

Government's Role in Saudi Arabian Village Development: The Case of Al-Yazeed

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Abstract

This is a study of the impact of governmental policies on space and cultural landscape changes in the village of Al-Yazeed (Asir Province) in southwestern Saudi Arabia. Data were collected from residents via a questionnaire, interviews, a field survey, government reports and handwritten documents. The study revealed that the settled residents of Asir Region are still living in a clanship but it has been weakened as a result of socio-economic development taking place in Saudi Arabia. It also showed that the nuclear pattern of the Saudi village which is based upon the clanship system as represented in Al-Yazeed has dramatically changed to a dispersal sprawl as a result of the development which has taken place over the last thirty five years. The vertical type of Saudi house has changed to one spacious floor with large rooms and windows, but privacy is still considered in such a conservative Islamic society. Finally, timing and function of weekly markets have changed to meet the new requirements of the fast developing Saudi society. Al-Yazeed is not the only example. Other parts of Saudi Arabia have witnessed similar changes.

Introduction

The study of local historical geography can illustrate ways in which government policies have impacted landscape changes. This paper attempts to analyze spatial changes in an Arabian village* resulting from the role and policies of the Saudi Arabian government. Many significant and subtle changes have occurred, which are reflected in the spatial organization of the village and in the individual dwellings. Such changes may be seen in other regions of the country as well. Many elements of traditional Arab culture, however, continue to be reflected in the spatial changes at the village level. For example the government policies have their impacts on plan, layout of houses and building materials. Another factor is internal tourism which has become popular in Saudi Arabia; it is likely to have an important impact on the traditional settlements in the proximity of developing resort areas. The village of Al-Yazeed in Asir Province, situated at an elevation of about 2300 metres above sea level, is one such village whose ancient settlement and

economy are in the process of major transformation, yet its inhabitants are trying to preserve the central elements of Saudi Arabia's Islamic traditions and culture.

**Village in Saudi Arabia is defined as a "place of permanent habitation (which means that the dwellings are built using solid materials). It has an identifying name and there exist one or several activities which provide the inhabitants with a means for making a living. The population is not less than 100 (20 houses) and there exists a factor of cohesion between the inhabitants" (Al-Rawaf, 1987).*

Methodology:

In order to tackle the governmental effects on spatial aspects in the village of Al-Yazeed throughout the twentieth century, several steps were followed such as literature review, collecting historical documents from local residents and interviews with head of a tribe and intellectuals from Saudi Arabia. In addition a field survey was conducted by one of the authors who worked for six years (1986-1992) as a faculty member in the geography department of King Khaled University (its former name was King Saud University), Saudi Arabia. A questionnaire containing several socio-economic variables was designed by the authors and distributed to each house in the village of Al-Yazeed. A senior geography major student who lived in the village assisted the authors in carrying out field research and interviews. Photos of houses of different periods were taken in the village and its proximity. These photos were compared and analyzed. Furthermore, several interviews during 2004 were carried out through the internet with professor, Muhammad Qahtani, the head of the geography department, King Khaled University in Abha. Professor Qahtani reviewed the manuscript and updated our information of changes which are taking place in the village of Al-yazeed. In 2006, further interviews were carried out with two Saudi professors: Ramze Al-Zahrani, and Meraj Merza, Um Al-Qura University in Mecca.

Saudi Vision and Policies in Rural Development

Saudi authorities expected enormous changes in people's life styles to accompany economic development. They were aware their approach was similar to that applied within other Arab states in which governments played a major role in various activities of development. The Saudis' goal was to establish a large middle class which would accommodate itself to new development and technological advances. Different Saudi ministries were created to develop all sectors of the national economy and basic infrastructure. Various ministries entered into contractual relationships with foreign construction firms. Roads, electrical power, dams, communications, schools and clinics were built by foreign contractors. However, Arab contractors took the responsibilities of building private homes for Saudi families (Al-Thani, 2001). Saudi authorities aimed to transform their society from nomadic to rural and urban ways of life. They were very careful in maintaining the political balance between religious institutions, heads of tribes and the ruling family. In fact the Saudis were successful in their efforts at rural development. For example, the Saudi rural developmental and health plans led to a sharp population increase in different parts of the country. This was due to a rapid decline in infant and child mortality while the fertility rate remained high. After the oil boom of the 1970s, the Saudi family, much larger in size than two decades ago, became a huge consumer. Construction, especially private home building, became even more pronounced. Several unintended results started to appear in urban as well as rural areas, such as sharp income inequalities, excessive consumption of ground water, destruction of cultural heritage, environmental pollution and desertification.

By focusing on the village of Al-Yazeed in the province of Asir, this study will show how 'development' is reflected in a microcosm of Saudi Arabia. The paper will bring out ways in which both cultural continuities and changes are part of Saudi Arabian rural landscape. In order to contextualize these changes and continuities, it is necessary to provide a brief geographic and somewhat more detailed historical-cultural background.

Geographical Setting

Asir Province is located in the southwestern part of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (fig. 1 and fig. 2). Its area is around 90,000 square kilometers (Al-Saleh and Al-Siryani, 1979) and its population

approximates 1,500,000. Most of Asir is mountainous with peaks ranging from 6000-9000 feet above sea level (Al-Sharef, 1984). Because of this high altitude, its climate is milder than that of other areas in Saudi Arabia. Most of the rain falls during the summer monsoon season and the annual rainfall is between 300-450 millimeters. The average annual temperature is 19 centigrade (Bunduqjee, 1987).

Historical-Cultural Background

Asir Region is inhabited by numerous clans* who are proud of their Arab descent, hospitality, courage and honor. Al-Yazeed is a village in this region, located 25 kilometers to the southeast of the central city of Abha. Although Al-Yazeed is located in the mountains, its surrounding landscape is plateau like, and the village itself is surrounded by agricultural land and pastures. Some of the village land is covered with semi forests such as Juniperus Excelsa.

Residents of Al-Yazeed are proud of their origin from Yazeed, a late member of the Umayyad Dynasty centered in Damascus, Syria, in the period 660 - 750 AD. After the fall of the Umayyad Caliphate rule in Damascus, Yazeed and members of his immediate and extended family migrated to the mountainous Asir region; they were fleeing the Abbasids who established their dynasty in Baghdad after they destroyed the Umayyad. Yazeed himself was killed by the Abbasids south of Makkah (Mecca). However, his group finally settled in the highest area in the mountains seeking protection. As new refugees, they had to settle in a marginal and contested area which was located between two hostile clans, the Al-Magheed and Al-Alkam. Being descendants of the Umayyad, the family of Yazeed received traditional hospitality from the Al-Magheed, local residents with whom they intermarried and became allies.

- *A clan may be defined as "an extended family, broadly based in the present in a great multitude of cousins, tapering to a few dimly-seen ancestors some generations back" (Ommer, 1986). Each clan is divided into the following:*
 - 1- *Jama'a (smallest unit) is an extended family composed of several closely related family nuclei.*
 - 2- *Fakdh or Ashira is composed of a group of jama'as and inhabits the geographical area of the settlement and is governed by*

a *Shaykh* (chief) whose home constitutes a pole of attraction.

- 3- *Qabila* (clan) is composed of several *fakdkhs* and is headed by a *Shaykh* Of *Shaykhs* (chief of chiefs) known in the *Asir Region* as the *Shaykh Ash-Shamel* (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1984). _

The village of Al-Yazeed assumed leadership in the area and stayed in power for several centuries up to the establishment of the Saudi state in the early twentieth century (Al-Bishri, 1983; Shaker, 1981). However, around 1000 AD a split over the leadership started to occur within the ruling family. As a result, some family members moved to a location overlooking the Tehama region. They also were relocated to marginal and disputed land between another two tribes, Al-Shahrani and Al-Qahtani. They named their new settlement after their great grandfather, Yazeed.

In Asir Region, settled residents lived in a clanship system and Al-Yazeed was no exception (fig.3). A great deal of respect was given to the chief of the tribe who usually inherited leadership. The consolidated clanship system was necessary. It indicated the strength of the clan and gave it more respect among its allies and enemies in the absence of a strong central government. However, consolidation had several co-operative prerequisites which every clan had to follow. For example, many clans managed to acquire granaries where a tenth of the harvest of each family head known as *ushr* (10%) or *jam'iyya* was stored and could only be used by permission of the tribe's chief. The *ushr* was used in several ways; e.g., to pay the costs of village protection, to feed village guests, to help the poor, to pay for digging irrigation wells, to help victims of accidents, to pay *diyya* (blood money), or to build or maintain the village mosques (Shaker, 1981, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1984). In addition, the clan had to share water wells and common pasture land.

The concentration of settlements in Asir Region was necessary for at least two major reasons. Firstly, this region is characterized by permeable rocks permitting rain water to escape into the depths of the soil. Thus, great efforts by residents were needed to dig wells. Secondly, pastoral areas were public property. Clan members did, however, own parcels of land around the village in which sorghum, millet and pomegranates and vines were grown (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1984).

Because of political instability in the region, each clan tried to ally itself with neighboring clans. This had several consequences for the socio-economic and political conditions of the residents. For example, in times of war the allied clans fought under one flag and in peace time their merchants and customers traveled together to weekly markets. The dates for these periodic markets were decided in agreement with allied clans for the purpose of securing the site of each market as well as the roads leading to it (interview with Al-Hader 1992).

The clan in Al-Yazeed village at present is divided into four branches (*fakhds*): *Al-Mjahir*, *Al-Areef*, *Al-Duwayh* and *Al-Immashi*. The latter has leadership of the clan. In addition to the native clans, there were distinctive social groups whose social status was related to their occupation. These five groups were:

Al-Ashraf: they trace their origin to the Hashimites, the Prophet Muhammad's family. For centuries Al-Ashraf worked as teachers of Islamic *Sharee'ah* (laws of Islam) and literature in village mosques and other areas. Therefore, they obtained great respect by residents of the region who were also proud to intermarry with them.

Lifyuud: This group of residents, though few in number, used to be the craftsmen for the village and for customers of the weekly markets. Members of this group were Arab in origin, but they may have been subdued in the past and were forced to carry out craftsmen professions which were not preferred by residents of the Arabian Peninsula.

Al-Balahtah: Members of this group worked as singers for village occasions. In addition, they were responsible for carrying oral or written messages between hostile clans. The nature of such an occupation provided a sense of security. Since different clans needed these groups for communication, they would not harm these messengers

Al-Hitman: This group of residents worked as barbers and sheep shearers.

Slaves: These servants worked in home service for their masters. In fact, slavery existed in the village of Al-Yazeed until the early 1960s when it was declared forbidden (Shaker, 1981).

Most of the residents in Al-Yazeed looked down on the occupations of the last three groups and did not intermarry with them. However, they were not discriminated against residentially. In time, members of these groups acquired pieces of land

that they paid for either in cash or by services they performed for their masters.

Al-Yazeed: Continuities and Transformation

Residents of Al-Yazeed have changed their occupations dramatically during the last thirty five years (Hejazi and Diab, 1997). For example, residents working in grazing and agriculture have declined. Instead they increasingly look for jobs in the Saudi civil and military infrastructure. These jobs are preferred because they confer greater social prestige. The number of people seeking government jobs has increased because the Saudi Arabian school system now offers education which provides them with the necessary qualifications. Foreign workers are offered jobs requiring manual labor in various aspects of construction and production (Taher, 1997).

Until 1932 the village of Al-Yazeed was compact and its houses were attached to each other. The doors of these houses were oriented toward the center, but the windows opened toward farms. Mud stone was used in the construction of the houses. Rooms in each house were constructed on top of each other with inside stairs and one room per floor. The houses were multi-level. The ground floor was used as a stable, the first floor to store grain and food stuffs. The second floor included the kitchen, water cistern and washroom, reception room and family room, with one room generally kept for the family patriarch. The top floor opened up to a terrace which was walled for privacy (Rifai, 1987).

The nucleated structure of Al-Yazeed was stable for a long period of time until the unification of Saudi Arabia as a kingdom in 1932. That date marks the emergence of new developments. For the next thirty years, up to the early 1960s, the nucleated structure was maintained for security reasons as well as the residents' affiliation with their clan. During this era, farming and grazing lands were separated from the village. The village itself was surrounded by a roughly circular zone of farming fields. The outer but adjacent circle was specified for grazing. In order to secure these areas, the residents established several defensive outposts called *qasabas*. These multipurpose outposts were used extensively by villagers as alarms against intruders, enemies, birds' depredation and rodents. They were also used for storing grain and implements.

Weekly Markets of Al-Yazeed

The earlier Al-Yazeed weekly market was based upon a traditional pattern in the Arabian Peninsula, where markets were established in the oases, in productive agricultural and pastoral areas or near transportation routes. Asir region is a productive agriculture and pastoral area located on the famous route between Hijaz and Yemen, which was used by early Arabs on their winter and summer semi-annual trips. With the emergence of Islam, the route achieved a religious function. Muslims started to follow the route from the southwestern parts of the Arabian Peninsula to Mecca for *Haj*, the annual obligatory pilgrimage, and for the voluntary small Haj called *Omra* performed any time of the year. Furthermore, Asir weekly markets were influenced by the old ports on the Red Sea, such as Jizan, Qunfuzah, Birk and Shuqaiq. Obstructions encountered between the Red Sea coast and the mountains of the Asir Region also affected business in the weekly markets (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1984).

In Asir Region, every clan or group of clans managed to establish their own weekly market. However, certain conditions had to be met. For example, a clan had to be strong enough to defend its market and the routes leading to it. In addition, the clan had to negotiate agreements with the neighboring clans for security**.

Another necessary condition was that the clan had to agree on the weights and measurements used in other markets of the region. Written agreements had to be reached between different clans regarding the timing of the market, weight measurements and security**. The chief of the clan in which the market was located kept these documents. The Al-Yazeed Saturday weekly market was not only a commercial place, but also a place in which residents of the surrounding clans met and solved their problems, including the punishment of criminals. It should be noted that the market and the routes leading to it were neutral places in an area of little security and stability. Treaties were concluded between clans which used to commute to market, but the security and defense of the market were in the hands of the Al-Yazeed clan. Local women were not discriminated against in market activities. They were allowed to sell their agricultural products and crafts. At present, it seems that women's presence in the markets of Saudi Arabia is disappearing since they receive governmental financial assistance. Some women hire foreign workers such as Egyptians or Yemenis to take care of their business in market.

Since 1990, Al-Yazeed's Saturday weekly market has been shifted to Wednesday and its location too has been moved to the main route which connects Abha with the neighboring resorts of the Asir National Park. The new location is designed to serve visitors of the resorts all year long. As a result, land prices have increased sharply in the market. The traditional spatial arrangements of the market and its cultural heritage have been replaced by semi-western retail investment***.

*** Handwritten document dating from 1850 indicates the existence of agreements between different clans on the security and weight/ measures of their weekly market.*

**** Interview with Professor Muhamad Qahtani, Chairman of Geography Department, King Khaled University, Abha, Saudi Arabia. 2004.*

The newly established markets in the country in general have lost their cultural heritage in an environment where planning and architecture have not been instruments in the hands of Saudi authorities. Furthermore, planning decisions did not keep in mind conditions of environmental sustainability. Changes in the periodic market system have made a major impact on the role of women in traditional business. In the traditional markets of Saudi Arabia, women had a notable presence, but many women have lost this role in modernized Saudi Arabia. Many, though not all, conservative and well to do husbands believe that women should only be homemakers. That does not mean all women agree with such beliefs.

Educated women have sought jobs in schools as teachers. In fact, Islam gives women full rights to go out and do their own business. But sometimes it seems that inherited culture in the Arabian Peninsula is stronger than the teachings of Islam. This is not the case in other liberal Arab countries such as Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon.

Al-Yazeed Village in the Context of Development in Saudi Arabia- an Overview

After the unification of the country in 1932, the regional appointed governors were concerned with several policies seen by King Abdul-Azeez as the cornerstone of building his kingdom's infrastructures. These policies included security, transportation routes, taxes, and Islamic and general education (Al-Bishri, 1983). To reduce the crime rate in his kingdom, King Abdul-Azeez established Islamic courts. In addition, the whole clan was held responsible for a crime committed by any one of its members. Because of these

security measures, alliances between clans began to decline. Such safety procedures were also reflected in house design and village development. For example, rooms in houses became more spacious and windows became larger. Newly constructed houses were built outside the nuclear village. The role of mosques as Islamic courts and educational centers declined because the government established separate Islamic courts and schools. In addition, residents' loyalty shifted toward the central government. In 1935 the first school was established in Abha and in 1947 the government inaugurated the first educational directorate.

Dramatic socio-economic changes have occurred in Saudi Arabia since its unification in 1932. The cultural landscape of each period may be seen as a reflection of Islam, the ruling power, capital accumulation, construction of roads, and the development of villages and urban centers (Schmelzkopf, 2004). However, the Saudi state did not establish and did not exercise its power over the uses of territories and the built areas, which comprise tiny fragments of this large country.

Changes in Al-Yazeed may be examined more clearly within the framework of four time periods suggested by the Saudi Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs* (fig. 4).

1- Before the unification of Saudi Arabia in 1932: This period is characterized by political and economic instability both in the Arabian Peninsula at large and in Asir Region in particular because of the absence of a central government. This instability was reflected in the socio-economic and welfare conditions of the residents. For example, their houses were built very close to each other and laid out in a semi circle. Thus, the rural settlements were compact and nucleated or semi-nucleated. Mud and stone were used as construction materials (fig 5). The village was surrounded by a wall which was later destroyed to allow for further village expansion**.

Throughout this period the residents of Al-Yazeed were self reliant in terms of their security and defense of their communal lands, water and fuel resources. During this period residents were dependent primarily on their farms and pastures. In addition, they kept good relationships with the local rulers of Al-Magheed whom they considered their allies. Unwin (1989), in his study of urban-rural agrarian exchange in Arabian Peninsula,

captured the types of exchange which were crucial for the traditional economy of the Arabian Peninsula at the end of the 19th century. These were exchanges between nomads and the settled population, exchange between the fishing of the agrarian communities and exchange of imports and exports. Residents of Al-Yazeed supported the mobile nomadic Bedouins with required grain and fruits. In turn, the nomads provided them with hides, meat and dairy produce. With the exception of visiting Makkah and Medinah once or more each year for pilgrimage purposes, residents of Asir region were isolated from the rest of the world. Their cultural heritage was kept intact.

** A questionnaire was designed to collect information about socio-economic conditions from residents of al-Yazeed. The author and two senior geography students from this village distributed and collected the questionnaire in 1992.*

*** Interview with Yahya Mushabab Al-Hader, school teacher and brother of the Shaykh of Al-Yazeed village 1992.*

2- 1932-1958: During this period the residents' lives remained largely unchanged. However, small subsidies were received from the central government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Mud and stone were also used in the newly constructed houses, but the vertical design was abandoned. It was replaced by one floor design with more spacious rooms and larger windows closer to the ground (fig.6). In this period, the residents of Al-Yazeed shifted their relations toward the central government of Saudi Arabia, and some members of the village were employed by the Saudi Army and Civil Administrations. Through out this period the region started to be exposed to surrounding regions in the Arabian Peninsula which enjoy similar cultural characteristics. Need for educational development was met through teachers from the Arab countries of Egypt, Jordan, Palestine and Syria (Ibrahem, 1985).

Those employed and with their children admitted to new schools abandoned their farms and cattle. Farms of Al-Yazeed were characterized by individual family farm holdings. The small size of farms was determined by Islamic inheritance practices which led to an increased subdivision and fragmentation of holdings. The average holding in Saudi Arabia was then less than one hectare in size. To improve the quality of the soils, especially in mountain areas, ploughs, hoes, and

spades, as well as a system of rotation, were used. (Unwin, 1989).

3- 1958-1970: The beginning of this period witnessed the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia launch its first cabinet; this was paralleled with the increase in oil revenues. Huge capital accumulation was witnessed in the area. Efforts to develop villages were characterized by financial, technical and organizational support to residents, e.g. establishing social centers. Although Al-Yazeed did not have any of these services, the number of classes and teachers in the primary schools increased. Only 8% (48 units) of houses were built during this period. This is an indication of slow development taking place in Saudi Arabia. Throughout this period concrete material started to replace the traditional uses of mud and stone in house construction (fig. 7).

Engineers and laborers from Jordan, Lebanon and Syria were brought in to man the construction of houses being built outside the nuclear village. New equipment such as caterpillars arrived in the area. Later, Caterpillar opened its agency in the city of Abha. Most new houses were only one floor, but rooms and windows became larger. Each house was surrounded by a wall for privacy and independence. Thus, the earlier cultural tradition of strict privacy continued. Because of limited resources, however, the new houses were not large enough to meet the needs of all the family members. As a result, each family kept its contact with the old house as well. In later periods, however, houses became larger. Today the average size of a house in the village of Al-Yazeed is 250 square meters; the number of rooms range between 8 and 20 to accommodate large families.

4- 1970- Present: This period is characterized by massive government directed and sponsored projects on every level. Five-year plans were developed during the 1970s when oil prices increased sharply and the government started to have a large cash surplus. In the period from 1970 to 2005, seven successive five-year plans directed that surplus to achieve specific goals. This effort resulted in changing various aspects of Saudi life. For example, the number of schools in Saudi Arabia jumped from 3283 in 1970 to 22000 in 1995. In Al-Yazeed, a school for boys was built in 1975, and one for girls in 1982. Intermediate and high schools for males and females are available at present. Furthermore, King Khaled University was recently constructed within the

proximity of Al-Yazeed. High school graduates of the village can now enjoy a university education. University graduates and laborers of this village are lucky because they benefit from jobs offered in King Khaled University and Asir National park. A clinic was also established in 1979, and electricity reached each house in the early 1980s. In addition, residents of Al-Yazeed as well as other residents of the region benefit from the University's hospital. They received government loans to construct modern houses that were built away from the village core (fig.8). Data obtained from the questionnaire revealed that 29% of the financial resources for home construction came from agricultural production and 71% came from monthly savings and government loans. It was also discovered that 75% of Al-Yazeed residents worked for the government while the remaining were retirees or laborers. It appears that government employees were more eligible for government loans.

Modern houses were built by engineering and construction companies in Saudi Arabia during this time period. Those who asked for loans from the government had to meet certain conditions in order to prove their eligibility; for example, house size, construction material and design had to meet the government's criteria. At present Saudi society remains conservative and it has, therefore, maintained a strong sense of its culture heritage which values privacy. In fact, many Saudis who visited or were educated in western countries found that personal privacy is well respected. At present, Saudi elites and intellectuals are trying to match their cultural values with modernization. However they are not successful in achieving women's freedom. For example women are not yet allowed to drive their own vehicles, are still restricted in their career choices (globaleye.org) and they are not represented in the *Majlis al-Shura* (Consultative Council) (amnesty.org/web/ar2002). At present, many members of the ruling Saudi family are pro-women's rights, and believe that women's rights are a matter of time. But their main allies who consist of the conservative Islamic clergies oppose such a move. Clergies believe that they will lose their share of power in the country as a result of modernization of every aspect of life in addition to laws and women's freedom.

Houses are built away from each other to obtain even more privacy than before 1932 when the houses were closely clustered. New designs emphasize private separate rooms for males,

females and guests. However, dispersed housing can cause major financial problems for developments. This is best illustrated when the government plans for water, electricity and other civic services. Despite many changes, however, the residents are hostile to the idea of demolishing the old houses located in the center of the village.

Most architects are foreigners and do not pay enough attention to the architectural traditions of Saudi Arabia. The old compact dwellings are considered a part of the cultural heritage or a link to the past in a fast-changing country. Their function has changed. Such old vacant houses are either occupied by expatriates, who work in the village or are used for storage. Unfortunately, such houses have also proven to be an increasing problem to residents as they have been used as hiding places for criminals and visa violators.

During this time, the Saudis in general have developed two kinds of 'dependencies'. First, they believe that the government is rich and their sources of income are not going to dry up, a guarantee of affluence for the future. This leads them to depend heavily on the government. Second, they have grown to be dependent on foreign labor in their daily businesses and in their homes. But the government is trying to invent its working class (Kronermer, 1997). Foreign workers also help residents to go back to agriculture pursuits. In fact "the government administrative departments may help village residents to keep their organization which helped them to manage their own resources in the past rather than depending only on government services such as state welfare policies, which may have negative effects on social structure" (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1984). As a result of government support, modern equipment and fertilizers are increasingly used in farming. Products of modern farms are sold to other cities in the Kingdom.

The dependency on foreign labor in farming has resulted in an increase in the number of Saudis looking for jobs in other sectors which offer higher salaries and more attractive conditions**. For example, agricultural employment in Saudi Arabia fell from 695,000 in 1970 to 600,000 in 1980 (Al-Rawaf, 1987). In Asir Province, 473 villages witness a daily migration of people commuting back and forth to work to other villages or urban centers, such as Abha and Khamis-Mushayt. About half of the probable growth of the main urban centers in Saudi Arabia during the period 1972 to 1980 was caused by emigration from the

southwest region, totaling approximately 800,000 persons or about 150,000 families (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1984).

Because of rapid village expansion, land values have sharply increased. The original public land which was used for grazing and shared by residents of Al-Yazeed was divided among them. The plan of the village has changed under the changing conditions of land use.

Clashes with neighboring villages have appeared over border land ownership. Furthermore, a few pieces of land were sold to Saudi residents who came from different provinces. Ultimately, clan loyalty began to weaken and residents increased their dependency on government services. The amount of money circulating in the villages in the form of salaries or loans is now far greater than in the past.

*** Interview with Professor Ramze Al-Zahrani and Professor Miraj Merza, Geography Department, Um Al Qura University, Mecca, Saudi Arabia, 2006.*

The rapid increase of income has its effects on Saudi spatial and social fabrics. For example new spaces are specified for guests, foreign maids and drivers. Saudi Women enjoy more free time and their action space has become larger in terms of such as teaching and nursing (Chatty, 2000) and nowadays in malls (Akbar, 2006). Furthermore, in the year of 2004 the Saudi government lifted a ban that kept women from jobs in most fields (keepmedia.com). But the role of Saudi working women in farms and markets has been completely abandoned. The new forms of life have changed the cultural landscape and space not only in the village of Al-Yazeed but also in Saudi Arabia. This suggests that economic conditions are becoming the main driving force for great changes in culture, landscape and space.

In towns of Asir Province such as Abha and Khamis Mushait and in the village of Al-Yazeed, new furnished apartment buildings, Saudi food and fast food restaurants, supermarkets and hotels were established to meet the needs of internal tourists. The basic infrastructure buildings were built on the main transportation routes. In addition a college of tourism was established in early 1990's in order to train Saudi youth in various tourism services. Saudi investment in tourism in Asir province will lead to occupational changes of local population. For example, the new generation will work in the tertiary ie service

function. This means that the village of Al-Yazeed which has been an administrative and agriculture -pastoral settlement now seems to be a tourist center, especially in summer.

Offering jobs for young Saudis in the southern province of Asir will decrease their internal migration toward the large cities such as Riyadh, and Jeddah.

Conclusion

The unification of Saudi Arabia in 1932 and its government development policies have changed the landscape of Al-Yazeed village in a number of different ways. For example, the nuclear pattern of the village, which was maintained for security and clanship reasons, changed when it followed the development plans benefiting from oil revenues after World War II. The present abandonment of old mud houses and the dispersal sprawl of new houses is a result of such development plans and security measures. Although spread out housing offers more privacy and space, the practice will strain the national Saudi budget because the government has to allocate more money to provide each house with various services. This practice is widespread without thought to ecological and sustainable realities.

Ties of solidarity among members of clans are disappearing in favor of growing dependencies on the government and its services. Remaining solidarity is displayed only for social occasions and financial interests. Likewise, the function, location, region and timing of the Al-Yazeed weekly market have changed to meet the new requirements of the increasingly changing Saudi society. Because of economic prosperity, education, communication and socialization, the rigid social stratification of the rural areas is disappearing.

The study revealed that residents' socio-economic and educational characteristics have changed and are accompanied by spatial changes in terms of landscape, space and culture. The society is trying to adjust itself to a modern way of life in the globalization era.

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Yahya Mushabab Al-Hader, school teacher and brother of the chief (Shaykh) of Al-Yazeed village 1992.

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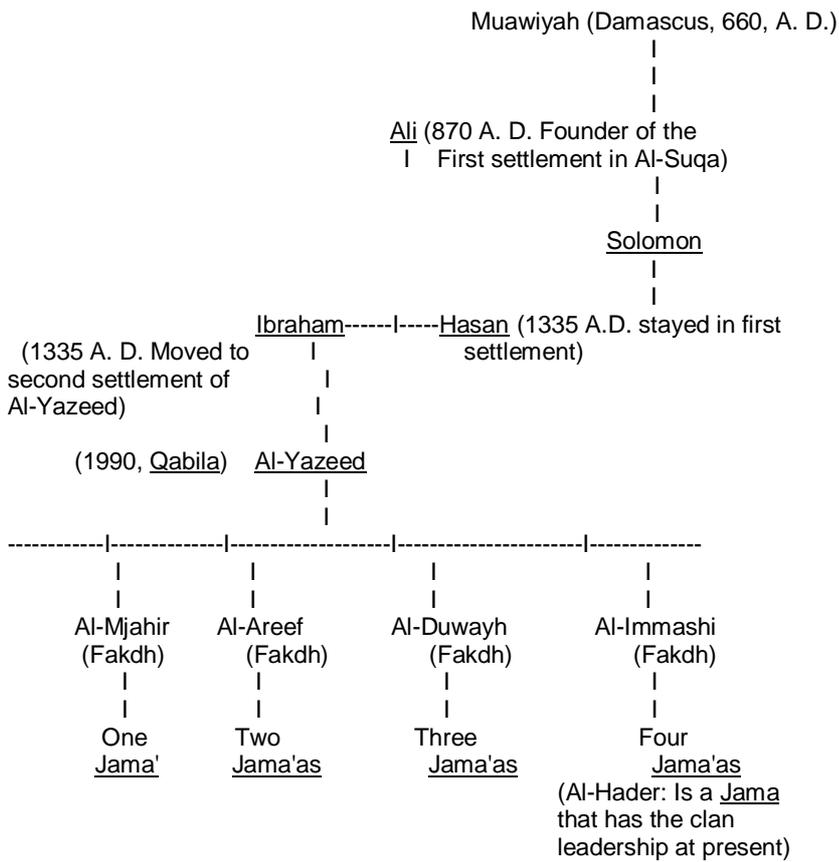


Fig.3. Genealogy of the Al-Yazeed

