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HARVARD UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF DESIGN

GEOGRAPHIES OF ENERGY: THE CASE OF THE TRANS-ARABIAN PIPELINE

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Rania's dissertation has helped define a whole new area of research and inquiry on the landscapes of energy. While expanding our knowledge of the history of oil transportation in the Middle East, her dissertation has also engaged in some of the central theoretical debates about space, technology, and society and emerged with a new theoretical framework, exposing the spatial underpinnings of energy. Along with the New Geographies issue on Landscapes of Energy that Rania edited, her dissertation provides a reference and solid ground for the emergence of a new interdisciplinary domain.

—Hashim Sarkis

Industrial energy systems require space to produce value while keeping at bay the geographic imperative and spatial repercussions of their operation. In the oil system, the international crude pipeline has allowed the control over a region's production through the exclusive ownership of the circulation channel that connects the wells to the terminal port. Although geographies of transport are central to oil, the spatial deployment of the industry's channels has often been dismissed in favor of a smooth "space of flows" and binary accounts of pipe-wars and pipe-dreams.

This dissertation explores the geographies of the Trans-Arabian Pipeline (Tapline), a cross-border line that transported between 1950 and 1975 Aramco crude from the wells of its sister concession in eastern Saudi Arabia, through Jordan and Syria, to a Lebanese port on the Mediterranean. Through the historical case study of the Tapline, I argue that territorial organization is simultaneously a force of production and the space in which frictions over production unfold. Particularly in relation to its convention agreement with Saudi Arabia, and as the boundaries of the sister Aramco concession corresponded with that of the Kingdom, Tapline extended infrastructural provisions in relation to the Kingdom's aspirations to settle, secure, and develop its northern boundary. The pipeline's large-scale technological system materialized a territory with its qualities and frictions opening a space—simultaneously epistemological and geographical—that could be incorporated into forms of political rationalities.

Through the case study of Tapline, Geographies of Energy seeks to spatialize the deployment of energy, map some of the physical, social, and representational geographies of oil transport in particular, and analyze the spatial and socio-ecological transformations in landscapes and livelihoods that occurred as places were incorporated into systems of energy.

