

**IN THE EYE OF THE STORM:  
Saudi Aramco and the Corporate Gated Suburban Community Phenomenon**

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August/2007

A thesis submitted to McGill University in fulfillment of the requirements  
of the degree of M.A. in Culture and Values in Education



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*Your file    Votre référence*  
*ISBN: 978-0-494-51411-5*  
*Our file    Notre référence*  
*ISBN: 978-0-494-51411-5*

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Department of Integrated Studies in Education for providing me with an extraordinary educational experience. Additionally, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Joe Kincheloe, and reader, Dr. Shirley Steinberg for their unfettering belief in me and my work, their support, encouragement and yes, “radical love.” I would like to thank my fellow classmates for challenging and moving me in ways I never knew were possible within the classroom. I would like to thank Catherine Hughes for seeing me through my masters from application to graduation, my parents for bringing me into this world and providing me with rich experiences for which I am grateful to reflect upon today, my sisters- for the inspiration and pride that is generated by their respective paths less traveled, Guillaume- for his great love, support and patience, Candice and Evita for their velvet hammers, Teprine and Marie-Andre for their translation work, Todd for his spread-sheet master techniques and finally Chris and the Wiedemers for encouraging me to pursue my masters in the first place.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

Abstract

Introduction

I.	Saudi ARAMCO: Historical Overview (The Macro)	[1]
II.	Saudi – U.S. Relations (The Macro	[3]
III.	Regarding Power and Terror	[5]
IV.	Saudi ARAMCO and the Gated Community Phenomenon	[9]
V.	Identification (The Meso)	[12]
VI.	Autobiographical Overview (The Micro)	[17]
VII.	Saudi Education: Brief Overview	[20]
IX.	Methodology	[30]
X.	Conclusion	[32]

Map of Dhahran Residential Compound (Figure 1-10) [35]

Streets of Dhahran (Figure 11) [45]

A Collection of Stories [46]

A Kings Ego Kills People [47]

Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques [48]

Quiet Revolutions [49]

Empire Building [50]

Midnight Surveillance [51]

Heed...The Empire Is Coming Home to Roost [52]

On Difference [55]

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Your Beard / My Last Name	[56]
On Being a Bridge	[57]
In the Name of Development	[58]
A 10 Year Old's Pocket Full of War Stories	[66]
Untitled (Figure 12)	[67]
Untitled (Figure 13)	[75]
Untitled (Figure 14)	[78]
A Bookshelf Worth Noting	[80]
Another Bookshelf Worth Noting	[81]
On Criticality	[82]
On the Prohibition of Alcohol	[83]
Mecca and the Locust Storms	[84]
Salvation	[85]
Untitled	[86]
On Perpetual Mirage	[87]
Haliburton Hovers	[88]
H2Oil	[89]
Dear Baba,	[90]
Pool Politics	[91]
Untitled	[96]
The Game	[97]
Tyranny of the Status Quo	[98]
References	[99]

## **ABSTRACT**

Dhahran, Saudi Arabia is home to the largest transnational oil corporation and gated suburban residential compound in the world. In exploring Saudi ARAMCO, I will undoubtedly be opening to the centerfold of all socio-cultural, religious, political, economic and pedagogical forces affecting today's geo-political affairs. The theoretical focus of my thesis comes from both a global and critical pedagogy framework that investigates the nature of asymmetrical power relations on micro, meso and macro levels. Additionally, the multiple perspectives I have gained while living in Dhahran and mediating between identities including girl, woman, South-Asian, Canadian, expatriate, student and artist have provided me with particular insights of a hermeneutical, epistemological, narrative, qualitative, phenomenological and visual nature. This has enabled me to perform rich multi-methodological research and informed written analysis. In this way, my thesis hopes to contribute to the examination of this largely un-explored phenomenon.

## **ABSTRAIT**

Dhahran, Arabie Saoudite, est le domicile de la plus importante société pétrolière transnationale et du plus grand quartier de banlieue résidentiel enclavé et protégé au monde; ARAMCO. En examinant cette société Saoudienne, j'explore directement le coeur des forces socio-culturelles, religieuses, politiques, économiques, et pédagogiques qui affectent les activités géopolitiques actuelles. L'accent théorique de ma thèse est issu d'une plateforme pédagogique globale et critique qui analyse la nature asymétrique des relations de pouvoir aux niveaux micro, méso et macro. De plus, les multiples perspectives que j'ai acquises durant mes années vécues à Dharan en ce qui trait à la médiation d'identités entre jeune fille, femme, Asiatique du sud, Canadienne, expatriée, étudiante et artiste m'ont apporté des connaissances de nature herméneutique, épistémologique, narrative, qualitative, phénoménologique et visuelle des plus pertinentes. Le tout m'a permis d'effectuer une recherche multi-méthodologique profonde et une analyse écrite juste et informée. Dès lors, ma thèse espère contribuer, de façon considérable, à la recherche de ce phénomène largement inexploré.

## **INTRODUCTION**

## I. Saudi ARAMCO: Historical Overview: (The Macro)

The history of Dhahran, Saudi Arabia began in 1930, when King Abdul al-<sup>6</sup> Aziz began allowing foreigners to investigate and evaluate the potential oil and mineral resources of his country. By May 29, 1933, the Saudi Arabian Minister of Finance and a lawyer from the Standard Oil Company of California, (SOCAL) signed an agreement in Jeddah giving that firm the exclusive right to explore, prospect, drill for, extract, treat, manufacture, carry away, and export oil and oil products. By 1938, Dammam Well No. 7, also known as *Prosperity Well*, located in the desert along the Persian Gulf, became the first and largest commercial producer of oil in the country, laying rich foundations for further foreign, specifically U.S., exploration. (Nawwab, 1995)

Over the last 70 years, Saudi Arabia's most abundant and controversial natural resource has managed to successfully sustain the largest transnational oil corporation in the world, Saudi ARAMCO (Arabian American Oil Company). The company's headquarters, located on the very site of *Prosperity Well*, and along the Persian Gulf in Dhahran, provides both the professional expertise and facilities for the export of 25% of the world's oil and natural gas resources. This is double the total of Iraq, the world's second largest known reserves, and nearly twelve times the reserves of the United States.

Saudi ARAMCO's oil operations not only encompass that of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, but also include the territorial waters of the Persian Gulf and Red Sea, totaling more than 1.5 million square kilometers, an area larger than the combined land mass of Texas, California, Oklahoma and Utah, or of France, Spain and Germany. (*see* Wikipedia, "Saudi Aramco") Additionally, the company manages virtually all of its country's enormous hydrocarbon enterprise, from the giant Ghawar and Safaniya oil



fields, the world's largest onshore and offshore fields, the leading-edge technology of the Exploration and Petroleum Engineering Center (EXPEC), one of the largest and most modern fleets of supertankers, to its global refining and marketing joint ventures. This type of "enterprise" invariably continues to place Saudi ARAMCO as both a leading player and highly vulnerable crutch for meeting world demands.

Initially, Dhahran was considered a rustic camp, an all-male outpost which provided mainly Saudi Arabian and American oil-men with the bare essentials: workshops and offices in which to do the jobs they were there to do, and basic board and bed. Chevron, Texaco, Exxon and Mobil serviced out its company members to administer technical assistance and training while providing administrative and educational expertise and advice. Although they continue to provide these services today, they have taken a back seat in regards to their ownership of ARAMCO, which underwent a 100% acquisition by Saudis in 1980, hence, Saudi ARAMCO. An adjoining residential compound, however, maintains its 1933 contractual leasing agreement under which employees and their families, (mostly North American) continue to follow corporate regulations rather than the country's *shariah law*.

In this way, the company takes pride in the ownership of the grounds it rests on. It ensures that all residents are protected within its "reliable" international corporate image. To what extent, to whom and at what cost this protection exists, however, is highly questionable. After all, like any corporate entity, it too has specific and long-standing alliances. They are evident within every aspect of daily life.

## II. Saudi – U.S. Relations (The Macro)

Clearly, it would be easy to say that the world is continually being remade by technology and innovation which will save us from our gross reliance on natural oil and gas resources, but the fact of the matter is that petroleum remains the motivating force of industrial society and the current lifeblood of the civilization it has helped to create. It is still the basis for the world's largest business, one that embodies the extremes of risk and reward, as well as the interplay and conflict between entrepreneurship and corporate enterprise, and between private business and the nation-state. It also remains, as was demonstrated in the first (1990-1991) and now the second Gulf War, (2003-present), as an essential element in national power, a major factor in world economies, a critical focus for war and conflict, and a decisive force in international affairs. With that said, it is no surprise that as U.S. dependence on foreign oil increases both at home and within its war efforts abroad, so too does Saudi Arabia's vital role as the only 'friendly' purveyors able to increase production dramatically in times of crisis. Concurrently, the country's highly influential position within the OPEC cartel, continues to claim it as a sentry for today's geo-global markets. So it is that the two pillars of this Saudi-U.S. relationship, oil and security remain fundamentally unchanged as conservative government elites from both nations forge ever-closer bonds. In this way, we see how nation-states have wielded power in determinedly strategizing, protecting, maintaining and nurturing rather perplexing elite government relationships.

In Robert Kaplan's words, "nothing dramatically symbolized this relationship, (Saudi-US), so much so, as the 'TAP line,' the Trans-Arabian pipeline: a massive, suspended cylinder of cement, with a paved road beside it, that carried oil westward from

the Dhahran fields on the Persian Gulf across the northern width of Saudi Arabia to the Mediterranean and Red seas.” Kaplan goes on to state that Ernest Latham, (Jeddah’s U.S. diplomatic staff member during the early 1950’s) noted the TAP line as being “one of the great arteries of Empire, the American Empire in the Middle East I mean, because that’s in fact what it was.” (Kaplan, 1993, pg. 135) Though this grand statement about the powerful alliance between Saudi Arabia and the United States was made as far back as the early 50’s, we must take a moment to understand that though the TAP line’s relevance began to dwindle as a main source of oil exports by the early 1970’s, it is a solid reminder of the often complex and long-standing efforts that empire building in fact suggests.

More importantly, it is essential to note that any discussions today regarding American empire building must address the nature and nuances of “power” itself, on both the macro, meso and micro levels of Saudi/ U.S. relations (Ali, 2002; Cesari, 2004). After all, in exploring dominant power structures within such relationships, one can begin to play an active role in taking the first step to resisting them. “Such resistance is accomplished not only by speaking in gender terms about race, class, sexual and colonial oppression,” (Kincheloe, 2005, pg. 35) but by “expos(ing) and contest(ing) oppressive forms of power as expressed in socio-economic class elitism, Eurocentric ways of viewing the world, patriarchal oppression, and imperialism around the world.” (Kincheloe, 2005, pg. 34)

### III. Regarding Power and Terror

As Kincheloe explains in his *Critical Pedagogy Primer*, “American power operates under the cover of establishing democracy abroad by utilizing colonial and imperialistic means to do so.” (2005, 40) Likewise, it is important to point out that democracy under these contexts does more than take a ‘good will’ approach in spreading its media driven ‘freedom forming’ values abroad, when in reality “its real purpose is to acquire geo-political advantage for future military assaults, economic leverage in international markets, and access to natural resources- as justified in the name of freedom (Kincheloe, 2006). In using the term ‘freedom’ we must turn to Arjun Appadurai’s essay: *Fear of Small Numbers*, which states that ‘freedom’ has indeed justified “a new global, elusive and non-spatialized- indeed virtual new enemy- *Terrorism*.” (pg. 116)

Let me stop for a moment and explain that the need to subject *terrorism* to italics is due to the fact that this term has emerged as a ubiquitous theme of global media flows in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, where scarcely a day goes by without mention of it. The term itself has come to exercise an enormous amount of power amongst those who have chosen to define and determine its extremely liminal spaces. Appadurai, however, defines it as a “quotidian war, war as an everyday possibility, waged precisely to

destabilize the idea that there is an “everyday” for anyone outside the space and time of war. To this, terrorism adds the element of unpredictability, the key to producing constant fear. States that engage in this sort of strategy with respect to their own populations or other populations are rightly viewed as engaged in terrorism itself.

Terror produces its effects by regularly blurring the bounds between the spaces and times of war and peace. It also works by its efforts to disguise its own principles of organization and mobilization. And it is above all devoted to the decimation of order, understood as peace or freedom from violence. Terror, in the name of whatever ideology of equity, liberty, or justice, seeks to install violence as the central regulative principle of everyday life. This is what is terrifying about terror, even beyond its bodily traumas, its spatial promiscuity, its dramas of self-sacrifice, its refusal of reciprocal humanism. Terror is the rightful name for any effort to replace peace with violence as the guaranteed anchor of everyday life. It uses emergency as its routine and values exceptional forms of violence and violation as its norm.” (pg. 32)

Though Appadurai does an exquisite job of visualizing this more or less ephemeral space, it is strangely enough still difficult to find public challenges of its rather pre-packaged Western constructions. Though I will continue to utilize the term to later discuss its relationships to Saudi ARAMCO, I would like to note my stance towards its current subjected typologies. After all, however rarely discussed, issues of race, nationality, colonialism, capitalism, gender, the environment, state power, and media must always be included within the context of discussions pertaining to any political acts of violence.

With that said, if we are to speak of *terrorism* in respect to power, we must also ask some of the following questions: What is state terrorism? When does economic growth become industrial violence? What is cultural terrorism? What are the differences between terrorism, resistance and revolution? Where does terrorism end and freedom

fighting begin? How does occupation complicate our understanding of terrorism? How does the framing of terrorism feed into racism and xenophobia? By asking such questions, we are verily utilizing a critically constructive (Kincheloe, 2006) approach to this heavily loaded term and its multiple issues and usages. This questioning process also enables readers, researchers, teachers and students alike, with the ability to begin to better understand and/or grapple with the nature of fear and the culture of anger in our world today. After all, in challenging the way dominant discourse is constituted and made "common sense", we can begin to unlock the grip that powerful institutions have behind such framing, and provide opportunities to build diverse, inclusive and just communities. By expanding typologies away from those of "(Islamic) religious fundamentalist" and toward multiple meanings, a heterogeneous and open typology of "terrorism(s)" becomes possible.

We must not forget that terror today engages in mobilizing the highly psychological aspects of U.S. empire-building strategies (Ali, 2004). As Aaron David Gresson III states in *America's Atonement, Racial Pain, Recovery Rhetoric, and the Pedagogy of Healing*, "what is needed is a massive, global change in the nature of the society. It is evident in the fact that the United States, having declared a "war on terrorism," has exposed the complexity of ideas preceding and following the war campaign, for instance, in trying to establish a "coalition of aggrieved nations" and then insisting that the United States will act unilaterally when and if it needs to. This dualism says something not only about our society but also about our historical representation of aggressive action (Slotkin 1973) and the ways that individuals are socialized into complicity with the system." (Gresson, 2004) Having said this, we can better understand

how power and position continue to be used through the false justification of rhetoric. These highly cognitive dimensions of the terminologies circulated today (regardless of their ambiguity and therefore resulting indefiniteness), have kept the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia shielded from public scrutiny. That is, only until after the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

Of course, over the last several years after these incidents, the Saudi/U.S. partnership has finally called attention to itself. Historians, filmmakers, artists, writers, comedians and academics from around the world have begun to create a hefty and often entertaining (see Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9-11*) public rapport with this previously taboo subject. With that said, no one has, as yet, dared to reveal the heated and often complex intimacy that is addressed only within the eye of the storm itself: within the gates of Dhahran compound. This is due mostly in part to a highly effective culture of fear that permeates the residential space, and which has only continued to strengthen the very associations and relationships that have kept power in place.

Indeed, it is obvious to note the strong rise in worldwide incidents of violence over the years following the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, for they manage to mark a very real threat while simultaneously establishing an uncanny security effort for Saudi ARAMCO communities and their respective facilities. After all, the most recent acts of violence in respect to Saudi ARAMCO, took place on February 24, 2006, when *Al-Qaida* (who claimed responsibility, as posted on a website often used by the group), dressed in ARAMCO uniform and driving company trucks filled with explosives, entered a side gate in the outer perimeter of the Abqaiq Oil Refinery. The attack was eventually foiled

after two hours of gun fighting, but was sure to serve as a red-light warning to perhaps future attacks on oil refineries in the country.

Despite the fact that the attempted attack had increased oil by \$2.00 a barrel, a moderate to severe attack on Abqaiq's refinery would destabilize the world market irrevocably. "For the first two months after an attack, productions there would slow from 6.8 million barrels to 1 million barrels, a loss equivalent of about one-third of America's daily consumption of crude oil. For seven months following the attack, daily production would remain as much as 4 million barrels below normal- a reduction roughly equal to what all the OPEC partners were able to effect during their 1973 embargo." (Baer, 2003) This lapse within the oil market would be felt by the world over and place unbelievable pressure on southern nations while simultaneously creating an undetermined amount of vulnerability within the U.S. government and market.

So it is that Saudi ARAMCO, with its many facilities and communities, begins to emerge as a critical node on the world map. In having better understood this corporate political entity and its function at a larger, macro level, we can finally begin to enter into those more intimate areas and domains (Dhahran and its three other respective compounds) with greater understanding. In this way, we may begin to tackle the more nuanced notions of power and oppression on the meso and micro levels.

#### IV. Saudi ARAMCO and the Corporate Gated Community Phenomenon

Saudi ARAMCO employees and their respective families live within four company compounds today: Dhahran, Ras Tanurah, Abqaiq and Udhalayah. Each



compound plays a specific role to its adjoining oil related facilities. Abqaiq (also known as Baqayq meaning “father of the sand flies”) is not only vital for Saudi ARAMCO but the world’s oil market. “After crude products (oil, natural gas, water, sand, etc.) are processed by the G.O.S.Ps (Gas Oil Separation Plants), the sour oil (containing H<sub>2</sub>S, hydrogen sulphide) is sent by pipeline to Abqaiq. The Abqaiq site stabilizes the oil then pumps it to Ras Tanurah, the world’s largest offshore loading facility where it is exported, or further refined at a domestic refinery. Abqaiq also has N.G.L (Natural Gas Liquids) plants that extract natural gas liquids (butane, propane, hexane, etc.) from the oil. These N.G.L's are stabilized by Abqaiq, then sent to other sites for further separation and purification.” (See Wikipedia, “Abqaiq”) In this way, Abqaiq is considered the world’s largest oil processing facility and home to 60% of Saudi Arabia’s total oil production.

Udhaliyah, however, is the compound of Saudi ARAMCO and was originally designated as a bachelor camp set up for drilling crews. In the late seventies it was expanded extensively to accommodate ‘family status’ western employees. Beginning in 1977, the compound began taking in additional family status employees as the Gas Gathering Program began to take shape. Providing housing for ARAMCO’s Gas Projects Division and their principal contractors, Fluor Arabia, Santa Fe, C.E. Lummis, and others, the town’s expansion was designed by a California architecture firm that included green belts, adobe style town houses, and a new kindergarten through ninth grade (or “K–9”) school. The compound thrived until it was mothballed in the late eighties following the completion of Phase IIA of a Gas Program (see Wikipedia, “Udhaliyah”) and then reopened in the early nineties near the end of

Operation Desert Storm. Over the following years, management kept the compound open and quietly down played any connection between Western personnel and the US military presence in the kingdom. To this end, the first residents of the newly reopened compound were later faced with the daunting task of making the ghost town feel like home.

As threats of attack and attempt of attack continued to rise against Saudi ARAMCO, the company began an appeal to the Saudi government for an armed security presence around all of its compounds, including Udhaliyah, despite its remote location. A reinforced company sized detachment of Saudi National Guard forces equipped with Commando armored vehicles were set up at intervals around the outer perimeter gates. What had once been considered a relatively open atmosphere at Udhaliyah, began to give way to an improvised walled compound, with a fence separation of single status male employees from the family status residential area. The construction of a new and architecturally attractive Mosque within the compound (considered 'secular soil' like the rest of the residential complexes) brought in local 'outside' attention, principally the local religious authorities, (*Mutawa*, or "decency" committee) and much of the previous privileges associated with these respective compounds began to disappear within Udhaliyah. Restrictions on the movements of single female employees, particularly medical employees, began to take place on a frequent basis as Udhaliyah depleted in resident population size. Today, Udhaliyah houses one hundred Western employees. For this reason, the compound is walking the fine line of closure for the second time.

Unlike Udhalayah, however, Dhahran is considered the most *active*, and is determined as the largest of the four corporate communities in both size (30 sq. miles) and population. The compounds, however, are all similar in the sense that they are all often characterized by those are familiar with it as a gated corporate Levittown, evoking images of a 1950's southern California suburb in which employees and their families live within a gated complex, complete with cul-de-sacs and streets named after those familiar to the U.S such as Spruce, Holly, Cherry, Pine, Walnut and Prairie. There exist trim, one- and two- story homes, identical in style, surrounded by lawns set off with hedges, trees, and flowers. The communities have recreational facilities and other amenities of modern North-American life, (*Saudi Aramco and Its World*, pg. 261) in addition to two schools, designed for children of expatriate employees and structured in the way of a main stream U.S. public school system. For years they too have been protected both by U.S. and Saudi air bases, several Saudi security forces, private in-compound security guards and a secret service. Due to strict regulations regarding access and security, it is often difficult to find public photographic/video documentation of the area. What has resulted is an isolationism and political climate today that is ever more heightened.

#### V. Identification (The Meso)

Because Dhahran functions as the care-taker and administrative hub for Saudi ARAMCO and indeed the geo-global market, the type of protection it receives through its dense security programs from both the Saudi and U.S. governments has become understandable to those whose stakes are involved (the 1<sup>st</sup> Gulf War being a fine example of U.S. security presence within the country). Issues of this nature over the last decade

and half, however, have come to the country and company's forefront of expenditure. For example, *Identix Incorporated*, the world's leading multi-biometrics security technology company, released a statement in October, 2003 to the effect that it would begin to provide identity management solutions for Saudi ARAMCO's more than 54,000 employees. This technology would facilitate employee enrollment via fingerprint biometric ID cards for physical and logistical access, conduct transactions and obtain ID's. The ID management system is believed to be the largest live scan system award in Saudi Arabia to date. <http://ir.11id.com/releasedetail.cfm?ReleaseID=208682>. This is of course but one security measure that has been taken into effect over the last few years..Dhahran compound has also invested a great deal financially to heighten its number of security forces while concurrently building 20 foot cement walls around the compound and many of its public buildings, including its elementary and middle schools.

It is important to note that before *Identix* biometric identification cards took effect, employees and their dependent were expected to carry in-compound identification cards at all times and for the purpose of entering all public buildings and/or access areas. The cards were somewhat similar to State ID's in the U.S., as they contained a headshot, fingerprint, birth date, blood type, address, phone number, religious affiliation, employee name and identification number. The difference between this card and others, however, was located on the bottom right hand corner under "STATUS."

Each employee had a number associated with his or her individual status: a number that ranged anywhere between +8 through +18. It determined their rank in the company, reflected their class in the community, the location of their home on the compound and ultimately their salary. Each salary was determined by the currency of

each employee's respective passport, therefore one's "worth" became inextricably linked to one's place of origin. With advanced technologies such as biometric live scanning systems to ensure even further safety, *Identix* has compounded this measuring system by not only monitoring and surveillance, but also by creating a massive curtailing of resident mobility. Additionally, creating such identification systems have left these compounds and communities of people divided and ruled under a most problematic economic, social, cultural and political power structure, wrought with misconceptions and assumptions about ethnicity, race, class, gender and religion.

Indeed, the severance between groups within the compound is both noticeable and invisible, as it weaves through a relatively diversified Dhahran international expatriate landscape. Employees and their dependents come from around the world including but not limited to: Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, the Philippines, the U.S., Canada, Britain, South Africa, Australia, Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Jordan, and bring with them a complex set of phenomenological and epistemological understandings: understandings that are at once in conflict with long standing U.S. corporate structures and Saudi law- indeed making little room for dialogue. The subtlety of these power plays (or "power blocs", to use the phrase that John Fiske (1993) aptly coined), continue to permeate this particular political situation and heavily weigh into the expatriate experience. In *The Sign of the Burger, McDonalds and the Culture of Power* Joe Kincheloe explains that Fiske's term is used:

"to describe social transformations around which power politics operate in contemporary society. Arguing that power-wielders do not constitute a particular class or well-defined social category, Fiske speaks of a power bloc as an

ever-shifting set of strategic and tactical social alliances. Such alliances are arranged unsystematically whenever social situations arise that threaten the position of allies, or whenever it is in the interest of the participants in the bloc to support mutually beneficial positions.” (p. 121)

Do residents feel safer now than ever before, now that they can identify and determine who enters into and leaves the gates of Dhahran? Does life go on as usual, though it is evident that the fear of attack due to continued exposure is a worry? These are questions that do not have concise answers, but one thing is true: public scrutiny of the political, social, cultural, economic and cognitive dimensions of this space whether within Saudi Arabia or outside of it, would mean generating undue attention. Tight media censorship within Saudi Arabia keeps compound residents in the dark and ignorant of the severity of the crisis. This type of information censorship tends to dis-empower, silence and scare people, creating instead a response and atmosphere of suspicion, frustration and even anger. The risks of deportation, loss of employment and industry black listing compound the concerns generated by its residents and those previously associated with the space.

Additionally, today’s political vocabulary and resultant societal polarization regarding *fear* and *anger*, *good* and *evil*, *terrorist* and *state sympathizer* are highly complex matters, yet often tend to be over looked and over-simplified under these particular institutional and social paradigms. Appadurai states:

“In every case, the geography of anger is not a simple map of action and reaction, minoritization and resistance, nested hierarchies of space and site, neat sequences of cause and effect. Rather, these geographies are the spatial outcome of

complex interactions between faraway events and proximate fears, between old histories and new provocations, between rewritten borders and unwritten orders. The fuel of these geographies is certainly mass mediated (by the news media, by the Internet, by political speeches and messages, by incendiary reports and documents), but its sparks are the uncertainty about the enemy within and the anxiety about the always incomplete project of national purity. The geography of anger is produced in the volatile relationship between maps of national and global politics (largely produced by official institutions and procedures) and the maps of sacred national space (produced by political and religious parties and movements). (2006, 100)

As someone who continues to hold ties within the industry while concurrently living and studying within North America, it is important to note my positionality, my personal struggles and my fears regarding these particular complexities. They have both enabled and disabled me in multiple ways. They have provided me with particular insights into the nature of these complexities while simultaneously reaffirming the roles of both *oppressed* and *oppressor* (as described by Paulo Freire). In this way, they have invariably forced me to make some interesting decisions regarding my writing style and the manner in which I have chosen to present information within my thesis. (Please see *methodology* for further explanation).

## VI. Autobiographical Overview (The Micro)

I attended Saudi ARAMCO schools, played in its Halliburton-sponsored ball parks, its stretches of vast desert, checked out books from its highly censored libraries, drove down its lush palm-lined streets, constantly negotiated between its corporate regulations and the Kingdom's *shariah* laws while mediating between my identities as girl, woman, Muslim, Canadian, South-Asian, expatriate, student and artist.

To give you an adequate understanding of my relationship to this space, it is important to note that my parents, who are first generation South Indian Canadian immigrants, lived in Dhahran for a total of 22 years, while I spent some of my most formative years, (between the ages of 2-14) being raised there. After this point, due to the fact that the company did not provide any education for expatriate children beyond the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, (a tactic used to re-assimilate North American expatriate children back into 'their motherland'), I was sent to an up-state New York private all-girls boarding school. During my years attending Emma Willard and later, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, I managed to go home to Dhahran two to three times per year. The boarding school I had attended was notorious for being the first secondary education system for women in North America, and made sure to familiarize me with the notions of western feminism. This provided me not only with fascinating insights into the diverse issues raised by feminists in both eastern and western discourse and practice, but also created a challenging dialogue between myself and my parents as I began defining myself as a young woman albeit what these two often butting ideologies hoped to achieve by indoctrinating me.



Before my departure for boarding school, however, and like any other expatriate child living within the confines of the compound, I attended the Dhahran elementary and middle schools: education systems that were/ are no different than today's mainstream U.S. public school system. History classes taught mainly U.S. history with the assistance of usually expired Houghton-Mifflin textbooks). Occasionally, social studies classes touched upon the history of the Middle East, but to the extent of teaching only the "rise" of the Ottoman Empire. Upper level English classes were designed to study American classics and dead white poets. Second language classes were offered, but only in French and Spanish. Arabic was offered, but only to visible minorities who came from the Middle East or North Africa.

Because Saudis were not allowed to attend the Dhahran schools, there was a divide between expatriate children and their local Saudi counterparts. Communication between these two groups, if I may even categorize them as such, was extremely rare. In fact, highly negative stigmas were attached to those expatriates who ventured into mingling with "locals" or even with those unlike themselves. Mid-day recess only affirmed similar divisions: divisions between male and female, black, white, American, Canadian, India, Pakistani, Pilipino, Chinese, Muslim, Christian, Mormon, Jew (etc...). And so it was, that even as a young child, coming into my own, I felt surrounded by limitations that ranged from social and cultural segregation to class hierarchy- all of which only reaffirmed the oppression that existed within the community.

In fact, society, education and schooling within Dhahran did not provide one with the necessary tools to understand others or "the other" (Capra, 1991) for that matter. Instead, it generally bred the same types of fear and anger I discussed earlier in the

chapter. It tried its best to stay away from naming power and oppression under any circumstance, it made sure to sustain top-down standards, (Freire, 1970) memory-based classroom practices, positivistic attitudes, homogenous distinctions and epistemological positions of a Western Cartesian Baconian nature (Kincheloe, 2005) It reaffirmed the divisions between groups as being an integral part of societal structure while simultaneously assuming that everyone was the same- regardless of race, class or gender. Neither the school system nor its teachers wanted to name nor confront *difference* let alone discuss the very politics of such a term. (Ghosh, 2004)

It is no surprise, then, that being educated within such a system dis-empowered me as a minority group member and silenced me on multiple levels. It left me questioning and at times even despising my very identity without providing me with the necessary support nor grounding for which to do so. I did not feel that there was anything I could say or do when my teachers made assumptions about my abilities and intelligence or classmates looked down upon or made fun of me for being Indian or “brown.” I did not know how to stand up for myself in the face of racial slurs and cutting class remarks. Racism, xenophobia, homophobia, sexual oppression, and so forth, were considered normal and acceptable by standards both inside and outside the compound. Though I was terribly unhappy about how I was treated and uncomfortable about what was happening around me, I felt completely powerless at the time- unable to find ways in which to grapple with this sense of loss of self within these long-standing power structures.

Of course, my parents knew better than to leave me completely to the mercy of this type of education. And so it was that I received a rather oppressive educational

experience, but came home everyday to a critically and socially engaged and challenging home schooling experience. It was at home that I learned how to think about and analyze situations from multiple perspectives and angles. It was at home that I began making art about my experiences- using the medium as my means for contemplation, reflection and action against what I was unable at the time to address within the school day. My love for the art-making practice - and my ability to express myself confidently within it- followed me throughout my childhood years and into adulthood where I began to finally give it the attention it needed- by developing my practices, pushing personal boundaries both inside art school, and within my professional art career. The art-making, and indeed creative writing processes, enabled me to express myself and the very issues I grappled with on a daily basis. They played an integral part in shaping and reshaping my views, and became a proactive way through which I could intelligently explain and express my experiences. Furthermore, these methodologies continued to challenge me in the spheres of learning and teaching and indeed research. Finally, they provided me with ways in which to critically and socially engage in the world, something I found difficult to do under the guise of the traditional classroom space.

## VII. Saudi Education: Brief Overview

As mentioned earlier and within my autobiographical overview, the various power dynamics exhibited between groups has influenced the psyche of generations of youth. Most influential in this campaign has been the manner in which education systems in both Saudi schools and U.S. schools have operated within the country. It is true that

although Saudi Arabia has been quite successful over the last 70 years in introducing formal education to its population and significantly reducing illiteracy rates, there are some holes in the educational fabric. "The discord between religious and secular schooling, between academic learning and the job market, and between women's education and their role in public life are important sources of tension in society" (Bahgat, p. 111) that have verily threatened the stability of the ruling regime. For this reason, it is critical to understand the history of education in Saudi Arabia, as well as the factors mentioned above, in order to better understand my rather isolating expatriate educational experience.

The modern era of Saudi education began with the Ministry of Education in 1953 as: "control over education was transferred from the local imam to the central government and functions previously assumed by the tribal or local community leaders, were taken over by the government. Education, welfare and employment came to be provided directly by the state to the individual citizen, allowing the Saudi state to permeate all aspects of its citizens' life. A process that greatly enhanced the control mechanisms of the state." (Prokop, p. 561)

The monarchy's achievement in establishing high literacy rates from one generation to another is unprecedented. In 1950 about 97.5 percent of Saudi Arabia's population was illiterate. (Russett, p. 224) By 1995, the percentage had dropped to 37.2 percent. (UNESCO, Statistical Yearbook, p. 1-29) This shift in literacy rates can be explained by one factor, oil. The revenues received by this resource enabled the country to establish institutions of higher learning at a rapid rate as approximately a quarter of total government expenditure was dedicated to education. (Prokop, p. 560) The

immediate need for skilled manpower was massive, however, and could not keep pace with the country's economic development.

Expatriates began sweeping into the country as they were invited to build a state-of-the-art economic infrastructure. Quickly though, Saudi Arabia's population became overrun with foreign labor. Over the last 20 years, there has been a tremendous struggle to nationalize the labor force, and so the government has begun implementing Saudization. "The general goal of this policy is to make it more expensive and harder for private corporations to hire foreigners and simultaneously to raise the technical skills and qualifications of the indigenous labor force." (Bahgat , p. 108) Unfortunately, nepotism and a general lack of educational qualifications on the part of Saudis permeated many high paying professional positions as affirmative action programs were set into place. In order for successful implementation of this policy to occur, Bahgat states that it requires at least three steps. First, a slow process of changing public attitude toward vocational education; second, a balance between technical training and 'academic' learning needs to be achieved, and most importantly women's integration into the labor force and public life in general. (Bahgat, p. 108)

Because of the constant push towards religious teachings in the sphere of education, there are a large number of graduates from religious universities or with a degree in social sciences and humanities "who experience great difficulties in coping with the complex challenges posed by the demands of international economic integration. Growing unemployment is becoming a serious problem. Academic performance and technical skills are increasingly important and many positions require proficiency in English, thus favoring those who went abroad or studied at a private school." (Prokop, p.

577) There already seem to be feelings of resentment and marginalization against those who have attended a traditional educational background. This tension is likely to become more intense, for two reasons. "First, the high population growth rate means that there will be more graduates and more job seekers. The current economic policies fail to generate enough jobs to keep up with the growing number of young people. Second, the growing need to diversify and privatize the economic structure requires a more skilled and professional labor force." (Bahgat, p. 111) This current educational system does not enable the indigenous population to meet these needs.

Although higher educational institutions were being built and filled during the mid 1950's, as noted above, there was a general sense that it was not academically strong enough. Saudis began studying abroad throughout the 1960's, 70's and 80's, at first leaving for other Arab countries such as Egypt and Lebanon, and then increasingly to the United States and Europe. With the continued expansion of universities, incentives to stay were established by the government, by making available a wider range of course offerings while also providing free tuition, textbooks, transportation, additional scholarships and even post-graduation land inheritance. Although this type of support has helped to keep many students in the country, there still exists a strong disparity within the number of graduates entering the country's small yet highly competitive job market.

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Saudi Arabia's significance as the heartland of Islam and its role as the guardian of the holy cities Mecca and Medina has provided the country with the utmost religious importance in the Muslim world and placed more pressure on the government to follow Islamic teachings. It is, after all, one of the few Muslim countries that depends on

Shariah law as the foundation of its legal system. In this context, the first goal of the state and educational institutions is to produce a “good Muslim.” A large part of the curriculum is directed toward achieving this goal, and forms of mass media are utilized for the central purpose of strengthening Islamic teachings. The Kingdom’s Educational Policy of 1969 outlines the objectives of the country’s program by stating that the guiding principle of education “is the duty of acquainting the individual with his God and religion and adjusting his conduct in accordance with the teaching of religion, in fulfillment of the needs of society and in achievement of the nation’s objectives.” (Prokop, p. 565) Furthermore education should “promote the spirit of loyalty to Islamic law by denouncing any system or theory that conflicts with it and by behaving with honesty and in conformity with Islamic tenets” (Education in Saudi Arabia, ed. 1991, p. 9) while also “developing [the students] feeling of responsibility to understand his rights and duties...and planting in him the love of his country and loyalty of his rulers.” (al-Sharaf, 1992)

These policies are being implemented by incorporating religious education as a basic element in all sectors of primary, intermediate and secondary levels of education, as well as in all years and subjects of higher learning. Saudi schoolbooks emphasize the importance of obedience (within an Islamic context) as a duty of every citizen. History is taught with the intention of creating a strong Saudi identity by glorifying and idealizing accounts of Islamic empires, particularly during the first centuries of Islam’s expansion. The events of the Arab world however, such as the rise of pan-Arabism, the Gulf War and other conflicts or revolutions in neighboring countries are not taught. Teaching about the “other”, other cultures, ideologies and religions reflect a Wahhabi-inspired world-

view, a world divided into believers and nonbelievers. As Capra (1991) explains “ordinarily we divide the world into separate objects- us and them- because we are not aware of a basic unity. While this division may be useful in helping us cope, it is not a fundamental feature of reality.” The very teachings of believer vs. nonbeliever and us vs. them have created a severe disparity amongst east and west today. Without examining “other cultures, other states, other histories, other experiences, traditions, peoples, and destinies” (Said, 1989, p. 216) in an informed manner, one will never be capable of seeing difference as “a dynamic human force, one which is enriching rather than threatening to the defined self, where there are shared goals.” (Lorde, 1984, p. 45)

Alas, during the early 1980’s and 90’s the West turned a blind eye and supported directly and indirectly the activities of Saudi Arabia abroad. The Kingdom began building and funding conservative religious movements, schools, universities, charity organizations, new mosques and Islamic cultural centers. Saudi-financed schools abroad began recruiting students from all over the globe to train a new generation of mosque leaders and clerics, who too would one day return to their respective countries, open schools or religious centers and spread Wahhabism. This was a way for the monarchy to preserve the religious foundations of the Regime.

The close relationship between both ulama (religious authorities) and government made for periodic government-sanctioned religious movements. The first of these came when the Saudi state was seriously challenged during the siege of the Great Mosque in 1979. The government reacted by reinforcing Islamic ideologies by giving considerable power and funding to the ulama. Their influence in the educational and social sphere,



however, was particularly felt in the field of women's education and the role of women in public life.

In 1960, seven years after the establishment of the Ministry of Education, there began talk of female participation. The establishment of girl's schools was met with a great deal of resistance though, particularly in the most conservative areas. For instance, "in an effort to block the establishment of girls schools in Qasim in central Najd, about 200 members of ulama and tribal sheikhs came to Riyadh to meet with officials arguing that such schools conflicted with the customs of Saudi society and threatened to do whatever was necessary to prevent these schools from opening." (Al-Hegdhly, p. 69) As a compromise and to pacify the ulama, King Faisal at the time placed female education under their supervision. Today, the committee works under the title of the General Presidency of Girl's Education (GPGE). The GPGE policy stipulates that education should provide a woman with the skills "to fulfill her role in society as a wife and mother...(and prepare her for) other activities that are compatible with her nature, such as teaching girls, nursing, and other activities needed by the society." (The Educational Policy in the Saudi Arabian Kingdom, p. 28-29) It is important to note here that Saudi Arabia's conservative attitudes towards the education of women did not come out of the influence of Islam per se but because of the traditions that grew up around it. A historical response to this took place in 1969 when a delegation from an ultra-conservative district visited King Faisal in protest against the building of a girl's school in their area. They declared that the education of girls was against their religion and that it would corrupt their daughters, but when the King replied by asking if there was anything in the Quran

that forbade the education of women they were forced to acknowledge that there was not and were reduced to silence.

The expansion of girl's education did not mean the disappearance of traditional attitudes towards the place of women in society or of the fear that girl's education was a Western-inspired innovation. "An examination of textbooks for girls' schools, especially at the elementary level, demonstrates that the GPGE worked hard to ensure that traditional values in society were upheld and that the freedoms of foreign women were not presented as admirable." (Al-Rawaf, p. 291)

Despite the large amount of female students who receive an education in Saudi Arabia today, there are still a number of serious limitations placed upon them. Restrictions are curricular in that many courses that are open to men (i.e. political science, engineering or agriculture) are not open to women, economic in that less money is spent on women's education and the equipping of their libraries and laboratories than on men's, cultural in the sense that they have to be driven to their institution by a man but must be taught by a woman (or by a man through CCTV (closed circuit television)), and occupational in that only a limited number of jobs are open to women and that only a small percentage of women are therefore able to find work.

Nevertheless, rapid changes have been made in the realm of girls' education over the last three decades. Vast oil revenues have financed massive educational programs in building and training from the 1960's onwards; Western-educated male Saudi graduates have increasingly wanted to marry well-educated Saudi women, and now a generation of educated women has emerged with aspirations for their daughters that greatly exceed that which their mothers had for them.

As much as there exists a constant push on the part of the ulama against any western influences, including education for women, it is interesting to note the contradictory position they hold as the ulama continue to stand hand in hand with the monarchy and in turn the United States. It is impossible to shelter each Saudi generation from the effects of westernization and globalization, as access to foreign media sources through travel, internet and satellite television have opened new channels of information which have circulated within the tightly controlled Saudi media. Everyone, including the young generation, “is exposed to outside influences while being inculcated with the traditional ideology. The heavy stress on upholding morality and tradition, central to Saudi teachings, are often in stark contradiction to the daily realities and global developments.” (Prokop, p. 570) It is the speed at which the country has developed in its struggles to keep up with the rest of the world that has in fact created such disconnect.

After international pressures post September 11, 2001, the Ministry of Education set up a commission to study and possibly revise the religious curriculum to rewrite those parts that incite hostility towards others and to adapt subject matter to current modernizing trends. The Saudi Minister of Education stated that there should be two phases to the educational development plan, first to “focus on ridding books of the unnecessary materials and correcting errors... second to encourage creative thinking and self-learning by providing young people with the skills and materials necessary for modern life, of course within the framework of the Islamic religion.” (Gulf News, Dubai, 7 March 2002) However, this plan is short of addressing any link between curriculum and extremism. The Saudi Minister of Education, instead declared the following in a 2002 Gulf News Broadcasting interview:

“it is of great importance to utilize those impacts [9/11] to serve our community. We do not claim that we are living on an isolated island, as the whole world has become a small global village. However, our national educational curricula never urged extreme thinking.” (Gulf News, Dubai, March 7, 2002).

Many Saudis today believe that the most urgent changes to be addressed within the educational sector exist within content itself. Although dialogue has begun, given the current political situation, it is increasingly difficult for locals to exhibit any sign of resistance –in calling for such change. The ulama of course, cautions the government by stating that any revision of religious or other curricula is demanding “a kind of political suicide.” As Michael Prokop quotes from her interview in February, 2002 with Saad al-Faqih, director of the Movement of Islamic Reform in Arabia (MIRA), “imposing change from the outside would destroy the whole effort and backfire. The religious opposition may view any revision of the curriculum as a sign of weakness on part of the rulers and another sign of its subservience to America.” (Interview with Saad al-Faqih, Feb. 2002)

Resistance to ‘outside’ pressures for curriculum change is not a surprise, but with continued efforts by locals to provide dialogue, a later far more encompassing discussion about national identity, the political future of the country and the relationship between the government, the ulama and the people may eventually take center stage. Exposing and overcoming stereotypes must be made if there is to be any resolve between east and west. The role of the media is tantamount in establishing intercultural dialogue, and it becomes clear once again that “intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, must not be used to only fulfill self-serving academic purposes, but ought to face up to the problems that need

solving urgently.” (Bielefeldt, p. 47) According to Yasamin El-Rifai’s account in her Paper entitled Peace Education: The Key to Sustainable Peace in the Middle East, “media and education together constitute the highest potential for culture transformation from a war culture to one of peace. It is important to therefore detect the failures and be aware of the dangers presented by these approaches in order to overcome them.” (p.17)

## IX. Methodology

For too long, educators and academia in general have been trapped within a discourse that excludes the majority. Like many worlds, the art world included- a vocabulary has been sustained and facilitated that often remains difficult to access by the majority. Coming from the visual art space has been incredibly helpful for my work as a writer. It has provided me with the ability to discuss both critical and complex educational theories through the art of informed storytelling, (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004) through the framework of human experience (Mitchell, 2005) and the lens of critically engaged visual discourse (Cary and Carter, 2004; Epstein, 2006). By utilizing hermeneutic, phenomenological, experimental, autobiographical and historical research methodologies in producing this body of work, I not only hope to engage ever-wider audiences, but also hope to continue to actively utilize and support multi-methodological (Kincheloe, 2005) research approaches, which are integral if we are to understand complex case studies such as those similar to Saudi ARAMCO.

The specificities of my multi-methodological research, as mentioned before, have entailed the use of both narrative and interpretive hermeneutical research. I define narrative research as the process of understanding experience as lived and told stories that

successfully capture and examine complex personal and human dimensions that cannot be otherwise quantified. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004)

Additionally, I have conducted textual and historical analysis (Moisio, Suoranta, Tobin, 2006; Berry & Kincheloe 2004) in order to address the socially constructed realities, experiences and perspectives of those residing within Dhahran. Because Saudi ARAMCO and indeed the gated corporate suburban community phenomenon provide such a unique, uncertain and complex set of understandings, it has been imperative to utilize methods that reflect such sensitivities in an authentic manner. The historical analytical process requires one to be able to discern how it is actively mediated by individual or group philosophies, ideologies and politics, while paying close attention to the nuances of power and oppression within such epistemological practices.

Over the course of the following 50 pages, I would like to invite readers to enter into a pivotal lived experience, one that will provide enriching insight into a particular geo-political situation. Having said this, I would like to reassure you that by no means are these stories to remain only formally illustrative. On the contrary, I hope to use this space as a means to provide a growth of dialogue, aimed at the heart of today's social justice and human rights issues. Each piece of writing, be it in the form of a brief statement, a short vignette or a part of a larger story, aims to allow readers to traverse a complex multi-perspectival moment. These moments can be as strong as a child's experience of war or as subtle as a description of what seems to be just another suburb in Southern California. It is through these moments that I will begin to unravel the deeper manifestations and constructions of identity and indeed humanness. After all, no story is

worth telling if it is not to challenge the reader on psychological, emotional and intellectual levels.

## X. Conclusion

In expressing the complexities of Saudi ARAMCO and its corporate gated suburban community phenomenon, I hope to bring about deeper understanding to present-day concerns while facilitating ever-wider dialogue. My renewed understandings of “dialogue” within the educational context have emerged from that which was emphasized throughout Paulo Freire’s career. According to him, “In order to understand the meaning of dialogical practice, we have to put aside the simplistic understanding of dialogue as a mere technique. Dialogue does not represent a somewhat false path that I attempt to elaborate on and realize in the sense of involving the ingenuity of the other. On the contrary, dialogue characterizes an epistemological relationship. Thus, in this sense, dialogue is a way of knowing and should never be viewed as a mere tactic to involve students in a particular task. We have to make this point very clear. I engage in dialogue not necessarily because I like the other person. I engage in dialogue because I recognize the social and not merely the individualistic character of the process of knowing. In this sense, dialogue presents itself as an indispensable component of the process of both learning and knowing.” (Freire, 1970) In this way, and furthermore, dialogue continues to be shaped and reshaped according to its subject and is experienced in multiple ways and at multiple levels of our micro, meso and macro understandings. In utilizing the art-making and creative writing processes, I am participating in a dialogue that is meant to engage readers at multiple interpretive levels, as interpretation, and the

study of one's interpretation of any given presented material, constitutes a dialogue in and of itself.

Thus, the unique dialogical process between subject and self has been extremely critical to the research and writing process. The multiple perspectives I have gained have provided me with particular insights into the nature of corporate structures- the gated community phenomenon- and a new era of the oil crisis. The constant study and negotiation of such spaces have enabled me with a rich means through which to reflect in active and empowering ways. Most importantly, these experiences have narratologically described life within the eye of the storm, within the confines of Saudi ARAMCO's corporate/ residential headquarters. In accomplishing this, I hope I have opened to the centerfold of the socio-cultural, religious, political, economic and pedagogical forces affecting today's geo-political affairs.



**MAP OF DHAHRAN RESIDENTIAL COMPOUND**



Figure 1

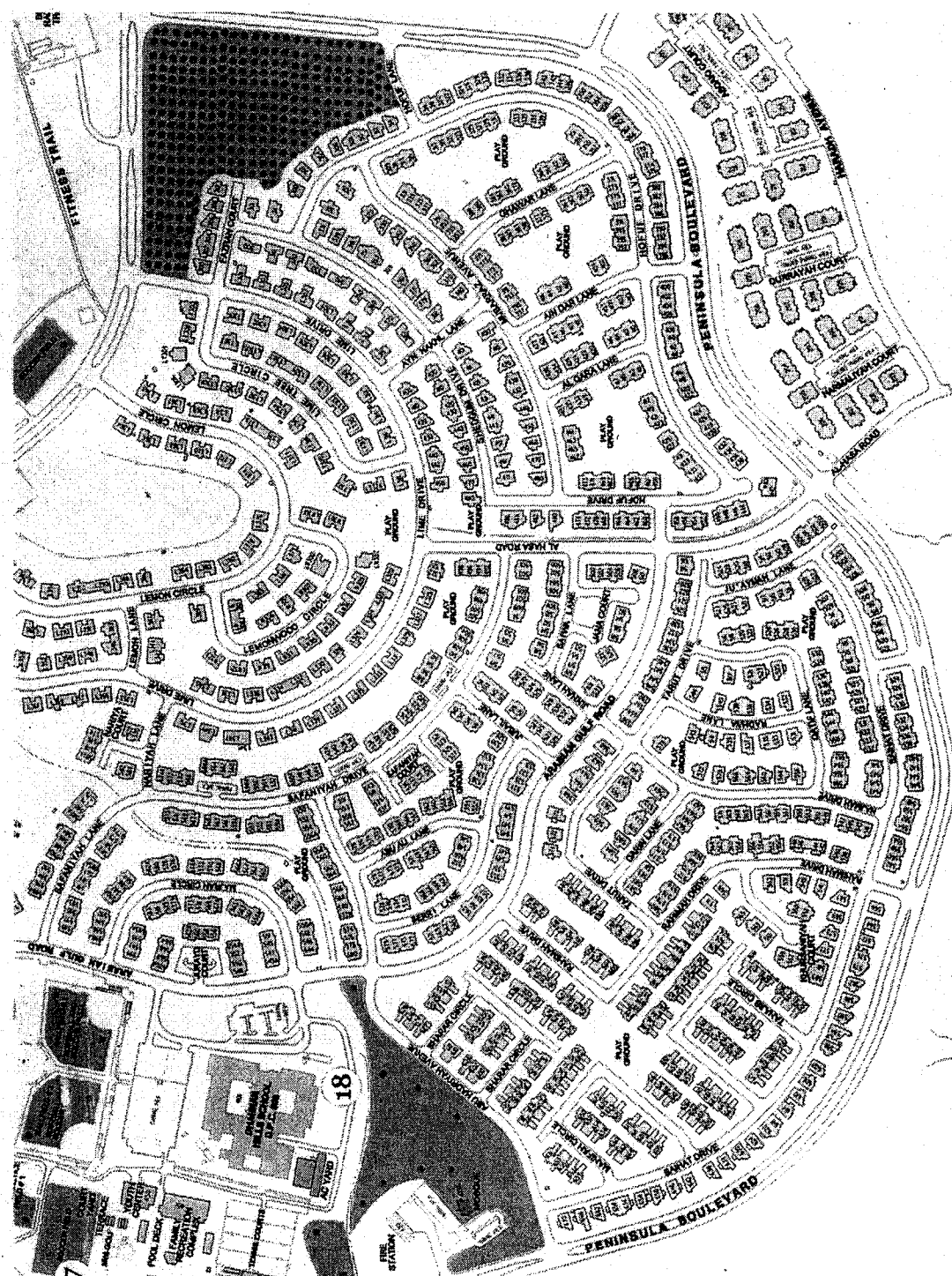


Figure 2



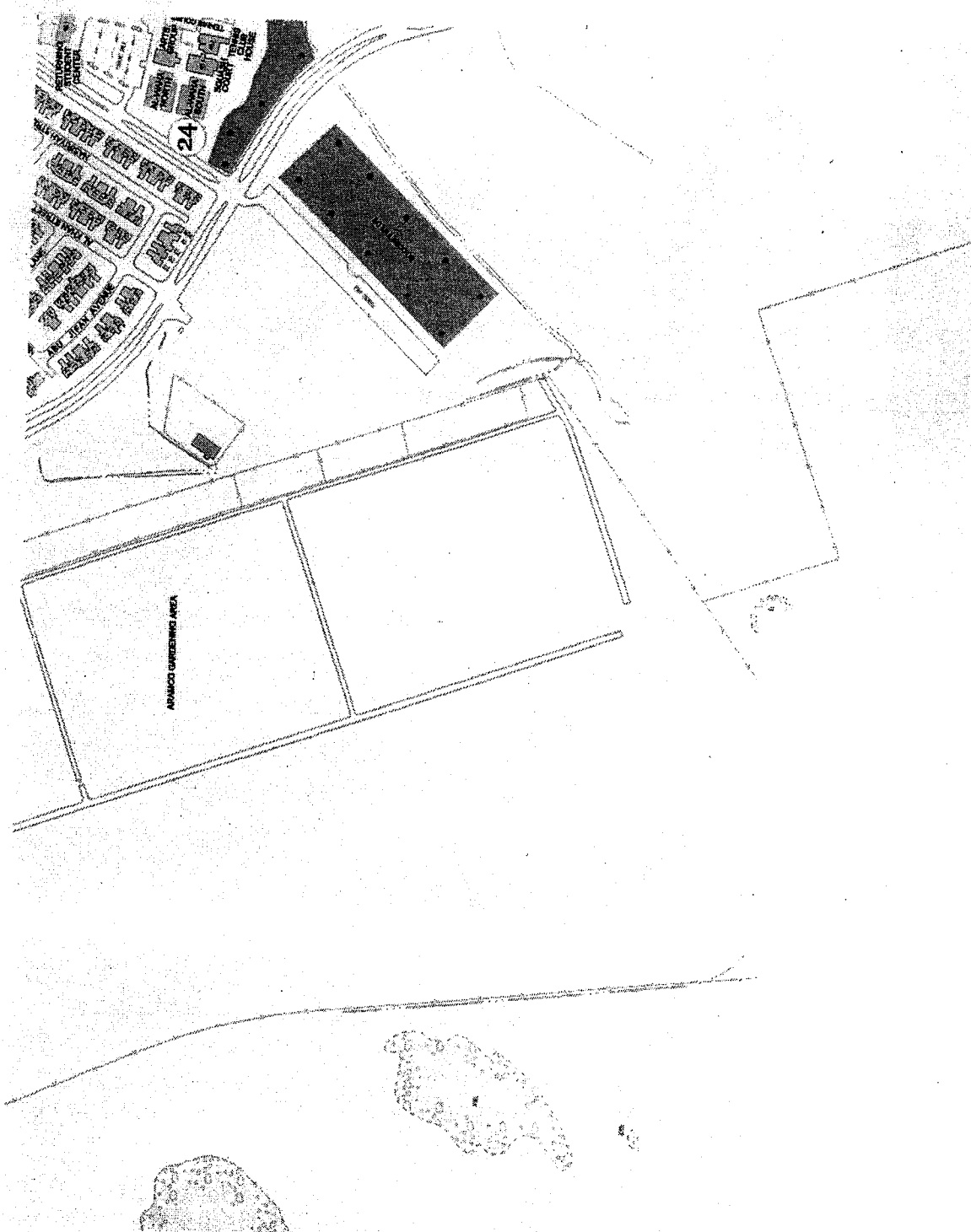


Figure 4





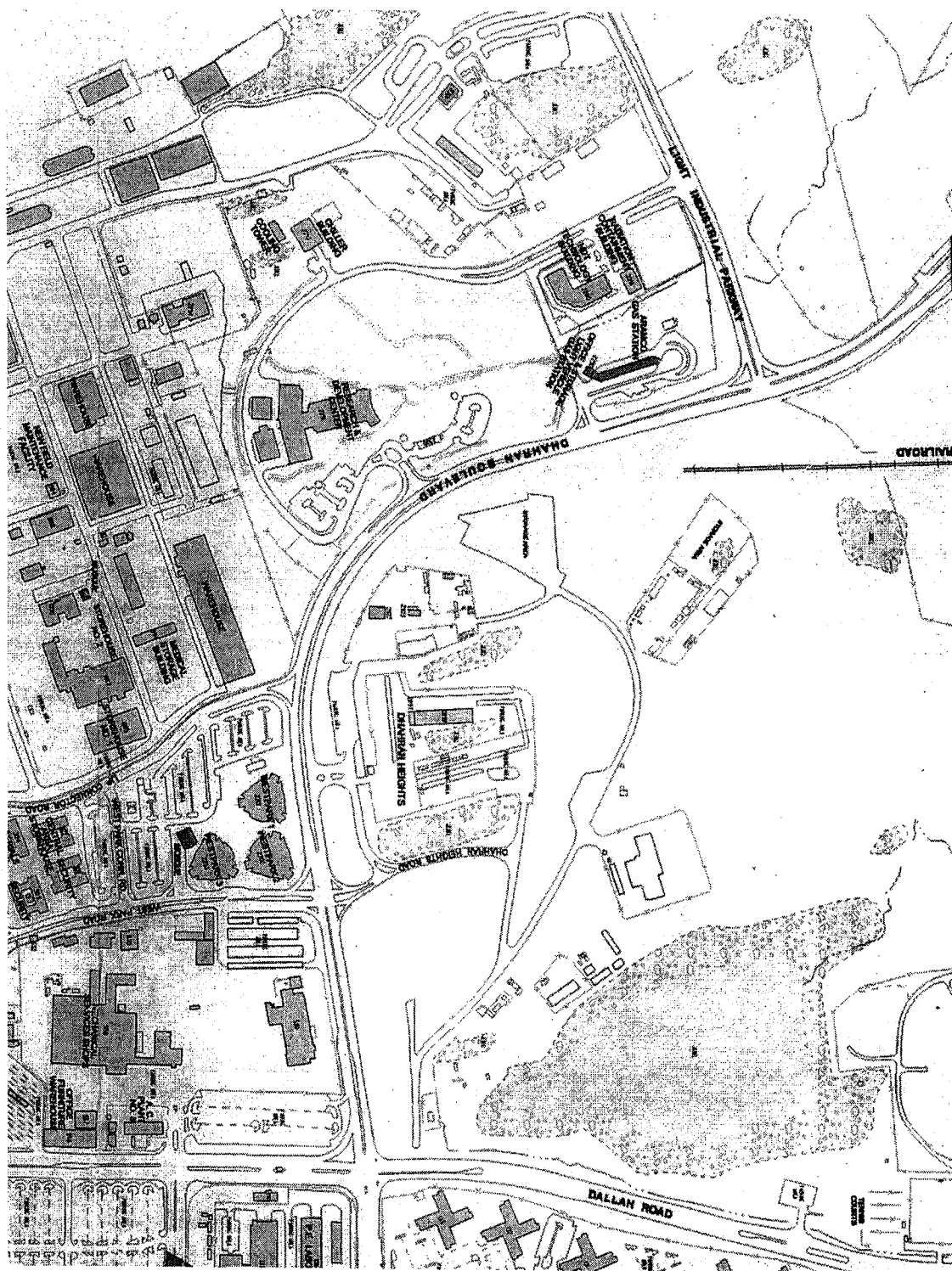


Figure 7





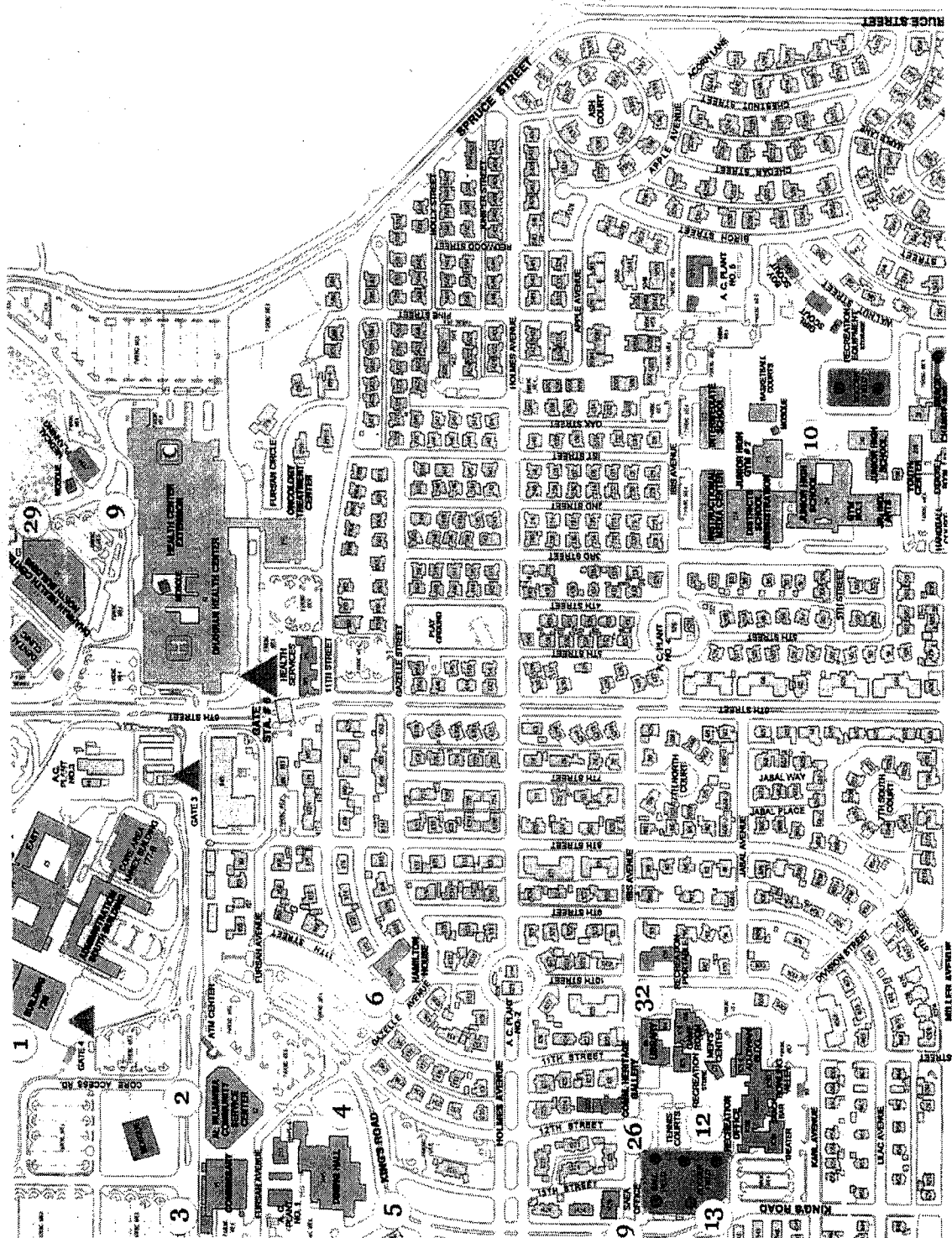


Figure 9

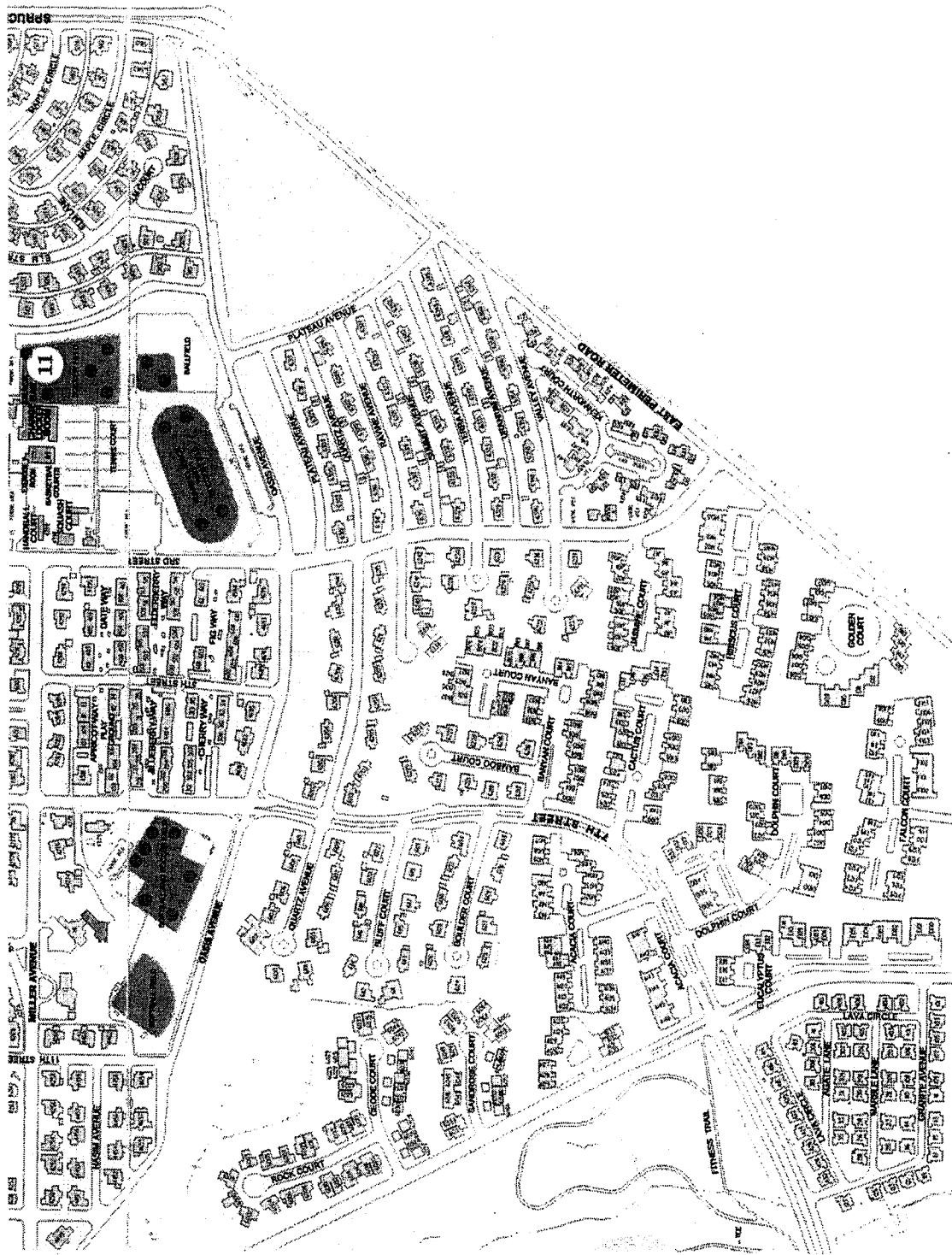


Figure 10

A ABQUAIQ ABU ALI ABU HADRIYAH ABU JIFAN ACACIA ACORN  
 AFLAH AGATE AIN DAR AL HASA AL KHAN AL QARA APPLE  
 APRICOT ARABIAN GULF ASH AYN NAKHL B BAMBOO BANYON  
 BERRI BIRCH BLUEBERRY BLUFF BOULDER CACTUS CANYON  
 CHEDAR CHERRY CHESTNUT CLIFF CLINICS ACCESS CORE ACCESS  
 CRAVE DAHNA DALLAH DARIN DARIYAH DATE DHAHRAN  
 DIVISION DOLPHIN EAST PERIMETER EASTERN EASTERN EXTENSION  
 EIGHTEENTH EIGHTH ELDERBERRY ELM EUCALYPTUS FALCON  
 FARZAN FIFTH FIG FIRST FOURTH FURSAN GAZELLE GEODE  
 GHAWAR GOLDEN GOLF COURSE GRANITE HANIFAH HARADH  
 HARMALIYAH HIBISCUS HISAN HOFFUF HOLLY HOLMES IBIS  
 JABAL JANA JASMINE JAWAN JINNAH JU'AYMAH JUBAIL JUNIPER  
 JURAYD KARL KENWORTH KHURAI KHURSANIYAH KINGS LAVA  
 LEMON LEMONWOOD LIGHT INDUSTRIAL LILAC LIMETREE LIP  
 CONNECTOR MACK MANGO MANIFAH MAPLE MARBLE MARJAN  
 MILLER MINT MOCHA MUBARRAZ NAFUD NAJMAH NARIYAH  
 NASARIYAH NASIM NINETEENTH NINTH NISAH NOMAD OAK OASIS  
 OLD ABQUAIQ PENINSULA PINE PLATEAU PRARIE VIEW QATIF  
 QUARRAYAH QUARTZ RADHWA RAHIMAH RAINBOW RAJA RAVINE  
 REDWOOD REMALL RIM RIYAH ROCK ROLLING HILLS RUB AL  
 KHALI SAFANIYAH SADROSE SAPWA SECOND SEVENTEENTH  
 SEVENTTH SEVENTH SEVENTH NORTH SHARAR SHEDGUM SIXTH  
 SOUTH SPRUCE STEINEKE SUMMAN SUMMIT TABRAK TAMRAH  
 TANAJIB TARUT TAWAYG TENTH TERRA THIRD THIRTEENTH  
 TWELVTH TWENTIETH TWENTY FIRST TWENTY SECOND URANIUM

Figure 11

**A COLLECTION OF STORIES**

A KINGS EGO KILLS PEOPLE

custodian of the two holy mosques

i count one hundred and 42 times  
against the hue of a blue screen tele

his nose a wet mess with each passing kiss

behind him  
his plane burns in waiting  
his runway littered with occasion  
his toes uncomfortable between  
his new split sandals

a red turf carpet  
rolls sideways into a limo after him  
and before fade out

/channel 13 ends its run for the evening

we live amongst the chaos and chrome of power  
it has a way with us- something subtle

like chalk white crowns against acrylic black drops

and green paper pyramids that blink right back

and sitting trains sprayed in late night content

to simone softly singing  
the real king is dead.

---

more quiet revolutions  
against some higher order  
in order.



i  
made  
an empire  
out of legos once-  
it was a tall wall built  
in red and white and blue-  
the trim at its foundation was green peace green

but it fell

like they always do  
right before I got  
the chance  
to pin

the last brick

living in a corporation  
is surprisingly similar to pitching a tent  
under your citibank office desk  
you can feel safe under the dark hue  
of midnight surveillance.

HEED...

THE EMPIRE IS COMING HOME TO ROOST

pigs blood spilled at the gates of the mosque again today and there were shots fired but thank god no one got hurt and when I went to Walmart to pick up some more socks for your father a man whispered rag head and told me to leave his country but they don't understand these people they assume that we are not American and that we don't have any pride and I have nothing against this country and its people and I am Muslim and I am American but they don't understand because they are ignorant and it doesn't matter how much CAIR is doing to change this or other groups there are still so many people here in these suburbs that think that we are all crazies who want to blow ourselves up and it seems its only getting worse and it gives us such a bad name this violence around the world that now uncle cant even get on the plane to Houston for this mornings' business meeting because the passenger next to him 'felt uncomfortable' and I think its because of his beard and he was traveling alone and just had his brief case and I told his wife when she called today upset that he lost his contract with the company that she should tell her husband to shave but the poor woman thinks he looks more handsome with it but I told her that sometimes you must do what the times call for and she and I got into an argument because she told me that we should fight for our rights and our identity more rather than shrink back but how are we to do that in our immediate situation the fact of the matter is that he couldn't even get on the plane because of how he looks or is perceived and uncle couldn't say anything that could get him on that plane at that moment and in this way we are powerless and in order to gain more power it will take time and these laws are changing and we are no longer protected in the face of them and look in the meantime they are watching our every move so don't take that book on the plane with you when you leave for college because it will attract more suspicion and I don't care if its about U.S. History or part of your summer reading material its written by Howard Zinn and they don't like these people and please make that phone call to the bank and ask when they will unfreeze our assets they have been doing this for months

questioning us for no reason since 9-11 and anyways you have an American accent and that always helps it did when we got our citizenship and you should have initialized your first name on your resume maybe then they would have given you a chance for that summer job and by the way you are grounded for making that statement about the occupation I told you to keep a low profile and please don't speak about politics over the phone with your friends at least not in English and who are these friends of yours anyways don't trust anyone you don't know how they will turn things around or if they have a tape recorder with them then what we are not safe anymore and look what happened to her son Lallat Aunty's son he was detained for 3 days because he went traveling through Africa and when he arrived to US security they asked him if he went to any mosques in Ethiopia and he said yes because he does pray and they asked him how many times he prays and he said he tries to pray whenever he can and then when he couldn't remember the name of the mosque he went to because these mosques don't have names they kept him for questioning and confiscated his passport you know he is a US citizen I thought you were safe as a citizen but now we are all being bunched up into the same category and the patriot act really doesn't do much for our rights and I am just a housewife trying to be a good mother but it only gets me more worried reading the newspaper and having to get backlash for these horrific atrocities and so instead of getting angry I decided to join an interfaith group because these times call for total surrender and compassion even in the face of ignorance on both sides east and west and I wish these divisions did not exist but everyday they just get worse and now you have to pick up the pieces for it all in your generation and I'm sorry for this so please work hard and study hard and try to be the best person you can be and don't sacrifice your identity the way we did in our generation or think we should but instead just be compassionate and live with dignity and harmony with all that is different from you because this world is ridden with so much fear and hatred and even the most uneducated person knows that we must never ever fight fire with fire and that we must always start change first from within\_\_\_\_

DO NOT FEAR DIFFERENCE  
IT ONLY KILLS COMPASSION

Yesterday

I was sized by the length of your beard and my last name  
and had wild dreams afterwards of a televised game show  
that made me walk labyrinths to find black lists  
which I heroically photocopied and sent out  
to you and the others

before walking along a precipice  
that broke flat and reconvened  
into the dim shade of a palm  
that could no longer fruit.

It gathered a mass, this palm  
But they were a lonely bunch  
And you were there  
And I was irregular amongst it all  
And it didn't matter that I had gone out on a limb  
And that I had identified even at all

I am pulled to defend you  
I am pulled to defend me  
It is difficult in a time like this to say fuck it  
I am me  
Cause at the end of the day- I am always sized  
by both the length of your beard and my last name.

some bridges fall  
in building them we risk our humanness  
among other things

but build on my friend- build on  
we are not made perfect for good reason



IN THE NAME OF DEVELOPMENT

I pull open the back flap of the brochure. It reads:

*The luxurious Makkah Hilton Hotel & Towers is superbly located in the city centre, offering 1,400 rooms, suites, villas and apartments. Just a few steps from the Holy Haram, the Makkah Hilton Hotel & Towers forms a part of the largest, most prestigious complex in the city and is close to many historical landmarks. The hotel provides a limousine service, but if required the city's transport link is only two minutes away. Our suites, apartments and rooms offer breathtaking views over the Holy Mosque and the Holy Kaaba. With our choice of restaurants and room service, whether you're seeking an aromatic coffee or the ultimate luxurious dining experience, we have what it takes to delight you.*

I look up for a moment- as a screaming wailing fitted child tightly clasps his plastic gun as he is slung over his father's shoulder and led past me.

*Points of Interest!*

*Our indoor shopping complex has no less than 450 brand-name stores. Access from the hotel is easy and you'll enjoy going around the various levels of the shopping complex. Or, you can relax in our lobby lounge while your family enjoys shopping for souvenirs and gifts.*

I sigh and welcome myself once more to the land of  
milk and honey.

i plop myself on to the first step of a cascading marble staircase that spills over the floors edge of the grand mosque. The jeddah marble factory has shifted hands and names and locations since the early 50's but continues to knock away- cutting, shaping, polishing- waxing poetic the quarries of farsah, madrasah and wadi fatima- cul-de-sacs tucked in hillside slopes sixty kilometers from the road here- arabian marble has managed some sacred death in the cool under my feet- in the round of each aged stair- in every hairline detail of shaded grey- in every carved brick of built wall- in each circling of the ka'aba- in every run from marwa to safa. so much time has been spent praying here- or shall i say wandering while prostrating. i've gotten to know these floors well- though i still can't seem to see god when i am told to.

IN THE NAME OF GOD curls in fine detail  
along the metal round of a key chain  
that rocks gently in drive

and with each left turn that is made  
towards the grand mosque a snow globe flurries  
in circle around the ka'aba

the cabby's closest sighting to a blizzard  
his dashboard- littered with prayer  
his eyes and smile with innocence

and I am grateful for him  
for in his welcome he reminds me  
that there is so much more to this space

than just a highly marketable mecca

shaybah camp

gross amounts of flat desert, pale and thin and unassuming  
are interrupted by occasional pockets of development  
that have you floored at aerial view  
and an altitude of 30,000 feet.

a lonely airstrip marks a solemn line in the empty-quarter

where I am told in standing on the runway  
against the silence of a grounded plane  
you can hear your blood flow-  
an exercise in the far reaches of human endurance.

nearby

an American maneuvers the clutch of his tractor  
one palm sweats furiously as he pulls it back and forth  
the other cradles early retirement

/all this while shuffling sand between sand.

### DANA DESERT

Trees don't grow very fast here- seeds lay for years in parched earth and wait for only reluctant rain they line the lonely highway and crowd the checkpoints small square cubicles with radio transmitters and fans and clipboards that require us to signature off before leaving for miles of dead red sand and silver piping \_\_\_\_

lush palm lined streets roll along man made hills, past sand courses, dining halls, commissaries, the hobby farm, the post office and adjoining bank, past the public library and one of four theaters and one of two co-ed pools, past their walled gates, their many fences, their checkpoints, past two by two square meter air conditioned booths grazed by lazy but efficiently skeptical guards, past bus stops and their stalled green and white lined mercedes vehicles, past playing fields and freshly painted tracks and tennis courts, past hundreds of men in sky blue uniform Dhahran's under-paid and over-worked un-touchables.

You can scramble an egg on Dhahran's side-walk most days of the year especially those days when the forecaster at 411 chooses not to pick up the phone to let you know that its more than 115 degrees fehrenheit. If he did, it would mean that anyone working outside would get the day off. Here, men in blue uniform are expected to work the scorching heat under all circumstances. No one does anything to defend them besides providing the occasional guilty bottle of water or pointing out some distant body of shade.



A 10 YEAR OLD'S POCKET FULL  
OF WAR STORIES

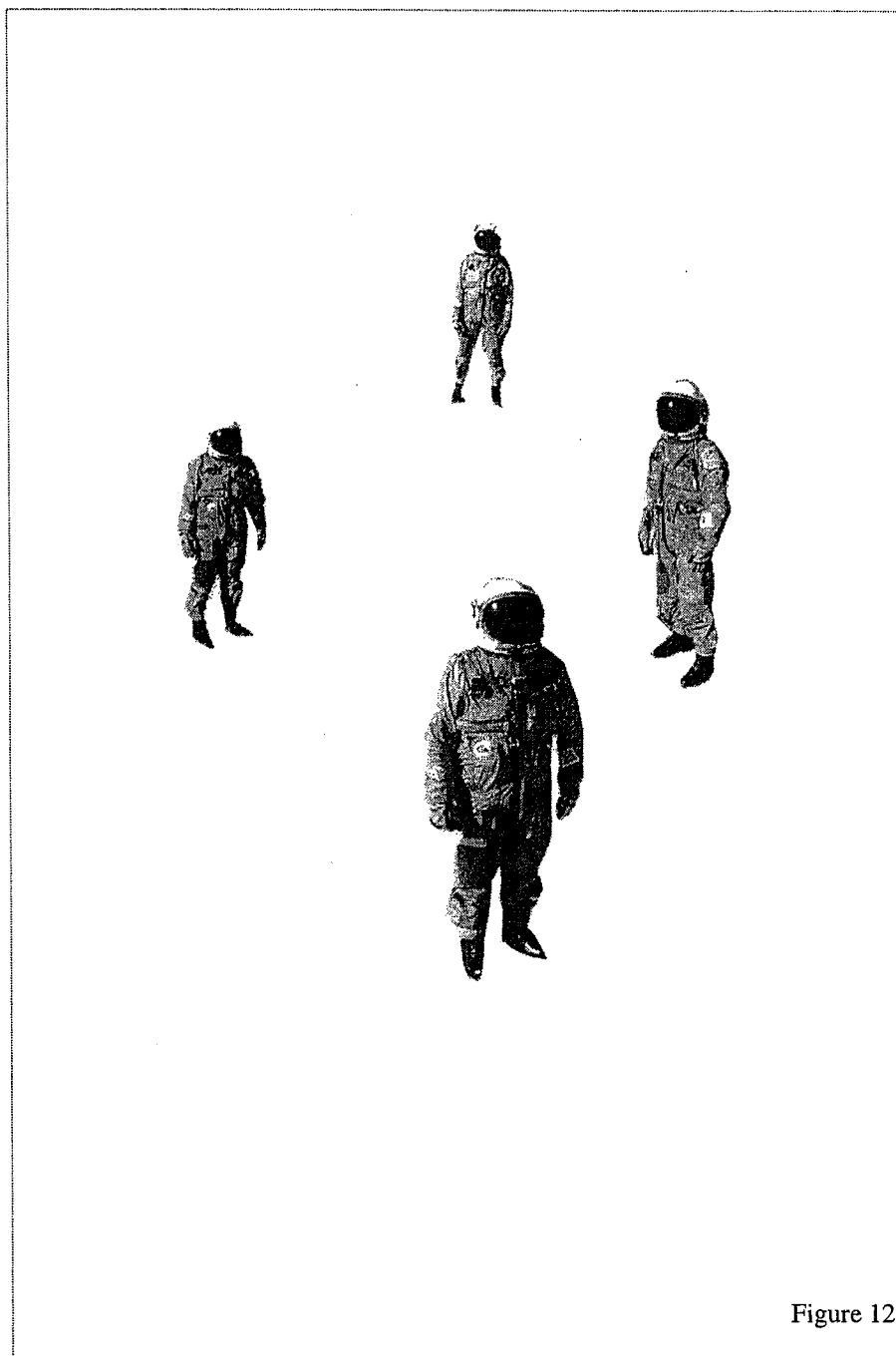


Figure 12

layla jackson's father was C.I.A.

if you read this, where are you?

you left at 9 and have gone missing since.

kissing tag at the playground  
was never the same  
without you.

humid august nights leave my tongue quenching a salty aftertaste. the gulf makes its way twenty minutes inland- escorted by some desperate wind that has tired of circling its heavy waters- its docked ships- its island refineries- its swimming pipelines- its stationed missile launchers- its floating landing strips- its saluting soldiers- its warring shorelines- its un-comfortable silence- its approaching storm.

it hadn't rained in two years and the slow rhythm and rotation of 24 hour salt water sprinklers couldn't even manage to convince the most amateur gardeners in the thickest heat square lots of grass burnt to a rich grain and put years on the row homes they rested beside the way bad lighting ricochets off 40 year old wrinkles and sets some over some in descript hill that hardly anyone these days talks about there was a wild wind that pushed a 10 year olds tire swing effortlessly back and forth and back and forth march 5 1991 it swept a black cape over camp and washed a gray over mid day and reminded kids to go inside cause sometimes night was scary and dark was evil and maybe for this reason heaven and hell did exist and maybe angels fell more often than one assumed i jumped off the swing when it fell to a pour danced and opened my mouth to its offerings these catchings of drops drinking from what I thought was god blessed until my rose shirt and flowered shorts soaked to a dirty dish rag and the ends of my hair held to one another for dear life a sticky mess my eyes stung my throat shrunk my fingers wrinkled faster than the average hot bath and I smelled like hell it was raining oil the windswept fires of kuwait caught fire for real and maybe just maybe for this reason it did exist hell

10,000 U.S. soldiers  
set up camp in the desert stretch  
behind the hobby farm.

eight months later  
all the horses were shot dead.  
their madness had made it difficult to catch a good ride.

the night that peter jennings stood in front of nadia's house the television screen lit up like the best fireworks show ever and i couldn't take my eyes off the green streaks kind of like the desert light show when i was 7 over the jebels behind our house on eid which made scary sounds but pretty colors and I couldn't really understand what Baba was up to around then and if he could in fact see all this with his own eyes and if the make shift shoe closet that we made into a safe room before family evacuation was really that safe but I assumed that the gas masks were and if anything he could just put one on when he was scared cause that's what I did at school when the sirens just wouldn't seem to stop

The Girl Scouts of the United States of America had my mother convinced it was the best club ever- had me selling next years calendars and baking hot pink cupcakes and almond date cookies for stationed soldiers- had me folding U.S. flags and making jesus prayers over camp fires - had me hunting for shrapnel on jebel rifts for superglue sleepover soirees- where we made war paraphernalia and scud and missile intercepted jewelry- earrings and pendants sold with surplus MRE's at auctions and fundraisers, car washes and lemonade sales- we were true Dhahran Scouts of the United States of America



### DO NOT BE FOOLED BY TABOO

In 1991, word on the streets of Dhahran proclaimed that democracy and the women's revolution in Saudi Arabia began with female U.S. soldiers pulling up in trucks to McDonald drive-thrus for an order of chicken mc-nuggets and big-macs, with milkshakes and fries.

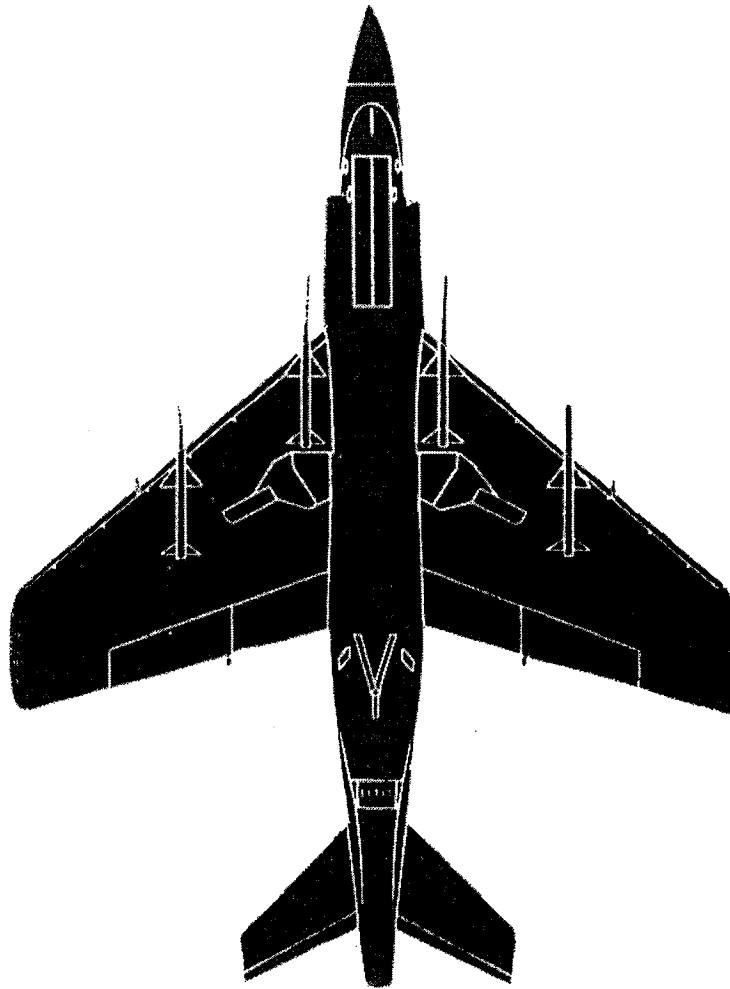


Figure 13

a wind blows its sharp whistle and rips

a line of white out of sky blue.

a patch of roof at 353  
makes like its being freshly raked  
and has the old woman  
downstairs

lifting  
a wrinkled index to a limp ear.

a girl looks up  
from her imaginary garden  
a second too late and sees nothing.

a grey winged birdy bites its tail  
and spirals to  
a dive.

a piece of paint  
chips off the side of an "F" from *FORCE*

a pilot talks dirty all the way down  
and the two-way transistor has him glad

he's good at playing straight.

The sky changed a forever-paler shade of blue  
after the war of '91 and left in its wake a growing  
mass of silenced resistors.

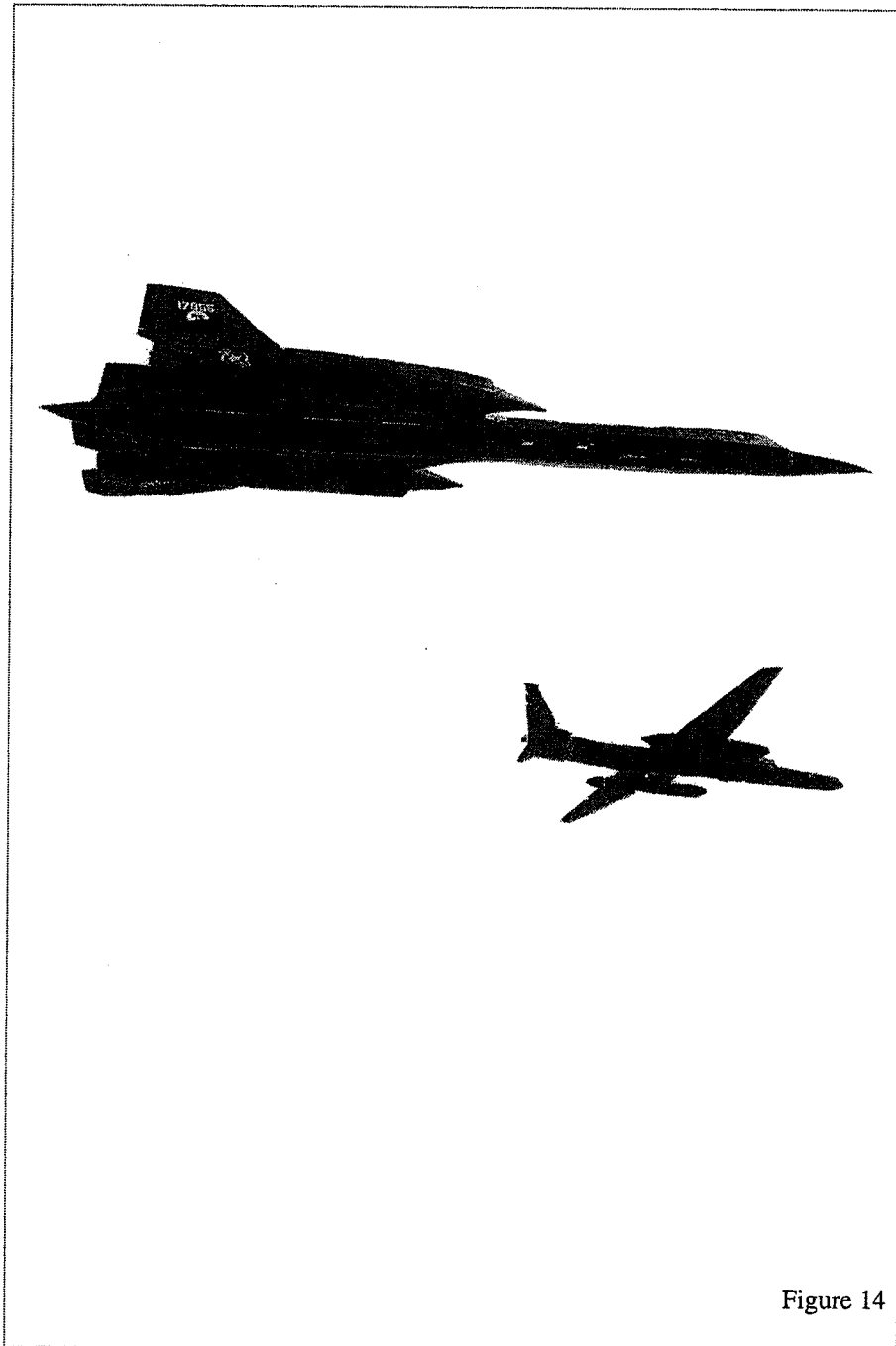


Figure 14

fine  
i admit it.

i'm obsessed with warplanes and spy games.  
what does that make me now?

### A BOOKSHELF WORTH NOTING

The First Honest Book About Lies / Boomer Basics, Everything You Need To Know About the Issues Facing You, Your Children and Your Parents / Teaching About Islam and Muslims in the Public School Classroom: A Handbook for Educators / Reclaiming Our Children: A Healing Plan for a National Crisis / The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager / They Dare Speak Out / A is for Admission / Home Learning Year by Year / Home-schooling: A Parents Guide to Teaching Children / A Field Guide to Home-schooling / The Conspiracy of Ignorance / Emotional Intelligence / Educating Your Child in Modern Times / The Thanksgiving Ceremony: New Traditions for America's Family Feast / The Holy Bible / The Essential Quran / Rumi and the Light of Eastern and Western Scholarship / The Art of Worldly Wisdom

ANOTHER  
BOOKSHELF WORTH NOTING

The Indispensable Chomsky:  
Understanding Power / Chomsky on  
Mis-education / 9-11 / A People's  
History of the United States / The  
Clash of Civilizations and the  
Remaking of World Order / Static,  
Government Liars, Media  
Cheerleaders and the People Who  
Fight Back / The Great War for  
Civilization: The Conquest of the  
Middle East / Forcing Gods Hand:  
Why Millions Pray for a Quick  
Rapture and Destruction of Planet  
Earth / How to Handle the News  
Media / Inside the Wire: A Military  
Intelligence Soldiers Eyewitness  
According to Life at Guantanamo /  
Weapons of Mass Destruction: The  
Uses of Propaganda in Bush's War  
on Iraq / Censored: Peter Philips and  
Project Censored / First Impressions:  
American Muslim Perspectives / The  
Other Israel: Voices of Refusal and  
Dissent / This Side of Peace / 100  
Ways America is Screwing Up the  
World / Spider's Web: The Secret  
History of How the White House  
Illegally Armed Iraq / Twilight in the  
Desert: The Coming Saudi Oil Shock  
and the World Economy



CRITICIZE WITH COMPASSION AND RIGOR

Inside: A GUIDE TO ARAMCO (1954)

Below is a nondescript title for a chapter  
written by a company member regarding the production  
of homemade wine- a pamphlet circulated  
by expatriate's to this day- it is also known as

#### THE BLUE FLAME

Perfected Techniques on the Ebullition of Sugar,  
Water and Suitable Catalyst to Form an Acceptable  
Aramco Assimilative Imbibable Potion Appropriate  
for Consumption

the locust storms pass every seven years  
in some mass exodus to the holy land  
for days millions of beings grow out of  
and eat into one another  
enter through the main gates  
circum-navigate the cube  
hover in the warmth of stadium light  
drink and drown in zam-zam

until some indefinable moment  
when they resurrect  
and push on  
further east

WE PREACH  
AS OUR ONLY MEANS TO SALVATION  
WHEN WE OURSELVES ARE POWERLESS

Growing up, I never publicly saw a camera to a face or hands holding one another or a kiss in a full-length feature or while walking along the street or a woman getting into the driver's seat of a car or smoking a cigarette or plastered on a poster or reclining against a billboard or working the counter or entering a room at a clothing store or gathered in protest or raising a hand in public defiance or traveling to another city or leaving the country or depositing money into a bank without male signature- some will ask why does it even matter? What does it represent? What does it not represent? What is our representation of representation?

What does living in perpetual mirage do to one's  
perception of reality?

**The Dhahran Diamond Dolls**  
**A Haliburton Sponsored Softball Team**

**BEWARE**  
**OIL IN THE AGE OF CRISIS**  
**IS WATER IN THE AGE OF**  
**DEVASTATION**



140 miles long 23 miles wide

of quiet stunned daily  
by sporadic drilling

while fathers

swallow double edged swords  
stab cogs in wheels  
and play supporting roles

in a world circus act

that kids like me

cant even begin  
to wrap our heads around.

I'm sorry.

THE HILL'S POOL  
DHAHRAN, SAUDI ARABIA

I stand feet- shoulder length apart along the wet ledge. It feels like forty feet- but its only 10. My palms sweat furiously against my damp frame. No one is watching. I am both relieved and reduced. All of a sudden the moment feels thinner than it really is. I want to turn back. 'Maybe some other time'- my right tells my left. I manage to shut both up- take one full deep breath- stretch my arms out- bend my knees and fall forward.

I land a belly flop- but it's expected. I wasn't interested in proactively springing forward- falling into the deep end at that height seemed a difficult task in and of itself. I had preformed my very first dive off the high board and not only did I expect a perfect jack knife- I was hoping to emerge to a whooping clapping cheering audience- better yet of strangers.

I came by myself that day- with no intension but to cool off- all it took was a good hour before the tips of my fingers and toes were raisins- another two before they started feeling like foreign nodes/ agents to some celestial calling. I'd like to say that I spent it playing games- throwing radiating hoops to the bottom just to fish them back up- practicing my freestyle (the only stroke I knew) or even playing with other kids- but really it was mostly spent tredding water and 'people watching'- though looking back- I never realized how obvious I was.

The hills pool was almost like any other. There was the kiddy pool at the far left corner- only a couple feet deep- stippled with mothers- mostly in full nekhaab. Only their ankles and feet waded- just enough to break their black and the suns' heat. Nearby- their terrible two's proved themselves in overblown wet suit armor- they awkwardly lunged at their plastic floating toys and anyone who was willing to crawl over and play- an easy mix of crying scared ones and feverishly absorbed-absurdly acclimated fish types. The shallow end of the Olympic sized pool however was responsible for the majority of action- kids splashing about screaming MARCO POLO- daring one another into the longest underwater kiss, cartwheel, and tea ceremony- all this between swim lessons and arguing parents and half eaten sandwiches.

Then of course- there was the deep end- in all its glory- a most recently initiated world of good swimmers and cool kids- doing things I was only beginning to attempt- well, like diving. I found it strange they wouldn't spend all their time in the pool- it was at least a good 122 F. Instead, much of it was spent leaning against the far right wall in casting shade and trying poses- passing cigarettes between one another- chatting and plotting with those who sneaked in from out of camp- entertaining themselves with the terrible radio quality of ugly and usually yellow- water resistant walkmans- drinking away the snack bars' stock of warm pepsi- flirting foolishly and by far pushing the

limits of what was considered acceptable swim suit wear (the big sign posted next to the changing rooms delivered a: "no revealing clothes, no bikinis or speedos" mandate.) The girls gave themselves seemingly uncomfortable wedgies- cut into the necks of their suits to reveal their growing round of breast: anything they wore- anyway they walked- their stance- their perfect posture- demanded attention- maybe even a sort of recognition. They were young girls coming into their skin- being as much themselves as one can be at- 12, 13, 14, 15 years of age -participating in what seemed to be a most normal- even sometimes banal past-time: *hanging out with boys their age*. Yet within taboo circumstances- often emerges a series of taboo situations.

The Hills Pool- similar to the Third Street Pool located across camp- was one of the most actively revealing public spaces in the country. It was co-ed: and if "co-ed" were a concept: it was by no means tolerated within the country. However, deep within the isolation of four expatriate compounds - far from the reach of local Saudi's and located within the walls of five distinct spaces; this "concept" if I may say so- was granted permission to unleash itself.

Yes, there were rules posted on signs around the pool and regulations bulleted into handbooks for when you first arrived and laws dusting on retired shelves- but in reality being a girl at this age- one

often found oneself in this brief moment of growth as being in some ways- quite untouchable. After all, you were too young to get fully reprimanded- too young and therefore quite able to get away with any full infractions that came your way- and yet old enough to realize that showing skin on this level was in fact creating quite a revolutionary stir within the often still waters of conservatism.

It seemed quite a rush to me- their not following. And though I was not fully aware of these complexities- I found it nevertheless quite fascinating at the time to watch it all go. After all, swim suits made people feel uncomfortable here. Made them act in ways they wouldn't otherwise. If it was a natural occurrence- it would be ok. But really it wasn't- and not only did people have to deal with their sometimes blatant body image issues- of feeling too fat or thin- they had to constantly find themselves reconciling 'the warp' that Saudi ARAMCO was. How often was it that you saw so much skin? One can try very hard to ignore the fact that there was an acclimation process that went underway- mediating between what happened within the gates of Dhahran and what happened outside them.

Regardless of it all, the 'cool kids' managed in some way to exude a vague rebellious tendency -a tendency that brought enough attention to sanction all dependent children to boarding school by age 14.

MULTICULTURALISM  
IS SO 1971

There's a game at play

that I am afraid I know hardly anything about  
yet have experienced from the eye  
of some mad storm  
that is set against the back drop  
of a strange place I could hardly call home



IN THE NAME OF NEUTRALITY  
DO NOT SUPPORT THE STATUS QUO

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