

Nomad Settlements In Saudi Arabia: A Cultural Approach to Understanding Urbanization in Developing Countries

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Abstract. This is a socio-political study of urbanization. While modern urbanization has become a universal phenomenon since the advent of the industrial revolution in Western Europe, the study of urbanization processes in developing nations is better understood through an historical as well as a cultural approach emphasizing the prevailing socio-political and economic developments within an international perspective. In this paper, I shed light on unique historical incidents which shaped Saudi Arabia's formative decades of nation-building cast against a backdrop of the predominantly rural and tribal population. During the early decades of political consolidation, King Abdul Aziz, the founder of modern Saudi Arabia, instigated a movement of sedentarization that resulted in hundreds of state-subsidized, ascetic tribal settlements called *hijar*, dotting Saudi Arabia's landscape. By the 1930s more than 200 *hijar* existed. The *hijar* program, created by King Abdul Aziz in 1912, set in motion a sedentarization process which has since shaped the modern urban network of the Kingdom, and ushered in a process of 'detrribalization,' the demise of a mode of production that had existed since recorded history. Three distinct types of *hijar* are outlined, the military-political *hijar*, the economic *hijar*, and sedenterization induced as an element of national development policies. I close the paper with some cautionary remarks about the application of Western approaches to urbanization in countries with low levels of political organization and economic development.

Introduction

Saudi Arabia occupies an area of 2.25 million square kilometers, slightly less than one-fourth the size of the United States. One percent of the land is arable, while approximately 39% is meadows and pastures. The remaining area is an uninhabited sandy desert. It has no perennial rivers or permanent water bodies. When King Abdul Aziz conquered and united what is now known as Saudi Arabia, he inherited a vast, rugged land, which was thinly populated and geographically isolated from the outside world by the forbidding expanse of deserts. In the early 1950s, it was estimated that less than two percent of the entire area was under cultivation [1].

The traditional and xenophobic society was afflicted with poverty, illiteracy, high mortality and endemic water shortages. The new nation lacked modern infrastructure, and technology and did not have an industrial base. The country had no social, medical or educational institutions in the modern sense (Fig. 1).

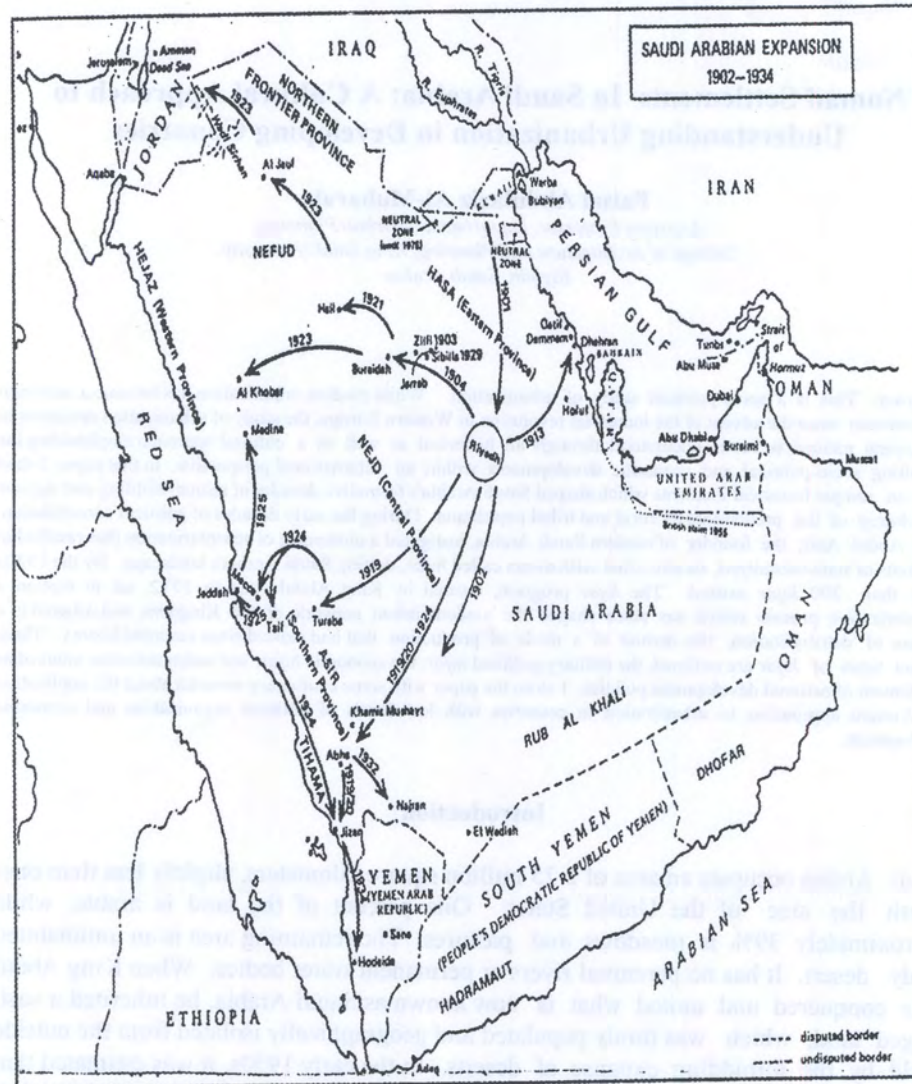


Fig. 1. Map of Saudi Arabia illustrating major cities and battles fought by King Abdul Aziz. Source: [26].

At the turn of the 20th century, the political entity of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was a collection of nomads, settled tribes and town inhabitants of diverse ethnic and tribal groups which were later united through a campaign of conquest by King Abdul Aziz during the first quarter of the century. King Abdul Aziz capitalized on such diversity by creating overarching loyalties based on a common social and religious legitimacy, that of reform "Unitarianism," first marshaled in the 18th century by his great-grandfather Mohammed bin Saud and the religious teacher, Mohammed bin Abdul Wahhab.¹

The genesis of modern urbanization in Saudi Arabia lies in the early battles fought by King Abdul Aziz Al Saud, the founder of modern Saudi Arabia, starting with the capture of Riyadh in 1902. Using the double-objective approach of religion and largesse to win the loyalty of the strong bedouin tribes occupying the vast sparse terrain of the Arabian Peninsula, King Abdul Aziz encouraged the formation of the *Ikhwān* movement in a successful attempt to turn their pugnacious independence into a sizable military force upon which he relied to expand his territorial gains. By doing so, he skillfully co-opted the tribal sheikh, hence avoiding confrontation, while utilizing their latent energies and endurance to proceed with the consolidation of his realm.

Within a mere decade, King Abdul Aziz originated the *hijar* program aimed at the settlement of nomads whose transient way of life and fickle allegiance had hitherto defied singular authority. The *hijar* program has since shaped the future of urbanization in the fledgling nation-state and given it a character of its own. This early formation of *hijar* foreshadowed the emergence of modern urban centers in the Kingdom. They were heavily dependent on the central government for financial support, a continuing characteristic of their urban economies which has since thwarted genuine decentralization and local administration of the cities' economies [2].

Urbanization is seen here as a positive phenomenon. Yet a lack of a proper understanding and control of the process will inevitably result in negative consequences. The early formative political developments dotted the nascent nation state with hundreds of bedouin settlements, *hijar*. These *hijar* (singular *hijrah*) with their bedouin population, became a ready reserve pool for the army and played a crucial role in the stability of King Abdul Aziz's rule during the early decades, and later as centers for transforming bedouins into settled productive citizens in the modernizing programs of the Saudi state. In this paper, I will assess the *hijar* program in an attempt to create a sociocultural analysis of urbanization involving a gradual transition from a predominately nomadic and pre-industrial tribal society into urban society. This paper

¹ In Saudi Arabia, the 18th century movement is called as *ahl-attawheed* (the Unitarians), whereas the term "Wahhabism" widely used in the West is looked upon as misnomer as well as derogatory. See below.

contributes to the ongoing search for paradigms to interpret the complex nature of the urbanization process and to understand the divergent pattern of urbanization in different world regions. Understanding the Saudi model could help planners predicate sound national, economic development policies through an appreciation of local and international conditions as well as of salient cultural attributes of particular societies. It is also hoped that such an understanding could prevent planners from repeating similar mistakes in societies marked by rapid urbanization, fragile political establishments and low levels of economic and environmental resources.

I argue in the following overview that studies of urbanization in developing nations have overlooked essential, particular sociopolitical developments whose clarification helps explicate the context within which the urbanization process takes place. As such, the elucidation of the political development contributes an essential approach to a better understanding of the cultural setting without which particular socioeconomic changes cannot be understood. The resulting political system plays a major role in shaping the national political structure upon which subsequent development paths are predicated. For example, in some political systems, political factors such as national and regime security and stability may take precedence over immediate economic goals as the major component of national policy. An absolutist monarchy presiding over a traditional society will most likely opt for a different economic development path than a secular and decentralized democracy. I argue that generalizations of Western urbanization must be taken with caution when applied to developing non-Western societies undergoing rapid transition.

Urbanization: Comparative Overview

Modern urbanization took place in Western Europe spurred by rapid industrialization of towns' economies and the mechanization of agricultural production in the countryside increasing surplus, hence freeing ruralites who flocked to rapidly industrializing centers. Western urbanization spanned more than a century of gradual social change and innovation. However, in less developed countries, national economic development lagged behind the rate of increase of urban population resulting in negative consequences such as unemployment, overcrowding, and a chronic shortage of urban infrastructure, all taken together resulting in 'overurbanization.' Population growth in these urban centers reflected improved health conditions, as well as better and higher income jobs in the industrialized metropolis, but the growth was more a reaction to external economic forces than to creative local planning. In many developing countries, for example, national and local economic development has been a function of colonialism, nationalism, modernization, the international movement of capital, technology transfer, industrialization and so on.

Urbanization studies are concerned with understanding the growth of urban areas and their population. Early studies in Western urbanization focused on demographic aspects of urbanization. Peterson [3] devised three major stages of population growth associated with stages of urbanization: (1) the 'initial' pre-industrial phase marked by high birth rates and high mortality, (2) the 'early Western population type' marked by an increase in fertility and decline in mortality rates, and (3) the 'modern Western society' state with low fertility and mortality rates. Davis [4] contributed to the demographic thread with his cityward migration component. He introduced a classification of cities, and analyzed the increase in population, and migrations. Demographic studies of urbanization were criticized for being limited to their narrow focus.

Theories of urban transition constitute the second generation of urbanization studies. Mabogunje [5] contends that "cities exist as points of economic articulation on the landscape, and their *raison d'être* can only be understood in terms of the economic system they grew up to serve." As such, urbanization is perceived as a spatial adjustment of economic growth. Reismann [6] viewed urbanization as a process of social change. Friedmann and Wulff [7, p. 6] stated that "the city is a social microcosm and consequently a multi-dimensional phenomenon displaying a variety of physical, spatial, institutional, economic, demographic and social characteristics." Bryan Roberts [8] discussed the emergence of the informal sector economy, while others advocated political economic considerations [9]. Such urban transition theories have become valid in the interpretation of urbanization processes in developing countries on the assumption that Western and non-Western urban processes are analogous. Critiques of such approaches point to 'pseudo-urbanization' and 'over-urbanization' in which the urbanization process is characterized by a high natural increase of population, low industrial growth and subsequent unemployment or under-employment.

Chu-Sheng Lin [10] devised five major themes dominating studies of Asian urbanization. The first focuses on the role of cities in regional economic growth. Cities are seen as centers of modernization which act as catalysts for economic development and social change. Hirschman's [11] and Friedmann's [12] analysis belongs to the same vein. Hoselitz and Singer [13] emphasize the positive constructive and generative roles played by cities in the process of social change. They see cities as the major movers in a process they called 'heterogenetic transformation'. Berry [14] contends that an urban hierarchy has been instrumental for innovation and development. These views limit urbanization to city performance in isolation of its overall social transformation.

Chu-Sheng Lin's second theme focuses on 'dualism.' It emphasizes the dualistic nature of economic structure in the city whereby a state of coexistence between advanced or modern sectors of the economy is juxtaposed with a traditional or

backward sector. Roberts [8, p. 3] states that "part of the explanation for the persistence of this dualistic structure is the growing importance of the state in the economy." Transnational capital and urbanization comprises the third thread. Proponents of this approach analyze the spatial implication of the globalization of production and investment and the role played by international corporations. One of the spatial outcomes of the flow of trans-national capital has been the development of a system of 'world cities,' with their global hinterlands instead of a limited national or regional interdependence.

The dynamics of urbanization in socialist societies offer an alternative to Western-based, conventional urban transition models. According to this approach, robust industrialization with limited urbanization in socialist countries has been interpreted "as a product of ideological convictions of equality and egalitarianism." Finally, the extended metropolitan regions constitute a new research agenda. McGee [15] and Genzberg [16] have developed the notion of the 'extended metropolis' as a unique aspect of Asian urbanization, "manifested by the growing diversification and commercialization of agricultural activities, the increasing inflow of foreign investment, and the development of infrastructure, particularly improvements in transportation and communication" [10, pp. 13, 16]. They expound a view that links cities to the ever expanding regional networks thanks to the breakthroughs in telecommunication and to the breakdown of time-space. The conventional urban-rural dichotomy has been tested by a new spatial system in which the distinction between urban and rural has become blurred. The approach emphasizes region-based urbanization rather than the conventional city-based model.

Still, the study of urbanization in developing countries, especially in the Middle East, is lacking knowledge of the national, political exigencies which play a considerable role in the structuring of the modern urban network of settlements and set the stage for future urban development. Studies that address only quantitative indicators of social transition (such as demographics, economic indicators and infrastructure) risk overlooking the fundamental cultural aspects, resulting in a limited analyses and outcome. An analysis of the factors behind the creation and development of such growth centers will help us to understand the prevailing socio-political and economic factors, and will contribute insights crucial to policy decisions.

Genesis: the Formation of the New Nation-State of Saudi Arabia

Tilly [17] differentiates four key differences between traditional and modern states. First, the modern state manages to attain territorial expansion and consolidation; second, it exerts a great degree of control over social, economic, and cultural functions within its confines; third, "it encompassed a set of ruling institutions

that were formally separate from all other kinds of institutions in its territory;" fourth, rulers of modern states attain a greater capacity in the monopolization of means of violence. To maintain its standing, the modern state forges bureaucratic and legal means to collect taxes, maintain armies, control the national economy, and manipulate economic growth, all created as sources for legitimate authority [18]. The survival of a political unit is maximized by recognized territorial land holdings, 'cultural homogeneity,' 'geographical advantages,' and the availability of extractable resources and a stable political environment.

The state is the consolidation of dispersed authority of a traditional society into a central power and source of control. Bendix [19] contends that, in Europe, the nation-state was a logical outgrowth of centralizing power of capitalist accumulation, while the industrial revolution flourished in the complex cultural and political developments in gestation since the Middle Ages. In Europe, nationalism was developed by kings to gain control over landlords and tribes and to abridge the power of the religious ecclesiastics. It has often been argued that nationalism makes for integration of institutions and, among others, "endowed the subjects within its jurisdiction with a sense of corporate loyalty and identity"[20, p. 150], a prerequisite essential for modernization which, according to Karl Deutsch, involves social mobilization and change. According to C. E. Black [21], central authority and its rationalized functions owe their existence to the rule of law, which is maintained by the bureaucracy specifically created to facilitate its implementation, as well as to the improved rapport between the state and the citizen. Yet, the emergence of industrialization in nineteenth century Europe ushered in rapid social, political and economic developments which spread beyond the continent in an unprecedented manner in history. Even countries that had been building their political institutions for centuries had to look for Western inspiration and direct help to cope with unprecedented problems in the process of modernization. These attributes and development phases of evolving modern states have helped set the stage for understanding the emergence of the Saudi nation state.

The history of the Al Saud dynasty's struggle to gain control over central Arabia and other parts of today's Saudi Arabia goes back to the eighteenth century. In 1744, Mohammed bin Abdul Wahhab, a descendant from a religious house, approached Mohammed bin Saud, the ruler of the small town of Deriyah, located in the vicinity of Riyadh. He won Ibn Saud's backing to join him in reforming the religious practices of the people, whom, both agreed, failed to maintain the essence of Islam according to its pure origins. The history of the Al Saud is divided into three periods spanning, respectively, 1744-1803, 1824-1891, and from 1902, the early onset of the modern era, to the present.

At the turn of the 20th century, the Arabian Peninsula was little more than a loosely knit patchwork of independent oasis towns, fishing hamlets and tribal grazing grounds ruled by feuding princes and tribal sheikhs. Whenever there were severe water shortages and droughts, marauding tribesmen invaded poorly walled villages and looted caravans. Nomads seldom granted their loyalties to central authority, and, given the prevailing state of the economy, appropriate conditions for a modern state seemed centuries from reality. Warlords appeared in various parts of the Arabian Peninsula whose subordination to the Ottoman Caliph became nominal. The sociopolitical order of the Arabian Peninsula had changed little since the time of the Prophet Mohammed when the Arabian tribes extended their sway over the vast Islamic world as it is known today. With the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, the political climate in the Peninsula was ripe for strong leadership as political fragmentation gave way to stronger monarchical rule.

The economically impoverished and politically fragmented character of the society changed due to the dramatic events during the early part of this century. By utilizing power, diplomacy, religious legitimacy and ancestral claims to dynastic inheritance, Abdul Aziz proceeded in his campaign to unify the various, isolated parts of the Arabian Peninsula. Felicitous political changes both worldwide and within the Middle East, offered King Abdul Aziz an opportunity to reclaim his forebears' control over vast parts of Arabia. A watershed event occurred in 1902 when Abdul Aziz, with a mere forty of his acolytes, invaded Riyadh, killing its Rashidi viceroy and bringing the pre-industrial settlement of approximately five thousand inhabitants under his family's control. King Abdul Aziz scattered battles in the central and eastern parts of Arabia turned into full scale invasions targeting the Hijaz (Western Arabia) region with its historical and religious centers of Makkah and Madinah, as well as the cosmopolitan port town of Jeddah, and the formidable mountainous region of Asir (Fig. 1). Abdul Aziz capitalized on the retreating influence of the Ottomans following World War I. As the war sorted out a new political geography of outside powerful players comprising the British, the Germans and the French, King Abdul Aziz's rivaling Ottoman viceroys, the Hashimites in Western Arabia and the Al-Rashid dynasty in the north were left without effective support in the face of the armed *Ikhwān* missionaries driven by the religious fervor of the King's preachers, who portrayed Heaven awaiting those who strove and died in the path of *jihād*.² These series of battles between the rival dynastic

²It must be emphasized that *jihād* as ordained by Islam is solely directed against non-Muslims (infidels) for purposes stipulated in the *Shar'ah* (Islamic law) and governed by noble rules that prohibited the destruction of towns, farms and innocent life, among others; in extremely rare situations (e.g., worshipping idols or any deities other than Allah, markedly deviating from fundamental teachings of the Prophet) such a religious obligation is invoked against groups from the same faith and subjected to scholars' *fatwā* (legal ruling or precedent). However, the interpretation of *who* the unbelievers are and the identification of deviating groups among Muslims, is, as in =

powers in Arabia culminated in the ceding of Jeddah to Abdul Aziz in 1926. The efforts of King Abdul Aziz Al Saud (1880-1953), resulted in the creation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a monarchy presided over by the King and his progeny. In 1932, the country was officially named the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and made a hereditary monarchy which appealed to traditions and was committed to modernity (Fig. 2).

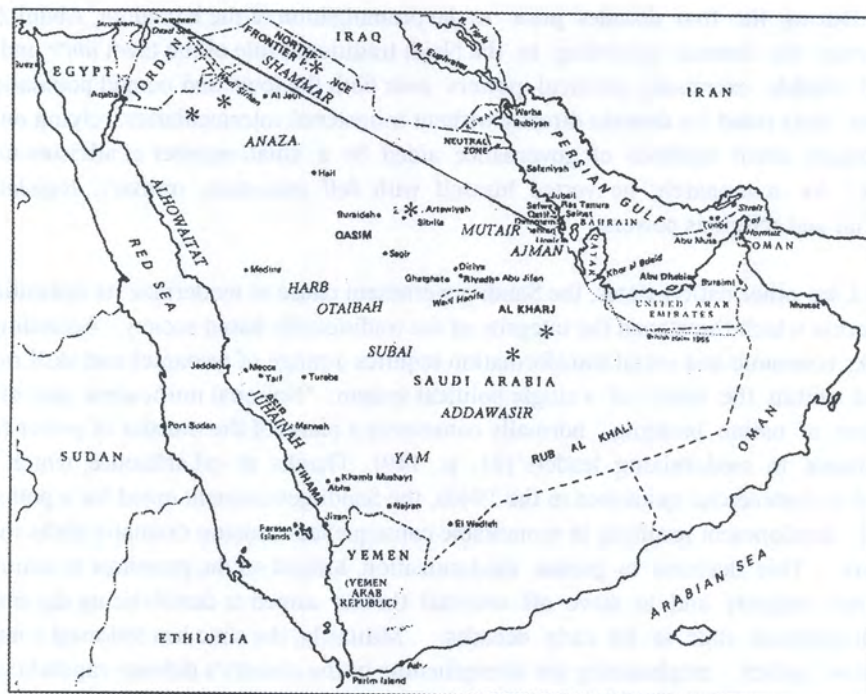


Fig. 2. Map of Saudi Arabia illustrating principal tribal pasture land and territory, locations of major bedouin projects, the Tapline and major cities [23].

Like his forebears of the first two periods, Abdul Aziz predicated his nationalist movement on the puritan ideals of the eighteenth century reformer Mohammed Ibn Abdul Wahhab. The teachings and religious values laid down by Ibn Abdul Wahhab provided an important umbrella for political leadership and administrative and institutional organization; and it formalized the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, previously informal, atomistic and tribal. Abdul Aziz unified the historically

= many other faiths, subject to confused historical circumstances usually exploited by political leaders for wordly purposes.

quarrelsome feudal *amīrs* of towns and brought security to a patchwork of distinct regions governed by a rudimentary, but evolving bureaucratic and security apparatus. He placed his dynasty at the top of the country's political control, appealing to the classical Muslim image. Abdul Aziz governed the Kingdom, as he had earlier governed the Sultanate before he added Hijaz to his domain in 1926.

During the first decades prior to the promulgation of the Kingdom, Abdul Aziz governed his domain according to the Najdi traditional role of the town *amīr* and the tribal sheikh, exercising political powers over both the town and nomad populations. Abdul Aziz ruled his domain directly without ministerial intermediaries, relying on the customary tribal methods of governance aided by a small number of advisors to his court.³ As a monarch, he vested himself with full executive, military, legislative, judicial and religious powers.

Like other nation-states, the Saudi government chose to modernize its institutions, a process which threatened the integrity of the traditionally based society. According to Black, economic and social transformation requires a range of resources and skill rarely found within the limits of a single political system. "National unification, part of the process of nation building, normally constitutes a phase of the transfer of power from traditional to modernizing leaders"[21, p. 149]. Thanks to oil affluence, which was found in commercial quantities in the 1940s, the Saudi government opted for a policy of rapid development resulting in remarkable consequences causing dramatic shifts in the society. This decision to pursue modernization hinged on the pressures to maintain internal integrity and to stave off external threats aimed at destabilizing the fragile Saudi political state in its early decades. Militarily, the state has followed a multi-objective policy, emphasizing the strengthening of the country's defense capabilities to thwart outside hostilities and, internally, to deter fragmentation of the nation's subregions, traditionally susceptible to segregation by tribal affiliations. The sedentarization of nomads in Saudi Arabia was a manifestation of such objectives.

Intervention in the process of urban development has been a hallmark of the Saudi monarchy since before the promulgation of the new nation-state in 1932. The enlistment of national financial resources, however meager, and manpower in the

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consolidation of the new nation-state resulted in a rapid increase of population in cities and indirectly resulted in an increase in urban living standards of the population. In the civil domain, the Saudi government has tried to create a stable, modern economy centered around a central bureaucracy heavily dependent on oil revenues. Learning from the experience of the previous two eras, King Abdul Aziz introduced his creative *hijar* program to settle the nomads, who comprised 75% of the population at the birth of the nation-state. The following decades witnessed a transformation from a traditional society marked by poverty and tribal warfare, into a city-centered nation with an urban population rising dramatically from 15% in 1950 to 77.2% in 1992 [22]. In short, a new political system emerged in which monarchical authority exercised the use of power and paved the way for the development of the modern state with its monopolization of functions in the hands of the central government.

The *Ikhwān* and the Formation of *Hijar*

Since the creation of the Saudi state, the structure of authority in the country has been characterized by the displacement of the existing social elite of towns and tribes and their replacement by inserted *amīrs* and sheikhs thought to be ideologically and politically loyal to the new government. Historically, tribal leadership was vested in the most noble descendant of the most noble house within a tribe who fulfilled the patriarchal obligations of the tribal sheikh. The leader was to maintain power; exert wisdom, bravery and generosity and above all secure the honor of all its members. .."[T]he tribal sheikh is expected to assure the welfare of his group by such means as receiving tribute and dispensing largesse, and his position of respect is secured by his willingness and his capacity to do favors for those who come and ask" [23, p. 39].

The introduction of a centralized monarchy gradually eclipsed the traditional order of semi-independent Bedouin control and princely towns of Arabia. In addition to the use of religious teaching to convince nomads to settle, King Abdul Aziz utilized his meager income to distribute food rations in the hitherto impoverished desert and, when the mostly agrarian economy subsided at the end of World War I, the King was the source of most basic necessities of life, dispensing food, currency and clothing to those who sought his help. As such, King Abdul Aziz's rise to power took the form of breaking up alliances by undermining existing tribal networks and assuming for himself the functions of the tribal, religious and state, hence eclipsing the multitudes of tribal affiliations.

The Politico-military Phase, 1912-1930s

King Abdul Aziz recognized the danger of his fickle bedouin subjects. He found a divergence between the unitarian teachings of Islam and those of the nomads. Bedouins were largely ignorant of the pure principles of monotheistic Islam as introduced by the Prophet Mohammed in the sixth century A.D., and reintroduced by Ibn Abdul Wahhab twelve centuries later. He was also watchful of the fact that their transitory ways of life could not be counted upon for regular enlistment in a dependable military force. Using the double objective of settlement and religious indoctrination, he started to co-opt the powerful sheikhs in his realm.

Bedouins were willing to give up nomadism by selling their livestock and joining in the newly introduced agricultural colonies. In exchange, the government assisted them in the new livelihood of subsistence agricultural production. Religious clerks advanced this transformation by likening the transfer to settled colonies as resembling that of the Prophet Mohammed's flight (*hijrah*) from Makkah (previously the land of the unbelievers) to Madinah (*dār-al-salām*), or the home of peace, hence such colonies came to be known as *hijar*. They were charged with the duty to bear witness to Allah, to uphold the true faith, and to instruct others in the ways of the Prophet Mohammed. The *Ikhwān* perceived King Abdul Aziz's territorial expansion as a new movement replicating the Prophet's early Islamic state, that of the *ummah* (nation of Islam), a notion of expanding community organized around Islamic principles and unfettered by any form of rigid physical or political boundaries. Philby wrote, "Villages sprang up in every suitable center with surprising rapidity: each having a present stake in the land as well as contingent one in eternity" [24, p. 129].

It was estimated that the new system of *hijar* settlements, throughout the regions lying within King Abdul Aziz's control, put 76,500 bedouin fighters into a standing army under the control of the King, a large number for peacetime even by the standards of modern states of our time [25]. "Artawiyah rapidly grew to a town of 10,000 souls. Men who had been traditionally the scourge of any and every government, unpredictable and fickle as mayflies, settled down to a life of fierce dedication.... They abandoned their tents and their nomad life, sold their sheep and camels, and gave themselves up to farming, to prayer and the Koran" [26, p. 69].

With the rise of King Abdul Aziz's control and wealth, the political relationship between the King and tribal sheikhs and the town's *amīrs* increasingly moved from that of interdependence to that of increasing dependence on the King's financial support. The King granted landholdings to those who were bound by personal fealty and conjugal ties. However, the *hijar* program was based on a loose concept of landownership, for the recipients of 'fiefs' did not have the right to alienate them, since

in principle every parcel of land was held directly or indirectly by the king.³ A major departure from traditional nomadism was the termination of the *himā* (tribal territory) system which hitherto was a source of power for tribal sheikhs as well as a factor in the spontaneous settlement of early *hijar*. As such, the sheikhs previously independent territorial control of vast tribal pastoral land was transformed into a “feudal-like” subordinate relationship to the King. Their new role evolved into that of bureaucratic *amīrs* whose appointments required sanctioning by the monarch [2, 27].

From 1927 onwards, King Abdul Aziz devoted his energies, to the extent that his resources permitted him, to the economic betterment of his nascent state. “It was, in short, the moment when Ibn Saud’s new kingdom began to assume the outline of a contemporary nation-state in place of the amorphous structure of a traditional desert fiefdom...”[26, p.79]. King Abdul Aziz embarked upon a structural consolidation and the establishment of law and order as a necessary prelude to the operation of foreign mining companies and other economic programs. By doing so, he moved from the phase of reliance on bedouin support to the strengthening of an organized national army, as his coffers benefited from foreign exchange, royalties and taxes trickled down from the state’s diverse regions.

The promulgation of the state with its standing and mechanized army lessened the king’s reliance on the *Ikhwān*. The kaleidoscopic incidents during the first three decades created a backlash by the recalcitrant *Ikhwān* when they concluded that the king had a limited notion of *jihād*. They preferred and desired to continue their conquests, as did the the Prophet before, outside the demarcated boundaries settled between the King and regional states and mediated by the British. To the *Ikhwān*, the notion of a state demarcated by political boundaries diverged from their goal of a boundless Muslim community. A series of violent confrontations settled in favor of King Abdul Aziz brought the military-religious phase of the *hijar* program to an end [28].

The Tribal Center: 1940s-1960s

The *hijar* program must be seen in the glaring uncertainties that accompanied the origins of the nation-state, which were marked by a political wilderness of clamoring feudal princes and sheikhs vying to fill the vacuum created by the disintegration of the

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Ottoman Empire, meager economic resources, and the utter lack of any institutional organization capable of guiding the state, let alone the *hijar* experiment.

The second generation of sedentarization efforts by the Saudi government commenced during the decade of the 1940s. The new state had safely passed through the 'red' formative decades marked by battles and treaties that resulted in the creation of the monarchic system under Abdul Aziz's control. The previous attitude of cajoling bedouins to win their support was substituted with a "negative" one which perceived nomadic life as anachronistic. From the army reserves in the conquest decades of the 1910s and 1920s, the king attempted to turn the latent energies of his nomad subjects into settled manpower that could be called upon to build the new nation. The life of bedouins was seen as precarious and their millennial ecology marked by incessant movement within their expansive regions was no longer compatible with newly drawn rigid boundaries of the new nation-states and the Persian Gulf sheikhdoms neighboring King Abdul Aizz's realm.

Demand for urban functions grew with improved economic conditions brought by imposed security under the new state. These demands, which were stimulated by population growth, the settlement of nomads and other migrants along with rising living standards, allowed the central state to assume a large role in the everyday life of towns and cities. Some *hijar* were endowed with more auspicious ingredients for growth than others. *Hijar* that housed tribal sheikhs, were located on tribal crossroads, were bestowed with sufficient quantities of potable water, or happened to be in the proximity of industrial or regional centers enjoyed relative prosperity and were bestowed with the status of administrative center or regional hub. Artawiyah epitomizes such a tribal center (Fig. 2).

With the establishment of order under the new state, the tribal institution was bound to change. Tribal authority and its traditional territorial control, including its autonomous control and protection of its members, setting its own rules of conduct and mediating between kin alliances and disputes gave way to the ever expanding bureaucratic control of the new state. The appeal of the state bound by Islamic faith rather than kinship as the basis of the community represented a great break with tradition.

Early estimates put the population of the Kingdom in 1950 at 3.21million. In 1932 nomads accounted for 70% of the national population. The first official census of 1974 put the percentage of nomads at 27%. Rapid improvements in economic conditions brought by the new nation-state were again expanded with the discovery of oil in 1938, and a concomitant increase in demand for oil following the end of WWII. The growing state bureaucracy and oil industrialization offered an improved income to

the traditional population and the demand for oil was sufficient to create the need for foreign labor and immigration. Both 'push' and 'pull' factors accounted for the historical flight from nomadism and rural areas to booming towns. The annual rate of urban population growth averaged 58.1% during the 1950s and 21.1% during the 1980-1985 period [29]. This astronomical growth reflected high natural increases, internal and international migration and reclassification of settlement into urban centers. Natural causes played their role as well. The northern region of the Kingdom where the majority of nomads lived, suffered a drought that lasted six years. The 1958 drought destroyed 90% of the region's livestock.

Encouraged by optimistic reports by a number of American geologists and agricultural experts, the government embarked upon a major initiative to ameliorate the conditions of the various regions susceptible to drought and abject poverty. Government projects included drilling water wells, introducing mechanical means to obtain water, and starting numerous agricultural programs and projects, all resulting in unprecedented upward changes in living conditions in numerous villages and *hijar*. Such programs both accelerated the settlement of nomads and also triggered a larger movement throughout the chain of the national urban hierarchy. Nomads and ruralites alike flocked to the larger towns and cities where demand for a large labor force was generated. The percentage of urban dwellers increased from an estimated 5.9% to 15% in 1950 to 50% by the early 1970s, and urbanization continued apace to reach 77.2% in 1992 [29, 22].

The combined developmental efforts shouldered by the ever expanding role of the national government included a number of programs and projects which focused on the improvement of agriculture and the settling of nomads. The Wadi Sirhan project in the northern region of Saudi Arabia, south of the border with Jordan, offered *hijar* and village dwellers water pumps and technical support to encourage bedouin settlement and lessen the negative impact of the vagaries of the meager waterfall on the Saudi population in general. The project was suspended and revived ten years later following the drought of the late 1950s. It placed more emphasis on pastoral grazing management than on agricultural development. The government distributed fodder, provided veterinarians, cleared old wells and drilled new ones and offered financial and technical aid to increase the number of livestock. The project, which covered an area of 40,000 hectares, represented a confrontation with reality, for practical imperatives clashed with previously held theoretical attitudes relating to the settlement of nomads at the expense of forgoing livestock production. Moreover, the government, partly due to limited resources and partly due to the cumbersome magnitude of transforming a large segment of the nomads who had lived for millennia with no settlements, was increasingly confronted with the conclusion that such intervention in the lifestyles of a large

segment of the national population must be approached with caution and at a slower pace than previously sought.

On the other hand, the Tabuk Basin Project (TBP) in the northern region bordering Jordan and Israel, placed greater emphasis on the settlement of nomads in the sparse and desolate region. The government delivered water, agricultural education, and training for the project which benefited 2,400 families. The area covered by the TBP amounted to 950 hectares, including 130 water pumps for irrigation. In addition, the government interspersed the region with 3,300 wells serving a total of 734 Bedouin clusters (*'izbah*). Another project espoused by the central government was in the area of Wadi Assabha. The government redistributed 40,000 hectares to 1,000 recipients, each receiving a four hectare agricultural lot.

The King Faisal Model Project (KFMP) targeted nomads inhabiting the southern region of the country, 240 kilometers south of Riyadh, the nation's capital. It covered an area of 40 square kilometers. The KFMP followed the (Saudi) classical approach to nomadism, that is the transformation of their transient lifestyle into a settled tribal labor force engaged in agricultural and other sedentary ventures. However, unlike the traditional approach in which the end-goal was the settling of nomads in easy-to-control and develop *hijar*, KFMP represented the first full scale project extending into the larger goal of national development. The KFMP was envisaged to meet the rising demand for foodstuffs nationwide brought by improved economic conditions; self-sufficiency in agriculture and other 'strategic' staples was the motto of the era. The KFMP was essentially a modern government-run farm with training facilities, experimental nurseries, and a settlement housing 1,000 bedouin families.

Wadi Jebreen which is located 100 kilometers at the south of the KFMP, represents another endeavor to alleviate the austere living conditions of Saudi nomads. It was basically an agricultural-related settlement which included training and production facilities aimed at inducing the settlement of nomads at the furthestmost southern edge of the inhabited expanse abutting the formidable desert of the Empty Quarter. In essence, in addition to their long-term objective of settling the nomads and as drought emergency relief centers, these agricultural 'outposts' also served ulterior political objectives, namely that of reinforcing the sovereignty of the central state, especially in the disputed border regions, and of instilling national association and patriotism among its nomad population whose previous mode of production and allegiance had little do with any central authority. These projects typified the government's approach prior to the prosperous 1970s, and were aimed at engaging the nomadic population in national economic development programs, and, through encouraging bedouin settlement, help establish the sovereignty of the central state in desolate and disputed border regions during the early decades of its formation [30].

The Bedouin *Hijar* as Urban Centers, 1970 to Present

The 1970s brought a tremendous increase in oil prices worldwide comprising a windfall for the Kingdom's treasury. As oil revenues rose sharply in the 1970s, government spending increased substantially. For example, annual oil income increased from \$1.2 billion in 1971 to \$22.6 billion in 1974, to \$101.8 billion in 1981. The programs which had been introduced in the 1950s and 1960s were substantially expanded by astronomical sums of capital which ultimately triggered more migration to the cities which, in the span of a few generations, has resulted in the concentration of the majority of the Kingdom's population in urban centers. Concomitantly, improvements in health provisions have decreased infant mortality and have prolonged life expectancy, causing a sharp upward kink in world population [2].

The social unit of the agrarian society, the tribe, drastically mutated into the mobile nuclear family as the new social unit, and was prone to migrate in pursuit of economic trends in the industrial age. Improved communication systems facilitated and increased access to information, increasingly suffusing the society, while technological breakthroughs in transportation shortened travel time, hence allowing fast and easy mobility between and within urban centers. All in all, these and other complex developments encouraged and reinforced the process of social mobilization, which is spatially translated in the physical migration of the population away from its rural habitat. As illustrated in the following examples, these trends were also observed in the urban growth of the north-eastern region of Saudi Arabia, which was primarily inhabited by nomads.

To the south-east of the Wadi Sarhan project, bedouins benefited from the nearby trans-national pipe line (Tapline) carrying oil from the oil producing fields in eastern Saudi Arabia to Lebanon. The unprecedented venture of building the Tapline project required an enormous labor force amounting to 16,000 workers at its peak. The early structures of Arar housed bedouins seeking jobs and benefits in the industrial camp. In addition to the Arar industrial camp, three other major pump stations at Al Qaisomah, Rafha, 284 kilometers to the south, and Turaif, 238 kilometers to the north were added. The new industrial compounds serving the pump stations formed the "Tapline urban corridor" upon which future growth ensued. At the location of each pump station, an industrial compound was built to house a professional staff and support facilities to maintain these pump stations (Fig. 2).

In line with the agreement between the Saudi government and the Arab American oil company (Aramco), Aramco built schools, health clinics, warehouses, airfields and some public-oriented facilities. Moreover, at the request of the government, the Tapline

constructed a tarmac road paralleling the pipeline, connecting the various growth poles dotting the Tapline corridor, a project which was completed by the mid-1960s. Although the road was essentially meant to serve the trans-saharan pipeline and its industrial compounds, it generated a substantial volume of traffic altering the regional urban network and creating considerable commercial activity of regional, national, and international significance. The combined effects of creating health services, providing water, as well as educational and transport facilities, have since bestowed the Tapline corridor's towns with large numbers of migrants and brought modern civilization to the desolate and arid region.

During the 1960s, Arar's population, in particular, grew at an annual growth rate of 4.6 percent, a higher growth rate per annum than its Tapline sisters (Turaif, 3.5%, and Rafha, 3.7%), a rate which was more than double the national annual population growth rate of 2.5 percent. Between 1962 and 1973, Turaif's population grew from 7,000 to 9,500 and Rafha from 4,000 to 5,500. In comparison, Arar's population increased from 9,000 to 14,000. Between 1973 and 1986 Arar witnessed an increase in its population at the average annual growth rate of 24 percent, a growth which, by 1987, gave Arar a population of 65,000. During the same period Turaif's population reached 20,000 while Rafha attained 17,000, increasing at an annual rate of 7.3 percent and 13.9 percent respectively. Such high growth rates reflected the acute urbanization process associated with economic and administrative sector development brought by oil industrialization and the growing influence and affluence of the central government [2].

Especially during its early years of formation, the transport of oil was the *raison d'être* for Arar's existence. Yet, oil served only as the starting point for Arar's subsequent development. Oil-related activity set in motion an urbanization process that continued even with the suspension of most of the oil transported through the Tapline following the eruption of the civil war in Lebanon in the mid-1970s. Although the genesis and early growth of the Tapline's towns reposed on the economic principles of oil marketing, later urban development must be credited to the national government's interest in enhancing urban centers in the desolate northern region for several reasons, one of which was the central government's concern for national security and sovereignty. Arar was also to benefit substantially from increasing expenditures of the military on the increasing number of troops stationed there[30].

The improved oil revenues of the 1970s fueled the migration to urban centers at an unprecedented pace. Bedouins and town ruralites flocked to regional centers and to the emerging oil towns seeking better job opportunities and public services. For example, during the early 1970s, the Northern region's urban centers offered an average income of \$334 per annum in comparison to \$163 for those living outside cities [31].

Assessment and Evaluation

In the light of the volatile political environment which prevailed during the first half of the century, the *hijar* program was a political success. Yet the *hijar* program must be evaluated in the overall sociocultural and economic implications that resulted from such an intervention in the spatial system of the Kingdom. Given the limited scale and the callow institutional development of the Saudi state during the first half of the century, one expected shortcomings in the transformation of bedouins from nomads to urban dwellers. The major goals of the development oriented phase of the *hijar* program were as follows: (1) the redistribution of population to increase agricultural land and even development, (2) the settling of nomads in communities with basic public services whereby they could then contribute to the national economy, (3) the provision of public services and infrastructure in *hijar* that promised future growth as well as to stop the development of clusters that did not possess the requisite ingredients for future development. To attain such goals, a number of means were devised including the coordination between the various government agencies and sectors (national, regional and local) handling settlement functions; developing regulations and guidelines that governed positive development of *hijar* in line with the national economic goals of the Kingdom, and limiting the development of scattered fortuitous *hijar* and *‘izab* which lacked growth potential; and the provision of public services and projects in *hijar* that enjoyed favorable conditions for future development [32].

According to Al Musallam, the average *hijrah* contained 40 residential units housing 251 inhabitants. The average number of inhabitants varied between the different regions of the Kingdom. A 1982 study by the Ministry of Interior covering 4,020 *hijar* concluded that 68% were not suitable for (efficient) future growth. In addition, a survey by the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs indicated that 4,636 residential clusters, *‘izab* did not mature to established communities. These clusters constituted a small number of shacks and *ahwāsh* - walled, irregular-shaped land lots containing a room or more, a yard and a shaded area for sheep, goat or camels. In many instances, small *hijar* and *‘izab* were either deserted or kept for temporary use during the grazing seasons. Bedouins developed the custom of moving between the established towns and cities where they worked or were hosted by their relatives during the summer, and moving back to their *hijar* during the winter. In other instances, during the early decades prior to the prosperous 1970s, bedouins squatted on public lands forming desultory communities called *hila*, shantytowns on the outskirts of towns and cities. Some built their walled structures *ahwāsh*, which sprang up around highways branching from towns, hoping to later file a claim for the land and then sell it to another party or wait for land values to increase as development occurred near the highway.

Prior to the prosperous decades of the 1970s and 1980s, state intervention in urban growth and planning was limited. Subsequently, the layout of *hīlal* (bedouin shantytowns in urban centers) and *hijar* paid no attention to any geometric or other perceived logical organization of its components.⁴ Temporary and poorly built structures were typically made of mud or cement blocks, cardboard, metal sheets, discarded water barrels, and cloth. Houses comprising a room or more were strewn about in space, without any logical relationship, ostensibly evoking the way *bedouins* pitch their tents in the desert. Occasionally, substantial though tawdry houses were built by a prominent sheikh, a retired or absentee government official or a livestock merchant. However, sociocultural factors did play a role in the location of homes. Houses and tents were grouped in a fashion that attested to family ties; additionally, an appropriate distance was allowed to maximize visual and acoustic privacy between dwellings. Goats, sheep, donkeys and stray dogs and camels were tethered nearby. In these *hijar*, one could find a mosque abutting an incipient *sūq* (market) lying on the road or at the nexus of desert treks. At a later stage (circa 1970s), and only in *hijar* that grew into sizable towns, a municipality (*baladiyyah*) was established which imposed administrative measures on the growth of the settlement and made some alterations in its organic structure.

In more substantial *hijar* such as these, people enjoyed a stable population and were bestowed with propitious factors for growth (such as the relative amounts of potable water and location on tribal desert tracks, a newly established regional road network, or in the proximity of growing regional towns or military bases). The government introduced schools, a security apparatus, and other bureaucratic facilities soon to be the very *raison d'être* of future development. In these settlements, the urban economy became increasingly driven by exogenous influence, that is of central state support, rather than self-support.

In addition to geographic and demographic considerations, a number of problems thwarted the healthy development of *hijar*. Tribal association and struggles and kin vendetta played a role in the location and development of some *hijar*. Lured by status and incentives provided by the state, young and deviating bedouin sheikhs were encouraged to relocate to new sites without due appreciation for future growth prospects. Such communities proved to be a waste of government resources and if ever

⁴The Royal no. 6011 dated 13/3/86 (1966) stipulates that land which has not been used for cultivation or residence or other investment ventures belongs to the government. Agricultural land is the property of the Ministry of Agriculture and urban land falls under the control of the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs. Royal Order no. 11571 dated 16/5/1401 (1981) clarified that old land gifts to tribal sheikhs were not meant for personal ownership. Rather such 'royal gifts' were meant for settlement and residential use only. This order was followed by Royal Order no. 256 dated 6/1/1402 (1982) stressing strict implementation of previous Royal Orders and offering further details.

inhabited never grew further than small *‘izab*. In other instances, tribal sheikhs were allotted substantial areas to be distributed among their members only to lay waste due to inner-tribal contentions. *Hijar* residents inflated their communities' needs to government agencies while allocation of resources was affected by the relative power of some tribal sheikhs, all confusing rational and equitable distribution of vital resources among competing *Bedouin* communities. Finally, administrative obstacles such as 'redtape,' dispersed authority among the various government departments handling different aspects of *hijar*, and lack of coordination between these departments all hampered positive outcomes. Consequently, the government halted the haphazard creation of new *hijar* unless warranted by sufficient supporting studies.⁵

Nevertheless, more and more, *bedouin* became urban dwellers as they engaged in the government's economic development programs of the 1970s and 1980s, which offered lucrative agricultural and real estate investment loans governed by lax requirements, and small industrial establishments which provided windfall profits to recipients. In the burgeoning towns and cities, the emergence of loyalties to neighborhood, family, and occupation gradually overrode the traditional ties of kinship. The burgeoning oil industries in the Eastern oil producing region, as well as the civil and military establishments absorbed ever-increasing numbers of *bedouins* and *ruralites*, thus migration to urban centers continued apace.

Conclusion

The kaleidoscopic events that engulfed the Arabian Peninsula at the turn of the century resulted in the creation of the new nation of Saudi Arabia, a monarchic state governed by tradition. A centripetal process ensued in which the fragmented power of tribal association weakened and diminished territorial control of tribal turfs was paralleled by the rising political aplomb of King Abdul Aziz, eventually to be hardened into an hereditary monarchy presiding over a centralized bureaucracy.

From a general developmental perspective, the *hijar* program constitutes a unique experiment in urbanization. For such a relatively massive and visionary intervention involved not only the transition of the nomadic segment of the population to that of settled tribal villages, but also a profound social and economic transformation initiated primarily for national political and later economic objectives. Such intervention in the national urban process, which dates back to 1912, was seen by King Abdul Aziz as a necessary measure to defuse centrifugal tendencies that prevailed for millennia as well as to convey legitimacy on the rising Saudi monarchy. Unlike most other urbanization processes in which a predominately rural population is driven out of their agrarian

⁵F. Mubarak. "Urbanization, Urban Policy and City Form: Urban Development in Saudi Arabia." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, Seattle (1992), 71.

settlements due to the simple socio-economic 'push' or 'pull' factors, the Saudi sedentarization model exhibited a profound metamorphosis of the bulk of the population from that of a traditional nomadic life to that of settled peasantry and urban dwellers. Such a metamorphosis was made possible by sweeping cultural developments forged by King Abdul Aziz's visionary political determination amidst propitious international conditions.

From a socioeconomic perspective, specifically, the urbanization of nomads in Saudi Arabia, the new spatial system of *hijar* clusters, villages and tribal centers, however hard and unfamiliar, offered a new chance to construct new lives with new sets of relationship, where the residents grasped at the bright opportunities within their reach.

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مستوطنات الهجر في المملكة العربية السعودية: طرح ثقافي نحو فهم ظاهرة التحضر في الدول النامية

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ملخص البحث. يتناول البحث ظاهرة التحضر من المنظورين الاجتماعي والسياسي. والتحضر من هذا المنظور يتجاوز حصر مفهومه الضيق في دراسة الجوانب الكمية كعدد سكان المناطق العمرانية والخوض في متضمنات تلك الزيادة في الدول النامية. فمفهوم التحضر الأوسع يغطي التغيرات الكيفية والتي تتضح في التغير النوعي لقطاع عريض من الظروف التي يمر بها المجتمع، أحد أوجهها زيادة عدد سكان المدن. وبينما أصبح التحضر ظاهرة عالمية منذ بدء الثورة الصناعية في أوروبا الغربية، إلا أن دراسة مسارات التحضر في الدول النامية تتطلب وضع تلك الظاهرة في إطار تاريخي يشتمل على فهم متعمق لظروف الثقافة المحلية، ويتم التركيز فيه على فهم التطورات الاجتماعية والسياسية والاقتصادية وفي ظل المتغيرات العالمية السائدة. فيلقي البحث الضوء على التغيرات التاريخية الفريدة التي شكلت العقود الأولى لتأسيس المملكة العربية السعودية عندما كان معظم سكانها يعملون في الزراعة والرعي. خلال تلك العقود المبكرة، تبنى مؤسس الدولة السعودية الحديثة الملك عبدالعزيز آل سعود حركة استيطان استهدفت سكان البادية نتج عنها مئات مستوطنات البادية التي عرفت بـ "الهجر" تناثرت عبر أقاليم شاسعة منها وذلك بدعم ومراقبة من باقي الدول الحديثة. ومع حلول عقد الثلاثينيات الميلادية، بلغ عدد تلك المستوطنات الـ ٢٠٠. وأحدث برنامج الهجر الذي بدأه الملك عبدالعزيز في عام ١٩١٢م حركة استيطانية تركت آثارها على الشبكة العمرانية الحديثة للمملكة، ونتج عنها مسار حركة عكسية نحو التمدن في المجتمع القبلي، وهو المجتمع الذي اعتمد على نظام الإنتاج الرعوي منذ فجر التاريخ. يشتمل البحث على مراجعة لنظريات التحضر في الأدبيات يتبعها تقديم صورة تاريخية للظروف السياسية والاقتصادية والاجتماعية التي ولد في كنفها برنامج الاستيطان. يلي ذلك تصنيف زمني لمراحل تكوين تلك الهجر وظروف نشأتها واستعراض لخصائصها المورفولوجية: هي المرحلة العسكرية - السياسية الاتجاه، والمرحلة الاقتصادية ومرحلة الاستيطان بفعل الاندماج ضمن سياسات التنمية الوطنية. ويختم المقال بعدد من التوصيات التي تنادي بتطبيق حذر لنظريات التحضر الغربية المنشأ دون الفهم الصحيح للخصائص الاجتماعية والسياسية والاقتصادية الفريدة لتلك المجتمعات.