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Chapter 6
The Making of an Oil City (1924-1927)

Abadan; Building a Sanitary City

Reza Khan concluded his important military campaign against Skeikh Khaz’al in 1924 with a formal visit to Abadan and the Fields. During the visit APOC officials asked the Prime Minister for his assistance for the reconstruction of sections of Abadan. The Company pointed out a neighborhood adjacent to the refinery, called “Sheikh” as a desirable site for building a modern sanitary bazaar for the growing boomtown. They highlighted the accomplishments of the oil industry in turning “a desolate wasteland” into a hive of modern industry that was employing 25 thousand “native” workers¹. The need for improving general sanitary conditions in the teeming boomtown was highlighted to the Prime Minister. The Company had recently asked Sheikh Khaz’al to sell them the land for the purpose, and he had agreed also to oversee the eviction of the current residents. Now Khaz’al was effectively out of the picture, and the Company was becoming concerned about dealing with the increasingly sensitive issue of property transfers in a manner that would avoid alienating the central government. The designated land was adjacent to the refinery and by then it had become a densely populated maze of shops, teahouses, hovels, and shanties where workers and migrants were renting rooms or had found a place to live.

The issue seemed straightforward. Abadan was a filthy boomtown, overflowing with destitute migrants and devoid of the most elementary public infrastructure such as latrines, cleans water, safe and sufficient food supplies, and a minimum of decent housing for the general population. Two major epidemics of cholera and plague had devastated the twin towns of Mohammareh and Abadan, adjacent to each other across the river Karun, and other epidemics and diseases were also a recurring scourge in the region (more on this below). The closely packed population, and the dreadful living conditions as good as guaranteed the fast spread of contagious diseases, with potentially devastating effects on oil operations. Since the War, recurring famines had weakened the population considerably, as had endemic

poverty caused by the endless warfare and the demise of existing social structures. The massive movement of military recruits and soldiers from India, Europe, and the Persian Gulf region through Mesopotamia and Southern Iran had significantly increased the dangers of epidemics. Pilgrims on their road to Hajj, or to and from the holy cities of Iraq and Iran were another major carrier of epidemics, as were the practice of transferring corpses cross borders for burial in these holy cities. Dr. A.R. Neligan, the influential British physician working at the legation in Tehran and serving on Iran’s Sanitary Council said of the situation in Abadan:

“In the early days of the rush of native labor and shopkeepers to the island huts and bazaars sprang up on no definite plan on land outside the Company’s control, and on which it was not allowed to interfere. When, therefore, plague was imported into Mohammerah in 1923 and thence spread to Abadan there was a sharp epidemic. The Company has taken most energetic measures since then.”

Displacing the population did not appear to be a major obstacle. The residents of Abadan hardly had any political influence to oppose their eviction since, by and large, they were poor migrants from the Persian Gulf Coast, indigenous Arabs, or Bakhtiyaris and Arab tribesmen from the province; scarcely the political constituency of Reza Khan or the nationalist modernizers in Tehran who were intent on patching together a uniform and modern nation out of the heterogeneous population of the country. Furthermore, few issues were more commonly shared among Company officials and Iranian modernizers and politicians as public health and sanitation. The topic embodied everything that was positive about ‘modernity’ and progress, and highlighted all that was abhorrent in unscientific and superstitious ‘tradition’. In addition, collaboration between Britain and Iran over sanitary policies and disease prevention had a long precedence from the early 19th Century. Therefore, Reza

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2 Floor, *Public Health in Qajar Iran.*
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Photograph 17: Reza Khan Visits Abadan, with Officers and APOC Officials (1925)

Source: Ministry of Petroleum, Iran

Photograph 18: APOC Bazaar in Masjed Soleyman (1925)

Interpretation of Modern Iranian Diplomatic History”; Neligan, “Public Health in Persia, Part 1”; Floor, Public Health in Qajar Iran, 202–204, 210–212.
Khan’s approval of sanitary improvements in Abadan and Masjed Soleyman by the Company seemed a foregone conclusion and was readily given.

However, the issue proved more controversial than appeared initially. First, urban residents put up significant resistance against their eviction and demanded better compensation than the Company was willing to provide. Without Sheikh Khaz’al there to crush the resistance, the army keeping its presence to a minimum near the Company areas (see chapters 2, 3, 5), and with the Company itself threading cautiously, the neighborhood defiance had a chance to solidify. Soon the intensifying urban resistance prompted local bureaucrats and politicians in Tehran to question the unanticipated political implications of the proposed spatial measures, to evaluate the emerging role of municipal policies, and to come to terms with facing an unprecedented political demand by a newly emerging social actor, the urban citizens of Abadan who were insisting on their “right to the city”. This collective urban resistance and negotiation by residents over their forced displacement and the terms and conditions of their reallocation became part of the repertoire of the ongoing urban politics in Abadan. The provision of sanitary urban infrastructure was accompanied by the re-engineering of the built environment of the city. This spatial re-organization gave rise to a number of fundamental questions: whom should it serve? (European expatriates? the more skilled echelons of Company employees? all Company employees? all urban residents?) How should it be paid for and managed? The question of who would be entitled to what amenities of urban living, and how the responsibly should be distributed and decisions made, became part of the abrasive dynamics of municipal and urban negotiations that lasted until mid century and the oil nationalization movement, and in the process shaped the built environment of Abadan.

The pressing issue of the provision of social amenities, especially housing and public health measures, fit within a larger political picture: that of the effective disappearance from the scene of Sheikh Khaz’al and the political and social order he had embodied. The new political context meant that the Oil Company and the newly arriving central government bureaucrats faced a social and political vacuum which had to be filled by new institutions of municipal governance and social services that in most cases existed only in name and now had to be assembled from scratch. While initially the topic of urban planning, municipal services, public health and the general
improvement of sanitary conditions, appeared as straightforward and mutually acceptable to all parties as universally lauded progressive and scientific measures benefiting the general welfare, in practice they proved to be controversial and imbued with significant consequences for the changing relations of power in the oil complex. The reasons were simple: These measures directly affected the intimate everyday lives of residents and individuals, and imposed on them changes that were drastic, highly personal, and often very costly. They lay at the core of a new regime of disciplinary power that sought to re-engineer in minute details the spatial arrangements, collective lives, the bodily behaviors, and the mentalities of the inhabitants, in order to transform them into safe and productive extensions of the oil complex, as well as docile and contented subjects of a modern nation state. The rest of this chapter will investigate the micro history of the emergence of the social question in Abadan during the interwar period, and how the issues of public health and sanitation, urban planning, and property relations shaped the built environment of the city, the working population, and of the oil complex.

It is safe to say that few issues concerned the APOC management as much as the sanitary conditions in Khuzestan. As we saw in the previous chapter, horrid living conditions, and the poor reputation of Iran, Khuzestan, and APOC were a major deterrence when it came to recruiting skilled employees and even unskilled workmen in the early post war era. The Oil Company took the matter very seriously and had invested heavily in the construction and maintenance of two major hospitals in Masjed Soleyman and Abadan, and 12 dispensaries throughout the Fields. The hospitals were the best equipped in the country, in particular the one in Masjed Soleyman managed by Dr M. Young, was reputed to be “better equipped than are the majority of hospitals of a like size in India“.

The 1924 APOC report to the Sanitary Council showed:

“What a large amount of free medical treatment the company was giving to the natives, but also showed that a very excellent sanitary service had been built up…the fact which, however, impressed the Sanitary Council above all others, was that the Company in spending £40,000 in a single year on its

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medical services, as opposed to its sanitary section) had considerably exceeded the total sanitary budget for the whole of Persia”.

The claim was no exaggeration. The Sanitary Council (Showra-ye Sehhi), initially a consultative body set up in 1874, was made into a permanent body in 1904, and had been assigned the task of overseeing medical affairs and public health in Iran. However, given its restricted financial and institutional resources, most of its reform policies were concentrated in Tehran, and its annual budget for the entire country was no more than £27,000, which was still a marked improvement from the annual £5,000 it used to receive prior to WWI for combating epidemics. Furthermore, given the state of the national economy, and the fact that the lion’s share of the state finances were regularly being funneled to the new army, even this meager annual budget was constantly in arrears for months. The Majles had tried to impose a tax on transport vehicles in order to fund vaccinations and public health measures, but the tax collection was a practical nightmare and did not produce many results.

The provision of medical services in Khuzestan was a pressing necessity, but also of great value in terms of public relations. From the 19th century western medicine had been a less politicized and more successful avenue of western penetration into Iran. Aside from American missionaries, and highly influential court physicians like the famous Frenchman Dr Tholozan who had been instrumental in establishing a medical school in Tehran and organizing the Sanitary Council at the end of the 19th century as the first serious efforts toward western medical practices, the British legations were also known to provide medical care and medicine to the public. The Ahvaz Legation, for example, on average treated a hundred patients per day. The APOC physician, Dr M. Young in particular, had amassed great credit among Iranian politicians, Bakhtiyari Khans, his colleagues at APOC, as well as

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among the general public, for the medical services he had been rendering as well as his outstanding administrative skills. But, as we have seen (Chapters 3, 5) his medical position also had placed him in a situation of acting as a skilled political negotiator at the highest level, and one who had exercised great influence on behalf of Britain and APOC on the course of events in Khuzestan since 1910. However, the tremendous resources that were being spent on medical treatment were a significant burden for the ever financially prudent Company, and it was clear that the prevention of diseases and epidemics had to take priority as the means of reducing risks, as well as cutting costs.

The fear of disease and contamination was one of the major concerns deterring European recruits from accepting employment in Khuzestan in the post war period (Chapter 5). The apprehension was well grounded. The 1918 Spanish Flue pandemic had cut a global swath of death, and southern Iran had been badly affected. In Fars, Percy Sykes estimated that a third of the population of the Qashqai pastoralists perished in 1918, as did a tenth of the urban population of Shiraz. Afkhami, who has studied the trajectory of the pandemic, estimated that up to 22 percent of the total population of the country perished by 1920. The deadly effect of the pandemic was exacerbated by the endemic warfare of marauding armies and warlords (chapters 2, 5), famine, drought, and debilitating poverty especially in the west and the south of the country. Nor had British troops been spared (especially the Indian infantries). In southern Iran, especially, the overall casualties were devastating; in Mohammareh alone 6,000 had been afflicted out of an estimated population of 20 thousand, with 240 officially recorded deaths.

13 Dr. Elizabeth MacBean Ross had spent a year prior to WWI among the Bakhtiyaris as the physician to the Bibis (elite Bakhtiyari women). See her fascinating memoirs in Elizabeth Ness MacBean Ross, A Lady Doctor in Bakhtiyari Land (London: L. Parsons, 1921).
14 K D Patterson and G F Pyle, “The Geography and Mortality of the 1918 Influenza Pandemic,” Bulletin of the History of Medicine 65, no. 1 (1991): 4–21. It is highly interesting that the authors of this insightful research completely neglect the Persian Gulf and the Middle East (with the exception of Jordan) from their analysis, a strange omission given that the region was a major theater of WWI, with the Ottoman Empire as one of the primary belligerents, and troops from India forming the core of the fighting men under the British flag. On the latter point see Roger Adelson, London and the Invention of the Middle East: Money, Power, and War, 1902-1922 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).
17 Ibid., 390–392.
18 Ibid., 384. For estimated population of Mohammareh at the time see table 7 in chapter 7.
If the influenza pandemic had been a global phenomenon, there were other widespread maladies in Iran that made living conditions in a congested place like Abadan equally hazardous. Although plague rarely originated in Iran and was often brought in from India and Mesopotamian through the ports of the Persian Gulf, Shatt al-Arab, and the long border with Ottoman Mesopotamia (Iraq), nevertheless it had deadly effects when it struck. From the 19th century seven major deadly plague pandemics had struck Iran19 with devastating results. Since the outbreak of WWI plague had been recurring yet again in southern Khuzestan, erupting into a particularly bad outbreak during 1923-1924, when it afflicted approximately 1000 reported cases in Abadan and Mohammareh, with more than half fatalities20.

Discussing the period of 1914-1924, Dr Neligan, the British representative on Iran’s Sanitary Council and physician to the British Legation, reported:

“…In spite of the regular appearance of plague on her frontiers the name of only one place in Persia recurs with any frequency (Mohammerah)…It used to be said that plague was always imported from Basra only 25 miles higher up the river Shatt al Arab, with communications by land as well as by water. It has been suggested that plague by now is endemic in Mohammerah town, but the facts are, on the whole, against this supposition. Abadan town, on the island of that name, six miles down the stream from Mohammerah, has, however, come to cause anxiety. The name appears in the years 1923 and 1924 only, and yet some 700 cases have occurred there. The explanation is that between 1909 and 1912 the APOC set up a refinery on the island, and that, instead of a few huts, there is now a considerable town and several villages, with a total population of some 50,000 souls [my italics]”.

Persian Gulf and the Iraqi border were particularly vulnerable areas, more so than the inland plateau that was hard to reach over the Zagros Mountains. Percy Loraine, the Minister in Tehran reported: “next to the littoral of the Gulf, the Perso-
Iraqi frontier is the greatest cause of anxiety to the Persian authorities”22. Indeed, since the opening of Suez Canal in 1869, with its fast and direct route linking the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean, “the health of the Persian Gulf had become a matter of concern to the shipping of the world”23. Britain controlled most of Iran’s border quarantine stations along the Gulf and the Iraqi borders until 1927, when the notion of British and Indian officers regulating and controlling the bodies of Iranians on the national borders became intolerable to nationalists24. In fact, the border stations’ quarantine system were the first instances of the kind of racial segregation that began to color preventive practices and create great resentment at the visible inequality. Floor’s description of the British controlled quarantines stations on the Gulf and Khuzestan makes clear that these not always operated rigorously, and sometimes they were highly discriminatory, letting Europeans pass without serious inspection while interning Asians, including Iranians, in a ‘purgatory’ state, under poor conditions, for extended periods, which caused great resentment among the travelers25. The failure of the British run quarantine system in the south to prevent the devastating plague and cholera epidemics of 1923-1924 contributed to the resentment. The 1923 Annual Report of the British Minister in Tehran was as always defensive in tone, but could not fully justify why the epidemics had come from a British colony, via ships flying the British flag or regulated by the Government of India, to territories under the effective command of the British military (Khuzestan and Iraq), through British operated quarantine systems.

“The [quarantine] service has continued to perform its important duties in its quietly efficient way, and has successfully prevented the introduction of plague and cholera, except at Mohammerah, where – it must be understood – the quarantine officer is responsible for the Port only. A good deal of criticism has, however, been leveled at our administration, most of it uninformed…The local Kargozars apparently under orders from Tehran, have begun to report on sanitary matters, and indeed criticize medical officers. There have been difficulties too in the way of getting the Persian authorities to pay their share of the expenses…On the whole, the impression left by the events of the past

24 Kotobi, “L’émergence d’une Politique de Santé Publique en Perse Qajar” 270.
25 See Floor, Public Health in Qajar Iran, 207, 210–211.
two years [1921-1923] is that of a purposeful mobilization for an attack on the service, and its replacement by a Persian service."

There were other equally deadly contagious diseases that plagued Iran. Cholera was “a much more anxious problem for Persia than the plague”, especially in port cities like Abadan and Mohammareh. The particularly deadly epidemics of 1850 and 1852 devastated Mohammareh. Earlier in 1822 and 1833 Dezful had been equally devastated by cholera and the plague. These towns were again hit by successive epidemics over the course of the 19th century. Mohammareh was again struck hard by a major cholera epidemic in 1910-1911, just as the oil industry was getting off the ground. Initially 23 cases of cholera were detected in Mohammareh in December 1910; by the following year this had turned into a severe epidemic, killing several Europeans as well as uncounted indigenous people. This was in spite of the efforts of Arnold Wilson, acting consul in Mohammareh at the time, whose “main concern was to ensure it did not spread to Ahvaz or get among the Company’s imported labor at Abadan”. The town was hit by another wave of cholera in 1917, but the 1923 epidemic was on another scale, especially as it was accompanied by the killer plague (see above). It came, as usual, via ships from India:

“Cholera broke out at Abadan on the 3rd of August. At Basra on the 6th of August, and at Mohammerah on the 21st... The epidemic at Abadan quickly assumed big proportions. There were, for instance, 553 cases with 528 deaths between the 10th-16th August. The Oil Company and the Sheikh of Mohammerah did all that was possible to prevent the epidemic extending. From Basra, however it spread up the Tigris and reached Baghdad at the end of August.”

29 Latifpour, Tarikh-e Dezful, 121–123; Kasravi, Tarikh-e Pansad Saleh Khouzestan, 162.
31 Arnold T Wilson, SW Persia; A Political Officer’s Diary 1907-1914 (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), 133.
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The previous month the plague had already affected 481 people, killing 409 in Abadan\(^{33}\); highlighting the critical state of the sanitary situation there:

“The question of Abadan is a new and serious one. It appears that there is overcrowding in the considerable native town which has sprung up, and that sanitation is indifferent. The Oil Company’s representatives were closely questioned as to the measures adopted when the epidemics broke out, and were able to report favorably. The town, however, and Iraq generally, are a menace to Persia.”\(^{34}\)

Cholera and the plague recurred in Abadan and Khorramshahr over the following years prior to WW2, in 1927, 1930, 1931, 1932, 1939; but by then more rigorous preventive measures were being put in place and the outbreaks although worrisome and deadly, were not causing as many fatalities\(^{35}\).

Malaria was “the chief cause of death and ill health in Persia”\(^{36}\), infecting nearly all the rural population according to most contemporary reports\(^{37}\). Neligan believed it not to be very prevalent in Abadan, Khorramshahr, or Ahvaz; but surveys conducted in 1925 revealed that both Khuzestan and the northern provinces of Azarbaijan and Gilan were hyper endemic foci for malaria\(^{38}\). Smallpox, typhus, typhoid, anemia, tuberculosis, were some of the other rampant diseases prevalent at the time. Skin diseases, trachoma, and other afflictions caused by contamination and poor hygiene were widespread, and afflicted some of the more established historical towns in Khuzestan, especially Shushtar and Dezful\(^{39}\). According to one estimate, between 20 to 40 percent of the country’s urban population in 1925 suffered from some form of venereal diseases\(^{40}\).

\(^{33}\) Ibid; Neligan, “Public Health in Persia, Part2,” 691.

\(^{34}\) Persia, Annual Report 1923, Burrell, IPD, Vol.6, 725.

\(^{35}\) Persia/Iran Summary Reports, 26 September 1927; 7 April 1930; 13 September 1939, in Ibid., Vol.8, 48, 514; Vol.9, 61, 63; Vol.10 518, 354; Vol.11, 77.; Persia Annual Report 1927, Ibid., V.8, 153-4; “APOC to the Department of Industry, Tehran”, 6 March 1932, p.1, INA 249005548


\(^{37}\) Afkhami, “Compromised Constitutions: The Iranian Experience with the 1918 Influenza Pandemic,” 388.

\(^{38}\) Neligan, “Public Health in Persia, Part2,” 693; Afkhami, “Compromised Constitutions: The Iranian Experience with the 1918 Influenza Pandemic,” 386.

\(^{39}\) Daneshvar, Didani-ha va Shenidanha-ye Iran.

\(^{40}\) Cyrus Schayegh, “Hygiene, Eugenics, Genetics, and the Perception of Demographic Crisis in Iran, 1910s-1940s,” Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies 13, no. 3 (2004): 342–343. There may be a misconception that the prevalence of venereal diseases reflects certain patterns of sexual behavior. This is unlikely. Venereal diseases were equally prevalent among Russian peasants in the 19\(^{th}\) century. In
In all these cases the main culprit in the tremendous vulnerability to epidemics and diseases was poverty and political disarray; and not an inherent cultural defect or racial deficiency, as many European observers maintained at the time. The answer must be sought in the turbulent political and economic history of Iran since the 17th century, riddled with recurring drought and famine, political insecurity, endemic poverty and destitution, inept and inadequate political leaders, and deficient knowledge of preventive hygienic and medical practices, which disproportionally affected the working population and the poor. The appalling state of the general standards of hygiene and public health, and the decrepit and undeveloped social infrastructure of waste treatment, food safety standards, decent housing, and basic health care were a result of this poverty and insecurity, not the cause of it.

Contagions and Sanitary Practices in Iran:

In chapter 4 we discussed the history of sanitary public health reforms and the innovations in municipal policies and urban practices that were formulated by a range of technical experts in response to the fears of contagion and disease in the colonies and Europe from mid 19th century. In particular, chapter 4 explained how the conceptualization of spatial strategies of defense against contagion overlapped with class and racial exercises of hierarchic power, and led to the scientific justifications for the implementation of spatial segregation in cities on scientific and sanitary grounds. Post war urban developments in Abadan were very much part of this crossed history of social reformist practices, as we shall discuss in this and the following section.

The Sanitary Idea was not new to Iran. In fact, social reformers and some among the political elites had conceptualized modernity and national progress as intimately connected to sanitary improvement and the adoption of modern European medicine since the middle of the 19th century[41]. Dar al-Fonun (the Polytechnic), the first modern western style school established in 1851 by Amir Kabir, the modernizing Vazir, included a curriculum of medical instruction. Amir Afkhami argues that from their case, as most likely in the Iranian case, this was a syndrome of extreme poverty and poor hygiene, coupled with living habits that let to the proliferation of skin diseases that targeted human genitalia. See Laura Engelstein, “Morality and the Wooden Spoon; Russian Doctors View Syphilis, Social Class, and Sexual Behavior, 1890-1905,” in The Making of the Modern Body, ed. Chathryn Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 169–208.

mid 19th century the growing Iranian nationalism was intertwined with a sense of shame about the state of the population’s health and of government responsibility to improve the situation. As an indication of this trend he cites the formation of a series of administrative boards and consultative bodies that did little more than hold meetings for a number of years, but eventually culminated with the establishment of the permanent Sanitary Council (Showra-ye Sehhiyeh) in 1904 on the eve of the Constitutional Revolution. Reflecting underlying social concerns the Sanitary Council began to take a number of public health measures, such as vaccination against smallpox in some cities, and setting up more quarantine stations on national borders. However, these efforts remained limited amidst the chronic economic and political crises of the first two decades of the 20th century (chapter 2). Nevertheless, the sanitary idea played a prominent role in shaping the growing secular middle class reformist culture, especially the constructivist Lamarckian notions that associated progress with the improvement of the quality of the population. For these reformers the population was the source of national power, on which depended the progress of the nation. A diseased, impoverished, and uneducated population was unable to work and to be productive, making it into an impediment to progress.

For Iranian reformers and modernizers, steeped in this Lamarckian discourse of biopower, there was little redemption in the existing patterns of urban life or the medical “quackery” of traditional healers. By and large they agreed with the drastic measures in municipal renovation and coercive public health measures that the state began to adopt under Reza Shah. Like many of their western counterparts, modernizing Iranian reformers embraced the notion of trusteeship, which provided them with positions of authority, as well as a market position, and allowed them to implement often-aggressive administrative measures to reform social conditions through correct education and the provision of modern sanitary infrastructure.

Sanitation, Segregation, and the Politics of Property in Abadan:

In February 1926 APOC medical director Dr. M. Young provided an assessment of the sanitary challenges facing the urban situation in Abadan:

43 Schayegh, “Hygiene, Eugenics, Genetics.”
44 Ibid. See chapter 4 for the emergence of parallel and similar ideas in Britain about poverty and the poor quality of military recruits following the Boer War.
“Even with the construction of our new lines [company housing for Indian skilled laborers] and with such modern sanitary measures as we may have taken, the position from the point of view of the outbreak and spread of disease cannot be effectively remedied unless we have the complete cooperation of the Persian authorities in Abadan Town…We must turn to the Municipality, which the Persian authorities are most anxious to develop…At the moment, the Municipality consists of individuals with no knowledge or experience of the proper conduct of municipal affairs, and with no financial means to support the municipality. I can see no good result from their work unless assisted by us with definite control behind the scenes, and also with funds. We cannot assume open control of municipal work as it is invariably misinterpreted in Tehran as interference in their internal affairs. The fact remains however, that by putting the Municipality here on its feet, we would provide the essential stimulus, and so hope in time to withdraw to our correct capacity of advisers and nothing else”\textsuperscript{45}.

The awareness that the oil company by itself was incapable of implementing effective sanitary measures and create a safe city had become evident, and so had the necessity of threading cautiously in dealing with the boundaries of sovereignty between the Iranian government institutions and the Company. The ‘target’ of concern was the “native town” of Abadan, the boomtown that had grown quickly to an estimated population of 40-60 thousand. The military language and imagery (as will become evident) often used in describing sanitary and municipal policies reflected the attitudes of both state institutions as well as the Oil Company. Given that the built environment of oil in Abadan and the Fields was already highly segregated and was on its way to becoming more so, the belligerent language simply reflected the militarized geography of oil that was taking shape in Abadan and throughout Khuzestan.

In 1909 APOC had leased the refinery land as well as the adjacent village of Braim from Sheikh Khaz’al, for £1/jerib (Chapter3). In 1914 they leased more land for the same rental\textsuperscript{46}. Braim, initially known as “Bungalow Area”, was upwind from

\textsuperscript{45} Extract from Dr Young, “Memorandum”, 16 February 1926, Pp.58-59, BP 71138
\textsuperscript{46} “Percy Cox to A.T.Wilson” 1 September 1918, BP 68779
the refinery. The local villagers were evicted, and initially a simple structure was erected made of tin to house the handful of Europeans preparing the ground for the refinery and shipping docks. Soon after this structure was replaced by a brick bungalow (later named No.1 Bungalow). As the refinery came on line during WWI three other bungalows were added. The imported skilled laborers, mostly from Rangoon and India, lived and slept in tents and mat houses. By the end of WWI most of Braim had become an exclusive expatriate community, separated from the indigenous population by the vast refinery to the south, the Shatt al-Arab River to the west, and stretches of land increasingly evacuated of population on its east flank. The European village also had an exclusive access road that was used during the 1929 labor strike to secretly transport the arrested labor strikers out of the island:

“ The English had a special road called the “Braim Road”. Nobody was allowed to use it except the English and those who worked for them and they trusted. A large number of soldiers and policemen who had entered the island [to crush the labor strike] used this road to transport the prisoners in the middle of the night to Mohammareh and then onto Ahvaz.”

By the end of the war the Company constructed some housing for its Indian skilled workers in equally segregated areas to the east of the refinery, that came to be known as Sikh Lane and Indian Quarters (see Figure 1). The Company also had entered negotiations with Khaz’al in 1918 to take hold of a village called Bawarda, situated on the riverfront. However, there had been difficulties in negotiations since suddenly land, which previously was a collective resource but not an exchange value with a market price, had now become a scarce commodity with a rapidly rising price, although the Company refused to see it that way. Percy Cox, the British Resident in the Persian Gulf, reacted to this marketization of land in 1918:

“Thanks for letting me now about the purchase price of land on the right bank of the river, at £100 - £150 per acre. This is too much compared to the lease we already have from the Sheikh of Mohammareh on Abadan [refinery land],

47 George Thompson, “Abadan in its early days”, Naft 7:4 (July 1931),14-18
49 “The land we wish to take up is situated a little below a place called ‘Barwairda’; one square mile; to set up a jetty and extension to lead dangerous oil away from the refinery”. A.T.Wilson to Percy Cox, 2 June 1918, BP 68779
which is £1 per Jerib (1909 and 1914 agreements). In 1914 we got additional land for the same rental\textsuperscript{50}.

Map 1 Abadan in 1925

\textbf{Source:} British Library; Modifications in Atabaki (2014)

This was disingenuous since Cox was well aware, as were other political officers, APOC managers, and local people, that since 1908 and the advent of oil capitalism land in all the oil areas of Khuzestan had become a scarce commodity with its monetary value rising exponentially. When Arnold Wilson was presented in 1911

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{50} Percy Cox to A.T.Wilson, 1 September 1918, BP 68779}
with a 4 volume printed version of the Intelligence Reports that he had collected and authored, titled “SW Persia”51 he felt that the information had already been outdated:

“What was said to me then [by local Khuzestanis] as to the ownership and value of land and crops is more likely to be true than what is said now, when the advent of the [Oil] Company has trebled and quadrupled prices.”52

In fact the Company was actively trying to designate and quickly take hold of all the land it wanted to acquire for its operations, in Abadan as well as in the Fields. Up to this point its agreements had been struck with the local magnates. The Company had established contracts with the Bakhtiyari Khans and Sheikh Khaz’al according to the terms of concession, which stated that uncultivated land should be given to APOC for free, and cultivate land sold at local prices. But, how these vague categories of property and land-use were to be applied to pastoral territories that were used seasonally, to populated riverside areas where land was of shifting and mixed use, or to dry-land areas left fallow for long periods or used as collective source of fodder and brush fuel, remained highly contested. Access to these lands was exercised through customary rights, and their enclosure was putting strain on local communities and creating anger and resistance53. Furthermore, once land had become commodified following the emergence of the oil industry and the urbanization that had followed in its wake, the notion of a fixed price for vacant land had become a fiction, especially in areas where massive numbers of migrants had settled, hoping to enter the wage labor market, and having to pay for housing, food, and other necessities.

In 1926 Arnold Wilson reported, “To date 20 square miles have been purchased [in Masjed Soleyman] for the period of concession at £48 thousand, and a further 4 square miles at £14,500 are shortly to be bought”54. The price of ‘uncultivated land’ in ‘unpopulated’ Bakhtiyari country had increased from £2,400 to £3,625, or by 66 percent. However, by 1926 the issue of the Company purchase of

51 These were later incorporated in the remarkable collection that is John Gordon Lorimer, Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia, 6 vols. (Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire, Eng.: Archive Editions, 1986). See also the selected and briefer version incorporated in Adamec, Historical Gazetteer of Iran.
52 Wilson, SW Persia; A Political Officer’s Diary 1907-1914, 124–125.
54 “A.T. Wilson, “Confidential: Bakhtiyari relations and land purchases”, 24 February 1926, BP 71183
land had become highly contentious as both the central government was claiming ownership of all land, and rank and file Bakhtiyaris and local Arabs farmers and tribesmen in Abadan were angered at being cheated out of their collective access to their territory and vital resources (chapters 3, 7).

As the Company was carving out its exclusive enclaves on the island, the teeming areas variably called “Abadan Town”, the “Traditional Village”, or “Shahr” by the locals, stayed beyond the control of both the Company and the central government, especially now that the political order embodied in Sheikh Khaz’al had disappeared from the scene. The prospective purchase of Bawarda, and the planned eviction of the so-called “Sheikh Village” on the immediate southern border of the refinery became focal points of an urban struggle that was fought in the name of sanitation by the Company, and the “right to the city” by the heterogeneous population of the city.

By all counts the living conditions of the population of migrants, oil workers, casual laborers of various kind, and the indigenous population in the “Shahr” were appalling. There are virtually no detailed personal or ethnographic accounts of the period that I am aware of, with the noted exception of the memoirs of the socialist labor activist, Yousef Eftekhami, orally collected (in 1988) by Kaveh Bayat and Majid Tafreshi. Eftekhami had gone to Abadan in 1927 in order to organize and unionize oil workers, and stayed there until he was exiled in 1929, after having organized and led the oil workers’ strike. Originally from Azarbajian, Eftekhami was trained as a professional labor organizer in the Soviet Union. He made his way with considerable difficulty to Abadan in 1927, via Boushehr and a sea voyage to Mohammareh. He managed to visit Aghajari, and eventually found work in the Oil Company’s Technical Workshop in Abadan (chapter 5). Initially he helped organize a short-lived demand by Iranian workers to establish their own sports club, which they had named “Kaveh Club”, but the Company was alarmed and shut it down after a few weeks with the help of the police. By 1929 Eftekhami had mobilized nearly 50 workers to form the nucleus of an organized trade union. Their call for a strike was met with widespread support in 1929, not only by oil workers, but also by their wives, as well

57 Ibid., 130–139.
as a wide array of townspeople from Abadan and Mohammareh, turning the initial labor action into a more widely based urban protest movement. Eftekhari’s sketchy and brief descriptions of life in Abadan are one of the few documents that provide a first hand voice from the perspective of a migrant worker (and a political activist and professional union organizer) to the refinery city, and of the living conditions under the Oil Company rule:

“The English had their exclusive neighborhood in Abadan, called Braim, where nobody was allowed to enter. If an Englishman married an Iranian woman he would be shunned and expelled from there. Truly they had built a paradise in the middle of that island where everything was available to them – swimming pool, clubs, and beautiful houses. There was another neighborhood called Bawarda, where Arabs lived, but the English wanted to grab it out of their hands. Most Arab dwellings were made of reeds; and the English set them on fire on numerous occasions, and forbade people from rebuilding or repairing what they had destroyed. There was another neighborhood called Ahmadabad…it was the filthiest place I have seen in my life. There weren’t even any toilets and people just squatted next to the water [ditches]. Abadan was generally filthy, but they [?] had dug some ditches that would wash away the filth with the [river] tide. Ahmadabad did not even have these ditches…nor did it have any drinking water. Epidemics usually started there… Other workers had made temporary shelters near the Shatt al-Arab…the most miserable workers in the world were those working for APOC. They never had enough food and clothing, or decent shelter. Some simply lived their bitter lives in open air under palm trees; others had made temporary shelters out of reeds, where in each room several households lived together…The Oil Company had constructed a few, no more than 150, workers housing for those with more experience and skills. In those each married family had two rooms, while single workers lived 6 to one room.

Abadan had become a highly segregated town by the middle of the decade, and Company officials intended to consolidate that segregation based on sanitary
principles, with the help of Iranian government institutions that they hoped to control discreetly. Arnold Wilson, APOC Resident Director in Mohammareh, supported Dr. Young’s plans by highlighting the indigenous population as the culprit for the abysmal sanitary situation: “As Dr Young points out, the crux of the problem in the control of epidemic disease in Abadan lies, now that our own house has been put in order, in the Persian Town itself”. However, the awareness that no degree of racial spatial segregation could avert the dangers of contagion was now being admitted:

“The areas controlled by the Company and the Persian Government are so dependent upon each other that the isolation of one from the other is an impossibility. We are thus faced with the necessity if we are to protect ourselves and if we are to reap the benefits of improved housing and sanitation…of compelling the local Persian authority to take definite steps to organize a municipality capable of dealing efficiently with public health”  

Photograph 19: Abadan. Workers' Living Conditions

Open Source

60 A.T.Wilson, Mohammerah to APOC, London, Letter #356, 8 March 1926, BP 71183
Wilson corresponded with Harold Homan, an American assistant to Millspaugh, who was acting as Provincial Director of Finance for Khuzestan, to offer Company financial assistance of an annual £2,500 for shoring up a functioning municipality in Abadan. It was clear from the proposal of financial and practical assistance that it was conditional, and the Company expected to have an active say so in setting the parameters of urban change in the city. Foremost in their list of conditions was for the Government to confirm the Company’s acquisition of a significant neighborhood adjacent to the refinery for building a modern bazaar, as well as its extensive plans to take over significant new parcels of land on the Island for developing exclusive Company areas.

Since the virulent epidemic outbreaks of 1923 the Company had resolved to confront the sanitary situation head on. It had brought in professional rat catchers from India, who managed to destroy 12,000 rats between April and July 1924. It began building brick and steel huts for its “10,000 permanent workers” (mostly skilled Indians) in India Lane and Sikh Lane, isolated well away from “the native Town”. The challenging problem of drainage in the waterlogged island, where subsoil water stood at 2 feet below surface began to be addressed by pumps. A piped water supply was being completed for the new Indian workers’ quarters from the river Bahmanshir, 6 kms away. The water was transported to a large reservoir to be treated chemically and piped to standalone pumps in “the [Indian] workers’ village”, or the area that became known as the “Indian Quarter”. “The Company is also planning a site for a new town, and the inhabitants of the old are being encouraged to remove to it. A piped water supply has been led to this site also. Everything possible is, therefore, being done to keep out cholera as well as plague”. Garbage disposal was another area rigorously attended to, “with large number of sweepers temporarily employed to keep Company areas well swept”. In Masjed Soleyman,

“Owing to the strictest sanitary discipline and constant supervision and inspection by trained sanitary squads, both European and Persian, the incidence of disease has been small. One of the reasons for this is the abundance of incinerators for destroying garbage and refuse. Scattered all over the fields one finds lengths of 17 inch piping, into one of which the refuse is

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61 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
tipped, and at the other a very large jet of gas… Squads are employed in nothing else but this, and the incinerators are constantly at work, complete destruction of rubbish taking about 15 minutes” 64.

However, few of these measures, publicized by Dr Neligan in the medical journal *The Lancet*, or Squadron Leader Cooper at the Royal Asiatic Society, had been actually aimed at improving conditions in the so-called “Persian Village” in Abadan, “… aside from the erection of 7 water points”. The purified piped water supply was for the Braim, the hospital, and the segregated living quarters of clerks, shift engineers, artisans, and Chittagonians (skilled Indian workers from Burma)65.

The same held true for the critically important sewage system. In Braim “all programmed sewers are working…each bungalow has a septic tank. Six water flush native latrines will be built in the area”. A rigorous plan was in place for “the new village” being erected for skilled workers to “convert all latrines to water flush system. Collecting tanks have been constructed, and the outlet pipes laid, and pumps arranged. The system needs electricity to start. As this is a matter of urgency the electrical department have arranged to give a temporary line within the next month”66. The fact that the water flush sewage system carried the untreated filth to the river where the rest of the Island, as well as the indigenous population downstream along the delta relied on the river for irrigation and drinking water was not considered relevant.

The Company was not unaware that ignoring the indigenous city was highly risky and planned to add more water points and piping, and to build a bridge over the creek that separated the Shahr from the refinery to facilitate access for workers coming to work at the refinery. However, the Company’s plan also involved major projects to clear out the population from several strategic areas in order to remake a *cordon sanitaire* that could be more easily monitored and controlled: “Other 1926-1927 proposals include…building a roadway through the center of one of the most unsanitary areas…connecting the proposed bazaar site to the proposed customs site”67.

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64 Cooper, “A Visit to the Anglo Persian Oilfields,” 152.
65 “Item 24: Water Supply”, 18 March 1926, p.82, BP 71183
66 “Item 23: Sewerage”, p.81, 18 March 1926, BP 71183
67 “Item 24: Water Supply”, 18 March 1926, p.82, BP 71183
Oil capitalism had created a new built environment in Khuzestan for the accumulation of capital in oil, by the dispossession of the local agrarian and tribal societies. This process had transformed the geography and social lives of the local population and created nightmarish urban landscapes of destitution, immense inequality, and industrial and human filth. Company officials were blaming the victims for the unhygienic conditions that had accompanied this new political economy, and constantly reminded themselves and anyone who cared to listen of the civilizing work they were undertaking: “… it [should be] realized that 10,000 natives are employed in the fields alone, and that not one of these has even an elementary knowledge of the principles of sanitation, the danger from infections and contagious diseases is very great”\textsuperscript{68}.

Photograph 20: Abadan - Market in Ahmadabad (1920s)

\textbf{Source:} Ministry of Petroleum, Iran

As we have discussed (chapter 4, previous sections of this chapter), the sanitary concerns over public hygiene and urban congestion had come to pre-occupy professional middle classes, corporate employers, colonial officials, and policymakers

\textsuperscript{68} Cooper, “A Visit to the Anglo Persian Oilfields,” 152.
in the interwar era. In Britain, the pressure of mass politics and working class mobilization were leading to negotiations over the establishment of a range of welfare institutions and municipal improvements. In the colonies like India or large parts of Africa, the sanitary measures being adopted had a more explicitly coercive and racist slant (chapter 4). Reflecting on the draconian 1920 anti-vagrancy laws aimed at controlling the effects of sanitary conditions and labor radicalism in Nairobi, Frederick Cooper remarks:

“In trying to build cities on the basis of cheap migrant labor states have had to face the different questions of what kind of urban order they were likely to create. They built mining and railroad cities, but not as they would have liked. The society that resulted was not a social category known as ‘urban’…having helped build a society in which Africans might choose to live in an outhouse or a shed, the colonial state forbade them to do so”\textsuperscript{69}.

In a non-colonial and yet highly dependent context like southern Iran, where APOC was a powerful private corporation faced with a new central government that was increasingly and jealously laying claim to its sovereignty over territory and the population, the biopolitical challenge of making a sanitary city had to be negotiated in a different manner, both with the state as well as with the indigenous population. For the local population the new and unfamiliar categories such as ‘garbage’ and ‘sewage’ were the byproducts of the alien industrial landscape\textsuperscript{70}; paying for access to filtered and chemically treated piped water was an amenity well beyond their means or capabilities; and observing the unfamiliar codes of urban sanitation was a novel practice that would have been more readily embraced had it not been imposed as obnoxiously and intrusively by a highly disruptive oil capitalism, or an authoritarian central government. Consequently, the draconian proposals of urban sanitization that involved massive displacements for the population and coercive attempts to regulate their bodies and their everyday lives were received with considerable skepticism and


\textsuperscript{70} Much as they had been in the fast-industrializing European cities of the 19th century. See chapter 4. For a historical view of how cities came to be categorized as ‘chemical systems’ by scientific experts utilizing categories of filth, waste, and pollution, among others, see Christopher Hamlin, “The City as a Chemical System? The Chemist as Urban Environmental Professional in France and Britain, 1780-1880,” \textit{Journal of Urban History} 33, no. 5 (2007): 702–28.
resistance, since they felt to be unjustly the targets and victims, and not the beneficiaries, of these grand schemes.

Again, Eftekhari’s recollections are disturbing, as they reveal the sense of daily humiliation experienced by the population in their interactions with Company officials or abusive government bureaucrats. What constituted “garbage” from a Company perspective was often a vital “resource” in the lives of destitute migrants. The evidence of poverty was a reminder for the expatriates of their superiority, and affirmed their “civilizing mission”, but it only enhanced the resentment of the residents who felt humiliated by their objectification:

“The scenes of working women using the oil sludge were heart-breaking. Workers’ wives would fill oil drums with that black liquid and carry it on their heads to use as cooking fuel for baking bread and filling the bellies of their naked kids living in those reed shacks. These women wore a long piece of ragged fabric that only partially managed to cover their bodies. The black sludge they carried on their heads would slosh all over their faces and bodies. The English and their well-dressed wives would stop these women, who were the real owners of the oil wealth, in order to photograph their misery… These were humiliating photographs of skeletal and emaciated women and workers. Anyone would be outraged, but unfortunately these scenes were the source of amusement for the English. For the workers, these humiliations were harder to tolerate than their nakedness, hunger, and the wretchedness of their lives; it made them resentful and furious, and mobilized them against the Company”

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The Company Director T.L. Jacks reported to his Chairman John Cadman, expressing his concerns:

“We have demolished the old village and built a new one for Company staff under controlled conditions. The value of this will be lost unless similar control is imposed in the Abadan Township proper. Now the Municipality is inadequate, with no Government of Iran budget for its ‘correct maintenance’, [creating]… the danger of epidemics spreading throughout the Company controlled areas, which is a grave menace to the Company’s operations”

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72 “Dossier 8: Notes of meetings held in Tehran”, 22 April 1926, *BP 71183*
Jacks was referring to company housing built for artisans and clerks (Indians and Europeans). These plans were costly and well behind schedule. The Company had planned to complete 95 buildings for artisans to accommodate nearly 2,700 men (including 380 married couples), but only 89 had been completed (costing £51 per person). Housing for clerks was even more costly, with only half of the 67 buildings planned for nearly 500 men completed, at £277 per head. The urban infrastructure for these projects was estimated to be 20 percent of the overall staggering anticipated cost of £177,000.\(^73\)

The cooperation of the Iranian municipality and government institutions had become crucial for the whole scheme to proceed, and the Company was offering to finance and assist the bureaucracy to accelerate the process. However, this offer of assistance was being questioned within the Company and, were it to be followed through, it could become a double edged sword, as it would delegate the power over the chaotic and abysmal urban situation to the municipality, and run the risk of it failing to cope with the considerable challenges involved. In the margins of the minutes of the meeting between Jacks, Cadman, and other senior APOC managers the following hesitations and conditions are jotted down in handwriting:

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“- Do we give active and financial aid to municipality?
- Unemployment and starvation is the responsibility of the local municipality, who should act with our guidance and financial support
- Cadman: Financial aid should be linked to Government of Iran contributions “so long as it functions in a proper manner”
- Need for formal arrangement with Ministry of Interior detailing procedures, detailed budget.
- Involve the Governor, keep low profile. Have issues raised by local authorities and not the Company”\(^74\).
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To provide a perspective on the situation, while the Company was planning to allocate £177,000 for housing 3,200 employees, it was offering £2,500 to the municipality to deal with the nearly insurmountable issues facing a boomtown of

\(^73\) Dossier 5, Item 14, 20-22 March 1926, Pp.55-61, BP 71183
\(^74\) Handwritten notes on the margin of 22 March 1926 meeting with Cadman, Dossier 6, Pp.55-56, BP 71183
more than 50,000 destitute migrants and local people, in the aftermath of devastating epidemics and famine. The government budget at the time, it will be recalled from chapter 2, was under severe stress, much of it allocated to the military or beholden to debt repayments. Although oil royalties had increased in 1924-1925, other major crises had put a severe strain on the budget. The devastating famine of 1925 had incurred heavy debts from emergency loans; the military operations against Sheikh Khaz’al, and the subsequent political disturbances over the change of dynasty had left little room for financial maneuver. The share of the Ministry of Interior from the budget was a paltry 6 percent of the government expenditures\(^75\), and little of it trickled its way to areas such as Abadan or Masjed Soleyman that were considered frontier regions, and under the tutelage of the Oil Company. The limited municipal budget, at the time, was supplemented by provincial taxe revenues from state land (khalesehjat), a portion of the provincial customs revenues, and a consumption tax on alcohol. Given the intense disputes over land between the central government and local magnates, and the generally unstable situation in the province that adversely affected agricultural production, these were hardly secure or sufficient sources of revenue for the scale of work that was being discussed.

“State lands” (khalesehjat) were a highly disputed category (as the central government was in the process of reclaiming land formerly controlled by the local magnates) and yielding little income due the poor state of agriculture and the continuing insecurity in the province. On the other hand, the newly imposed ‘banderol tax’ [fees charged for the government seal on individual liquor bottles] on bottled alcohol had become a major source of contraband and smuggling, with the systematic collusion of ill paid border guards and policemen in the frontier towns of Abadan and Mohammareh, leaving little reliable surplus for funding municipal projects\(^76\).

However, the Iranian state bureaucrats were not ready to turn down the financial offer of assistance by APOC, nor could they afford to refuse their responsibility for municipal and sanitary improvements since these were the spheres of authority that the new state institutions were jealously claiming from the former...


\(^76\) On the extent of smuggling in Abadan, who was involved, the extent of the collusion of state officials, and its impact on municipal tax revenues see “Illegal activities of border guards (counterfeit labels, illicit and diluted alcoholic drinks, smuggling of alcohol without banderol, etc.)” 1930-1932, I.N.A. 240008497; “Assessing the tax revenues of Khuzestan; consequences of the reduction of revenues from alcoholic drinks and state lands”, 1927-1929, I.N.A. 240010128
local elites and the Oil Company. Hence, the Company’s conditions and proposed plans were accepted. The proposal letter from APOC to the Ministry of Interior is worth quoting in some detail (my translation):

“The Public Health of Abadan requires a municipality…There have been a number of serious outbreaks of epidemic diseases over the past two years. The Company as a result was forced to build modern housing for several thousand workers at great expense to itself, in a new neighborhood… the maintenance of public cleanliness is expensive and requires adequate personnel, organization, and professional management to control waterborne diseases… As for the welfare of the 25,000 people of Abadan who live next to us, little has been done for their sanitation by the municipality [I assume this figure refers to the position of the local population who were not directly employed by the Oil Company]. They mostly live in dwellings made of reed and face grave danger, as there are no sanitary facilities or adequate sewerage. Regardless of what the Company does in its own area the danger of epidemic outbreak in the Bazaar and the Town is constant… [The situation creates the] need for the municipality to provide electricity, sewage, housing, waterways. The Company is willing to help with financial assistance until the municipality can stand on its own”77.

The letter proceeds to offer a detailed proposed budget for the municipality, probably drafted by the urban planner and architect J.M. Wilson, who had been asked to consult on the situation. The Company suggested that it was willing to subsidize a 70 percent raise in the salary of the director of the municipality to 100 Touman, and offer further assistance free of charge for the construction of free public toilets; garbage collection, incineration, and landfill throughout the city; fire stations; quarantine centers for those afflicted with contagious diseases; and an annual subsidy budget of 2,000T “until the Municipality can stand on its own, but only if the government commits to make up the rest [of the required budget], and the funds are allocated exclusively to municipal issues”78.

77 APOC to Ministry of Interior, 27 April 1926, INA 240009253
78 APOC to Ministry of Interior, 27 April 1926, INA 240009253
The built environment of the oil industry and the reproduction of its working class began to take shape in a conjuncture that was intimately linking the global with the national and the local. On the one hand the transnational concerns and requirements of corporate extractive capitalism had begun to be guided by the lessons in social reform, governance, management, and the scientific discourses of sanitation and professional urban planning. These scientific praxes were not politically neutral, as they were shaped by, and reinforced the notions of segregation by race and social class that underlay class conflict in the west and racial domination in the colonies. New modern nation-state institutions taking shape in Iran, such as municipalities, public health authorities, schools, individual record keeping, and property registration, were deeply influenced by the interaction with these global practices in Khuzestan’s oil industry; as they were by the increasingly vocal pressures from a new subaltern social actor, the urban residents and industrial working classes in Abadan and across the oil industry in Khuzestan. These heterogeneous subaltern social actors had to invent collective ways to negotiate and struggle to improve their lot in the novel urban setting where they found themselves. The frictions around the remaking of the urban space of Abadan embodied these scalar dynamics, and contributed to shaping the built environment of oil there.

The Bazaar of Abadan:

Prior to 1925 when the new central government institutions began to be set up in Khuzestan, APOC would routinely take drastic coercive measures to evacuate and expel squatters or settled populations out of the way of its projects with the help of its local allies. In Masjed Soleyman and Bawarda it set fire to reed houses and shops and demolished huts to clear the path for oil installations or company neighborhoods (see above, and chapter 3). When necessary it relied on the assistance of local magnates to enforce its projects. These actions were justified on two bases: first, the recurring theme of “empty land” which presented seasonally or collectively used territories as uncultivated or dead land and; second, the contractual deals with the local magnates, as well as the legal clause in the D’Arcy Concession, which gave the Company the right to obtain uncultivated land free of charge, or to purchase cultivated land at the established local price from its owners (chapter 3). Since these contractual property categories were vague, incongruous with local realities, or highly disputed, they created resentment among the dispossessed, which were left with few options but to
move to the urban spaces created by oil in search of wage labor or some form of livelihood on the margins of the oil industry.

The handful of central government officials stationed in Khuzestan also resented these Company actions, not so much out of sympathy with the plight of the local population as for the contempt toward their own nominal authority, as shown by this report of the Kargozar in 1923: “The Company acts as it pleases with Iranian citizens. There are no government agents at present to deal with complaints, except at Mohammareh. To monitor the Company we need offices in Masjed Soleyman, Naseri [Ahvaz], and Ebbadan [Abadan].”

However, with the fear of Sheikh Khaz’al gone, the remaining residents of the Bazaar neighborhood resisted intimidation when the Company tried to evict them. By May 1925 the Company had destroyed some 140 dwellings, but demolitions and evictions ground to a halt when the rest refused to move or be intimidated. The residents were from all over. At least 20 of those demolished dwellings housed Indians who had come there from Mesopotamia. Others came from Bushehr, Shiraz, Kazeroun, Isfahan, and elsewhere, mostly it seems from southern Iran, as evidenced from the names of signatories on the petitions. The Kargozar in Mohammareh received 57 written complaints demanding justice and protection. The Company was refusing to pay compensation and threatened to take matters to Tehran; but the conflict was becoming politicized, with some “troublemakers” urging residents to resist eviction:

“The Company is asking the government permission to build a bazaar in the so-called Sheikh area. Previously, the Company and Sardar Aqdas’ [one of Khaz’al’s tiles] agents had demolished the houses there. Whoever does not have a compensation contract from the Company can get paid according to the type of room they had: Brick room 175 Rupees, Mud brick 88 Rps, Mud 55 Rps. There are some troublemakers involved. The Company persists. It has held multiple meetings and refuses to acknowledge any claims, stating that they have already purchased the titles [to the land], and if they agree to pay anything it will be only out of goodwill.”

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79 Kargozar to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tehran, 29 December 1923, INA 240009253
80 Kargozar to Foreign Ministry, 5 May 1925, INA 240009253
81 Mohammareh to Foreign Ministry, 8 May 1925, INA 240009253
82 Mohammareh to Foreign Ministry, 8 May 1925; 12 May 1925, INA 240009253
The oil workers living in the neighborhood were intimidated and did not appear to be willing to confront the Company openly, fearing for their jobs and livelihood. The Kargozar arranged a meeting, but in spite of official invitations by the Company for them to participate oil workers and Company employees kept a low profile:

“A final meeting was held with the Company on the 20th of May. Some of the plaintiffs are employees of the Company, and thus refused to appear in the commission, in spite of multiple invitations from the personnel office. It was determined that the Company has to pay an additional compensation of 18,000 Rupees, or 6,000 Touman to those displaced”83.

“An atmosphere of fear and surveillance reigned in Khuzestan, and especially in Abadan”84. At the same time, Company public relations and propaganda was lauding the place as a pleasant and safe destination for visits, and a great place for Europeans to work (Chapter 5). However, things were rather different from the perspective of migrants and unskilled workers:

“My difficulty was how to travel in Khuzestan because the English had put up barbed wire everywhere and forbade anyone from entering [any of the Company controlled areas]…wherever you went you would be interrogated: Where are you going? Why have you come? Who are you here to see? … I wanted to go to Aghajari, but it was all fenced in and there was a guard at the gate. The place was in the middle of the mountains…In Khuzestan everything was forbidden. Iranians couldn’t start a club, a cooperative, or any associations. We received permission from the Abadan Cultural Office to establish a sports club for Iranians…The English immediately put us under surveillance…we had only athletic activities, but the club became very popular and the whole town was participating, so the Provincial Government shut us down after two months… Things were very difficult for migrants and newcomers to Abadan and Masjed Soleyman. Masjed Soleyman was all

83 Mohammareh to Foreign Ministry, No. 295, 21 May 1925, INA 240009253
84 Eftekhari, Khaterat-e Dowran-e Separi Shodeh, 129.
fenced in, and you couldn’t enter without government permission. Abadan was equally bad.\textsuperscript{85}

APOC was creating fortified enclaves by enclosing its areas with fences, behind which the business of accumulation in oil capitalism could operate according to its own rules of social, spatial, and economic behavior. In these de-territorialized spaces carved out by the Company those higher up the corporate hierarchy had a different experience of everyday life than the masses of casual unskilled workers and urban migrants. For some the fences and barbed wires represented a sense of safety and comfort behind defensive fortifications, for others they evoked fear, alienation, and incarceration. However, they all had to live by the rules being imposed by the Oil Company. Marx drew attention to the stark contrast between the geographies of market exchange versus the domain of production when labor is commodified under capitalism\textsuperscript{86}. We can broaden this geographic contrasts and think of Company towns as corporate extensions of the disciplinary power exercised in coercive work spaces into the everyday urban spaces of reproduction:

APOC was attempting to carve out an isolated, enclosed, militarized, and de-territorialized geography of oil extraction to contain and defuse the frictions caused with labor relations, national laws, and popular resistance\textsuperscript{87}. In isolated locales, such as Masjed Soleyman and Aghajari, which were in fact mining towns with a limited life span and utility beyond the productive phase of the oilfields, the Company had

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 34, 123–124. See also the fictional masterpiece of Abdelrahman Munif, \textit{Cities of Salt} (New York: Vintage, 1989). Set in a fictional kingdom in the Persian Gulf, the story recreates a similar haunting landscape of fear and estrangement among the indigenous population confronted with the Leviatan of oil capitalism.

\textsuperscript{86} “This sphere that we are deserting, within whose boundaries the sale and purchase of labor power goes on, is in fact a very Eden of the innate rights of man. There alone rule Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham…On leaving this sphere of simple circulation or of exchange of commodities, which furnishes the “free-trader vulgaris” with his views and ideas, and with the standard by which he judges a society based on capital and wages, we think we can perceive a change in the physiognomy of our dramatis personae. He, who before was the money-owner, now strides in front as capitalist; the possessor of labor-power follows as his laborer. The one with an air of importance, smirking, intent on business; the other, timid and holding back, like one who is bringing his own hide to market and has nothing to expect but — a hiding”. Karl Marx, \textit{Capital}, vol. 1 (London: Penguin, 1976), 281.

greater freedom of action to create company towns under its more or less exclusive disciplinary control. However, the sheer scale of Abadan, and the fact that as a city it was becoming many things at the same time -- an industrial city built around the world’s largest refinery, a strategic border town, a major port, a city of desperate immigrants, expatriate employees, and of increasingly desperate indigenous population witnessing the dismantling of their customary rights and familiar social structures -- simply limited the ability of the Company to completely hegemonize the spatial order. Furthermore, the frictions with the emerging state institutions and the teeming local population, not all of whom worked for the Oil Company, were to force the Company to negotiate more than it had anticipated, and shaped the built environment of Abadan in a highly contested dynamic.

Although oil workers may have been too intimidated to participate openly in negotiations over their eviction from the “Sheikh Neighborhood”, their neighbors and others did; forcing the Kargozar in Mohammareh to form a committee to address the losses incurred by “Iranian citizens”. The Company claimed its actions were humanitarian, and refused to enter into any formal negotiations since it considered its dealings to have been proper and contractual. The Grievance Committee set up by the Kargozar was informed by the Company that the evicted people had signed a contract and been compensated; their signatures had been witnessed by the Municipality, and that concluded the deal. Any further action on the part of the Company would be purely voluntary and undertaken solely on humanitarian grounds.

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88 I have extensively discussed the comparative dynamics of company towns in Ehsani, “Social Engineering and Modernization in Khuzestan’s Company Towns.”
89 Questioning the reductive notion of “dual city” that explains the spatial logic of colonial and industrial cities as Europeans versus the indigenous, or employers versus employees, Marcuse suggests the alternative notion of “a quartered city”, where multiple forms of distinction and hierarchy are simultaneously at work shaping a divided urban space along more fragmented lines than a simple binary dichotomy. See Peter Marcuse, “‘Dual City’: A Muddy Metaphor for a Quartered City,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 13, no. 4 (1989): 697–708.
90 Kargozar to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 25 May 1925, INA 240009253
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Map 2: Abadan in the 1930s

Map 3: Abadan in the 1960s

Source for Maps: Lawless and Seccombe (1987), 49, 50. The shaded area southeast of Braim was designated for the new Bazaar of Abadan.
Meanwhile trouble had reached the capital and Teymourtash, the powerful Minister of Agriculture, Trade, and General Welfare inquired from his counterpart at the Foreign Ministry “whether or not the rights and privileges of the Government and of citizens had been respected according to the article 3 of the D’Arcy Concession”\textsuperscript{91}. It was clear from the message that the primary concern was the dignity of the Government, and whether the Company had ignored its sovereignty. The Kargozar was asked to provide a full account to his superiors, who were becoming uneasy. His report is an important document worthy of quotation, as it reveals the views and anxieties of state officials, especially at the local level:

“Shaykh Abdollah and the Company have demolished a number of houses situated in the so-called “Company Area”. In fact Abadan has two neighborhoods, respectively called ‘Company’ and ‘Sheikh’. Most houses and shops are in the latter, which are left to their own, although people are constantly trying to improve things. In the Company area homes were demolished and people were forced to sign consent forms. The Company’s motives in demolishing houses is unclear. Some believe they intend to expel all Iranians from Khuzestan, others think they want to dig a canal to separate their buildings and factories from the city. In your servant’s opinion they intend to turn Abadan into something like Masjed Soleyman, where they own everything and nobody else has any authority… They intend to replicate that situation in Abadan and undermine the current city, as once the bazaar is completed the Company will control all transactions through its own lackeys. We should resist allowing the situation in Abadan coming to resemble that of Masjed Soleyman. On the other hand, since the municipality has some revenues and is under the control of the government it needs to work hard to pave roads and keep the city clean in order not to give any excuses to the Company”\textsuperscript{92}.

\textsuperscript{91} Minister of Agriculture, Trade, and General Welfare to Minister of Foreign Affairs, No. 1881, 6 June 1925, INA 240009253. Clause 3 of D’Arcy Concession is available in Ferrier, History of the British Petroleum Company, 1:640.

\textsuperscript{92} To the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Ebbadan Houses and Company Actions”. (Abadan is spelled two different ways in the same letter), 3 June 1926, INA 240009253; Kargozar to Foreign Ministry, No.474, 6 June 1925, INA 240009253.
The Kargozar was alarmed about the absence of any tangible government authority in Masjed Soleyman, which appeared to him as occupied territory. He felt the Company had similar plans for Abadan, and his primary concern was to impose government sovereignty over the city and to check the mysterious and questionable machinations of the Company. The fate of the evicted population did not appear to overly concern him. However, he was clear that if the government were to exercise any authority it needed to work hard to perform certain social tasks, such as building and maintaining an urban infrastructure, and to insure that sanitary concerns were being addressed. “The state” as such was not an institutional presence in the city, but to make a state and to claim sovereignty over the territory and the population required performing certain social tasks that were now being defined as general welfare. The Kargozar followed his report with a further note, this time providing a historical background to the conflict, and framed the frictions with the Company within the changing political situation of the demise of Sheikh Khaz’al and the new order being imposed by the central government in Khuzestan. Again, it is an important historical document worthy of full quotation:

“Last June (June 1924) The Company warned some home owners to vacate their premises to clear way for demolition. We have objected to the Company and to the [British] Consulate [in Mohammareh] that the Company had no right to so threaten the residents. We demanded to know how the Company intended to proceed with the evictions if residents ignored the warning? For now they say they do not intend to be unjust, and they will wait while [their] workers look for alternative housing. Meanwhile the revolution had begun in Khuzestan. Sheikh Khaz’al was openly challenging the government. The Company took advantage of this situation and without informing this office or the Foreign Ministry asked Sheikh Abdollah who, at the time, was Khaz’al’s appointed governor in Ebbadan [Abadan], to demolish the houses and transfer the land to the Company. They employed the services of a Company secretary, a certain Mirza Hossein Shushtari, to give a veneer of legality to these proceedings. When I objected to this, Sheikh Abdollah showed up at the Kargozari with a number of Arabs and threatened me not to interfere. The houses were demolished. Residents were complaining in secret but we couldn’t do anything. We held seven meetings with the Company. Finally, [the General Manager in Mohammareh, T.L.] Jacks agreed to pay
compensation, but [APOC Chairman Charles Greenaway] his boss refused and insisted the issue must be resolved in Tehran [my emphasis].”

The accusation of threatening and intimidating government officials did not sit well in Tehran, nor did the impression that the Company was acting like a state; although a confrontation could be avoided by blaming Sheikh Khaz’al and his rogue agents acting with impunity; and now that a “revolution” had taken place and Khaz’al had been removed by the army and Reza Khan, everything would be different. The conflict with Sheikh Khaz’al had focused public attention on Khuzestan, by highlighting the state of Iranian oil workers and the details of the oil concessions in the growing national press at a time when nationalist sentiment was running high following the rejection of the 1919 Anglo-Persian Agreement by the Majles and the increasing centralization of the state under Reza Khan (Chapter 2). The newspaper Tajadod published a series of seven reports titled “Naft” [Oil] that reviewed the history of oil concessions granted to the British and Americans, and how Iranian statesmen had handled these agreements94. The newspaper received a critical reply to its coverage, titled “About Oil”, which it published, and then proceeded to publish a longer series of more critical assessments titled “The history of the Anglo Persian Oil Company”95. Bad publicity in the nationalist press, at a time of transition when the British Government and APOC were trying to reconfigure their long term strategy and felt highly threatened by Soviet influence, American competition, and the radicalization of the masses was a headache that the Oil Company wished to avoid.

July 1925 became a pivotal month in the struggle over the Abadan Bazaar and the evictions planned by the Company. The Prime Minister, his cabinet, and the Majles received a series of telegraph petitions from “Ruined Abadanis made homeless” (Khaneh Kharaban-e Abadan), which declared their patriotism and claimed, “The Company intends to demolish our homes and has caused us 150 thousand Rupees of damages. The former Kargozar was useless and refused to carry out serious investigations or make accurate reports. We plead for your assistance”. Other telegraphs arrived complaining, “We have been made homeless for more than a

93 Kargozar to Foreign Ministry, No. 490, 16 June 1925, INA 240009253
94 “Naft”, Tajadod, Nos.9-12, 14, 16-17, from 25 June 25 to first of July 1924
95 “Dar Atraf-e Naft”, No.15, 9 July 1924; “Tarikh-e Company-e Naft-e Iran va Inglis”, Nos. 62, 71-75, October to 18 November 1924, in Tajadod
year. Please investigate and follow up on this complaint”. The pleas were signed by a coterie of people whose names indicated they were immigrants from other cities and regions (Hassan Shirazi, Mohammad Javad Qomsheyi, Seyyed Mohammad Shirazi). Some of their names indicate a degree of literacy, carrying the title Mirza which means secretary/notary (Mirza Jani, Mirza Hossein Isfahani); many petitioners were shop owners (Qahvehchi). It is unclear if any were employees of the Company, since this was the era before the universal compulsory registration of individual information, the adoption of formal last names, and the issuance of birth certificates. But since the Kargozar’s reports highlighted the residence of many oil workers in the neighborhood, and their intimidation by the fear of retribution by the Company, we can surmise that this was a collective neighborhood movement, publicly fronted by those individuals who felt less vulnerable to direct Company intimidation.

Petitioning authorities for justice in the name of loyalty and patriotism had a long tradition in popular politics during the Qajar period. It was one of the few ways that ordinary people could seek justice against abusive officials by petitioning higher placed members of elites and pleading for their protection; but now the strategy had begun to become part of the repertoire of the new wage working class of the industrial proletariat and urban subalterns in industrial towns. Teymourtash, who was becoming Reza Khan’s right hand man, was alarmed by these mounting frictions and demanded an investigation by the Foreign Minister. At stake were the potential political repercussions stemming from the unexpected resistance of local residents, the bad publicity in the press during a critical period of uncertainty and crisis, and concern over the actions of the Company that was acting like a sovereign government:

“...The Majlis has received numerous complaints from shopkeepers and residents of the so called “Company” neighborhood of Abadan against the demolition of their property. At present a commission made of the representative of the Provincial Military Government and the Cabinet of Ministers is negotiating for adequate compensation of the residents. What is

96 14 July 1925, INA 240009253
98 No. 4250, 21 July 1925, INA 240009253
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alarming is the collection of the so-called public health taxes by the Company. This seems to be the same as municipal taxes that the Company was collecting and spending until recently due to the absence of a municipality in Abadan. You ought to establish a regular municipality as soon as possible in the city in order to end this irregular state of affairs, which is contrary to the national regulations. Until this happens it will be impossible to resolve the disputes between the Company and residents” 99.

On 24th July 1925 matters came to head and the whole region erupted. After the military had displaced Khaz’al the Arab populations of Mohammareh, Abadan, and southwestern Khuzestan were apprehensive and resentful of the humiliating manner in which they were being treated by the government soldiers and bureaucrats. The non-Arab migrants were initially glad to be rid of the oppressive yoke of Khaz’al, but soon discovered that the new government agents and soldiers had little leeway with the Company to offer them effective protection; or were equally abusive as Khaz’al and the Company lackeys. The notion of the Company funding the Municipality’s budget, building schools (chapter 5), subsidizing the wages of mayors and school teachers, etc. did not exactly give credibility to the autonomy and impartiality of government officials: “The Iranian Police Department in Khuzestan was very weak…and because they were funded by the Oil Company and were their lackeys, they were busy intimidating and extorting the wretched people of Khuzestan… the Oil Company supported the Police Department only to intimidate and suppress any opposition” 100. Eftekhari, who was trying to organize the oil workers in Abadan in 1927-1929 felt the only significant threat against the secret nucleus of labor activists he had managed to set up came from the Company’s own secret police, and not from any intelligence gathered by the thuggish and ineffective Iranian police 101.

When the military government of Khuzestan refused to pay compensation for requisitioning food and pack animals, and began to impose a new tax on date trees, a major tribal insurgency ensued among the rural Arab population (see Chapter 7). The British Minister Percy Loraine, as was to be expected, claimed that a sinister

99 Ministry of Agriculture to the Ministry of Interior, No. 1350, 6 July 1925, INA 240009253
100 Eftekhari, Khaterat-e Dowran-e Separi Shodeh, 126–127.
101 Ibid.
conspiracy was at play: “they were further agitated by the intrigues and incitement of the agents of the parties whose interest is to create trouble for the Central Government or to provoke disorder that would affect British interests and Anglo-Persian relations”. However, he did concede that, “circumstances were, on the whole, favorable to such a general uprising”\textsuperscript{102}. In spite of this, a “general tribal uprising” did not materialize because in the absence of the unifying power of Khaz’al some of the insurgents broke rank and acted prematurely. The Company and the army had been alerted by,

“The isolated and premature outbreak of a band of 400 hungry Arabs, who broke into Mohammareh on the 24\textsuperscript{th} of July, temporarily immobilized the small garrison and had possession of the town for a few hours. His Majesty’s consul was isolated and unable to enter into communication with the APOC, whose senior official, Sir Arnold Wilson, considered that the seriousness of the situation justified a direct request for the urgent dispatch of a gunboat of troops from Iraq for the protection of the Company’s interests. At the same time, he placed his [APOC’s] transport at the disposal of the Persian military authorities for the transport of reinforcements from Ahvaz. These arrived with commendable promptitude during the night, and had so far restored the situation before the arrival of troops from Iraq that it was found unnecessary to disembark them”\textsuperscript{103}.

This event catalyzed a significant change in the provincial dynamic (see more detailed discussion in Chapter 7). It made the Company more convinced of the “efficacy of Persian methods in tribal warfare” and came to trust that the Central Government could effectively impose security and safeguard Company operations. It formalized the Company’s change of alliance with the government against its erstwhile local allies, the Arab tribes. The use of motorized transport revolutionized the logistical geography of the region, as Iranian troops were transported within hours to confront the popular protests instead of taking days to arrive on foot and horseback. It also signaled how oil, or more precisely fuel oil for motorcars, produced in Abadan refinery, was facilitating new political alliances and the application of modern

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
technology to engineer a whole new built environment of access roads and rapid transportation and communication. Last, it alerted the Oil Company as well as the provincial junta of the simmering danger of popular discontent, and the necessity of preventing further insurrections, especially in congested and destitute urban areas with a teeming population of anonymous and desperate denizens.

In Mohammareh a new attaché replaced the former Kargozar, Haj Mirza Moqaddam, who was re-assigned to Tehran, thus conveniently annulling all the provisional agreements he had drawn out during his mediations between the residents and the Company: “The former Kargozar had several friendly meetings with the Company, which cannot be acknowledged as formal agreements”104. By insinuating, perhaps unfairly, a lack of integrity in his predecessor, the new Kargozar reported,

“The Company claims all negotiations with the former Kargozar were informal and merely a good-will gesture, since the plaintiffs had all signed over their property titles to the Company. Report #295 claimed that APOC had agreed to pay a compensation of 18 thousand Rupees [indicating the Indian currency was more prevalent in the province and widely used by the Company instead of the Iranian national money], but they now deny this. Nor do we have any document proving the Company had ever agreed to pay such a sum. It may be appropriate to ask Hajj Mirza…Moghaddam, the former Kargozar, whether he has any legal proof in support of his report”105

The situation in Abadan had stayed relatively calm during the July events, but simmering anger now threatened to spill over into open confrontation in the highly tense city, as former allies and subjects of Sheikh Khaz’al felt betrayed and their anger added to an already confrontational situation:

“Approximately a hundred evicted people gather on a daily basis to pressure the Kargozar. Some local thugs, who used to be formerly in the pay of the Company, are now causing trouble and agitating. A few days ago Seyyed Jaani Shirazi, a leader of Ebbadan [Abadan] thugs, attacked Mr… [illegible] the Company’s head of operations with a stone. The latter was almost killed,

104 No. 1369, 13 July 1925, INA 240009253
105 Kargozar to Foreign Ministry, No. 889, 10 August 1925, INA 240009253
but managed to escape. The military government has made several arrests, but the situation is unruly”\(^\text{106}\).

In spite of the tense situation, and encouraged by their newly established cooperative alliance with the government and the dismissal of the over-critical former Kargozar, APOC decided to dig in its heels. They informed Tehran that they had legally purchased these properties from their former owners with their signed consent, and paid a fair price that according to the terms of the concession was not to exceed the local fair market value of similar land\(^\text{107}\). It was conveniently overlooked that land prices had changed since 1921, when a “fair market value of land” had been last agreed with Khaz’al. The Acting Director F.C. Greenhouse met Teymourtash at his house in Tehran to hammer out a resolution.

“Following the 2\(^{nd}\) of August meeting of the committee investigating the situation in Abadan at your home we arrived at the following conclusions:
- The demolition of buildings in the Company area of Abadan was deemed necessary and was carried out for the general welfare of the population and according to the recommendations of the Company physicians and public health professionals.
- Concerning the demolished houses that had been previously compensated it is unnecessary to carry out any further investigation. Beware that the same troubles that are being created for the Company in its small area may soon bedevil the Government in the city of Abadan
- The refusal of some Iranians in the Company Area to pay rent or Sanitation Duties. Company does not make any profit on these dues, and they are all spent on sanitation expenses.
- The new and large bazaar of Abadan: The area had been previously delineated and cleared by Khaz’al and the Company was supposed to build a bazaar for the Sheikh. To insure safety and sanitation it is best to complete the construction before the start of the rainy season”\(^\text{108}\).

\(^\text{106}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{107}\) APOC to Foreign Ministry, Nos. 25/79/27/637, 15 August 1925, INA 240009253
\(^\text{108}\) Greenhouse to Teymourtash, No.9/251, 18 August 1925,
The remainder of 1925 and 1926 were the short-lived period of honeymoon between the British Government, APOC, and the Central Government of Iran. By 1927 relations became testier, eventually breaking down during the acrimonious renegotiations of the D’Arcy Concession between 1928-1933\(^{109}\). In the above cited summary of his meeting with Teymourtash, Greenhouse made several claims: That the whole idea of the Bazaar and the subsequent evictions had been the work of Sheikh Khaz’al and not APOC; that the Company’s sole aim was the improvement of the general welfare and public sanitation, based on the recommendations of scientific and sanitary experts. He implied that the plaintiffs demanding redress were opportunists out to extort the Company, which had already paid fair compensation. He warned that opening the Pandora’s box of compensations for confiscated property would be just as harmful to the Government that was now busy reclaiming all customary held land and properties as state land. He eased the Minister’s mind by implying that the Company was not acting as a political authority by collecting taxes which, he acknowledged, was the purview of the government only, but merely charging rent and sanitary fees within its own area to maintain and improve the generally beneficial infrastructure. The urgency in Greenhouse’s missive was evident, and he followed it up with another pressing request a month later when the government stayed cautious and did not act quickly enough:

“[We had made an] arrangement last year (1924) to build a new bazaar in Abadan town at the request of the Shyakh of Mohammerah…The need for the bazaar is very urgent in the interest of the public and of the good sanitation and hygienic control…The Company would consent to build the bazaar if the government so wishes…It is suggested that the shopkeepers displaced by the recent demolitions be given first refusal of shops, and permission be given to the Company to lease out these shops at a rent to be agreed with the military governor sufficient to pay the cost of electric light, water, sanitation, and administration plus 10% per annum to cover the original cost of construction. The bazaar is designed for the sale of foodstuffs…and is almost as important as the provision of a good water supply”\(^{110}\).


\(^{110}\) “Greenhouse to Ministry of Agriculture”, No. P/316, 15 September 1925, INA 240029099
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The Politics of Food:

The Company’s claim about food supplies being of vital importance, on an equal par with clean water, housing, and sanitation were not off the mark. As long as Mohammareh had been a “dirty little village” and Abadan, its rural island hinterland, food supplies were not yet a vital concern. As the oil industry was taking shape food supplies of Europeans were imported in tin cans by the sea, or as grain purchased locally or from Iraq. However, by mid 1920s, with post war conflicts, droughts, epidemics, famines, and the substantial growth of the population, the quantitative supply of basic foodstuff, as well as its quality, had become of vital and strategic importance. Khuzestan had been the historical grain basket of Iran and Mesopotamia until the 9th and 10th centuries (see chapter 1), but land degradation, water-logging due to lack of proper drainage, and political crises had drastically reduced the region’s agricultural production, making it prone to recurring famines (see Chapters 2, 3, 5, 7). The problem of famine did not affect the Europeans as much as workers and the local population who were unable to afford market prices.

Since the opening of Karun to commercial shipping in late 19th century, much of the local food crops were exported to more lucrative markets. Ella Sykes in 1901 recorded 15 prominent merchants in Basra who controlled the date trade, and exported wool and wheat from Ahvaz. She also noted the drastic ecological changes that had taken place all along Karun, comparing Henry Layard’s description of the thickly wooded banks of Karun with the “totally deforested” landscape she saw in her visit: “no gazelle, or even a hyena, let alone a lion”112. No shooting for Lady Ella! The combination of the voracious requirements of the oil industry for brick kilns and energy prior to the completion of the refinery, and the growing needs of the local population for cooking fuels had put great pressure on the already fragile ecology of the region113.

112 Ibid., 267–271.
113 Working class families in Abadan used charcoal for cooking well into the 1940s. Poor Rural villagers, to this day, use a mixture of cow patties and straw, fuel still being too costly for their subsistence lives. Given Eftekhari’s account of oil sludge being used as a cooking fuel in the 1920s we can surmise that the working population used whatever was available as cooking fuel. Nasim Khaksar, Oral Interview about everyday life in Abadan in the 1950s, Amersfoort, March 2014; Author’s fieldnotes, Khuzestan, 1988-1990.
Arnold Wilson during his military service in Khuzestan had been very active in identifying potential irrigation schemes for large-scale food production in southwest Khuzestan\(^{114}\). The logistical awareness that the growing oil industry, as well as the British military, would require a secure, substantial, and sufficient, supply of food was already evident prior to WWI. Even the Qajar state had become aware of the commercial agrarian potential of the region after the noticeable interests of European prospectors in the late 19\(^{th}\) Century\(^{115}\), and sent Najm al-Molk, an able engineer, to Khuzestan in the 1880s, to assess the possibility of rebuilding broken irrigation dykes and waterworks on Karkheh and lower Karun (see Chapter 5). In 1904 a Major Morton was dispatched by the Government of India to investigate the feasibility of establishing a commercial irrigation scheme around Ahvaz\(^{116}\). In 1909 alarms rang when the British Legation learned that a Dutch syndicate had obtained an option for developing an irrigation scheme on the Karun, and warned off the Iranian government from considering the scheme because “A project of the character above stated is evidently calculated to produce a very considerable change, both commercial and political, in the existing situation on the Karun”\(^{117}\). Sheikh Khaz’al became interested in soliciting British help to develop such a scheme himself, and in March 1909 Sir Wiliam Willcocks, “a great engineer from Egypt”\(^{118}\) arrived to assess the regional potential for irrigated agriculture on a large scale.

Willcocks was impressed and claimed that rebuilding the dam at Nahr-e Hashem on the Karkheh that had fallen into disrepair in mid 19\(^{th}\) century would unleash the agricultural potential of 1.5 million acres, especially in northern Khuzestan, but would cost an estimated £500 thousand to develop. While Willcocks felt that better natural drainage and soil quality made Khuzestan’s commercial agricultural potential greater than Mesopotamia’s, he also warned that any such scheme would adversely affect date gardens downstream, around Mohammareh, which relied on siltation and downstream water flow\(^{119}\). What the European

\(^{114}\) Arnold T Wilson, *A Precis of the Relations of the British Government with the Tribes and Shaikhs of Arabistan*, 1911, Appendix A.


\(^{116}\) A.T. Wilson to Cadman, 18 February 1926, BP 71183


\(^{118}\) Wilson, *SW Persia: A Political Officer’s Diary 1907-1914*, 96–97.

prospectors, as well as the engineer Najm al-Molk who had made similar assessments four decades before, all shared was the conviction that the land was a wasted resource, left negligently underdeveloped by ‘the natives’:

“[Karkheh] is the finest site for a dam I have ever seen. It has of course been used in the long distance past and was unsuccessfully repaired some 50 years ago. Now a great vested interest has grown up in the marshes [reference to the Arab tribes inhabiting the wetlands] in which the river wastes itself. A little rice, a little maize, and thousands of miles of reed beds are all that the river serves. It might water 50,000 acres of wheat, and still leave plenty for rice fields.”

The following year a Russian national also obtained an irrigation concession on the Karun, this time prompting the British Foreign Office to step in directly and apply pressure on the Shah to put aside, once and for all, the idea of granting any foreign concessions for irrigation works in Khuzestan. Wilson felt frustrated and blamed the mistrust between Tehran and Sheikh Khaz’al for the failure of any attempt to develop the full agricultural and food potential of the wasted land and water. However, his insightful comments demonstrate the awareness that this was not simply an issue to be resolved among political elites and governments. Wilson already foresaw in 1911 that local people and collective social structures would resist their dispossession if drastic changes in landownership, irrigation systems, and agricultural development, were implemented at their expense instead of for them:

“This country is evidently easy to irrigate and would be extremely fertile, but the obstacles are many. The land is in communal ownership, and a redesigned system of agriculture would benefit one tribe and community at the expense of another. It is harder to deal with communities than individuals. The government is an alien government, i.e. of Tehrani Persians. If their authority was supreme here they would get all the revenue and spend it elsewhere.

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120 Wilson, SW Persia; A Political Officer’s Diary 1907-1914, 97.
121 Persia, Annual Report 1910, Burrell, IPD, Vol.5, 116–117; Wilson, SW Persia; A Political Officer’s Diary 1907-1914, 101
Irrigation works need organization, honesty, and steady outgoings on maintenance. None of these are to be expected in Persia.”

However, none of these modernizing agrarian and irrigation schemes for commercial food production on a large scale came to fruition, and the quantity as well as the safe quality of food in Khuzestan remained primary concerns, and directly linked to political stability. In 1926 Arnold Wilson urged APOC to approach the Iranian Government and ask it to entrust the Company with building irrigation schemes and large scale food production projects, by offering the added incentive of funding the project with a loan, to the tune of £100-£150 thousand, at a “low interest rate of 6%, as long as the construction is entrusted to us. This would benefit the Company by reducing food prices, and increase tranquility of the area, and create a steadier labor market.”

The inevitable reliance of Abadanis on the market for food supplies was a double-edged sword. On the one hand the dispossessed peasants, pastoralists, and migrants became a reserve army of cheap and interchangeable labor, congregated in town, and eager to get hired for low wages to feed themselves by purchasing all their necessities in the market. On the other hand, food insecurity, coupled with epidemics, chronic poverty, and social dislocations, created a cauldron of resentment and potential insurgency. Yousef Eftekhari, who managed to get hired at the Technical Workshop in Abadan, one of the pet educational schemes of the Company for training skilled Iranian workers (chapter 5) recalls his wages, and his living and working conditions as permanently precarious:

“My wages were 8 Touman, which eventually increased to 10T. Rahim Hamdad [his comrade] also received 8T. Together we rented a house for ourselves [as a safe house] for 4T. The two of us had to live on the remaining 14T for the whole month. We were truly under duress… Back then a bag of

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123 A.T. Wilson to Cadman, 18 February 1926, BP 71183
flour alone cost 5T in Abadan. Workers couldn’t pay in cash and had to get credit; and the unscrupulous shopkeepers charged them 6T for a bag of flour… Casual workers couldn’t afford anything besides bread. Most of them never had warm food, tea, fruits, let alone any meat…Life in Khuzestan was nearly impossible without ice and water, especially in summertime, and for those who had to work more than eight hours under the blazing sun. The Company did not provide any water; let alone ice…the luckier workers managed to get hold of a clay pot or a canvas bag. This helped filtrate the murky water a little bit, and also to keep it cooler. If you weren’t so lucky as to have a clay jar or a canvas bag you ended up having to drink water that tasted like oil and was hot”124.

However, food provision was not a problem only for the poor, but even affected Indians and Europeans. “The local community pays any price for high quality vegetables… [one of the main reasons why] the cost of living is increasing”125. In the days before container refrigeration or climate controlled railroad and truck transport made possible the transfer of large quantities of relatively fresh food126, the absence of fresh produce, dairies, and normal food was a major issue affecting the quality of life, even for Europeans. In the late 1930s, long after a modern bazaar had been finally built in Abadan, the problem of safe and sufficient food supplies persisted. To assess the rising costs and mounting discontent a food and nutrition expert by the name of William Jardine was hired to provide an assessment of food conditions in Abadan and the Fields. His report concluded that one of the major and recurring complaints by “the staff” was about the quality and unpredictability of the supply of bacon, vegetables, and meat. “The complete lack of choice, combined with low quality and low standards of cooking affects the physical and mental condition of the staff…the lack of other amenities and the climate are badly enhanced by food problems” 127

124 Eftekhari, Khaterat-e Dowran-e Separi Shodeh, 35, 119–120.
125 BP 49700
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The Company had established a dairy farm “to supply the staff continuously with milk. Jardine was asked to evaluate the dairy farm and make suggestions for improving the situation, since “the irregularity of food quality and quantity enhances abnormality of life in Iran”. Jardine concluded that given the location of Abadan little could be imported from outside the province, “some fruits perhaps, but no vegetables. Meat is a problem that cannot be remedied locally, but frozen meat [packed in dry ice, before refrigerated containers] can be imported…butter can be produced locally, same with pigs”. Jardine’s suggestion was to solve the food problem by improving local supplies, by employing an agrarian specialist, and insuring the maintenance of “disease free areas…taking precautions against diseases… and the threats of contamination”. However, all this required an increase in the supply of local grains, maize and barley.

The logistic of food demand and consumption intertwined the Company areas and the indigenous communities, as did epidemic viruses, and work in the refinery. As it were, “the Company is obliged to operate for itself and its employees a comprehensive food supply scheme”\(^\text{128}\). The considerable expense and the practical difficulties entailed in these schemes were an irritating inconvenience for a commercial oil company. In 1937 APOC had to import some 32 tons of bacon, ham, butter, cheese, lard, cream, and jams; together with 36 thousand tins of canned milk\(^\text{129}\), not a negligible expense during a period of economic stringency.

Militant Particularism in Abadan:

The Company’s plan to evict residents and merchants, paying compensation to those who had some form of official property title (it is unclear how many did, and from what authority) based on outdated property values, and then to charge them rent for re-admitting them as Company tenants, under its own strict supervision, did not sit well with the residents. These were the same “unscrupulous shopkeepers” that Eftekhari pointed out were fleecing workers with high interests. But the common struggle over threatened shared urban space was creating momentary common alliances, in what David Harvey calls “militant particularism”\(^\text{130}\). It was true that the

\(^{128}\) Ibid.
\(^{129}\) Ibid.
new bazaar would offer many new amenities, such as electricity, water, a clean and modern space; but it was doing so on Company terms, after it had dispossessed and evicted the people who lived there, and it was unclear who could afford the transition once they had lost what they already had. Some of the shopkeepers and merchants found an attorney in Bushehr to plead their case. They put together a petition and sent it not only to the Majles and the Cabinet, but also to the newspaper Iran, which published it:

“Once again the Company intends to demolish houses and evict the miserable population in the name of making a street. Two years ago they destroyed a major section of Abadan and despite numerous petitions and complaints they have not paid any compensation. Now they are at it again. We implore you to stop this injustice that is destroying Abadan’s urban fabric (shahriat-e Abadan) and preventing its development”

The petition was signed by a score of residents and merchants, some of whom cited their trades as clockmakers, cloth makers, grocers, coffee shop owners, urban landlords, bakers, merchants, etc. Again, from the geographic and ethnic attributes of their names we can surmise many were immigrants from mostly southern parts of Iran adjacent to the province (Isfahan, Kazeroun, Shiraz); others came from nearby towns in the province itself (Behbahan, Ramhormoz). A number of them had explicitly Arabic names (Khezr-e Arab, Fahd Qawab Arab, Seyyed Abdollah Arab, etc.). Many simply cited their name, so it was unclear what they did, or where they came from; simply that they were part of the common cause of laying claim to their shared urban space. The struggle moved to the Cabinet and Reza Khan, in one of his last acts as Prime Minister before ascending the throne in December, signed the following cabinet ruling:

“The APOC’s plan to build a bazaar will subsequently improve Abadan. Therefore the Cabinet approves their plan under the following conditions:
- The land belongs to the Government, who shall be party to the transactions.
- The Company shall build the Bazaar at its own expense

131 Law attorney Tehranizadeh, Bushehr, to the Majles, Prime Minister, The Government Cabinet, IRAN Newspaper, 6 October 1925, INA 240009253
- The Government ought to approve the plans for the bazaar. To speed things up the Military Governor of Abadan can inspect the plans
- The Company shall pay the property (Mostaqellat) taxes on shops leased by it
- To maintain price control rents shall not exceed 7% profit on capital expended together with expenditures on repairs, government charges, and water, electricity, and sanitation charges, which are to be borne by the Company
- Foreign subjects are forbidden to own property and real estate, yet as all Company’s institutions under the terms of Concession revert to the Government this permission is granted to the Company as an exception

APOC management was unhappy that its intentions to take full control of a strategic section of the city had been frustrated again. The Company intended to clear out the undesirable elements in order to design the area according to its own specifications. It felt this was necessary to maintain exclusive control and impose discipline. The Company justified the venture in commercial terms, and calculated that the rents and fees it intended to charge would cover the costs. But these plans now seemed in tatters, since the Government wanted a piece of the action and intended to impose its own oversight over the whole process. Greenhouse wrote an exasperated letter to Teymourtash:

“Tardy correspondence has yet again delayed the completion of the bazaar until 1926. In view of the urgent need to provide accommodation for the poorer classes of shopkeepers – the sellers of meat, fish, and vegetables – our offer was made as generous as possible, and for this reason no mention was made of the heavy capital cost of the construction which will become the property of the government in a few years time [once the D’Arcy Concession expired, in 1961]. It is regrettable that our offer has been refused.”

Greenhouse went on to make a detailed reply to the Cabinet decree, the main points of which were: first, a refusal to pay ground rent to the Government on the

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132 Cabinet Ruling; Signed by “Prime Minister Reza”, 5 October 1925, INA 24002909
133 Greenhouse to Minister of Agriculture, 7 October 1925, INA 240029099
ground that “the charge of ground rent by government on wasteland is opposed to the terms of Concession”. Second, he accepted to pay commercial property (Mostaqellat) taxes, but, third, it wanted to know why no mention had been made in the Cabinet decree of how APOC should recoup their “capital costs of £50,000”? Last, he emphasized yet again the urgency of the situation and the vital need for the project to proceed as quickly as possible. In order to show some flexibility, Greenhouse made a slightly more generous offer a week later: “At great sacrifice to Company, and in public interest, we agree to restrict the rent to be charged on bazaar shops to 8.5% of capital expended on construction, electricity, filtered water supply, sanitary & miscellaneous services supplied by Company at cost (from 10%)”.

Teymourtash tried to placate the Company, and informed the Foreign Minister that he was willing to support the idea of the government to mediate the conflict with the residents so long as the state became the sovereign authority over legal transactions, tax collections, and the ultimate landowner:

“A meeting was held at my house to deal with the issue [with Greenhouse present]. It was decided that the Military Government of Khuzestan should look into this affair and, first, collect land rent from Iranians residing in the Company areas on behalf of the Company, after confirming that all the legal documents are in order. Second, the agents of the Ministry of Interior [the Municipality] will collect the public health/sanitation taxes from the residents, in order to reimburse the expenses that are currently being paid by the Company out of pocket.”

However, even the powerful minister’s missive was difficult to accept for a fledgling bureaucracy that was suspicious of the extra territorial powers of the Company, and felt highly insecure during a time of transition under the arbitrary and authoritarian scrutiny of Reza Shah. The bewildered responses of various institutions showed that the deceptive appearance of what Tim Mitchell calls a “state effect”, concealed the reality that interconnected and institutionalized state machinery simply

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134 Ibid.
135 Greenhouse/APOC to Minister of Agriculture, No. P/362, 14 October 1925, INA 240029099
136 Teymourtash, Minister of Agriculture to Minister of Foreign Affairs, No. 5753, 15 October 1925, INA 240009253
did not exist at that stage. The Ministry of Justice, in charge of redrawing property laws, sounded baffled and ignorant of what had transpired previously and inquired “what does the Company intend to do?” At the same time the Foreign Ministry was confronted with a continuing stream of ever more elaborate telegrams and messages from its local attachés and Abadan residents denouncing “the Company’s illegal plans to make streets and to demolish homes and buildings”. Meanwhile, the new Kargozar seemed to be far more sympathetic to the Company’s position, and filed the following report:

“The Company is refusing to pay the 130 thousand Rps’ compensation demanded by the evicted and displaced population. There is a big difference between what the residents ask and what the Company is willing to consider. The demolished houses are of two types: Some have been demolished in the Company area [Braim, Refinery], others in the so called “Sheikh” neighborhood by the government of the time (Khaz’al) in order to build a bazaar for Sheykh Abdollah. At present both groups of population are mixed together. The Company’s dealings’ with the residents seems to be fair, but their demands are too high. Nevertheless the Company is willing to help.”

It now appeared that people evicted from different areas - Braim, the Sheikh neighborhood, and the Shahr - were making common alliance to resist their dispossession, and to demand at least proper compensation. The central bone of contention was becoming the issue of the legal ownership of what, by now, had become urban land.

**The Politics of property in interwar Abadan:**

Who ‘owned’ this urban land? What was the meaning of property under these changing circumstances? Chapter 3 discussed the incongruence of different notions of property when APOC was making its land deals with the Bakhtiyaris and Khaz’al. In the process of its negotiations APOC had relied on the liberal and Lockean notion of private property as a natural right insured by a free contract, which had led to the

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138 “Ministry of Justice to Teymourtash, Minister of Agriculture”, No. 9072, 25 October 1926; Series of telegraphs to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 9 November 1926 to 25 January 1927, *IA 240009253*
139 “Kargozari: Follow up on report No. 199”, No. 25, 26 December 1925, *INA 240009253*
privatization of the collective territories of the Bakhtiyari following the collusion of their khans with the Company. The D’Arcy Concession had given APOC the right of free possession of dead (mavvat) and uncultivated (bayer) land. None of these categories applied to Abadan since it had become a boomtown after 1912.

“In the Fields population centers had developed in isolated areas. There the Company performs the municipal duties. Abadan is somewhat different. There were some cultivators in the vicinity of the refinery area, but villages and a rapidly expanding town came into being, adjacent to but outside the Company area”

As a result, the Company’s repeated references to residents having signed over their properties in exchange for fair compensation begged the question of what kind of documents had been signed over, who had obtained these titles, from whom, and under what circumstances? From Eftekhari’s memoirs and the petitions of residents we know there were many people renting their residence at a significant share of their meager wages. These renters, in all likelihood most of them oil workers, were also being displaced with little alternative shelter available in the highly congested boomtown. Their claims for a “right to the city” did not figure at all in the contractual game of compensation for formal titles. It was most likely that any titles had been purchased from the patriarchal authority of Khaz’al, who had held control of the Island until he was deposed. But the Central Government had never recognized his authority over what it called “state land” (khalesejat), and now that Khaz’al had been deposed all his legal dealings were considered moot. Consequently, the claim of the Company that it had paid fair compensation for a title issued by Khaz’al met a sympathetic ear from government bureaucrats.

In any case, these titles in Abadan were no longer about agrarian land of any sort, so the categories specified in the Concession could hardly apply to them; nor did the clauses referring to the fair local value of cultivated land, since migrants and indigenous people had transformed these areas into urban residential land. Having been dispossessed once from their customary and collective geographic resources to make room for the primary accumulation of extractive oil capitalism, the now urban

140 “Terms and Conditions of Employment; Chapter 6; Municipal Development”, p.34, June 1946, BP 41516
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migrants were being again dispossessed to make room for the built urban environment of oil that would facilitate the accumulation of capital in the industrial processing of oil capitalism. The Company was willing to compromise its desire to take full control of the urban space, and was glad to delegate the politically charged task of evicting and dispossessing the population to the government, so long as its specific requirements for creating a segregated sanitary city were implemented. The state, on the other hand, was faced with the dilemma of citizen demands for fair treatment, justice, and protection, during a period of momentous transition when the institutions and the governmental practices of a new centralized nation state were being erected, legitimized by a nationalist claim of representing the interests of the nation and improving people’s material lives.

The deadlock following these confrontations put the politics of property in the city at the center of the consolidation of the oil complex in the interwar years. Given these mounting frictions, and the generally unstable political situation, the Company decided to withdraw its proposal and bide its time.141

Illusions of Segregation: Servants and the Politics of Domestic Households

As it turned out Greenhouse’s urgency in the autumn of 1925 had not been misplaced. The climate and major political events conspired to postpone the whole affair. The rainy season came and made large-scale construction impractical. The Majles voted to depose the Qajar Dynasty and appoint a new monarchy, headed by Reza Shah Pahlavi. The political transition was so momentous that it put the whole affair on hiatus as far as the central government was concerned, but not for the Company, who faced the double urgency of addressing critical sanitary conditions, coupled with the desire to take exclusive control of urban space.

In 1926, the Company prepared itself for a long-term re-organization given the new circumstances (Chapter 5). The discussions and meetings between directors in London, and field managers in Iran were arranged around John Cadman’s official visit for the coronation in April 1926. Arnold Wilson highlighted some of the essential matters up for review during Cadman’s visit. Chief among these were:

“The new market and the main gate are essential features of the sanitary and housing improvement…the selected site aims at moving [the new] bazaar

141 “Note on Abadan Bazaar position”, no date, no author (probably A.T.Wilson), BP 71183
away from insanitary lower section of the Sheikh’s village and to fit it into the sites where new villages are being erected... Sewerage (waterborne) will be extended to these new villages.”

Once again the themes that dominated Company plans were erecting gates, segregating space, creating exclusive sanitary conditions, and providing an urban infrastructure (waterborne sewage) only for these Company areas. The fact that dumping the human sewage from Company areas into the river where it would infect the water intake of the rest of the “native city” a few hundred meters downstream was an inconvenient fact that was often acknowledged on scientific grounds, but ironically did not undermine the segregationist plans (It will be recalled that at this stage only 7 piped water public outlets had been established for the entire Shahr, which Company correspondence estimated to have a population of 25 thousand). As we have seen, on numerous occasions Company officials had stressed the fact that urban sanitary prevention measures had to be inclusive and universal, otherwise they simply would not work. Europeans, skilled Indian workers, and casual Iranian workers shared the workspace of the refinery and had to physically interact on a quotidian basis. For another thing, European expatriates were heavily dependent on domestic servants for cooking, cleaning, disposing of garbage, gardening their lawns, washing their cloths, carrying their goods, attending and caring for their children, etc. These routine everyday physical interactions simply undermined the scientific justification for racial and class spatial segregation, and revealed them for what they were: The urban design of a built environment for the maintenance of unequal relations of power and dominance based on racial and class differences.

Although there is more material available for the post-WW2 period, I have not come across specific information regarding servants and domestic workers during this interwar years. Nevertheless, through routine and casual references found in archival materials over the years, we know that servants and household domestics always formed significant numbers in Abadan. In the last years of the AIOC operations before nationalization there were more than two thousand servants working for

Europeans in Company areas. Many servants lived in the Shahr, or routinely interacted with people there. Initially many domestic servants were Indians, especially cooks from Goa were highly appreciated. After the re-negotiated 1933 Oil Agreement, the Company committed to replace Indian workers with Iranians, but as in 1920 and 1922 when the striking Indians had been expelled (Chapter 5), this new attempt to replace Indians did not create problems only in the workplace, but also in households where skilled cooks were deemed essential for domestic comfort and culinary satisfaction:

“Lack of good cooks depresses men further…Iranians are bad cooks, but eager to learn…they have no experience of a varied diet and do not present food in appetizing form. They only know how to fry and boil… Even if the cookery schools train many, they can’t get to serve 500 bungalows. A man can’t be expected to go home and prepare or supervise his own food…the cook’s position is perhaps today the most irritating factor in the food position at Abadan… [Given that by late 1930s Abadan had many married couples in residence it was important not to take things too far:] It is not suggested, at the moment, that the lady inhabitants of Abadan should actually do their own cooking in the cookhouses attached to the bungalows. But they can supervise the preparation of food and control the cook”.

This report is rich on so many levels – and one does wonder about the statement by an Englishman about bland cooking - but more significant are the politics of gender, the division of household labor, and the perceived role of the “lady” of the house, topics of great significance that will be analyzed elsewhere (in chapter 7 I touch upon the politics of household in the Company enclaves, but a fuller treatment of the topic will be undertaken in a future study). However, what we need to emphasize here is that the notion of spatial segregation justified on the grounds of sanitation was merely an illusion, obfuscating and reinforcing the underlying unequal relations of power in an industrial city. To the extent that fresh food was available it had to be produced and purchased locally, which was one of the reasons for the

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143 “Preventing the flood Workers to Oil Regions, Finding Employment for Abadan’s Unemployed, Restarting the Refinery”, 1950-1951, IN A 240017450
urgency of building a modern bazaar. Servants purchased food and prepared it in the European areas. They cleaned, kept order, and did the laundry. Even in married couples’ quarters there were routine and physical everyday interactions with domestic workers, who may have appeared invisible when crossing the rigid fences and gates raised around the Company areas to keep out contamination. Consequently, the illusion of ensuring protection from epidemic hazards by enforcing and maintaining spatial segregations with the indigenous population did not jibe with practical realities.

In the aftermath of the 1933 re-negotiated oil agreement, Iran’s insistence on the further Iranianization as part of the new Concession led to significant changes in the built environment, as the provision of housing and urban amenities for Iranian employees became a new requirement. JM Wilson, the Company architect and urban planner, proposed the development of an “Abadan Garden City for the mixed population of first, second, and third class employees”. As the explicit exclusion of Iranian nationals from Company benefits was becoming politically untenable, hierarchical distinction by assigned employment grade became the new norm for access to urban amenities and living conditions. The idea of “the garden city”, it will be recalled, was initiated by Ebenezer Howard at the turn of the century, as a utopian utilitarian solution for overcoming the urban malaise of class strife, inequality, and unsanitary living and working conditions, by creating garden cities in the countryside, combining workplace and living quarters by employers and employees side by side.

As quickly as it was conceptualized, the idea had become the inspirational basis of the rising urban planning movement in the era of social reform, but not as Howard had intended. The idea was adopted as the basis of residential suburbanization for the middle classes in Britain and the US; and of planned exclusive areas in the colonies. The original idea of organically combining work and everyday life in the same self-sustaining green geography was dropped. Women, in particular, became highly isolated and alienated in these posh spaces where they were relegated to domestic

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work only or, as was suggested above, to the task of overseeing servants doing the household tasks according to prescribed middle class standards\(^{147}\).

J.M. Wilson was a Scottish architect who had served as assistant to Edwyn Lutyens during his reconstruction of Delhi. The most prominent architect of the turn of the century, Lutyens had been among the first to implement a gentrified version of Howard’s garden city idea for building middle class suburbs around London’s Hamspted Heath. He then implemented the concept on a much vaster and imperial scale to Delhi by creating exclusive enclaves\(^{148}\). His assistant, JM Wilson, was later hired to design buildings in colonized Iraq after WWI, building the Baghdad train station and the university there. He was then engaged in 1925-1926 to oversee a much grander project, not for an Imperial employer, but for a private corporation APOC, to develop long term urban development plans for Abadan. This was one of the largest company town projects in the world\(^{149}\), excluding the equally massive projects that were taking shape in the Soviet Union during the 1930s\(^{150}\).

The idea of designing new urban areas for “a mixed population” of Europeans and elite Iranian employees sat very uneasily with the Company directors. The plans were for the development of Bawarda and additional parts of Braim into major housing estates for clerks, staff, and higher skilled artisans. D. Jameson, the General Manager, objected to Wilson’s proposal expressing his fear of contamination:

“We will encounter great trouble for that area in case of epidemics, since there is much communication there that are not under Company’s control… it is preferable to have the European staff isolated from others. In other eastern

\(^{147}\) Aldridge, “Only Demi-Paradise? Women in Garden Cities and New Towns”; Hayden, Redesigning the American Dream.

\(^{148}\) Irving, Indian Summer.

\(^{149}\) I have analyzed the development of company towns elsewhere. On average, industrial and mining company towns were built for relatively small populations of employees, averaging around 5 to 10 thousand. Abadan was on an altogether different scale, and the fact that a significant segment of the population always remained excluded, but adjacent to the Company areas, defined its hybrid character and political and social dynamics. See Ehsani, “Social Engineering and Modernization in Khuzestan’s Company Towns”; Margaret Crawford, Building the Workingman’s Paradise: The Design of American Company Towns (London: Verso, 1995); Oliver J. Dinius and Angela Vergara, eds., Company Towns in the Americas: Landscape, Power, and Working-Class Communities (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

\(^{150}\) Stephen Kotkin, Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization (University of California Press, 1997).
countries Europeans live apart as they don’t have the same immunity to disease as natives do”\textsuperscript{151}.

Bawarda, in particular, was considered with hesitation due to its proximity to the \textit{Shahr}: “Bawarda is not ideal for a European area, as when cholera broke out it would be all around there, and many inhabitants of the ‘new colony’ would be carriers of typhoid and dysentery”. Elkington, the General Manager at Abadan, was particularly concerned that “the large number of servants already in the Bungalow area (Braim) are probably already carriers”.

However, with the new agreement imposing “Persianization” on the Company, avoiding the risk of contamination to Europeans could no longer function as a scientific justification for maintaining the racial and class system of power that kept being reinforced through spatial segregation. Jameson remarked, “One of the greatest difficulties in the future would be that every Persian who could read or write would imagine that he was a first class employee.” Brewster reassured him that some degree of segregation would always be maintained: “Even if the whole Company were completely Persianized, there would still be class distinctions, and the executives would move to the present Bungalow Area (Braim)”, an accurate prediction of what transpired in the following years\textsuperscript{152}.

The sanitary idea continued to act as justification for spatial segregation, and became a permanent feature of the built environment of oil. While maintaining explicit racial segregation became increasingly untenable due to political circumstances over the following years, other forms of spatial hierarchy by rank, employment status, and social class persisted and became ingrained into the urban fabric of the refinery city and imbued its habitus. We will now return to our story of the decisive period of transition in 1926-1927, to close the story of the bazaar and see how the urban frictions and struggles developed and shaped Abadan in its aftermath.

\textsuperscript{151} “Visit to Persia, February/March 1934: Notes of meetings held at Abadan, 22 February to 1 March 1934”, Volume 2, \textit{BP 67590}
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.
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Photograph 21: Abadan - Braim

Source: BP Archives

The Honeymoon of 1926:

In the winter of 1926, after Reza Shah had ascended the throne, the government re-opened the case of the Bazaar. Now the terms of the inquiry had become the legal ownership of urban territory, as a review of the case by a government ministry stated:

“The Oil Company planned in 1924 to build a bazaar in order to improve sanitation. They prepared the plans and the building material, but had to stop due to rainy season. Now they ask, first, if the designated land is considered state land, then it should be transferred to the Company free of charge…. third, they pledge to control prices by keeping the rents they will charge for shops not to exceed 8.5% of profit on expended capital. Last, the Company undertakes to collect all additional charges that are due to it for services such as lighting, purified water, sanitation, and public order; as well as the government duties, from the tenants”153.

153 Ministry of Agriculture to Ministry of Finance, No. 8590, 11 January 1926, INA 240029099
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Having realized that under the new political and local circumstances the Company’s insistence on obtaining exclusive control over a public area such as the Bazaar would only make the government more suspicious, Arnold Wilson came up with an alternative scheme of recruiting a local Iranian merchant, a Mirza Hossein Movaqqar, who was also the Majles deputee from the area, to take charge of the new bazaar project and to build and operate it according to Company plans and with its considerable assistance. Wilson arranged a meeting in Tehran between Cadman, Homan, The American adviser in charge of Khuzestan’s finances, Movaqqar, and senior Company directors, to hammer out an agreement to have Movaqqar front the project in order to avoid objections by the government and local protesters. An agreement was made for the Company to draw up and submit a plan based on “sanitary concerns and controls”, and to extend a loan of 75,000 Rps, at a low interest rate of five percent, for Movaqqar to build the bazaar on 4 blocks, with the provision of further expansion as soon as the situation became more favorable. At the meeting Homan was urged to obtain the approval of the provincial governor for the scheme and to make sure the crucial issue of a final transfer of property rights would take place.

However, the Company was already planning further expansions, and had come to the decision to acquire significantly greater stretches of urban land for its projected urban and industrial operations, just as the government was imposing new property laws and setting up land registration institutions. At a meeting between Dr Young, Cadman, and Jacks, it was decided that while the Company should keep a low profile, they ought to ask the government for the grant of some 500 ha of land in Abadan (1,300 jerib). Included in this land request were some 66 ha north of the refinery to Bahmanshir River, 36 ha to the west of the refinery for recreational space, and 45 ha between the village of Bawarda and the Sheikh Village (the site of the proposed bazaar). The Company was designating all this as “uncultivated land” and intended to demand the government for its free transfer.

154 “Notes of meeting between Homan, Movaqqar, Cadman, Jacks, Elkington”, 18 March 1926; “Item 19: Bazaar”, 18-19 March 1926, BP 71183

155 On the politics and history of determining the variable local unit of land measurement Jerib, to permanent and definite metric system during the 1909-1918 land negotiations with the Bakhtiyaris see chapter 3. Lambton gives the local Jerib as 1,108 m². See Ann K. S. Lambton, Landlord and Peasant in Persia (London: IB Tauris, 1991); Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh, Ganj-e Shayegan (Berlin: Kaveh, 1946), 195.
In a demonstration of the continued fluidity of the political situation, it was decided at the meeting to keep active contact with Sheikh Khaz’al, who was in exile in Tehran, in case he returned to power. Dr Young visited Khaz’al in Tehran to assess his situation. Instead of a possible political player who could make a comeback and again become a force in the province he encountered an old, impoverished, and broken man who asked Young for assistance: “The old man is of course very downhearted. He has no means and he is in need of a loan, but I told him that at the present moment we did not consider it in his own interest to borrow money from us”. He advised Khaz’al to throw himself on the mercy of Millspaugh, and even if the government would not restore all his property perhaps they would at least provide him with an allowance to live out his days.

Realizing that the old political arrangements were well and good in the past, there was now real concern among Company directors about the numerous old agreements signed with the Bakhtiyaris and Khaz’al coming under serious government scrutiny and reconsideration (see chapters 3, 7). The Foreign Ministry had asked the Finance Ministry to make a ruling about the legal status of khalesheh (state) lands in Abadan, and were told that, “This bazaar is not part of the Concession, and needs to be renegotiated”.

An apprehensive Cadman told Foroughi the Premier, and Davar the Minister of Public Works, that the Company was not to blame for the deals it had had to make with the local magnates. Given that until very recently the Government had had neither land registration offices in the provinces, nor a tangible institutional presence to enforce its rules, the Company had had no option but to deal with the local magnates. Cadman also made an implicit threat by reviving the old wartime disputes when APOC had suspended royalty payments after German sabotage of its pipelines in 1915, and hinted that APOC could ask for compensation from the government for failing to protect it as the concession demanded (chapter 2).

However, these fears proved ungrounded, and a meeting with Millspaugh at the end of April had somewhat allayed the Company’s fears regarding future
government claims for the land deals made with the Bakhtiyaris and Sheikh Khaz’al. Millspaugh went further and offered the Company an immediate allocation of the desired “uncultivated land” in Abadan that they were requesting.

During these pivotal meetings with the Cabinet, Cadman discovered that the primary concern of the Iranian government was not so much local popular discontent about its treatment by the Company, but the Iranianization of the labor force, and the terms of the concessions regarding royalties (see chapter 5). The state was willing to be flexible regarding the spatial arrangements and land confiscations the Company was asking in Abadan, so long as they did not impinge on the ultimate formal sovereignty of the government and its representatives.

In Abadan also the negotiations had proceeded regarding the Bazaar. Harold Homan, the American provincial financial director was following up the scheme of making Movaqqar the front man for the Bazaar project:

“This office has entered negotiations with Mirza Hossein Movaqqar who is currently a Majles depute, to build a large bazaar on state land (khaleseh) in Abadan. This decision was made when complaints began to be received from residents of Abadan against the Company’s [excessive] demands. An agreement has been reached between Movaqqar and the government, and approved by the Company, to build a bazaar according to plans approved by this ministry and the Company’s engineer, to charge rents not above the current rates, and to respect all prevailing laws regarding state lands (khalesehjat).

In addition, I must bring to your attention that there is much unused land adjoining this bazaar, but there are very few Iranians with the wherewithal or the willingness to undertake such construction, with the exception of Movaqqar [my emphasis].”

In effect, the state was embracing the proposal offered by the Company and confirming the whole urban modernization scheme, so long as a member of the Iranian new political elite was prominently involved. The notion of “Iranianization”

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160 Minutes of meeting between Millspaugh, Jacks, and Fairly, 30 April 1926, BP 71183
161 “Harold Homan, Head of Khuzestan Finance Office to Head of Iran’s Finances, (Millspaugh), in reply to correspondence No. 41706, dated 22 January 1926”, No. 1610, (unclear day) May 1926, INA 240029099
was becoming a catchphrase for Iranian elite nationalists as a substitute to any real renegotiation of power that would also involve the local population, and the acknowledgment of the collective rights of urban citizens. The Company’s claim that the areas it already occupied, as well as those further territories it was now demanding were unused and unoccupied wasteland surrounding the oil works in Abadan was being accepted by the state, in spite of vociferous objections and pleas by local residents, as well as the reports of the local government Kargozars. In March the government sent an envoy to the province, Mr. Nasr, in order to get a first hand assessment of the situation in a region that was still clearly an unknown territory to the new state actors. Nasr provided a detailed intelligence report, providing alarming information about the extent of Company monopoly control in Masjed Soleyman (chapter 5). Regarding Abadan, Nasr reported as if from a foreign country, about which he was providing original reconnaissance:

“Abadan: This is a region for the refining of petrol. I have submitted to you all the maps of this region, which I have secured with great pain. In these maps you will find that besides the refinery installations the Company has many other buildings and constructions, such as dwellings, shops, mosque for Indians, and movie theaters. There are 16 thousand workmen. The Persian workmen live in wicker huts or under tents outside the Company areas, but the Indians and Chinese dwell in constructions erected by the company or under good tents. The Company has its own police department as well as a municipality. The local Iranian police have no authority at all. The Company collects taxes on land, property, and sanitation. As regards the health of the workmen the Company has taken good measures”

The year 1926 was the high point of good relations between APOC and the central government. Pivotal agreements were reached, and the relieved Company finally launched into its coveted urban planning projects. But citizen resistance had not ended by simply being ignored and dismissed, and soon after the frictions returned with a vengeance.
After the Honeymoon was Over: Urban Strife and the Social Question in post 1926 Abadan

Most histories of this period have depicted the reasons behind the increasingly turbulent relationships between APOC and the Iranian Government between 1928-1933 as caused by the disputes over the royalties and terms of the concession that came to a head following the Great Depression of 1929 and culminated in the highly contested 1933 oil agreement. However, both global circumstances, as well as urban tensions in Abadan, and the continued resistance of workers, residents, and local population also played an important role in exacerbating frictions and forcing adjustments by the state and the Company.

In the proceeding years certain patterns were set, with the Company constantly demanding and expecting more from the government to shoulder the social responsibilities of expanding and maintaining the urban infrastructure and to suppress local resistance; while the state felt it was the Company’s responsibility to maintain and develop the built environment of oil, and felt aggravated by the heavy handed actions that were alienating the local population. At the same time, on the international scale, labor strife and mass politics were casting a heavy shadow over corporate perceptions about the vital importance of “the social question” for political stability and more smooth labor relations. The 1926 General Strike of miners and transport workers in Britain was a watershed in enforcing a rethinking of industrial relations among the employers (see chapter 4). In Iran the brutal program of the disarmament and the forceful settlement of tribes, coupled with compulsory universal conscription, and intrusive cultural laws enforcing a universal national dress, created a major backlash that resulted in the general tribal uprising of 1929. In the spring of the same year a major labor strike occurred among the oil workers of Abadan, organized and led by Yousef Eftekhari. The turbulent political situation would prove

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that the restlessness and discontent of the subalterns, the working classes, and the urban populations, could neither be ignored permanently, nor simply fenced in behind gates, barbed wires, and fortified enclaves.

As Company plans to develop new parts of the city began to be implemented after the summer of 1926 more local complaints kept flooding the Ministries in the fall and winter of the following year. People being evicted to make room for boulevards, ditches, and streets, were told that their complaints were pointless because, “The Provincial Government of Khuzestan has been ordered to allow street making in Abadan only after it has been discussed in the Provincial Administrative Council and after owners have been satisfied with the just compensation they have received for the buildings being demolished”164. However, when the Company began digging canals and ditches all over the island the government agents were highly alarmed and the Kargozar asked, “The Company is digging canals around Abadan. The cost is paid out of oil revenues, where the government is a shareholder. Has the government permitted this? Is the Company’s intention to stifle the expansion of the city?” The response of the head of Abadan Municipality was highly interesting and worthy of being quoted in detail:

“The ditches and canals were dug before I came here; on the east side in 1923, and in 1925 on the west side, both without the government’s permission. Most of the population in Abadan work for the company, and the city has a population of 60,000. The ditches have curtailed the city’s expansion and the high density has made the population miserable. There is conflict and even murder over each zar’ [Dehkhoda: zar’ = 2m²] of land, and families of 20 live in utter misery huddled in a 50 zar’ [100 m²] patch of land. Now the Company has also taken over this side of Haffar (name of canal), which used to be part of Abadan, where they have occupied acres of space, and are preventing people from building shelter, housing, or shops. Something has to be done for the welfare of this miserable population. Either they should be relocated and compensated so they can build something for themselves, or the Company’s expansion should be curtailed, and the open side of Abadan adjoining

164 “Response of Ministry of Interior to Ministry of Agriculture, Trade, and Public Welfare regarding complaints against evictions for street making in Abadan”, No. 6494, 30 January 1927, INA 240009253
Chapter 6 – The Making of an Oil City (1924 -1927)

Khorramshahr [to the north] should be allowed to expand and allow people to build houses for themselves.\textsuperscript{165}

Once an agreement with the government was put in place in 1926 the Company had moved energetically to launch a program of urban development for the expanding areas under its control. Its sanitary projects of sewerage and drainage ditches were at the same time acting as new fences and fortified barricades to contain the displaced population in an increasingly carceral landscape, that was designed by professional experts in urban and municipal planning and sanitation.

In 1925 APOC hired the consulting engineering firm F.C. Temple to work on sewerage and drainage. The following year the experienced Scottish urban planner, J.M. Wilson, with extensive colonial experience in India and Iraq, was employed to oversee the city’s transformation over the coming years, and until nationalization in 1951\textsuperscript{166}. In 1936 other prominent firms, N. Porteus and D.M. Watson, were brought on to further expand and develop sewage and water works. Richard Costain, the largest British home construction firm was contracted in 1938 to oversee the Company’s massive housing programs, under the planning direction of JM Wilson\textsuperscript{167}.

Until 1930s all housing and urban development programs were geared toward European staff, and the skilled artisans. After 1933 housing skilled workers and Iranianization of the labor force also became part of the agenda. It was only in the 1940s that the Company was confronted with the inevitability of accepting a role in assisting with the housing crisis and urban conditions of ordinary laborers. The political changes in the post WW2 era when labor mobilization, socialist activism, urban struggles, and nationalist sentiments were reaching an explosive point, finally prompted the Company to begin addressing the horrendous housing conditions of ordinary laborers: “Many of the labor houses built during wartime have no internal water, light or latrines. There are one water point for 16 quarters, and one communal latrine per block for 8 quarters. However, they are rapidly being updated to peacetime standards”\textsuperscript{168}.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{165} Kargozar to Ministry of Interior, No. 170, 9 March 1927; Municipal Director of Abadan to Ministry of Interior, No. 101, 19 May 1926, \textit{INA} 240009253
\textsuperscript{167} “Terms and Conditions of Employment, 1946: Chapter 3, Housing and Sewerage”, \textit{BP 41516}
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
While the Company did offer aid with important urban amenities for the Shahr area, it never committed to significantly improving conditions there; leaving the dilemma for the central government to handle. Meanwhile, the major land clearings across the island, and especially around the refinery and the Company areas, that had began in 1927 were intended to clear space for streets, housing estates, and large excavation works for the building of canals and sewerage and drainage ditches. As a result, all the vital Company areas -- residential estates, the refinery, roads, tank farms, the port, the new bazaar, administrative offices, clubs, expanding port facilities, the airport, etc. – were surrounded by defensible open spaces that could be easily monitored, policed, and kept under surveillance. All these projects were displacing massive numbers of people, as the Municipal Director reported with dismay, and pushing those evicted into an ever more condensed Shahr area. The sewerage ditches, the sanitary canals excavated to carry the human refuse to the river were at the same time acting as new physical barriers to enforce spatial segregation, and to defend the new exclusive enclaves carved out by and for the Company with the consent of the state.

Almost immediately the new urban works created a strong backlash, especially as the demographic pressures were mounting in the increasingly congested city. The new government appointed municipal agents began to object. Hossein Sami’i, who had been placed in charge of Abadan’s municipal affairs, warned that, “Abadan’s population is annually increasing because of Company affairs. There is no justification for limiting the expansion of the city, and for the population to suffer because of a useless ditch.”

The latest dispute was over a major ditch for berthing large boats coming up the river:

“The Company has dug a 300 zar’ canal in East of Abadan to allow ships to dock at high tide [zar’, it seems, indicated both a unit of length as well as surface, pending on the context]. A year and half ago (1925?) another canal was excavated that separated the Company from the west of the town. It appears the only intention [of these projects is to further] separate the two [Company areas from Shahr]... These actions curtail the expansion of the town since the areas beyond both canals are [also] occupied by the Company,

169 Hossein Samii – Municipal Affairs of Ministry of Interior to Foreign Ministry, “Regarding No.101, No. 3006, 7 February 1927, INA 240009253
and the town cannot spread in those directions, nor to the south where it borders the Shatt (al-Arab River). However, there are lands to the North as well as some unused land within the existing city [for the growing population to settle].

The popular resistance against increasing evictions continued and added to the pressure cooker of urban discontent. Petitions to the Majles and authorities, reports to newspapers, and complaints to local officials, continued and became more vocal, as evidenced by the following petition that reached newspapers and the Court, prompting the Monarch to look into the situation. The petition was penned by “Your humble servant Mehdi Reza, also known as Abdollah Atiq al Hossein, acting as attorney for the plaintiffs, “My clients, the residents of Abadan”, and giving his address as “Next to the Turks’ Mosque, by the Cloth Shoemakers’ Market [Bazaar-e Givehkesh-ha]”:

“Regarding the homes demolished in 1924 by the Company in Abadan: We sent a telegram to the Majlis, all the ministries, and all well known newspapers. In Mohammareh we had meetings with the Kargozar, the Company representative, and the British Consul, and they all agreed and drew a tally of 24,000 Rps compensation to paid, but thus far my clients have received naught. Please clarify whether the Company has not paid, or have they paid the government (but not us), how do they intend to pay people?”

Reza Shah’s office made an inquest to the Company regarding the ongoing complaints, but the Company dismissed the whole affair as opportunism by the plaintiffs, and urged the government to move on and draw a line under the affair:

“We did pay some compensation for the illegally built huts and cottages built on Company property [?!] . This demolition took place several years ago with the consent of government officials who acknowledged them to be the source of sanitary danger and epidemics and felt it necessary to demolish them. At the time government officials determined the amount of compensation, which was paid. You ought to inquire from Mohammareh officials about this. Of

171 “Complaint: Aqa Mehdi Reza”, No. 18042, 1 January 1928, INA 240009253
course acknowledging claims years after they have been cleared will only cause further trouble”\textsuperscript{172}.

**Conclusion:**

The post-WWI era was a pivotal period that shaped the oil complex globally, as well as in Iran, within the context of revolutionary transformations that were taking place at various scales (chapter 4). The transformation of the built environment of Abadan reflected these processes, but also was the spatial setting for making them a reality: Without places like Abadan and Masjed Soleyman there would not have been a transition to Fordism of mass consumer production and consumption that was built on the foundations of cheap and plentiful petroleum, nor the possibility of democratic mass politics based on notions of publicly provided social welfare.

This urban geography was shaped by a host of social and political relations that contributed to its taking shape: The sanitary ideas of public health, coupled with the apartheid practices of racial and class segregation justified on scientific grounds but implemented as exercises of power and domination, mediated and implemented by an emerging class of middle class professional experts. In this chapter we investigated the micro processes of “the state effect”, by analyzing how the nascent state institutions actually took shape on the ground, and came to define their governmental functions and jealously tried to carve out spheres of sovereignty over populations and territories for the exercise of their authority. To the extend that sources are available, we tried to excavate the social and historical agency of subaltern classes and urban denizens as they had to adjust to their new urban conditions after having been deracinated and dispossessed of their customary and collective modes of economic and social life. They carved out new urban solidarities, and founded new urban identities, in order to collectively resist their further dispossession and to struggle for their right to the city.

Our analysis of the urban transformation of Abadan showed how the coercive commodification of urban space and everyday life created the material basis for a labor market, as well as a market for the basic necessities of everyday life. This urban built environment was thus the setting for the creation of a permanent wage laboring

\textsuperscript{172}“His Majesty’s Personal Office inquires from PM about No.18042, 11 January 1928 #11752; APOC Reply, 14 January 1928, No. 10564, \textbf{INA 240009253}
class, where one did not exist before. The precarious conditions of life eventually made cheap casual labor too expensive, as the relentless resistance of the urban population to its living and working conditions, as well as their ongoing dispossession eventually culminated in open insurrections such as those that occurred in 1925, 1929, culminating in a general tribal uprising and the oil workers’ strike, that drew some major concessions from the Oil Company and the Government (see Conclusion).

The detailed micro history of the Bazaar of Abadan presented here encapsulates much larger global, national, and local dynamics that, I will argue, were paradigmatic in how the oil complex was shaped in Iran. I have tried to demonstrate through this thick description that the oil complex was shaped, in practice, by the constant frictions and struggles between social agents that were vastly unequal, but nonetheless had no choice but to contest and negotiate as they played their part in the assemblage of the oil industry. In the process of these contested relations, taking place in the urban setting of Abadan, these social agents - APOC, the Iranian state, and the local population of Abadan - strove to shape the city to fit their interest; and were in turn shaped and transformed by it.