and their manifestation in labour market demands and state-to-state relationships. Hadar Hadramis did not, of course, totally evade these conditions, particularly the state's legal regulations, but they were able to adapt them to their own socioeconomic understanding and their own logical constructions. Hadramis were able to function as families and individuals interacting with other families (Kuwaitis), if not as part of these families. In the first phase of their migration, the situation of Hadramis was at times akin to 'soft slavery', resulting from the Kuwaiti hunger for labour and Hadrami village relations. Yet it was these same relations that enabled Hadramis to avoid not only the labour import agencies and their exploitative channels, but also the burdens of satisfying the state's legal and formal orders, as is the case for Hadramis in Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf States. For instance, the return to Kuwait and the overstepping of the restrictive immigration regulations that were issued after 1991⁵³ was exclusively facilitated for Hadramis by Kuwaiti families through their links with state officials. A Kuwaiti family informed me that they imported their old *siby* because they trusted him as a son and might also need him for miscellaneous housekeeping tasks.⁵⁴ Such a relationship with Kuwaiti families enabled the settlement of additional Hadar Hadramis in Kuwait to a greater extent than any other Hadrami group. Such practices are recurrent in the chapters to follow, but they will be reinforced or shifted according to the context and personalities involved. I close this section by outlining how the form is synthesised.

⁵³ Because of the Yemeni government's pro-Iraqi stance in the Gulf crisis, immediately after the war ended, the Kuwaiti Ministry of the Interior (immigration division) issued a list of 'non-desirable' citizenships which included Yemenis. These non-desirables were prevented from working or visiting unless they were highly demanded by the state.

⁵⁴ The Kuwaiti family issued a visa for the Hadrami to work as a 'special servant' under article 20 of the Law of Foreign residents, but in reality he works for one of the family's relatives as a courier in his business. This is considered a violation of the Alien Residence Law, but in all Hadrami cases I have seen, no one has been deported as the result of such an act.

The form of Hadrami attachment to Kuwait may be seen as wrought by three synthesising historical and socio-logical processes that have brought individuals and institutions together. First is a Hadrami socioeconomic reading of the Kuwaiti economic map of societal relations. A feature of this reading was the identification of how Kuwaiti society was organised, where power was socially concentrated, and what social and economic tools were needed to approach it. From the beginning, Hadrami immigrants realised that there was, and still is, a gap in some services which a great majority of Kuwaitis, for moralistic reasons, were hesitant to undertake; thus, Hadramis presented themselves as an alternative. On the whole, Hadar Hadramis connected more with traditional merchants and less affluent *Hadar* families in Kuwait. Hadramis worked for these groups but also migrated through them. In this way, Hadramis were exposed to a power that through time has secluded them from the austerities of migration.

Second is a Hadrami process of *personification* regarding migration as a whole. An employment connection to a Kuwaiti is personalised through a committed visit system and small gifts from Hadramawt. Work itself is personified by Hadramis by 'being around' and ready to serve. Although many Hadramis have long been outside the house, taking on different jobs, they continue to be available to their old Kuwaiti families not as foreign workers but as 'available sons' or 'friends of family'. A Hadrami presents himself as someone helpful and loyal to serve outside the realm of his job and sometimes beyond his capability. Undoubtedly, such a personification process has its costs, which will be demonstrated in daily relationships with the *mu'azzib* (Chapter 5).

Finally, there is the Hadar Hadrami use of a memory of place. In this usage, Kuwait is constructed (realistically or imaginatively) as a story of the success of a place which transformed itself from 'nothingness' into 'prosperity'. Analogy and contrasting of events in both places shape a significant expression of many Hadramis who think that Hadramawt is one day going to represent a similar story of success. Importantly, among many immigrants, this construction of Kuwait serves as a logical justification for the continuation of individuals' separation from their families and migration out of Hadramawt. For instance, migration to Kuwait (at any time before 1990) is remembered by some Hadramis as a happy story which involves intimate networks of families and friendships, security, and an active material lifestyle which resembles that of the Kuwaitis. All of this is usually delivered in contrast to the life of

the village or Hadramawt, which as a whole is perceived to be empty, dependent, corrupted, and non-progressive.

Migration to Kuwait was intrinsically an act of a time during which the labour market and social communities were structured around a continuous process of inclusion and exclusion through differentiation, categorisation, and a systematic manipulation of political and economic power. This peculiar construction prevailed as a form of consciousness not only between Kuwaitis and Hadramis, but also among the Hadramis themselves (Chapter 7). The Hadar Hadrami house-to-house migration enabled Hadar Hadramis, more than any other group, to be inserted into the social patterns of Kuwaiti life. As such, they became part of the subjective experience of many Kuwaiti individuals and a part of social memory in general. But house-to-house migration's patterns and memories also operate as a scheme of relatedness between the Hadramis and Kuwaitis that determines much of the Kuwaiti impressions and classifications of Hadramis in general. It also functions as a schema for Hadramis' expectations and actions abroad. In this regard, for Hadar Hadramis of Kuwait (particularly those who spent most of their lives there), their 'actual' time starts with the time of their migration, and the whole *experience* becomes an act in that time structured by material and contextual relationships with the place.

CHAPTER 3: AL-QARAH VILLAGE AND MIGRATION: THE SEARCH FOR INCOME AND THE RUNNING AWAY FROM DEBT

Introduction

This chapter is guided by a central question: How might the socio-historical conditions of a village or any other Hadrami locality have led to its attachment to one particular place of migration for a prolonged period of time? By and large, it is very difficult to find a satisfactory answer to this question in the study of Hadramis abroad, for analyses of Hadrami migration have always focused on how Hadramis have flourished in their settlements, and only after their establishment as communities. These analyses, however, have produced two effects present in the Hadrami migration literature. The first is a tendency to overlook the significance of variations in the socioeconomic and cultural background of Hadrami immigrants and their role in shaping a migratory experience. The second product is a powerful and generalising perception of Hadramis as naturally expert movers. Certainly, migration to Kuwait, as we saw in Chapter 2, was not a fresh experience for Hadar Hadramis. Prior to Kuwait, some Hadar Hadramis had already migrated to East Africa and Saudi Arabia, though for shorter periods of time. Like migration to Kuwait, Hadar Hadrami migrations to East Africa and Saudi Arabia were stirred by basic economic needs. Thus, many departed in search of alternative sources of income or to avoid troubles originating from a debt relation in their localities. As it had been for some families who sent their children out to work for others in East Africa and Saudi Arabia, movement to Kuwait was a costly and precarious activity. Nonetheless, to most other Hadar Hadramis, migration to Kuwait not only was a new experience and longer in its duration, but also had different and abiding effects on the life of the individual and the community as a whole. As I show in this and the next chapter, an important attribute of Hadar Hadrami migration to Kuwait is the circular interplay between three processes: search for income, accumulation of debt, and the continuation of long-term bonds with Kuwaitis. These processes set the context for Hadar Hadrami immigrants' interactions during and after migration.

The preceding chapter discussed the socio-political and economic character of Kuwaiti society and its role in shaping the Hadar Hadrami migration in general. In this chapter, I explore the development of one Hadar Hadrami out-migration using the

experience of al-Qarah village as a case study. To a large degree, al-Qarah shares its migratory experience with its neighbouring Hadrami villages, which I also researched through interaction with their immigrants in Kuwait.⁵⁵ Common features between al-Qarah and other Hadar Hadrami immigrant villages can be seen, for instance, in the timing of migration, in the immigrants' age and pattern of settlement abroad, in the various types of employment and economic behaviour abroad, and so on. These commonalities are related to what I argue to be significant sociohistorical conditions that characterised Hadrami village life. Hence, historical circumstances in al-Qarah village resulted in its people's movement as we know it today when leaving the village became a regular search-of-income practice amongst the least privileged segments in Hadrami society. To show how this is the case, I examine two levels in the experience of al-Qarah migration to Kuwait. The first level engages the historical situation in al-Qarah which led to its systematic out-migration. At this level, one can observe general patterns and variations in al-Qarah and its immigrants' economic and travel practices related to three main destinations (East Africa, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait). The second level relates to contemporary migration-related activities that I observed in al-Qarah village, which reveal important aspects of the relationship between the village and its immigrants abroad. This is so because some of the essential activities that take place in al-Qarah emerged as a reaction to its relationship with Kuwait.⁵⁶

Al-Qarah History and migration

Although not directly located on the sea, al-Qarah is considered a coastal village and is located near the town of Ghayl Ba Wazir. Besides minor fishery activities, al-Qarah's economy has traditionally depended on two major resources—small-scale spring-irrigated agriculture and out-migration—the relation between which is essential for understanding the role of migration in al-Qarah's socioeconomic and political life. Noticeably, and unlike nearby *Hadar* villages and towns, al-Qarah never had any established *Sayyid* group who beside their moral authorities would have been involved in land acquisition.⁵⁷ The most fertile plots in al-Qarah were owned by

⁵⁵ These other *Hadar* immigrants are discussed in all other chapters.

⁵⁶ Activities that Hadar Hadrami immigrants are involved in and that directly influence life in the village are discussed in the next chapter. Thus, this rather short chapter should be read as an introduction to the next one.

⁵⁷ There were only two or three prominent *Mashayikh* families, whose members were responsible for Islamic teaching in the 'ulmah and worked as judges in the *Qu'ayti* sultanate.

certain families who typically, but not always, belonged to a tribal segment of the population (*Yaf'i*).⁵⁸ The *Yaf'is* are seen by *Hadar* as outsiders because as military, or '*Asakir*, as they are still so called by *Hadar Hadramis*; they came from a different region. Several centuries ago, thousands of *Yaf'is* came to support their kin who controlled the *Hadramawt* region during the formation of the *Qu'ayti* and *Kathiri* sultanates (ca. 1700-1967). Traditionally, *Hadar Hadramis* worked as wage farmers for the *Yaf'is*, who were their patrons and lenders of money simultaneously. The whole area that comprised al-Qarah and Ghayl Ba Wazir⁵⁹ was claimed by *Yaf'i* Sultan 'Awad 'Umar al-Qu'ayti in 1876. Thenceforth, everything considered wealth in the area was considered part of the wealth of the sultanate. *Yaf'is* in al-Qarah and Ghayl Ba Wazir were given land by the sultanate, but there were also other merchant *Hadar Hadrami* families who leased land from the sultanate. Later on, some of these *Hadrami* leaseholders became *ad hoc* owners.⁶⁰ Boxberger (2002), who examined the political and economic history of *Hadramawt*, made important observations on the relations between the landowners or leaseholders and the rest of the *Hadar Hadrami* population in areas of al-Qarah and Ghayl Ba Wazir. "Farmer debt was common and landowners liked to keep good farmers in debt ... farmers often died in debt to the owners, who could then take everything from the [farmer's] family except their house" (Boxberger 2002: 116). I discussed in Chapter 2 the role of debt and the economic means through which poor *Hadar Hadramis* lived in the village (sharecropping, renting land, working on others' land, and food-for-services activities) before migration. Here, I will only reiterate that debt remains the most critical element to be considered when we examine al-Qarah relations with migration. In the vast majority of the cases I investigated, a debt relation preceded someone's move, and it stood behind many *Hadar Hadramis*' actual decisions to migrate. However, it will also be seen that debt among al-Qarah immigrants in Kuwait accumulated through the migration process itself and prevented most immigrants from securing any substantial form of capital.⁶¹

⁵⁸ There were *Yaf'is* in al-Qarah who were very poor; however, very few of them became involved in house services in Kuwait.

⁵⁹ Ghayl Ba Wazir is the nearest town to al-Qarah and has a population of 40,000. Ghay Ba Wazir is considered the centre of the province.

⁶⁰ From the *Hadrami* merchant families are the Bu Sab'ah and Ba Shurahil, and the *Yaf'is* are al-Yahri and al-Yazidi.

⁶¹ The influence of debt on immigrants abroad is discussed in detail in the next two chapters.

When the sultanate was overturned by the socialists in 1967, the Hadrami and *Yaf'i* landowners did not lose their wealth completely as a result of the communists nationalising the state's resources. Since the collapse of socialist rule in South Yemen, the same landowning families of the sultanate have regained most of the fertile lands in the area of al-Qarah. Therefore, even after migration became the only systematic way of earning a living (making some *Hadar* financially independent from landowners), immigrants returning to al-Qarah for unspecified periods of time have sought farming jobs and borrowed money from landowners.⁶² What is significant to note here is that migration does not seem to have dissolved the classic social and economic divisions in al-Qarah, as they are still very much reflected in social relations, particularly marriage preferences.

The bulk of the *Hadar* population of al-Qarah formed during several famines in Hadramawt (particularly the famine of 1943), during which many families moved from interior Hadramawt to its coastal areas. These starving families were called by the few settling families *laqtin al-ta'am* (those who feed on scraps of food), denoting not only their miserable condition but also their subordinate social status. Since then, however, *laqtin al-ta'am* (today's *Hadar*) have become the majority of al-Qarah's people and labourers and have consistently formed the majority of out-immigrants. It was at that particular point in the history of al-Qarah that *Hadar* households began to send out individuals whose work abroad became the main source of income for their families.⁶³ The survey of al-Qarah shows that out-migration began in the late 1930s with a few immigrants heading to East Africa to work as shop assistants for long-established Hadrami merchants there. Among the *Hadar* Hadramis of the time, East Africa (and later Saudi Arabia) seemed to be the nearest and cheapest destination for poor farmers and youngsters. In the 1930s-1940s, 10 people from al-Qarah migrated to East Africa and only 4 migrated to Saudi Arabia, all working as shop assistants. Making the trip to places like Mombassa was relatively easy for those unable to finance a journey to more distant destinations, as dhows were shipping almost daily from the nearby port cities of al-Mukalla and Aden. Buying the journey vouchers and the travel documents, however, was an act that produced or accumulated debt for the immigrant. To be able to finance the journey, *Hadar* Hadrami immigrants had to

⁶² See Chapter 5 for more discussion of the continuation of this debt system.

⁶³ On this particular issue, Hadrami historian 'Abd al-Rahman al-Mallahi (2000) emphasised the relationship between class oppression and *Hadar* out-migration to East Africa at the beginning of the twentieth century.

borrow money or had to work onboard dhows as cooks or carriers during the entire journey. In East Africa, al-Qarah immigrants lived and settled wherever the Hadrami shop owner did. The owner of the shop took care of all of the material needs of his assistant, including medication, food, and clothing. All al-Qarah individuals who went to East Africa at the time were either children or were much younger than the shop owner; hence, they had to be dependent on him or on an *'aqil* there who supervised their affairs.

Similarly, in the 1940s, the land route to Saudi Arabia was open and states' territories were not yet clearly marked. Therefore, crossing from Hadramawt to places like Mecca, where al-Qarah people normally went, was not of much concern. I was told that in the early 1950s, Saudi Arabia became a safer, cheaper, and more lucrative destination for migrants seeking work relative to East Africa, which might explain the shift from Africa to Saudi Arabia. One can observe that in these two al-Qarah migratory destinations of the 1930s-1940s, the concentration of Hadar Hadramis in specific occupations was in accordance with a known Hadrami migratory economic pattern in these two places.

By the early 1950s, no one went to East Africa as a second destination,⁶⁴ instead favouring Saudi Arabia (Table 1). Although the al-Qarah migration to Saudi Arabia was brief, the increase in the number of immigrants was indicative of a change in economic preferences and intensive networking. At that time, Hadrami commercial activities had already established strong niches in major urban centres of Saudi Arabia, namely Jeddah and Mecca (see Ewald and Clarence-Smith 1997: 281-296). Here again, Hadar Hadramis were mainly recruited by other Hadramis as shop assistants. A Hadrami merchant's need for a home wage labourer was based on reasons like social acquaintance, language, and so on. However, I was informed that an important reason that a Hadrami was preferred as a shop assistant over any other

⁶⁴ The term *second destination* may be understood in the following context: During a certain period of the al-Qarah movement (say the 1950s-1960s), immigrants who had chosen a particular place for their first migration chose another as the destination for their second migration. Hence in table 3.1, for example, the figures 33 and 38 indicate immigrants who went to East Africa and Saudi Arabia, respectively, for the first time and who had never migrated before. The figure 65 under the category 'Destination of 2nd migration' in the same table indicates all those who had been immigrants once before moving to Kuwait. There are very few individuals from al-Qarah who have experienced migrations to three different places, but I also interviewed several Hadar Hadramis who had worked first in Kuwait and then in Saudi Arabia, finally re-immigrating to Kuwait as a third destination of migration. Many Hadar Hadrami immigrants who are now in Kuwait consider themselves third-time immigrants because they went first to Saudi Arabia, then worked in Kuwait until the 1990 events, and then returned to Kuwait in the following years.

immigrant was the fact that, when indebted, a Hadrami could easily be followed in Saudi Arabia or Hadramawt. Rubayyi' Bin Salim, who migrated to Mecca and worked in a Hadrami grocery, said, "We were preferred because we never robbed and hid in mountains; we were *Hadar*, they knew we were peaceful and fearful. In the summer, we always travelled to our houses and villages in Hadramawt ... if you wanted us in those days, you could have easily caught us." This could explain the continuities in the economic activities that Hadar Hadrami immigrants carried out in East Africa and then in Saudi Arabia. Perhaps because of the increase in the number of immigrants, al-Qarah immigrants congregated in rented houses. It seems, however, that the age of al-Qarah immigrants was much higher in Saudi Arabia than in East Africa. I could not find a specific explanation for this. Yet one of the immigrants who went to Saudi Arabia before going to Kuwait told me that in the 1950s many families hesitated to send their children to work in Mecca and Jeddah because there were rumours about forced Saudi conscription and stories about kidnapping children for enslavement purposes.

Yet the Saudi phase in al-Qarah migration coincided with a dramatic shift in al-Qarah's migratory destinations. By the late 1950s, almost 80% of all individuals who went to East Africa and Saudi Arabia had already migrated to Kuwait. These immigrants had returned for a short period to al-Qarah before departing with others, many of whom were first-time immigrants, to Kuwait (Table 3.1). Al-Qarah migration to Kuwait reached a peak during the years 1955-1967. As seen in Chapter 2, the same period witnessed speedy socioeconomic changes in Kuwait that required massive numbers of labourers. This was the period during which hundreds of Hadar Hadrami children were sent by their families to work in Kuwaiti houses. However, not all al-Qarah immigrants were children; some who were already married with children also performed domestic house services in Kuwait. At some point in the mid-1960s, more than one-third of al-Qarah's young male population was working and living in Kuwait. In Kuwait, some of those adults who worked as shop assistants in Saudi Arabia or East Africa moved directly into Kuwaiti merchants' shops, while the majority were swiftly drawn into the domestic labour realm. In the 1950s and 1960s, the *sibyan* (servants) were part of the Kuwaiti house budget and prestige, as shown in Chapters 2 and 4. Over time, particularly from the early 1970s onwards, many al-Qarah immigrants who performed housework moved through the house's connections to work as shop assistants or in other jobs in the government. An old ex-immigrant

remembered, “In those days al-Qarah looked as if it was part of Kuwait, not Hadramawt. We ate like you, we went to work like you, and we developed like you.”

Table 3.1: Departures to different destinations in the 1950s-1960s

Place	Destination of 1st migration <i>Number of immigrants</i>	Destination of 2nd migration <i>Number of immigrants</i>
East Africa	33 (12%)	-
Saudi Arabia	38 (14%)	10 (13%)
Kuwait	191 (72 %)	65 (83%)
Other Gulf countries	4 (2%)	3 (4%)
	N= 266	N= 78

By the mid-1970s, it was said that nearly half of al-Qarah’s male population (est. 1000 to 1300) had either worked or settled in Kuwait.⁶⁵ As shown in Table 3.2, first-time migration from al-Qarah to Kuwait did not stop in the 1970s, although it was limited by the specific reasons I discussed in Chapter 2. Hence, al-Qarah immigrants continued to move in order to work as *sibyan* in houses. However, in the 1970s, all foreigners in Kuwait were required to have a Kuwaiti legal sponsor, and al-Qarah immigrants who came in the 1950s as children were by then reaching adulthood and marriage age. Consequently, the vast majority of al-Qarah immigrants were legally sponsored by the same Kuwaiti families they had worked for as servants. As they aged, al-Qarah people began to move to other jobs outside the domestic sphere. These other jobs were either related to or recommended by the immigrants’ Kuwaiti families. A typical example of such a move was when a *siby* joined his *mu’azzib* in the government and worked as *mandub*. Al-Qarah and other Hadar Hadramis’ legal sponsorship was easily renewed, and with it continued the Hadrami house connection in Kuwait (Chapter 5). It was during this period that many Hadar Hadramis brought their own families to settle in Kuwait and thus began to live separately from their Kuwaiti sponsors.

⁶⁵ In the 1970s, for instance, al-Qarah’s first sports club was suspended because most of the village’s youth population had migrated to Kuwait (*al-Hawmah*, 2004, Issue 17, pp. 14). An athlete from the nearby town of al-Shihr told me that a similar event had taken place in his town when it was difficult to find a team in Hadrami coastal villages that played regularly because members used to leave every now and then to work abroad or to join their families.

Table 3.2: Departures to different destinations in the 1970s-1980s

Place	Destination of 1st migration <i>Number of immigrants</i>	Destination of 2nd migration <i>Number of immigrants</i>
East Africa	-	-
Saudi Arabia	10 (12%)	3 (27%)
Kuwait	71 (82%)	5 (45%)
Other Gulf countries	5 (6%)	3 (27%)
	N= 86	N= 11

Al-Qarah immigrants refer to the 1980s as the years of *al-nawm* (sleeping), denoting the comfort of their affairs in Kuwait. This is due to the fact that by 1989, Hadramis, and Yemenis in general, had become the only immigrant population in Kuwait that was exempt from legal sponsorship requirements. This privilege, however, did not last for more than a few months because of the war. Just before the 1991 Gulf War, there were probably 60 to 70 al-Qarah families living in Kuwait, comprising a population of around 400. All of these families returned to al-Qarah during the war. In 1990, 248 al-Qarah immigrants returned home, less than one third of whom have since re-migrated to Kuwait (Table 3.3). However, Table 3.3 shows a steady increase in the number of immigrants, as the number of returnees exceeds first-time immigrants. All al-Qarah immigrants in Kuwait today have either returned to their old jobs or have assumed new jobs similar to those they carried out prior to 1990. In most, if not all, cases, these Hadramis have obtained work visas through an old *mu'azzib* or someone affiliated with him. Today, only a handful of al-Qarah immigrants work as actual house servants, but there are restaurant cooks, for example, who work for a Kuwaiti in his house at some weekly or monthly pre-specified day. At the present time, and like the majority of Hadar Hadramis in Kuwait, al-Qarah immigrants specialise in couriering and similar jobs for reasons I discuss in Chapter 5.

Table 3.3: Departures to different destinations in the 1990s to date

Place	Destination of 1st migration <i>Number of immigrants</i>	Destination of 2nd migration <i>Number of immigrants</i>
East Africa	-	-
Saudi Arabia	4 (13%)	3 (6%)
Kuwait	24 (80%)	39 (83%)
Other Gulf countries	2 (6%)	5 (11%)
	N= 30	N= 47

Some of my informants had migrated to the three places (East Africa, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait) and seemed to share a common scenario or discourse on the reasons for their migration. Their accounts, used for analysis here, were both factual and socially constructed. First, the small world of the village was ‘stretched out’ by its own push factors, thus leading to out-migration. In the 1940s and 1950s, Hadramis say that those who had accumulated wealth (*tubanah*; sing. *tabin*, i.e. landowner) began, on an unprecedented scale, to drag people into unfair and oppressive agrarian and political relations. It was then that *Hadar* people began to leave the village as immigrants. Thus, many families sent their own children out to repay a debt or to reduce household expenditures. Informants recounted their experience in East Africa and Saudi Arabia as merely running away from the *tabin* or as ‘filling one’s own stomach’. In an interview, Muhammad Maqrum remembered his migration to East Africa: “I was 13 years old when I travelled there. I spent 4 years in a grocery shop owned by a Hadrami. My father sent me there just to be fed. I earned nothing and I didn’t know where my money went. I was paid annually for fear that I would run away at any time.” By moving out, individuals and families either avoided risks of oppression and need, or, as in the majority of cases, distributed these risks among their members.⁶⁶ Hence the scenario proceeded from the late 1960s to the 1980s, when the *tubanah* system was officially abolished by the socialist revolutionaries and

⁶⁶ Nevertheless, Hadramis like Muhammad do not think of their departure and work as inhumane. They see their circumstances as the logical outcome of the socioeconomic situation of their household and village, and even of Hadramawt as a whole. This is so because poverty is a reality in Hadramawt, and the family order is seen as natural and concentrated on the father and other senior figures. The need to move out with a father or to follow his orders to do so is seen by Hadramis as just part of that reality.

harsh socialist rule was blamed for people's desire to leave. Since the 1990s, the Northern Yemeni dominance of Hadramawt and 'harassment' of its people is said to have pushed Hadramis out of their country. The discourse of departure has always been operative among Hadar Hadramis and has played a central role in people's reasoning of their move, as well as their understanding of personal dependency on the Kuwaiti sponsor's connection.

Second, in East Africa and Saudi Arabia, al-Qarah immigrants worked for other Hadramis who were, in the cases investigated, related to the immigrant through familial or friendship and debt links. In these two destinations, Hadrami immigrants were entirely isolated from the native's social life. This contrasted with the fact that at the outset of their migration to Kuwait, Hadramis were engrossed by the social and domestic life of Kuwaitis. Many of these Kuwaitis would later become either 'employers' or 'social sponsors' of the Hadramis.⁶⁷ Thinking back on the occupations they filled in East Africa and Saudi Arabia, Hadar Hadramis on many occasions referred to their presence in the Kuwaiti house as the final chapter, or sometimes the end, of a story of suffering. Thus, for example, my informants who had experienced two or three migrations viewed themselves as moving from the unfair and harsh work conditions of East Africa and Saudi Arabia to the 'intimate' family life and 'comfortable' work of Kuwait. The difference in Hadar Hadrami occupations in those migratory destinations is significant to understanding Hadar Hadramis' perspective on that experience and the interpretative tools they use to comprehend it. Hadar Hadramis relate their dependency on a Kuwaiti *mu'azzib*, for instance, to their own social identity, that is, as *Hadar* (as discussed in the next chapter). Yet it is important to note that the discourse that Kuwait represents a safe haven or a concluding stage of one's problems continues to be prevalent even among inexperienced and first-time al-Qarah immigrants. At the core of such a discourse, as will be seen in the individual cases in the next two chapters, dependency's values and relationships are reproduced as though they were those of a Hadrami *siby* (house servant) and his Kuwaiti sponsoring 'father'.

⁶⁷ See Chapter 5 for a discussion of the categories of employer, legal sponsor, and social sponsor (i.e. *mu'azzib*).

Al-Qarah village today

Presently, al-Qarah has a population of around 4,000, according to my own count, which does not significantly differ from locals' estimations.⁶⁸ There are 517 residential units, with an average of 7 members in each family household. Al-Qarah lacks asphalted roads. There is one elementary school, one health centre, and four mosques. One of these mosques is dedicated to women.⁶⁹ Moving westward, a major irrigation canal cuts through the village and feeds the farming area that surrounds al-Qarah. Today, there are 17 people from the village working in Saudi Arabia, 13 in the United Arab Emirates, 3 in East Africa, 2 in Qatar, 1 in Egypt, and 1 in China. These immigrants are long-established, and most have double citizenship and secure or varying sources of income. At present, there are 64 al-Qarah immigrants in Kuwait. However, the Kuwaiti number is distinct in its constant fluctuation, as there are some individuals who have a Kuwaiti work visa but neither maintain a job nor settle in Kuwait for a definite period.⁷⁰ The village is divided into 4 quarters (sing. *harah*), one of which is known amongst locals as the Kuwait Quarter (*harat al-Kuwayt*). Some think it is so called because they believe a large number of its residents are immigrants in Kuwait. Others believe that because of their prolonged stay in Kuwait, some of its residents' house building style gradually began to resemble that of the Kuwaitis. There is, however, a more plausible explanation of the origin of the quarter's name. The quarter's list-of-house-residents I collected does not show any clear concentration of immigrants in any migratory destination. Throughout the history of al-Qarah movement, immigrants to Kuwait have come from all four quarters. However, the list of residents indicates that the earliest immigrants to Kuwait originated from the 'Kuwaiti quarter'. Two of these immigrants were the first

⁶⁸ To reach a reasonable estimate of the al-Qarah population, I used the local list of wedding invitations, which contained the names of all adult males who were entitled to attend a wedding. I had no access to women's names and could not know how many children there were in the village; therefore, I had to rely on key informants and elderly people for estimations of women and children's numbers. I also obtained estimations from employees at the Central Agency for Statistics and the Ministry for Immigrants' Affairs in al-Mukalla city.

⁶⁹ Not all women in al-Qarah go to the mosque to perform their five daily prayers. However, because of strict gender segregation among Hadar Hadramis and women's rare public appearance in the village's daily activities, walking the road to the mosque is a socio-religious act that might have been the most publicly organised activity to which I found women to be committed in al-Qarah. I could not know with certainty, though, whether this was a traditional practice in the Hadrami Hadar village as a whole or a recent development. It is, however, important to note that in al-Qarah and Hadramawt as a whole, the role of 'socio-Islamic' and 'fundamentalist' societies has been significant in recruiting women to participate in activities that some Hadrami people view as recent and unusual transformations, such as the congregation of women in a mosque.

⁷⁰ This is what I call the *visiting-feeding-immigrant* type of migration among Hadramis of Kuwait (discussed in the next chapter).

to build their houses using materials brought from Kuwait and in a manner which was seen by others in the village as 'illustrious' and 'Kuwaiti'. A house with these characteristics became an indicator of wealth and status in the village. I was told by elders and ex-immigrants that since then, inhabitants of all quarters, including non-immigrants, have imitated their neighbours' 'Kuwaiti style' of house building.

Over the years, building materials (doors, windows, paint, drainage systems, electrical equipment, etc.) from Kuwait have accounted for an important portion of the remittances and savings of immigrants. Although such materials have been unaffordable for most immigrants, some have persistently purchased them over many years, often with borrowed cash. A Hadrami immigrant could borrow from kin or a friend, a wealthy *ṭabin*, or from a Kuwaiti *mu'azzib*. Recently, a young al-Qarah immigrant (whose father and father's brother also work in Kuwait) took a loan from a Kuwaiti bank to finance his sister's marriage. Normally, obtaining a loan in Kuwait is not an easy or feasible process, particularly for immigrants whose monthly income may not be steady or at least secured by a Kuwaiti government employment position. The young Hadrami's loan was made possible only through his *mu'azzib*'s name and guarantee before the bank. Later on, we will see what consequences the process of accumulating debt has had for Hadar Hadramis' overall economic performance in al-Qarah as well as Kuwait.

The general economic condition of al-Qarah village is marked by two obvious features: unemployment and poverty. These two phenomena are interrelated (i.e. poverty may result in unemployment and vice versa), but in the case of al-Qarah, this relationship needs some clarification. Today, most of the economic activities that non-immigrants perform either relate to government employment or daily jobs such as taxi driving. Some individuals who are employed in the official sector do not receive enough monthly income to satisfy the basic needs of their households. Others are unemployed and poor for social and personal reasons. Many of these individuals are old ex-immigrants who returned from Kuwait following the 1991 war. Though some of these individuals were apparently capable of carrying out jobs, they declined to do so because they said they were not used to the kind of 'humiliating' jobs of *al-Bilad* (home).⁷¹ A major source of income for these people was regular money remittances

⁷¹ See the discussion of this phenomenon in Chapter 6 on immigrants' biographies. These individuals occasionally receive food and money aid through their former Kuwaiti *mu'azzibs* or their fellow immigrants in Kuwait (Chapter 4).

from immigrants abroad.⁷² Walking through al-Qarah, one can easily see how serious the problem of unemployment is there. During regular work hours in the morning, young people in their 20s and 30s share the coffee shops' tables with the seniors who spend most of the day there. The village's basic structure is also dependent on different forms of donations.

The health clinic, the school, and the mosques either were constructed or are maintained by money coming from outside Hadramawt. The football team of al-Qarah received shirts and shoes from Kuwait. The clinic's x-ray kit was brought from Kuwait by al-Qarah immigrants.⁷³ Electricity and water may be disconnected several times in the same day. In the late 1970s, before electricity reached al-Qarah, generators were brought from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to the village. Houses shared electric sources, dividing electricity amongst themselves based on allotted usage times. When I was there in summer 2004, paying the electricity and water bills was a 'frightening concern' for the people of al-Qarah. Bills are called the 'terrorism of electricity' because they are usually attached to a warning of persecution or prolonged discontinuation of vital supplies. The *al-Hawmah* leaflet interviewed people who complained that although electricity and water were irregular in supply, full bills were sent to them, adding more to their households' ongoing debt.⁷⁴

To a noticeable extent, the economic life of al-Qarah is marked by sporadic, brief, and minor undertakings. Al-Qarah has a very small number of shops that are significant in their income for their proprietors. The rest of the shops are of two types. One is called the 'morning job' shop (*shaghla sabahiyya*), in which bulk goods like vegetables and bread are bought from the city and quickly resold to locals. These morning jobs do not generate any substantial profit, and their holders' main income comes from whatever their migrating relatives periodically remit to them either in money or goods. Most holders of such shops have kin working in Kuwait or other

⁷² Immigrants' donations are discussed in the next chapter. However, Kuwaitis also send money and other forms of remittances (food and clothes) to ex-immigrants. These practices will be dealt with in more detail in chapters 5 and 6.

⁷³ *Al-Hawmah* announced special thanks to the immigrants in Kuwait for buying the x-ray equipment (see *al-Hawmah*, 2004, Issue 17, pp. 2). The mosque and the school are also regularly supplied by people of al-Qarah. However, those who have a more secure source of income, like the few well-established immigrants in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, are expected to donate more money regularly to community services in al-Qarah. Muhammad Ba Yumayn, a rich al-Qarah immigrant who is now a citizen in Saudi Arabia, regularly donates money, food, and other goods to the village and its people; *al-Hawmah* repeatedly declares special thanks to this particular individual for his donations (see *al-Hawmah*, 2000, Issue 3, pp. 1, 4-8).

⁷⁴ *Al-Hawmah*, 2002, Issue 8, pp. 12.

places, and the sporadic nature of their activities is encouraged by the constant anticipation of remittances from abroad. The other type of shop is less common and is also related to migration. These shops are opened temporarily by returning migrants who intend to spend time operating them during the summer holidays when many are expected to finance a family wedding, for instance. Here, the commodities come from two sources: Kuwait and local lenders. Goods brought from Kuwait are light (accessories, stationery, and toys) and easily consumed items (chocolates, Kuwaiti-made *macaroni*, and so on). Returning immigrants can also borrow money or merchandise from local lenders to operate their shops during their stay. I am not sure whether these infrequent ventures achieve anything for the returning immigrants or for their families. Sometimes, an occasional shop is just a response to an immigrant's relatives' excessive demands while he is at home. At other times, such a business may help the immigrant to finance his journey back to Kuwait. Finally, occasional activities have a prestigious dimension, particularly because an immigrant is always expected to have 'something at hand' (*lazim ma 'ak shay fi yaddak*) so that others can see that his departure was not useless.

In al-Qarah, one can easily see that years of out-migration have not generated major economic changes, nor have there been any serious projects in which the community as a whole was involved as a result of money coming from employment abroad. Decades of migration have satisfied some of the consumption needs of Hadar Hadrami farmers but have made agriculture a subordinate activity. Consequently, migration has made many people of al-Qarah 'farming illiterates'. I talked to immigrants and ex-immigrants who were old enough to have either practiced, or constantly been exposed to, seasonal farming proceeds but who lacked the basic knowledge and even the aspiration to farm. Although some of the al-Qarah returnees worked on others' land through the local *tubana* system during their return from Kuwait in 1990, to these people agriculture was no longer a realistic guaranteed source of income. Al-Qarah's major water resource, *al-Hawmah* fountain, has begun to dry up. In 1998, cities like al-Mukalla, under the state's organisation of the so-called 'August Project', began to withdraw water from the area through pipelines eventually directed to other urban centres some 100 km away. Some al-Qarah people blame irrigated agricultural techniques and the unwise, unfair usage of pumping machines for reducing the village's water level to its minimum. Others blame drought alone for the deterioration of agriculture in al-Qarah. A local promoter said that

drought has characterised the weather in recent decades such that today 95% of the date palms are infertile.⁷⁵ He suggested that drought was the reason for people's departure and search for alternative sources of income outside the village. Finally, many asserted that migration alone was the main reason for al-Qarah's agricultural depreciation, for many believed that they could make wealth more quickly and easily abroad than in the village. It is very difficult to identify the most plausible reason behind agriculture's subordination in the village. However, one can easily say that at present, farming is at best an irregular or secondary activity for most of the al-Qarah population. A few households in al-Qarah are capable of meeting their needs through farming alone. Deserted farming plots are abundant in al-Qarah, for even immigrants who had the opportunity to buy a piece of land planned the time of their work on the land to coincide with their summer visits to the village. During this time of the year, however, farming is hardly rewarding and takes more effort and labour.

In the summer, like the rest of Hadramawt, al-Qarah receives visiting and returning immigrants, who bring with them money and goods. This is also the time when many weddings take place in al-Qarah, and shops raise their prices. Residents' attitudes toward the immigrants' visits are contradictory. On the one hand, families are reunited and those who initially stayed behind can enjoy the gifts brought to them from outside. On the other hand, it is recognised that an immigrant's visit will place pressure on the house budget because expenditures increase dramatically during this period. Hence, for some residents, the desire to have a relative visit from abroad is equal to the need to see him depart. I am not suggesting here a conscious process of 'pushing out' the immigrant to travel again to Kuwait. However, approaching his departure, the pressure on the immigrant and his family grows quite intense, and the return to his job in Kuwait usually becomes a public affair discussed by family members and friends in the village. The social basis of some individuals' anxiety about their return to Kuwait and the ways in which this affects immigrants' behaviour are discussed in chapters 6 and 7. By the end of the summer break, many immigrants have already borrowed money from within the village or from a Kuwaiti source, with promises to repay it as quickly as possible. Throughout this process of meeting the costs of travels back and forth to the village, al-Qarah immigrants incur greater debt,

⁷⁵ *Al-Hawmah*, 2002, Issue 8, pp. 3.

and the search for income during migration becomes an attempt to keep up with repayment obligations.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion has illustrated that the local socioeconomic and political background of the Hadrami village was as important as the receiving society's role in bringing about Hadrami migration to Kuwait. The *Hadar* population of al-Qarah village came about as a result of movement to coastal areas due to famine in inland regions at the beginning of the twentieth century. Since then, the people of al-Qarah have migrated to various destinations, mainly due to economic need. Villagers' economic needs are related to two factors: lack of resources and ongoing debt. In al-Qarah, there were recurring conditions of starvation and unequal distribution of land and wealth. In addition, political relations in the Hadrami coastal agrarian villages, in general, did not favour the *Hadar*, who thenceforth looked for sources of income, and perhaps protection, outside their locality. As discussed in Chapter 2, changes in the al-Qarah socio-historical circumstances were dramatic and coincided with the formation of a state and a national society (Kuwait) that was in need of this Hadrami group. The migration of al-Qarah residents to three destinations (East Africa, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait) resulted in distinct variations, particularly in socioeconomic behaviour (i.e. the nature of immigrants' work and their social distance from the native population). The next chapter will discuss the ways through which *Hadar* Hadramis of al-Qarah conceptualise their economic specialisation and their shift from jobs as shop assistants in East Africa and Saudi Arabia to positions as house servants in Kuwait. An observable pattern in al-Qarah's three migrations—one that is reflected in its immigrants' daily activities in Kuwait—is the continuation of debt practices. We will see how the relationship between income and debt is cyclical, hence explaining immigrants' prolonged personal attachments to Kuwaiti sponsors. Ultimately, I will argue that for most *Hadar* Hadrami immigrants, income generates family pressure and more debt, which in turn justify one's stay abroad. All of these aspects, however, lay the foundation for relations of dependency between the Hadrami worker and his Kuwaiti *mu'azzib*.

CHAPTER 4: AL-QARAH IMMIGRANTS IN KUWAIT: AN EXCHANGE OF PEOPLE FOR THINGS

Introduction

In an article about debt among members of an immigrant group in western India, Mosse et al. showed that debt is essential to capturing the dynamics of today's labour migration, which might not be reducible to narrow push-pull models of analysis. More specifically, Mosse et al. held that for some immigrants,

labour migration is indeed a forced livelihood response, although it arises from a complex set of social relations (including relations of debt and dependency) rather than simply ecological crisis and subsistence failure. For others, however, migration provides a positive opportunity to save, accumulate capital or invest in assets. While some migrants have surplus incomes to invest in agriculture or economically productive assets at home, others find their earnings already committed in relations of debt and dependency ... migration may not in fact improve income or security (may indeed undermine it by perpetuating debt and dependency) and yet it continues as a strategy of survival. (Mosse et al. 2002: 60)

Similarly, migration provided other Hadar Hadramis with opportunities to save and build monetary capital and to maintain solid investments in the neighbouring Arab Gulf States.⁷⁶ Conversely, through migration, Hadar Hadramis of Kuwait accumulated debt and persisted in their dependency on the house, which represented their primary means of access to income.⁷⁷ This chapter examines the relationship between Hadrami debt and the establishment of dependency values and practices amongst al-Qarah immigrants. Hence, I will illustrate how the relationship between debt and dependency has been manifested in the experiential and practical aspects of al-Qarah immigrants' lives, namely in the patterns of their settlement and interaction in Kuwait. To consider these aspects, this chapter will establish an association between the economic prospects of immigrants living in debt (whether debt is carried on from Hadramawt or somehow accumulated throughout the migration process) and the development of the Hadrami *siby* (domestic servant) as an occupation and as a social experience in Kuwait. I attempt to show how the economic need resulting from a shortage of income and debt inform the ways immigrants live and interact in Kuwait

⁷⁶ The most prominent *Hadar* families include Bin Ladin, Ba Ma'ruf, Bin Mahfudh, Bugshan, Ba Khashab, Ba Khashwin, Ba Durayq, and many others who are now influential in large-scale businesses beyond the realm of the Arab Gulf.

⁷⁷ I use the term 'house' to indicate a family or a legal or social sponsor (see Chapter 5).

and how they connect with the village. The discussion will demonstrate Hadar Hadrami patterns of travel (such as the feeding/visiting immigrant practice, discussed below), which are motivated not only by basic material needs but also by the experience of domesticity in the Kuwaiti familial sphere. Understanding al-Qarah immigrants' patterns of travel contributes to the central proposition of the thesis that dependency values and practices shape immigrants' actions. Thus, I illustrate how the *siby* experience and the economic condition of Hadar Hadramis as immigrants in Kuwait today are reflected in the framework of their economic culture (i.e. modes of saving, expense management, consumption patterns, etc.). I will begin by establishing a model for the *siby* complex as work and as a social role, and for how Hadar Hadramis conceptualise the domestic experience. The next section will present the particular context (the *'izbah* settlement) in which al-Qarah immigrants in Kuwait interact and maintain connections with their Kuwaiti *mu'azzibs* and the village. Then I will discuss the particular patterns of communication between migrants and the village to explain the role of debt and family demands in shaping those contacts. In the last section, I present the peculiar category of Hadar Hadrami feeding/visiting immigrants, which has resulted from these long-term bonds with and dependency on personal Kuwaiti connections as the only source of income.⁷⁸

Sibyan or subyan: linguistic ambiguity and reality

The *siby* represents a break with the Hadar Hadrami pattern of socioeconomic specialisation (i.e. shop keeping) carried out by members of this group in East Africa and Saudi Arabia prior to their migration to Kuwait. Every Hadar Hadrami who came to Kuwait from the 1950s to the mid-1970s experienced one or another type of servitude. My Hadrami informants who came in those years worked as *sibyan*, a Kuwaiti term denoting a servant working in or somehow attached to a Kuwaiti domestic place. The survey shows that of the 310 al-Qarah immigrants⁷⁹ who chose Kuwait as their first destination, 60 individuals assumed a house job directly after arrival in Kuwait. Some of these individuals did not carry out any job other than domestic work during their prolonged settlement in Kuwait.

However, as a term, as a social origin, and as a vocation, *sibyan* is problematic, both in Kuwait and for Hadar Hadramis themselves. I dealt with the

⁷⁸ In the next chapter, I discuss the long-term bond as an expression and a consequence of the dependency that characterises Hadar Hadrami-Kuwaiti relationships.

⁷⁹ This number refers to all first-time immigrants to Kuwait including deceased persons.

meaning of *Hadar* in the introductory chapter, explaining how members of this group were erroneously seen by other Hadramis whom I met as being suited to the house service occupations because these jobs were consistent with the *Hadar* socioeconomic identity. The association between this Hadrami socioeconomic identity (i.e. *Hadar*) and the roles *Hadar* have performed in Kuwaiti domestic life is not always precise. Interestingly, Hadar Hadramis attributed *only* the dependent nature of their lives—being attached to Kuwait—to their social identity as *Hadar* (using the phrase *tabi'atna hakatha*, it is our character). Hadar Hadramis rejected the connection between their work as servants and their dependent relationship with Kuwaitis. They said that because of their *Hadar* 'character', "once we suck the milk we sleep on it, and we do not want to mature; we always like to be taken care of." To examine this *Hadar* belief more closely, I describe the influence of the domestic socioeconomic path on the ways in which al-Qarah people conceptualise their dependency in the Kuwaiti labour process.

Hadar Hadramis have a complicated view of themselves and the meaning of the work they have done. This view is related to the social classification system in Hadrami society overall, and to the linguistic usage of the terms *subyan* and *sibyan* in Hadrami and Kuwaiti societies. To Hadar Hadramis, the Hadrami *subyan* (sing. *sbay*) are the lowest social class, and intermarriage with them is not permitted. According to Hadar Hadramis, *subyan* are lower than slaves, as slaves can be freed and can take the family name of their masters. There is speculation about the origin of *subyan*, but most authors point to their migration from East Africa to Hadramawt. Whatever their origins, *subyan* are endogamous, but they also intermarry with descendents of Hadrami African slaves.

In Hadramawt, the *subyan* have traditionally carried out domestic services and other 'disgraceful' activities. Both men and women have fulfilled these roles; however, domestic labour does not appear to be common practice, as they are said to perform such activities for the wealthy only. Nevertheless, I have been told that they work on a daily-income basis and that many assume a peripatetic lifestyle, moving between towns and cities. Hadar Hadramis look down on *subyan* and believe that *subyan* possess physical traits that separate them from all other Hadramis. I have not, however, seen any distinct difference in their appearance. *Subyan* have also migrated to Kuwait, though on a smaller scale than Hadar Hadramis, and have shared with the latter a specialisation in domestic jobs.

The term *sibyan* (sing. *siby*) has similar implications for Kuwaitis. *Sibyan* came mainly from three places of origin—Southern Iran, Balushistan, and Southern Iraq—and most were descendents of African slaves. Groups from these regions came as immigrants and have exclusively performed services for ruling-class and well-off Kuwaiti families. The difference between Hadar Hadramis and these ethnic groups is that these *sibyan* are now Kuwaiti citizens. However, they may still be identified by Kuwaitis as *sibyan*. *Sibyan*'s relationships with the wealthy and the *Shaykhs* clearly fit a patron-client model of socio-political exchange. Although the majority of Kuwaiti *sibyan* no longer perform domestic tasks, they are available for wealthy families whenever they are required. To an extent, a *siby* can be appreciated by the wealthy, particularly if he or she has a lot of experience. Still, in the Kuwaiti context, the word *siby* can be used as a derogatory and stigmatising label denoting not only a dependent and low status, but also an 'impure' social identity.

Being of non-*subyan* Hadrami origin and working as *sibyan* in Kuwait has presented Hadar Hadramis with a socio-cultural dilemma. A Hadar Hadrami immigrant may be admired by others who regard him as a successful and independent person—a 'whole man'. Being a 'whole man' means that, for instance, one's wife does not, like *subyan* women, need to go out to work for others, because she is always provided for by a husband. This division of labour (men work outside, women inside the house) and its consequent hierarchical and gender differences are regarded with pride by Hadar Hadrami men. An informant told me of several cases of al-Qarah families who preferred immigrants over others as husbands for their daughters. But how can a Hadrami be a 'whole man' while performing a low-class, domestic, and feminine vocation during migration? Of course, today only a few Hadar Hadramis actually carry out domestic jobs, but as will be seen later on, the consequences of this dilemma shape the experiential world of Hadar Hadramis and how they perform in this migration. To deal with this dilemma, Hadar Hadramis have manipulated vernacular differences (*sibyan* versus *subyan*, etc.) and have depicted their relationship with Kuwaitis as representing a quasi-kinship and friendship form of association.⁸⁰

In 1957, Abu Ayman worked for a time in a Hadrami grocery in East Africa. He was 11 when he came from al-Qarah to Kuwait in 1958 and worked in several

⁸⁰ Hadramis' relationships with Kuwaitis will be dealt with in the next chapter.

houses as a *siby*. Now, Abu Ayman works as a gate-guard and a courier in the palace of a Kuwaiti woman from the ruling family. He vehemently rejects the idea that the work they did in Kuwait might have been seen by others in Hadramawt as the work of Hadrami *subyan*. He ridiculed me when I compared Hadar Hadramis' domestic servitude after migration with *subyan*'s vocation or status. Abu Ayman, like his fellow villagers, went into great detail to show me how these vocations are distinct. To explain this, a play on words (which is based on actual vernacular differences) was Abu Ayman's usual starting point. There is a dialect-based difference in pronunciation between the Kuwaiti *siby* (pl. *sibyan*), meaning a male servant, and the Kuwaiti *sbay* (pl. *sbayyan*), meaning a non-adult male. These terms are inverted in Hadrami language usage, in which *siby* means non-adult male while *sbay* (pl. *subyan* or *sbayyan*) denotes a social origin and domestic service. The latter term is also used as a stigmatising or categorising label. For instance, the famous Hadrami poet Ba Hurayz discusses his origin as a *sbay* in one of his poems. In this work, Ba Hurayz responds to a Hadrami *Sayyid* who had degraded his social roots:⁸¹

True, my origin is from hajar and I am sbay: but my conduct is the honest avoidance of low deeds

حقيق أنا من حجر وأصلي قال بوسالم صبي || لكن أصلي زين ما نجي للشروع القاصرات

This linguistic difference is not insignificant, for it has been drawn on by *Hadar* immigrants in Kuwait to prove that what they did at least fell into the blurry middle ground between Kuwaiti *sibyan* and Hadrami *subyan*. When some immigrants were asked about the nature of their work in Kuwait, and why it differed, for example, from what they used to do in East Africa (i.e. work as shop assistants in Hadrami groceries), they used words with hidden meanings and quickly emphasised the materialistic splendour that the house job entailed. All this created confusion and uncertainty, but it did not prevent others from following the same path. Even those who were originally known as *'uggal* (local leaders or seniors) and were respected in al-Qarah took on *sibyan* jobs in Kuwait. However, the confusion strategy did not work for everyone. Some returned to al-Qarah after a short stay in Kuwait because they could not stand the 'hidden humiliation' (*laki*) in others' queries about their jobs.

⁸¹ For more on the social and political context of this poem, see Ba Hamdan (2004: 20-21).

Non-migrants back home accused migrants of being 'spoiled' and 'smoothened' by the domestic life of Kuwaiti houses. Such attitudes towards migrants led some to disappear and to avoid fellow villagers for long periods. When they did visit the village, they did it privately and stayed for a short time.

The narrative of the Kuwaiti *siby* as a 'comfortable job' (*shaghlah murihah*) was very powerful. It caused some villagers to become prospective immigrants, always ready to depart and to enjoy the 'luxury' of life in Kuwait. This narrative was conveyed by Abu Ayman: "For Kuwaitis, a *siby* is more respectable than the Hadrami *sbay*, who carried dirt outside the town and slept in the streets. I used to sleep with my *mu'azzib*'s children in their room. They used to take me with them to the sea and to cinemas ... I was *min'azz* (honoured or elevated) by working for a Kuwaiti house." A significant element that makes this narrative powerful is the general interest in the change in immigrants' appearances when they return home. Thus, Abu Ayman continued: "We go to Kuwait with dark faces, dirty, and slim, but we come back with chubby white faces and clean clothes. Is this the life of Hadrami *subyan*? No, we were, and still are, beloved by Kuwaitis, and our people saw this with their own eyes, *subyan* of Hadramawt are not even real Hadramis. They came from somewhere in Africa to work in dirty jobs in houses. They are miserable in the way they look and the way they are treated; the more they work, the more they lower themselves."

The play on words enabled some *Hadar* immigrants to avoid humiliation during conversations. Significantly, it was also intended to preserve the belief in and practice of male superiority. Amongst *Hadar* Hadramis, there is a powerful image of male superiority. This is often expressed in terms of family dignity, honour, self-esteem, and even male sexual pre-eminence. This is the image that *Hadar* Hadramis think is consistent with the gendered and strict division of labour in their lives (i.e. men work outside, while women do domestic work). Perhaps more than any other aspect of Hadrami identity, I have found the *Hadar* Hadrami gender hierarchy to be very stringent. They often make jokes, in a disgraceful way, about the 'sexual laxity' of Bedouin Hadrami women, for they are seen in the streets wandering alone, deal with men publicly, and so on. Anything resembling Bedouin women's conduct is almost non-existent in a *Hadar* village like al-Qarah. The strict nature of *Hadar* gender relations may have been stimulated by migration (i.e. men reacting to doubts about their male prestige abroad). In all, however, it is difficult to see that any change has occurred in the structural values of *Hadar* Hadramis' gender setting as a result of

the 'lowering' roles that men once fulfilled during this migration. One clear outcome, however, is that as Hadar Hadrami men became reliant on their Kuwaiti connections for their livelihood, women became totally dependent on their men.

The experience of being *siby*, however, did not lead all Hadar Hadrami immigrants to become totally dependent on their Kuwaiti sponsors. There were some individuals who in fact became affluent and very independent as a result of being *siby*. The experience of Abdullah 'Awaḍ Bin Sabih and Muhammad 'Umar Qumman are noteworthy examples of transformation in an immigrant's social and economic positions.⁸² In 1952, Abdullah Bin Sabih (d. 2001) was probably the first person from al-Qarah to migrate to Kuwait, initially working as *siby* for an affluent Kuwaiti family. Subsequently, Abdullah helped other family members to migrate to Kuwait. Although he did not obtain Kuwaiti citizenship, Abdullah's *mu'azzib* made him a supervisor of his real estate property and awarded him a building in which Abdullah began to invest in the early 1990s. After Abdullah became affluent, he began to send donations to al-Qarah, and he helped others to return to Kuwait after the 1991 war. Today, all of Abdullah's sons and other relatives are in Kuwait working in the same Kuwaiti family's businesses. The role of certain individuals in establishing an immigrant niche can be seen in the case of Bin Sabih. After the family and relatives of Bin Sabih returned to al-Qarah during the Gulf War of 1991, Abdullah Bin Sabih (through his Kuwaiti *mu'azzib*'s connections at the Kuwaiti Ministry of the Interior) swiftly brought his whole family and some other relatives back to Kuwait in 1992. Today, there are 15 individuals from Bin Sabih's family who mainly work in Abdullah's *mu'azzib*'s businesses.

From 1960 to 1975, Muhammad Qumman worked in Kuwait for Ahmad al-Khatib, the Kuwaiti founder of the Arab nationalist movement there. While working

⁸² These are the real names of two public figures. Theirs and other individuals' real names are presented in al-Qarah's 'wedding invitation list'. The wedding list, which is available for public purchase from al-Qarah's stationery shop, includes all of al-Qarah's adult males who are entitled to attend the village's weddings. Some persons I interviewed also provided me with information about Bin Sabih and Qumman and other known people in the village. I met some of these people in al-Qarah on public occasions and recorded more information on al-Qarah's immigrants. *Al-Hawmah*, al-Qarah's periodic leaflet, contains brief biographies and memoirs about immigrants in East Africa, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE, from which I also gathered information on these persons. Personal names in Hadramawt are important because they are known as being indicative of typical *Hadar* names. Rodinof (2002: 170) rightly noticed the frequency of names like Yaslam, Mubarak, 'Awaḍ, Faraj, Khamis, Jum'an, 'Umar, 'Umran, and Rubayyi' amongst farmers, artisans, and other 'low' classes in Hadrami society. These are shared names amongst the *Hadar* of the coast and very common among *Hadar* immigrants of al-Qarah. Names like Surur, Muftah, and 'Anbar are more common amongst descendents of slaves, while Hamid, 'Alawi, Ja'far and Husayn are common as *Sayyids*' names.

as a peon for al-Khatib, Muhammad was exposed to the Arab nationalist movement, which was very strong in Kuwait at the time. Qumman, however, returned to al-Qarah in 1975 and joined the ruling socialist party, becoming a director in one of the Yemeni state offices near al-Qarah. Later, Qumman was elected to the parliament; he remained a member until his death in 1999. People with whom I conversed believed that it was al-Khatib's strong connections with the revolutionaries in South Yemen at the time that enabled Qumman to achieve his political goals. Qumman facilitated several persons' movement to Kuwait and helped them to find jobs through his old Kuwaiti connections. These two individuals' stories are identified by al-Qarah people as unusual examples of success and social mobility. For the majority, the most significant transformation was the change in the nature of work done *for* the Kuwaitis. This was the change, for example, from working as a *siby in* the house to working as a courier, a guard, or a driver *for* the house.

As indicated in Chapter 2, and as will be explained further in the next chapter, Hadar Hadramis' movement out of the house did not disconnect their relationships with their Kuwaiti families. The persistence of these connections was motivated by two factors. Among many Kuwaitis, the existence of a *preconceptualisation* of Hadrami immigrants as 'dependent followers' and the *memory* of the Hadramis' move in and out of the house strongly shaped their expectations about what a Hadrami could or should do as an immigrant. Second, Hadramis in general continued to accept and perform the role of the *available servant* even when they were no longer working in the house.⁸³ Thus, the receiving society's influence on Hadrami migratory reality has been as significant as the subjective Hadrami factor. For example, some Hadramis told me that whenever they applied for a job in a bank or a government office, they were asked by Kuwaitis to choose between working as *mandub* (courier), *murasil* (postman), *farrash* (office peon), guard, and similar positions. These limited options have been based on Kuwaitis' image of the Hadrami as typically being suited to such jobs. The Hadramis resent this Kuwaiti work categorisation, saying that when a Palestinian or an Egyptian with the same qualifications applies for a job, he is accepted wholeheartedly and given a higher position and a bigger salary. Table 4.1 shows the concentration of al-Qarah immigrants in menial employment, a pattern that

⁸³ See Chapter 5 for more details on why and how Hadar Hadramis continue to play such a role in the migration reality of Kuwait.

persists despite the fact that some individuals have sufficient education to perform more complex jobs with higher salaries:

Table 4.1: Jobs currently carried out by al-Qarah immigrants

Type of work	Number of immigrants
<i>Mandub</i> (courier)	23 (36%)
House servant	9 (14%)
Cashier	9 (14%)
Shop assistant	9 (14%)
Property guard	7 (11%)
Driver	4 (6%)
Restaurant cook	2 (3%)
<i>Farrash</i> (office peon)	1 (2%)
N = 64	

‘Awad, 30, is one of these Hadramis who has a college degree but was offered a courier job. He depicted the situation as such: “If you came to a place empty-handed and you were always offered 5 KD only, and you seem to be happily accepting it without negotiation, then it becomes difficult to ask for more. This is the problem that our predecessors created for us; they taught us their wisdom: eat whatever is given to you and shut your mouth.” Yet ‘Awad also thinks that the Kuwaitis are responsible for what he called the Hadrami tragedy in Kuwait: “We do not speak or behave like the Palestinian or the Lebanese who wears a tie and shows off his etiquette to the Kuwaitis. We dress like Kuwaitis at work and sometimes when we visit al-Qarah, but we are seen by Kuwaitis like the miserable Kuwaitis of the old days before the oil.” ‘Awad’s resentment was common amongst my informants, particularly members of the young generation and first-time immigrants to Kuwait. Yet what this illustrates is the extent to which the two societies have equally shaped the character of this migration. As described in Chapter 2, the Kuwaiti *meta*-cultural-economic-political construction of different immigrant groups as categories was peculiar and has been instrumental in maintaining state control. Here, Hadramis are perceived as being very humble, kind, needy, work-oriented, and loyal to Kuwaitis. But while such descriptions of Hadramis do, to an extent, reflect reality, they are not accepted by all Hadramis as being sufficient. For, if they were, ‘Awad reasoned,

Then why were we excluded from citizenship and better employment opportunities? ... but as I told you, when my father came here in 1962 he could have done something to improve himself and applied for better jobs or even a citizenship, but all he wanted then was *raha* (comfort). My father and all his

relatives used to hold onto the same job for years. Their theory was simple: get the salary, buy things from Kuwait, send home monthly remittances, and when visiting home spend everything and come back and sleep until the next salary comes in ... Kuwaitis admired our loyalty, of course, and the more they admire us *up*, the more we go *down* ... I now feel that I reluctantly carry my father's image with me.

From this, it is evident that the early Kuwaiti 'domestication' of Hadar Hadrami immigrants and the Hadrami acceptance of this prearranged socioeconomic path coincided to constitute the Hadar Hadrami migratory experience. Therefore, I hold that the activities and expectations of Hadar Hadramis in Kuwait today are generally the result of an ongoing cultural production of the memories and connections of the house-to-house migratory experience. To demonstrate how this is the case, I use the *'izbah* to show how a group of Hadramis experience migration today. Of course, not all Hadramis in Kuwait live or socialise in such a context. In fact, the majority of Hadramis today live alone, share a flat with another Hadrami, or live with their sponsoring families. Such cases are the focus of the following chapters. The *'izbah*, however, will show how *dependency*, as an experience and as a practice, is reflected and reproduced in immigrants' behaviour and prospects, and how al-Qarah village is attached to Kuwait through its immigrants.

In the 'izbah: persistence of a migratory domain

The 'White House' (*al-bayt al-abyad*)⁸⁴ is one Hadrami place in Kuwait today where people are exchanged for goods. In the eyes of Hadramis at home, whenever people head to the White House, goods from 'prosperity' (*al-khayr wa-'l-ni'mah*) come into the village. Families at home receive regular remittances, but transferred money is less significant than objects received through travel. Money is not the equivalent of prosperity (*al-khayr*); the latter is something more appreciated than the 'dirtiness of coins'. And because prosperity is believed to exist only outside the village and Hadramawt as a whole (*khayr al-Bilad kulluh min barra*), it is made more attainable by money, which is significant and valued. From the White House, al-Qarah obtains the luxurious and the necessary: canned cheese and powdered milk, mangoes, diabetes and *Panadol* pills, diapers, cigarettes, accessories and gold,

⁸⁴ So called by the al-Qarah immigrants and those at home, the White House is an example of an *'izbah*. This is a gathering and a living place for males only, where newcomers from Hadramawt (normally of the same village) are received and provided with temporary settlement and directed to available jobs before they find places of their own.

clothes, stationery, cameras, and mobile telephones. Over the years, al-Qarah as a village has become dependent on what comes from this 'outside' of many of its people.

Of the houses that the previous generation of al-Qarah immigrants have established, the White House is the newest and functions as a centre for al-Qarah's socioeconomic, moral, and political life. Memories of events and personal stories that took place in al-Qarah, for instance, are recalled with reference to dates of movement from one *'izbah* to another reaching the White House. Some al-Qarah immigrants live and socialise in the White House, but through it they also maintain ties with the homeland (*al-Bilad*) by recapping daily village affairs as well as exchanging gossip. A Hadrami *'izbah* receives frequent village visitors, who return home carrying foodstuffs, clothes, and loads of letters. Some visitors are even provided with the costs of airtravel by fellow immigrants to take the trip to Kuwait to help carry huge amounts of goods back to family members in the village. Frequent visitors, however, also take the trip for other reasons—for instance, to be hospitalised for tuberculosis, to see a *mu'azzib* (Chapter 5), to eat real food (*nakul rayyith*), to improve their health (*baghaina nit 'afa*), and therefore to be comfortable (*'ashan nirtah*).

One of the noteworthy features of Hadar Hadrami migration in this context, however, is that the distinction between the lifestyle of the settling immigrant and the temporary visitor is not always clear. First, long-term migrants who return home do in fact travel back to Kuwait either as visitors or as second-time immigrants. Second, some visitors may decide during a visit to settle and to find a job for some time before returning home 'with something' at hand. Third, immigrants and visitors come to Kuwait through relatives or personal connections and seek similar objectives. Together, these variations constitute a custom and a practice which persists among Hadar Hadramis today, one that is comparatively uncommon among other socioeconomically and culturally similar immigrant groups in Kuwait.⁸⁵ The Hadrami practice represents a peculiar social experience of movement towards resources through which one group of people becomes, to a large extent, *totally dependent* for its basic livelihood on another.

The White House *'izbah* is so called by al-Qarah immigrants to indicate, sometimes sarcastically, the significance of its inhabitants and the activities that take

⁸⁵ The experiences of Lebanese and Egyptians in Kuwait, for instance, contrast with the Hadramis' prolonged dependence on Kuwait as a main source of income.

place therein. The White House is a *domain* because it constitutes one level of experience in the Hadrami migratory consciousness of three or more different interfaces: the village, Kuwait, and the place that combines these two (i.e. the *'izbah*). The White House is a ground-floor two-bedroom flat located in a crowded area of housing mostly rented by foreigners. On my first visit to the White House, I was accompanying my key informant, 'Awad, who lives there with five other Hadramis. 'Awad works as a courier for a local catering company, the owner of which used to be 'Awad's father's sponsor. The other five Hadramis also work as couriers or peons in the private sector. Of these five Hadramis, Abu Ayman is the oldest and most established in terms of income, experience, and connections, and he is also 'Awad's father-in-law.

What seems to be a feature continuous with the old *'izbah* structure of the 1950s is the co-existence of different generations in one place. This is an important point, for normally a Hadrami private space is not shared in such a manner. In my interaction with Hadramis in al-Qarah, I found that the use of social space defines generational powers and hierarchical differences between individuals, something that Hadar Hadramis accentuate in their daily encounters. As will be seen later on, in the White House, generational differences, while upheld, become much more elusive and not very binding. The difference between the *'izbahs* of the old days and the White House is that the old *'izbah* functioned mainly as a recruitment centre for newcomers, mainly children, and contained more settling members than the White House does. The White House has several functions that reach beyond the interests of its inhabitants to other immigrants and to those who are in al-Qarah village.

Socialisation and donation

The *'izbah* is a very significant Hadrami space for socialisation, as visitors can come at any time of the day to take a nap, to watch television, and to eat a meal. The White House is also a place where the pressure of being away from family and children is reduced. Not all al-Qarah immigrants visit the White House, but many show up on Friday night, when a communal meal is prepared. The shopping list, the Friday meal, and the rent of the *'izbah* are not solely the responsibility of the six tenants. There are other al-Qarah immigrants who 'co-operate' with the *'izbah* residents to pay the rent and to buy necessities for the *'izbah*. The number of co-operators is probably twice the number of permanent residents. Often, the co-

operators contribute to the budget of the *'izbah* an approved, though always fluctuating, sum of money. This money is used not only to finance the activities in the *'izbah*; but also sent to al-Qarah to finance activities or to assist individuals or entire families. Such donations are sent out according to calls from al-Qarah or according to eyewitness accounts of residents' need in the village. With currency differences (1.635 Kuwaiti Dinar = 1,000 Yemeni Riyal) and keeping in mind that a family's average monthly income in Yemen is less than 10,000 YR (see Zayd 2002: 99), the *'izbah* donations are to some households a vital, if not the only, source of income.

Because there are some variations among the *'izbah*'s members in terms of monthly income and the number of family members to receive remittances, contributions also differ from one person to another. Decisions regarding recipients and amounts of donations are reached informally, although some co-operators' wishes are taken more seriously than those of others. This does not mean that there are prominent personalities whose wishes are always accepted wholeheartedly, but only that some individuals' prestige is upheld when their desire to remit to someone is readily accepted by others. Still, as said above, there is no single or clear principle for the *'izbah* monetary contributions. Thus, in many, if not most, cases of donation, goods and necessities are remitted instead of money. Goods include, for instance, a camera sent to the editors of the village's sports team's news leaflet and a television and a radio for a paralysed senior. An immigrant contributed some boxes of pencils for al-Qarah's elementary school, while another offered scent and a wall-clock for al-Qarah's mosque. A family might be remitted long-life milk (something in shortage in al-Qarah), rice, and children's clothes. In these cases, it is not always clear why money is not sent instead, but there is a general notion amongst al-Qarah immigrants that the 'Kuwaiti money' is 'corruptive'. One of the collaborators insisted that when people in al-Qarah get used to money remittance, they will buy *qat* and other trivial items, thus forgetting their children's basic needs. Such allegations, and the fact that the *'izbah* donations are not strictly regular, create tension between immigrants and non-immigrants and produce narratives of betrayal as well as accusations of envy and misconduct. However, it is these allegations and the strain they impose on immigrants that make these donations seem obligatory for the *'izbah* members and requested by non-immigrants (see Chapter 6).

Letters, debts, and demands

The White House may be thought of as a centre of communication with al-Qarah. Every Wednesday, when the regular Yemeni flight reaches Kuwait, I join ‘Awad in the airport. He goes expecting Hadrami arrivals to have letters for him and other Hadramis in Kuwait. We return to the *‘izbah* with loads of letters to be gathered by visitors on Friday. In the *‘izbah*, receiving letters from family or friends generates ambivalent reactions amongst immigrants. As Hadramis say, a letter starts with some *good* news and will always contain plenty of *bad* news. Before discussing the influence of these two types of ‘news’ on the individual immigrant, I should note that it is not precisely clear to me why Hadramis depend on letters so much. Hence, I can only speculate on the reasons for Hadramis’ usage of letters when there are much easier methods of communication between family members who live apart. Every Hadar Hadrami I knew in Kuwait had a mobile phone and frequently called and text-messaged family and friends at home. Letters, however, have always been a Hadrami preference. In addition to letters, other related forms of written documents are found with Hadramis in Kuwait, whether they are literate or semi-literate. Immigrants preserve nearly every piece of paper (phone numbers and addresses, names, memos, tickets, receipts, copies of old passports, informal agreements between individuals, and so on).⁸⁶ As for letters, they are normally kept for some time before they are disposed of. Of course, there are basic practical and personal considerations that this form of correspondence satisfies for immigrants everywhere (see below).

Nevertheless, letter writing (and perhaps paper holding in general) among Hadrami immigrants may be viewed in connection with the history of commerce in the region and the need to keep records. As we saw in Chapter 3, Hadar Hadramis worked for other Hadrami merchants settled in East Africa and Saudi Arabia, who most likely would have been concerned about the inputs and outputs of their sales or debt activities and the like. One common type of inventory that I found among the Hadar Hadramis of al-Qarah was ‘record and debt papers’ (*daftar al-tasjil wa-’l-dayn*), as they were called. These papers indicated amounts of money, objects, and almost anything else sold, given, or lent amongst persons and households, even between family members. Similarly, in a region and a culture where people’s

⁸⁶ Unlike letters, these types of documents are more scattered (for example, one immigrant’s receipts of goods purchased for his wife or a job application form for his brother might be found in another immigrant’s residence or car).

departure abroad has always been common, if not expected, writing a letter is a rational activity that Hadramis have probably become used to in order to maintain closer family connections and ties with other distant Hadramis. Additionally, in Yemen, intellectual history and literacy production in Hadramawt are comparatively more longstanding and perhaps more competent than other regions. Many of the older generation of Hadar Hadrami immigrants in Kuwait studied in one or more *'ulmah* educational institutions in their villages.⁸⁷ In the *'ulmah*, there was an emphasis on the value of the written word as being a valuable and long-lasting container of the truth.⁸⁸ It would be reasonable to think of letter writing as an extension of this scholarly background and to conclude that because of apprenticeship between generations of immigrants, letter writing was transmitted as a preferred tool. Taking the above interpretations into account, my following explanation is complementary. It relates to the contents and objectives of a letter. The majority of written correspondence I have seen between immigrants and family at home relate to demands (personal and material wants) and other familial issues that arise from migration. As such, letters are intended to store information longer and must, as in fact they are, be useful mnemonic devices to organise lists of demands. And, like other written documents, Hadrami letters are used to support one's attitudes and actions and to prove the urgency of someone's needs or instructions to a distant person (see Goody 2000: 10). Although in many cases the exchange of letters is suggestive of trust, closeness, and personal accountability, it also places tremendous pressure on the immigrant. A letter is like a 'spectre' of obligations, dues, and family and friends' demands, most of which al-Qarah immigrants cannot fulfil.

The night I prepared to return from al-Qarah to Kuwait, three persons showed up at my host family's door to give me letters to take with me. One person merely wrote his letter standing near the door; it took him five minutes to hand it to me. Two

⁸⁷ The *'ulmah* was a preschool-level institution, with much emphasis on religious learning. In the *'ulmah*, students learned to read Arabic texts, particularly through recitation of the Qur'an, and mastered basic writing, but they also learned fundamental mathematical operations. *'Ulmah* institutions were later closed by the socialists, who regarded them as symbols of 'backwardness'. However, it is important to note that some Hadar Hadrami immigrants I interviewed were sent to the earliest socialist government literacy delegations at the beginning of the 1970s to teach in the remote areas of south-eastern Hadramawt and the interior *wadi*.

⁸⁸ On the role and cultural value of the writing tradition in Yemen in general, see Messick (1993). On the importance of studying writing channels and the range of their cultural meaning and economies in societies, see Basso 1974; Goody 1987; Olson 1994; and Barber and Berdan 1998. Linguistic anthropologist Zdenek Slazmann 1998 discussed, though very briefly, rules of interaction between individuals that writing possibly governs, as well as how the content and purpose of a letter determine its compositional form (1998: 254).

of these persons I had never met during my stay in the village, and I wondered how they could have trusted me with the task. Indeed, they may not have trusted me at all, but I was asking the wrong question in this situation. Letters are written almost on a daily basis by most members of a family to their immigrant relative and might be compiled for one or two weeks before they are shipped with someone going to Kuwait. The number of letters received from al-Qarah each week at the *'izbah* attests to this practice, but the reason for the high volume of letters received or sent is that there is a general impression that the letters will not reach whoever they are sent to, or that the person to whom the letter is sent will forget about or ignore the entire letter or some of its contents. Thus, repetition is necessary as a reminder, albeit with few words. Therefore, many letters carry only the name of the receiver. I think this unique practice is motivated by three factors. First, I have noticed that women hesitate to put their names on letters sent to their husbands or relatives, just as immigrants are reluctant to write their names on letters to their wives. Second, there is a general belief amongst immigrants and non-immigrants alike that when a letter has the sender's and the receiver's names on it, a third party will definitely want to intrude and open it. Finally, some senders tend to hesitate to have their names on a letter because the receiver might readily neglect it if he knew its source (see also Chapter 6). The last two points, however, attribute an important role and meaning to letters in this Hadrami migratory context.

Letters are documents that maintain family relationships when members live apart for long periods of time (see Pitt 1972: 25). I know of a love relationship between an immigrant and his cousin in al-Qarah which resulted in marriage through the exchange of letters, where pre-marriage relations are very difficult in the *Hadar* context. However, letters have a materialistic and socio-psychological dimension, namely, as a constant element of pressure on those who receive them. Abu Ayman says of letters that "they are the wish that sometimes you don't want to have in hand, things you think people forget about come back to you in a letter." Sometimes a letter reminds the immigrant of his responsibilities back home; it may point out the need for his presence to sort out a problematic situation in the family, for example.

Abu Ayman was pressured by his only brother's decision to sell his share in their family house in al-Qarah. Abu Ayman told me about his dilemma: If he himself did not buy his brother's share, the family would break apart and someone else would benefit from his brother's portion. Abu Ayman wanted to buy his brother's share, and

he wanted his brother and his children to stay despite his brother's actions, but he did not have sufficient funds. Abu Ayman's options were not limited in dealing with the situation, but they were very difficult to execute. He could borrow the money, ask someone respectable to convince his brother to delay his move, or convince his brother that more frequent remittances in various amounts would be better for him than selling his share. Abu Ayman chose the last option, and his brother accepted it, although in later letters to Abu Ayman he threatened that he might reconsider selling his section of the house. The brother, Nasib, is younger than Abu Ayman; he came to Kuwait in 2002, working first as a cook and then as a courier, but had to return to al-Qarah permanently in 2004. I was told by a third Hadrami that Nasib's return was based on an agreement between him and Abu Ayman that the brother would return and look after their families' affairs. The deal was that Abu Ayman would support him to provide for his family. As the third Hadrami said, "Abu Ayman promised him to make him live just like an immigrant at home, but it was difficult to do so; *demands* from everywhere and everybody make you incapable of financing just one person."

The meaning and the value of a letter from home were contradictory amongst al-Qarah and the other Hadar Hadrami immigrants with whom I interacted. For example, immigrants complained when a family member or a friend did not write to them for a long time. At the same time, immigrants viewed others' sudden or unexpected correspondence with them with suspicion, seeing it as motivated only by a sender's demands for goods or money. Many times I heard Hadramis in the *'izbah* referring to letters as *talabat* (list of demands). Demands are referred to as *qalaq* (hassles or headaches) and are the bad news. Good news is short and is a rarity in letters; such information is normally sent through a mobile text message or a brief phone call. As demands usually take the form of a list of items and specific requests of an immigrant, letters are preferred, as they are cheaper (being carried, not stamped) and more likely to be read due to the quasi-anonymous way in which they are sent.

Hadar Hadrami immigrants have to cope with two kinds of demands. First, there are the *non-stop* requests for commodities each month. These are more frequent demands and may include preserved food items such as powdered milk, macaroni, tea, coffee, and rice; accessories; clothes; housewares such as kitchen utensils; and so on. These items are shipped via land, making them easier to afford and collect. The second are *last-minute* demands, which are more pressing on immigrants' budgets and social relations. These requests, which usually surface shortly before a visit home, are

difficult and infuriating for the immigrant because they are typically made quite late. The commodities demanded are usually larger in quantity and/or more expensive. The goods requested might include kilos of Basmati rice and canned cheese, televisions, electric fans, mobiles, and gold or silver. Usually, these items cost more in terms of weight, as they must be shipped with the immigrant on his flight home. Furthermore, buying a flight ticket is an additional cost (160 KD = 97,000 YR) that immigrants have to consider months before their departure. To meet such demands, borrowing from other Hadramis is, in many cases, almost inevitable. Additionally, the role of the *mu'azzib* is important, as many Hadramis are given some payment by their sponsors when they prepare to leave for a visit. Immigrants are distressed more by this kind of *talabat* because by the time they are made, the immigrant is usually empty handed. When this is the case, a Hadrami's only resort is to claim that he forgot or did not receive the request.

Nonetheless, in most cases that I have observed, and for some compelling reasons, immigrants do manage to meet such demands. A Hadrami's social prestige is upheld or elevated when he shows an unhesitant response to others' needs, which reflects his image as a capable man with no dependence on others. Perhaps more than the actual satisfaction of providing for individuals, a good reputation is often the immigrant's aim in this process. What motivates and helps the immigrant to manage last-minute demands is a widespread system of debt and borrowing in this community. Debt, as I illustrate here and in Chapter 5, has a significant place in social relations and the overall migratory behaviour of Hadar Hadramis of Kuwait. Among the Hadramis of the White House, for example, demands and debts are cyclical. Debt and demands are as old as the Hadar Hadrami migration to Kuwait, and they have always been important regarding how, when, and why people migrate, visit, or return. A debt and a demand can push someone out of the village and can pull him back in. Therefore, Hadar Hadrami debt is an inescapable experience for some al-Qarah immigrants, who remain immigrants just because they are caught up in the debt-demand cycle. In 1962, the Sa'id Bin Nashi returned from Kuwait to al-Qarah for a visit. In a cynical and tragic poem, he describes his trouble with his family's demands after spending some time in al-Qarah:⁸⁹

⁸⁹ For a complete version of Sa'id's poem, see *al-Hawmah* leaflet 2004, Issue 19, pp. 12.

And after some days there came the 'id || I asked Allah for mercy because of things soon approaching me

وبعد أيام قالوا عيد با تجي : دعيت يارب أيش اللي هو علي

My wife came and started her hassle and cheap talk || she said buy me shoes and buy me some gold bangles

جات أم العيال و لقت لي قيل وقال : قالت إشتري كرت و بغيت لي كم بنفري

Life detained us at home and I became speechless || I borrowed money for a ticket and said to her I am travelling back and running away

صرت علينا البلاد ما عرفت حتى هرج : دينت نولي وقلت شونا مسافر وفار

A house and a marriage

Poet Bin Nashi's experience is not uncommon amongst Hadar Hadramis today, particularly those who have been in Kuwait for a long time. Those who belong to the younger generation also have to cope with the problem of debt-demands. Under the current conditions of Hadrami employment in Kuwait, and given the average salary that most Hadramis obtain, the debt-demand is very difficult to manage.⁹⁰ Because of this difficulty, some immigrants decide simply to return and look for a job in al-Qarah. Khalid, 33, came to Kuwait in 2002 and lived in the White House, working as a shop assistant in a Kuwaiti gold shop and making around 200 KD (122,000 YR) monthly. However, he stayed for only 2 years before returning permanently to al-Qarah. His decision to return was very difficult for him, but he had specific justifications. "There my wife and relatives can see that I am like them, I have nothing to hide; I am not a 'rich' immigrant anymore ... and they will not ask for Kuwaiti stuff and burden me with expenses. I am happy now." When comparing his Kuwaiti salary with his current monthly income working as a teacher in the village (22,000 YR), some of his family members harshly criticise his return. However, for those al-Qarah immigrants who are similar to Khalid in terms of age, income, and educational qualifications, the decision to stay is equally difficult. To demonstrate how this is so, here is how the monthly salary of 'Awaḍ is divided:

Total income.....250 KD (152,000 YR)
Contribution to White House rent.....27 KD
Phone calls.....20 KD

⁹⁰ I gathered information on average salaries from 116 Hadrami immigrants in Kuwait in a general demographic survey of the community. The range is, on average, between 150 KD and 300 KD monthly.

Remittance (money and goods).....150 KD
 Personal expenses.....20 KD
 House food.....20 KD
Total expenses.....237 KD
Total monthly savings.....13 KD

‘Awad has been planning to build a four-bedroom house in al-Qarah for five years now, but he is always set back by family demands and the fact that building materials are extremely expensive in Hadramawt. The following is the initial budget for the first phase in ‘Awad’s house-building expenses, as indicated by him:

Bricks, cement, and builder’s wage.....195,000 YR
 Sand and base stones.....28,000 YR
 Contractor’s wage.....21,000 YR
 Security lock bar.....1,500 YR
Total expenses259,000 YR (420 KD)

‘Awad bought some bricks, cement and, most importantly, a security lock bar. Materials needed for a house are collected in a slow process that may take years; a security lock bar is used to fasten the materials purchased thus far to protect them from theft or sabotage. I saw ‘Awad’s lock bar in al-Qarah village, but I was shocked to learn that his materials had a new ‘owner’. This individual has never been an migrant, but he claimed that he was guarding the materials until ‘Awad repaid him a debt when he came back from abroad. Obviously, then, ‘Awad’s plan to start house construction must be constantly postponed because of his inability to save enough money to start such a project. ‘Awad was then put in an even more difficult situation, as he was expected to fund his non-migrant brother, who had declared his desire to marry soon. Such a marriage would weaken ‘Awad’s capacity to remit ‘generously’ or to reconsider his house’s needs seriously for some time after that.

Hadar Hadramis’ marriage expenditures are among the highest of all Hadramis, including the well-off *Sayyid* class. Some Hadramis think that this is just an emergent phenomenon, whereby people boast and make a show of extravagance during marriage events. Hadramis (immigrants and non-immigrants) who criticise this behaviour believe that it emerged with the start of migration, when many returnees and visitors wanted to emulate the Kuwaiti lifestyle of consumption. Some of the weddings I attended in al-Qarah were largely events of showing off and expressing differences in status and reputation. People compare weddings based on how much food is offered, the amount of dowry, the couple’s living place, the amount of money

paid to entertain the attendees, and so on. Each wedding (and the people who attend it) is assigned a social significance—a status with reference to previous weddings within the village or even beyond. A wedding could be a local topic for some time; rumours and gossip about the event usually circulate afterwards. Gossip is transmitted rapidly from the village to the *'izbah* and may follow the migrant over a long period. In addition to gossip, weddings are also subject to almost inevitable mockery. Stories about the couple's families' stinginess due to the low-cost or vulgar presentation of wedding supplies and food quantities serve as grounds for rebuke and lowering of reputation.

To avoid being the subject of village mockery, families must boost the level of their consumption during weddings and put as much effort and money into these events as possible, in order to “shut the mouths of the talkers”, as Abu Ayman stated. I have gathered information on the specific expenditures required for a Hadar Hadrami wedding, which would certainly be unaffordable for most al-Qarah migrants and non-migrants with whom I conversed. Again, however, these Hadramis depend on borrowing money from others to cover the costs of a marriage.

Below are all the actual costs for the wedding of 25-year-old Ahmad, Abu Ayman's son, who is also an immigrant in Kuwait. Abu Ayman's monthly salary is 300 KD, and Ahmad's monthly salary is 180 KD. The Hadar Hadrami marriage system is patrilineal and patrilocal. However, both the husband and the wife's family share in the marriage costs. The expenditures listed are standard amongst Hadar Hadramis, but of course people are known to spend more.

Husband's family's contribution:

Dowry (money and gold).....200,000 YR
 Room and furniture.....150,000 YR
 Men's wedding dinner.....50,000 YR
 Wedding lunch.....100,000 YR
*Subhah*⁹¹50,000 YR
 Entertainment for guests.....100,000 YR

Total: 650,000 YR (1000 KD)

Wife's family's contribution:

Women's wedding lunch.....100,000 YR
 Complement of dowry and gold 500,000 YR
 Luxuries and personal care items..... 150,000 YR
Total: 750,000 YR (1200 KD)

⁹¹ This is a gift of presents and money given to the bride by her husband on the first morning after the wedding.

It is not totally clear why the bride's family contributes more money, and I have obtained no information from women regarding this particular issue. However, senior Hadar Hadramis explained that paying this amount of money is usually done only once and is justified by two things. First, in order to encourage young men to marry their daughters, fathers must somehow show that they are generous and ready to help (i.e. by paying more). This is because once a woman moves to her husband's household, her father either ceases to provide for her or significantly reduces his previous expenditures on her. Second, Hadrami fathers hold that the greater contribution of money for their daughters' marriages takes the form of gold, which is the only and most enduring source of security for their daughters when they are divorced or when their providing husbands die.

Savings? What is savings?

Family demands, debts, and marriage expenditures are just a few examples of what an immigrant faces once he is settled abroad. Additional expenses are also expected to be covered by the immigrant, such as medication and children's schooling. Kuwait used to be a major destination for Hadramis seeking medical care. Before the war in 1991, Hadrami immigrants were allowed to bring their relatives to Kuwait for prolonged visits to receive free medication. Some visitors spent several years receiving medication, while others only went to Kuwait for periodic appointments. Presently, Hadramis have to pay for medication in Kuwait whether they are immigrants or visitors; however, this often does not prevent relatives from making medical visits, especially if a Hadrami's *mu'azzib* or sponsor provides for such a trip. Equally, education is a major concern for Hadrami families, particularly when a member reaches the higher education level. Before 1991, all Arab immigrants in Kuwait were entitled to free public schooling. In fact, several Hadramis I met had migrated to Kuwait for that specific reason, particularly in the 1970s, when many wanted to escape the socialist party's military conscription. After 1991, a change occurred by which all Arab workers in Kuwait were required to find private education. However, in 2003, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education stated that, of all Arab workers, only Yemenis would be allowed to enrol in the public schools for free. In terms of education expenses, this has helped the small number of Hadramis who have children in Kuwait. Nevertheless, the majority of Hadrami immigrants today are

hesitant to bring in their families, due to the constantly rising rents in Kuwait, and thus many prefer to live a bachelor lifestyle and to share rent with others.

As described earlier, in the *'izbah* and beyond, serious or persistent saving efforts are very exceptional, given the economic and social conditions with which Hadar Hadrami immigrants must contend. The attitude survey I conducted amongst 41 Hadar Hadrami immigrants in Kuwait⁹² on monthly savings shows how, for many immigrants, being away may not in fact be a solution for an individual or a household's meagre economic conditions; rather, as Table 4.2 below shows, it may instead add to the complications.

Table 4.2: Immigrants' monthly income savings

Monthly savings	Number of immigrants
30 KD or less	9 (22%)
Around 50 KD	12 (29%)
100 KD	11 (27%)
200 KD or more	5 (12%)
Undecided	4 (10%)
<i>N</i> = 41	

The concentration of savings in the range of 50 and 100 KD is understandable, given the average Hadrami monthly income and expense distribution. However, these savings are not regarded by Hadramis as building up a liquid asset as future capital. In fact, saving is probably the 'dirtiest' word of all among the Hadar Hadrami immigrants of Kuwait. The proverb *'yawmak 'idak'* (lit. everyday is like a *'id*)⁹³ is frequently reiterated by Hadar Hadrami immigrants when asked about specific plans or any chances for saving for the future. Abu Ayman sadly jokes: "We enjoy the moment ... as long as one can eat and dress well, we rarely think about what will happen tomorrow." This does not mean that they have no concept of saving; rather, those who save funds do not do so with the accumulation of wealth in mind. Money is saved to meet continual commodity demands from home, or, in some cases, to address a crisis. For example, an amount of money may be preserved for a long time for the

⁹² Among respondents to the attitude survey, 18 individuals are from al-Qarah village, while the others come from three other Hadar towns: al-Shihir, Ghail Ba Wazir, and al-Hami.

⁹³ The Hadrami proverb could mean something like the English saying 'living from hand to mouth', which indicates an inability to save either because of rapid unplanned consumption of income or overwhelming material demands.

purpose of purchasing items from Kuwait at the time of departure. This is because each amount of money saved is equated with a certain commodity to be bought from Kuwait. Hence, Hadar Hadramis spend a good portion of their time wandering the shopping centres in Kuwait merely tracking and examining goods to be bought for a visit home. When I wondered why ‘Awad and I were spending hours just roaming around shops before he decided to buy one or two items, he replied: “Because I follow a list, and this list can change or expand every week; everyone wants you to buy him something, even the rubbish bags they would want to have brought from Kuwait!”

It is very important to note, however, that saving here is analogous not only with buying items, but also with buying hearts. Abu Ayman clearly stated to me that Hadramis do recognise that one of the purposes of being an immigrant is to establish some capital (and of course be independent of others) before returning home. But “is there a place for saving when you remit money to your brother’s friend’s brother-in-law, when you have to buy gifts from Kuwait, when you want to build a house, when you have to repay a debt, and when you want to have your son or daughter married?” Abu Ayman asked.⁹⁴ A constant pressure that al-Qarah immigrants have to deal with before a visit home is the expectation that they will purchase commodities for as many people as possible (see Sayad 2004: 52-53). Forgetting someone on the buying list results in a sort of debt which must be transferred to the next year’s visit or be compensated for with a valuable alternative from Hadramawt. Although things brought from Kuwait often have equivalents in Hadramawt, goods coming from Kuwait imply greater prestige, ideas of ‘prosperity’, and social connectivity with a Kuwaiti *mu‘azzib* or with a Kuwaiti source of power. For example, Hadar Hadramis prefer a *mi‘wazz* (*sarong*, popular Hadrami dress) that is brought from Kuwait, although Hadramis know that there are much more affordable and higher quality Hadrami *mi‘wazz*. Hadar Hadramis in Kuwait do not publicly wear *mi‘wazz*,⁹⁵ perhaps because, as an identity marker, the *mi‘wazz* is not a unique Hadrami costume; many Indians wear it publicly in Kuwait.⁹⁶ Indeed, it is interesting to see how Hadar

⁹⁴ Regarding the relation between an individual’s movement and gift and service obligations among family and kin, see for instance Van Dijk (2002: 185); on reciprocity and distribution of gifts in such contexts, see Narotzky (1997: 42); on family services as a form of obligation for the immigrant, see Izuhara and Shibata (2002: 159).

⁹⁵ Hadramis wear *mi‘wazz* when they are in Hadramawt among their families; they do not wear the garment in Kuwait at all, except after work in an intimate context.

⁹⁶ In fact, Hadramis in general recognise that the custom of wearing *mi‘awazz* originated in a cultural borrowing that occurred when Hadramis living in India imported the garment as a symbol of high culture, wealth, and intellectualism.

Hadramis in Kuwait interact with cultural objects and other purchased goods from Hadramawt. On many occasions, Hadrami objects (gifted or used) are concealed, discarded, or preserved unused for some time until the immigrant visits home. I counted the number of objects possessed by a Hadrami immigrant and compared the number of objects he had from Hadramawt with those he used in Kuwait. A noticeable pattern was a certain apathy about showing or using Hadrami objects. When he used a Hadrami pair of white shoes and a waist-ribbon with pockets, called *sibtah*, on the day of the 'id, his friends at the 'izbah laughed at his Hadrami effects, which they regarded as shoddy and cheap. Another similar instance also invited scorn from his friends, who said he was 'ignorant' about the high quality of the personal care items used in Kuwait. Hadar Hadramis' desire for, or even emotional attachment to, objects from Kuwait is a significant element that continues to shape Hadar Hadrami consumptive behaviour. Hence, one of the results of Hadar Hadrami dependency on Kuwait is this peculiar consumption process, which is characterised by three elements: unclear economic planning, solid faith in the durability of Kuwait as a source of income, and emulation of Kuwaiti consumption values, particularly in terms of purchasing and shopping style. These elements and the consequences of Hadrami attachment to Kuwait are woven into the following two chapters.

Visits and memories of dependency

Here I illustrate how the Hadrami 'izbah in its present form, within the Hadar Hadrami framework of dependency, encourages the emergence of new patterns of movement, namely of a peculiar type of 'immigrant', to whom I refer as *visiting-feeding immigrants*. These may not be immigrants as such, because they usually stay in Kuwait only a short time before returning to al-Qarah. Additionally, some have work visas issued and constantly renewed by a *mu'azzib* but only visit Kuwait every six months or less. Under the Kuwaiti Alien Residence Law, an immigrant with a work visa must not spend more than six months outside the country; otherwise, his visa will automatically be cancelled. I have found this movement behaviour to be more prevalent amongst the elderly generation of ex-immigrants, particularly those who spend more time working in Kuwaiti houses. I contend that the emergence of this type of immigrant is related to the 'izbah.

For some al-Qarah people (i.e. regular visitors), the mere presence of the 'izbah in Kuwait today indicates the persistence of a longstanding relationship (dating

specifically before 1990) between Hadramis and Kuwait and Kuwaitis. These Hadramis refer to that relationship using words like ‘success’, ‘intimacy’, ‘brotherhood’, ‘loyalty’, and the like. To these Hadramis, the *‘izbah* is a place of memories of the ‘days of opulence and comfort’ (*ayyam al-‘izz wa al-rahah*), when Hadramis came easily to Kuwait and created family lives, sharing a sense of community and identity with other Hadramis. The *‘izbah* signifies the former ‘openness’ of Kuwait as a place to live, bringing back to life some of those memories. Some of these Hadramis, thinking back to their migration to Kuwait, recalled ‘food memories’ (Sutton 2005) or remembered it as a time when they could eat items they had been deprived of in Hadramawt. Mango, for instance, is most frequently used to remember the ‘beautiful’ days of Kuwait before the sad times or the catastrophe of 1990 (see Chapter 6). Hadar Hadramis told me that during the period of socialist party rule, importing canned mango juice from Kuwait or elsewhere was considered a violation of communist economic policy, as mango was regarded as an unnecessary luxury item. Thus, when these visiting-feeding Hadramis return to al-Qarah, they take with them cartons of mango because others back in al-Qarah will feed not only on the mango itself, but also on the implied memories.

However, some of the visiting-feeding immigrants with whom I met in the *‘izbah* did not conceptualise their frequent visits in terms of ‘beautiful’ Kuwaiti memories; rather, they viewed their goals as plainly nutritional and materialistic. Salman, 68, having come to Kuwait for his third visit since 1991, expressed his disappointment and anger with his old sponsor. He worked for the Kuwaiti as a *siby* and then as a driver and courier for more than 25 years, until the sponsor fled Kuwait during the Iraqi invasion in 1990. I interviewed Salman at the White House a week before his departure to al-Qarah. Salman clarified the objectives of his visits to Kuwait:

I do not come here to beg my sponsor; it is his duty to receive me and even welcome me when I visit. Why? Because I served him all these years without complaining and we were like loyal friends. But now that I am old and have no income and can’t work because of my painful legs, he turns away from me as if he doesn’t know me. In my previous visits I asked him for some money and he also asked me to spend some time at his house ... I wanted to be comfortable and eat good food and I don’t hide this; we are poor and we need help. When I returned to al-Qarah I took good amounts of canned food for my family ... on this visit I didn’t get anything from him, he denied me even tea and bread.

Whether they are emotionally and materially rewarded or disappointed during their visits, feeding immigrants like Salman sometimes express general relief and satisfaction. During the *'id*, the number of feeding immigrants increases noticeably because they can go and see their old *mu'azzibs*, who may offer them some *'idiyyah* (money given by adults to children on that day, and possibly to female relatives). Not all visitors go to a *mu'azzib* expecting to be given money or even accept the *'idiyyah*; indeed, it is not common or socially acceptable to give *'idiyyah* to an adult male. However, the amount that a Hadrami receives is, in most cases, much higher than that given to children—a fact that motivates the *mu'azzib* visit. It can be said that perhaps the only social security system available to these visiting-feeding immigrants is in the continuation of the *mu'azzib* relationship, which makes the visit very important and clearly indicates the extent of the dependency of these Hadramis on Kuwait. To visiting immigrants, the *'izbah* is a midpoint between Kuwait and the village, and it is also the Hadrami place where relations of dependency are revived or reinforced.

Conclusion

The case of al-Qarah migration shows that what began as an act of economic necessity has become a powerful cultural experience that not only contradicts its original materialistic justifications, but in some aspects suppresses them. That is to say, while Hadar Hadramis of Kuwait justify moving out by citing their intention to make money and become more independent as 'whole men', in the process of migration, they are dragged into cyclical dependent structural processes with Kuwaitis. Hadar Hadrami migration to Kuwait is carried out through and reproduces a specific culture of migration: a *culture of dependency*. Hadar Hadramis' economic culture (modes of saving and consumption of items and food) points to a strong faith in the endurance of an external resource as lifelong income. Dependency is structured around the initial Hadar Hadrami migratory role (domestic work) in Kuwaiti society and its socioeconomic values and cultural attitudes among Hadar Hadrami immigrants. Dependency can be seen as a prevalent tendency to assume the role of a *siby* for the service of a house or a *mu'azzib* (Chapter 5).

Like other Hadar Hadrami villages' migrations to Kuwait, the al-Qarah experience can be regarded as based on three main elements: an ongoing stream of social links (with Kuwaitis and the village), a prior socioeconomic path (the house connection and domesticity), and a potent disposition to retain an old social role

(availability to serve around the house). Through al-Qarah immigrants, I have shown what has tied the community to one place for many years, even though the economic occupations (house services) that Hadar Hadramis traditionally fulfilled are no longer theirs.⁹⁷ Al-Qarah migration to Kuwait indicates the extent to which the Hadar Hadrami experience of domesticity is significant in shaping immigrants' expectations and the nature of their connection with Kuwait today. That experience, however, shows that there may be no direct correlation between Hadar Hadramis' social identity and what they have undertaken as a socioeconomic role in Kuwait (i.e. domestic service). But the dependent nature of the early Hadar Hadrami attachment to the house and its consequential associations with Kuwaitis today is very prominent not only in shaping a specific migratory consciousness, but also in influencing the ways Hadramis move and interact with Kuwaitis and among themselves. Dependency through migration continues to be characteristic of Hadar Hadrami daily activities within the *'izbah* and through the visit system, which touches on the basic needs in al-Qarah's socioeconomic life. Within this framework of dependency, the *'izbah* functions as a place of individuals' collective economic action through village donations, in addition to its role as a symbolic locus of the persistence of Hadrami attachment to Kuwait. In the next chapter, we will see what Hadrami dependency as such satisfies for some Kuwaitis and why they also insist on maintaining their relationships with Hadrami immigrants.

⁹⁷ On the symbolic role that the existence of this immigrant community satisfies among Kuwaitis today, see Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: HADRAMIS AND KUWAITI SOCIO-LEGAL SPONSORSHIP

Introduction

The most important element that predetermines and characterises the economic, political, symbolic, and social relationships between Kuwaitis and all immigrants is the legal system of *kafalah* (sponsorship). The development of this system was brought about by an organised, official effort to manipulate and control a massive foreign labour force. The *kafalah* is simultaneously a legal system and the most significant political tool that the Kuwaiti rulers use in order to institutionalise the power relationship between state authorities and Kuwaiti citizens, on one hand, and between Kuwaitis and immigrants on the other. This effort is seen by state planners as an act of sovereignty. However, as discussed below, the *kafalah* also reveals a powerful interchange between the local social view of immigrants and the role of law in the migration process as a whole. In Kuwait, within and through the *kafalah* realm, the boundaries between legal instructions and normative values on migration are blurred and more often collapse in daily practices. Thus, while Kuwaiti sponsorship is a legal apparatus, it constantly reinvigorates a strong social hierarchy for natives and foreigners. As such, it produces a symbolic and factual distinction between Kuwaitis and immigrants.

As indicated in Chapter 2, the sponsorship system was a basic control system that was made possible through the programmatic categorisation of the working populations in Kuwait. Promoted by the *Shaykhs* and the merchants, the *kafalah* system produced a hierarchical division of labour between Kuwaitis and foreigners and had two important dimensions. First, there was a locally powerful cultural and political appreciation of the *kafalah* as an economic incentive and as a structurally privileged position awarded to the citizen by the state. From the Kuwaiti perspective, sponsorship was a nationalistic mechanism which enabled the native minority to protect itself from, but also to manipulate and control, massive numbers of working immigrants. The second dimension was the dominant perception among Kuwaitis of the ideal structure of any resulting socioeconomic relationship with immigrants. In such a structure, Kuwaitis were perceived as *native employers* and expatriates as *temporary labourers*. Among Kuwaitis, sponsoring an immigrant was seen as an act that delineated the socio-political boundaries between themselves and everyone else.

Sponsorship was also seen as an act of accessing the state's legal institutions and resources; thus, many Kuwaitis found in it an important venue for establishing legitimacy and personal prestige. Finally, Kuwaitis viewed their specialisation in certain jobs in public sector employment (i.e. government) as a social privilege which naturally came with nationality.

As I will demonstrate in the following sections, for Kuwaitis and immigrants alike, the role of law in the conceptualisation of sponsorship and hence of immigrants remains problematically vague yet extremely decisive in the migratory process as a whole. Like other laws, the Kuwaiti laws that deal with migration and immigrants, the Alien Residence Law of 1959 (ARL) and the Labour Law of 1964 (LL), are written rules. However, the two laws never explicitly define the notion of the *kafalah* or explain the relationship between the *kafil* (sponsor) and the *makful* (the sponsored immigrant). In practice, the application and the weight of each of these two laws are subject to political factors, informal circumstantial interpretations, and individuals' actions. Among other things, Kuwait's legal policies and practices on migration have always varied according to the origins or nationalities of the immigrants. Hence, for example, on most occasions the ARL (administered by the Ministry of the Interior) overrules the LL in granting, terminating, extending, or restricting the work of a specific immigrant or even an entire national group. Accordingly, certain immigrant populations have related differently to the frameworks of the *kafalah* and the implied work designation policies. At all times, the specificities and political preferences of Kuwaiti migration laws have shaped the incentives that have inspired the decisions of potential immigrants (Schuck 2000) and have determined the prospects and behaviours of immigrants even before they travel. Yet unlike the experiences of other Arab or Asian immigrant groups, in the Hadrami migratory experience the *kafalah* has continued to shape all phases of Hadrami relationships with Kuwaitis even after the permanent return or the death of an immigrant.

The focus of this chapter is how sponsorship is perceived and acted out in the interactions between Hadramis and Kuwaitis. This chapter will examine the properties and the consequences of the Hadrami association with the Kuwaiti sponsor. A main premise is that the Hadar Hadrami link with Kuwaiti sponsorship must be seen as extending beyond the economic and legal spheres of migration to a historical and symbolic construction of a peculiar *debt-peonage* bond. Such a bond is based on tacit, accepted patterns of social and personal dependency and supremacy. These patterns,

however, are perceived in terms of trust, personal sentiments, pseudo-kinship, and friendship relations that entail binding moral obligations. Not only did such a bond maintain Hadar Hadrami migration in Kuwait; it was also performed and presented by both Kuwaitis and Hadramis as commendable and exemplary of how other immigrants should relate to Kuwaitis, and as what would be expected from Kuwait as a source of wealth. To understand the implications of this in the context of Hadrami migration in Kuwait, we must look first at the organisation of the *kafalah* system as a law, then at the system as a social practice through Hadrami experience.

The kafalah (sponsorship) and the power of the kafil (sponsor)

The etymology of *kafalah*, from the root *k-f-l*, in the Arabic language is significant to the broader linguistic and cultural background of the concept, as it shows that the basic derivative forms of *k-f-l* extend to the meaning and interpretation of *kafalah* today in the legal and social settings of migration. The basic derivatives mean: 1) to feed and provide for someone; 2) to adopt, to espouse, or to protect a dependent; 3) to guarantee and be a legal guardian; 4) to pledge an alliance with someone; and 5) to appropriate or annex someone or something.

Although characteristic of the Arab Gulf countries, including Kuwait, the *kafalah* as a societal institution has been addressed by few researchers of the area's migration.⁹⁸ The few works to discuss the *kafalah* have been general in scope and mostly interested in the structural and policy aspects of the national setting of migration. However, the *kafalah* must also be understood through an examination of cultural models, historical trajectories, and contextual varieties that outline each immigrant community's unique reaction to sponsorship.⁹⁹

The origin of the concept of Kuwaiti sponsorship fundamentally relates to the ways in which power has been distributed and organised through labour force segmentation and control of peoples' mobility (see Chapter 2). Years before the oil industry and the emergence of Kuwait as a modern state, Kuwaiti *Hadar* merchants used to act as guarantors of labourers and were able to receive and expel individuals based on their personal recommendations.¹⁰⁰ Merchants' power and economic

⁹⁸ With the exception of Beaugé 1986; Longva 1997, 1999; and Shah and Menon 1999.

⁹⁹ For a comparative perspective on other immigrant populations' reactions to Kuwaiti sponsorship, see for example Arzuni 1994 on Lebanese migration to Kuwait; al-Ghabra 1987 on Palestinians; Shah 1999, 2000 on East Asians; and Ahmad 2003 on Egyptians.

¹⁰⁰ Some labourers who came from other parts of Arabia, Iraq, or Iran in the 1940s and 1950s were given a paper stamped with a known Kuwaiti merchant's name on it. With this stamp, the worker was

interests are reflected in today's Kuwaiti official design of the main laws dealing with foreign workers.¹⁰¹ Yet it was the 1959 ARL and its several amendments (1963, 1965, 1968, and 1975) that made all immigrant workers virtually dependent on their Kuwaiti employers for their entry visas, work, and residence. The law, active today, requires that every immigrant worker in the domestic, private, or public sectors be vouched for by a Kuwaiti employer who is explicitly identified as his sponsor or *kafil*. By 1975, the *kafalah* became an absolute condition and a primary constituent of Kuwait's immigration. However, neither the content of the *kafalah* nor the relationship between the *kafil* and the immigrant worker were clearly explained in the law. This is still the case, perhaps because "The [*kafalah*] practice was well-anchored in Kuwaiti tradition and was, therefore, widely understood and taken for granted by the native population" (Longva 1997: 79; see also Beaugé 1986).

Procedurally, all non-Kuwaiti employees must be issued an entry visa through their sponsor/employer before coming into the country. Upon arrival in Kuwait, prospective workers must be issued a residency stamp on their passports with the clearly documented consent of their sponsors. Both procedures are done through the Ministry of the Interior. Finally, through the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MSAL), a worker must be granted a work permit.¹⁰² Generally speaking, the sponsorship is a document that consists of the employer's signature on a form of request issued by the MSAL in which the sponsor declares that the immigrant works

supposed to be free to move around. Yet expulsion based on a prominent person's advice was also a common practice. At the time, Dubai acted as an expulsion destination for 'misbehaving' or 'unwanted' labourers, as many (including a Hadrami, Muhammad Ba Laghnum, whom I met in the UAE in 2004) were deported there as criminals. See also Lienhardt (1993) on the role of respected Kuwaitis in the arrangement of labourers' entry in the 1950s.

¹⁰¹ The Law of Alien Commercial Companies of 1960 (active today) stipulates that a foreigner cannot launch a business in Kuwait without having a Kuwaiti partner, who is required to own at least 51% of the capital.

¹⁰² Principally, in the private sector, any prospective sponsor is required by the LL and MSAL to show a contract and/or a proof of real and existing business in order to bring in a foreign labourer. However, by law, not all foreign workers in Kuwait must have a work permit or a contract of work. Domestic servants are excluded from this procedure; in fact, they are not even covered by the LL, as they are not considered workers by definition. Therefore, all of their affairs, including life-threatening concerns, are left to the goodwill of their sponsors and customary practices, all of which are shaped by the framework of the ARL. Others simply cannot obtain any contract or formal agreement for a job. Many immigrants have been issued entry visas by their Kuwaiti sponsors based on the condition that upon arrival in Kuwait the prospective employee would pay a bribe to the Kuwaiti in return. Many Kuwaiti sponsors, however, have not completed the three steps, stopping after issuing the entry visa or the residency stamp. This is a common illegal practice known in Kuwait as the 'residence permit trade' (see Chapter 2).

for him (or her).¹⁰³ The sponsor must also inform the Immigration Department in the Ministry of the Interior whenever changes are made to the labour contract, as in cases of renewal, expiry, or cancellation. The *kafil* is responsible for the repatriation expenses of the worker upon the contract's termination. All immigrants may have a sponsorship in only one of the following employment categories: a state institution (a public-sector entity like a ministry, a public school, etc.); a private institution (a private-sector entity such as a company or a small shop); or a private citizen (offering domestic-sector employment, mainly in home domestic services).¹⁰⁴ Each sector is identified with a type of visa which carries the number of the article in the ARL that determines each entry's conditions for foreigners. Visa No. 17 is for foreign employees in the public (government) sector; Visa No. 18 is for employees in the private sector; Visa No. 19 is for professionals and the self-employed business partners of Kuwaiti businessmen; and Visa No. 20 is for domestic servants. All labour immigrants to Kuwait are theoretically contract-based workers,¹⁰⁵ and the majority are concentrated in the private and domestic sectors. However, as rightly observed by Longva (1997: 84), three categories (Visas 18, 19, and 20) share the fact that the *kafalah* was intended to attach the immigrant to a private individual rather than to an institution and to render immigrants totally dependent on sponsors.¹⁰⁶ This was done

¹⁰³ Kuwaiti women may sponsor foreigners if they show a proof of need, which is determined by their non-employment in the government or lack of other private source of income. Currently, many of the famous labour-importing agencies are owned by and carry the names of Kuwaiti women (mostly Bedouins) from the non-privileged segments of Kuwaiti society.

¹⁰⁴ For Hadramis, the articles were arbitrary, as they could hold one work visa and do another kind of work (see the section below on the *mu'azzib*). Yet it can be said that throughout their migration to Kuwait, Hadramis' work concentration followed a pattern which was related to shifts in the Kuwaiti domestic and private business sectors and governmental demands for specific labour skills. It was also related to shifts in Kuwaiti politics, which have always been sensitive to regional political events, as reflected in changes in its employment preferences from one immigrant population to another.

¹⁰⁵ Problematically, however, LL accepts verbal contracts, which complicates the situation for many workers who spend most of the period of their employment uncertain of their duties and rights. The LL states, "Employment of a labourer shall be made under a contract in writing or verbal ... In the event of a verbal contract, the labourer or employer may prove his right by all evidential methods" (Article 12, official translation). I was told by a Kuwaiti employee at the Department of Labour Relations that even when written in form, such contracts are a mere formality, as the employer/sponsor can rely on the ARL to constrain or limit the demands of the labourer in cases of dispute, contract cancellation, or visa transfer to another sponsor or another sector.

¹⁰⁶ It is not clear why Longva excluded Visa No. 17 in this regard. However, I think that Longva was under the impression that because government employment had clearer terms of contract, individual employees would not be interested in bonding with Kuwaiti individuals except in the formal settings of their work. This is pretty much the case with some Arab and Asian employees (Asians were the main group in Longva's study) in the Kuwaiti public sector. Yet, as will be shown presently, the Hadrami employees with Visa No. 17 did mostly attach to individuals, despite their work in the government. In fact, it was mainly through one or more Kuwaiti citizens that some Hadramis came to be government workers.

through a number of strategies based on lawful as well as conventional practices that placed an enormous amount of power in the hands of the Kuwaiti sponsor.

Among the most important strategies are 1) threat of deportation; 2) restriction of immigrants' freedom of movement; and 3) the sponsor's refusal to transfer an immigrant's visa or to issue a residence or work permit. The first strategy is covered by ARL, under which immigrants can be deported under judicial and administrative headings including "security and moral reasons". For expatriates, fear of deportation is a continuous pressure of daily life. Some Kuwaitis resort to such a strategy in order to cancel an immigrant's visa, which always leads to his or her deportation. In many cases, a personal connection at the Ministry of the Interior and an accusation of a violation of a moral code or a national security concern are enough to invoke this law and deport an immigrant.¹⁰⁷

The second strategy of constraining immigrants' freedom of movement is a more common practice that is recommended by authorities at the Ministry of the Interior. In Kuwait, foreign workers are required to surrender their passports to their employers as long as they are in the country. Although this practice is not required by law, the Ministry of the Interior recommends it as a crime deterrent, since immigrants who would commit a violation would not be able to escape without their passports. Passport confiscation also assures the employer that the employee will not leave the country before the end of the contract period. The final strategy relies on the immigrant's legal obligation to work only for his sponsor/employer and his or her inability to transfer from one visa category to another without the *kafil's* agreement. Such an obligation makes immigrants of all work categories vulnerable and easily dismissed in any labour conflict. In cases, mostly involving domestic workers, in which the employer declines to release a worker from his sponsorship, the most

¹⁰⁷ Domestic servants' visas (article 20) can be cancelled at any time with no obligation for the sponsor to show a reason for such an act. To complete the cancellation, the Kuwaiti sponsor goes to the Ministry of the Interior and performs a quick procedure, but he or she must pay for the repatriation expenses of the immigrant and make sure that the worker has departed from the country. Other workers coming under the three remaining articles may not be deported as such, for sponsorship cancellation in these cases entails a procedure in which the MSAL can interfere if the employee contests the cancellation. Not every act of cancellation may be carried out easily by the Kuwaiti sponsor; in such cases, the Kuwaiti sponsor can resort to a non-renewal strategy. In these conflict situations, foreign workers may search for another Kuwaiti sponsor before the expiry of their work visa, but then again the original sponsor must permit the transference of the visa to another sponsor. If the original sponsor refuses the transfer, or, as some Kuwaitis have, asks for bribe money for the release of the employee, the MSAL can interfere again and may help end the conflict. Alternatively, the prospective sponsor may ask the employee to cancel his residency and work permit, which is a very easy procedure at the MSAL. When the employee does so, he must leave Kuwait (as required by the ARL) and must be called for by his new sponsor under a new visa and work permit.

common solution for immigrants is to run away and find another job; they then become illegal aliens subject to deportation or prosecution.¹⁰⁸

Clearly, the peculiar security and political concerns of the state were present in the mentality that framed the ARL. But this does not mean that the Kuwaiti LL does not offer any legal protection to working immigrants. The LL is fairly explicit about employers and workers' duties and rights and the ways in which workers can sue their employers in most occurrences of contract violation.¹⁰⁹ In fact, access to courts in cases of workers' complaints against their Kuwaiti employers can be organised, and is sometimes encouraged, by the divisions of Labour Relations at the MSAL. Still, "the Labour Law on the book is not the labour law in the street, where the law of measuring need, power, and identity counts more," as a Kuwaiti head of a labour division at the MSAL explained. All foreign workers in Kuwait suffer from the fact that although the LL regulates the relationship between a worker and an *employer*, it does not order the relationship between a worker and a *sponsor*. The two positions are merged as though they are the same. For immigrants, this results in a situation in which the Kuwaiti figure (whether a sponsor or an employer) is seen as encompassing the legal, economic, and political power of the state. In a report on migration conditions in Kuwait, Longva (1999) described the immigrants' dilemma arising from this situation:

The 1959 [Alien] Residence Law regulates the sponsorship relationship, upon which the presence of any immigrant in Kuwait depends entirely. Although the LL allows the worker to go to court and sue his or her employer, it does not take into consideration the fact that while the trial is pending, the plaintiff is unemployed and forbidden to work for anyone else. Nor does the Residence Law take into consideration the possibility that the sponsor may resort to pre-emptive measures, such as accusing the worker of some morally reprehensible behaviour that could lead to his or her deportation. Migrant workers are well aware that even if they win the court case, the outcome of the conflict will be the end of their relationship to this particular sponsor. Thus, the worker will have to leave Kuwait and start the whole costly recruitment process anew from home. (Longva 1999: 22)

¹⁰⁸ To transfer from the private sector to the public sector, a foreign employee needs a sponsor's consent and may be required to leave Kuwait and re-enter with the new type of visa. There are other important procedures in this regard, but these are beyond the scope of this study. On this particular issue, see Longva (1997: 77-111) for an excellent detailed analysis of the formal aspects of Kuwaiti sponsorship. Refer also to the Alien Residence Law No. 17 of 1959 with all amendments; the Law of Commercial Companies of 1960; and the Private Sector Labour Law No. 38 of 1964.

¹⁰⁹ For example, articles 40 to 51 of the LL specify limitations on the employer's authority in the form of legal obligations towards his workers.

I was told by a Kuwaiti employee at the legal division in the MSAL that even the ‘moral spirit’ that the Kuwaiti LL adopted was explicitly based on the so-called *mi‘yar al-taba‘iyyah* or the ‘criterion of dependence’¹¹⁰ in the interpretation of labour relations. The criterion assumes that in any labour situation the worker should be perceived as the weakest party, dependent on his employer’s legal commitment and goodwill for the honest implementation of a fair work contract. The overall objective of such an approach is to preserve ‘social peace’ in the country and ‘stability’ in the labour market. To a great extent, this objective is achieved, not because of a compelling labour law, but because all labour (and work)¹¹¹ affairs in Kuwait are seen (by locals, foreigners, and lawmakers) in terms of a *migratory situation* that is organised by a powerful, politically sanctioning apparatus such as the ARL. “Kuwait is like a tiny tent, but rich in resources. If you saw a foreigner in that tent, it was not because he joined a free labour market; he entered Kuwait because he was *given* a provisional spot in prosperity,” as a Kuwaiti employee described the situation. Some Kuwaitis simply view immigrants’ presence in Kuwait as a supplicant act, while others see it as an external incursion into national resources. This view, which I sketched in Chapter 2, has strongly informed the essence of the Kuwaiti legal, moral, and social ideologies and has worked as a model for social ranking, work identity, and symbolic differentiation in all migratory encounters. What is remarkable in this migratory situation, however, is that foreigners too subscribe to the *Kuwaiti-employer* and *non-Kuwaiti-worker* model, which demarcates deliberate and intuitive patterns of interaction between Kuwaitis and the rest of the population.¹¹² The concept of *kafil* forms the basis for these patterns of interaction, which in turn contribute to a broad nationalistic construction of socioeconomic and behavioural ranking between locals and foreigners.

¹¹⁰ This criterion was said to be a founding principle in the major Kuwaiti Civil Law’s approaches to the form and content of contracting between individuals in general.

¹¹¹ There is no distinction between labourer and worker in the Kuwaiti laws. However, because the LL is mainly designed for sponsored employees in the private sector, and because Kuwaiti employees’ affairs are regulated by the Civil Service Law, it is generally accepted that ‘workers’ (*al-‘ummal*) refers to non-Kuwaitis, while ‘employees’ (*al-muwazzafin*) are citizens working mainly in the government.

¹¹² Although most Kuwaitis are themselves employees (i.e. working for others), non-Kuwaitis, of whom the majority are low-wage workers, deal with Kuwaitis as their own sponsors/employers, even outside the workplace. This can be seen in daily instances of status affirmation through differences in Kuwaitis’ and workers’ physical gestures, greeting roles, and symbolic transactions of the clothing system, particularly the Kuwaiti national dress, *dishdasha*. For more discussion of the symbolic significance of *dishdasha* in Kuwait, see Tetreault 2000; Longva 1997; and al-Mughni 2001.

Nevertheless, neither the institution of sponsorship nor the structure of interactions it produces can reveal the total variety of associations between Kuwaitis and different immigrant populations. For instance, Palestinians have traditionally dealt with Kuwaitis in a strategically competitive or even advisory style, as many of them have worked as advisors for their sponsors in the recruitment of other immigrants.¹¹³ Palestinians have traditionally been “admired, respected, and emulated by the Kuwaiti merchant class” (Longva 1997: 43). Egyptians have always tended to depersonalise relationships with sponsors and employers, assuming a money-collecting, swift pattern of migration. Hadar Hadramis, however, have attached themselves devotedly to their sponsors/employers and have spent much time and effort in the construction of social relationships that emanate from sponsorship. Although Hadramis have been integrated into the structure of institutional sponsorship, they have very often dealt with it in expressly historical, symbolic, and highly personified terms (see below). As such, Hadar Hadramis have been distinct from all other Arab immigrants, including other Yemenis and non-Hadar Hadramis, in inserting informal personalised content in a prescribed system of control and dependence (i.e. legal sponsorship).

The value of personal and past links

As shown in the individual life histories in Chapter 6, Hadar Hadrami migration to Kuwait is an ongoing history of personal relationships, enduring as a guide for present and future expectations. All Hadar Hadrami interactions in this migratory context involve relationships that were “built on a real past and an extended future” (Duck 1994: xii), which shape Hadrami relational behaviour in the present. The Hadrami connection with Kuwait represents a stream of past constructions of real individuals which are embraced and acted upon by Hadramis in the present. These Hadar Hadrami constructions embody all the continual and incomplete associations that take place during migration to Kuwait. These include stories and memories of travel and return, emotional and social obligations between kin and friends, personal objectives and expectations, and any kind of attachment to a Kuwaiti or several Kuwaitis that an immigrant carries out or has been involved in since his or her initial movement. These constructions are highly individualistic, yet they are not isolated

¹¹³ Not all Palestinians, however, have been capable of assuming such a strategy, for many of them came originally from peasant and poor backgrounds; thus, many were probably very much reliant on personal relationships with Kuwaiti friends, employers, or co-employees (see al-Ghabra 1987).

from a broader Hadar Hadrami understanding of the role of ‘relationships’ and their past dimension or their place in today’s Hadrami community in Kuwait (see below).

Though this past is not deliberately recognised by Hadramis today, nearly every Hadrami I know who has moved to Kuwait has built on a preceding personal, mostly dyadic, relationship with one or more Kuwaitis. Some of these relationships might not have lasted for long, but the kind of ‘obligations’ they established and the symbolic value of their exchange have held through time and under difficult circumstances. Faraj, a 26 year old who came to work in Kuwait in 2003, represents a typical example of how past individual links shape the present. Faraj’s uncle (MB) worked from 1963 until 1985 for a Kuwaiti family as a house cook and then as a guard. When the uncle came for a visit in 2002, he was asked by the eldest son of the uncle’s first, now deceased, *kafil* to bring someone whom he trusted to work as a guard or a *siby* (domestic servant) for the family. The deal that was reached contained its own validation for the two parties. For the uncle, recommending Faraj was part of repaying a debt; it was a “...[recognition] of my deceased *mu‘azzib*’s [an old *kafil*]”¹¹⁴ favour when he cared for me when I starved or got ill and when he adopted me like a *son*, not a *servant*.” For the Kuwaiti son, the transaction had no clear short-term or accumulating economic interest¹¹⁵ but functioned as a symbolic and moral reassertion of the figure and authority of his father, hence serving as a continuation of the value of the hierarchy within the family house.

The Kuwaiti process of reconstructing a ‘private past’ is conveyed and revived through an emphasis on values of obligation, kindness, trust, and even equality with those old dependents and their offspring. It is only in this manner, as lifelong dependents, that the majority of Hadar Hadramis today are espoused and considered valuable as family-like immigrants in the social life of many Kuwaitis. In fact, having a Hadrami, or anyone affiliated with an old Hadrami, perhaps another Yemeni,¹¹⁶ is becoming a noticeable trend among middle- and high-class *Hadar* Kuwaitis. Overall,

¹¹⁴ I discuss the difference between the *kafil* and the *mu‘azzib* below.

¹¹⁵ The Kuwaiti son would have had access to thousands of servants, including Egyptians, Indians, and Bangladeshi Muslims, who were willing to take any job at a much lower salary than the Hadrami would expect. Hadramis expect to be paid higher salaries than other Arabs or Muslim Asians who work for families.

¹¹⁶ Other Yemenis, however, did not traditionally associate with Kuwaitis in the way Hadar Hadramis did. In other words, Yemenis—particularly those of *Yaf’i* origins and North Yemeni farmers—were not extensively pulled into the Kuwaiti domestic sphere of work. Thus, they were not as important as the Hadar Hadramis, who came to be part of a Kuwaiti reconstruction of past domestic family structure and ideology.

a *Hadrami past in Kuwait* continues to be the most significant avenue for Hadar Hadramis' in-migration and determines the patterns of interaction with Kuwaitis.

Against this background, one can account for Hadar Hadramis' understanding of the *kafalah* system and patterns of interaction with the *kafil*. Hadar Hadramis see the *kafalah* as just another source of supremacy and affluence for any Kuwaiti who may, or may not, strive to reassure the growth and the value of a social and sentimental relationship that developed through migration. Thus, for many Hadramis I conversed with, the *kafalah* (as a legally binding contract) is just a trivial documentation of one's 'prolonged visit'. Perhaps the only direct encounter that most Hadramis experience with the Kuwaiti legal system occurs when they are formally granted an entry visa and a residency stamp in their passports. After that, a Hadrami cares less about his legal status than about his standing in the eyes of his *kafil*, or even someone who represents a potential *kafil* for a kinsman or friend. Maintenance of the relationship with the *kafil* endures as a persistent daily concern; therefore, several of my informants frequently complained about the burden of the unrelenting socio-moral obligations of the *kafalah*.

These kinds of obligations, however, reveal a major inconsistency (seen here as central in the construction of peonage debt) in the Hadrami-Kuwaiti relationships that developed as a result of the *kafalah*. For now, though, such inconsistency opens the way for the analysis of the *kafalah* as grounds for interpersonal relationships that have a prescribed official and socio-historical structure and meaning. Using systematic materials, I will show how the *kafil* was perceived and thus approached by Hadramis before considering the characteristics and implications of the Hadrami-*kafil* relationships for this migration. To do so, I use some general themes (or patterns) of interpersonal interaction known in ethnographic literature. Together, these themes will form a model of the development of the debt-peonage relationship that emerged through Hadar Hadramis' long-term bonds with Kuwaitis.

Thus, in light of Eisenstadt and Roniger's (1984) insightful analytic survey of a wide range of ethnographic writings on interpersonal relationships, I discuss the Hadrami-Kuwaiti patterns of interaction.¹¹⁷ However, prominent amongst these

¹¹⁷ There is a good body of anthropological writing on variations on the interpersonal relationship (i.e. patron-client relationship, friendship, and pseudo-kinship). Examples of ethnographies on Middle Eastern societies are Gilsenan 1996; Gellner and Waterbury 1977; Combs-Schilling 1985; Caton 1987; Khalaf 1977; and Eickelman 1998, especially pp. 55-65. On Central and South America, see a relatively comprehensive work by Wolf and Hansen (1972).

writings was the patron-client pattern of relationship, which at some point occupied a central place in anthropological research on social differentiation, personal alliances, and individual networking. While there are some commonalities between the debt-peonage relationship that I am arguing for here and the patron-client interpersonal relationships in other parts of the world, the significance of the variations between the two cannot be ignored. Most research on patron-client and other interpersonal relationships has derived patterns of such links from within intra-community, mainly peasant, socio-political life. In such communities, persons were socially and historically tied to each other in a system of exchange that was usually based on predetermined expectations about power location and distribution within the community. These studies showed that members of those communities usually had a shared perspective on the value of patronage for the social structure as a whole. Here the degree of freedom to undo these social links was very minimal, though not totally absent, while in the Hadrami case the extent of choice in entering into a personal relationship with a Kuwaiti through the *kafalah* has always been greater. This is because, for instance, the historical and cultural context of the Hadar Hadrami peonage in Kuwait is hardly comparable to the patron-client association known in neighbouring Arab communities. Conversely, the parties' understanding of the social exchange that results from Hadrami-Kuwaiti relationships is neither shared nor similar for Kuwaitis and Hadramis. I illustrate these variations throughout the rest of the chapter.

'A kafil dies; a mu'azzib never':¹¹⁸ legal and social sponsorship

The Hadrami understanding of the *kafalah* and the relationship with the *kafil* is essentially shaped by a conceptual figure called the *mu'azzib*. In fact, Hadar Hadramis, more than other Arabs and non-Arab immigrants, have referred to the *kafil* as *mu'azzib*. Before illustrating the meaning of this figure, it is important to explain the term's semantics within the classical and local languages. In formal Arabic, the root 'a-z-b has specific derivatives that mainly denote adjectives of persons' possible standing within a familial or house context. The most important of these derivatives, used in Kuwaiti idiomatic language, are *mu'azzib* (for male) and, to a lesser degree,

¹¹⁸ This is an expression used by a young Hadar Hadrami who told me that he, and others, never thought of the legal *kafalah* once he obtained it. The most significant concern was maintaining an extremely peaceful relationship with the *mu'azzib* (who held a status I refer to as that of a *social sponsor*).

mu'azzibah (lit. the wife of the *mu'azzib*).¹¹⁹ It is important to note that all other derivatives of the root 'a-z-b (such as the *'azib*: one who has no family or who has been away for a long time) revolve around two social categories. The first relates to a person's position within a hierarchy of domestic relations, while the second relates to the degree to which that person is independent within the same setting (*al-Munjid Arabic Dictionary* 1986: 503).

The Kuwaiti *mu'azzib* is a socially established term and a metaphor that has roots in the *Hadari* (urbanite) Kuwaiti house values and patronage relationships indicated in Chapter 2. These include the position and power of the family's head male and the political associations between merchants and *Shaykhs* and dependent and less privileged locals (see al-Naqib 1987). Today, the *mu'azzib* is a real and symbolic figure who can represent one or several socio-political positions simultaneously. He could be an old patron, a social father or mentor, a boss at work, or the head of one or more households. A *mu'azzib* could also be the owner of a shop or the legal *kafil*. The Kuwaiti ruler is called the big *mu'azzib* or the *mu'azzib* of all. Thus, the *mu'azzib* may be defined as a normative socioeconomic and moral position that even an ordinary Kuwaiti acquires as a result of being a *kafil*. Significantly, within the context of migration, the *mu'azzib* is a symbolic figure that encapsulates the power of official authority. Whatever the socioeconomic position of the *mu'azzib*, he always has a degree of control over others' behaviour and has the power to order their lives. *Mu'azzib*, as a label, is always exchanged within a context of social differentiation and affirmation of a certain hierarchy of relationships among persons.

However, a distinction shall be drawn between the *kafil* (legal sponsor) and the *mu'azzib* (social sponsor). To a Hadrami immigrant, the *mu'azzib* is usually the *kafil* or a direct boss at work. But not every *kafil* is the *mu'azzib* of a Hadrami. This is because a *mu'azzib* could be someone who has merely been a first or a previous *kafil*. Therefore, although a Hadrami could have only one *kafil*, he might also be connected with one or, exceptionally, two *mu'azzibs*. There are cases in which a Hadrami immigrant refers to someone as his *mu'azzib* and refers similarly to another who used to be his father's as *kafil/mu'azzib*. Conversely, I heard some Hadramis use *mu'azzib* to denote someone who would be a potential *kafil* for a relative or a friend. In daily

¹¹⁹ It is not uncommon in Kuwait to hear a man referring to his wife (sometimes an older wife or an aged mother) as *mu'azzibah*. Some Kuwaitis refer to someone as their *mu'azzib* if the latter is temporarily hosting them during a specific social occasion. The use of the word *mu'azzib* is honorific and temporary in such a context.

practice, however, a *mu'azzib* is not directly addressed with this label; terms like 'uncle', 'father', or 'father of' are used instead.

An important point of comparison must be discussed here. One can find some resemblance between the *mu'azzib* and the *ṭabin* in rural farming areas in Hadramawt. The *ṭabin* can be a landowner, a fishing boat owner, a trader, or a moneylender. Some of my informants made analogies regarding the *mu'azzib* and the *ṭabin* yet believed that their relationship with the *ṭabin* was based on 'open exploitation' and 'forced employment' similar to certain patron-client relationships found in parts of the Arab world. My older informants had themselves been subjected to the system of *tubanaḥ*.¹²⁰ This system worked through sharecropping, servitude, and peonage, in which landowners and shop traders employed people in the community through food or a cash credit process. In the case of *tubanaḥ*, debt could accumulate viciously and be inherited from father to son. Moreover, the whole process of searching for a job was carried out through a *ṭabin* and was intended only to lessen the debt, not as a means of earning extra income.¹²¹ I have insufficient data on the development of *tubanaḥ* and its socioeconomic role in Hadramawt today.¹²² However, some important points should be mentioned.

First, I was astonished by the number of informants who were working in Kuwait to repay 30 years or more of *tubanaḥ* debt. Abu 'Ali and his son (both working in Kuwait) continuously borrowed money from one or more *ṭabin* to finance their travels back and forth from Kuwait. Abu 'Ali continued to borrow cash from a landowner in his village whenever he needed to go back to Kuwait after a family visit. Others had been unable to pay off an old *tubanaḥ* debt that was the result of a short-term sharecropping or indenture process. The exact amount of that debt was only vaguely, if ever, calculated by Hadrami immigrants I spoke with, but they confirmed

¹²⁰ The system was common in peasantry economies in Hadramawt and in many ways resembled the cash-for-credit system, which was mostly carried out through the patron-client associations described in Chapter 2.

¹²¹ Presently the *tubanaḥ* persists as an employment and debt-bondage system. The *tubanaḥ* was terminated formally under the socialist rule of South Yemen, when many landlords were ordered to share their land with peasants. As a result of this process, then called 'agrarian reform', many of the well-off landowners departed with their valuable possessions to Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. In 1990, the unification of North and South Yemen motivated landowners to return because the government allowed landowners to invest privately and to use local labourers through various forms of contracts, including the cash-for-credit system.

¹²² For more on the history of economic practices in the farming areas of coastal Hadramawt, see Boxberger 2002: 97-120; and Bin Shaykhan on the area of Ghayl Ba Wazir (n.d.). For firsthand data on the *ṭabin* and farmers' economic behaviour in the Tarim area in interior Hadramawt, see Dostal 1984: 282-252.

that they were indebted to someone who kept a record. Nevertheless, I have found that some of my informants kept what I call 'scratch inventories'¹²³ of their debts to one or more *tabin*. A comparison of one of Abu 'Ali's debt records with the one held by a famous *tabin* in al-Qarah village showed an immense discrepancy between the two.¹²⁴ Abu 'Ali, though, never asked about his debt publicly; when I inquired about this topic, his response was furious and surprising. "What do you want me to do!? Ask him in front of others! ... After all these years abroad my family and friends believe that I am full of money and would never imagine that I still need the *tabin*'s money or help." Recently, all of Abu 'Ali's three sons immigrated to Kuwait to help him repay his 'Hadrami debt'.¹²⁵

Second, both the *tubanah* and *mu'azzib* system involve an accumulation of debt. However, an important distinction between the *tubanah* and Kuwaiti sponsorship is that, in the Hadrami system, debt is understood as accumulative in monetary terms only. Within the Kuwaiti *mu'azzib* system, debt is binding as a 'moral load' on the Hadrami side. Thus, the essence of the debt is seen as originating from the acceptance or the 'lenience' (in Hadrami terms) of a *mu'azzib/kafil* on whom one is dependent. This debt also has a historical weight that has been transmitted as a boon through generations of immigrants.¹²⁶ Young Hadar Hadramis who had never been involved directly in house-to-house migration frequently spoke about the 'days of house work' (*ayyam shughul al-buyut*) in the 1950s and 1960s as if it entailed a collective debt to a place (Kuwait) which at some point embraced them, and their fathers, at no cost. But the feeling of being continuously indebted to the place is a powerful moral and experiential drive, and some Hadar Hadramis seem apologetic about the expansion or duration of this debt. In other words, debt in this sense is measured in time and moral weight. To Hadar Hadramis, though, there is no payment to be made *per se*, except a continuing commitment to show willingness, loyalty, and

¹²³ I call these 'scratch inventories' because the information they contained was often unreadable or incomprehensible even to the immigrants who kept them. In such inventories it was possible to find miscellaneous information such as numbers and names; poetry; lists of purchases; and agreements written on materials like a piece of newspaper, an old letter from family, or even the wall.

¹²⁴ The *tabin*, who worked in Kuwait for some time from the late 1950s to 1965, refused to show me all his debt records. Nonetheless, he asked me to send a message to Abu 'Ali that he was willing to forgive him a great proportion of the debt. The *tabin*'s gesture of good intention seems to have changed, though, because Abu 'Ali now has all of his three sons working in Kuwait. This increases the pressure on Abu 'Ali to repay the whole amount of his Hadrami 'debt'.

¹²⁵ Two of his sons were sponsored by Abu 'Ali's *mu'azzib*, the other by a young Kuwaiti *Shaykh*.

¹²⁶ This is because Hadar Hadramis believed that they were unique in their connection with Kuwait, which was perceived to be a 'long lasting affection' between Kuwaitis and Hadramis.

conformity to *repay* and to show reciprocation to Kuwait. Being indebted, however, is in itself a stress, a burden as Hadramis would say, of a special kind.

Bin Sa'ad, who worked at his *mu'azzib*'s real estate company as a courier for more than 35 years, expressed his emotions regarding this type of debt: "I feel that it is unfair and inappropriate to leave my *mu'azzib*, although all my years I made nothing, only exhaustion and humiliation. I could have got rid of this pressure but it is impossible to lay it off one's back; we are addicted to this now." Hence, being morally indebted is to some Hadramis a psychological constriction that needs to be handled through a calm or satisfactory relationship with the *mu'azzib*. To others, it is one reason for being away from family and home for a prolonged period of time. For still other Hadramis, experiencing a sense of moral debt only means that a relationship with a *mu'azzib* is extending beyond the material level to a form of social connectedness that confers high value on the Hadrami as an indispensable person. These Hadramis speak about the *mu'azzib* as morally equal to or even dependent on the Hadrami, without whom it would be difficult to manage. I now situate these variations in the context of the Hadrami-Kuwaiti debt-peonage interpersonal relationship.

Availability and readiness to serve the *mu'azzib* characterise the daily activity of Hadar Hadramis. The greater the availability of a Hadrami to his *mu'azzib*, the more tasks he must execute. Higher availability entails greater moral attachment between the two, as well as more Hadrami personal dependency on an external source of power. In reality, this readiness is a continuation of the house *siby* lifestyle, only now the *siby* is 'around' rather than in the house. The house-to-house migration experience works as a schema of Hadrami immigrant behaviour and relatedness to Kuwaitis. It also determines the Kuwaiti impression of and expectations about Hadramis in specific ways.

Mubarak, 45, is sponsored by his *mu'azzib* but works as a courier in a local company, which belongs to his *mu'azzib*'s friend. Mubarak arrived under article 20 (domestic servant). By law, he violated his job designation and some employer/sponsor regulations, but he, like other Hadar Hadramis, managed to do so through the protection of his *mu'azzib*. Although Mubarak never refuses to do a free service for his employer, he is more connected to his *mu'azzib*, who was his last *kafil* before the war in 1991. Mubarak frequently complained about his inability to meet the demands of both the employer and the *mu'azzib*. The *mu'azzib* gave Mubarak a

compact car and a mobile. He also paid some of the travel costs whenever Mubarak intended to visit home. Occasionally, on his summer vacations, the *mu'azzib* would take Mubarak with him to 'help' during travel. As Mubarak's legal sponsor, the *mu'azzib* (through his connections at the Ministry of the Interior) also enabled Mubarak to obtain visiting permits easily for his wife and children.¹²⁷

In return, Mubarak performs specific tasks for his *mu'azzib*, ones that other Hadramis share with him. These tasks are referred to by Hadramis as 'help services'. Help services include shopping for the *mu'azzib*, completing bureaucratic paper work, repairing the family car, taking children to and from school, and various tedious tasks. Thus, at night, Mubarak never turns off his mobile, lest his *mu'azzib* ask him to do something. Although Mubarak's passport was not confiscated by his *kafil*, like other Hadramis, Mubarak may not leave the country without his *mu'azzib*'s and employer's consent. Thus the actual decision to travel home or to return forever is in itself another burden of a special kind. Nevertheless, Hadramis are much freer than other immigrants to retain their passports, and they express pride in the fact that they are trusted and given the option to travel when they need to. But this trust originates from the fact, and presumption, that Hadramis will always be around, available, and forthcoming about what they will do the next day. Hence, a passport in the Hadrami's hand increases both trust and the Hadrami's availability. During and after work, Mubarak carries out paper work for his *mu'azzib*, which puts him in constant contact with the Kuwaiti bureaucracy.

A Hadrami like Mubarak is a *face saver* for his *mu'azzib*. Bureaucracy in the local political culture is viewed as the state arena, a national context where only personal relationships play a central role. Every point of access to it is underlined by the prominent socio-political practice of favouritism (*wastah*). The Kuwaiti bureaucracy, as represented in governmental processes, for example, consumes a great deal of time and effort. An irony of Kuwaiti bureaucracy is that those who need smooth access to it are the majority who operate it (i.e. Kuwaitis). Kuwaiti favouritism involves a complex array of personal dealings and trade offs between

¹²⁷ Visitors to Kuwait must be called for by a Kuwaiti person who guarantees them, or by a business that must show reasons for the visit, or by a visitor's family member who works in Kuwait and whose salary is no less than 400 KD. This last condition was recently changed, as the salary was reduced to 250 KD, but Hadramis like Mubarak and other expatriates in Kuwait have hesitated to bring their families because rents have been rising unstopably ever since the MSAL's declaration of these changes.

employees at different places within the government and may be seen as guided by a simple rule: I do you a favour here, and you do another for me there, and so on. More significantly, favouritism is an instrument of individuals' social mobilisation. An individual's effectiveness can thus be measured by his ability to get things done in the bureaucracy, particularly in terms of procedures that Kuwaitis refer to as the hard ones or the 'non-movers', *jamidah*. If someone can complete these procedures, others may see him as a 'big *wastah*'.

An example of a 'non-mover' is an application which unmistakably does not satisfy any of the requirements for a high-level government position. If some *wastah* intervenes and the application is accepted, the application has been 'moved' through his favour.¹²⁸ The non-movers are the 'heavy stuff' and are distinguished from the 'light stuff' that involves long queues. Non-movers are the speciality of 'big *wastahs*'—the highly capable and influential persons who never stand in a queue. Even an ordinary Kuwaiti is not expected to wait in a line; it is assumed that he must know a *wastah* who saves him the wait. A famous catchphrase used by Kuwaitis and foreigners alike is: "A Kuwaiti never stands in a queue." Seeing Kuwaitis in a queue is uncommon, particularly in state institutions, and not standing in queues distinguishes Kuwaitis from all the rest. To most Kuwaitis, standing in a queue is seen as a humiliating act; thus, many hand in their papers and leave, returning when the paper work is finished. Some foreigners, too, view Kuwaitis who line up with them as deprived, marginal, and ineffective people in their own country. Therefore, locals' involvement in the processes of Kuwaiti bureaucracy entails a compromise of prestige, as well as a loss of face or a symbolic drop-off of one's image in front of immigrants, who are perceived as being last in line within the national context. Hadramis only carry out the light stuff for the *mu'azzib*; thus, Mubarak, and every Hadrami courier I know, saves his *mu'azzib* from face loss within the Kuwaiti bureaucracy.

A Hadrami and a *mu'azzib* have a *lifelong association*. Any relationship with a *mu'azzib* is expected to endure as a binding social obligation, despite the fact that it can be voluntarily and officially abandoned (Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984: 43; 49).¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Although favouritism shapes local social relationships and is taken for granted as a practice, Kuwaitis joke about the role of favouritism in their lives, saying that Kuwait is the only place where impossible things can happen.

¹²⁹ Note that Eisenstadt and Roniger used the term 'abandoned' with regard to patron-client relationships in a community, not in reference to relationships between immigrants and sponsors.

Yet a Hadar Hadrami never withdraws openly or dramatically from a relationship with a *mu'azzib*. A *mu'azzib* relationship may decrease in closeness through the aging of an immigrant, for instance, or other uncontrollable circumstances like death and the physical separation after the 1991 war, but Hadar Hadramis of Kuwait remain attached to their *mu'azzibs*, despite seniority, death, and physical separation. For instance, Karamah, 57, whose *mu'azzib* died years ago, came to Kuwait on a visit in 2003 and remained there when the *mu'azzib*'s family transferred his visit visa to article 20 (domestic servant) and asked him to live with them. I met with Karamah at his *mu'azzib*'s house in a rich area in Kuwait. Again, like many Hadar Hadramis, his legal job designation is private servant, though he actually works as a shop assistant at his *mu'azzib*'s brother's textile company. When he returns to the family's house, he performs domestic activities that mainly involve pouring coffee and tea for visitors. For Karamah, the personality of his deceased *mu'azzib* endures in the family: "Even if they did not ask me to serve them I would have been satisfied with just being around the memory of my *mu'azzib*." In Kuwait I met with several old Hadramis who had been out of Kuwait for years following the 1991 war but made a costly trip to visit the *mu'azzib* and 'to see Kuwait'. During the visit, an old Hadrami would offer to work for a *mu'azzib* or to bring a son or a relative to work in Kuwait. Some found *shaghlah murihah* (a non-demanding job) at a *mu'azzib*'s business or house.¹³⁰ Others were satisfied with whatever the *mu'azzib* advanced as gratitude (i.e. money). Still others, constituting the majority of old Hadrami visitors, paid more frequent visits to revive or to reconfirm old 'friendships' with their *mu'azzibs*.¹³¹

A relationship with a *mu'azzib* is sustained through the *zakat* and *sadaqat*¹³² or other monetary forms of aid that the *mu'azzib* wishes to remit. Such remittances may also take the form of basic subsistence items, such as rations and other goods, particularly during the month of Ramadan. In Hadramawt, ex-immigrants wait for these items annually; some have specific due dates for their transactions. A continuation of a *mu'azzib* contract is considered a personal success to some ex-

¹³⁰ By law, 'non-skilled' or non-professional immigrants should not be reissued a work visa if they exceed 60 years of age. However, several Hadramis over the age of 60 have remained in Kuwait through a *wastah* by their *mu'azzibs*.

¹³¹ I discuss the meaning of such friendship below.

¹³² Two Islamic religious-economic practices essential for a Muslim's application of Islamic principles. These are mainly directed to the poor and other weak sections of society. In many cases, Hadar Hadramis referred to *sadaqat* and *zakat* as remittances (*tahwilat*) or 'transactions from Kuwait' whether made in monetary or goods form.

immigrants, for this is seen as an indication that one was cherished and honoured¹³³ (*yan'azz*) by one's *mu'azzib*. The payments received from Kuwait increase satisfaction among ex-immigrants, yet the Hadrami expectation of a lifelong association with a former sponsor also reinforces whole families' total dependence on an external source of income. In all, the Hadrami faith in the external source of help makes debt-peonage a self-perpetuating system outside of the individuals themselves.

A Hadrami-*mu'azzib* relationship is not based on friendship or pseudo-kinship notions. I propose such notion despite the existence of a strong element of emotional and spiritual attachment in the majority of cases (discussed below). In fact, the whole relationship may be couched (by Hadramis and Kuwaitis) in terms of altruistic giving, intimacy, and personal loyalty between 'friends'. Sometimes Hadramis depict themselves as 'sons', and the *mu'azzib* as a 'father', 'uncle', or 'big brother'. More often, the Hadramis I interacted with talked about the ease, humbleness, and accepting nature of the Kuwaitis for whom they worked. Usually, this depiction of a Kuwaiti *mu'azzib* is offered in comparison to other Hadrami immigrants' relationships in neighbouring states. For example, Hadramis of Kuwait think that the formality of work and migration found in Saudi Arabia is the most depressing aspect of Hadrami life there. Hadramis of Kuwait who had lived and worked in Saudi Arabia told me that it was very hard to establish a 'friendship' or to socialise with Saudis informally. Salih Humayd (who currently works as a courier in a Kuwaiti company) worked in Saudi Arabia after fleeing Kuwait during the war of 1991. The Hadrami community in Saudi Arabia was much larger and very well established politically and economically, and Salih's work was stable and rewarding. Nevertheless, in 1994 he called his former Kuwaiti *mu'azzib* (hotel businessman) and asked him to re-sponsor him on a visa status, which he did. In a life history interview, Salih complained that Saudis were generally rude and that his boss had no interest in socialising with him. "My salary here is less than what I used to make in Saudi Arabia, but there you feel a constant pressure ... almost isolated, you are disconnected from the place. In Kuwait I can go visit my *mu'azzib* in his weekly gathering at his house. With the *mu'azzib* I feel safe and relaxed ... like friends."¹³⁴

¹³³ I am not certain whether these two terms are the exact English equivalent of *yan'azz*. In all, when a person is being *yan'azz* by someone else, the former is usually thought of as being 'lifted up' from the need of others.

¹³⁴ The contrast between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait is occasionally expressed to show the Hadramis' sympathy with Kuwaitis in casual conversations, but it is not removed from the fact that Hadramis have

I will return to Salih's story later on. For now, I shall emphasise that to a great extent, his belief in 'friendship' with his *mu'azzib* reflects what he sees as an advantageous closeness to his Kuwaiti sponsor. Other Hadar Hadramis share Salih's views, which are reinforced by the Hadrami *de facto* practice of dual sponsorship (*mu'azzib/kafil*). Nevertheless, these views find their origin in the dyadic nature of the interaction itself. To explain this, I show the Hadar Hadrami logic of the meaning of relationships of this nature. Hadar Hadramis believe that any relationship (legal or social sponsorship) that develops between a Hadrami and *mu'azzib* is the result of the latter's voluntary *acceptance* of that relationship. This is because, given the availability of many skilled and cheaper labourers, a Kuwaiti *mu'azzib* is under no obligation to accept a Hadrami. Hadramis think of this as a generous act, one that subjects someone to constant *khajal* (embarrassment) before his *mu'azzib* or his affiliates. Thus, the sponsor is the initiator of the relationship and the Hadrami is a recipient of what becomes, once established, a standing *offer* that must be preserved and safeguarded.

The offer is maintained by linking oneself to a *mu'azzib* through personal servitude and availability. In some instances, the *mu'azzib* does not in fact need the Hadrami's service for any practical purpose, but there is a clear *mu'azzib* preference to have the Hadrami around, particularly in familiar contexts. It is assumed that the

an idealised image of Kuwait as being 'peaceful', 'prosperous', 'open', and very nationalistic when it comes to Arab brotherhood and unity. This image is usually fashioned through a contrast and comparison between Kuwait and other neighbouring states, namely Saudi Arabia or even Yemen itself. A French anthropologist who recently visited two other Arabian Gulf States and interviewed some established Hadramis who lived and worked in Kuwait until the 1990 crisis said that this image of Kuwait was widespread among these Hadramis, even among their youngsters who had never seen Kuwait. The anthropologist believes that Hadramis hold such an image because Kuwait is more politically 'open' and because they "had a life there" despite the fact that they were not economically successful, as they were in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, where there was no 'margin of freedom' (Camelin 2003, personal communication). In reality, however, and from an insider's view, Kuwait cannot be perceived as peaceful or 'open' (openness is a relative concept), particularly to immigrants. Nevertheless, and while there is some truth to Camelin's view, the reasons behind Hadramis' idealistic image of Kuwait need not only be understood on the basis of a comparison between states and degrees of their 'openness'. An understanding of the nature of the Hadrami and Kuwaiti societies and how they are articulated through the migration processes, how the cultural perception of place and others is reached, and by whom, is also needed in this particular case. It is true that Kuwait did play (and still does play) a very significant part not only in the form of financial donations directed at Yemen's infrastructures, but also in its mediatory role in the frequent and violent Yemeni political conflicts. And it is true that a year before the 1991 war, the Yemenis, those of Hadrami origin in particular, were the only Arab citizens who became entitled to work and settle in Kuwait without being subject to the harsh legal restrictions of the visa and local sponsorship system. These state-to-state relationships contributed to the Hadrami migration to Kuwait, but the continuation of Hadrami presence and 'predilection' for Kuwait, as the chapters together show, is far more complicated than an attachment to an 'open place'.

Hadrami will 'approach' the *mu'azzib* rather than wait until he is summoned. Therefore, in the events I have observed, the *mu'azzib*'s impassivity defines the behavioural rules of the dyadic interaction between the two. A *mu'azzib*'s impassivity is also expected to be met by clear Hadrami acquiescence and docility. I met with Jamal Jum'an, 18, after his first 2 weeks in Kuwait. He used to sit on a chair near the door of his *mu'azzib*'s real estate office. Every time the *mu'azzib* entered or prepared to leave the office, Jamal would stand up and say: "*hala 'ammi, tamir shay?!?*" (lit. "salute, uncle, order me to do anything?!"). Jamal told me that his father and his neighbour in Hadramawt, and his *mu'azzib*'s sons, taught him this Kuwaiti greeting style. The word *'ammi* (uncle) is used by unrelated Kuwaitis, mainly to address someone who is a senior or father-in-law. It is still used by Kuwaiti ex-slaves and members of other traditionally unprivileged local segments of Kuwaiti society to refer to their old patrons and to address any member of al-Sabah ruling family. The word *'ammi* (lit. FB or father-in-law) in this context does not, however, denote a kinship bond of any kind. It implies, instead, a reassertion of the supremacy of the *mu'azzib* and communicates the devotedness of the Hadrami to service. Indeed, in Kuwaiti society, the use of the word *'ammi* in work situations would be offensive amongst unrelated individuals. To Kuwaitis, *'ammi* is not a proper term of address among those who see themselves as equals. Therefore, it is suitable for, and should only be used by, those who acknowledge a socioeconomic distance between themselves and those to whom they speak.

Hadramis not only acknowledge this distance in the *mu'azzib* relationship, but also preserve it as a hierarchical value. Yet this was downplayed in my conversations with Hadrami immigrants about the superiority that many *mu'azzibs* gained from the Hadrami presence. Instead, the structure and meaning of the relationship are framed by concepts like friendship, trust, father-son care, and other quasi-egalitarian notions. Many affirm that their relation with the *mu'azzib* is the purest form of a two-person friendship, since it does not involve any immediate or grand economic or political matters.

This is also how Salih, sincerely perhaps, understood and established a 'friendship' with an 'uncle'. I expressed my confusion to Salih about how someone could be a friend and an 'uncle', when the latter term clearly denoted inequality in the Kuwaiti context, particularly between an immigrant and a *mu'azzib*. Salih's response was as follows: "Well, can't you have an uncle who likes you like a friend!?" In

reality, though, when Salih goes to his *mu'azzib*'s weekly home gathering, the distance and verticality of the relationship are reproduced in his interaction with the *mu'azzib*. There Salih pours coffee for guests, sits with other servants in the auxiliary room, and eats only when his *mu'azzib* and guests have finished their multiple-course meal. "I know I am not like my *mu'azzib*, but I must regularly show him my face so that I can always be near him." Thus, Salih believes that his performance of such acts—which do not occur between real friends in Kuwait or Hadramawt—only reassures his *mu'azzib* that he has no interest in materialistic gain. Rather, he is there to show his appreciation of the favour of offering him a sponsorship. The logic of an offer gives the *mu'azzib* moral and personal superiority in daily interactions, but it also shapes practices and expectations on both sides.

The daily practices that Hadramis like Jamal and Salih perform are significant because they have always made Hadramis distinct from other immigrants in their interactions with Kuwaitis. Most importantly, these practices have maintained (within mainstream Kuwaiti cultural perceptions of foreigners) an image of the Hadrami as an ever-loyal, easily satisfied, and pleasing figure, accepting the local norms and social order. To Kuwaitis, particularly members of prominent segments of society (to whom Hadar Hadramis were traditionally attached), the 'appropriate' social order should be marked by ubiquitous ranking and power differentiation. To powerful Kuwaitis, the uniqueness of the Hadar Hadrami presence was that it enabled an 'appropriate' social order to be reproduced in a symbolic yet smooth and effective way. This was done through an embedded language of verticality within an intimate discourse of interpersonal connections like friendship, loyalty, and quasi-kinship references.

Any Hadrami-*mu'azzib* relationship is *based on inequality*. The economic dimension of inequality in access to resources between Hadrami immigrants and their legal or social sponsors is ubiquitous and may be seen as constituting grounds for subsequent forms of personal exchange. Needless to say, disparate regional economies brought Kuwaitis and all other immigrants together. And, of course, natives and immigrants in Kuwait invest differently (to an extent complementarily) in constructing the realities of the migration economies of Kuwait. But it would be naïve to examine inequality in this context as being secondary in the materialistic processes of migration. In Kuwaiti society, inequality is *the* political ideology of migration; that is to say, it is a central vision of how resources, space, and all affairs should be arranged and controlled between 'us' as the native employers and 'them' as the

foreign workers. As an ideology, its practical effect is one of prioritising the access and allocation of resources in any arrangement concerning migration policies and immigrants and locals' needs. This ideology is even ubiquitous among ordinary Kuwaitis who might never have engaged with immigrants in a direct economic process or in a sponsorship relationship (whether legal or social). As illustrated in Chapter 2, to these Kuwaitis the ideology works as a guide for cultural legitimacy and historical precedence in constant opposition to a vaguely defined foreign body. As an ideology, it preserves inequality as a political vision and a way of life seen as appropriate and protective by many Kuwaitis, who perceive migration and immigrants as a threat to their very social and cultural existence.¹³⁵

It would be equally simplistic to view the Hadrami-*mu'azzib* interpersonal connection solely in terms of its economic framework. Of course, the material aspect of working with a *mu'azzib* is taken for granted by Hadramis, but this is only realised through a web of cultural and personal attitudes about the social value of being near, even protected by, a Kuwaiti *mu'azzib*. Specifically, Hadrami material objectives are only reached by positioning oneself in a symbolically and factually unequal life setting with the Kuwaiti sponsor. This form of inequality leaves no ground for disclosing, contesting, or sometimes even questioning that inequality directly. There are, however, Hadar Hadramis who are aware of, or have been subject to domination, even direct coercion, as a result of a peonage relationship with a Kuwaiti *mu'azzib*. Ironically, though, these Hadramis, who might have contested such inequality, were, in the cases I knew, accused by their own communities of betrayal of their *mu'azzibs*, of being arrogant and wanting to be 'successful' like Palestinians and Lebanese. They were also viewed as defective individuals who did not deserve to be near prosperity. I know of one person who was even marginalised by his own family and friends when he decided to terminate an unfair relationship with his *mu'azzib* and went back to Hadramawt.¹³⁶ He was constantly stigmatised as a failure.

¹³⁵ Some Kuwaiti intellectuals and state planners (see for instance al-Najjar et al. 1988; al-Tamimi 1983) saw a security issue in the fact that there was an immigrant majority and local minority. Longva (1997) explored such protective concerns in their relationship to the Kuwaiti social order and their general implications for Kuwait's exclusionary migration policies.

¹³⁶ Seventeen years after leaving his *mu'azzib*, the same person is now back working in Kuwait for another *mu'azzib* as a driver. Surprisingly, he was directed to this new social/legal sponsor by the original *mu'azzib*. He saw his relationship with his new *mu'azzib* as more successful, more intimate, and more promising because his son was also preparing to join him to work for the same *mu'azzib*.

In the Hadrami-*mu'azzib* interaction, no form of power struggle emerges, because power is assumed to have resided for a long time, even eternally, on one side of the relationship—that of the *mu'azzib*. Hadar Hadramis never think of or speak about replacing the *mu'azzib*'s status or taking over his riches. Hadar Hadramis of Kuwait do not struggle to enhance their economic conditions relative to that of the *mu'azzib*, or even to the conditions of other immigrants. Rather, Hadar Hadramis' only focus is on how to improve the terms of inequality in a way that conserves the relationship forever. Being part of an unequal relationship is the only way for Hadar Hadrami immigrants to sustain a more or less steady source of income. Inequality itself is preserved as 'a way of life' during and after one's migration has ended. In this Hadrami migratory experience, inequality is perpetuated through a core value and practice of *dependency*.

The Hadrami-*mu'azzib* relationship is intended to be, and is presented by both parties as, an ideal experience which evades any economic intentions and manipulative or competitive practices seen to have characterised other immigrants' relations with Kuwaiti sponsors. What is usually presented as exemplary in the Hadrami-*mu'azzib* association, however, is conveyed as an 'inherent hierarchy', which is celebrated through forms of dependency that suppress the possibility of any competition or conflict with the sponsor. This is one of the most significant elements that has maintained Hadrami in-migration to Kuwait. However, as demonstrated later, dependency has contrastive effects on the Hadrami presence in Kuwait.

Dependency as economic security and personal success

Hadar Hadramis are almost totally reliant on working abroad, as they are tied to external sources of income. In the case of Kuwait, resources that Hadramis usually seek (i.e. steady income) can only be accessed through local individuals (legal or social sponsors). Among the majority of non-Hadrami immigrants I have seen, there has always been a focus on sources of income and their long-term economic qualities rather than on the person (i.e. *kafil*) who provides them. For Hadar Hadramis, on the other hand, migration has constituted an effort to maintain close and lasting individual relationships. A Hadrami puts effort into maintaining growth and proximity in his relationship with a *mu'azzib*. This Hadar Hadrami tendency is not irrelevant to the cultural and socioeconomic background that this group shares with some other immigrant communities in Kuwait (i.e. a rural, peasant life marked by need and

poverty). The question of why Hadar Hadramis were distinct in their migration to Kuwait and were easily integrated in dependency dyadic relations has already been examined in chapters 2 and 4. For now I shall examine other aspects of dependency.

First, being dependent *in* and *on* a *mu'azzib* relationship is the only way through which Hadar Hadramis think they can repay the moral debt that somehow accumulates with sponsorship. Second, dependency is not thought of in terms of inequality, but is seen by Hadramis as a reward that comes from a *mu'azzib* relationship. Third, dependency creates a symbolic form of exchange between the powerful independent *mu'azzib* and an integrated figure of his capability, in this case the Hadrami. The Hadrami-*mu'azzib* relationship does not involve any tangible or significant 'give-and-take' economic dealings, given that many Hadramis do not directly work for the *mu'azzib*. Rather, the Hadrami is only part of a wider set of relations in the economic and social life of his *mu'azzib*. Hadramis, relative to what their *mu'azzibs* actually do, are economically insignificant and can be replaced at any time by others. A Hadrami is kept because he performs dependency on the *mu'azzib* as if it were natural inequality, which reflects a desirable local socio-political and moral order of migration and immigrants' behaviour. Finally, Hadar Hadramis, to a certain extent, vary in the degree of their dependency on the *mu'azzib* figure. Nonetheless, the vast majority have migrated, found work through a social sponsor, or 'retired' (see below) under the supervision of one or more *mu'azzibs*.

When a Hadrami becomes dependent on his *mu'azzib*, he is then expected not to attempt to invest in the relationship in any material or, perhaps more significantly, prestigious way. Of course, many Hadramis do gain some prestige (for example, when they return home on visits) from the relationship with a *mu'azzib*, especially if the latter is known as powerful in his locality. But the irony of building and maintaining prestige through dependency is far more complicated than it might seem. The Hadrami is expected to avoid any act that would 'lower' his *mu'azzib*'s prestige in front of other Kuwaitis as well as foreigners. The more a Hadrami shows dependency on his *mu'azzib*, the more the *mu'azzib* gains prestige and strengthens his symbolic worth.

Nevertheless, what most Hadar Hadramis want from a dependency relation is security. To Hadramis, an individual is secure when his *mu'azzib* protects him from bureaucratic and state apparatuses, particularly those related to immigrants. Hadramis are not particularly concerned with migration policies, for these have usually favoured

them over other immigrant nationalities. To be secure, a Hadrami needs assurance of the continuation of a monthly income, which is mainly achieved through the *mu'azzib's* satisfaction. As shown in the example below, however, the need for security and hence dependency continues even after the immigrant's 'final' return. At all levels of interaction (at work or during the *mu'azzib's* social time), a Hadrami's availability means that his time and effort are services transferred to the *mu'azzib*, who can capitalise on them symbolically and socially. As such, the typical Hadar Hadrami-*mu'azzib* relationship is not cast as an economic transaction (i.e. a trade, or an exchange of goods) between the two. For both, the rationalisation of the relationship is of an 'accepted' inequality that eludes worldly matters, relying upon emotional attachment, loyalty, and trust between different peoples. This could explain how an old and famous image came about among Kuwaitis of the Hadrami as an easily satisfied and non-ambitious person.

When a Hadrami meets the expectations of his *mu'azzib* (i.e. by demonstrating that he is devoted materially and prestigiously), he is said to be loyal, and the whole relationship is seen by others as an ideal situation of serenity and honesty. A Hadrami meets all of his *mu'azzib's* expectations (and he thus is ideally dependent) when he is meticulously responsive to all the directions given by the *mu'azzib*, including moral instructions on personal behaviour and life decisions.

An indication of this dependency relationship is the Hadrami's responsiveness to his *mu'azzib's* directions. But the quality of orders that a Hadrami receives from his *mu'azzib* indicates his level of success as a person. Success is sometimes measured by the duration of a relationship with a *mu'azzib*. For example, while an old Hadar Hadrami was asked by his *mu'azzib* to bring his son to work in a certain job, his son was ordered to learn the Kuwaiti coffee and tea pouring manners and to wear a Kuwaiti *dishdasha* (Kuwaiti dress). In the Hadrami father's case, following the *mu'azzib's* order to bring the son meant greater satisfaction of the Kuwaiti with his dependent and greater achievement for the Hadrami. The acculturation process that the son and other newcomers had to undergo did not always come about. This is probably why some Kuwaitis hold that while Hadramis tend to look like them, they are funny in their outlook and in the ways they try to imitate the Kuwaiti vernacular. Nonetheless, for the *mu'azzibs* as well as for the Hadramis, a vulgar acculturation process sustains and justifies the need for more commands and also increases the moral supremacy on one side of the relationship.

There are other forms of *mu'azzib* orders. Such orders include advice, gestures, hints, and expectations of serving the desires and the orientations of the *mu'azzib*. For example, Yahya, whose legal sponsor is his *mu'azzib*,¹³⁷ works as a shop assistant in his *kafil*'s company. Ideally, his work requires that he is always in the company from 6 am to 5 pm. He lives with his father in a separate room in the *mu'azzib*'s house. At night, when I used to meet with him, a member of the *mu'azzib*'s family would call on him to go shopping, to take a friend of the family somewhere, and so on. These demands could last well beyond Yahya's bedtime. I asked Yahya why he accepted these conditions, even though it was his time off and his original work hours had already passed. "This is what my *mu'azzib* wanted from me; to work and to serve him—he needed my help. I knew this even though he only asked me once to take the children to school." Serving a *mu'azzib* means that one should prepare oneself to be on standby for an order—anytime, anywhere. Of course, Yahya's father instructs his son on the significance of the *mu'azzib*'s directions and how to be alert for the things that the *mu'azzib* wants but does not verbalise. Every Thursday, during his *mu'azzib*'s weekly gathering, Yahya's father stands at the door of his *mu'azzib*'s house and receives guests while Yahya pours coffee and tea. Late at night, when guests become tired and need a drive home, Yahya's father volunteers, even though the *mu'azzib* has specialist drivers available. "If I don't do this the *mu'azzib* would think that I am acting tired and may be in no need of him anymore." Yahya's father thinks that he himself is now more dependent on his *mu'azzib* than the young Yahya. "I am old now and the only wealth I have in this life is my work and the trust and satisfaction of my *mu'azzib*." Thus, he is always vigilant lest he overlook something that his *mu'azzib* expects him to do.

Dependency has an important status value for the *mu'azzib*, and the more prevalent dependency is, the more its value is reinforced and exchanged within a *mu'azzib*'s family or between different *mu'azzibs* as an accomplishment. Therefore, a *mu'azzib* who is known to be 'kind' to a Hadrami is also interpreted by others around him as being capable of 'adopting others' and also of controlling the direction of their lives. To some *mu'azzibs*, then, any attempt at loosening a dependent relationship, especially if made public, is considered a threat to one's symbolic worth. For example, a Hadrami who has been totally dependent on a *mu'azzib* but shows a desire

¹³⁷ The *mu'azzib* belongs to one of the prominent *Hadar* Kuwaiti families.

for autonomy, or who acts careless regarding his dependency on his *mu'azzib*, attracts different reactions in different cases. These reactions have included physical insults; termination of the legal sponsorship, when one exists; an end to all social sponsorship; and even deportation of the immigrant. All of these reactions were rare in the Hadrami experiences I encountered during fieldwork, but since they did happen, it is important to show how and why a *mu'azzib* would react to a change in dependency in a specific way.

The story of 'Ashur shows the extent to which a Hadrami dependency is significant for the *mu'azzib*'s symbolic construction of his public power status. 'Ashur wanted to change his work, so he went to his *mu'azzib* and asked him to find him a comfortable non-demanding job:

My *mu'azzib* directed me to his brother, who recruited me in his company as a guard. My *mu'azzib*'s brother also held a high position in the Ministry of the Interior. In this job they wanted me to learn complicated stuff, but I didn't; I was feeble-minded, ignorant, I didn't want to learn. I didn't like it, thus I went again to my 'uncle' (*mu'azzib*) and asked him to find me another job. He called his brother at the Ministry of the Interior and told him to find me a job as *farrash* (peon) at his office. But I didn't go to take the position, for I found another job recommended by a Hadrami friend. Days later my *mu'azzib* caught me at the market: "You *dishonoured me and lowered and blackened my face* in front of my brother." He slapped me, and I started crying. But then he seated me and offered me tea. They [Kuwaiti *mu'azzibs*] were lenient ... merciful, he wanted goodness and righteousness for me. They used to view us as their sons ... Thank God, I never misbehaved again.¹³⁸

At some point in time, 'Ashur was legally sponsored by the *mu'azzib*, who took 'Ashur to work for him as a shop assistant in his retail business. 'Ashur's relationship with the *mu'azzib* continued even when the *mu'azzib* transferred his *kafalah* to someone else. The *mu'azzib* was, and is still, one of the most powerful political and economic figures in Kuwait, and the politics of maintaining face were crucial to him. Thus, the social sponsor not only wanted 'Ashur to follow his directions, but also to show that he did so before others. 'Ashur believed that he was morally and emotionally dependent on his *mu'azzib*, for the latter took care of him, directed him towards goodness, and made him behave well. In another interview, 'Ashur told me that he was indebted to his 'uncle', who taught him 'good manners' and how to be respectable as a person. Whether 'Ashur really believed in the moral

¹³⁸ This quotation was part of a 'memory-refreshing' interview, which preceded the more detailed life history of 'Ashur (see appendix).

authority of his *mu'azzib* was, I think, less significant than the fact that part of the moral and prestigious worth of the *mu'azzib* has been built up through what have been seen as insignificant figures like 'Ashur.

The prominent view that a Hadrami-*mu'azzib* association is a lifelong union renders dependency a fact of life for many, even when the two persons are physically separated. As described earlier, a relationship with a *mu'azzib* may persist through *zakat and sadaqat* and other forms of remittances. The practice of dependency in this migration is evident amongst Hadar Hadrami heads of families. These heads of families are ex-immigrants who are physically and financially dependent on others. To them, an old *mu'azzib* (or his family's financial and food supplies) is in reality a system of retirement (i.e. a social pension). Particularly for households that do not have enough members to follow up a father's position with a *mu'azzib*, the need for that aid is almost inevitable. To some families, these pensions are regular and even sustain their basic livelihood. For other families, though, aid is more sporadic or occasional (arriving during Ramadan or 'id), but whenever received raises expectations that more will come. The visit system is instrumental in the continuation of such *mu'azzib* aid; when ex-immigrants are incapable of making the journey, friends and relatives make a visit to the *mu'azzib* on their behalf. Abdullah Bin Sabih, mentioned in Chapter 4, carried out *mu'azzibs'* visits on behalf of others for many years. Abdullah died in 2001, and I only have a friend's recollections of the way he helped his Hadrami fellows. "Every Ramadan, he would go to visit *mu'azzibs* of ex-immigrants and would say to them, 'Help your sons who are jobless, starving, with no one but you to help them'."

Remittances, financial and otherwise, that *mu'azzibs* pay to ex-immigrants and their families are not always generous, and they are never harmful to the *mu'azzib's* budget. In all cases, however, these remittances never make anyone less dependent on this external source of income. Furthermore, the *mu'azzib's* donations are always incomplete in one way or another, which encourages many ex-immigrants to wait for them year after year. However, individuals who receive *mu'azzibs'* aid payments are usually less concerned about their incompleteness than about their due dates and their emotional and moral connectivity with Kuwait and the *mu'azzibs*. The importance of these promotions is that they have a binding element seen by Hadramis as a moral debt that may never be repaid in kind but always must be recognised as such.

Conclusion

Kuwaiti sponsorship is designed as a political, economic, and legal framework for all native-immigrant interactions. The effectiveness of sponsorship resides in the fact that it was designed by the most powerful segments in Kuwaiti society, who used it as a tool for maintaining social control and hierarchy. The social origins of the *kafalah* are reflected in the structural properties of Kuwaiti migratory processes. The most significant structural properties of Kuwaiti migration revolve around the reproduction of hierarchy, the prioritisation of access to resources, and the affirmation of Kuwaiti legitimacy and precedence over foreigners. As immigrants, Hadar Hadramis connect with Kuwait through the social origins of its sponsorship rather than the official organisation. Hadrami house-to-house migration and the continuation of the house *siby* style of work render connectivity with Kuwait more distinctive and sustainable for Hadramis than for other Arab and non-Hadar Hadrami immigrants. One reason for this is that Hadar Hadramis have been available at the right time to fit neatly into a local process of reviving and reinforcing a hierarchy. This process is still well known in the relationships between rich Kuwaiti families and their dependents. Hadar Hadramis were present in the domestic life of many prominent Kuwaitis well before the legal sponsorship system was established. But when it became a necessity, sponsorship was seen by Hadramis as just a re-arrangement of the hierarchy within Kuwaiti society. Its legal framework was not of much concern to Hadramis, as it was assumed that they were always part of that hierarchy, albeit one of its most dependent elements.

Through the concept of moral debt and the practice of debt-peonage, Hadar Hadramis became totally dependent, during and after migration, on the interpersonal relationships they established with Kuwaiti *mu'azzibs*. Although debt-peonage as a practice did not entail any significant economic exchange for the *mu'azzib* and did not involve any major profit for the Hadrami, it was important for Hadramis and *mu'azzibs* alike. Debt-peonage enabled a persistent Hadrami in-migration, and it also reinforced the hierarchical status of certain *mu'azzibs* in their own social settings. In a peonage association, a Hadrami immigrant who is dependent on a Kuwaiti *mu'azzib* has a low structural value, yet his significance resides in the high status which his *mu'azzib* gains when the Hadrami is kept in a low and struggling position within the hierarchy of the *mu'azzib*'s relationships. Debt-peonage is a self-perpetuating system

because, to some ex-immigrants, extended forms of dependency on the *mu'azzib* are still the only means of their livelihood after migration. Thus, within this peonage system, a Hadrami is not a client of any sort, because clients may negotiate terms of exchange for different types of resources and may compromise on aspects of personal influence. The Hadrami examples show that a peon may not be engaged in any significant economic processes—not even a direct work relation—with a *mu'azzib*. A Hadrami peonage means a clear disposition to serve and be available within a wider setting of *mu'azzib* relationships. To some young Hadrami immigrants in Kuwait, like Jamal Jum'an, the readiness to serve and the feeling of indebtedness were taught as a value in family life and throughout generations of immigrants. Indebtedness and peonage became internalised as a 'state of mind' rather than being perceived in terms of experiences of coping with the real structural difference between immigrants and natives in Kuwait.

CHAPTER 6: STORIES OF MIGRATION: DIFFERENT LIVES AND 'A CATASTROPHE'

Introduction

Anthony Fielding (1992) wrote about the difficulties in the study of migration:

There is something strange about the way we study migration. We know [...] that moving from one place to another is nearly always a major event. It is one of those events around which an individual's biography is built. The feelings associated with migration are usually complicated, the decision to migrate is typically difficult to make, and the outcome usually involves mixed emotions [...] Migration is a statement of an individual's worldview, and is, therefore, an extremely cultural event. And yet when we study migration scientifically, we seem to forget all this. (Fielding 1992: 201)

Anthropologists attempt to reconstruct an ethnographic reality from stories, emotions, and events narrated. Thus, they may portray an experience of the past, or even of the present and the future. An ethnography represents social phenomena observed and analysed through the lives of a limited number of individuals of a community in a specific locality. However, migration, as a social process, poses a problem to ethnographic representation, as migration always starts with a link at some point in time and under certain socio-historical conditions which leads to continuous and distinctive social processes across time and space. As such, many aspects of an emigration may not always be observable for the ethnographic inquiry. Yet it is this character of migration that has probably motivated most anthropologists' research on people's movement. In the study of migration, anthropologists, like others, search for social tendencies and variations. To do so, anthropologists of migration employ different techniques that help to generate information needed for interpretation.¹³⁹ The choice of one technique or another is usually predicated upon the research questions and the units and levels of analysis on which researchers operate.

Thus, quantitative techniques would reveal a general association between the size of an immigrant community and the fluctuations in macro labour economics between the sending and receiving societies. While quantification shows frequencies, it does not reveal the subjective experience of an individual or how an individual's experience might reflect that of a social collectivity. To explore the latter micro level analysis where a household, or an individual's life, is used to explore a broader

¹³⁹ See Kearney (1986), Gmelch (1980), and Brettell (2003) for a review of such approaches.

history and context of a migration. Ethno-historical techniques (such as life history or biographies) are suitable for a micro level of analysis and have been used by anthropologists since the 1920s, though not particularly concerning migration (Radin 1933; Mintz 1979; Vansina 1985; Gulliver and Silverman 1995; Besteman 1993; Taylor 1983; Angrosino 1989). The use of biographic materials is relatively recent in ethnographic research on migration (Poggie 1973; Kikemura 1981; Constable 1997; Gmelch 1992; Brettell 1995).

As a process, migration is methodologically problematic: how does one analyse, and what techniques are needed to understand, the varieties of a socio-historical phenomenon that is simultaneously shaped by the interactions of individuals and structures? For instance, a Hadar Hadrami's movement to Kuwait is more or less individualistic (i.e. based on personal factors and character-related reasons), but it is carried out through the household structure, friendship, and regional relations. An objective of this chapter, then, is to attempt to address these issues by approaching migration as a social process that operates at three different levels (Faist 1997: 188; Hoerder 1997: 78). First, migration is a *structural* process involving specific state-to-state economic, legal, and political relationships. Second, it can also be analysed at a *relational* meso-level between structural and individual relationships. Finally, it exists at an *individual* level. Understanding migration, then, necessitates the use of different data sources and analytic techniques. Through exploring the life histories of individuals, this chapter intends to give more meaning to 'objective data' extracted from the few Yemeni statistics on Hadramis' 'return migration' or the *catastrophe* after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990.¹⁴⁰ Although the available official statistics are limited to returnees' responses, they contain some information that may be used to infer Hadrami experience before the mass return. Hence, as a way of achieving another objective of this chapter, I use these formal records along with life stories, because I attempt to show the ways through which Hadar Hadramis (immigrants, ex-immigrants, or non-immigrants) think of the whole experience of moving to Kuwait as an *ongoing social catastrophe* (*ma'sah ijtima'iyah mutawasilah; karithah mustamirrah*). Hadar Hadrami migration to Kuwait created dramatic and severe changes that resulted in individual and familial tragedies. Their mass flight to Hadramawt revealed to them in shocking clarity the extent of the 'miserable' and

¹⁴⁰ Hadramis used 'return' or 'escape' migration and 'the ordeal' or 'catastrophe days' interchangeably to refer to their departure from Kuwait to Hadramawt during the Iraqi invasion.

catastrophic lifestyle to which immigrants had been accustomed in Kuwait. Some ex-immigrants told me that because they had been so confident that their relationships with their *mu'azzibs* would always be maintained, they had given up thinking about the future or the possibility that Kuwait would not one day be a place for dependents like them.

The 1990 mass return was just one event which showed the duration and magnitude of the *real catastrophe*. In Hadramawt, most villager returnees became jobless because at the time of their return, they were either inexperienced as farmers or were unaccustomed to the type of harsh work offered to them. Moreover, returnees had to deal more closely with family responsibilities, something many were free of during their stay in Kuwait. Divorce and second marriage were rarities among the Hadar Hadrami families, yet people in al-Qarah and Ghayl Ba Wazir told me that when many returned from Kuwait in 1990, divorce became like 'a sip of tea in people's mouths'. What made the experience of returning home even more catastrophic was that many thought of 'running away' to return to Kuwait as the only solution to their miseries. Some Hadar Hadramis perceived the whole experience of constant departure and miserable return as part of a prescribed destiny of Hadramawt. In all, this chapter attempts to show patterns, as well as variations, in expressions of the catastrophe(s) in Hadar Hadrami individual migratory experiences. In order for these personal experiences to be meaningfully contextualised, they should be seen as encapsulating exchanges between different levels of the social process of migration, although each involves specific acts of individual and family decision-making.

Numbers and Narratives

Numbers speak of catastrophes. I was once advised by an old Hadrami fellow who I met in al-Qarah village: "If you want to know what happened to us in those days, count how many souls there are in each house today." Beginning in the first days of the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, 23,455 Hadramis fled in groups of families, mostly leaving their possessions behind, except for cars and women's gold.¹⁴¹ These Hadramis comprised more than 50% of all Yemeni returnees from Kuwait (46,547) and 69% of all Hadrami returnees from other countries. To some Hadramis,

¹⁴¹ Source: Central Statistical Organisation, Yemeni Ministry of Planning and Development: "The final results of the returnees after 2-8-1990." Sana'a, 1991. 23,455 is a total which includes dependents and other associates of the working immigrant, such as women, children, non-working father or mother, and so on.

particularly non-immigrants, the event itself was understood as a punishment by Allah of those who spent their days playing with money, spending it aimlessly on luxurious possessions and 'Kuwaiti things'. This punishment became collective, affecting the whole community because of the deeds of the immigrants. However, many ex-immigrant Hadramis believe that the catastrophe went on for years and that the war was just a natural result of it. As Abdullah Ba Khalid put it: "In Kuwait we were living in complete ecstasy, when we visited home at summer; we emptied our pockets and quickly travelled back to Kuwait. Some of us saw ourselves above others there. You knew the immigrant from his chubby face and body and from his cleanness ... we never thought that one day we would need to establish a home—we were happy." The extent of the catastrophe can be seen in the fact that 85% of Hadrami returnees did not own a house of their own, as well as in the fact that of all working Hadramis at the time, 81% had already spent 10 or more years in Kuwait.¹⁴² Upon their return in 1990, these Hadramis were allocated to schools, mosques, and relatives, and they were formally treated as refugees. They looked very vulnerable in the eyes of others who at some point had thought of these returnees as competent and affluent. Returnees were called, pejoratively, the *mankubin*.¹⁴³ "I had to cope with this; I was dependent on others who once were fed by me, medicated in Kuwait through me, and found jobs for their relatives through me. When I returned to Hadramawt I hid for a couple of months in my brother's house, but eventually I worked for those whom I fed and did the type of work I was not even physically used to ... I heard talk and gossip but I ignored it." To this Hadrami, who returned to Kuwait in 1997, the move itself was not only for money. He was running away to seek a 'better' and more 'comfortable' life and to rebuild his reputation and save face, which he thought he had lost during that period.

Shortly after returning to Hadramawt, 76% of all Hadramis who had worked in Kuwait before 1990 expressed a desire to go back to their old jobs. They wanted to work as couriers, drivers, shop assistants, guards, and the like.¹⁴⁴ That desire to leave, or the expectation to hold a visa in Kuwait at any time, is destructive of some families' lives. Meanwhile, waiting for a visa from Kuwait postponed any

¹⁴² Source: Central Statistical Organisation, Yemeni Ministry of Planning and Development: "The final results of the returnees after 2-8-1990." Sana'a, 1991.

¹⁴³ This is the term used by other Arabs to describe the Palestinian Arabs dislocated by European Jewish colonisers in 1948. The term *nakbah* is still used in any reference to that event.

¹⁴⁴ Source: Central Statistical Organisation, Yemeni Ministry of Planning and Development: "The final results of the returnees after 2-8-1990." Sana'a, 1991.

employment options or urgent social responsibilities. In some cases, the wait ended tragically, with the rejection of the person's application by Kuwaiti authorities or by an old *mu'azzib*. Still, given the high poverty and unemployment rates which are characteristic of Hadramawt, the hope and attempts to gain a visa may never cease for some Hadramis. Other Hadramis who hoped for a visa accumulated debt throughout the process and, by the time of their departure, could hope only to 'run away'—a practice I discuss below. The process of waiting for a visa is full of accusations, tensions, and termination of relationships between relatives and friends at home and abroad. An example is the experience of Sa'id, who made it to Kuwait recently and was asked upon departure by his uncle (FB) to secure him a visa. When Sa'id's efforts failed, he was constantly accused of neglecting his uncle's wishes and discarding his letters to his old *mu'azzib*. In addition, his uncle refused to marry his daughter to Sa'id's younger brother, who lived in Hadramawt. Another Hadrami terminated his friendship with an individual who kept asking for money and a visa: "Back home they think just because you are in Kuwait you are instantly rich and you become like a Kuwaiti, whose application for a servant's visa takes minutes only—they don't know that things have now changed in Kuwait."

What makes the Hadrami experience in Kuwait distinctive is the degree of awareness among Hadrami immigrants that the patterns of living which Hadramis adopted before and after the 1990 return were disastrous. "Yes, but this is our life; Hadramawt is always called *Hadramawt al-maja'ah* (starvation Hadramawt). We came from a disaster, migrated to a disaster, and we returned home in a disaster. Nothing new." These were the words of Hasan Mahfuth, 58, who now works as a guard in a *Shaykh's* palace in Kuwait and spends most of his day playing electronic games. Such awareness can also be seen in the way Hadramis criticise their economic behaviour and their delusions regarding the time of their return once they reach Kuwait. In a survey I conducted among 41 immigrants in Kuwait, 37 of them did not know when or under what conditions they would decide to return to Hadramawt. Sixty-one percent of the respondents, of which a majority had spent at least 15 years as immigrants, said their first priority was to build a house of their own. Yet they did not know how or exactly when the house would be finished, as they had little or no savings to hand and very high rents to pay in Kuwait. This is what 'Umar 'Ashur called *masrahiyyat al-ma'sat*: "a play of a tragedy; our migration is just like that. People come and people go, but no one teaches the other his wrongdoings ... the more

you send money to them, the more they want to come here and be like you.”¹⁴⁵ To people like ‘Ashur, the mere continuation of Hadramis’ connection to Kuwait is the persistence of a ‘tragedy’ that everyone knows about but denies. This, I argue, is but one of the consequences, and a major feature, of the Hadrami culture of dependency on Kuwait—not only as a source of income, but also as a psychological refuge from the pressures of family and village life. This can only be seen more clearly in individuals’ stories about themselves and how they evaluate their experience.

Like numbers, narratives speak of social and individual migration catastrophes that can only be seen in time and through it. Among Hadar Hadrami immigrants, past events (migration before 1990, the Gulf War, and the return to Hadramawt) shape the ways through which they perceive their current standing and relation to Kuwait. Narrative is central, as has been demonstrated by Gilsenan elsewhere (1996), for the structuring and reproduction of social life. At the heart of every Hadar Hadrami immigrant narrative, however, Kuwait as a place is an important aspect of the whole migratory experience. Immigrants’ references to ‘Kuwait before’ and ‘Kuwait after’ the 1990 catastrophe shape their narratives in different ways. Hence, as will be seen later on, Kuwait becomes what may be called a ‘spatial genre’ which is significant to the development of Hadrami migratory narrative through which the community’s “past articulates its present” (Gilsenan 1996: 32).

Life histories reveal not only how immigrant families lived and survived the experience of movement as individuals, but also how particular individuals interpreted that experience and attached collective meaning to it.¹⁴⁶ In most cases, migration is found to be a family arrangement where an individual’s agency and freedom are compromised. Yet it is this compromise that usually gives the individual a new value as a person within a structure of relations. The Hadrami life histories that follow show that class and gender positions, or regional labour market relations, may not be the

¹⁴⁵ Manda’i Dayyan, a researcher on Yemeni migration, reached a different conclusion from ‘Ashur’s on the role of remittance in migration. Dayyan suggested that one of the characteristics of Yemeni migration in general is that when immigrants’ remittances fall, rates of out-migration rise (1999: 48).

¹⁴⁶ Some scholars (Angrosino 1989; see also Brettell 1997) distinguish between the life story and life history as genres and as sources of data. The former is a recorded narrative that reveals specific events or relationships in the narrator’s life, while the latter is a detailed record of an individual’s entire life. I do not make such a distinction here and use the terms interchangeably, for I believe that any life history, like a life story, involves some degree of selection of topics of interest and events to be recorded, with the researcher and the interviewee together constructing its final outcome.

primary motives for people's migration or its perpetuation. Rather, an individual's move is always the result of a "powerful blend of motives" (Brettell 2000: 100).

The state of mind of an individual immigrant engaged in travel, his or her interpretation of others' experiences, and a family's life under migration are normally overlooked in mainstream migration research. Migration research, then, should draw on autobiographies in order to "get beneath the abstractions of migration theory and to understand migration from the insider's perspective" (Gmelch 1992: 311). To reach this objective, the individual life history technique exposes the narrative, or different versions of it, to account for the migratory experience as a whole.

Stories of Hadrami migration

Muhammad Bin Salim

In 2004, Muhammad, 80, was living in a two-bedroom decaying house in al-Hami village with his wife and daughter. Al-Hami is primarily a maritime community, but it also contains some agricultural activities. Following residents' migration to Kuwait, most of these agricultural activities were abandoned. I found Muhammad sitting on his doorstep before we entered his *diwaniyyah* (men's gathering place). He spent 47 years of his life as an immigrant in Kuwait. During those years he visited Hadramawt 4 or 5 times, mainly for marriages or family deaths. Muhammad, like many in al-Hami, looks like other old Hadramis in his dress, gestures, and demeanour, but he uses, in a rather 'wistful' tone, some Kuwaiti dialect and jokes. In al-Hami's narrow streets, I was surprised by the way people greeted each other using Kuwaiti expressions. Clearly, at some point (particularly the 1950s and 1960s), al-Hami was mainly populated by children and women whose men had migrated to Kuwait. The connection between Kuwait and al-Hami is old, for al-Hami functioned as a station for Kuwaiti dhows for many years, and Kuwaiti sea merchants recruited sailors from al-Hami probably more than any other Hadrami town. Muhammad was a sailor who was transformed into an immigrant in Kuwait.

In 1943, aged 19, I was on a Hadrami dhow in Calicut. I worked for this dhow's Hadrami captain, for he had bought my and my father's debt from another Hadrami trader under the condition that I would work for him on his dhow. But I knew I couldn't pay either of them. So I escaped and went to a Kuwaiti merchant (Shahin al-Ghanim), whose dhow was also stationed in Calicut, and asked him for a job. He took me on instantly. There were already Hadramis working for him and for

other Kuwaiti merchants. They told me that Kuwait was growing and in need for workers in the construction and oil industry. With the merchant we arrived in Kuwait. The merchant's name was our only passport for entering Kuwait. We lived at a merchant's niq'ah and lived there for some time. At first I worked as a carrier for different merchants. To me, those days were absolute pleasure, as I didn't have to send any money home, I had one brother and a mother and I wasn't married at the time, thus I spent all my money on my dress and entertainment. I used to join Kuwaitis in musical and wedding gatherings. Around 1947 a Kuwaiti contractor for the oil industry recruited me and other Hadramis to do similar jobs. Soon after, however, I moved to the airport to work as a carrier, and with me was another Hadrami called Sa'id Kuwaiti. His original name is Sa'id Suwatir, but no one knows how he got such a nickname, which is now his official one. I spent 12 years in Kuwait without a visit to al-Hami, until in 1955 I travelled there and married my first wife. I returned to Kuwait without my wife in 1956, but I never had any children from her. I divorced her while I was in Kuwait in 1957. How? It was easy, there was a Hadrami religious man called 'Abdul-Hamid Ba Wazir'¹⁴⁷ who worked in a judge-like role for Hadramis in Kuwait. He used to work as a clerk for a Kuwaiti merchant, but he wasn't officially assigned to a judge's position. Ba Wazir asked me to bring two Hadrami witnesses, which I did, in order for the divorce to be acceptable as an Islamic act.

In 1958 I worked as a guard in the stores of merchant 'Ali Ahmad, who employed many Hadramis similarly. But I quit after a fight with one of his Palestinian supervisors. Ali Ahmad gave the Palestinian officers 200 rupees, while we, who worked day and night, received 20 rupees; it was unjust. Later on, I was employed for a similar job for 300 rupees in Ali Ahmad's cousin's company. At that company I did everything—I was the guard, the carrier, and the farrash¹⁴⁸ (peon) for our mu'azzib. It was only then that I began to remit to my mother and brother 150 rupees each month. However, in 1967 I was prepared for a second marriage; thus, I asked for a leave, but the company refused, and when I resigned they also refused to give me all my 'service indemnities rights'. Even so, I never cut all my ties with my mu'azzib; he still sends me cash every other month or so, and some members of his family send me part of their annual zakat. After marriage, in 1967, I returned to Kuwait and worked again at the airport, but a year or so afterwards I applied for the Ministry of Education and worked as a farrash for 10 years. In 1977 I quit my government job and worked as gas filler at a fuel station near to where I lived. This was the year when my wife and two daughters joined me in Kuwait up until the 1990 Iraqi invasion.

I never thought that I would return home with empty hands; I never imagined that I would have to move back to my country. Kuwait was my place. This is why in all these years I didn't build a house in al-Hami. In the Kuwaiti days, we didn't care about anything; I didn't have to remit to anyone at home. The early days of the invasion were horrible; I didn't have a single dinar in the bank, thus I worked for 18 days at the station just to feed my family from whatever sales we made that day. After begging my station supervisor, he lent me 100 KD, and then I decided to return home. Upon return to al-Hami, we lived with my father-in-law for some years. We were like refugees on our own land. Some returnees were so depressed that they died of heart attacks. The house you see now was built a few years ago, when I authorised a person to get my service indemnities rights from Kuwait, and I received US \$8000 as compensation from the United Nations. All al-Hami people benefited

¹⁴⁷ Ba Wazir belongs to the *Mashayikh* Hadrami religious class.

¹⁴⁸ There is no definition of this occupation in the Kuwaiti labour and civil service laws. In general, however, a *farrash* always works in, not outside, a governmental office work place.

from the UN money, either to start or complement a house of their own. Now, I am here just remembering the sweet days, but the generosity and kindness of my mu'azzib is a relief for me and my family.

The small size of Muhammad's family is somewhat peculiar, as most *Hadar* immigrants came from extended families. The size of a family determined who migrated first and who might stay behind, with older family members being the primary movers. But Muhammad was younger than his only brother, and the reason why he was always away was the family's incapability to repay its inherited debt. Running away by changing jobs after a failure to repay an accumulated debt was not uncommon in Hadramawt in general.¹⁴⁹ Thus, his escape to Kuwait for 12 years was an extension of such a practice. Muhammad laughed at this: "I am still chased by the dead," he remarked, meaning that he was still in debt to his original debtors' sons. Escape, as a kind of a migration event, created disconnection, disruption, and dependence on individual and familial levels.

In Muhammad's story, as in others', these creations eluded limitations of place and time and became essential elements that shaped the whole migratory experience, even though he was not 'physically' an immigrant any longer. They determined his number of visits and his ties to his community in Hadramawt. The uninterrupted 12 years in Kuwait were "my *sala* (joy) ... when I visited home I looked like a stranger." When a man spent years 'away', he lost a feature of his identity, a name, like his friend who was transformed into '*Awad Kuwaiti*. This name was intended initially as a rebuke for being away from family and home but eventually became official. Running away became a way of life which allowed for a novel vision of how one's actions might be performed and hence justified, no matter how disruptive these actions were. The act of divorcing his first wife was performed through such a vision. Although there was no solid basis for his distance-divorce in the major Islamic interpretations, Muhammad, like others I know of, justified this act on the basis that he was far away. The disruption such an act might have caused on individual or familial levels was usually swept away quickly by another marriage or a quick visit and return to work.

Muhammad's story suggests how social and economic relations of migration persist even after the immigrant's retirement. Old relations of dependence transcended

¹⁴⁹ In recent work, Dresch (2000: 60) identified this as a fact of life among Hadramis of similar backgrounds.

the political and social boundaries between Kuwait and Hadramawt. As in other extreme cases of total dependence, the livelihood of Muhammad's household entirely depended on the annual monetary aid he received from his *mu'azzib*. In addition, the Islamic donation systems of *zakat* and *sadaqat* played a vital role, and still do, in covering the basic material needs of ex-migrants. However, the *mu'azzib*'s 'generosity' is not an obligatory exercise for many *mu'azzibs* and can be highly sporadic and unreliable. The anticipation of such funding put dependent Hadramis like Muhammad into an unending game of hope and waiting. There are numerous cases I know of in which people have postponed necessary duties in their lives (e.g. taking a job, constructing a house, studying, marrying, etc.) pending a trip to Kuwait. Young people I talked to in al-Hami and other coastal areas, such as al-Qarah and Ghayl Ba Wazir, had many promising plans for their future but thought that if they made it to Kuwait their 'dreams' would come true. Stories about longstanding but eventually successful attempts made by certain individuals to get a visa to Kuwait were equally significant in the circulation of this attitude regarding life plans among Hadramis who wanted to migrate.

Although Muhammad was not working with his *mu'azzib* at the time of his return home in 1990, his relationship with the *mu'azzib* was revived through other Hadramis who arrived in Kuwait after the war ended. Muhammad sent him letters, made calls, and appointed friends to visit and ask the *mu'azzib* for help. He also sent gifts (usually Hadrami henna and honey). "When my friends visited my *mu'azzib* and told him: 'Your son [Muhammad] sent regards to you and was in need and sick,' he knew me instantly." The aid received did not result in any realistic economic improvement for the receiver, but the emotional effect was clear: "In Ramadan when we receive whatever from there ... I feel as if I were still in Kuwait."

Migration life in Kuwait has changed the way people organise even their spatial settings in Hadramawt. This can be seen in the Hadar Hadrami house design. Most *Hadar* houses I saw now include an additional room called *diwaniyyah* (a Kuwaiti word for 'men's gathering place', usually located at the entrance of the house). I was told that such an addition was a new trend which had started in the 1970s. Notwithstanding the economic cost of the *diwaniyyah*, many people designed the house according to the size of the *diwaniyyah* and the accessories needed to beautify it. Muhammad, however, completed the *diwaniyyah* at a later stage due to lack of money and supplies. In al-Hami and other *Hadar* towns, one can easily see the

incomplete structures of many houses which lack window frames, ceilings, or even doors. The incompleteness is due to the gradual and very slow nature of the construction process, which has always depended on remittances from abroad and the immigrant's planning and budgeting. Muhammad completed his *diwaniyyah* using UN compensation, as well as 'some' of his retirement service rights from Kuwait. To receive his pensions while in Hadramawt, he had to authorise a Kuwaiti or an Arab Gulf citizen who was in Kuwait to extract a certain amount of money from the place of his work. For many Hadrami ex-immigrants in Kuwait, doing this means going through an unfair and very exploitative process. In order to extract their pensions, they had to be charged half, sometimes more, of whatever amount their pensions were. I was told that people from the Mahrah region, many with Saudi citizenship, were the most actively involved in this process. After the 1991 war, people from Mahrah moved around in areas where Hadrami returnees were desperate for any source of income, and thus Mahara people wrote binding contracts with Hadramis to make the withdrawals and to accept the unjust fees. Muhammad was one of many Hadramis exploited in such a manner. "I had nothing but to sell all my years for a few coins ... it was unjust, but you tell me what other option I had?! I needed to complete my house ... And you see it now; eaten by sea vapour and salt."

'Amrah al-Mas'ud

'Amrah, 70, of al-Dis coastal town, is a woman who surprised me and forced me to rethink my knowledge about typical household and gender relations, particularly in terms of women's place in these domains in Hadrami society. 'Amrah was unique in her relation to men during her two marriages, as well as in comparison to other women in Kuwait and Hadramawt. Not only this, but as an immigrant, she was distinctive, as she made decisions that contrasted with the normative practices related to her family morals and women's movement at the time of her travel. I met her in the town of Ghayl Ba Wazir while she was visiting her daughter and son-in-law. Her son-in-law, 'Umar, a teacher who had spent most of his life in Kuwait, was present during the whole meeting.

In 1955, I was 20 when I first married. A year afterwards my first daughter was born, but soon after I was divorced. I had two brothers but no sisters, and my father used to work as a handler on dhows. Al-Dis was always full of stories about Kuwait and Hadrami sailors who, once they arrived there, never wanted to come

back, except for brief visits. Many claimed to their families that their dhows had been pierced near Kuwait so they could stay there and work for merchants in shops, houses, and the like. I said to myself: I have to see Kuwait. Why not? So, in 1961, soon after my second marriage to another Hadrami, Salim, who was already an immigrant in Kuwait, I was the first woman from al-Dis to travel with her husband to Kuwait. In those days it was totally 'ayb (shameful) for a woman to leave her hometown and her father and mother behind. More shocking to people there was that I made a decision to leave behind my 6-year-old daughter from my first marriage. I wanted to have her with me, but her grandparents refused to let go of her. When we arrived in Kuwait, one of the drivers (a Hadrami) of my husband's mu'azzib (al-Nisf; of the Kuwaiti elite) took us to the house of the mu'azzib. We paid regards to our mu'azzib's family and gave them gifts before we were given a room in al-Nisf's resort. My husband was a cook for the family, but later he became a farrash (peon) for his mu'azzib, who was a director at the Ministry of Electricity and Water. But my husband also worked as a driver for him and his family in the evenings. Our mu'azzib liked him so much that when he got ill, he allowed no one to accompany him to the hospital except for Salim. He liked him to the extent that al-Nisf offered to marry him to an Egyptian woman at his own cost, but my husband refused the offer. Salim was tied to me.

My first days in Kuwait were full of laughter at the manners and lifestyle of Kuwaiti women. I used to spend long nights with our mu'azzib's women, and I questioned them about things that made no sense. First, I noticed that the Kuwaiti women's gowns were opened from the front, unlike ours that came in one closed piece. I wondered: why were Kuwaitis' gowns torn apart? Were they poor or didn't they know how to use textiles!? Another thing that I still don't understand was the coffee pouring style of Kuwaitis. When I was handed my first cup of coffee with a little of it at the bottom, I was offended and spilled it out before their eyes and asked them: What?! Are you that stingy?! Or you don't have enough coffee?! Is this the Kuwait of generosity? Our Hadrami cup is always full.

In 1963, I had my first son born in Kuwait, but I missed my parents so I went for a visit with my newly born Mubarak. Whenever I visited home I took with me money for my parents and presents for friends and relatives, who ever since have referred to me as the Kuwaitiyyah (the Kuwaiti lady). Our mu'azzib and his women gave me money whenever we declared that we were leaving for a visit. In 1965, I lost Mubarak. He went with his father to a Hadrami 'izbah in al-Murqab, where he fell into a big drain and drowned. Yet I never lost faith in Allah, who compensated me with twins the next year, a boy and a girl, and five other girls in later years. When my children became old enough I began to travel to Hadramawt alone, because my husband was so busy with his mu'azzib in Kuwait. I loved the trip back and forth and continued to visit Hadramawt until my parents died. After the Iraqi invasion in 1990, my husband, our children and I fled to Hadramawt in a car through Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, until we reached San'a, where my husband died because of kidney problems. My married daughter went temporarily with her Kuwaiti husband to Saudi Arabia. When we returned to al-Dis I heard how people rejoiced at what happened to us and called us the 'full fleers who came to sell their gold to avoid starvation'. I used to shout at them that we were not Palestinian refugees, we left our homes willingly and we were now coming back to them with our possessions. I still visit Kuwait to see

*my daughter, our old mu'azzib's family, and other friends. I make sure I see them one by one.*¹⁵⁰

'Amrah decided to move at a time when people, sometimes openly, would stigmatise her and her family for doing so. Indeed, her own family thought of her 'going out' as *'ayb*, added to the fact that she had to leave her daughter behind. Among Hadar Hadramis, gender relations are maintained through spatial and economic separation. I have found no evidence of any *Hadar* woman's activity in systematic farming, although women have been involved in other informal and quasi-domestic subsistence economies. There is a sense of pride in such a gender setting among immigrant and non-immigrant Hadrami men, who told me that this was a distinguishing cultural element in their life. Men believed that because they were independent, their women did not have to work out in the field, for example. This is probably why Hadar Hadramis have many jokes and stories about the 'boldness' and 'sexual freedom' of Bedouin Hadrami women. This kind of freedom is attributed to Bedouin women's ability to go out alone with flocks, to visit markets without a husband, and to receive male guests if their husbands are away. In this light, one can understand *Hadar* immigrants' penchant for taking their wives with them abroad while few Bedouins did so.¹⁵¹

Ideally, the Hadar Hadramis follow a patrilocal residence rule, and the household is usually a unit of an extended family. When *Hadar* women migrated with their husbands, they became relatively independent. In many cases, these women escaped the hierarchy of decision-making and budget distribution, in which power usually fell in the hands of their husbands' parents or older wives in the household. Nonetheless, women who accompanied their husbands were also *re-domesticated* within a new household context. As women took on the domestic activities that the immigrant husbands used to carry out alone, men were saved time and effort. Thus, men became freer to attend special occasions and to visit and be visited. This increased the expenses of the immigrant, yet, as shown in Chapter 4, it did not stop the remittance to relatives at home. With women, many immigrants faced pressing demands related to their children's schooling, health, and familial and emotional

¹⁵⁰ Besides probably her *mu'azzib's* family, 'Amrah's daughter (a teacher) is her only regular remitter in Kuwait. After each visit to Kuwait, she returns with bags of presents for her family and neighbours in al-Dis.

¹⁵¹ If they migrate, Bedouin Hadramis usually head to Saudi Arabia and the UAE and very rarely to Kuwait. All Hadrami Bedouins I saw in Kuwait did not have their wives with them.

necessities. Thus, the married immigrant lived in a constant attempt to reach a balance between his emotional and social needs and his economic reality abroad. There were families that united abroad and then divided when the women and children were sent back home for some time before reassembling again in Kuwait.

‘Amrah came from a similar *Hadar* background but was unique in her stance as a woman and her understanding of her socio-cultural context, particularly during her migration. She acted not as a woman accompanying her husband, but as a traveller with a free and active personal and social life. ‘Amrah was involved in the daily life of Kuwaitis, judging and establishing her own vision of how the host society worked, and through this she evaluated Kuwaiti society openly. Through this kind of interaction, she showed her own identity not as an immigrant who was in need of the care and generosity of the host society, but as a thriving individual with a rich tradition and independent view. Hadar Hadrami women and even men, like her husband, traditionally hesitated to be involved in such encounters with Kuwaitis. She has maintained this attitude even after her husband’s death and after her migration. Thus her decision to ‘move out’ to see Kuwait was a powerful personal aspiration, which she valued at the expense of certain familial and emotional demands on her as a mother and as a daughter of her own parents. Her marriage and departure injured some ties at home, but at the same time, she created new ties and reconstructed damaged ones specifically by ‘being away’. This she did through persistent gift offerings and visits whenever she was home. She also told me that she helped other women to adapt and survive in the new environment when they followed their husbands to Kuwait.

A woman’s engagement with an immigrant has contrastive effects. On the one hand, I was told that families accepted migrants, or migrants-to-be, as potential husbands of their daughters more easily than non-migrants. Migrants were preferred for the economic security and the remittances they could offer. Some terms were informally included as part of marriage contracts, under which the potential husband would be obliged to, or would try to, work in one of the Gulf countries directly following engagement. Some women did not accompany their husbands immediately after marriage. However, family members of a daughter engaged to an migrant lived in constant fear that their daughter would move away if the couple so decided. ‘Amrah’s marriage did not include terms of departure, although her migrant husband was welcomed very readily by her family. Her husband might have been willing to

leave her behind, but it was she who insisted that she would not marry him without being at his side abroad, even though her daughter was still dependent on her.

‘Amrah carefully calculated her migration decision. To her, the move was totally rational, and it was evident in her words that she lacked any clear regret, sadness, or complaints. She did, however, experience various losses that were related to that decision (the loss of a daughter, a son, a husband, and a whole life). During the 1991 Gulf War she had to separate from her Kuwaiti-married daughter, who lived as a refugee with her husband in another country of exile (Saudi Arabia). ‘Amrah too had to flee and return to Hadramawt, and more problematically, with a foreign nickname ‘*the Kuwaiti ‘Amrah*’. In al-Dis, many of the ‘old stories’ about her departure were revived to remind her of her shame. When I asked her whether she comprehended these tragic events, her answer seemed irrelevant: “I was the first al-Dis woman in Kuwait and I can still go...” I never understood what exactly she meant by that, but it seemed as if those painful events in her migration stood tiny before the experience of first moving out of al-Dis village. Perhaps, it is also as if the agonies she endured during her migratory life were incomparable to what she saw as the real tragedy of spending the rest of her life in the village, near the people who scorn her ‘failure’ and return from Kuwait. When I reiterated my question to her she said: “...I can still go and visit my daughter, and see Kuwait ... and they [people in al-Dis] can see that I am freer than they are and that I am still an appreciated woman.”

Hadi ‘Umar

Before meeting Hadi ‘Umar, I had an image of the Hadrami *Sayyid* as someone economically affluent and religiously or politically active. There is of course an observable pattern of Hadrami *Sayyids*’ migratory activities and lifestyle. My preconception, however, might not have been unrelated to the powerful tendencies conveyed in the literature on Hadramis abroad, which is mainly concerned with the economic and political accomplishments of prominent Hadrami personalities. What I found was that Hadi’s life and migration were not distinct from those of non-*Sayyid* Hadramis in Kuwait. When I met him, he was living in a bedroom in a shared house with Asian immigrants in the immigrant-populated slum area of Jilib al-Shuyukh in Kuwait. Hadi was born in the agricultural village of Ghayl Bin Yumayn in 1955. He migrated, still unmarried, to Kuwait in 1975 at the age of 20. His father, 92, and mother, 83, live in Hadramawt. Hadi is the oldest of three brothers and three sisters,

none of whom ever migrated. His wife and children never accompanied him during his 30 years abroad.

Of course, I didn't like the idea of having my wife here with me. See, we are different, we are like Bedouins. I didn't come to Kuwait to stay at home with my wife, I came to work, and work means no time for family. True, a woman wouldn't want to have her husband always abroad, but what can I do, this is life. Yes, I would love to have my family with me, but the expenses would be unbearable. If I did I would be spending money in both places. Thus, to save myself the headache I leave my family behind and remit money or goods directly to my father, who then decides how to distribute it. We are not like the Hadar of the coast, who are used to moving with the whole family. My parents are both Sayyids. My father was the 'aqil of the village—even Bedouins consulted him over their disputes. My father owned many pieces of land in Ghayl Bin Yumayn, where farmers, the Hirthan, meaning du'afa', or the Hadar¹⁵² as we sometimes call them, sharecropped with him. They still work for us today and live near or in our land. These are our Akhdam, they are the people here in Kuwait. We don't give them wives, but some Sayyids did marry from them. The Akhdam look like the 'Abid because they intermarry with them. Many Hadar, particularly those who worked on our land, still serve in our family weddings. They do everything from cooking to singing because they are ours; they are our followers.

I didn't study beyond 6 years in school at the village. After the 1967 socialist revolution I worked at the village's cooperative society from 1972 to 1975. I always wanted to go out to make money, especially when there were relatives who travelled to Kuwait. I used to admire them. I decided that I had to go out, and with the help of my father and another Sayyid, I got a visa to Kuwait. I came as a servant for a Kuwaiti house under article 20 of the law. Of course I would never work in a house as a servant, but it was very easy in those days to hold one legal job designation and do another. I arrived in Kuwait and lived in an 'izbah with older folks, and found a job instantly working for a relative in his textile shop. We used to sell children's and women's clothes, which has been my speciality ever since, until the Iraqi invasion in 1990. I moved from one Hadrami to another, and with every move my salary increased. I started from 20 KD until I was paid 150 KD in 1978. This amount of money was more than excellent to me because in those days the person you worked for took care of your meals, clothing, and sometimes rent. I used to send most of my salary to my father, who would buy a piece of land or provide for our needy relatives and neighbours. Even those who weren't in need, we always provided for them.

¹⁵² *Hirthan* literally means 'ploughmen' who not only were landless farmers, but also did not have any social or economic means to negotiate long-term contracts with landowners to work on their land. Hadar Hadrami immigrants strictly distinguished themselves from *Hirthan* who were paid on a daily basis rather than monthly or in advance like other *Hadar* farmers. However, on a number of occasions, I heard non-farmers, particularly Bedouin Hadramis, using *Hirthan* in a derogatory manner to refer to all *Hadar* farmers, even fishermen, and townspeople in general. But it is not clear why Hadi used the term *Akhdam* (lit. servants or peons), which is used in a different context, namely in the western Yemeni region of Tihamah. *Akhdam* refers to the mixed population of African and Indian descendents who had been historically marginalised in the Yemeni society, living in extremely miserable economic conditions and possessing low social status. Hadar Hadrami immigrants, however, considered the *Akhdam*, 'Abid, and *Subyan* as similar social categories. It is possible, though, that Hadi conflated *Hadar* with *Akhdam*, *Hirthan*, and *Subyan* in order to distinguish himself, as a *Sayyid*, and perhaps as a Bedouin, from the *Hadar* in general and from Hadar Hadrami immigrants in Kuwait in particular.

After five years in Kuwait, in 1980, I made my first visit to my family, when I married and spent two months there before returning to Kuwait. At the time, I made a partnership with another Sayyid in a textile shop until the war of 1990. The shop was good in terms of our families' monthly needs. But the economic situation in Kuwait in the 1980s was shifting against our interests, for Kuwaiti owners increased shop rents and workers' wages decreased. Fortunately, though, by 1986 I had built a house for the whole family, where my parents, my wife, and my brothers and their wives also lived.

During my 30 years in Kuwait I interacted with Hadar Hadramis, but I've never socialised with them. They have a different system of life than we do. They had their own gatherings and worked closely with their Kuwaiti mu'azzib, and they used to do services for their sponsors beyond their original work hours. I never worked under a Kuwaiti person, unlike the Hadar, who depended for everything on the mu'azzib. Why? I think because they were attached to Kuwaiti persons through their early work in houses and later as couriers or drivers in Kuwaiti families and businesses. They were used to this kind of relation even before their migration to Kuwait. This is what they have always been doing in Hadramawt—they work for other people; they inherited this position of being poor and in need of protection. That is why Hadar Hadramis in Kuwait are referred to as people of the salary and other Hadramis are people of the shop. I myself refer to my Kuwaiti sponsor as my mu'azzib and I visit him and bring gifts from home to his family, because I need him and I need to arbut 'alaqah (establish a relation) with him. I don't work for him directly of course, but I know that everything is in his hands. Without the mu'azzib I wouldn't be here talking to you, particularly after 1990 when Yemenis in general were classified as non-desirable citizens by Kuwaiti authorities.

At present, my job title is khadim khas (special servant), although I don't serve at a Kuwaiti house. I am satisfied with everything I have done so far—I have done what I intended to achieve. I am here because I visit friends and to see if I can start a new shop. I spend months here and months there in Hadramawt. You know, I am used to this now. In all my visits home, it never entered my mind that I wouldn't return to Kuwait. I go home with the intention of coming back to Kuwait. Now I feel I want to go there just to see myself returning here. I have this feeling of staying in Kuwait until I reach my goals, and it is for Allah to decide when or how they will be reached.

Hadi's first working permit was, like his current one, given to him based on a friendship between his relative and a Kuwaiti guarantor. In both cases, Hadi's economic activity was independent of the legal guarantor. In addition, Hadi was not descended from the most deprived segments of the Hadrami society, which constituted the majority of immigrants in Kuwait. In reality, his family owned some of the most productive farming plots in Ghayl Bin Yumayn, and his father's connection could have guaranteed him some rewarding job in Hadramawt. However, his move must be understood as part of a common Hadrami migratory experience. One must first confirm that Hadi's initial motivation was overtly materialistic and reflected his desire to accumulate wealth. Yet his own formulation of his migration shows an attempt to conceal a divergence between the whole experience and one of its original

and most common expressions among migrants (i.e. earning capital and returning home). In other words, to Hadramis, the objective of making money was the normatively and ethically accepted project of any individual. Whether such an objective was successfully achieved may not be as significant as the showing of persistent personal effort by *being there* near the goal itself. His words made it clear that he was satisfied at some point; yet again, he was still in Kuwait working on achieving unforeseen goals. Thus, whenever I met Hadi, he always had some project in mind. At one time, he wanted to buy cars from Kuwait to be sold in Hadramawt; at other times, he wanted to go to Sudan to buy sheep herds to be exported to Kuwait. He had many more ideas of trade projects, and in which Kuwait was his permanent business station. Yet, hours of talk about the yields of such projects were his only real achievement. He once told me that his family owned shares in a new fishing company in Hadramawt and that because of this, he did not need a job in Kuwait. That his family owned shares was true; in reality, however, he had to sell his car and was in debt to two other Hadramis. Interestingly, instead of remitting to his family back at home, at some point Hadi asked his brother in Hadramawt to send him some money.

Hadi's insistence that his economic and social identities were interconnected reflects general trends whereby Hadar Hadramis relied on domestic services and couriership, whereas shop keeping was more the speciality of Bedouins or Mahra.¹⁵³ But as Hadi's consciousness of himself as a *Sayyid* has worked as an ideological framework throughout migration, his experience shows a contradiction between the framework he upholds and its practical and symbolic expressions. Hadi has a vague, yet peculiar, understanding of Hadrami social compositions. "Hadramis are either Bedouins, or *rif*,¹⁵⁴ or *Hadar*. I am from the *rif*, not totally nomad and not totally *Hadar*." However, because Bedouins¹⁵⁵ who migrated to Kuwait rarely brought their families with them, he referred to himself as Bedouin in that context. Being a *Sayyid*,

¹⁵³ However, there were a few Hadrami *Sayyids* in Kuwait who worked as domestic servants, like Najib Maknun, whom I met in al-Hami. I also collected the life history of another *Sayyid*. This *Sayyid* works as a courier in his *mu'azzib*'s company but is always available for services related to his *mu'azzib*'s family (i.e. shopping, driving, and pouring coffee). As shown in previous chapters, at present there are a few Hadar Hadramis who actually reside and work as domestic servants in Kuwaiti houses. Others may legally be classified as such (i.e. private servant) but factually occupy other jobs outside the house domain. Still, it is expected that these Hadramis will sometimes perform domestic or menial tasks for their legal sponsors.

¹⁵⁴ Rural or agrarian.

¹⁵⁵ Very rarely do Bedouin Hadramis migrate or settle in Kuwait like Hadar Hadramis do. They have traditionally been connected to Saudi Arabia and the UAE. If they do migrate to Kuwait, they spend very short periods there. Of the few Hadrami Bedouins I met in Kuwait, almost all of them held Saudi citizenship and were highly mobile.

from the *rif*, and sometimes like a Bedouin, he does not share a *Hadar* identity, particularly in its farming and serving characteristics. Clearly, Hadi's account emphasised that these cultural and economic characteristics were at work at home and abroad.

Did Hadi's conception of Hadrami immigrants' social origins—and thus his work classification of Hadramis in Kuwait—indicate that Hadramis' social structures move with immigrants as well? The distinction he made between his 'Bedouin' style of migration (*ahl al-dukkān*; people of the shop) as opposed to that of the *Hadar* (*ahl al-ratib al-shahri*; people of the monthly salary) is used by all Hadramis in Kuwait. It is used by people like Hadi to imply the low status of *Hadar*, namely males, in their total dependence on their Kuwaiti sponsors. But the distinction is also used to suggest that sponsoring affluent people like Hadi did not change the status quo in Hadramawt and that Hadramis thus remained divided into servants and landowners, or mixed *Hadar* and pure Hadramis like Hadi.

In reality, though, nothing in Hadi's Ghayl Bin Yumayn radically differs from the exemplar *Hadar* town of Ghayl Ba Wazir in its economic or social relations. He himself worked as a farmer on his father's land. Furthermore, it is not difficult to identify the similarities between Hadi and the rest of the *Hadar* immigrants in terms of a lifestyle that has been shaped by a specific economic understanding and practice of travel. Respectively, Hadi's view of the *mu'azzib* and his dependence on such a figure are inconsistent with the position of his family back home, which has its own 'followers' from *Akhdam* and *Hirthan*. Finally, Hadi is legally classified in Kuwaiti official documents as a 'private domestic servant' (visa no. 20); thus, he may as well be referred to by others as a *siby* of his legal sponsor. But being a servant, though on paper only, is what he relates as a prototypically *Hadar* immigrant activity. Even more significantly, although Hadi did not actually work according to his visa designation, he showed a disposition to serve his sponsor like any other *Hadar* Hadrami. He did, however, reconcile such contrasting realities through different means. One was to establish a socio-spatial distance from *Hadar* immigrants, thus maintaining a sense of difference and impassivity at the same time. Second was to emphasise the practical aspect of migration by deemphasising the significance of job designations on paper, as long as one has a last name and is "honoured in his original place". Third was to appear to be always in demand and to emphasise the temporary duration of his stay by frequently suggesting a date for departure, which was

constantly adjusted. Such reconciliations shaped Hadi's migratory experience. His migration has ceased to be about employment or merely making money. Hadi travels back and forth between the two places, spending more months in Kuwait than in Hadramawt. In Kuwait he is free of family responsibilities; he tours around and lives a purely bachelor life. In Kuwait, he is jobless, and aside from whatever he holds from past savings, he receives funds from family.¹⁵⁶ Most importantly, he feels that he is welcomed as a guest whenever he travels between the two places.

'Awad Sa'id

In the mid-1950s, 'Awad, now in his 60s, was the only son of a father who sent him to Kuwait to help pay the family's debt. 'Awad's mother died when he was a child; later, his father married two other women, who produced two sons and a daughter. His father died in 2002, having worked as a farmer and a fisherman. 'Awad was married twice and had one son, who died shortly after birth. He divorced both wives. 'Awad came to work as a *siby* (domestic servant), but unlike most Hadar Hadramis, he has remained 'inside' some of the most prominent merchant houses for almost 50 years. His actual travel was typical of that period of Hadrami migration to Kuwait, but his experience as a whole was not. He witnessed the transformations in domestic labour in Kuwaiti houses. I used to meet him in his room at the back of the Kuwaiti house. The room has one bed, a television, and a closet. He shares the bathroom with several servants from Southeast Asia. Perhaps because of his illiteracy, 'Awad's memory was vague about the dates of his birth, departure, marriage, and visits, but he knew that he was 15 when, around 1955, he arrived in Kuwait.

I was born in the Mahra region in Sayhut town, which was a mixture of Hadrami and Mahri families. By birth I am a Hadrami, and being Hadrami is shameful. I believe that people are defined by the place of their birth. Sometimes I feel this and I refer to myself as 'Awad al-Mahri, and Kuwaitis know me by this name. I didn't want to leave Sayhut, but my father insisted. He ordered me to do like my cousin, who was already in Kuwait working for a Kuwaiti Shaykh as a building guard. We heard stories about people who went to Kuwait for a short period and were able to pay back all their debts. When I arrived in Kuwait, a relative, who worked as siby for a merchant, told me about a nearby house that needed a siby. The house of al-'Atiqi merchants was already filled with servants and African slaves when I got there. I found two African women, one 'Umani, one Mahri, and one Hadrami. Al-

¹⁵⁶ This is the only Hadrami case I know of in Kuwait where the immigrant is being remitted money by members of his family at home rather than the other way around.

'Atiqi even had an 'original' Kuwaiti, who worked for him as farrash and driver. The Kuwaiti is still there living with his mu'azzib's sons. My job was to clean the cows' house. This house of al-'Atiqi still has slaves of its own, although they don't work as servants anymore, for their mu'azzib 'extracted' a citizenship for them. I am unlucky, for although I have been working for rich people all my life, who could have obtained citizenship for me, all I got was: 'You are like our son!' At the beginning, I thought that my stay in Kuwait would be temporary, a year or two, not knowing that every day that passed dragged me into this misery. I spent 2 years in al-'Atiqi's house; my salary was excellent, 50 rupees, but I didn't like the way our mu'azzib abused his servants verbally. He had a temper, and I was always scared of him. Thus, I didn't come back to this house after my first visit home.

Then I moved to another merchant house, al-Nasir. My mother's brother, who worked for al-Nasir's wife's brother as a sibby and also collected rent for him from shops and estates he owned, presented me to me my new mu'azzib. My job was cooking and cleaning; I lived in a room with another Hadar Hadrami, who was the driver for our mu'azzib. Our mu'azzib, al-Nasir, had three wives in three houses, which together formed one big family house. I was attached to his new wife's house only. My salary was 35 rupees, but the 'mother' (his wife) gave me 100 rupees in secret, as he would have been upset had he known that she had done it. When my mu'azzib died, my 'mother' (my mu'azzib's wife) transferred my residency to her own name. When she moved to a new house of her own with her daughters and sons, she took me with her, where I am to this day. She treated me like her son, and I needed this connection with a family. I call her mother, for when my father married his third wife and had other sons, he ignored me. I loved him, even though what he cared about was the monthly payment I sent to him and my half brothers. Without the money I sent them they wouldn't have been able to own a house. I myself don't have a house of my own now. I don't know if my brothers would let me in if I decided to go back. Even when my brothers call now, they only ask for money, and nothing but money. I wouldn't refuse to help, for if I did they would spread news at home that their brother who was loaded with money had acted stingy and hated them, although he knew that they were poor and dependent on him. They are like a dead man who doesn't move, except after my money injection every month. Like other Hadramis, all my brothers cared about was to show off and to own things from Kuwait or any place from the Arab Gulf countries. They always want to look clean. And you wanted me to be proud of myself as a Hadrami!?

You want to know what my job is if the house is full of other servants now? I tell you this: Nothing. I live like a donkey, which may be replaced by another at any time. Sometimes I do the house shopping, sometimes I cook, other times I watch television. It is not our time in Kuwait anymore, although we did the work in houses that women usually carried out; tough work. It is not our time, because Hadramis no longer travel like serving children, and because Kuwaiti houses now prefer to us the Indians and Filipina maids, who brought with them the 'yes, madam' 'yes, sir' and 'okay' style of sibby. Everyone made something from their life except me, I am the unfortunate. Presently, I am not sure how much my salary is, perhaps 100 KD. I just asked my mother for some money to be sent to my brothers. I didn't go home to visit after my father's death. To tell you the truth, I am not sure when that was. During the 1990 invasion, I had nowhere to go, but to stick to this house. I am attached to my mother more than any other person in all my life affairs, and if I have to leave one day, all I want is a one-room shelter. If this doesn't happen I will seek refuge in a mosque.

In my conversations with Hadramis who worked as domestic servants in Kuwait, I found a degree of pleasure, perhaps fascination, in their tones and expressions regarding their memories of the Kuwaiti house. This, I think, stemmed from the fact that they were contemporaneous with an episode of significant socioeconomic development at the Kuwaiti family level. These developments worked as a model for the enhancement of a household's life in which individuals were expected to move from one stage to another on the economic and social ladder. The movement of family members from house, to school, to employment and marriage was taken for granted and was usually contrasted with the crude and simple Kuwaiti way of life that was believed to be characteristic of the pre-oil era. Among Hadar Hadramis in particular, as opposed to other Hadrami immigrant communities in Kuwait or in the Arab Gulf, the development of the Kuwaiti house was celebrated as a distinguishing element of their life in Kuwait. As a Kuwaiti old person expressed to me: "These Hadramis were the 'witness from within' on Kuwaitis' persistence and modernity, but also mercifulness and charitable life." Thus, Hadramis who worked as servants were also ordered to go to night schools, while others worked afternoons with their *mu'azzib* in the office and still others were employed in the government through their *mu'azzib* when they were no longer attached to house work. Hadramis internalised such a model as an elevation but also as a shared cultural memory with Kuwaitis. 'Awaḍ, however, did not go through any of these stages, and the bitterness in his words about himself is related to his feeling that he was behind the others. Along the same lines were 'Awaḍ's resentment and denial of his Hadrami identity and his embracing of another (*Mahri*), which he saw as representing success and seriousness.

Nevertheless, in many ways 'Awaḍ's life resembles those of other Hadar Hadramis who have very limited control of their lives or their periods of stay when they became attached to two different worlds. Obviously, harsh economic conditions render people's options and range of potential actions unclear when they have to deal with the consequences of life 'here' and 'there'. But uncontrolled and ambiguous visions of life and future necessities have roots in the ways Hadar Hadrami migration developed as an experience. Indeed, for some Hadramis, this vision lay behind the actual move and the perpetuation of their migration. I noticed the uncertainty, even the despair, which 'Awaḍ went through when I asked about his plans for a visit, when

he needed to renew his passport, or how much his salary was¹⁵⁷: “When you are used to being asked about nothing; just sleep and relax knowing that they (*ahl al-bayt*—people of the house; his Kuwaiti family) will take care of you, you can never imagine being away on your own. When everything you do is the least important—the cooking, the cleaning, and the shopping only—why would you care about the more serious things in life if you know that someone is taking care of you and them?”

The fact that ‘Awaḍ had witnessed the shifts from slaves, to ‘Umanis, to Hadramis, and finally to Indian and Filipina servants in the house made him sad. He felt that his position had become transient. “I don’t know what I am, a *siby* or something else; I don’t know why I am living ... If for anything I am only living for my mother and I don’t know what will happen to me when she dies—Allah forbid.” The sympathy towards ‘his mother’ is not baseless, for not only did she take care of him as her son; she also became his ‘*mu‘azzib*’ when there was no actual need for ‘Awaḍ as a *siby*. This was at a time when Asians dominated the domestic sector and Hadramis began to ‘walk away’ from the house. Not all women did this, particularly when one like her (who came from a rich merchant family) inherited nothing significant from her husband except for a Hadrami servant. ‘Awaḍ was part of the transition that took place in other people’s lives. Since then, he has been neither a working immigrant nor a house *siby*. Much of ‘Awaḍ’s daily activity that I observed related to gossiping about events within the house and calls from his brothers at home. Very rarely does ‘Awaḍ interact with other Hadramis, and only occasionally does he meet with two friends. Most of his narrative concentrated on his treatment by his mother and other members in the family. This was usually delivered in comparison with how Asians were being treated. ‘Awaḍ has many stories about how, for instance, Kuwaitis only asked to see a receipt when he went shopping for them. “They do not trust me, they trust the foreigners.” He was also offended when he found out that other servants had received gifts from his mother when she recovered from an illness.

Day after day, his life was caught up in an endless circle of talk and complaints in a way that sometimes made him the joke of the day in the house, especially when he insisted that he deserved a Kuwaiti citizenship. He is no longer an immigrant *per se* who travels back and forth and maintains clear connections with

¹⁵⁷ Engseng Ho (1999) noticed that among members of a Yemeni community in Cardiff, UK (many of whom were Hadramis who came from coastal towns) elderly individuals who had spent more than 30 years in Britain did not even know how to claim the social welfare that was their due.

home. Furthermore, 'Awaḍ is not exactly a needed *siby*. 'Awaḍ shared this experience with some Hadramis, who were even adopted by ordinary non-merchant Kuwaiti houses. In 2001, Salih Jum'an, aged 72 (an old *siby*, then a house driver), came to Kuwait on a special servant visa for his old *mu'azzib*. He lived in the *mu'azzib*'s house, where he did nothing significant other than be present whenever guests showed up. 'Awaḍ, too, is adopted almost as a 'refugee-son', whose presence does not affect the house's budget in any way. He is kept because he is a character from the past who encapsulates special family memories related to growth, successful relations, extension of house rules, and generosity of well-off persons. During the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in 1990, 'Awaḍ remained in the house of his mother, who was spending the summer in Spain with other members of the family. After the war ended in 1991, 'Awaḍ's Yemeni passport was classified, by Kuwaiti authorities, as one of the 'non-desirable nationalities'. Like all other foreigners who remained in Kuwait during the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, in order to renew his permit of residency, 'Awaḍ had to bring at least ten Kuwaiti citizens to certify his loyalty and non-cooperation with Iraqis. His Kuwaiti family did this for him readily, and since then he has not visited his Hadrami family. "What will I do there? In the war people wanted just to flee and leave this mess ... war or else, you will go and come back and find me just wandering here."

Conclusion

The Hadrami narratives demonstrate that what stands behind people's decisions to migrate, or to remain abroad indefinitely, is a blend of motives and preconditions that each individual experiences uniquely. In terms of migration, the individual is constantly responding to structural limits (familial, local, national, and state-to-state relations). Through these Hadar Hadramis' life histories, however, I have shown the prominence of debt as a major factor in many individuals' moves. Muhammad Bin Salim and 'Awaḍ Sa'id migrated as a result of family debt in their localities. Debt processes among *Hadar* farmers and fishermen indicate the importance of village socio-historical and economic conditions, as we saw in al-Qarah's case, in Hadar Hadramis' justification of moving out or running away. The life histories of Hadi 'Umar and 'Amrah al-Mas'udi show that for some Hadar Hadramis, the decision to depart was based on economic and personal considerations other than debt. Hadi wanted to make quick and easy capital, something he saw as

akin to his status as a *Sayyid*, or as he once said: “I was born with money in my hand.” His social identity entailed expectations of success and guaranteed moneymaking, and thus was important in the continuation of his stay abroad. Hadi’s stay in Kuwait, however, did not, as I have argued, generate substantial income, and therefore his lifestyle, economic action, and reliance on a *mu‘azzib* corresponded with the general pattern of Hadar Hadrami migration in Kuwait. ‘Amrah al-Mas‘udi’s personal vision of her society and her own interests and desires as a woman were decisive in her decision to migrate. Her life history exhibits the impact of the enticement that stories of comfort, freedom, and prosperity in Kuwait created amongst many Hadrami villagers at the time of her departure. However, it is very difficult to say how significant a determinant such enticement was in ‘Amrah’s (or other women’s) decision to accompany her immigrant husband to Kuwait.

As we saw in Chapter 4, although many Hadar Hadrami immigrants stayed in Kuwait for long periods of time, they were not totally disconnected from family and friends at home who ‘burdened’ them with demands. Yet immigrants exhibit complex feelings about the whole experience of leaving their homeland. The move may be enchanting for the immigrant or admired by those who see him as an ideal of success, but the stories show that migration is contradictory in nature. While an immigrant may be criticised as an extravagant runaway, there is constant pressure on him to remit to those left behind and to stay away. Thus, the act of being away is both a *virtue* in one’s life, and, at the same time, marked by an intense *fear* of a return that may be seen as a failure. Under this sort of tension, many Hadar Hadramis have lived and continued to come to Kuwait as immigrants. Today, some Hadramis think of this ‘virtue-fear’ way of life as the only option for those seeking a better job and a higher wage and, significantly, as the only way to maintain one’s family relations. Other Hadrami immigrants, however, see this as a continuation of the so-called ‘Kuwaiti disease’, in which happiness and satisfaction are found only in total dependence and carelessness. To these Hadramis, the catastrophe was not simply in the war of 1991, but also in a cultural consciousness of being happy to be away. The 25-year-old Salah put it this way: “Before the war in 1991, I used to ‘hear’ about, not see, my father because he was always there in Kuwait. But I am so happy that my father is now here with us ... yet he only seems pleased and optimistic these days whenever he hears that his *mu‘azzib* is thinking of calling on him to return to Kuwait again ... This is my

fear.” In the next chapter, I examine how the tension of fear-virtue and dependency might be reflected in the immigrant community’s interrelationships.

CHAPTER 7: KUWAIT AS A LIMITED SPACE: ENVY AS A FORM OF HADAR HADRAMI INTERRELATIONSHIP

Introduction

“Say I seek refuge with the Lord of the dawn, from the mischief of created things, and from the mischief of darkness as it spreads; from the mischief of those who blow on knots; and from the mischief of the envious one as he practices envy.”¹⁵⁸ Every morning, Abu ‘Abdu (who used to be a farmer from Ghayl Ba Wazir) starts his day with these Koranic words as he hangs the same *sura* in his room. In the frame, the words ‘envious’ and ‘envy’ (*hasad*), set in large type and a different colour, stand out from the rest of the *sura*. It was not until a late stage of my fieldwork that I began to see the seriousness of Hadar Hadrami concern with *hasad* and how critical it was in immigrants’ lives. Perhaps, as Abu ‘Abdu thinks, I cannot see it because I do not believe in it and, more significantly, because I am not a Hadar Hadrami. But I argued with Abu ‘Abdu that, as Muslims, we are not supposed to believe in *hasad* and its effect on one’s fate, although one must recognise that in fact it exists between persons. Furthermore, I explained, I had learned that one’s best guard against *hasad* is faith in Allah with a purity of heart. “There are no pure hearts anymore,” Abu ‘Abdu retorted. “The more they get from you, the more they want to see you down. I know that some of those whom I brought here would wish to push me out of the way. Of course, everything is caused by Allah’s deeds, but what do you do if the envious is always next to you?”

What bothers Abu ‘Abdu and other Hadar Hadrami immigrants is not only the destructive nature of envy, but that it is embedded in close relationships and provoked by any individual act that others can observe. Envy is annihilation (*al-hasad damar*), and some relatives are like scorpions (*ba‘d, al-aqarib ‘aqarib*) who ‘do something and never tell you they did it’ (*saw shay wala taqul shay*). Yet Abu ‘Abdu has a complicated theory on the origin of *hasad* and how it became characteristic of Hadar Hadrami migratory reality. For example, *hasad* is caused by greed, poverty, or weakness in religious faith, as well as by what he calls the ‘Kuwaiti disease’, which results from being around Kuwaiti society’s extravagance. Finally, *hasad* is entrenched in people’s dislike of anything just or equal. This last point was disturbing

¹⁵⁸ The Koran, *surat al-falaq*.

to me. Before studying this Hadar Hadrami experience, I rarely questioned the idea that envy usually emerges from an egalitarian ethos, or the notion that any egalitarian penchant found in people's relationships is motivated by some form of envy. Envy, to me, was at least a levelling mechanism, particularly where deprivation was communal, such as in an immigrant community, hence any change in an individual's position within this setting of relationships might not go unchecked.

However, as I argue in this chapter, Abu 'Abdu might not have been wrong when he saw an association between envy and people's constant struggle for inequality. In the Hadar Hadrami experience, envy is not only expressed in the evil eye, but also through the constant effort of the envious¹⁵⁹ to replace someone or to reduce him symbolically or factually within a certain situation. As such, envy, and the fear of it, involves a constant fear of dispossession and loss of one's location, particularly when such a location is perceived to be desired and an object of competition in the Kuwaiti migratory milieu. Envy is seen as being motivated by a desire to be near to, or higher than, the envied person's place. My argument, though, is complemented by the assertion that such a form of envy is emergent within the Hadar Hadrami immigrant community as a result of the particular character of Hadar Hadrami migration to Kuwait. Just as a concern for envy marks almost all male-male personal interactions in the Hadar Hadrami community, it also functions to perpetuate a Hadar Hadrami migratory culture of dependency, itself based on accepted forms and practices of inequality between Hadar Hadramis and Kuwaiti sponsors (*mu'azzibs*).

The connection between this culture of dependency and Hadar Hadrami envy cannot be understood without acknowledging, first, the structural inferiority that Hadar Hadramis internalise in their relationships with Kuwaitis, and second, that this structural inferiority produces a specific kind of social proximity in which social comparison between Hadar Hadramis becomes an essential process for the rise of envy. Thus, the intensity of envy is greater within Hadar Hadrami relationships than between Hadar Hadramis and Kuwaitis, where resentment rather than envy is seen to characterise the Hadar Hadrami reaction to structural inferiority. Here, I should reiterate my central argument that envy may seem to emerge from an egalitarian ethos and may reflect assertions of equality. In the Hadar Hadrami experience, however, it strives to create or to sustain an existing inequality, particularly when the

¹⁵⁹ The envious here is a male. I do not have any information on the women's view of envy regarding this migration.

socioeconomic gap between the subject and the object of envy is minimal. Hadar Hadrami envy represents subjective and partial concerns of inferiority, which emerge as a formative element of social relationships in migration. In the following, I first demonstrate how envy is emergent in this community and then describe envy's expression and consequences in the Hadar Hadrami migratory context.

Ethnography of Hadar Hadrami envy

Hadar Hadrami migration to Kuwait reached a peak in the late 1980s, with a migrant population of around 25,000. But as we have seen in Chapter 6, the community vanished as a result of the 1991 Gulf War, and later as a result of the Kuwaiti migration policies that followed. Today, there are 4000 to 5000 Hadar Hadramis in Kuwait. Hadar Hadrami immigrants arrive regularly and easily, although the difficulties of obtaining a Kuwaiti work visa, or of finding comfortable work and a *mu'azzib*, remain a problem for many, if not most, prospective immigrants. However, and in addition to the diminutive size of Kuwait, the contraction in community size is reflected in intra-community forms of association, personal relationships, and social networking. For example, gossip not only transmits faster within a community of this size, but also circulates for longer periods and, in some cases I know of, leads to open accusations and durable tensions. Those who intend to migrate or visit are subjected to more questions and verifications of where and for whom they will work in Kuwait. Additionally, their connections are more exposed, traced, and scrutinised during conversations, mainly by those who are already immigrants. The community size makes Hadar Hadramis in Kuwait more proximate; thus, individuals are easily reached for assessment of their comparative standing. Proximity motivates such an exhaustive comparison process amongst Hadar Hadramis that some individual immigrants try to evade it through invisibility and avoidance of the community altogether. These individuals' behaviour is justified as eluding envy and being protected. Hadar Hadrami social proximity is not the only element that leads to comparison, conflict, and individuals' strong belief in envy. The inferior position of Hadar Hadrami immigrants and the structural properties of their relation with other Kuwaitis and certain immigrant communities are also significant.

In comparison with other Arab nationalities, Hadar Hadramis' return migration to Kuwait was swift and successful. Hadar Hadramis in general were not accused in official or local Kuwaiti political discourse of betrayal or ingratitude. Some

Kuwaitis even distinguish between Hadar Hadramis—whom they regard as their sons—and all other Yemenis. Hadar Hadramis, too, emphasise the strength, endurance, and intimacy of their personal links with Kuwaitis. The two societies resonate with such depictions, particularly in comparing Hadar Hadramis to other groups such as Palestinians and Egyptians. This exchange between the two societies resulted from what I called in Chapter 2 *house-to-house migration*. This is a fundamental factor in understanding the peculiar position that Hadar Hadramis have always occupied within Kuwaiti migration.

When sponsorship became a prerequisite, Hadar Hadramis, unlike other immigrants, did not have to search for sponsors, because the latter were already there in Kuwaiti houses. Hadar Hadramis were easily sponsored by a member of a Kuwaiti family, usually the father or someone he recommended. Since then, Hadar Hadrami presence in Kuwait has become almost exclusively dependent on such connections. I have already shown in Chapter 5 how and why the Kuwaiti relationship with Hadar Hadramis has persisted, and what symbolic functions this form of association satisfies—for example, the fact that Hadar Hadramis perform inequality, through dependency, as if it were the natural order of association between Kuwaitis and all foreigners. Here, however, I should reiterate that for such inequality to be maintained as *natural*, the immigrant must show his strong, sometimes complete, dependence on the sponsor. Hadar Hadramis not only accept such inequality by being totally dependent on someone else; they also *internalise* it not only as a structural value, but also as a culture of migration. Being more dependent means more relatedness to a *mu'azzib*, and hence the latter's greater satisfaction and unwillingness to relinquish the Hadar Hadrami. Importantly, Hadar Hadrami immigrants connect the ways through which the *mu'azzib* capitalises on their dependence with the degree of 'success' of such a relationship. The question now is how such inequality, through dependency, might be reflected in the social attitudes and forms of relationships of the Hadar Hadrami immigrant community.

To many Hadar Hadrami immigrants, being dependent implies a strong disposition to compromise one's self-worth and prestige. Furthermore, some of my informants think that their value as people is determined by being related to a *mu'azzib*, even when they are no longer working in Kuwait. Abu Salih cheerfully commented, "When my *mu'azzib* sends me money every Ramadan, my wife and relatives in the village know that I am still worthy of respect and that I am honoured."

Yet it is this kind of situation that causes most Hadar Hadramis I have met to experience what might be seen as *status inconsistency* (Goffmann 1957; Geschwender 1967; Runciman and Bagley 1969). This is the situation in which an individual (or a group) experiences a socioeconomic or a cultural position which imposes both negative and positive influence on his status.

When this status inconsistency is set against the structural inferiority of Hadar Hadramis' relationships to Kuwaitis, it also engenders feelings of *relative deprivation*. Relative deprivation arises when individuals of similar background subjectively perceive themselves to be disadvantaged or inferior in relation to other groups of similar socioeconomic traits who are seen to be rewarded. Hadar Hadramis usually use other immigrants, like Palestinians or Egyptians, as a reference group in this respect. However, it is evident from the literature that a sense of relative deprivation is more likely when status discrepancies among individuals are not so great. Relative deprivation creates discontent that is reflected in intensive forms of social comparison, leading to conflict, jealousy, and envy among those who feel a comparative inferiority (Young 1987; Runciman 1966).

For example, Hadar Hadramis believe themselves to be distinctive in their relationship with Kuwaitis. This is because they are attached to local powers and are therefore privileged by the persistence of their migration, when in fact there is no realistic economic need for them. However, their performance of ideal dependency on Kuwaitis generates no reward, particularly not Kuwaiti citizenship, which entails important economic and political advantages. Hadar Hadramis in general are openly resentful of this inconsistency, and I have found it to be a common topic in their conversations with Kuwaitis. However, status inconsistency has complicated social dimensions related to the forms of individual relationships and attitudes among Hadar Hadrami immigrants, particularly social comparisons. A Hadar Hadrami immigrant is always evaluated by fellow immigrants and kin: where is he positioned, what will he achieve out of such a position, and how he will preserve his place with a *mu'azzib*? These concerns comprise central topics in the community's gossip and narratives. Yet such a continuous evaluation not only involves a check on one's status, but is also delivered through a meticulous comparison of another or several statuses simultaneously. This produces an unmistakable tension in the community.

Usually, a Hadar Hadrami immigrant is aware that his status is always questionable; this generates an intense pressure with which he must cope. Status

inconsistency puts every Hadar Hadrami immigrant in a very contradictory social position. While an immigrant is normally seen as being successful as ‘a whole man’ (*rajjal kamil*) because others need him, he is still dependent on an external relationship, the termination of which is interpreted by others as complete failure. In other words, a Hadar Hadrami can experience some prestige, but it has a constant susceptibility to humiliation and loss. Such individual positional contradiction was rarely revealed to me in detail. However, this is what 53-year-old Yaslam Mansur thinks of his life as an immigrant:

Here, when I enter my place my wife and children would recognise my orders through my eyes’ movement, but outside I receive orders like children in a school ... and when I go to visit our village some would cheer me and make compliments, others would ask me to help them get a visa through my *mu’azzib*, while others would joke with envy in their hearts and say: ‘You are still where you are, Yaslam; you went to work as a *siby* (servant) and you are now a courier for your *mu’azzib*—no citizenship, and no Kuwaiti villa’ ... sometimes I wish I could hide or be deaf for the rest of my life.

Yaslam came 45 years ago to Kuwait to work as a servant, and he is now a courier for the same Kuwaiti family. Immediately after the 1991 war, his *mu’azzib* sent him a work visa and a flight ticket. He is seen by others as fortunate, for he is beloved by his *mu’azzib*’s family, who did not forget him when he needed them. Nevertheless, Yaslam’s experience of status inconsistency causes him to compare his position with those of others. He feels that his position is threatened by those who gossip about him or those who somehow want to be near to his position. But other Hadar Hadramis see Yaslam’s fear as resulting from selfishness, possessiveness, and envy, for he does not perform good deeds for others. Although he is aging and must be prepared to return, he is still not giving up his position and does not introduce other Hadar Hadramis to his *mu’azzib*. Noticeably, Yaslam, like other Hadar Hadramis, rarely interacts in a place where the *mu’azzib* can be exposed to other Hadar Hadramis who might offer an alternative. Some Hadar Hadramis told me that this kind of attitude is recent and only became intense following Hadar Hadramis’ return after the 1991 war. There are many Hadar Hadramis today who make visits to their old *mu’azzibs*, asking specifically for work visas or merely for some financial assistance. Some visits are made secretly. I asked a Hadar Hadrami ex-immigrant who visited his old *mu’azzib* why he would be concerned that others would know of his presence: “Why? If they knew I were here and that my *mu’azzib* refused to give me a visa, they would be happy about my *khaybah* (disappointment). If some knew I were here they

would say: 'His *mu'azzib* must surely have a place for someone, let us go ahead of him.' Others will envy me and cause me misfortune, and the *mu'azzib* might cut all our ties." Such fear of envy leads other persons to hide or distort facts about their comparative standing.

Therefore, a Hadar Hadrami must not praise his own situation publicly, for this is believed to call for competition over his place and may cause envy. In an incident he related to me, an informant spoke to others about his *rahaḥ* (comfort) in his job, which involved merely sitting and reading newspapers in his *mu'azzib*'s office in the government. Nevertheless, he swiftly reminded them that the job was not worth the bad words he hears from his *mu'azzib* every day. Interestingly enough, anthropologist Amitav Ghosh (1983: 218) has noticed a reverse in this behaviour in a similar social setting, with envy believed to be attracted when a man works too hard. This tells us that envy itself appears in certain social relationships shaped by cultural context and historical processes. Hadar Hadramis have long been exposed to Kuwaiti work values and consumer culture, which demeans physical or hard work and mainly appreciates undemanding office jobs. Ninety-eight percent of Kuwaitis work in offices in the government. I have observed that Hadar Hadramis desire and compete for such positions; Kuwaiti work standards have shaped Hadar Hadrami morals on the meaning and values of work. In fact, the Hadar Hadrami search for *rahaḥ* resembles the Kuwaiti cultural appreciation of undemanding vocations.

For example, a Hadar Hadrami who works under article 17 of the Alien Residence Law (which is devoted to foreigners employed in the Kuwaiti government) is said to be a *Shaykh*, being near Kuwaitis, usually performing easy tasks in one place, and having a more secure income. Hence, transfer from article 18 (for workers in the private sector) to article 17 is procedurally more difficult than transfer from article 18 to article 20 (for domestic servants). The majority of Hadar Hadramis in Kuwait work under articles 18 and 20; few Hadar Hadramis work under article 17. But it is interesting to see that those under article 17, who are normally more established as immigrants, are more eager to reduce their daily socialisation with the majority, although their work hours in the Kuwaiti bureaucracy are shorter and more flexible. They spend their leisure time around Kuwaitis, specifically their *mu'azzibs* and associates, because Kuwaitis, according to these Hadar Hadramis, are not going to envy someone who is dependent on them. Such behaviour of 'article-17' Hadar Hadramis generates criticism and accusations of arrogance from other Hadar

Hadramis. The former are accused of being protective of their places to such an extent that they disregard their fellow immigrants, and others say that the basis for such isolation is envy because they fear that when others get closer to them they will compete with them to take their employment places, in order to take a 'bite' from their *rizq* (endowment). Not all Hadar Hadramis think of these articles in such a classificatory manner, but the movement from one article to another usually indicates differences in one's social status, even power, in comparison with others.

Envy is rarely made public in this context. In fact, references to the evil eye or witchcraft are not very common among Hadar Hadrami immigrants. However, envy is thought to be found in others' actions, gestures, and ways of speaking, as well as in certain relationships. There is no particular character trait denoting who is likely to be an envious person. A person can feel envied because he perceives his position to be superior, while at the same time others may see him as envious. There are, however, some individuals who are known as dangerous because they always feel inferior to someone and deprived (*mahrumin*) of something. These individuals are likely to be born like this, and Hadar Hadramis have been accustomed to this tendency for a long time. Hadar Hadramis feel that *al-qill*, or scarcity or deprivation, always generates a deep sense of inferiority and 'dark feelings' towards others' riches or well-being.

Abu 'Abdu's experience shows in more detail how envy is expressed or practiced. Abu 'Abdu works as a guard in one of his *mu'azzib*'s real estate properties. He is over the age of 60, which under Kuwaiti laws renders him obligated to leave the country except for visits, yet he is allowed to stay through his *mu'azzib*'s connections at the Ministry of the Interior. He does not in fact perform any physical tasks, except a few phone calls to his *mu'azzib* regarding the condition of his real estate. Sometimes, he spends two to three days without seeing other Hadar Hadramis, but his immobility does not prevent him from obtaining information on others and their whereabouts. It also means that his room is a place where others can gather.

We used to spend hours in his room talking about all sorts of things, but his job and *mu'azzib* were the least popular topics in that room. It is these very topics, and questions about them, that are believed to be motivated by envy; therefore, one must avoid them as much as possible. If one has to give an account of one's position, one must know how to defend one's position and defeat one's rival, whose intentions are not 'clean' in bringing up this topic. For instance, when one of Abu 'Abdu's cousins enquired about his *mu'azzib*'s residence, Abu 'Abdu responded vehemently, saying:

“What do you want with his address?! You think you can marry his daughter! What are you? You are just a bug.” The cousin had come to work as a courier through Abu ‘Abdu himself. He is young but in fact less privileged in terms of salary and the work he does. Abu ‘Abdu is seen as lucky, having an easy job with a relatively high salary.¹⁶⁰ I was told by Abu ‘Abdu that the cousin wanted to know his *mu‘azzib* in order to replace him in his job and that the cousin would do so by ‘digging underneath Abu ‘Abdu’s feet’: “This is why he and some others now visit me; they have their jobs, but they don’t want to see me happy, or superior to them—they have black hearts, it is all because of envy, they feel they can’t sleep when you are happy.”

What is envied here is the good, privileged position which Abu ‘Abdu occupies, but it is not only his place that is seen as a desired goal to compete over; his relationship with his *mu‘azzib* is seen by the envious as an ideal success. Every six months, Abu ‘Abdu’s *mu‘azzib* gives him pocket money, buys him a flight ticket, and allows him two months to visit home. The *mu‘azzib* bought Abu ‘Abdu a mobile and occasionally allowed him to drive his Lexus jeep. The envy of such a relationship takes a very complicated form, but it is always embedded in figurative hints and specific conversational styles. Envy finds expression in showing disinterest in whatever the rival may have achieved. As an act, disinterestedness is related to envy in the sense that it is used to devalue the envied person’s economic status or prestige. This situation could be observed when one of Abu ‘Abdu’s friends showed unresponsiveness and ‘coldness’ in welcoming Abu ‘Abdu’s return from a visit to home. Such a posture is thought of as an act of envy, and that which is envied is the ‘happiness’ of the returnee immigrant. Abu ‘Abdu thought of his friend’s coldness as stemming from a mean wish that Abu ‘Abdu not return so that he could put his brother in his place. In these occurrences, envy is a rational means-to-end act.

However, envy can also be irrational in that the subject and the object have similar positions and the true value of the envied good is not at all clear to the subject. Hence, although in this context disinterest may be considered an impolite reaction, many are puzzled about why and how it has come to be common in Hadar Hadrami interactions. In any case, disinterest may be seen as one of the strategies that the envious person uses in order to deny the rival any chance to enjoy an achievement, or even to disclose a disagreement with him. Disinterest can also be expressed in an

¹⁶⁰ The average wage of Hadar Hadramis is in the range of US \$400 to \$600. Abu ‘Abdu makes around \$600.

indirect manner when the envious presents a model of success (usually an affluent and unreachable person) during a conversation with a successful fellow, thus implying a comparison between the two which would either diminish or insult the immigrant's reputation and pride. Nonetheless, disinterest does not terminate relationships in this community, for it is an attempt to impress or to make an indirect 'statement' about someone's social status and action. As such, it only stimulates more competition and more plans for social revenge among immigrants.

Envy is commonly seen as the cause of misfortune. Strangely enough, though, among Hadar Hadrami immigrants, envy is also said to arise when one experiences misfortune of some sort. Foster has noticed that the *sop* behaviour, which is the loser's compensation in a competition, is a kind of symbolic sharing by the winner to buy off the possible envy of the loser (1972: 177). In the Hadar Hadrami case, however, any attempt of this sort is usually interpreted as rejoicing at hardship (*shamatah*), a situation that is only generated following someone's misfortune. When Abu 'Abdu's son was denied a work visa by the *mu'azzib*, Abu 'Abdu at first disappeared for a couple of days before others came, pretending, as he believed, that they were there to 'assuage' his disappointment with his *mu'azzib*. "When a camel seems to fall down, many knives will come to take a piece of it. That's me and them. In their hearts they would say about my son's not coming to Kuwait: 'Thank God, minus one' ... They feel as if when my son comes here that he would take the bite from their mouths ... they think I am a fool and have no memory of what they did." Months later, Abu 'Abdu took revenge. He refrained from helping to renew the work visa of one of those individuals who rejoiced at his misfortune. The envious person was Abu 'Abdu's fellow villager, who used to work for Abu 'Abdu's *mu'azzib*'s sister. Before leaving Kuwait, the envious person had to borrow money from Abu 'Abdu himself to buy his return flight ticket and goods for his family. Abu 'Abdu commented triumphantly on that: "Minus one." Six months later, I met with the same person in my visit to Hadramawt as he was trying to get a new visa to Kuwait. He looked miserable and felt humiliated by his return, for he had not expected to remain in the village for such a long time.

Envy occupies an important part of Hadar Hadrami social life. Almost 50% (20 out of 41) of the Hadar Hadrami immigrants surveyed saw envy as a more prevalent and 'negative' attitude than stinginess, for example. (More than 50% of them saw extravagance and arrogance as the most noticeable negative attitudes

amongst Kuwaitis). Envy is seen to dominate relationships under migration, almost as a communal concern; thus, Hadar Hadramis attribute this attitude to a general belief that 'no one wants to see the goodness of others' (*ma ahad bagha al-khayr li ahad*). The antipathy that Abu 'Abdu shows towards his own people for being envious and greedy is not unusual among immigrants of such a background. As said before, *hasad* brings with it the 'loss' of one's reputation, job, money, and health. Even one's failure in getting a visa to Kuwait is sometimes attributed to envy. As such, envy is an invisible and constant threat. But *hasad* also determines the nature of one's relationship with friends and family members at home. The fear of envy encourages some immigrants to continue to remit money and goods to relatives, old friends, neighbours, and those whom the immigrant does not like.¹⁶¹

Those at home, or those who could not make it to Kuwait for one reason or another, may be seen as injurious to the immigrant's well-being, for they feel deprived and inferior to the immigrant. Thus, despite Abu 'Abdu's bitterness about his brother and family, whom he says mostly contact him to send them 'something' (money or goods), in reality he still remits to them, and even to some of the people he accuses of envying him. A serious concern about envy may also control the behaviour of an immigrant in that it encourages someone to remain 'hidden', as Hadar Hadramis say, for years in Kuwait. I was told that a Hadar Hadrami person with whom I met briefly in Kuwait had been terrified for more than 20 years, during which he never visited home, for he believed that it was too risky for him to be seen so healthy and happy by envious kin in his village. Therefore, all he did in those years was to send money and goods to his daughter, who then redistributed them accordingly.

Like this person, Abu 'Abdu believes that giving to those with destructive spirits will protect him from envy or at least minimise its consequences. At home, Abu 'Abdu will be 'examined' in terms of the way he dresses and the way he looks to determine whether he is healthy, happy, or even different in one way or the other. In Kuwait, he will be envied, as he will be seen as a returning competitor to someone who hates to see him back. This is probably why a timely return to Kuwait, for instance, is sometimes celebrated by Abu 'Abdu, who survived the effort of the envious to 'freeze' or bring him down by keeping him around in Hadramawt for a

¹⁶¹ See more personal accounts of envy in the life history of 'Ashur, (see Appendix).

longer period of time. These concerns are not confined to Abu 'Abdu; others also take them seriously, as the following two passages show. These are excerpts from Abu 'Abdu's favourite poems on envy and the envious, composed by his Hadar Hadrami immigrant friend and poet Muhammad Ba Nusayr. Ba Nusayr, 79, whose life history I audio-recorded, also devoted large portions of his poetry to his anxiety regarding envy and its possible impact on his 'place' and well-being.

In this poem (undated), Ba Nusayr describes preparing to return to Kuwait after a visit to his hometown, al-Shihr:

And there the poet who misses his family and sons || I prepared and depended on Allah to meet the faraway beloved

وبعد قال الشاعر المشتاق لأهله والولاد || عزمت وتوكلت بأشوف الحبايب لي بعيد

Those who are in the Kuwait of prosperity and honoured lions || when I reach them on a Friday it will be like an 'id

لي في كويت العز والناموس يا كم من أسد || لما نصلهم با يكون عيدين جمعه وعيد

We will meet the beloved while the envious is away || we will celebrate and kill sheep for this happy day

با نلتقي الأحبه والحاسد بعد || با نذبح الخرفان في اليوم المبارك والسعيد

We leave the envious and malicious whose soul is darkened by Allah || who will be punished on the day of judgment

حاسد و حاقد وقد بلاك الله ربك بالرمد || و عاد يوم العرض عنده بايحاسبك الشديد

This poem is titled 'intended especially for those envious and spiteful' (May, 2000):

O Allah the one and the only whom we all worship || you the eternal protect me from the envious's viciousness

يا فرد يا معبوديا واحد صمد || يا حي يا قيوم كف شر الحسود

Beware of them and run away from them (envious) || they will eat you alive like the snakes and lions

يا غارة الله منهم حذرك شرد || با يأكلونك مثل الأفاعي والأسود

O son, some relatives are scorpions || shamelessly they will feed you but their venoms that shackle you

بعض الأقارب عقارب يا ولد || على الخسي با يسقيك سُمه والقيود

And beware of those who are mean and envious || people of gossip and sedition who are malicious

واحذر من الأندال وكبار الحسد || أهل النميمة والفتن لي هم حقود

How many times I provided for them but they say this is petty || one thousand, two thousands I gave, but they say we saw no money from you

يا كم وكم مديت قالوا كم تمد || يا ألف يا الفين ما منك نقود

The stress of envy in immigrants' relationships is reflected in a pattern of Hadar Hadrami social networking or individual interconnections. In anthropology, there has been a general tendency to focus mainly on the ways in which networks either grow or endure to form a concentration of social relations which formulates a group identity. It is tempting to follow this method in the case of Hadar Hadrami immigrants. However, as Barnes (1990) asserted, one of the significant aspects of the concept of social networks is that it also enables us to look "at those parts of social life where groups do not always form" (1990: 72-73). Hence, it can be inferred from Barnes' assertion that when networks are concentrated in one area of social interaction (relations with close family members and friends), they are somehow minimized in other areas of social relations (relations with same-village immigrants in the community). Among Hadar Hadrami immigrants in Kuwait today, there is a great loosening of individuals' relationship networks. For Hadar Hadramis, being part of a group (in its narrowest sense) increases, as I have shown earlier, observation, comparison, and pressure on the individual. Remarkably, many Hadar Hadramis today dissociate themselves from group commitments and live in a spatially dispersed manner, assuming an individualistic lifestyle. The number of Hadar Hadrami 'izbahs in Kuwait today may explain the general Hadar Hadrami avoidance of publicity and systematic interaction. Before 1990, it is estimated that there were at least 30 'izbahs in Kuwait, compared with 3 or perhaps 4 at the present. What this leads to is a

reduction in the level of networking amongst immigrants, which can also be seen in the tiny number of well-connected people (*'uggal*, for instance) in the community, as was the case prior to 1990. Of course, Hadar Hadrami immigrants do have a help or favouritism system, and there are mobilising individuals who invest in these relationships. But networking exposes the individual and the resources to which he might have access. Consequently, Hadar Hadrami networking is confined and linear (as in the exchange of information and job resources between a father and a son) and very much fragmented as a process. In such a context, and given the socioeconomic and structural conditions of this migration, concern about envy forms and becomes a representation of Hadar Hadrami social relationships. In the following, I situate the Hadar Hadrami concept of envy within broader theoretical frameworks.

Envy: a problem of analysis

There is controversy over what precisely envy is, or what it represents in human life. On one level, envy may be characterised as an attitude or emotion towards another individual's good fortune and a desire to gain it. It is usually a three-party relation, which involves an envier (subject), an envied person (object or rival), and a particular 'good'. The good may be an actual possession, a capacity, a physical trait like beauty, a certain relationship, happiness, or even the potential for success or an employment position, as in the Hadar Hadrami case. Envy, however, may occur when the subject perceives the object to have an undeserved good, even when that good creates no real material discrepancies between the two parties. As an emotion, envy represents a form of distress at the good fortunes of others. On another level, envy may be seen as a strategy for eliminating rivals and benefiting from certain givens in a situation. This last interpretation makes envy a significant topic in political philosophy and political behaviour. Still, a known problem that envy poses is the difficulty of its analytic categorisation. What is it that distinguishes envy from other similar emotions, feelings, attitudes, or even dispositions such as jealousy and resentment?

Envy, jealousy, and resentment

Basically, envy revolves around a constant tendency to evaluate one's well-being in a comparative manner. Comparison intensifies in familiar contexts, which result from face-to-face interaction, a small gap in subject-object distance, and other forms of social proximity. These contexts and the competitiveness they bear make

envy hard to distinguish from jealousy. Hadar Hadramis do not clearly distinguish between jealousy (*ghirah*) and *hasad*, for the two belong to a group of negative emotions and black desires referred to as hatred. Nonetheless, and for analytic purposes, I shall discuss ways through which envy may be distinguished from jealousy.

Typically, jealousy has two parties: the subject and the rival. It may be characterised as the wish not to lose something (very important for the subject's self definition) to someone else. Usually, the concern of jealousy is some favourable human relationship by which the subject's status and value are measured. While with envy the subject desires to have what the rival has, in jealousy the subject is defendant of a status and a relationship. Envy may stem from, or occur during, a certain phase in a relationship and become a concealed admiration of the object's superior situation. Jealousy, on the other hand, may result in an open conflict leading to a recognised antagonism and hostility (Ben-Ze'ev 1990; see also De la Mora 1987).

These distinctions between envy and jealousy are given an ordinary meaning among Hadar Hadramis. Nevertheless, for Hadar Hadramis, envy has a more socio-pathological connotation believed to be infinite in its effect because, as Hadar Hadramis say, 'envy resides in people's hearts' (*al-hasad sakin al-qulub*), whereas jealousy comes and goes sporadically. Jealousy, in this sense, can be justified, even ridiculed, especially when it turns into prevalent anger, say between brothers or wives. Envy, on the other hand, is seen by Hadar Hadramis as unjustified hatred towards others' well-being, success, and happiness. A further distinction between resentment and envy is also necessary.

Resentment is a moral emotion which embodies some clear moral claims, complaints, and principles related to more general conditions of injustice. In the case of resentment, inferiority or injustice results from broadly felt deprivation. What makes the distinction between envy and resentment difficult is that both involve concerns of inferiority and varying degrees of social comparison. Yet, it is clear, as most philosophers of emotion suggest, that unlike resentment envy does not represent a moral concern (See De la Mora 1987; Ortony et al. 1988). This is because "envy addresses only partial concern rather than the general concern typical of the moral domain" (Ben-Ze'ev 1992: 553). Perhaps this is why, in political rhetoric, resentment is commonly viewed as a major societal inspiration for eliminating inequality. This is an important distinguishing element between envy and resentment.

The central concern of envy is a specific inferiority in relation to someone else. However, this perceived inferiority cannot originate without some form of comparison and a sense of relative deprivation (Kohn 1986: 141; Ben-Ze'ave 1992: 555).

Envy and the scale of social comparison

The intensity of envy, hence the degree of the perceived inferiority, always depends on social comparison, which necessarily involves competitiveness. Hadar Hadrami envy breeds this competitiveness. Regarding envy, comparison is more prevalent among those who perceive themselves to be equal or alike. Envious comparison is impossible without premeditated competitiveness between related parties. Of course, a Hadar Hadrami immigrant who wishes to have the wealth of the Kuwaiti *amir*, or even of his own sponsor, does so through comparison, but in no way would he think of himself as competing with them. Therefore, a Hadar Hadrami may resent, for example, the extravagance of his Kuwaiti sponsor, but he is not envious of him, for competitiveness is hardly possible in that relation. Francis Bacon said: "Where there is no comparison, no envy; and therefore kings are not envied but by kings" (Bacon *Essays* 1625/1955: 9). People compete with those of similar standing and with those who are, or are expected to be, slightly superior to themselves. Envy, then, arises, and in fact intensifies, in situations of lesser inequality rather than in more extreme ones. In cases of minimal inequality, Hadar Hadrami patterns of social relevance create a sense of deprivation essential for competitiveness (the strongest form of comparison). Within the Hadar Hadrami immigrant community, deprivation is expressed in the tension that there is restricted access to some 'good'. A common instance among kin is when a subject believes himself to be underprivileged because he is deprived of that good or its likeness by his relative's intentions, actions, or mere position. The aim of the subject's and the rival's efforts is not to 'get even', although it may be expressed as such by the subject. However, as I showed in the ethnography, both individuals' efforts are aimed at creating distance or maintaining a social difference. The question is: how is envy rationalised? Namely, how did it become associated with egalitarian moral values?

Envy is a moral paradox. For instance, envy is commonly condemned by Hadar Hadramis, yet appears to embody moral values believed to result from a desire to achieve equality. Thus, it has been assumed by some scholars that an envy-free society can be reached when resources are evenly allocated amongst individuals so

that no one desires the bundles of others rather than his own (Foley 1967; Dworkin 1981). Hence, with equality envy would not exist, or, if it did, it would not be as negatively effective as it is under inequality. It is this paradoxical nature of envy that probably led to the famous attempts by Freud, Nietzsche, and Rousseau to rationalise envy as the emotional drive for general social justice. But the common connection between envy and egalitarianism, and justice as one of its values, is based on the principle that envy is rational. As such, envy is seen as a rational emotion, for it involves thoughtful assessments of real conditions that individuals would wish to change or maintain, and that are mostly related to the disproportionate distribution of a good or a resource. Envy, then, is rational because, in philosophical terms, of its *fittingness* or objective rationality (D'Arms 2002: 4). Envy is fitting, for example, when a Hadar Hadrami's effort is directed at possessing an existing good that his rival really does have.

However, I showed earlier that envy, as an emotion, can also be typically unfitting, and therefore irrational—at least in contexts of minimal gaps in subject-object distance, where in fact envy is found to be more intense, and sometimes a shared concern. This is because, as in the Hadar Hadrami context, an individual's perception of lacking some good that a rival has may not correspond to the reality of the situation, in which the rival does not in fact possess the desired good. Furthermore, sometimes the nature of the good he lacks is unclear to the envious person. So envy may be directed at having a good which is not really a 'good' that would be significant or valued for the subject's self-interest or self-worth, had he known its true nature (D'Arms 2002: 4). Additionally, Hadar Hadrami envy arises in cases when the subject and the object do in fact possess similar goods, or when both hold more or less equal positions, but there is a feeling that bad differences are present, or are impending, between the two persons; this prepares grounds for comparison and creates envy. In this sense, envy is irrational and may not be considered a moral emotion.

My view of Hadar Hadrami envy, though, should not imply that envy has no normative dimension, or even justification, especially from a subjective point of view, which usually involves some degree of a value claim regarding a certain situation (see Ben-Ze'ev 1992: 564-565). It is this normative element that has endowed envy with an important place in theories of egalitarianism. Again, in such writings, the rationales of envy are seen as significant foundations for the concerns of equality in societies.

Thus, the assumption is that there is a negative correlation between envy and economic equality. This is an egalitarian assumption that George Foster (1972) embraced. Foster asserted, "In theory, if not always in practice, a major strength of an egalitarian society derives from the fact that since differences in access to good things are slight, envy is reduced to a level where it is not a seriously disruptive force in the society" (Foster 1972: 185). I have demonstrated, however, that this might not be the case, since envy was found to be very intense amongst Hadar Hadrami immigrants who either held similar goods or had equal access to them.

Envy and the Image of the Limited Good

Although envy is an apparent element in the persistence of power conflicts and social differentiation, anthropological attempts to analyse envy are curiously few. The topic has not received attention equal to that given to witchcraft and the evil eye. Recognition of envy, because of one's possible inferiority in a situation, is extremely rare since it entails shame and some compromise of self-esteem. Foster (1972), expanding on German thinker Helmut Schoeck (1970), pointed out that envy is almost a taboo in daily conversation, in research, and in literature.

In many ways, envy could be seen as an art of resisting detection, for it must always be concealed. But it is also an art in terms of managing the ways in which it must be exhibited, such as gossip or distorted situational judgments of others' actions and well-being. As such, envy is a simultaneously rational and irrational act. It is rational, for it involves personal calculations and studied choices. Yet at the same time, it involves fear and discomfort that are sometimes the products of groundless "irrational fantasies" (Foster 1972: 168). It is this very nature of envy which makes it a fundamental element in the analysis of social relations, especially when these relations are characterised by status differences, varying access to goods, personal competition, and a sense of socioeconomic deprivation. Anthropologists who examine envy in ethnographic contexts tend to distinguish between sociological and psychological frameworks. Regarding this, Foster offered a systematic ethnographic effort which situated envy as an emotion within the dynamics of socioeconomic life. In his view, however, the dynamics of a society are to be understood through 'behaviour patterns' such as envy, which can be examined using a model he called "The Image of Limited Good" (1965a: 293).

Originally, Foster formulated this model to refer to what he saw as the cognitive orientation of peasants in a Mexican village. Thus, peasants' behaviour is patterned in a way that leads them to view everything in their social, economic, and natural universes as insufficient in quantity. Therefore, "all of the desired things in life as land, wealth, health, friendship and love, manliness and honour, respect and status, power and influence, security and safety, *exist in finite quantity and are always in short supply*" (Foster 1965a: 296 italics original). And because the peasant economies are not productive, Foster suggested that there is only a finite amount of wealth produced (297). "[It] follows that *an individual or a family can improve a position only at the expense of others*. Hence, an apparent relative improvement in someone's position with respect to any 'Good' is viewed as a threat to the entire community" (Foster 1965a: 297 italics original).

According to Foster, social institutions and personal values display tendencies that are functions of their cognitive orientation or the image of limited good. A characteristic tendency in peasant society is the constant effort to maximise individual security by not showing prevalent attempts to accumulate wealth and to overpower others. Another tendency is to minimise the threat that could result from envy. Fear of envy underlies many of the ritual and symbolic acts carried out by individuals. Envy is neutralised or guarded against through concealment of one's improvement or through symbolic sharing of what an individual or a family might have (Foster 1965b: 27-33). In such a context, Foster (1965a) argued, individuals see themselves in a perpetual struggle with other fellows for possession of or control over what they deem as their share of scarce values (302). Therefore, Foster believed that the competition, suspicion, and mutual distrust that shape all social relationships are motivated by a cultural disposition that resists change and suppresses differences to reach a social equilibrium (Foster 1965a: 302, 305, 310).

Foster (1972: 169) extended his argument to say that the Limited Good, or the insufficient quantity of the good things in life, seems to underlie possibly all envy, not only among peasants but also in all other societies. In modern societies, fear of envy and mechanisms that reduce it are also expressed in the concealment and sharing of goods pattern. Tipping, in American society, for example, is a symbolic device used to buy off the envy of people less fortunate than the giver (166). Foster claimed, moreover, that living people can also fear the envy of the dead. Hence, "mourning rites, emphasising sombre clothing and the avoidance of pleasurable activities, also

constitute symbolic denial that the life of the survivors is worth coveting” (1972: 177). Although envy is minimal in egalitarian relations, Foster held that it is in these social relations that envy is most commonly felt. There is a clear tendency in Foster’s analysis to interpret every symbolic act in this regard as stemming from a concern regarding some limited good, and therefore envy.

Tipping, for instance, can have specific cultural, political, and symbolic meaning across the world other than fear of envy. Sometimes, the amount tipped in the Hadar Hadrami society is intended to show others the tipper’s richness, generosity, or kindness. In other occasions, and whatever the amount tipped, it can be used merely to humiliate the tipped person. Showing grief in the Hadar Hadrami context can be the result of a genuine feeling of loss or may be an expected reaction through which a person can avoid the criticism or gossip of his or her living fellows. However, as Cancian has shown (1989: 140), Foster’s tendency to reduce such acts to envy stems from his belief that envy is *universal* (almost eternal in the *reason of being*), because everywhere, all good things in life are sensed to be limited. Envy’s universality, then, renders it a shared attribute of the human mind; therefore, the interpretation of it must be psychological (Foster 1972).

This significant claim that Foster made, however, is somewhat misleading and in a way weakens his analysis, for envy is *not universal* in human societies; rather, it is *typical* of certain relationships and social processes that can be found in all societies. In addition, envy can be emergent as a phenomenon that can arise or intensify during specific social phases of dramatic change in the experience of individuals. Envy as an emotion can only be expressed, and hence has a meaning, through its own social process, economic relations, and cultural and historical trajectories. In some western and peasant societies alike, envy can hardly have any special position in the system of emotion. It has been shown that, for instance, in French societies neither “learned nor popular literature gives prominent place in the universe of feelings to envy” (Cuisenier: 1972: 189). Hence, envy is not always related to a belief in the limitation of good things in life.

In Kuwaiti society, Foster’s model of the image of limited good is literally inverted. Anthropologist Sulayman Khalaf (1992) showed how Kuwaitis, who enjoy one of the highest per capita incomes in the world, view all sources of wealth, including state welfare, as ‘Unlimited Good’ (Khalaf 1992: 53) and that they have deep faith in its durability. Kuwaitis, though, feel more envied by neighbouring Arabs

in other countries than by each other (1992: 76-77). This is despite the fact that there are minimal local variations in accessing state wealth, which, in Foster's understanding, can become a major ground for feelings of inferiority, competition, and envy. In the 12 audio-recorded life histories of Hadar Hadrami immigrants that I gathered, references to envy were almost totally absent at the early and middle phases of the interviews that related to village life and any previous migration before moving to Kuwait. Only when informants began to account for their migratory experience in Kuwait (particularly after 1990) did references to emotions like resentment, envy, hatred, and even moral degeneration appear frequently in their stories.

All this, I believe, makes envy a context-specific phenomenon that could cause *subjective* and *partial* concerns of inferiority and deprivation to surface as an aspect of social relations in a specific locality. Hadar Hadrami envy does not appear in isolation of other emotions (such as guilt, misery, powerlessness, and dependency) that attend to specific socio-historical experiential moments. Consequently, envy is not an unchanging or fixed emotion, for it can be intense at some times and under certain conditions, while it is almost unfelt at other times and under other conditions. It takes a particular social character, as envy is always based on certain degrees and patterns of communication across and within communities. More significantly, envy's intensity is always dependent on the extent to which people believe it to be central in their daily practice and how they express or control it. It follows, then, that not every sense of deprivation, limited access to goods, and inferiority will be shared and thus lead to competition and envy. As Gonzalo Fernandez de la Mora strongly argued, "[the] essential condition for envy to arise is not an objectivity of scarcity, as so many think, but rather a subjective inability to have [...] in the majority of cases the problem of the envious person has nothing to do with the fact that some good is more or less limited, but rather for a lack of the necessary capacity to obtain it" (De la Mora 1987: 69).

Nevertheless, some of the issues raised by Foster some 40 years ago remain contentious today, particularly the idea that envy can be strongly related to a sense of inferiority and competition for resources seen by some individuals as limited or inaccessible. It is important to note, though, that whereas Foster suggested that envy stems from a community's cognitive orientation, the Hadar Hadrami case reveals that envy cannot be adequately analysed without situating it within the structural reality of this migration. In other words, the nature of Hadar Hadramis' relationship with

Kuwait and Kuwaitis has not only stimulated envy among immigrants, but has also given the envy of the Hadar Hadrami its own meaning and social character.

Conclusion

Clearly, Hadar Hadrami immigrants in Kuwait see employment opportunities and some *mu'azzib* relationships as being limited in number, and they also view certain job titles as being more prestigious than others. This vision, however, cannot be isolated from the economic and sociohistorical realities of this migration, specifically the Hadar Hadrami structural inferiority as seen in patterns of dependency. Inequality, I have shown, can be performed as total dependency in Hadar Hadramis' peculiar relation to Kuwaiti *mu'azzibs*. Inequality is also subconsciously internalised and is reflected in the Hadar Hadrami sense of status inconsistency and relative deprivation. I have argued that inconsistency and deprivation result in intense forms of social comparison, hence competition, among Hadar Hadramis who are socially proximate. Envy, then, can be emergent as a result of specific circumstances and can have its own social character. Envy emerges within the Hadar Hadrami migratory context as a form of relationship which tends to increase social distance and to intensify any existing vertical arrangement of power. Only partial or subjective concerns motivate envy between a Hadar Hadrami subject and a rival in this context, but these concerns, I have argued, have no moral basis like that of the Hadar Hadrami resentment of Kuwaitis' superiority. Here, Hadar Hadrami envy is related to individual inferiority, not inferiority as a whole. This is what makes envy, in this experience at least, irrelevant to any levelling mechanism or any egalitarian penchant. Hadar Hadramis, like Abu 'Abdu, think that equality is an impossible ideal, if not an unwanted outcome of any relationship. I always thought that when Abu 'Abdu used his favourite proverb, *ma ahad ahsan min ahad* (no one is better-off than the rest), that what was implied was an aspiration for equality. In reality, though, what it meant was that what has been achieved as status today may be lost tomorrow, and that therefore, there is always a possibility for competition and conflict over resources and social statuses. Abu 'Abdu said: "I will not leave my spot, why?! Am I a fool?! Why would I let them ride over my shoulders? This is my *rizq* (endowment), given to me by Allah, who will protect me from their envy." Lastly, then, Hadar Hadrami envy is an individual mechanism of pulling-down and pushing-aside others, rather than an egalitarian tool of justice.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

The analysis in this thesis suggests that Hadar Hadrami migration to Kuwait presents a paradox on various levels. To understand this paradox, I have examined how it played itself out in contradictions that gave rise to, and henceforth perpetuated, particular forms of association between Hadar Hadramis and Kuwaitis. On the Hadrami level, the paradox was acted out in the endurance of the strong connection of individuals and whole households to a place, while the forms and consequences of such connectivity have traditionally run against the movement's own socio-logical rationalisation and material bases. There was a clear Hadar Hadrami resolve that the opportunity to be in Kuwait would increase a man's status, reputation, and security within the immigrant community and village relationships. Yet at the same time, most Hadar Hadramis recognised that such an achievement in migration was only possible through a more or less cognisant self-immersion into dependent personal relationships, pervasive in daily expressions of unequal powers and hierarchy with Kuwaiti sponsors. The Hadar Hadrami reliance on the *mu'azzib* relationship—through the extension of the *siby* role or the disposition to serve outside the house—sustained the dependency moralities of Hadar Hadrami migration in Kuwait. An important practice that preserved Hadar Hadrami migration in Kuwait was the development of the *mu'azzib* relationship. The Hadrami-*mu'azzib* relationship emerged as a complex combination of these rudiments: the extension of the house-to-house migratory relationship, a powerful Hadar Hadrami sentiment of moral debt towards Kuwait and Kuwaitis, and a Kuwaiti penchant for control through the reconstruction of the symbolic power of the father within and outside the house. Much of this relationship entailed the performance of the immigrant's inferiority and the sponsor's superiority as if it were a natural, acceptable, even fair exchange of powers. I showed that there was a positive association (yet ironic in this male-oriented migratory context) between dependency and the degree and meaning of a man's success. A Hadrami, in his relations with the *mu'azzib*, was seen as being successful if his dependency was strong enough to become a kind of capital and a lifelong source of income and security. This is why Hadramis have traditionally located themselves near powerful people in Kuwait while being excluded from the means of power itself. This is exactly

what discourages mobilising, saving, future planning, and any serious attempt to achieve citizenship among most Hadar Hadramis of Kuwait.

On the Kuwaiti level, while the immigrant represented a socio-pathological figure for the state and, to a great extent, for society at large, it was the presence of this body that was necessary to shape Kuwaiti notions of national identity, cultural purity, and power in the family, with patriarchy seen as its most genuine value. These contradictions were reflected in the persistent Kuwaiti differentiation between natives and foreigners and socioeconomic and political categorisation as a way of exercising control over masses of immigrant populations. The Kuwaiti categorisation of Hadramis as needy, dependent, loyal, marginal, and un-ambitious has two foundations. First is the fact that categorisation was not a property of the receiving society alone, for Hadar Hadrami immigrants too embraced and maintained that reputation from the beginning. Hadar Hadramis were not totally passive in the migratory process, for it was this characteristic image that kept up their unrelenting presence in Kuwait despite transformations in the relationships between Yemen and Kuwait. Hadrami migration persisted despite the fact that Hadramis have never played a direct or significant role in Kuwait's overall migration economies. Second is the fact that the timing of the house-to-house migration and the Hadar Hadrami role in the Kuwaiti domestic life was synchronised with a Kuwaiti process of reconstruction of family hierarchical values and house-symbolic practices. Domestic values and practices were perceived by the Kuwaiti rich to be interrupted by the state's processes of education and employment of traditional house dependents (i.e. local slaves and the like). I have argued that Hadar Hadramis were seen as perfectly fitting, in terms of the timing of their movement, to compensate for the dramatic shortage in slaves and other attached dependents of affluent Kuwaiti houses. Hadar Hadramis were apt in terms of their socio-ethnic and physical character. There was a connection between Hadar Hadrami immigrants' physical appearance, which was similar to that of African ex-slaves and other marginal local groups in Kuwait, and the smoothness of their absorption into the domestic life of the rich houses. Hadramis were perceived and treated as dependents attached to one or more Kuwaiti families, and they remain such in the Kuwaiti cultural conceptualisation today.

Therefore, although Hadar Hadramis were preceded by 'Umanis in their contact with the Kuwaiti domestic realm, they were the only group that satisfied and preserved the Kuwaiti ideological model of the 'ideal immigrant'. As a prototype,

Hadar Hadramis differ from other immigrants in the ways in which they match a Kuwaiti stereotypical expectation of how Kuwaitis should be approached and how immigrants should behave in general. Hadar Hadramis are the 'best' immigrants in their personification of sponsorship, in their naturalisation of the local conception of the hierarchy of power between foreigners and natives, in their prevalent dependency on the *mu'azzib*, and in their disposition to serve and to perform the *siby* role or lifestyle. The Kuwaiti-Hadrami model of the ideal immigrant may be thought of as representing a culmination of the Kuwaiti-immigrant relationship. The model starts with any association between Kuwaitis and other immigrants, progresses to a Hadrami and a *kafil*, moves to a relation in which a Hadrami is incorporated in a Kuwaiti *mu'azzib*'s hierarchical setting, and then leads to an extreme dependency relationship. This finally culminates in the ideal situation of a prevalent *mu'azzib-siby* bond where the former's power may also be attained through the latter's disposition to serve.

The stories of the 'catastrophes' of migration and the experience of al-Qarah and its people illuminate the extent to which the house-to-house migratory experience and dependency values have played a significant role in shaping the Hadrami experience. The 1991 event was a turning point for Hadramis and Kuwaitis. The elimination of Kuwait as a state in 1990 was not just a political disaster; to the ordinary Kuwaiti, it was an unforgettable *loss of face*. "We became like the Indian and Bengali street cleaners, just like immigrants and refugees," Kuwaitis can be heard saying when they remember the event. For the more powerful Kuwaitis, the event of 1991 was even more humiliating. The Kuwaitis' need to recover from this loss of face corresponded with the quick return of Hadar Hadrami immigrants to their old sponsors and 'adoptive' families.

In some cases I observed, the *mu'azzib* made Hadramis' return intentionally public to Kuwaitis and other immigrants. As shown throughout the thesis, after Kuwait's liberation, some Kuwaiti families brought back their old Hadrami *siby* or driver, who was given a room near or at the back of the house. Some returnee Hadar Hadramis did not carry out any serious tasks, but to their Kuwaiti families it was as if the Hadrami presence in the house represented the return of all that had taken place in the house, and in Kuwait as a whole, before the invasion, reaffirming that Kuwaitis remained Kuwaitis and immigrants were still immigrants. For the most part, Hadar Hadrami migration to Kuwait today is just part of the social and symbolic reconstruction of Kuwait's migration reality, as discussed in Chapter 2.

To Hadar Hadramis, a major outcome of the 1991 war was a reduction in the size of the immigrant community, hence the emergence of severe forms of social comparison and individual competition over recruitment and certain *mu'azzib* relationships. Within the community, there was correlation between Hadrami resentment of Kuwaitis' superiority and extravagance and the ways in which envy forms relationships amongst Hadar Hadramis themselves. Envy, competition, and conflict relationships, which had only emerged during migration, were transferred to the immigrants' places of origin. The elimination of Kuwait as a state in 1990 also affected the Hadar Hadramis' prospects regarding the political stability of Kuwait as an abiding destination for work or settlement and hence as a secure source of income. Still, for the majority of today's Hadar Hadrami immigrants and prospective arrivals, Kuwait's instability, while creating Hadrami scepticism, has only boosted their reliance on pre-existing personal relationships with old sponsors and Kuwaiti espousing families. The basis for the structure of dependent relationships between Hadar Hadramis and their Kuwaiti sponsors is still found in the persistence of quasi-patriarchal and servitude forms of relatedness. Hadar Hadramis and Kuwaitis together reproduce these forms as a given cultural and structural directives between immigrants and natives.

Hadar Hadramis understood legal sponsorship as a part of the reconfiguration of the house association. A sponsor was seen as a dominant father figure who merely came to be equipped with yet another authoritative tool, that of sponsorship. As a result, many Hadar Hadramis who fled to Hadramawt during the 1991 war remained jobless for the 7 months of the Iraqi occupation (others for longer than that), waiting for their Kuwaiti 'fathers' to return home and to call on them to come back to Kuwait. This is an important outcome of the experience of the house-to-house migration that made dependency on the *mu'azzib* the only way for these Hadar Hadramis to survive. Hence, I argued in the chapters that many Hadar Hadramis today may not be considered immigrants *per se*, for, to Kuwaiti families, a Hadrami servant is an indication of a cultural preference and a social marker of power and identity. As a *siby*, he is part of a process of remaking values associated with family authority and the distribution of power between generations, genders, ethnicities, and classes. The concept of a dependent who is customarily a follower of his *mu'azzib* has always been central to the Kuwaiti domestic practices of patriarchy as a sign of social and political power. Perhaps more than any other immigrant group (including hundreds of

thousands of Asian house-servants), Hadar Hadramis internalised these social practices, but they did not accept them blindly. The internalisation of Kuwaiti society's hierarchical values was seen in the practice of what I call debt-peonage. The Hadrami-Kuwaiti peonage practice (i.e. the Hadrami's availability to serve and to be around for the Kuwaiti to whom he is indebted) was related to a general Hadar Hadrami notion and feeling of moral indebtedness to Kuwaitis for three reasons. First, Kuwaitis received and 'sheltered' Hadramis (i.e. recruited them as servants in their houses) and their immigrant fathers when they were 'hungry' and 'miserable'. Second, Kuwaitis trusted Hadramis and thus 'privileged' them with their sponsorship. Finally, many Hadar Hadramis presently are given jobs in Kuwait despite their economic insignificance and at a time when there are other more qualified and cheaper labourers.

My effort to study this migration was driven by a need to consider patterns and varieties in Hadrami movement and attachment to a place. To do so, I relied on materials drawn from my own ethnographic and historical research, as well as other comparative work on Hadramis elsewhere. This was reflected in my fieldwork data collection whenever I discussed my informants' lives using other Hadramis' experiences elsewhere as points of reference. Throughout my research, an important lens for my comparative analysis was other Hadrami migratory experiences. Yet as productive as it might have been, my attempt to compare Hadar Hadramis with other Hadrami immigrants occasionally became an extraneous effort, especially when the case contrasted acutely with the descriptions of other Hadramis abroad.

First, the timing of Hadar Hadrami migration to Kuwait in no way resembles any other modern Hadrami movement, for it is a late, if not the last, Hadrami mass migration. Second, the bulk of Hadrami immigrants in Kuwait have always come from the margins of Hadrami society. Third, the menial socioeconomic role that Hadar Hadramis performed in Kuwait, even though it resembles some Hadrami roles elsewhere, was unprecedented in terms of the scale of attachment to the domestic realm of Kuwait and in the continuities of its social and cultural values under all phases of the migration. Finally, the richness and duration of Hadrami Diasporas in the East Indies, India, and East Africa prompted very little interest amongst my informants; in fact, many were totally uninformed about where or how other Hadramis flourished elsewhere. Thus, my attempt to extend these experiences to the Hadramis of Kuwait seemed irrelevant. Of course, peculiarities such as these were

significant and did not totally deter comparison with other Hadramis as a method of analysis. Indeed, the anthropology of migration should be comparative in scope.

But comparison, as I saw it, was reasonable when the unique contextual contours of the ethnographic case guided the usage of relevant Hadrami instances. As a researcher, I found this to be a suitable and practical stance. For my informants, on the other hand, it was Kuwait more than any other Hadrami case that they related to in order to give meaning to their migratory experience. This was a rather provoking feature of Hadar Hadrami migration in Kuwait that I tried to discount as unrealistic. Perhaps this is because I (and my informants, of course) recognised the realities of the cultural, historical, and socioeconomic gaps between Hadramis (as immigrants) and Kuwaitis (as citizens). Hadar Hadramis assessed their own experience using the receiving society's forms of historical and social construction. The 1990 catastrophe was a shared key timeline with Kuwaitis for memorising and interpreting past events. Significantly, migration to Kuwait and the timing of each individual or family move operated as the Hadar Hadramis' 'little history', which shaped the ways in which they related to incidences that took place at home. For instance, the time when so-and-so came to Kuwait was the same year when the Amir of Kuwait died; al-Qarah was flooded when Kuwait gained independence; or someone got married at the time that his *mu'azzib* divorced his first wife.

Hadar Hadrami immigrants adopted even Kuwaiti conceptualisations of social identity by claiming greater historical precedence in the place, and socio-spatial and cultural propinquity to Kuwaitis, relative to other Arab and Asian immigrant communities in Kuwait. Hadar Hadramis show pride in—and remind other immigrants of—the fact that they were the 'first' Arab nationality to return to Kuwait after liberation, even though they were classified as 'non-desirables'. Hadramis emphasised this as a kind of cultural proximity with Kuwaitis. This was evident in the way Hadar Hadramis denounced some Kuwaitis' preference for employing Egyptians, whom Hadramis saw as newcomers and greedy money-makers, or Iranians, who were perceived to be 'real' foreigners and a subversive fifth column. As illustrated in the thesis, these were the same categorisations on which Kuwaitis drew. Even the Kuwaiti conception that there was always a regional conspiracy of some sort focused on Kuwait's independence and wealth is reiterated by Hadar Hadrami immigrants in daily conversations. Thus, just like Kuwait, Hadramawt has been 'raped' and 'robbed' by the Northern Yemenis, as Kuwait was by Iraqis.

The case of Hadar Hadramis in Kuwait shows the extent to which a young migration can develop into a powerful social experience which may be read as the property and expression of not one, but rather two dissimilar societies. In the Hadar Hadrami case, regarding the whole experience, those who lived it as immigrants attributed meaning to it using expressions drawn from their own and the Kuwaiti society's cultural and historical consciousness. The Hadar Hadrami performance of dependency on the *mu'azzib* is exceptional and distinct from the behaviour of all other immigrant groups in Kuwait, including Bedouin and other tribal Hadramis in the country. Without the belief that they had always been marginalised in their own homeland, Hadar Hadramis might not have been capable of dealing with status differences with Kuwaiti sponsors. As a local concept, as a status, and as a value, the *mu'azzib* was understood by Hadar Hadrami immigrants in contrast to the *tabin* figure and the monetary type of debt which the *tubanah* system entailed. Many Hadar Hadramis buy into the Kuwaiti elitist ideology that the reason affluent Kuwaitis recruited Hadramis was that the former were merely kind and merciful toward the needy and the poor foreigners.

The Hadar Hadrami migration to Kuwait is important because it sheds light on three related dimensions: the nature of power practiced in this context, the possibility of its exchange between weak and dominant social players, and how migration produces social power. The symbolic power that some Kuwaiti *mu'azzibs* could have only attained in the presence of a Hadrami servant did not lead to a balance or distribution of powers in any case I encountered. Hadar Hadramis' active engagement with local expressions of hierarchy and order, as in the Hadrami-*mu'azzib* personal relationship, was embraced by Kuwaitis as a sign of accord, loyalty, and conformity. The only way in which some Kuwaiti *mu'azzibs* achieved the sense of power that seemed deeply rooted and eternal was through the presence of an 'ineffective' and exemplarily compliant figure like a Hadar Hadrami. Hence, one of the issues that this research tried to expose was how migration, or specific immigrant groups, helped in the preservation of traditional powers in Kuwaiti society. Still, this aspect must raise the following question: how inevitable, as a result of lasting dependency, are the power relationships that tie Hadar Hadrami immigrants to their Kuwaiti *mu'azzibs*? We have seen in several individual cases that the Kuwaiti practice of power may be described as "kind but unavoidable" (Larmour 1997: 283). Therefore, another question is whether the voluntary pattern of their migration makes

Hadar Hadramis free at all and capable of releasing themselves from conditions of inequality and inferiority that characterise their lives as immigrants.

Perhaps an understated issue in this research, and one that could be a useful area of research in the future, is the growth of a cultural identity among a relatively new Kuwaiti 'middle class' (composed of technocrats, young private employers, middle-aged government officials, military personnel, etc.), which is guided by a patriarchal domestic ideology that shapes their families' ideas about 'healthy' and 'genuine' house relations. These relations are delivered in a complex array of symbolic processes to denote that patriarchal practices have always been *the* traditional, and hence the correct, way of life of Kuwait. Among members of the middle class, the presence of a *siby*, namely male, is becoming increasingly a sign of the concentration of fathers' power and stable family relations. Thus, several young Kuwaitis told me that they now prefer to have a Hadrami male as a cook, as a driver, or as a coffee pourer in their *diwaniyyahs*. In Kuwait, people increasingly like to refer to any menial worker who serves in official or private settings as *siby*, whether the worker is Hadrami or not. The word *siby* is used today in Kuwaiti magazine advertisements to revive interest in the 'house-male-servant' among the new generation of Kuwaiti house-heads. A sign of power is displayed when an Arab with a dark or African appearance serves or walks behind a Kuwaiti in public. Clearly, the relationship between race, namely 'blackness', and migration is important in this regard and raises questions of how racial categorisation is now working as a Kuwaiti practical ideology for creating social distance and asserting power differentials.

The Hadar Hadrami ethnography raises serious questions about the degree of sovereign power that nation-states can use to limit or to expand the ins and the outs of a migration. We have seen how Hadar Hadramis have at least in part succeeded in coping with the political tensions between the Kuwaiti and Yemeni regimes that were usually reflected in official migration policies between countries in the region. Through the house connection, Hadramis were seen as members of families interacting with other families. Hadar Hadrami immigrants were simultaneously able to absorb and interact at a distance with unwanted state quarrels, benefiting from their own structural position in relation to the affluent Kuwaiti families. This also implies that migration can no longer be seen as an 'external event' in which people merely move to where economic resources are or when political conditions are propitious to immigration. It also contradicts the notion that the immigrant is passive and that

migrating social structures necessarily change in response to new socioeconomic fluctuations.

A significant point of contention here is how to understand the ways through which Hadar Hadramis reconcile differences in their 'social outlook', knowing that they experience different social realities in Kuwait and Hadramawt. There are some indications that migration to Kuwait did not lead to important changes in the social divisions in Hadar Hadrami villages. It seems that some of the pre-migration societal relations intensified under, and perhaps because of, migration. As more *Hadar* and other Hadramis migrate, those divisions become sharply expressed in distinctive cultural and ideological forms in daily interactions. These forms, I believe, are evident in the strict marriage preferences among today's villagers, in the increasing tension amongst Hadrami identity groups, and in competition over social privileges and perhaps invention of moral authorities. Thus, if these forms of change are to be followed ethnographically and in their own locality, the Hadar Hadrami migratory experience may be an important key for understanding the nature of change in Hadrami social organisation as a whole.

APPENDIX: ‘Umar ‘Ashur

Important notes:

1: This is a summarised transcription of a 7-hour audio-recorded life history of 56-year-old ‘Umar ‘Ashur. If some aspects of ‘Ashur’s account of his experience seem repetitive, this is because those aspects carry concerns that are very significant to him. Additionally, these aspects are important because they correspond with the accounts of other Hadar Hadramis interviewed.

2: ‘Ashur’s narrative may not be adequately grasped without the names of many individuals who played roles in shaping his experience. However, all individuals referred to in this document have been given pseudonyms, except for known Hadrami family or public names.

3: Questions and topic titles are in bold font. The interviewer’s questions start with (A); the interviewee’s account starts with (‘Ashur). Please note that the interviewee’s speech style may appear as incomplete thoughts, particularly when he shifts between the past and present tenses, which may create some confusion when read in English. However, to remain true to the interview, I had to leave his statements as they were.

4: Life histories (or life stories) can be written in a variety of styles depending on the nature of the materials, the aims of collecting a life history, and the disciplinary background of the research. I have chosen to take a middle ground between the autobiographic and ethnographic life history approaches to personal sources. However, in this document, I put more emphasis on the former (i.e. the narrative); thus, I only clarify ‘Ashur’s version of his migratory experience in the footnotes.

A: Tell me about you and your memories as a child; what do you remember about al-Qarah village and your childhood?

‘Ashur: I was born in al-Qarah village, my father and my grandfather were all born in al-Qarah ... they all came from interior Hadramawt during the starvation ... we are Hadar, we farm and live in towns. Everyone nowadays talks about his genealogy; some people add last names that would look like an authentic Hadrami origin¹⁶² ... I

¹⁶² Prefixes like *Ba* and *Bin* that precede a last name indicate, though not always, a Hadrami background in Yemen. Interestingly, changing the family name and constructing extended genealogical trees became prevalent among Hadar Hadramis, particularly after the unification (Hadramis call it the ‘annexation’) of Hadramawt with San‘a. Some Hadramis viewed this phenomenon as a way of resisting

don't know why! But we, Hadar, are not like Bedouins; we live in towns and villages. Bedouin Hadramis used to live in no certain places ... and there are still some of them that do not settle, but many Bedouin today farm in al-Qarah, like al-Sha'amli and bin Bukur who own lands ... it was the state's land and was granted to them, some did buy pieces of land though. Bedouins are *qaba'il* (tribes), we are *'awa'il* (families), and we are *mutmaddin* (urbanites). We go to state employment and schools, while Bedouin work as truck drivers and the like. And do you know that they still think of the Toyota pick-up as a camel? Bedouin are now settled and even intermarry with Hadar.

I am the youngest in my family ... my mother had 12 sons but they all died ... diseases. There are only now three of us—me, another brother, and a sister. I think I was born in 1944 during *al-maja'ah* (the starvation), but as I recall in my childhood we had frequent rainstorms in al-Qarah. One night the ceiling of our room collapsed on us, which we rebuilt in the 70s when I came on a visit from Kuwait. My older brother got married when I was 40 days old.... He was 14 when he married, and he has a son who is about my age. My father died when I was 2 years old; he was a farmer in al-Qarah who worked in other people's lands. But I never worked in farming as a child. I was just like any other kid; all I remember was that I played football in al-Qarah.

I dropped out of school in the fourth grade.¹⁶³ At some point in time, my brother also worked as a farmer 'for the people' (landowners). My brother didn't often work. I don't know why he didn't ... my father's brother took care of me most of the time... and all my clothes during *'id* holidays came from my mother's brother because my brother didn't like to work, he always depended on me ... he took my salary when he sent me to Mukalla city to work there. I never asked him about my money. I was 12 when someone came to al-Qarah and 'nailed me' (*eywakduk*) while I was playing with children around *al-Hawmah* (a fountain in al-Qarah) and he asked my brother and relatives about me. He was a tailor called Bashir Makram, from Ghayl Ba Wazir town. Then my brother came to me and said: "Umar, do you want to see al-

the 'systematic' efforts of the Northern Yemeni government to dissolve Hadrami history. Names with *Ba* and *Bin* are thus seen as a solidification of Hadrami cultural identity and peculiarity.

¹⁶³ 'Ashur dropped out of school after fourth grade because, at the time, students who wished to continue their studies had to go to the intermediary school in nearby Ghayl Ba Wazir, which only those who were capable of paying fees could have done. People like 'Ashur were pushed by their families' needs into the labour force at an early age because they were dominated by other family members. Other individuals were sent outside Hadramawt to work for an immigrant relative or a friend.

Mukalla!?” To a child, in those days, al-Mukalla was like Paris [laughter] ... Without thinking, I liked the idea of going there ... we heard stories about it! You know, al-Mukalla used to be even better than Kuwait. “He wants you to do their shopping and cook for them, and your cousin, Ahmad Mubarak ‘Ashur, is already there and will teach you what to do,” my brother said. I didn’t refuse to go; my mother didn’t either. So I departed. This was in 1955 and since then I saw my family on Fridays only. I only felt that I and my mother were separated when I came to Kuwait, because in al-Mukalla everybody thought that it wasn’t that difficult for me. Some of our relatives were there, yet my mother always cried whenever I travelled on Fridays from al-Qarah to my work in al-Mukalla. She died while I was in Kuwait in the 1980s.

I didn’t know how much my salary in Mukalla was, but I knew that my brother collected it every three to four months, maybe it was 15 rupees or shillings, I am not sure ... My brother took it all, but our families gave me and my cousin clothes during the *‘id*—they wanted to make us happy with work. In al-Mukalla, I and my cousin worked for a big carpentry shop. My job was to shop and cook for the carpenters and the owner of the shop. After lunch, we went to work in the afternoon. I was the only child in the carpentry shop, but there was someone who was about my age and from al-Qarah: ‘Awad Bin ‘Ali; he later died in a car accident in Kuwait in the 1970s. We, the servants, lived in a separate cabin, while the owner lived in his own place. In al-Mukalla, I used to visit my uncle¹⁶⁴ on Fridays, but whenever I went there, I cried before him. Why? I really don’t know. His daughters and wife asked me: “Why do you cry, ‘Umar?” and my uncle would order them: “Just leave him alone.” Perhaps because I wanted to go to school then. Before al-Mukalla, I went to *al-Ma‘had al-Diny* (Religious Institute) in Ghayl Ba Wazir but the class didn’t round up so they dismissed us and ordered us to come next year. Then my brother came up with this al-Mukalla thing.

From time to time, and besides the shopping and the cooking for the carpenters, the boss wanted me to do some carpentry jobs if they had many demands for weddings ... The owner of the carpentry business belonged to one of the prominent families in al-Mukalla, who owned this business and used to bring people from al-Qarah and neighbouring villages to work for them. Later on, a friend of mine from al-Qarah, Muhammad Bin Salim, came to work at the same carpentry business.

¹⁶⁴ ‘Umar’s mother’s brother’s kin, who worked as a judge for the Qu‘ayti sultanate.

He didn't spend long there, for he went to Kuwait and worked as *farrash* at the Ministry of the Interior.

A: Can you tell me what you know about farming?

'Ashur: Farming in al-Qarah depends on underground water, which comes from the rain, and then it pours into al-Qarah through channels. As I told you, I never worked in farming, but al-Qarah people mostly cultivated tobacco in the few farming places around. Not too much money came from farming, *al-Hawmah* almost died. Drought and drilling companies withdrew all water available in the ground around al-Qarah, and people neglected farming. We used to have dates like the size of a cup; can you believe this? They now buy produce instead of farming it. You asked me why *al-Hawmah* died! *Al-barakah* (God's Blessing) is less and less, see that's the reason, because of *hasad* (envy) and everyone hates everyone—yes, not only hatred; 'they' (Hadramis or al-Qarah people) teach their children so. They work, people there are fine; they are better off than me and you. You see them at coffee shops just sitting, but they are better than me as a *mughtarib* (immigrant), and whenever I go there they ask me: "Umar can you get me a visa to Kuwait?" ... They all wanted to go to Kuwait, to take your place, and be like you. It's *hasad*, you know!

I spent two years in al-Mukalla. Yet I didn't spend much time in al-Qarah; when I returned from Mukalla, I was on my way to Kuwait, no question! We heard nice stories about it; I remember in the 1950s when a cousin came with others from Kuwait. My cousin brought a picture of 'His Highness' the Amir of Kuwait then and hung it in his room. I thought I could study there, and many people were heading to Kuwait at the time. So my brother borrowed money and bought me a *Mahri* passport; it was easy—15 shillings and that was it, you had the papers. There were about 30-40 people from al-Qarah on the day of our departure, all in one pickup, and there were four of us who hadn't reached the age of 15, but, as was usually the case, we were accompanied by *'uggal*, who took care of us. My mother was praying for me, I remember. She cried, and in the middle of the road to al-Hami coastal town, I also cried ... I then realised that I was away, I was terrified ... I wanted my mother.

There were more than one hundred of us on that small dhow; all of us 'wanted Kuwait'. They came from different places in Hadramawt, but mostly from the coastal towns. We spent a night in al-Hami, on our way to Dubai. That was probably in 1958.

Everything was calm, and the journey went fine until we reached Dubai, when troubles began. For some reason, our *'uggal* thought that the *Mahri* passports might not be accepted in the Kuwaiti port if we had come from the sea, so a land route would be much safer. Hence, we would go to Bahrain on another dhow, then to *al-Khubar* in Saudi Arabia, and finally by car to Kuwait. Before reaching Bahrain we were hit by a violent rainstorm, the dhow was pierced, almost tipped over, and we barely made it to the shore in Bahrain. Food and water were swept away when the water poured into the dhow. We starved ... Two days in Bahrain repairing the dhow and the Bahrainis didn't take us in, they ordered us to go to the Saudi coast some 20 km away. When we got to the Saudis, they accused us of being Somalis, not *Mahris*—not even Hadramis or Yemenis—and they held us there for some days without food. We spent two nights on the dhow, then they ordered us back to the Bahraini coastal authorities, who then did the same. We begged them for food and water, and after three days, they brought us some and ordered us back to Dubai! You know, we could have saved ourselves all this burden, and jumped off like the Iranis from other boats. But our people are cowards, I am telling you, we people don't like such things as walking off the line, they don't know how to deal with things, even simple things. Everybody jumped off the boat and went on their way; we, only people from al-Qarah, stayed on the boat.

We had to pay money to take another dhow from Bahrain to Dubai, so our *'uggal* borrowed some from a Hadrami trader who worked at the port. In Dubai, we went to a *Mahri* man who was known as a 'passports issuer' and was stationed in a coffee shop there. You could see the whole of Hadramawt there 'buying papers'. We sailed from Dubai to Kuwait. On the dhow, our 'knowledgeable' people told us that Kuwaitis would ask you, who is the person you know in Kuwait (a Kuwaiti guarantor), and we would all respond: Muhammad Mutlaq, or another Hadrami person known to Kuwaitis, like Salih Mahsun, who once had a *'izbah* in *al-Murgab*. At the port, they took us into quarantine to check for diseases, and from there Palestinian taxi drivers took us to our destination: the *'izbah* of al-Qarah. I wasn't really shocked when I first saw Kuwait; it was similar to the place where I came from; actually, at the time, our country was much better. There was nothing in Kuwait.

The *'izbah* was in an area called *Jalib al-Shuyukh*, and there I saw people working mostly in Kuwaiti houses as *sibyan*, some as well-diggers,¹⁶⁵ a few others as shop assistants or house guards. I didn't want to work in houses, but if you didn't work your whole life would be destroyed because the *'uggal* and others would stigmatise and bully you as not being a man. And if you didn't work, they would charge you at the *'izbah* for the period spent there. I didn't want to work at a house because I was scared, I didn't understand the Kuwaitis' speech, and they had different words for things. But then I had no other option; at the beginning I worked at a Kuwaiti woman's house, she was alone there; I cleaned and cooked for probably three days. It was an old cousin who brought me to this house; he himself worked at a nearby house for years ... Kuwaitis loved the Hadramis; at that time there were no Indians or Sinhalese in Kuwait like nowadays—all domestic servants were Hadramis. I couldn't get along with the manners and the way Kuwaitis talked, although I could have done the job itself. I ran away back to the *'izbah*, and I told them there that I wanted to work with any Hadrami, anywhere. Hence, I worked in a grocery with a relative who worked as a shop assistant for a Kuwaiti, 'Ali Falih. I took the place of a 'Umani who was leaving at the time. This was what some Hadramis began to do later on: you vend stuff for the Kuwaiti and you get your salary at the end of the month; it was an easy and comfortable job. I lived in a room with four other Hadramis from al-Qarah at the back of our Kuwaiti *mu'azzib* (Falih) house. It was then that I began to see what a *mu'azzib* meant. With us, in the room, was Sajid al-Kaldi, he was *Asakir*, and you asked me if he worked as a servant? No, they consider themselves *qaba'il* and therefore don't take such work! [Laughter]. After a month, the Kuwaiti owner of the shop resold it to another Kuwaiti who wanted me to be part of the deal and insisted that he would only buy the shop if 'Umar was going to be in it. 'Ali, my first *mu'azzib*, told me to accept it and that he would later take me with him for a government job as a *farrash*. A few months later, I moved to the health centre where my *mu'azzib* 'Ali worked. My job was simple and straightforward; I cleaned, prepared tea, and, because I could read, they allowed me to call for patients' names waiting to see the doctor. At that time many Kuwaitis, particularly Bedouins, suffered

¹⁶⁵ At the time, state borders began to take shape and many Bedouins were settling in towns like *Jalib al-Shuyukh*. As grazing became restricted in desert areas, many Bedouins brought some of their livestock with them. They needed secure sources of water, and the *Jalib* (lit. water well) was known to contain plenty of subterranean water. A few Hadramis from al-Qarah like Ba Khatib and Ba Hashwan worked as diggers for some years in this area.

from tuberculosis. I remember *Shaykh* Sabah al-Salim came to check on the centres in our area when ‘Ali came to me and asked me to present Kuwaiti coffee to the *Shaykh*. I told him I didn’t know the manner of pouring coffee in Kuwait. Hadramis fill up the cup, and you Kuwaitis barely half fill it. ‘Ali insisted, though, and I was embarrassed but I did it anyway.

A: Why you? You told me there were other people at the place, Kuwaitis, Palestinians, Syrians, and Egyptians, who could have taken the task of pouring coffee to the *Shaykh*?

‘Ashur: I think because we look like Kuwaitis; I wear *dishdasha* just like any other Kuwaiti, it fits me. Besides, Kuwaitis like me; they like Hadramis and trust us. I feel myself as one of the Kuwaitis, but non-Kuwaitis, Palestinians, Iraqis, Iranis, and others were foreigners to me. We and Kuwaitis have much to share in customs and values. We learn “good manners” and politeness from Kuwaitis.

A: Do you mean that Hadramis don’t have good manners or don’t know how to be polite?

‘Ashur: No! No, we learned those kinds of values and manners that are desirable. Back home we lack manners and values like those relating to money and prosperity. I tell you this story. Once, I went to *al-Bilad* (home; Hadramawt) for a visit. I took a taxi from al-Mukalla to go somewhere; I handed the driver some extra change, but he was dissatisfied with that, and he threw the money carelessly at me and went away. There at home, people don’t appreciate *al-ni‘mah* (any sort of wealth coming from God). Kuwaitis know what it means. This is why Allah gave *al-ni‘mah* to Kuwaitis, because they valued it and respected it, and their deep intentions are clean and kind. I know this, but you can’t see it.

My salary at the health centre was 200 rupees, no dinars yet in Kuwait, and it was more than excellent. I, and my fellow Hadramis, never cared about money or what we would do with it. We only fed and dressed ourselves with the money we got. I worked in the morning at the health centre and went to an intermediary school in the evenings at no cost—as you know, then it was easy for everyone in Kuwait to enrol. I finished the intermediary school in Kuwait. After 2 years in Kuwait I wanted to visit *al-Bilad*. ‘Ali, my *mu‘azzib*, reminded me to take only a short leave so that I didn’t lose my job. I didn’t listen to him carefully though, and didn’t exactly know the

seriousness of the situation. At that time, I had money and was prepared for marriage. But this was just the beginning of the story.

My mother's brother arranged everything, I paid 300 shillings as a dowry, and bought a bed and a closet, but I had to build one room for me and my wife on the roof of my family's house. This needed money and time; I wrote to my cousin Faraj 'Ashur in Kuwait to send me some, but he ignored me and didn't even send his refusal. He could have sent me some, I knew it, but he didn't. Hence my wife's family held her at their home until I found a room for her to live in. Then my mother's brother came up with the idea of pawning our family's house to the government as the only way for me to complete my marriage. So, the *Qu'ayti* sultanate administration advanced us 2000 shillings and kept the house's property documents, until I travelled back to Kuwait, when I would buy the debt again and regain ownership of the house papers .

My stay in *al-Bilad* amounted to one year. I travelled back to Kuwait, but I didn't take my wife with me to Kuwait. I had to buy another *Mahri* passport because I lost the first one, and we took the same route from Dubai to Kuwait in a dhow, now supported with a motor-engine, which made the trip faster and maybe safer than before. In Kuwait I went to my *mu'azzib* 'Ali, who told me that they had fired me because of absence. We Hadramis didn't know what the deal was; we were ignorant and limp-minded. You know we had opportunities to get a Kuwaiti citizenship but we used to say: "No our country is better than yours." I remember my *mu'azzib* 'Ali once said to me: "You people will regret this one day." Did you know that I myself had filled out application forms for people seeking the Kuwaiti citizenship? Kuwaitis used to ask me to do this for them. Sa'id Khalid from al-Qarah used to work for Sa'ad al-Tamimi (a Kuwaiti merchant) at his shop, and many Kuwaitis came to get al-Tamimi's authentication for a citizenship. Sa'id was only asked to change his last name to be given the citizenship, to take his *mu'azzib*'s last name, but he arrogantly refused.¹⁶⁶ It is our *'uggal* who destroyed us ... they didn't orientate us towards citizenship; some of them didn't even want to drive, they were scared to death. One of them wanted to burn my school books in Kuwait; they didn't let you go free. Anxious and fearful they were. I don't know how our lives went on.

¹⁶⁶ I met Sa'id Khalid in al-Qarah and he confirmed this story, but he also added, "What we got from Kuwait is this: it took us young and tossed us when we became old."

I stayed jobless for months; here and there ... I worked sporadically for any amount of money, just wanted to feed myself. Until I saw ‘Abdullah Bin Sabih, from al-Qarah, who told me that a Kuwaiti merchant wanted a Hadrami to work for him in his food retail shop in the old *Souk* (market) in Kuwait city because another Hadrami (Abd-al-karim Ba Wazir), who worked for the Kuwaiti, was leaving for a home visit and wanted me to take his place until his return. I started working there. But I tell you, it was this new *mu‘azzib*, Ghanim Thuwayni,¹⁶⁷ who taught me *al-akhlaq*, you know, the good manners, politeness, and etiquette. I worked as a bookkeeper, nothing complicated, what’s out and what’s in, not too many calculations, and most significantly I wrote down the names of those in debt for ‘my uncle’ Ghanim. I worked in the morning until noon. I lived in my *mu‘azzib*’s house. After noon, I would go to the shop until six o’clock and then back to my uncle’s house to clean and pour coffee for his guests until he ordered me to go to bed. He made me like his son. Even my ‘aunt’ (Ghanim’s wife) used to buy me clothes for *‘id* and other expensive goods from Kuwait and I used to send part of it to *al-Bilad*. As a *mu‘azzib*, he considers me like his son, and still even today in *ramadan* I go to visit his family and they give me ‘something’ (money) and whenever I come from a visit to *al-Bilad* I bring them Hadrami honey and henna as a gift. They treated me like one of their sons. I can’t remember my salary with my uncle, but it was more than great to me. After four months, Ba Wazir came back to Kuwait, so I moved to another Kuwaiti merchant next door, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Hamad.¹⁶⁸ With Hamad, I did similar work, but I spent less than six months there. I got out of this job because I went to *al-Bilad* for a visit, but I didn’t return to him for some reason I can’t recall at the moment.

So I went to my *mu‘azzib* Ghanim and asked him for a different job. He directed me to his brother ‘Abdullah, who was then the owner of a huge company and at the same time holding a high position at the Ministry of the Interior. At the company my job was to attend employees and keep a book of their signatures of attendance and leave everyday. I lived in a room in the company’s garage in a remote area in Southern Kuwait. At the company, they wanted me to learn how to work on the calculator and wanted me to become more ‘sophisticated’, but I didn’t—I was feeble-minded, ignorant, I didn’t want to learn. At the time, all I wanted to do was to

¹⁶⁷ Belonged to one of the most powerful families in Kuwait (economically and politically), known to have contributed to the establishment of the basic Kuwaiti security system for the Ministry of the Interior.

¹⁶⁸ Also a very rich family; belongs to the powerful merchant guild in Kuwait.

go to cinemas and hang around with friends and have fun. The job was not what I had expected; it restricted my movement and I was living very far from the centre of events. Thus, I called my uncle Ghanim again and told him that I didn't want that job. He called his brother 'Abdullah, who was then director of the police force, and asked him to find me a job as *farrash* at his office in Kuwait city. That was exactly what I was really looking for. I went to see my uncle's brother in his office. At the time, in 1970 I guess, the P.D.R. Yemen passport was barred from jobs relating to state security. They thought we were all communists like our rulers then [laughter]. But he was willing to put me in the job. So, my uncle's brother asked me to go and get my passport to recruit me on the spot. I said I will, but I never returned to him because I heard from a Hadrami friend that they would 'suck my blood' in work for only 17 KD. I told you I am ignorant; I don't realise where my interest is. Two days later my *mu'azzib* Ghanim caught me at the market: "You dishonoured me and lowered my face in front of my brother." He slapped me, and I started crying. But then he seated me and offered me tea. Man, they were lenient ... merciful, he wanted goodness for me. Kuwaitis used to view us as their sons when we first came here. Thank God we never misbehaved.

A: You and many other Hadar Hadramis who went to school here, and were near powerful people, could have made a fortune; an intermediary degree at the time was something in Kuwait, other immigrants did very well with such a school certificate and worked in banks and high government positions. I don't see that Hadramis achieved any of this.

'Ashur: No, they did ... very few. You know, we are not like the Palestinians; we are weary of difficult things, we get bored with hard things easily, and we avoid them.

A: If you were like a son to your mu'azzib, like many Hadramis here in Kuwait who said so, why are there only a handful of Hadramis who became Kuwaiti citizens?

'Ashur: I wasn't actually offered a citizenship; we weren't offered, I mean Hadramis, we heard talk only but nothing serious, some jokes and stories, that's all. It is those *'uggal* who came here first, they should have started it. Can you believe that from the day when 'Abdullah Bin Sabih came to Kuwait (1952) until his death, his job designation was *khadim khas*, meaning *siby* (private servant) and that his *mu'azzib*, al-'Usaymi, was a member of the first citizenship-awarding committee, yet Bin Sabih

never had it. True, his *mu'azzib* treated him kindly and brought his sons and grandsons to Kuwait to work for al-'Usaymi's businesses, but none of them has citizenship. Even if Bin Sabih wanted to be a Kuwaiti citizen, our people would not like to see this. Even if you say you want to make some money or buy merchandise and resell it, they would say: "Umar, you don't know what you are getting into; this is not for you—forget it, you will be broke," and you get disappointed just because they hate to see you improve your life. I know some Hadramis who complained about the way their *mu'azzibs* treated them, although these Hadramis came here as children and were raised in Kuwaiti houses. But thank God I never had anything as such. You know some of our people don't control their behaviour; the way they talk and think is inappropriate and this is what makes the *mu'azzib* nervous and therefore mistreats them. It is their fault, they must behave. I wanted to work as a teacher; I could have done so in *al-Bilad* with my intermediary degree, but I didn't. I guess my destiny is in being away.

One day at the *Souk*, I saw an Iraqi friend who worked with me at the health centre and asked me: "Did you collect your service period rights?" I replied: "What does that mean?" He told me that I had some money for the period I worked there, compensation. You know, Iraqis are very knowledgeable and know these things. I didn't go to the Ministry of Health to get these 'rights' immediately; I didn't know what to do. Later I went to the Ministry of Health to collect the money, because I thought I could buy the debt (the family's house pledge) out of this compensation money. I needed money so urgently at the time. My family kept sending me letters asking for money and other demands from Kuwait. At the Ministry of Health they refused to give me the money because my name on the record they had was 'Umar 'Ashur al-Mahri (as written in my first *Mahri* passport), and the authentication document I was presenting to them then was a P.D.R. and read 'Umar 'Ashur only. By luck, I saw 'Ali Falih, my first *mu'azzib*, who happened to be working there. He resolved the problem and eventually gave me the money. I sent the whole thing to my brother; he claimed that he did pay back the authorities in order to free our house property documents. I am not sure to this day that he did. Whenever I ask him about the receipt for this transaction he replies that the document is in my mother's brother's possession, who died years ago. I don't know if we actually own the house or not; maybe we are just living in it and the government have forgotten about us [laughter].

A: In those days, in the 1970s, did you think of a return some day to al-Qarah?

‘Ashur: No, no one ever thought of returning, particularly when the socialists came to power and limited Hadrami out-migration. Besides, those who made it here were better off than those who stayed behind, because they could study and get medical care free of charge. And we did activities here in Kuwait that were impossible there in al-Qarah. We used to gather at al-‘Usaymi’s company warehouse; many people from al-Qarah met there, and we used to send money to the football club of al-Qarah. We sent them shirts and other sports items as donations. Numerous people from al-Qarah came to work with al-‘Usaymi because ‘Abdullah Bin Sabih was trusted by his *mu‘azzib*, and many came through Bin Sabih to work for al-‘Usaymi’s many businesses, and still do. You know the driver of al-‘Usaymi, Salim ‘Umar Ba Swayd was his private driver and he used to travel with their family wherever they went. The manager of all al-‘Usaymi’s money, however, was a Christian Lebanese. I think he is still there. Al-‘Usaymi still sends money to those who worked for him during *ramadan* and *‘id* times. In late 1991, Bin Sabih was probably the first Hadrami to return to Kuwait, a time when it was impossible for us to get in because of our government’s support of Saddam Hussein. Bin Sabih used to go to Kuwaiti *mu‘azzibs* and ask them to help their ‘sons’, who suffered joblessness and poverty in al-Qarah. Later on he stopped this, for he heard bad words about us from a Kuwaiti *mu‘azzib* he went to.

In 1970, after my work at the company, and after I had what I had with my ‘uncle’, I almost ran away and disappeared. So, I went to work with another Hadrami from al-Dis (a town 80 km east of al-Qarah) in a textiles shop. He didn’t own the shop, of course—as you know, by Kuwaiti law all shops must be owned by Kuwaitis.¹⁶⁹ The Hadrami only owned the merchandise and gave the Kuwaiti a percentage or a rent; it depended on the agreement they arranged. The guy from al-Dis shared the merchandise with a Kuwaiti owner of the shop and also paid rent for him. My job was to sell clothes; I lived in a nearby Hadrami *‘izbah* for al-Dis people. I knew about this job and this man from al-Dis because a friend told me about him. I spent only four months there, because the man from al-Dis had his brother-in-law coming from *al-Bilad* to work; thus, they told me that he was taking my place and that I had to look for another place to work. I went back to the same *Souk* where my Uncle

¹⁶⁹ See Kuwaiti Rent Law no. 35, 1978.

Ghanim had his shop, but I didn't go to him. I was ashamed and afraid. I went to another Kuwaiti merchant in the same market ('Adnan Hamid) and gained a job as a shop assistant. I knew that he wanted to recruit a Hadrami because Faraj 'Umar, from al-Qarah, had been working for him for a while and wanted to go visit *al-Bilad*; thus, I took his place. You know, we come and go those days, we never settle, from one place and *mu'azzib* to another, until you are somehow settled. And you know, when Faraj came back from *al-Bilad*, he didn't return to Hamid, he went to another *mu'azzib*. With Hamid, my job didn't differ from the work with other *mu'azzibs*. I sit in the shop, sell and write down what comes in and what goes out—meaning only simple things, not many calculations. Hamid has many sons, but at that time they were all students and never involved in the shop-keeping affairs.

A: Why did Hadramis, or people like you, *Hadar*, I mean, usually attach themselves to a Kuwaiti *mu'azzib*? Or what does the word *mu'azzib* mean to you?

'Ashur: The word *mu'azzib* ... I have heard the word here in Kuwait only. Perhaps it is similar to the *tabin* in our country. The *tabin* owns farming land and recruits people to work on it; he also pays them all their food rations. I never worked for a *tabin* because I didn't work in farming at all. You know what they say about farmers in *al-Bilad*: "May Allah never create me like a farmer" ... [Laughter]. Why? Farmers have rusty minds, they understand nothing. The *mu'azzib* here is merciful, unlike the *tabin*, the *mu'azzib* considers you as his son, and only because of this we attach ourselves to him. We were not like *Mahri* people; they helped each other, and our people didn't. Our people kept themselves to themselves only; they never interacted with the Kuwaiti merchants they worked for the way others did and they just did their business, and nothing else. Unlike the *Mahris*, who used to take merchandise on credit from Kuwaitis. *Mahris* are adventurers, they don't care about loss; but we, Hadramis, we fear debt—we hate it. We do things for the *mu'azzib*, we don't work with him.

A: But I saw other Hadramis in Kuwait who were adventurers and dealt with debt and were always at shops, not with a *mu'azzib*.

‘Ashur: Yes, yes, these are people of *al-Dakhil* (interior Hadramawt), Bedouins,¹⁷⁰ they like shops, but they don’t make money, really. However, we, especially al-Qarah people in Kuwait, are afraid of money, it brings problems, they think. We can’t bear someone coming to your door about a money matter. They dislike problems like these!

After Hamid, probably early 1980s, I worked for a Palestinian at his stationery store, in which he owned all the merchandise. He only paid the rent to the Kuwaiti owner of the property. He already had another Hadrami shop assistant;¹⁷¹ the Palestinian needed another when his business was beginning to expand, and I was there. Everyone did so in those days, you know. We moved here and there! It was then that Kuwaiti migration regulators required that all immigrants should have a “working permit” and a “stamp of residency” (*iqamah*) in their passports and must be approved by a Kuwaiti sponsor. So I had to do this, my first *iqamah* was done by ‘Ali Faysal, who I knew of through one of my friends. But he wasn’t like my *mu‘azzib*, only that my *iqamah* was with him.

After the Palestinian, another Kuwaiti called Sulayman Sa‘ad, who opened a stationery store nearby the Palestinian’s shop, saw me and asked me to work for him for a better salary. I didn’t refuse the offer, but his stationery store didn’t go very well because of its location, I think. During my work with him I lived in an *‘izbah* in *al-Murqab* area, which was then inhabited mostly by Hadramis ... they used to call it ‘the Hadramawt of Kuwait’. Not anymore, now Indians and Pakistanis! [Laughter]. Then my mother died and I wanted to go to *al-Bilad*; this was the first time I went home after my first marriage—six years after, that is. In order to leave, I had to bring someone in my place at the stationery store. Sa‘id Faraj was there and he took the job. We had unstable jobs—one comes and another goes, unless you worked for the officials (Kuwaiti government) or in a company known for its convenience and leisure in terms of work—you stick with it. In *al-Bilad*, I spent two months, I missed it, but during the days of the socialist party the country was not what you expected. Awful, it was so awful, so you got to go back to *al-Ghurbah* (exile; to your migrant

¹⁷⁰ Coastal Hadar Hadrami immigrants (or *ahl al-Sahil*) use the word *ahl al-Dakhil* indistinguishably to denote Bedouins and people from the interior of Hadramawt.

¹⁷¹ The shop assistant, from al-Qarah, who was married to the daughter of his Palestinian boss in the early 1970s, has never visited al-Qarah since. The shop assistant is still in Kuwait but rarely interacts with Hadramis.

destination). All you did when you visited home was to spend the money you had there. When empty handed, you returned to Kuwait, and so on.

During that first visit, I found my wife sick; we treated her, but I returned to Kuwait while she was still sick, no one knew exactly what she had suffered from. I never had children with her. In *al-Bilad* I knew that she worked in selling henna and other stuff, she walked out and sold things to people. My family didn't like this kind of behaviour ... my mother didn't like a married woman to go out on her own, so I divorced her. I was here in Kuwait when I did. It was easy; I made an 'unlimited authorisation' to my brother through the PDRY embassy here, sent it to him in al-Qarah, he went with the document and showed it to her, and she was divorced. She didn't ask for it, I just did it. No, no pressure from my family, I just did it.

A: Did you want to go to *al-Bilad* after discovering that you couldn't have children?

'Ashur: No, I always wanted to stay in Kuwait. True, I didn't have children, but I always looked at my brother's children as mine. I sent them money; my brother never worked when I was in Kuwait, although he always could, but he didn't want to. I remitted money to them, stuff, clothes, even Kuwaiti food during *ramadan*. All my effort was devoted to them. I loved it; I felt satisfied and happy when I did this. But when I fled during the crisis of 1990, what I found from them was what? Repugnance and disaffection. Can you believe this?!! I didn't expect this attitude from them. If it were someone else, he would go crazy over the things I saw from my own family when I got back empty-handed. I can't describe it to you ... but they are still my people and family.

A: But don't you think they were helpless in those days ... it was chaos in those days, can you blame them?

'Ashur: I tell you this ... when they had food in those days, my brother and his wife and sons never called me in to share their meal, although I was starving then and they knew it. When they realised that now I had nothing to provide, they abandoned me.

A: Was this the reason for your return to Kuwait, maybe you wanted to leave them all?

'Ashur: No, leaving is in our blood.

A: Tell me what you did when you moved to Sulayman Sa'ad's stationery store?

'Ashur: Sa'ad's stationery store didn't make a good business, and he resold the stationery store to another person, but I was bored and I asked him to find me work as a *farrash* in Kuwait University (KU), where his cousin held a position. This was in November 1973; I remember exactly the date of my recruitment. My salary was very 'weak' at 18 KD, although other people earned 100 KD at the time. I just wanted to work. I worked as *farrash* at the accountancy department; I prepared tea and coffee for employees there. Many Hadramis of al-Qarah and coastal areas, *Hadar* you know, worked as *farrash* and *mandub* (courier) at the university and elsewhere. To work at the university, I had to change my working residency from article 20 (private servant with 'Ali Faysal, the legal sponsor) to article 17 (government employment). This was much better for me. I had the opportunity to work in the evenings as a *farrash* too for the Kuwaiti Olympic Committee, at the time directed by several *Shaykhs* of al-Sabah ruling family. I used to take the *Shaykh's* car to wash and fuel it, and I did hang around with it [laughter]. Palestinians living in the area of the Olympic Committee hated me for that, and during the Iraqi invasion, I feared the Palestinians more than the Iraqis, for I thought that they would inform the Iraqis that I worked for a Kuwaiti *Shaykh*. So I disappeared, as if I had never been created.

A: What did you think of working with Kuwaitis in the government?

'Ashur: We never really got in touch very closely with Kuwaitis; they were heads of offices, non-Kuwaitis were a mix as employees, different nationalities, and Kuwaitis didn't interact with us that much. In our leisure times we (Hadramis) would go to watch football games, some of us organised football teams, and when we fled to *al-Bilad* during the war in 1991, people there bullied us and said: "Here came the dancers and players, now they come, they were happy there dancing with the Kuwaitis." They rejoiced at our misfortune. It was impossible to do activities as we had back home, especially during the socialist rule. If we had planned to or even talked about it, they would say: "See who is coming from Kuwait and wants to *yitgahgah* (brag) on us. They don't know that originally Kuwait was empty when we went to work there, but Kuwaiti people built it up, unlike us, we only talked: Hadramawt is the civilisation, the history, and so on. People develop and we stand still. Hadramis were merely watching each other and gossiping about anything.

One day you told me that you think of Hadramawt as a transplant, what does this mean?

‘Ashur: I think of Hadramawt as a small seed that only grows and flourishes if transplanted in another place. Think of it, even our music and musicians like the famous Abu Bakir Salim and ‘Abd al-Rabb Idris, they became known when they left Hadramawt for Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Even Hadrami businessmen made their wealth outside of *al-Bilad* in Indonesia and East Africa; if they had stayed behind, they would have been buried. Even intellectuals and politicians organised activities and wrote famous books not in Hadramawt but in Egypt and the Gulf States. *Al-Bilad* makes you dull and lazy.

Tell me about your second marriage?

‘Ashur: This was probably in the mid-1980s; my second marriage happened while working at Kuwait University. The marriage idea came while some changes happened to me and my work at the KU. In KU, I won a compact car that was part of a random draw of names of all employees who were required to contribute to the KU social security fund. I had good luck, because I have a clean soul, and God rewarded me for that. It was my father’s brother Yaslam ‘Asuhr who indirectly offered me one of his two daughters. He was clever, you know, he saw that the university gave me a car because, as you know, they promoted me from *farrash* to *mandub*, who does paperwork. He began to throw hints to me about marriage, and told me that another person was interested in one of his daughters. I thought about it ... my salary would increase if I had my wife in Kuwait, and I thought maybe I could have children out of this marriage. I went for a brief visit there and married his daughter. With the second marriage I didn’t have children either. I had some problem, so I brought my second wife to Kuwait for a check up. There they told me that it was me who wasn’t capable of producing offspring. I asked my wife: “What do you want to do now?” She answered: “I am with you whatever happens.” This is the only wife I had brought to Kuwait, and she stayed with me a year or so. But I had to ask her to go back to *al-Bilad*, because when her father realised that I couldn’t have children he kept ordering her to get me to buy her gold instead, and whenever he visited us he reminded me and her of so and so, who had just had a child. I couldn’t take any more. I took her to *al-*

Bilad and asked her to stay there at my family's house, until I divorced her later on during the war in 1991.

A: How many times did you visit *al-Bilad* in your 35 years in Kuwait?

'Ashur: Perhaps 6 times; I don't spend long periods at *al-Bilad*, I don't enjoy it when I am there, all of them (Hadramis in Kuwait), not only me, feel so. When I go there I am like a stranger, I know few people, I only socialise with my friends who also come from Kuwait to visit. People of al-Qarah think that I am arrogant—I am not, I just don't know them.

Can we talk about your experience of the Gulf War in 1991?

'Ashur: I was living in *al-Murqab* when Iraqi troops poured into Kuwait in 1990. At the time I remember that I was planning to go to Egypt for a tour, but I didn't; instead I went to Basrah in Iraq, days before Saddam's invasion. I was married then, for I didn't divorce my second wife until six months after my arrival in *al-Bilad*. I have never dreamed of being in such a situation; none of us could have imagined that we would lose everything so swiftly one day. On the first days, I became hysterical, couldn't eat or sleep. I was fortunate because I had my car and my passport when I came from Basrah and didn't yet hand it to the KU. On the sixth day of the invasion, I and a Hadrami friend fled, just like Kuwaitis [laughter]. The only difference between us was that we had a land, a country, and we went back to it. Kuwaitis didn't, so they fled all over. We reached Riyadh, to Jeddah, and from there to Aden, and finally to Hadramawt. On our way, we stopped at a Hadrami friend's in Saudi Arabia. There was Muhammad Ba Yumayn, the richest person in al-Qarah today—you know him. He worked for a Saudi Amir, as a servant at the beginning, but later the Amir made him a supervisor on his real estate. The Amir 'did good' with Ba Yumayn.¹⁷² Ba Yumayn asked me to stay there so that I could be granted a working permit, but I refused; I didn't like the atmosphere in Saudi Arabia. It's not like Kuwait; here (in Kuwait) there is much *raha* (leisure or comfort). I heard they didn't have this in Saudi Arabia, and I didn't know about the nature of work there. Also, I never thought that I would stay more than weeks in *al-Bilad*; I assumed that things would be

¹⁷² Muhammad Ba Yumayn is one of the few persons from al-Qarah who made some fortune in their migration.

resolved soon and we'd be back. I didn't expect to stay in *al-Bilad* for almost 13 years before returning to Kuwait.

Eight months before the invasion, my brother asked me to send money so that we could start rebuilding our family's house. So I took a loan from the KU social security fund and gave the money to a friend, who was then on his way to the UAE. I asked him to buy cast iron, cement, and hardwood; they say it's cheaper there. The friend did that and sent these tools to my brother in al-Qarah, where he stacked them there beside the house. However, during the crisis, I got out of Kuwait with empty hands, except for 100 KD remaining from my salary. Thus when we reached Jeddah, I needed money to continue the long journey, so I had to borrow some from a Hadrami there, promising him that I would pay him back when I reached al-Qarah and sell some of the construction materials we had then. I did pay him, but the construction materials began to be the only thing for me and my brother's family to feed on. I didn't lose hope that I would soon return to Kuwait. I saved anything when the invasion occurred, because I never thought that a whole country would vanish like this. Kuwait is always there for people like us.

You know what our people called us when we arrived: the *mankubin* (origin. *nakbah*, catastrophe). They even taught children and old ladies this label for us. Many back home still use the term to refer to us who fled the war. My niece was the first person to receive me in al-Qarah; she was crying. I felt ashamed, as if I was defeated. They thought that I was 'full' (with money); otherwise, who could have got out of Kuwait with a car only? People there were always suspicious. And when they saw me coming from Kuwait with a clean appearance and nice clothes, they said: "He is a millionaire!" But they know nothing about my misery. All of them wanted to rob and cheat me. Even my nephew, whom I brought for medical treatment in Kuwait at some point before the invasion, said: "Uncle 'Umar, you are old and I want your car, you don't need it." I replied: "But I have nothing but this car." They are used to taking things from me, and I have always been generous to them. Even when I worked as a taxi driver in the crisis there, I kept feeding them. As if I were still an immigrant wherever I resided. I can't talk to you further about my family's treatment of me when I returned during the war. I will be very exhausted. I don't know why our people turned away from us. We weren't playful in Kuwait as they accused us; we spent our lives just feeding them. I heard that some families kicked out their returning members.

A: What do you say when you hear that someone says that many of you Hadramis in Kuwait ran away from your houses' and families' responsibilities, relaxing in Kuwait for most of the time, and visiting *al-Bilad* occasionally?

'Ashur: We paid them out of our blood all these years, not relaxing. I tell you how these people think: before August 2nd 1990 there was a road in al-Qarah called 'Kuwait Street'; you know what they did with it when Kuwait was gone, they renamed it 'Saddam's Street' ... Why would they do this, I couldn't figure it out to this day. During the crisis al-Qarah was just a mess; almost everyone who returned had to suffer like me.¹⁷³

A: What did you do when you discovered that you were like an 'immigrant' at home?

'Ashur: In 1992-1993, the state began to distribute pieces of land for small fees, which I applied for and got a small piece of land, just an empty one. I didn't do anything with it. I asked my brother and relatives to give me money to do repairs on my car, which was the only thing that kept me alive, but they all refused. I knew they could have given me some, but they didn't, even my brother. So I had to sell my car, and there I was 'sitting free'—no job and no wife; always thinking of Kuwait. Because at the time I heard that many Hadramis bought Somali and Kenyan passports and their Kuwaiti *mu'azzibs* recalled them and got them work visas. The Kuwaiti authorities knew that they were Hadramis, because the names were the same, and they allowed them in. Later on, Kuwaiti authorities asked Hadramis to transfer their visas from the Somali passport to their original ones. They never charged them with fraud or anything; they knew us, we were very loyal to Kuwait. Thus, I sold my piece of land in order to travel to Kenya and buy a passport. There was a Hadrami from al-Qarah who would help me do so. Hence, I travelled to Kenya in 1995 with \$3000, paid \$1500 for the passport and the rest of the money was my tickets and expenses in Mombasa. I spent three days only and went back to al-Qarah, again without a single 'paper' (money). After five months, someone came with my Kenyan passport, so I called my last Kuwaiti *mu'azzib* Khalid Fahad, who was the director of the social care centre at KU.

¹⁷³ Statements of praise for Saddam Hussein can be seen on walls in al-Qarah. However, I couldn't locate any violent statements or praise regarding Kuwait. The family reactions of which 'Ashur and other returnee Hadramis complained were among the outcomes of this particular migration; it became an 'arena for social revenge' between individuals.

A: What makes him a *mu'azzib* for you?

'Ashur: He was my boss at work in the KU, but also my *mu'azzib*, because he used to ask me to shop for his family, do his paperwork at ministries, and get his travel tickets, these sorts of things. When I called him, he asked me to be patient and wait, but he was really mad at me when he knew that I had bought a Kenyan passport. He used to send me 100 KD every year when I fled, but he stopped that when he knew that I bought a passport to come to Kuwait. He was a good man and didn't like someone like me to sell everything he had. I called him again and again but he ignored my calls. He was upset.

It is now 1997; I lost hope and started talking to myself like a crazy person. So, I sent a letter with 'Abdullah Bin Sabih to my uncle Ghanim begging him to bring me to Kuwait, but he didn't do anything for me, except that he gave Bin Sabih some money to help me. Since then, however, my uncle Ghanim began to send me some money on *ramadan* and similar occasions. I felt relieved with the money, that I was still in contact with Kuwait, and that someone cared for me. Then in 1998 one of my relatives offered me a job in al-Mukalla in a magazine. My job was a *farrash* and a guard at the same time. I lived in a room in the same building. My salary was very humble, 7000 YR (= 6 KD). It wasn't anything I wanted to work for, but I had to feed myself at a time when many were becoming jobless, as you know. It is even worse now in *al-Bilad*. Yet in another way I felt as if I were in Kuwait when I worked at the magazine because the people there were intellectuals and had good manners and they knew how to talk to you. Can you imagine this!? I started as a servant kid from al-Mukalla and returned to it as a servant too [laughter]. I spent four to five years at the magazine, but I never stopped my attempts to return to Kuwait; always in my mind. So, I applied for a 'visiting entry' permit to Kuwait. I had it through a Hadrami whose wife was Iraqi, who in turn had a sister who was married to a Kuwaiti. The Kuwaiti called for me and issued the entry on my Yemeni passport, because things were becoming slightly easier for Hadramis who used to work here to come to visit. You asked me where did I get the money from to travel to Kuwait ... well, my relative who worked at the magazine lent me half of the necessary amount, the rest I also borrowed from another friend who worked in Kuwait at the time.

This was in 2002 when I came to Kuwait. I spent most of my time trying to find a *mu'azzib* who would take me to work for him. Wherever I went, I took Hadrami honey and henna to offer as gifts for an old *mu'azzib*. I had my 'uncle' Ghanim in mind, so I went to see him. I was shocked. When he saw me visiting he shouted at me: "What are you doing here? What do you want? We have no jobs for you—go back to where you came from." I didn't go back to where I came from, of course; I couldn't believe that I made it to Kuwait [laughter]. So, I went to visit my *mu'azzib* at KU, Khalid Fahad, but he ignored me many times and hung up whenever I called, until he answered one day and I asked him to find me a job with him. He asked me: "Umar, how much did you pay [bribe] to get the entry visa?" He didn't like those Kuwaiti people who took money from foreigners who sought a visa. I went to see him at his real estate company, and he told me that he would transfer the visit entry into a work visa (article 20) and that I would be working for him as a private servant at the company and for his family house. But it was not an actual *siby* like the old days, cooking and serving at home. Now, as you know, I do all sorts of things: I drive his children to school, I shop for the house, I do his paperwork because he doesn't have time to do it, and whenever I have free time I have to be at his office. My salary is not better than the help (money) I get from him at *ramadan* and other occasions. When he took me to work for him, I asked my second wife to remarry me; it wasn't an official marriage though, no costs or anything, just wanted her to come back as my wife anew. I visited *al-Bilad* very briefly in 2003 to get her back and she is now living in my family's house in al-Qarah in a separate room.

A: When will you return for good to al-Qarah, or when do you plan to?

'Ashur: When will I return, you ask me? When Allah says so ... I will probably return, but I will never let go of Kuwait, and if I return I would spend only three to four months there, you know I can still have my job at the magazine in al-Mukalla, now with higher salary (12000 YR) and my place is preserved by my relative, who is now a member of the parliament. I don't feel I want to go back.

A: Did you save anything thus far?

‘Ashur: I have no capital in this life but my health, tranquillity, and God’s protection. When I was in al-Qarah during the crisis days, I drank a glass of water and thanked my Allah for that, although my stomach was rumbling with hunger. And you know what, I kept a tidy appearance, I am used to this from my days in Kuwait, but in *al-Bilad* they thought because I looked neat that I had millions. They don’t know that I am used to this way of living. I can’t save anything now because I send *al-Bilad* money, and family demands never stop—they want medicines, kitchenware, clothes, even stationery and eye glasses; sometimes they want certain types of food from Kuwait, especially during *ramadan*. They want to eat the food we eat here in Kuwait. I can hear people in *al-Bilad* saying that ‘Umar is now back to his many Kuwaiti *mu‘azzibs*, he is full of cash. They envy you for anything; some of them have ‘strong’ eyes, I am scared of their *hasad*. They would envy you for just being healthy and suffering no disease.

A: What do you think of Hadramis who are now in Kuwait?

‘Ashur: They are pathetic. When I came here in 2002 I went to live temporarily at the ‘*izbah*, the ‘White House’, and you know what was the first thing I heard them saying about me: “There he comes, what will this senile man be doing here? He will just be playing around.” Some of them hated to see me back in Kuwait; as if they were feeding me or that I came there to take a bite out of their mouths. Some of our people here are sick-minded; when they want to show off they tell stories about themselves and how they sit with this or that Kuwaiti, they try to ‘up’ themselves ... without naming them, I am sure you have met some of them. Do you believe that some of the young newcomers envy me for the job I have now? They say things like: “Umar, why don’t you give me this job? Let me take your place with your *mu‘azzib*.” Yes, they want to take it because the job I have is comfortable. No jobs are rewarding in Hadramawt, even those who have properties would want to depart, and if they stay, they can barely ‘carry themselves up’. I told you Hadramawt is like the plant which can only flourish away from its home. You want Hadramawt? Search for it outside of *al-Bilad*. Whatever they do there now is useless, even if the President ‘Ali ‘Abdullah Salih brings all of the green land of San‘aa into Hadramawt, nothing will grow up. This is Hadramawt’s destiny and it’s God’s wisdom since the days of *Thamud*

thousands of years ago. Hadramis had plenty of wealth, but were never thankful to Allah, thus he dispersed us on earth ... this is written in the Koran!

Some Hadar Hadramis say: “we are the people of *ma saybi!*” when they refer to themselves or to Hadramis in general. Could you explain *ma saybi* to me?

‘Ashur: You know we are called the people of *ma saybi* because whenever problems arise, our first reaction is: none of my business. Even when you see your brother in trouble you say *ma saybi*.

A: Do you think that your migration and being away is part of this *ma saybi* attitude? I mean, you have many life problems or perhaps things that need some decisions and handling assertively, but you just move away and say *ma saybi*.

‘Ashur: No, no, how come? My living and working here is *ma saybi*? No, never. I help them with money, my effort and blood all go to them, and you say *ma saybi!*? Before the invasion, we even brought patients here to be hospitalised in Kuwait. How come *ma saybi!*? The immigrant is not *ma saybi*. Even the headache pills, we send it home from here these days.

A: I know people there who work for 12000 YR and who have children but are making a living there but they don’t want to come to Kuwait at all ... how do you see this? ... You told me you still have your job there with a better salary now and it is more secure with your relative there at the magazine!

‘Ashur: Yes, yes, but the salary there is not enough for me and my wife. I lost many things in my life ... I don’t have a house of my own. Do you know that I will be renting next time when I visit because our family’s house is now full? I have a goal here in Kuwait, which is that I plan to build two rooms for me and my wife. My *mu‘azzib* knows this; he knows I am not here to play, I feel satisfied now.

A: And did you start building these two rooms?

‘Ashur: Not yet, but when the time comes, I will. The most important thing is that they don’t envy you for the things you have. I mean even when I complete these two rooms, I am not afraid of anything but *hasad*. That’s really funny, I am supposed to be afraid of nothing but Allah; instead I fear humans’ eyes more than Allah. May God forgive me for that.

A: After all these years now in Kuwait, how do you see Hadramis and Kuwait?

‘Ashur: It’s like the ‘play’ we see on television. I have a role, others who are now coming are also studying their new roles to continue the show. For Hadramis or others, thank God, Kuwait is open, but I hope that the *Shamaliyyin* (North Yemenis) never be allowed here, they will rob the whole place.¹⁷⁴ Did you know that I feel more secure and comfortable in Kuwait than in Hadramawt, especially since these *shamaliyyin* (North Yemenis) came to us. These days, many Hadramis come to Kuwait thinking that they will easily get their old jobs as *mandub* or guards, or even a servant. They don’t know that Indians and Egyptians took these jobs at the minimum salary. When Hadramis come here they are shocked by the changes in salaries, because we are not like the Egyptians or the Indians, we have family demands and we send money regularly. Now many Kuwaiti families ask for a Hadrami driver or a cook or a guard to work as *siby*. But the Hadrami is not like an Indian driver who accepts 40 KD per month. A Hadrami would need at least 150 KD a month.

A: Why do you think you Hadar Hadramis associate yourself more with a *mu‘azzib* than those Bedouin Hadramis of the interior we see here?

‘Ashur: We are fearful. We fear tiresomeness, we want comfortable work, we are used to laziness. True, some of our people worked at shops years ago, but it wasn’t that serious work, only selling but no serious commercial deals like the ones *Mahri* and Hadrami Bedouins deal with. Besides, no matter how much you collect, money disappears. If you have 500 KD, 200, or 100, it will all vanish. The 500 KD will go more quickly than the 200, but the 100 KD can be held easily ... in all cases it’s the same, even the 100 KD will soon be gone.

A: What would you want to have from Hadramawt, something you would like to see here in Kuwait?

‘Ashur: I certainly don’t want to see people of al-Qarah here ... or did you want me to say my wife? [Laughter]. I don’t feel myself as *mughtarib* in Kuwait really. The only thing that makes me feel unpleasant nowadays in Kuwait is that when I pass by *al-*

¹⁷⁴ Ironically, Kuwait is currently the only Gulf state that allows ‘unsophisticated’ Hadrami labourers to come for work. Other states, even those in which Hadramis were once privileged (like the UAE and Saudi Arabia), have closed their doors to immigrants from these economic and national backgrounds.

Murqab area all I see is Indians and Pakistanis, no Hadramis. And sometimes when I go do something for my *mu'azzib* some Kuwaitis look down to me, but because I have clear self-respect and I show it to them they would ask: "Are you a Kuwaiti!?"

Glossary

- Al-Bilad*** The homeland, among Hadrami immigrants.
- Al-Dakhil*** Hadramawt of the interior valley.
- Al-Sahil*** Hadramawt of the coastal region.
- 'Abid*** Slaves or their descendents.
- 'Aqil*** A senior person whose position within a family or friendship and relationship may confer upon him honorific power and a degree of control over young members' decisions and actions during the migratory process.
- Farrash*** In Kuwaiti government and private offices, a peon or a tea-boy.
- Hadar*** In its most comprehensive meaning, a sociocultural identity customarily used in the Arabian Peninsula to denote settled individuals or townspeople who were known historically neither to reveal bare arms nor to assert tribal genealogy as part of their identity. In some cases, the term *Hadar* has certain connotations, namely an economic specialisation, and a high, or low, class position within a society as a whole.
- Hasad*** Envy.
- Iqamah*** The official Kuwaiti legal prerequisite for all foreigners who intend to reside or work in Kuwait.
- 'Izbah*** The Hadrami male gathering house. Rented by several individuals, it has functioned as a temporary settlement and a recruitment station for new immigrants to Kuwait.
- Kafalah*** Legal sponsorship.
- Kafil*** The Kuwaiti legal term for a personal guarantor of a foreigner who wishes to work or live in Kuwait.
- Mandub*** A courier.
- Mashayikh*** The Hadrami religious specialists in Islamic ruling and teaching. They form an important social stratum and are seen as second in importance to the more prominent class of *Sadah*.
- Mu'azzib*** A figure who cares and provides for other individuals and usually has authority over their actions. In Kuwait, the *mu'azzib*'s significance has been instituted in old economic relations and family hierarchical traditions. The *mu'azzib* indicates the concentration and organisation of social and symbolic power in this context.

<i>Murasil</i>	A postman.
<i>Muwalladin</i>	Hadramis born in non-Arab countries, mostly as the result of mixed marriage between a Hadrami man and a non-Arab woman.
<i>Niq'ah</i>	Off-shore station for shipping goods and people from and to Kuwait, once owned and operated by local merchant families. Now replaced by modern ports.
<i>Sadah</i>	A Hadrami religious class widely respected because of its members' claim to be descendents of the Prophet Muhammad.
<i>Sadaqat</i>	Charitable donations of various forms and kinds, guided by general Muslim principles of equality, cooperation, and help of the poor and those in need.
<i>Sayyid</i>	Singular of <i>Sadah</i> . A <i>Sayyid</i> may not be a practitioner of any religious authority.
<i>Shaykh</i>	Singular of Hadrami <i>Mashayikh</i> . In Kuwait, the <i>Shaykh</i> is a political hereditary title that refers to any person belonging to the ruling family.
<i>Siby</i>	The Kuwaiti term for any house servant or a wealthy family's client. The <i>siby</i> 's subordinate relationship to his patron family may last for generations, and his descendents inherit the consequences of this relationship.
<i>Sibyan</i>	Plural of <i>siby</i> .
<i>Subyan</i>	Singular <i>sbay</i> , a 'houseboy' or 'lad'. <i>Subyan</i> is a Hadrami group known by its low social status and very limited work opportunities. <i>Subyan</i> were believed to have moved from Ethiopia to Hadramawt many centuries ago and to have worked as labourers for Hadrami tribes in Western Hadramawt. Many of them are still clients of tribes in the <i>Wadi</i> and elsewhere. Today, they move between cities, do menial jobs, and perform street and house cleaning. <i>Subyan</i> have traditionally been socially excluded; thus, Hadar Hadramis do not intermarry or even interact with them.
<i>Ṭabin</i>	Originally used to denote a Hadrami landholder, but can also refer to any prominent merchant, a shop owner, a boat owner, or any wealthy person who recruits people for his own interests.
<i>'Uggal</i>	Plural of <i>'aqil</i> in the Hadrami dialect.
<i>'Ulmah</i>	A preschool village-based educational system in pre-independence Hadramawt.
<i>Wadi</i>	Valley.

Zakat Islamic canonical taxes and one of the five faith pillars of Islam.

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