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## Chapter 1: Profile

### Introduction

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia occupies a special place for Muslims as the cradle of Islam. Devout Muslims around the world turn to the holy city of Mecca in prayer five times a day.<sup>1</sup> The country also has more than 25% of the world's known oil reserves and has the capacity to produce in excess of 10 million barrels of crude oil per day.<sup>2</sup> The discovery that 15 of the 19 hijackers responsible for the events of 11 September 2001 were nationals of Saudi Arabia put its society under the microscope.<sup>3</sup> That attention revealed a country which imports the latest modern technology and weaponry.<sup>4</sup> Yet, it continues to be governed by a traditional monarchy whose power is legitimized through a variant of Islam that much of the rest of the Muslim world views as fanatical and eccentric.<sup>5</sup>

### Area

The total area of Saudi Arabia is 1,960,582 sq km (784,233 sq mi), making it slightly larger than one-fifth of the continental United States.<sup>6</sup> It shares land borders with Iraq 814 km (506 mi), Jordan 744 km (462 mi), Kuwait 222 km (138 mi), Oman 676 km (420 mi), Qatar 60 km (37 mi), United Arab Emirates 457 km (283 mi), and Yemen 1,458 km (906 mi).

The kingdom has been described as a series of horizontal north–south belts by those traveling laterally from west to east.<sup>7</sup> The Arabian-Nubian Shield (ANS) is a geological surface formation of Precambrian crystalline rocks that lies to the east of both branches of the Hijaz Mountains. One branch lies to the north of Mecca, the other to the south. The two converge in Mecca. The northern Hijaz range does not exceed 2,100 m (6,889 ft) in elevation. It gradually decreases to around 600 m (1,968 ft) in the vicinity of Mecca. The southern branch extends from Mecca southwards nearly 800 km (497 mi) into the Asir region of south central Arabia. The rugged western mountain wall or escarpment, which descends abruptly toward the sea, is only dotted by a few coastal plains. The more gentle eastern slopes are scarred by wadis<sup>8</sup> that mark the path of ancient rivers. During infrequent rain storms they become raging torrents carrying water down to the central

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<sup>1</sup> Global Security. "Mecca." 27 April 2005. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/gulf/mecca.htm>

<sup>2</sup> BBC News (UK Version). "Country Profile: Saudi Arabia." 14 July 2007.

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/country\\_profiles/791936.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/country_profiles/791936.stm)

<sup>3</sup> Middle East Media Research Institute, Special Dispatch Series No. 323. "Saudi Columnists: Urbanization and Development in Southern Saudi Arabia, Not Poverty, Led to September 11." 1 January 2002.

<http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP32302>

<sup>4</sup> *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*. Mamdani, Mahmood.

"Introduction: Modernity and Violence [p. 14]." 2004. New York: Pantheon.

<sup>5</sup> *The Battle for Saudi Arabia: Royalty, Fundamentalism, and Global Power*. Abukhalil, As'Ad. Chapter One. "The Paradoxes of Saudi Arabia [p. 27]." 2004. New York: Seven Stories Press.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Saudi Arabia." June 2007.

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3584.htm>

<sup>7</sup> This section drawn from the World Conservation Union. Heady, Harold F. "Ecological Consequences of Bedouin Settlement in Saudi Arabia." No date.

<http://www.iucn.org/themes/ceesp/publications/SL/CT/Chapter%2036%20-%20The%20Careless%20Technology.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> From the Arabic, *wadi*, meaning "valley" or "dry river bed."

plains. Scattered oases, which draw water from springs and wells in the vicinity of the wadis, allow for some subsistence farming. Lava beds (*harrat*) are part of the eastern topography of the Hijaz and Asir mountain ranges. They represent evidence of prehistoric volcanic activity.

A narrow belt of sand connects the Nefud desert in the north to the Rub al-Khali (Empty Quarter) in the south which is the largest sand desert in the world. Covering 650,000 sq km (250,966 sq mi), making it equivalent to the size of France, over 80% is sand dunes. Extending eastward is a coastal plain that loses elevation at the rate of 1 m (3 ft) per km (.62 mi) until it reaches sea level. Most of Saudi Arabia's oil resources, which constitute one of the richest sources of hydrocarbon deposits in the world, are located beneath this coastal terrain. The kingdom contains large parcels of rocky gravel, plains and lava beds which lack significant soil. Soil that can support crop farming is found in the gullies around the oases. Most land requires irrigation, however, to grow agricultural products.<sup>9</sup>

### **Climate**

Summer is hot with temperatures in some parts of the kingdom reaching 49°C (120°F). Winter is cooler with a country average temperature of 23°C (74°F). These averages mask considerable local variation which ranges from 24°C (75°F) in Medina (Western Province), rising as one goes southwest until it reaches 28°C (82°F) in Jeddah (Western Province). In the mountains of Asir in the southwest, where snow can be seen in the winter months, the average temperature is only 19°C (66°F) reflecting the high altitude. Riyadh, the capital city of the central province, which is surrounded by desert, averages 25°C (77°F). In Dhahran, the Eastern Province, temperatures average 26°C (79°F).

Apart from topographical factors such as altitude and proximity to the sea, Saudi Arabia's climate is also affected by winds.<sup>10</sup> In regions like the eastern parts of the kingdom, where there is little ground cover, the northwesterly wind, *shamal*, blows for most of the summer months and can precipitate severe sandstorms. Here, seasonal variations are less evident. Change reflects the southerly shift in wind patterns during the winter months which usher in cooler weather and moisture.

Overall rainfall for the kingdom averages less than 127 mm (5 in) per year. Again, this average masks considerable regional variation. In the Rub al-Khali, decades can pass with no precipitation. By contrast, in the southern Asir Highlands annual rainfall may exceed 255 mm (10 in).

### **Bodies of Water**

Saudi Arabia has no rivers. The kingdom has invested heavily in desalination to produce adequate amounts of potable water.

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<sup>9</sup> Library of Congress. Country Studies. Saudi Arabia: Topography and Natural Regions. 1992. <http://countrystudies.us/saudi-arabia/15.htm>

<sup>10</sup> ArabNet. "Saudi Arabia: Climate." 2002. [http://www.arab.net/saudi/sa\\_climate.htm](http://www.arab.net/saudi/sa_climate.htm)

### *Red Sea*

The Red Sea separates Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. In addition to being the kingdom's western border, it serves as a maritime border for Eritrea, Sudan, Egypt and Yemen. With a maximum depth of 2,130 m (6,988 ft), it is 2,250 km (1,398 mi) in length and, at its widest point across, is 355 km (220 mi). The northwestern end of the Red Sea connects to the Gulf of Suez. In the east it connects to the Gulf of Aqaba. The Sinai Peninsula lies between the two. To the south, the Red Sea narrows in the Bab al-Mendab Straits,<sup>11</sup> and then merges with the Gulf of Aden, part of the Arabian Sea.<sup>12</sup>

### *Persian Gulf*

The Persian Gulf is Saudi Arabia's eastern maritime border. It separates the Arabian Peninsula from Iran. In addition, it borders Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman. With an average depth of 50 m (164 ft), it is 1,000 km (621 mi) in length. The maximum width is 370 km (230 mi). The water is warm and the salt level is as high as 40% owing to the fact the evaporation rate exceeds the inflow of fresh water.<sup>13</sup>

## **Major Cities**

### *Riyadh*

Riyadh is the capital of Saudi Arabia. A fast-expanding metropolis with many modern high-rise buildings, the old city, *al-Batha'a*, still exists and functions as a city center. It was chosen as the capital of the *emirate* in 1824 and its fortress remained the base for Saud family rule until 1881, when they were driven out. In 1902, a young Abdulaziz, returned from exile and regained control of the city. From there he acquired the territory that comprises the present-day kingdom which he founded in 1932.

### *Jeddah*

A major port city on the Red Sea, Jeddah is the point of entry for most visitors who come for the *hajj*. Part of an ancient trade route, the number of visitors who have passed through have left their mark and made Jeddah Saudi Arabia's most cosmopolitan city.<sup>14</sup> It was the kingdom's diplomatic capital until 1982. During the 1980s, an estimated growth rate of 10% doubled the number of residents to two million by 1993.

### *Dhahran-Dammam-al-Khobar*

Dhahran-Dammam-al-Khobar is a combined metropolitan area in the oil-producing Eastern Province which borders the Persian Gulf. The 1938 discovery of oil there resulted in rapid growth and expansion of the city. Today it is home to the largest oil company in the world, the Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco), established as a joint venture with **Standard** Oil Company and renamed Saudi Aramco in 1988 after it had been fully nationalized. Saudi Arabia's largest military air base, which was used by U.S. air forces during the Persian Gulf War in 1991, is located in Dhahran. Likewise, the kingdom's largest east coast seaport, Dammam, is located here as well.

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<sup>11</sup> Bab al-Mendab comes from the Arabic meaning "gate of tears."

<sup>12</sup> Encyclopaedia of the Orient. "Red Sea." c. 1996–2007. [http://lexicorient.com/e.o/red\\_sea.htm](http://lexicorient.com/e.o/red_sea.htm)

<sup>13</sup> Encyclopaedia of the Orient. "Persian Gulf." c. 1996–2007 [http://lexicorient.com/e.o/pers\\_glf.htm](http://lexicorient.com/e.o/pers_glf.htm)

<sup>14</sup> Saudi Arabia Market Explorer. "Jiddah." No date. <http://saudinf.com/main/a85.htm>

### *Mecca*

Mecca, called in Arabic “Makkah al-Mukarrama” (Mecca the Holy), is a city nestled in the hills approx. 70 km (42 mi) from Jeddah. It is the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad and the center of the Islamic world. To this city, several million Muslims make the yearly pilgrimage during the tenth month of the Islamic year. The holiest shrine in Islam is here: the Ka’abah, a cube-shaped stone house, 18.28 m (60 ft) in width, height, and breadth. Embedded in its eastern wall is a black meteorite stone approx. 30.48 m (12 in) in diameter and held in place by a large silver frame. A black brocade drape, *kiswa*, around whose top the Muslim *shahada*<sup>15</sup> is embroidered in gold, covers the building. **Believed to have been built** by Abraham and his son Ishmael, the Ka’abah is mentioned in the Old Testament. Mecca was a thriving commercial area at the center of caravan routes in the late 6th century at the time of Muhammad’s birth.

### *Medina*

Called “Al-Medina al-Munawara” (Medina the Enlightened), this second holiest city in Islam was a place of refuge for Muhammad after he fled from Mecca. Here he built a power base of new converts to Islam. Eventually, Muhammad returned to Mecca with a formidable army and forced residents to convert. Today, the Prophet’s mosque and several other mosques in Medina are visited by pilgrims on the way home from Mecca.

### **The Founding of the Modern State**

According to Saudi lore, the origins of the present-day Saudi state in the 20th century owe much to the power and personality of King Abd al-Aziz. Having watched his family driven out of their territory as a child and into exile in British Kuwait, he recognized the value of an alliance with the British as early as 1904. Two years after his small army had recaptured control of Riyadh, Abdulaziz’s authority was solidified by the 1915 Anglo–Saudi Friendship Treaty in which the British recognized Saudi control of **Nejd**, Hasa, Qatif, and Jubail.

With his control over Hijaz secured in 1925, aided by British material support, Abdulaziz declared himself King. This resulted in a new treaty with the British. It included a pledge that he was to respect other British client-states on the Arabian Peninsula. In 1932, Abdulaziz proclaimed the establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The longevity of the monarchy depended upon establishing a royal lineage that would produce future Kings. In this regard, Abdulaziz saw the advantage of making strategic marriages to women from all the major Saudi tribes. These marriages yielded many offspring.

On 14 February 1945, King Abdulaziz met President Franklin Roosevelt aboard the U.S.S. Quincy which was anchored in the Great Bitter Lake, north of the Suez Canal. Roosevelt was on his way home from the Yalta Summit and had given great thought to the energy needs of postwar America. During World War II, American forces had used

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<sup>15</sup> *Shahada* from the Arabic meaning “I bear witness,” consists of the words in Arabic “I bear witness that there is but one God and Muhammad is his Prophet.” It is the basic creed of a Muslim.

one hundred times more gasoline than they had throughout World War I and developing new sources were a matter of national security.<sup>16</sup>

The King proved to be a receptive audience. Oil, discovered in the kingdom in 1938 by American geologists, was his primary source of revenue. It had become all the more important given that his other source of revenue, income from the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, had dried up during the war. Administering his large territory, and keeping tribal leaders happy, required more financial resources than he was able to generate. Aramco officials estimated he required USD 10 million to govern effectively. It was unclear whether he would be able to hold on to power in the absence of an outside power making up the difference.

Until 1942, Great Britain had made up the shortfall between what the King needed and what his internally generated financial resources provided. This had the oil companies concerned. Specifically, they feared that Britain, which was being underwritten by the United States, would shut them out of post-war oil extraction discussions. In 1943, President Roosevelt made the kingdom eligible for U.S. assistance through the lend-lease program. Between 1940 and 1947, the U.S. provided Saudi Arabia with USD 99 million in aid, only 25% of which was to be paid back.

Although the King welcomed the assistance, he was concerned about the prospect of his kingdom becoming a quasi-colony. This prompted him to insist that when the U.S. Consulate in Dhahran was under construction in 1944, the flagpole be put in the wall rather than the ground. He reigned until his death in 1953, at which time his oldest son, Saud, took over.<sup>17</sup>

### **Governance and Dynastic Succession**

Saud was overwhelmed by the responsibilities of governance. Moreover, the impact of post-colonial Arab intellectual politics in the kingdom was profound during the 1950s and 1960s. Dissidence took shape in a number of forms. The new, small professional class began to make demands for a voice in how the government was run. Fears of a coup or governmental overthrow were so profound that King Saud issued an order in 1956 prohibiting Saudi nationals from going abroad for study.<sup>18</sup> Two groups of officers were executed for plotting against the King. Crown Prince Faisal was so worried he threatened to use the tribally-based National Guard against the King. Amid allegations of prodigality and corruption, Saud abdicated in 1965 and went into exile in Egypt. Prince Faisal, the Prime Minister, became King.

Whoever ascends to the Saudi throne is an absolute monarch because there are no formal, institutionalized checks on his authority. For practical purposes, however, his ability to rule effectively depends on creating and sustaining consensus within his very large,

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<sup>16</sup> *Thicker Than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia*. Bronson, Rachel. Chapter Two: "Dropping Anchors in the Middle East [p. 39]." 2006. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>17</sup> In Saudi Arabia after Abd Al-Aziz died, the crown was passed to his eldest son and then from brother to brother, not father to eldest son. The Crown Prince is first in line for succession.

<sup>18</sup> *The Battle for Saudi Arabia: Royalty, Fundamentalism, and Global Power*. Abukhalil, As'Ad. (Chapter Four: "Founding and Evolution of State [p. 94].") 2004. New York: Seven Stories Press.

extended family numbering approx. 20,000 people.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps in recognition of the logistical difficulties, Faisal acted to strengthen the powers vested in the monarchy. Although he had been prime minister during most of his brother Saud's reign, he issued a royal decree stipulating that henceforth the king would serve both as head of state and as head of government.<sup>20</sup> The idea of a consultative council, which had been floated earlier, was shelved.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, while Saud's foreign initiatives could be characterized as erratic, Faisal's foreign policy was fixed to accommodate a stable alliance with the United States.

Faisal's rule was more stable than his brother's, in part, because he consolidated power and suppressed dissent, both within and outside the royal family. The *ulama* or board of Islamic judge-scholars were brought into the government as salaried employees, thereby removing their independent status. He also convinced the skeptical religious establishment that broadcast technology could be utilized to propagate religion. Accordingly, radio shows and the nascent television system were tasked with devoting a portion of air time to religious programming.

The oil boom enabled Faisal to buy off discontent by implementing a "cradle to grave" welfare system. He was assassinated by a nephew in 1976. His successor, Prince Khalid, who suffered from arthritis and heart problems delegated power to his younger brother, Crown Prince Fahad. At Khalid's death in 1982, Fahad became King. Fahad opened succession up to Abdulaziz's grandsons, but selected his brother Abdullah to be the Crown Prince. Prince Abdullah has ruled since Fahad suffered a stroke in 1995 and became King in 2005 after his death.

In sum, the government has developed into an oligarchy. This is a type of governance where a privileged few rule the many. The ruling few are royal princes. They have achieved notoriety within the kingdom by using Saudi Arabia's oil wealth to underwrite lavish lifestyles. Some have accumulated enormous personal wealth, e.g., the late King Fahad had a personal fortune estimated at USD 20 billion.<sup>22</sup>

### **Type of Government**

King Abdulaziz ruled through a combination of personal style and tribal tradition. He stipulated that the kingdom was to be ruled by his direct heirs of the first king. The constitution is derived from the Quran, while the legal system is based on *shari'a* or Islamic law. He saw no need for formal institutions of government until late in his life when he established a *majlis al-wuzur'a* or Council of Ministers in 1953.<sup>23</sup> It drafts resolutions which are then ratified by royal decree. Ministers are appointed by the

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<sup>19</sup> Global Security. "Saudi Leadership." 20 July 2007. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/gulf/sa-leader.htm>

<sup>20</sup> Library of Congress. "The King." <http://countrystudies.us/saudi-arabia/47.htm>

<sup>21</sup> *Thicker Than Water: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia*. Bronson, Rachel. (Chapter Four: "Shifting Sands [p. 81].") 2006. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>22</sup> The word oligarchy comes from the Greek for "few" and "rule." WiseGeek. "What is Oligarchy?" 2007. <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-an-oligarchy.htm>

<sup>23</sup> SaudiOnline. "The Council of Ministers." 8 May 2003. <http://www.saudia-online.com/Government%20Council%20of%20Ministers.htm>

monarch. The law stipulates that the kingdom's judiciary is independent. Judges are appointed by the King on the advice of the Supreme Judicial Council. The monarch retains the power to overrule judicial decisions and grant pardons.

He also created *majlis al-maliki* or royal consultative assemblies in which any Saudi could take his grievances to the King. Few are actually granted an audience with the King; most present their concerns to a deputy minister or aide. Visitors of course must be thoroughly screened. This arrangement, sometimes called "desert democracy," is not the same as having a voice in the decision-making process itself. Some see it as having primarily public relations value to the royal family, because it enabled them to cast themselves as benevolent patriarchs.<sup>24</sup>

In 1993 this innovation was institutionalized into the *majlis al-shura* (Consultative Council or Senate) which was inaugurated by King Fahad. Initially the *majlis* had 61 appointed members; in 1996 the number was increased to 90 members. Although the *majlis* has no formal legislative powers, it has the authority to examine government policies and propose laws or amendments to existing laws. Decisions or suggestions from the *Majlis* then go to the Council of Ministers for review before being forwarded to the King for his approval.<sup>25</sup>

The Saudi state is comprised of 13 governorates (*imarat*), each headed by a governor (*emir*) who enjoys the rank of a minister. Their direct superior is the Minister of Interior. Many of the governors are either his brothers or his nephews. All of them are princes and members of the royal family, although some are not direct descendants of Abd al-Aziz. Most of the governors have royal deputies.<sup>26</sup>

The first ever municipal elections in Saudi Arabia were held in 2005. A total of 1,800 candidates competed to fill 592 seats, the other half filled by appointment, in the kingdom's 38 municipal councils. No female candidates stood for office nor were women allowed to vote. Citizen interest was low, however. Only one-quarter of eligible voters in the Riyadh region bothered to register.<sup>27</sup> After the polls closed, it took the government an additional eight months to appoint the remaining members.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Middle East Review of International Affairs. Champion, Daryl. "The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Elements of Instability Within Stability." December 1999. <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/1999/issue4/jv3n4a4.html>

<sup>25</sup> Emory University. Islamic Family Law. Legal Profiles. Saudi Arabia. "Saudi Arabia, Kingdom Of." No date. <http://www.law.emory.edu/ifl/legal/saudiarabia.htm>

<sup>26</sup> Middle Eastern Review of International Affairs. Raphaeli, Nimrod. "A Brief Guide to Its Politics and Its Problems." September 2003. <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2003/issue3/jv7n3a2.html>

<sup>27</sup> Voice of America News. "Saudi Arabia Holds First Ever Election." 10 February 2005. <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2005-02/2005-02-10-voa7.cfm?CFID=195332705&CFTOKEN=63100882>

<sup>28</sup> Le Monde diplomatique. Gresh, Alain. Saudi Arabia: reality check." February 2006. <http://mondediplo.com/2006/02/02saudi>

## Media

Newspapers in Saudi Arabia are privately owned, although publishers, editors, and journalists must be appointed or have received approval from the government to operate. There are no codified restrictions on freedom of expression in the kingdom so self-censorship prevails. Journalists are acutely aware of what consequences await anyone who questions Islam or voices opposition to, or criticism of, the government in general or members of the royal family in particular.<sup>29</sup> At a minimum, they will never write for a Saudi publication again. There are 20 newspapers that appear daily of which two, Saudi Gazette and Arab News, are in English. The national television network broadcasts 24 hours a day in Arabic on three separate channels, and 20 hours per day on a fourth English-speaking channel.<sup>30</sup> Social reform, including the role of religion, the status of women in society, and the need for educational reform, are perennial topics for debate in the media. The internet, to which many Saudis subscribe, is heavily censored.<sup>31</sup>

## Economy

Oil accounts for 90 to 95% of the kingdom's export earnings.<sup>32</sup> The joint venture company Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco) was established to develop the kingdom's vast oil reserves after oil was discovered in 1938. Large-scale production began after World War II.<sup>33</sup> Aramco came to employ thousands of people in the kingdom's Eastern Province, many of whom were minority Shi'ites who dominate the population in Eastern Province where Saudi Arabia's oil is located. From the beginning through the 1970s, Aramco was regarded a parastate, i.e. a state within a state. It built the first roads, airports, schools, hospitals, and water and power plants in the kingdom.<sup>34</sup>

With oil reserves in the range of 262 billion bbl (barrels), it is no surprise that oil has played a prominent role in the kingdom's development plans for the new millennium. Given that barely 15% of the kingdom has been surveyed, the prospects for expanding petroleum exports could be quite significant. However, the need for economic diversification has also been recognized. With a young population and high rate of unemployment for males 18 to 23, job creation is a pressing concern for the government.<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, Saudi Arabia's population jumped from seven million in 1980 to more than 27 million in 2006 (with 60% under the age of 20). At the height of the oil boom in 1980,

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<sup>29</sup> BBC News (UK Version). "The press in Saudi Arabia." 26 January 2005.  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/4148009.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4148009.stm)

<sup>30</sup> Kidon Media Link. Newspapers and New Sources Saudi Arabia. 2006. <http://www.kidon.com/media-link/sa.php>

<sup>31</sup> Reporters Without Borders. "Blogger.com accessible again." 6 October 2005.  
[http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id\\_article=15201](http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=15201)

<sup>32</sup> *Thicker Than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia*. (Chapter One: "Oil, God and Real Estate[p. 21].") 2006. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>33</sup> Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. [www.globalization101.org](http://www.globalization101.org). "Energy." No date.  
<http://www.globalization101.org/index.php?file=issue&pass1=subs&id=335>

<sup>34</sup> *The Battle for Saudi Arabia: Royalty, Fundamentalism, and Global Power*. Abukhalil, As'Ad. (Chapter Four: "Founding and Evolution of State [p. 90].") 2004. New York: Seven Stories Press.

<sup>35</sup> Oxford Business Group. "Saudi Arabia – Country Profile." 2005.  
<http://www.oxfordbusinessgroup.com/country.asp?country=44>

the kingdom's per capita income was around USD 21,000. By 2001 it had fallen to around USD 12,200. This reflects the impact of population growth. The country's resources must be shared by many more people.<sup>36</sup>

Though the idea of privatization of industry outside the petroleum sector has traditionally received a favorable reception, in reality, it has been largely limited to allowing private firms to contract for service functions, particularly for foreign investors.<sup>37</sup>

### **Ethnic Groups**

The tribes of Saudi Arabia consider themselves to be pure "Arabs" based on their ancestry in the indigenous tribes of the peninsula. Yet, over the centuries other ethnic elements have migrated to the peninsula and settled there. Estimates of ethnicity are largely uniform—Arab 90% and Afro-Asian 10%.<sup>38</sup> Among the native tribes, regionalism plays an important role and tribal territories are well known and demarcated. However, African and Asian minorities owe their presence in the kingdom to the proximity of Africa just across the Red Sea and to the seaports of the Arabian Gulf that have been historically open to merchant trade with Asia. Finally, the yearly pilgrimage, *hajj*, brings pilgrims from all corners of the Muslim world, a few of whom remain every year and never return to their home country.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *The J Curve: A New Way to Understand Why Nations Rise and Fall*. Bremmer, Ian. Chapter Three: "The Slide Toward Instability [p. 116.]." 2006. New York: Simon and Shuster.

<sup>37</sup> U.S. Energy Information Administration. "Saudi Arabia." 2007.  
[http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Saudi\\_Arabia/Background.html](http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Saudi_Arabia/Background.html)

<sup>38</sup> Department of Near Eastern Affairs. U.S. Department of State. June 2007. Background Note: Saudi Arabia. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3584.htm>

<sup>39</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. Saudi Arabian Ethnic Groups. 2007.  
<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-45205/Saudi-Arabia>

## Chapter 2 Religion

### Introduction

Saudi Arabia is a theocratic state.<sup>40</sup> Its legitimacy does not derive from the ballot box, but rather from religion and from what is held to be divine truth. Understanding what Islam means for Saudi Arabians and its residents requires a discussion of how theocracy in this part of the Arabian Peninsula began. Located at the geographic center of the Islamic world with Islam's two holiest sites, Mecca and Medina, the country is by admission purist and conservative. The King carries the secondary title, *khadam al-haramain al-sharifain* or "guardian/servant of the two holy places." For Saudi Arabians, practices or innovations that deviate from the 7th century C.E. teachings of the Prophet Muhammad have to be justified. The people have sometimes been erroneously labeled "Wahabists"<sup>41</sup> in the popular western press. They, however, would probably describe themselves as *muwahiddun* (unifiers), *salafiyyun* (purists), or *hanifeen* (monotheists). There is no shortage of radical fundamentalism in Saudi Arabia. Modern fundamentalism can be traced back to the 18th century teachings of Abdul-Wahab, but it owes its zealotry more to 20th century writers like Sayyid Qutb, who have left volumes of programmatic works on reforming Islam and returning it to its original purity.

### Theocracy on the Arabian Peninsula

There is very little theoretical literature available on Wahabism, a movement which played an important role in shaping the ambitions and actions of the ruling sheikhs of the Al-Saud tribe.<sup>42</sup> The man after whom this early form of fundamentalism was named, Muhammad Abdul-Wahab, was born into the Tamimi tribe in Nejd in the early 18th century. He died before the turn of the 19th century.

The Nejd, an arid region of central Arabia north of Riyadh, is not historically noted for producing Islamic scholars.<sup>43</sup> Its barren topography is reflected in the dearth of intellectual history. Indeed, unlike 20th century Islamic thinkers, Abdul-Wahab did not leave a body of writing that could be consulted by posterity. Besides a legacy of preaching Sunni Islam as it existed at the time of the Prophet and a literal interpretation of the Quran, his only written contribution was a short collection of *hadith*, or sayings of the Prophet.<sup>44</sup> He was a literalist who considered the cult surrounding saints, holy men's tombs, and sacrifice to holy men—all prevalent practices among the oases dwellers and nomads of Arabia—to be unacceptable innovations (*bida*). Modernity was heresy for him and his followers. One test of the depth and purity of faith according to Abdul-Wahab and later reformers in Islam is the proximity of the believer to Islam as it existed in the

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<sup>40</sup> A theocracy is a state which is ruled by religious authorities.

<sup>41</sup> The word "Wahabi" comes from the name of a Muslim cleric reformer, Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahab (1703–1791), who was an early supporter of the Al-Saud tribe.

<sup>42</sup> *The Battle for Saudi Arabia: Royalty, Fundamentalism, and Global Power*. Abukhalil, As'Ad. Chapter Three: "Wahhibiyyah [p. 51].". 2004. New York: Seven Stories.

<sup>43</sup> Congressional Research Division Report for Congress. Blanchard, Christopher. "The Islamic Traditions of Wahhabism and Salafiyya [p. 5]." 17 January 2007. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RS21695.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay*. Hamid, Algar. 2002. New York: Islamic Publications.

7th century C.E. Reformers in Islam, incidentally, are not liberalizers in the western sense of the word, but rather guardians of the original faith.

### **Wahabi Alliance with the House of Saud**

To enforce his fundamentalist views, Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahab needed the support of a political authority.<sup>45</sup> He found a receptive audience in the Al-Saud Sheikhs of Diriyah Oasis near Riyadh, which was under the control of Muhammad Ibn Saud. Both patron and protégé benefited from this union. The militant Al-Saud tribe found the austere brand of Islam a good companion for their expansionist agenda. A mutual support pact between the Al-Saud ruler of Diriyah and Muhammed Ibn Abdul-Wahab was signed in 1744. Henceforth, Al-Saud warriors referred to themselves as a brotherhood of the *mutawwa'een*<sup>46</sup> or “those who are sent to lead others back to the path of righteousness.” Religious police who patrol the 21st century streets of Saudi cities, enforcing Shari’a law, are known even today as the *mutawwa’ah*. They are members of an official organization known as “The Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice” (*hay’a al-amir bil alma’roof wa lil nahee ‘an al-muhkar*).

Throughout the 19th century, the *mutawwa’ah* proselytizers and clerics helped consolidate territory after Ibn Saud had conquered it. The Ibn Saud sheikhs husbanded Wahabi fanaticism. This included the use of *takfir*, or declaration of the infidelity, for other Arab tribes who rejected Wahabi orthodoxy. The declaration legitimized warfare and the seizure of the property of those declared as infidels. This was particularly true in the case of the Shi’a tribes of the east coast. In this way the House of Saud acquired more land and expanded its presence on the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>47</sup>

### **Theocracy in the 20th Century**

In the early 20th century, Abdulaziz gathered more tribal territory into his fold and conceived the idea of creating an enduring state. However, he was aware of the necessity of prolonging tactical compromises with the Wahabi brotherhood, as well as, strategic alliances with foreign powers like Great Britain, who were regarded as infidel nations. By the end of the 1920s, the union of Saudi military strength and Wahabi doctrinal power was rapidly becoming obsolete for Abdulaziz. When the Muslim Brotherhood revolted against him in 1927, he moved to crush them. Many were killed. Their gatherings were banned and only those who declared total allegiance to Abdulaziz were tolerated. In 1932, Abdulaziz declared the territories he controlled to be the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

In the decades following the founding of the Saudi state, the nexus between Al-Saud and the Wahabists lost much of its significance. Other fundamentalists, some more potent than the Wahabists, e.g. Sayyid Al-Qutb, have come along. Yet the King continues to favor the Al-Sheikh tribe, as the descendents of Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahab are now

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<sup>45</sup> *A History of Saudi Arabia*. Al-Rasheed, Madawi. (Chapter One: “Society and Politics, 1744–1818 and 1824-1891 [pp. 16–17].”). 2002. New York: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>46</sup> *Mutawwa’een* is the plural of *mutawwa’ah*.

<sup>47</sup> *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay*. [p. 62] Hamid, Algar. 2002. New York: Islamic Publications

known, by appointing one of their number to sit as Grand Mufti on the *ulama*, or supreme board of Islamic scholars. He is thereby permitted to issue religious edicts (*fatwa*).<sup>48</sup>

In effect, there is nothing secular about the Saudi state. Religion envelopes the affairs of everyone in totality. The Ministry of Waqf, or Islamic Endowments, together with the *ulama* regulate all religious affairs and much of the daily life of Saudi citizens. The Waqf Ministry oversees international Islamic relations as well as the annual pilgrimage (*hajj*).<sup>49</sup>

### **Five Pillars of Islam**

Islamic religious belief is based on five pillars of faith. The first of these is the *shahada*, or the basic declaration of the faith, expressed by repeating the phrase “There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his Prophet.” The second pillar is prayer (*salat*). Five times a day at appointed hours: dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and mid-evening, Muslims face Mecca in their prayers. The third pillar is *zakat*, or tithing. Originally voluntary, it is now deducted as a payroll tax at the rate of 2.5% of one’s income. The fourth pillar is *sawm*, or fasting during the daylight hours of the month of Ramadan. Only the young and infirm are exempted. The fifth pillar is performing the *hajj*, or pilgrimage to Mecca, once in a lifetime for those who are physically and financially able to do so.

### **Prayer**

Although the Quran specifies men may worship in a clean home, public piety is officially encouraged in Saudi Arabia. To facilitate this, there are mosques everywhere. This includes beaches, schools, military installations, law enforcement agencies, airports, border crossings, gas stations, shopping malls, business offices, and government buildings. Temporary mosques can even be found at construction sites. When the call to prayer is heard, all businesses close except for hospital emergency rooms and public security installations.<sup>50</sup> On highways, it is customary for truck drivers to get out of their vehicles and pray by the roadside.<sup>51</sup> Non-Muslim visitors should not attempt to enter mosques or photograph them.

### **Religious Holidays**

Saudi Arabia recognizes only two Islamic holidays: the *Eid al-Fitr* and the *Eid al-Adha*, or Feast of Sacrifice. *Eid al-Fitr* marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan. *Eid al-Adha* is the feast of slaughter that celebrates the end of the pilgrimage season. The official calendar of the country is the Islamic lunar calendar which is thirteen days shorter than the Western solar calendar. Thus, these festivals occur at different times each year and the timing of each depends on a moon sighting.

### **Exchange 1: Will you be celebrating Eid al-Fitr?**

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<sup>48</sup> International Journal of Middle East Studies. Kechichian, Joseph A. “The Role of the Ulama in the Politics of an Islamic State: The Case of Saudi Arabia.” February, 1986. Vol. 18, No. 1 (Feb., 1986), pp. 53–71.

<sup>49</sup> Library of Congress. “The Ulama.” No date. <http://countrystudies.us/saudi-arabia/54.htm>

<sup>50</sup> Telegraph. Moss, Fiona. “My Life Inside Saudi Arabia.” 4 June 2004. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/arts/main.jhtml?xml=/arts/2004/06/04/ftsaudi04.xml>

<sup>51</sup> Escape Artist. Straub, Hans. “Saudi Arabia After the Intifada: Life in Saudi Arabia as an Outsider.” c.1996–2004. [http://www.escapeartist.com/efam/59/Life\\_In\\_Saudi\\_Arabia.html](http://www.escapeartist.com/efam/59/Life_In_Saudi_Arabia.html)

Soldier:	Will you be celebrating Eid al-Fitr?	raaH tiHtafloon b'eed il fuTir?
Local:	Yes!	na'am!

### *Hajj*

According to the original sayings of Muhammad, one of the five pillars of Islam is making the annual *hajj* pilgrimage once in a **lifetime**—finances and health permitting. It is a highly ritualistic undertaking that consists of more than simply traveling to Mecca.

The pilgrimage takes place between the eighth and thirteenth days of the Arabic month of Hajj (*dhul hajjah*) of the lunar calendar. Pilgrims from all corners of the Islamic world arrive in Mecca prior to that date. As a pilgrim approaches Mecca, he enters the zone of *ihram*, or purity and holiness. It begins about 10 km (6 mi) outside the city limits. Here, males will don two white sheets that are wrapped around the body, while females wear a simple white gown. These are special worship clothes which are worn throughout the pilgrimage.<sup>52</sup> The physical act of putting them on is accompanied by a mental change reflecting the desire (*niyyah*) on the part of the pilgrim to renounce the worldly life for a more pious and humble existence. The events of the five days between the 8th and 13th days of *hajj* month are fixed and they proceed in strict ritual fashion. For the Islamic year 1429 (Gregorian calendar 2008) the *hajj* will begin during the first week of December.

Having entered Mecca in a state of *ihram* (purity), pilgrims proceed on the first day (8 *dhul hajjah*) to the Grand Mosque, the *masjid al-haram*. There they perform the *tawwaf*, or circumambulation of the Ka'abah, walking around it seven times. They pray in the Grand Mosque and proceed to perform the *Sa'i* (the running between the hills of Safa and Marwah). This commemorates the search of Hajar, Abraham's second wife, for water for herself and her son Ishmael. Afterward, the pilgrims drink from the Well of Zem Zem that was shown to Hajar by an angel.

On the second day (9 *dhul hajjah*), the pilgrims move out to an encampment on the plains of Mina, east of the city and in view of Mt. Arafat. This is the hill from which Muhammad delivered his last sermon. The day is spent in prayer and reflection as pilgrims ask for forgiveness for their sins. At night they move on to Muzdalifah and prepare for the high holy day to follow, *Eid al-Adha*, the Feast of Sacrifice.

The third day (10 *dhul hajjah*) is the highest holy day of the Islamic year and it begins with pilgrims throwing pebbles (*al-ramy*) at a pillar symbolizing the devil. The stoning is in commemoration of Abraham's wrestling with the devil as Satan sought to drive him to sacrifice his son. The feast which follows and which is celebrated throughout the Islamic world is the *Eid al-Adha*. The slaughter of a sheep or goat reminds believers of the ram that was sent to Abraham to be slaughtered in place of his son. The Saudi government operates a large slaughterhouse and meat processing facility near Mecca, which ships frozen meat to needy Muslims throughout the Islamic world.

<sup>52</sup> Bashiri Working Papers on Central Asia and Iran. Bashiri, Iraj. "A Brief Note on the *Hajj* Rituals." 2004. <http://www.angelfire.com/rnb/bashiri/hajj/hajj.html>

On the fourth and fifth days (11–12 *dhul hajjah*) pilgrims return to Mecca to revisit the Grand Mosque, perform an additional *tawwaf* (circumambulation) and additional stonings. By the sixth day (13 *dhul hajjah*) pilgrims leave Mecca; many proceed north to visit Medina before leaving the country.

### Places of Worship

Unlike many other Islamic countries, where non-Muslims are permitted or encouraged to visit mosques, places of worship in Saudi Arabia are strictly off limits to non-Muslims. A non-Muslim should not attempt to enter or peer into prayer places.

#### Exchange 2: May I enter the mosque?

Soldier:	May I enter the mosque?	mumkin nadKhil al masjid?
Local:	No.	laa.

There are basically two kinds of places for worship: *masjid* (mosque) and *musalle* (a prayer hall). However, Muslims can and do pray in public when a mosque or prayer hall is not available. One should never walk in front of a person praying. It invalidates his prayers.

#### Exchange 3: Do I need to cover my head?

Soldier:	Do I need to cover my head?	laazim aghaTee raasee?
Local:	Yes.	na'am.

Each mosque has an assigned *imam* (prayer leader). Congregational prayers and sermons are held on Fridays. Prayer halls can be found in schools, airports, hospitals and other public and private buildings and they spare the busy traveler or businessman the walk to a mosque.

#### Exchange 4: Must I take off my shoes before entering the mosque?

Soldier:	Must I take off my shoes before entering the mosque?	laazim anza' in'aalee gabul adKhil al masjid?
Local:	Yes.	na'am.

Prayer times are listed in newspapers and published on television for the convenience of Muslims and guidance of foreigners. They are five in number and depending on the time of year they are: dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and mid-evening, between 8 p.m. and 9 p.m.

#### Exchange 5: When do you pray?

Soldier:	When do you pray?	mita tSalee?
Local:	We pray at noon.	aSalee iDh Dhuhur.

### **Shi'a Minority**

The Shi'a are a minority in Saudi Arabia, constituting approximately 5% of the total population. They primarily inhabit the Eastern Province, where they comprise perhaps 33% of the population.<sup>53</sup> From a Saudi theological perspective, Sunni Muslims ought to consider the Shi'as to be tainted by *shirk*, which means the association of **a mortal** with the sole divinity of God. This is particularly true of the *Ashura* (feast of the 10th day) which commemorates the martyrdom of Hussein at the Battle of Karbala on the 10th of the month Muharram in the year 670.<sup>54</sup> Until recently, Shi'a Muslims living in Saudi Arabia were prohibited from building basements in their houses, owing to official fears that they could be transformed into prayer halls (*husseiniya*).<sup>55</sup> Strict stipulations limit Shia mosque construction and other aspects of Shi'a worship. Shi'as have been barred from all but the most modest displays on their principal festivals. They can import religious texts, but are not allowed to print books themselves.

### **The Influence of Religion on Male–Female Interaction**

Even by the standards of the conservative Muslim Middle East, Saudi Arabia enforces strict gender segregation.<sup>56</sup> The late Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Baz, a blind theologian and member of the *ulama*, had a great impact on the status of Saudi women. Specifically, any part of a woman, including the sound of her voice, was something which should be revealed only to family members and close friends. Women also remain prohibited from driving cars in order to avoid being alone in the physical proximity of unrelated men. The same Abdulaziz bin Baz routinely appeared on television, condemning graphic depiction of human forms and photography. Television itself was accepted only after it was pointed out that it could serve as a medium to spread religious messages.

### **Guidance on Public Conduct**

In no other Middle Eastern country is a foreigner under greater scrutiny than in Saudi Arabia. The reception of foreigners in the country varies between total hospitality to mere tolerance of infidels on holy ground. The former is much more common; **but** the latter does exist. Visitors are enjoined to dress modestly—men with long trousers and women with long skirts and covered heads. During the month of Ramadan, foreigners are warned not to eat, smoke, or drink during daylight hours in public or in the presence of Muslims. Religious police patrol public areas and are empowered to take into custody men and women whose public conduct is considered immoderate or immoral. Under no circumstance should a male approach or attempt to talk to a female in a public or private place unless the two are married or closely related.

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<sup>53</sup> Library of Congress, Federal Division of Research. "Shia." No date. <http://countrystudies.us/saudi-arabia/28.htm>

<sup>54</sup> BBC News. "In pictures: Ashura celebrations." 5 April 2001. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/1263232.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/1263232.stm)

<sup>55</sup> Pittsburg Tribune-Review. Hiel, Betsy. "Saudi sect presses for equality." 6 May 2007. [http://www.pittsburghlive.com/x/pittsburghtrib/news/middleeastreports/s\\_506273.html](http://www.pittsburghlive.com/x/pittsburghtrib/news/middleeastreports/s_506273.html)

<sup>56</sup> Humanities and Social Sciences Online. Naber, Nadine. "Disaggregating Islam from Arab." December 2002. <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=149891042829107>

## Chapter 3 Traditions

### Greetings and Introductions

The use of first names in Saudi Arabia denotes more familiarity than in the West. There is no close equivalent to Mister, although the Saudis borrow the Hashemite title of “Sayyed” for this purpose in written correspondence. Arabs value sincerity over formality unless it is at a formal reception. A simple greeting goes a long way to opening doors.

#### Exchange 6: How are you?

Soldier:	How are you?	wish lonak?
Local:	Fine, very well.	bKhayr, Tayib.

The appropriate level of friendliness, without assuming undue familiarity, can also be achieved by the use of the *kunya* which refers to a man’s first-born son. Thus, a man may be referred to by his friends as *Abu* (father of), followed by the name of his (usually eldest) son, e.g., Abu Yusuf or father of Yusuf. It is quite acceptable to ask a mutual acquaintance if you do not know a man’s *kunya*. Even if he is not yet the father of a son, the name has been picked in advance and therefore is acceptable to address a man in this way.

#### Exchange 7: Hi, Mr. Mohammed.

Soldier:	Hi, Mr. Mohammed.	marHaba aKh imHamad.
Local:	Hello!	ahlayn!
Soldier:	Are you doing well?	'asaak ibKhayr?
Local:	Yes, by God.	ee wal laa.

Somewhat less common is the female equivalent *Umm* (mother of).<sup>57</sup> Asking about the family is acceptable; to make direct inquiries about a man’s wife or daughter is not.

#### Exchange 8: Good morning.

Soldier:	Good morning.	SabaHk al laa bil Khayr.
Local:	Good morning.	SabaHk al laa bin noor.

Handshakes amount to a firm clasp of hands. A man should never extend his hand to a woman outside his own family. Instead, when being introduced to a woman he should put his right arm across his chest, bow slightly and avoid eye contact. For Muslims, the left hand is reserved for activities associated with the bathroom. It should never be used to take food or to offer something. To offer something to someone with the left hand is considered extremely rude. Saudi men among themselves may rub noses or kiss shoulders depending upon the tribe and level of familiarity between the individuals. Such

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<sup>57</sup> Executive Planet. “Saudi Arabia: First Name or Title?” 5 December 2006.  
[http://www.executiveplanet.com/index.php?title=Saudi\\_Arabia:\\_First\\_Name\\_or\\_Title%3F](http://www.executiveplanet.com/index.php?title=Saudi_Arabia:_First_Name_or_Title%3F)

greetings should not be interpreted as evidence of homosexuality which is illegal in Saudi Arabia.

Prosperity has not transformed the traditional character of the Arabs of Saudi Arabia. Arabs are spontaneously friendly. Whether one encounters a native Saudi or an Arab guest worker from the Levant or North Africa, a friendly hello will always bring a polite and friendly response.

**Exchange 9:** Good afternoon.

Soldier:	Good afternoon.	masaak al laa bil Khayr.
Local:	Good afternoon.	masaak al laa bin noor.

Basic "hellos" between Arabs and foreigners are usually accompanied by a firm handshake. This underscores the sincerity of the greeting.

**Exchange 10:** Good evening!

Soldier:	Good evening!	masaak al laa bil Khayr!
Local:	Good evening!	masaak al laa bin noor!

Between peninsular Arabs, traditional greetings are very formulaic and can extend to a ritual of several minutes with inquiries about parents, uncles, and cousins. An Arab is never alone and members of his family are visible or invisible partners in most of his transactions.

**Exchange 11:** How is your family?

Soldier:	How is your family?	shlon ahalk?
Local:	They are doing fine, thank you.	maa 'aleyhum, Taybeen.

One can observe Bedouin Arabs kissing each other's forehead or cheek, or bumping each others noses. These are tokens of friendship or tribal ties and not a sign of homosexuality. Such gestures are **almost** never extended to visitors or foreigners.

**Exchange 12:** Good night!

Soldier:	Good night!	tiSbiH 'ala Khayr!
Local:	Good night!	tiSbiH 'ala Khayr!

**Dress Code**

The only absolute requirement for attire in the Kingdom is modesty. For men, this means covering themselves from navel to ankle. Short sleeves are acceptable, but not short pants. Foreign female visitors are required to adhere to the same dress code as Saudi women in public. This means putting on the *abaya* (black outer cover) and head scarf in public. Every part of the body should be covered in public except the face, hands, and feet.

**Exchange 13:** How should I dress?

Soldier:	How should I dress?	wish albas?
Local:	Wear loose fitting clothes which cover your body.	ilbas malaabis fiDhfaaDha tighaTee jismak.

A woman can wear literally anything she chooses to under the *abaya*, however. The public dress code for women is taken very seriously in Saudi Arabia. So serious is the level of enforcement that the religious police (*mutawwa'een*) recently interfered with rescue efforts during a fire at a girl's school because the fleeing students were not in compliance with the dress code for females. As a result, at least 14 students lost their lives.<sup>58</sup>

**Exchange 14:** Is this acceptable to wear?

Soldier:	Is this acceptable to wear?	haaTha magbool libsa?
Local:	Yes.	na'am.

**Superstition**

The “evil eye” is part of Islamic cosmology. In essence, it is a belief that good luck or fortune can elicit envy in others that may bring about some misfortune. Even mundane misfortune such as breaking a leg is typically attributed to this superstition. In Saudi Arabia, those who suffer from severe mental illness are presumed in rural wisdom to have been struck by the evil eye. A psychiatrist has observed that mental illness is difficult to acknowledge due to the stigma it carries in Saudi society. Moreover, many of those who have undergone successful treatment for emotional or mental problems persist in the view that the evil eye was the root cause of their affliction.<sup>59</sup>

To avoid casting the evil eye on anyone, do not express admiration for their possessions or family without concluding with the words “*ma shallah*” or “God Bless.” This conveys the hope God will similarly bless the speaker with a baby boy or a new car as opposed to suggesting the speaker desires that which belongs to the listener.

**Gifts**

Do not show excessive admiration or interest in something belonging to someone else, because it makes him feel obliged to give it to you or risk the wrath of the evil eye.

For a soldier, an appropriate gift for Saudis who have provided a great deal of assistance would be a unit coin. Casual acquaintances will not expect a gift. Saudis will not open wrapped gifts in the presence of the giver, but wait until later to unwrap it privately to avoid seeming greedy and impatient.

**Exchange 15:** This gift is for you.

Soldier:	This gift is for you.	haaThee hadeeya lik.
Local:	I cannot accept this.	magdar aaKhiTh haa.

<sup>58</sup> Human Rights Watch. “Saudi Arabia: Religious Police Role in Saudi School Fire Criticized.” 15 March 2002. <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2002/03/15/saudia3801.htm>

<sup>59</sup> Asharq Alawsat. al Eidan, Kholoud. “The Evil Eye: Traditional Superstitions and Mental Illness in Saudi Arabia.” 2 August 2007. <http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=7&id=9773>

Never offer gold jewelry or silk garments to men because both are regarded as effeminate by Muslims. Cologne is a very acceptable gift, however. Perfume should only be presented to women by other women. A man should never present a gift to a woman to whom he is not related.<sup>60</sup>

### Food and Hospitality

The staple ingredients evident in Arab cuisine hark back to a time when nomadic tribes could only consume transportable food items such as rice and dates, or ambulatory livestock such as sheep and camels. As the caravans established new routes throughout the Middle East, seasonings and vegetables were discovered and incorporated into existing tribal dishes. This accounts for the aromatic anomalies found in Arabic cuisine today.<sup>61</sup>

#### Exchange 16: The food tastes so good.

Soldier:	The food tastes so good.	al-akil Tayib.
Local:	Thank you.	mashkoor.

Nowhere is this more evident than the western region of Hijaz. In addition to the traders, pilgrims from far away lands sometimes remained and their culinary traditions blended into regional cooking.<sup>62</sup>

#### Exchange 17: This food is very good.

Soldier:	This food is very good.	haaTha al-akil Tayib.
Local:	It's Aseeda.	haaThee 'aSeeda.

Lamb with milk and rice (*saleeq*) is the best known of all Saudi rice dishes. It is akin to hot rice pudding. The rice is semi-cooked in meat or chicken broth and then mixed with milk, stirred and simmered for about 30 minutes until soft. Various kinds of gravy, cooked with vegetables and meat, are also common in the Kingdom. The coastal areas are famous for seafood and rice dishes.

Arabic coffee and fruit drinks are popular alternatives to alcohol, which is forbidden by the Quran. Alcohol-free beers and cocktails are available in hotel bars. Serving Arabic coffee to visitors is an age old custom which reflects Bedouin hospitality. The coffee ceremony (*gawha*) follows ancient rules of preparation etiquette. In the presence of his guests, the host will roast, cool, and grind the beans. The beans are ground by hand using mortar and pestle. Cardamom pods are added during the grinding process. After the coffee is brewed, the host will pour a cup for each guest, all of whom are typically male. The cups are small and when you have had enough, a gentle shake of your cup signifies

<sup>60</sup> Executive Planet. "Saudi Arabia Gift Giving: A General Overview." 5 December 2006. [http://www.executiveplanet.com/index.php?title=Saudi\\_Arabia:\\_Gift\\_Giving](http://www.executiveplanet.com/index.php?title=Saudi_Arabia:_Gift_Giving)

<sup>61</sup> ArabNet. "ABC of Arabic Cuisine." 1998. <http://www.arab.net/cuisine/>

<sup>62</sup> Aramco Services Company. Ni'Mah Isma'il Nawwab. "The Culinary Kingdom." Jan./Feb. 1999. <http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/199901/the.culinary.kingdom.htm>

to the server that you do not desire further refills.<sup>63</sup> The Bedouins have a saying, “he makes coffee from morn until night.” It is the highest praise for a generous man; no greater compliment can be issued. Likewise, no greater insult exists than in refusing a cup of coffee or tea.<sup>64</sup>

**Exchange 18:** I really appreciate your hospitality.

Soldier:	I really appreciate your hospitality.	mashkoo' 'ala iDh Dhiyaafa.
Local:	It is nothing.	wajibkum.

When cooking, it is common for Saudis to make enough to accommodate last minute guests. When a meal is over, there should always be food left over; otherwise, it might appear that a guest had not been fully satisfied.

**Exchange 19:** What is the name of this dish?

Soldier:	What is the name of this dish?	wish isim hal akla?
Local:	This is <i>kabsa</i> .	haaThee ismaha kabsa.

It is possible that male soldiers might receive an invitation to dine at a Saudi home. In this case, they will be received by the male members of the family and will not see the women. The western practice of taking a house gift or sweets is not common among Saudis. Politeness and courtesy are the best rewards for hospitality.

Etiquette requires that you remove your shoes before entering the home. It is important to stand up to greet people and make sure the soles of your shoes or feet are never visible when sitting.

If invited for lunch or dinner, the most likely dish is the national dish, *kebsah*, which is a dish of spiced rice and meat, either lamb or chicken, served on a large charger or tray.

**Exchange 20:** What ingredients are used to make *kabsa*?

Soldier:	What ingredients are used to make <i>kabsa</i> ?	wishee mukaweynaat al kabsa?
Local:	Lamb meat, rice, tomato paste and mixed spices.	laHam ghanam wu riz ma' SalSat TamaaTim wu ibharaat imKhalaTa.

At this point the guest may be exposed to informal gestures commonly used by Saudis. A touch of the finger to the nose means “I will not forget.” A touch of the index finger to the face below the eyes emphasizes the sincerity of the response. A click of the tongue and an upward shift of the head means “No.”

<sup>63</sup> Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. 2004. “Doing Business with Saudi Arabia.” [http://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/business\\_saudi\\_arabia/doing\\_business\\_saudi.html#isl](http://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/business_saudi_arabia/doing_business_saudi.html#isl)

<sup>64</sup> In Mama’s Kitchen. “Saudi Arabian Cooking.” No date. [http://www.inmaskitchen.com/FOOD\\_IS\\_ART/mideast/saudi\\_cooking.html](http://www.inmaskitchen.com/FOOD_IS_ART/mideast/saudi_cooking.html)

Major Saudi cities have all manner of trendy restaurants serving a variety of international cuisine.<sup>65</sup> Yet all dining establishments enforce the strict rules of gender segregation including separate entrances for men and women. This means a family cannot dine together in public. Men must go to the men's section while women and children are seated in the family section. Women, moreover, can be denied admittance without the written approval of a senior male member of the family.<sup>66</sup>

### Weddings

Honor is of crucial importance to Muslim culture. Nowhere is this more true than in protecting the purity of females. Chastity is the most important asset a woman brings to marriage.<sup>67</sup> "Honor killings" of women by their male family members and revenge killings of the male involved are an ancient means of addressing violations of the honor code, both real and imagined. Under these circumstances, the Saudi practice of segregating the sexes is the most practical means to maintain public order.

As a result, public dating can have serious legal consequences in Saudi Arabia. Officially and practically; it does not exist. This means young people have few opportunities to meet. Yet, young men and women in urban areas are better acquainted prior to an arranged marriage than was the case in the past, often using cellphones and other modern means of communication to get to know each other.<sup>68</sup> Nowadays, women typically have the right of refusal in marriage offers. This would be done indirectly. When the family of the male asks for the hand of another family's daughter, if she is not interested they will be told "We are sorry, but she wants to continue her education." This stage is handled by the female members of the families. If the young woman accepts, the fathers of the couple become involved.

It is customary for men to pay a dowry for their brides. A specified amount of money is paid by the husband to the wife as a form of dowry or *maher*.<sup>69</sup> This reflects the seriousness of his commitment. It is the responsibility of his family to come up with the sum which has been agreed upon. The negotiation takes place between the senior male members of both families over coffee. No one even takes a sip, however, until the amount has been agreed upon and the business has been settled.

In Saudi Arabia, marriage is not a sacrament but a civil contract.<sup>70</sup> It must be concluded and signed in the presence of witnesses. After the ceremony has been officiated, the bride and groom proceed together toward a wedding cake as the guests move out of the way to

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<sup>65</sup> Chicago Sun Times. Abu-Nasr, Donna. "Service with a smile? Not in Saudi Arabia: Rules go beyond sex." 17 April 2006. [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qn4155/is\\_20060417/ai\\_n16162699](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4155/is_20060417/ai_n16162699)

<sup>66</sup> Washington Post. King, Colbert. "Saudi Arabia's Apartheid." 22 December 2001. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A15193-2001Dec21?language=printer>

<sup>67</sup> Country Reports. "Saudi Arabia – Family." <http://www.countryreports.org/login/login.aspx?myurl=/people/family.aspx&countryid=212>

<sup>68</sup> Saudi American Forum. Long, David. "The Role of the Extended Family in Saudi Arabia." 10 March 2003. [http://www.saudi-american-forum.org/Newsletters/SAF\\_Essay\\_09.htm](http://www.saudi-american-forum.org/Newsletters/SAF_Essay_09.htm)

<sup>69</sup> Under Shari'a law, women have control over their own dowry. Washington Post, International Spotlight Saudi Arabia. "Women's Work." 3 October 2001. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-adv/specialsales/spotlight/saudi/art14.html>

<sup>70</sup> People of Saudi Arabia. "Society and Change." 1999. <http://saudicities.com/people1.htm>

create a path. In the past guests presented the couple with livestock, now they present envelopes of money.

**Exchange 21: Congratulations on your wedding!**

Soldier:	Congratulations on your wedding!	mabrook iz zuwaaj!
Local:	We are honored you could attend.	sharaftana biHDhoorak.

When they reach the cake, the groom holds the bride’s hand carefully and together they hold the knife. After they cut a small piece of the cake, the groom holds the piece of cake and the bride takes a bite. Next the bride takes the piece of cake and allows the groom a bite. This ritual demonstrates the concern they feel for the other’s welfare and that they will look after each other. It prompts the attendants to break into a round of applause for the couple.<sup>71</sup>

**Exchange 22: I wish you both happiness.**

Soldier:	I wish you both happiness.	atamanaalakum as sa'aada.
Local:	We are honored.	tisharafna.

This is followed by separate parties for male and female guests. Urban weddings are held in “wedding palaces” which offer separate banquet facilities for the sexes. The men will dine in one room and the ladies in another. At some point the groom and the senior male members of his family will go into the bride’s banquet room where the women will be singing and dancing. This will be announced in advance, enabling women who are not related to the groom to cover themselves. Pictures will be taken and at some point the bride and groom will slip away, with chauffeur services provided by a male member of the groom’s family, leaving the guests to party and celebrate.

**Funerals**

For strict Sunni Muslims, all people are considered equal in death.<sup>72</sup> Public displays of grief for the deceased are frowned upon as is visiting graves.

**Exchange 23: I would like to give my condolences to you and your family.**

Soldier:	I would like to give my condolences to you and your family.	'aDham al laa ajrak.
Local:	May God preserve you.	jizaak al laa Khayr.

After the burial, neighbors will often prepare food for those who have lost a relative in order to feed out-of-town guests. Alternatively, there will be an official condolence reception at the family’s home.

**Exchange 24: Please be strong.**

Soldier:	Please be strong.	towakal 'ala al laa.
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<sup>71</sup> Topics Online Magazine. “Wedding Customs From Around the World.” c.1997–2005. <http://www.topics-mag.com/internatl/weddings/wedding-customs.htm>

<sup>72</sup> International Herald Tribune. Fattah, Hassan. “Fahd is buried in a simple grave.” 3 August 2005. <http://www.iht.com/articles/2005/08/02/news/saudi.php>

Local:	God willing, we will try.	insha al laa.
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When King Fahd, who was worth a reported USD 20 billion, died in 2005; he was accorded an austere service and laid to rest in an unmarked grave in the Al-Saud family burial plot near Diriyah. Government offices remained open since there was no official day of mourning.<sup>73</sup>

### **Non-Religious Holidays**

#### *Independence Day*

The Kingdom was founded on 23 September 1932. This date is commemorated every year as a celebration of unity and progress.

#### *Jinadriyah Camel Races and National Festival of Folklore and Culture*

This is the only non-religious festival in the Kingdom which is held annually in February in Mecca. Organized by the National Guard under the supervision of the Crown Prince, the two-week long celebration features camel races and other types of cultural performances.<sup>74</sup>

### **Do's and Don'ts**

- Do respect Saudi Arabia's strict rules for gender segregation.
- Do remove your shoes when you enter a Saudi home.
- Do remember Saudis do not refer to their own religion as Wahabism, instead refer to themselves as Muslims.
- Don't use your left hand for any public activity.
- Don't show the soles of your feet.
- Don't try to establish eye contact with women.
- Don't attempt to photograph mosques.

<sup>73</sup> BBC News (UK Version). Asser, Martin. "Analysis: The Saudi way of death." 3 August 2005. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/4743085.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4743085.stm)

<sup>74</sup> AsiaRooms. "Festivals and Events in Mecca." 28 October 2007. <http://www.asiarooms.com/travel-guide/saudi-arabia/mecca/festivals-and-events-in-mecca/index.html>

## Chapter 4 Urban Life

### Introduction

Over the past three decades Saudi Arabia has made the transition from a mainly rural tribal society to a predominantly urban society. As recently as 1960 the capital city of Riyadh was an oasis-based, mud-brick dwelling community of less than 60,000 people. Its airport was an asphalted strip on the edge of the community. Today, Riyadh is home to over four million people, and ranks among the fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the world.<sup>75</sup> The old airport is now in the middle of the city; the new airport is approx. 40 km (24 mi) north of the outer city limits. This transition is due to large-scale migration from rural areas as well as to decreases in the death rate while birthrates have remained high.<sup>76</sup>

### Urban Development

Modern urban development in the Kingdom has proceeded from a Western model of high rise housing developments, which have been built around the traditional city center grid model. In this hot, desert landscape, air conditioning makes human habitation in steel-reinforced, multi-storied concrete structures possible.

The electricity to run these air conditioning units comes from oil. The same fuel supplies the energy for practically every aspect of urban life in Saudi Arabia, including water. The only supply of fresh water comes from the desalination of sea water, a process that requires a tremendous amount of energy. After the water has been rendered potable, it must then be pumped to a nearby or distant city, again using more of the same source of energy.<sup>77</sup> Without oil, the comfortable urban lifestyle many Saudis enjoy would quickly come to a halt. This means Saudi oil reserves figure in more than just foreign exchange revenues.<sup>78</sup>

For the urban poor, a category that includes many recent transplants from the countryside as well as expatriate laborers from Asia and Africa, the cost of housing can be prohibitive. To address this problem, the government has introduced various schemes to assist low-income Saudi buyers. Interest-free loans from the Real Estate Development Fund, for example, have enabled the working poor to build their own homes on land plots allocated by the state. The plight of African and Asian laborers who have no access to social services remains unchanged.<sup>79</sup>

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75 Explore Saudi Arabia. "Saudi Arabia Today: A Rapidly Evolving, Cosmopolitan Society." No date. <http://www.exploresaudiArabia.com/factfile/file09.htm>

76 California Institute of Technology, Jet Propulsion Laboratory. "Urbanization: Riyadh, Saudi Arabia." 22 October, 2001. <http://asterweb.jpl.nasa.gov/gallery-detail.asp?name=Riyadh>

77 Green Home Building and Sustainable Architecture. Hart, Kelly. "Urban Sustainability in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia." 18 November 2006. <http://www.greenhomebuilding.com/weblog/2006/11/urban-sustainability-in-jeddah-saudi.htm>

78 Washington Monthly. Drum, Kevin. "Crude Awakening." June 2005. <http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2005/0506.drum.html>

79 UNESCO. "Improving Living Environments for the Low-Income Households Saudi Arabia." No date. <http://www.unesco.org/most/mideast3.htm>

## **Employment**

Up to one-third of Saudi Arabia's male population under 25 years of age is unemployed. The picture would be potentially far worse if women were taken into account.<sup>80</sup> From an economic point of view, there are obstacles to increasing the number of Saudi citizens in the work force. One difficulty is that Saudi workers in low-skilled and entry-level positions are becoming less competitive with foreigners in the private-sector labor market. The wages of unskilled non-Saudi nationals have been adjusted downward since the early 1980s, without diminishing the supply of foreigners willing to work in the Kingdom.<sup>81</sup> There are now more than five million foreign workers in a country with a population of about 24 million.

The number of European and American skilled professionals in the Saudi workforce has declined since the 1970s. In part this has been due to the implementation of the Ministry of Labor's "Saudization" program, which requires a steadily increasing presence of Saudi workers in skilled and technical positions. Of equal importance in the decrease of expatriate technical expertise is the contribution made by the large number of technical training institutes and vocational training centers that have been operating for the past two decades.

## **Health Care**

The principal objective of the Ministry of Health (MOH) is to provide primary health care to all Saudi Citizens free of charge. This mandate is fulfilled through hospitals and clinics established throughout the Kingdom. However, there is a lack of information about the quality of primary care in Saudi Arabia, despite the central role of primary care centers in the national wellness strategy. Good access and effective care were reported for immunization, maternal health care, and control of epidemic diseases. Poor access and effectiveness were reported for chronic disease management programs, prescribing patterns, health education, and referral patterns.<sup>82</sup> In addition to primary care, there are a number of specialized hospitals. However, foreign laborers from Africa and Asia are excluded from health care schemes, and have no access to primary care facilities.<sup>83</sup>

Saudi Arabia's wealth has enabled the Kingdom to become a presence in medical research by luring first-class researchers with the prospect of excellent working conditions. Their success has been recognized in a number of areas. Researchers at King Saud University College of Pharmacology in Riyadh, for example, developed a drug shown to be effective in stabilizing the blood sugar level of diabetics. The King Khalid

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80 Yale Herald. Heldman, Heather and Daniel Gottlieb. "To win US security, invest in Saudi education." 20 April 2007. <http://www.yaleherald.com/article.php?Article=5547>

81 People of Saudi Arabia. "Society and Change." c.1999. <http://saudicity.com/people1.htm>

82 National Center for Biotechnology Information. Al-Ahmadi H. and Roland M. "Quality of primary health care in Saudi Arabia: a comprehensive review." August 2005. [http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sites/entrez?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&list\\_uids=15883128&dopt=AbstractPlus](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sites/entrez?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&list_uids=15883128&dopt=AbstractPlus)

83 International Hospital Recruitment. "Health Care in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia." 2004. <http://www.ihrcanada.com/countries/saudi/health.htm>

Eye Specialist Hospital, also located in Riyadh, with a largely international medical staff, has become internationally recognized in the treatment of eye disorders.<sup>84</sup>

### Education

Education in Saudi Arabia is divided into three separately administered systems: general education for boys, education for girls, and traditional Islamic education for boys. The Ministry of Education, established in 1952, oversees general education for boys. Education for girls falls under the bureaucratic jurisdiction of the General Presidency for Girls' Education. The curriculum and graduation requirements for both sexes are the same even though education is separate.

#### Exchange 25: Is there a school nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a school nearby?	fee madrasa gareeba min hina?
Local:	Yes.	na'am.

Children enter school at age six and complete six years of elementary school. Upon passage of an exam, they then continue on to the equivalent of three years of middle school before enrolling in high school.<sup>85</sup> However, a large part of the curriculum emphasizes religious studies. In particular, schools stress *hafiz* (memorization) and *tafsir* (explanation) of the Quran, as well as the application of Islamic tradition to practical situations encountered in everyday life.

Religion is also part of the post-secondary secular college curriculum and enrollment is compulsory for all students.<sup>86</sup> Far more Saudi students earn degrees in theology than in engineering which means many are uncompetitive for employment outside the religious establishment.<sup>87</sup> Efforts are underway to change this, but will take time to bear fruit.<sup>88</sup>

#### Exchange 26: Do your children go to school?

Soldier:	Do your children go to school?	'indik 'eeyaal bil madrasa?
Local:	Yes.	na'am.

Given the religious nature of the Saudi curriculum, those who cannot find jobs become discontented; they are an easy mark for Islamic radicals who preach hatred of infidels including Shi'ite Muslims. In short, they constitute a bloc of potential recruits who are easily motivated to join the struggle to restore Islam to the golden age of world dominance they have learned about in school.

84 Library of Congress. "Saudi Arabia: Health." No date. <http://countrystudies.us/saudi-arabia/32.htm>

85 World Education System Canada. "Saudi Arabia: Education Overview." 6 May 2004. <http://www.wes.org/ca/wedb/saudiarabia/saedov.htm>

86 World Education News and Reviews. Sedgwick, Robert. "Education in Saudi Arabia." December 2001. <http://www.wes.org/ewenr/01nov/practical.htm>

87 National Geographic Magazine. "Saudi Arabia on Edge." October 2003. <http://magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0310/feature1/zoom3.html>

88 Chronicle of Higher Education. Krieger, Zvika. "Saudi Arabia Puts Its Billions Behind Western-Style Higher Education." 14 September 2007.

<http://chronicle.com/subscribe/login?url=/weekly/v54/i03/03a00101.htm>

## Daily Life

International visitors first notice what appears to be the adoption of many aspects of Western consumer culture, including fast food chains and foreign department stores. However, for many Saudis, adherence to the traditional lifestyle is paramount.<sup>89</sup> In the framework of large-scale relocation to urban centers, extended families still tend to live in close proximity to each other, on the same street or in the same city district. Regular get-togethers keep the bonds alive. In Saudi Arabia, socializing is the primary way of spending leisure time since there are no movie theatres or other public forums for entertainment other than shopping malls.

It is common for wealthier families to employ household help. Female foreign laborers fill these jobs. This practice has led to abusive labor practices that have come to the attention of foreign governments and major international human rights organizations.<sup>90</sup> In addition to having an excessive amount of responsibility for raising children, these workers have been abused physically and sexually by male members of the family and almost exclusively suffer from forced confinement.<sup>91</sup> In situations where rape and abuse have been alleged, they have little legal recourse. Social isolation is also an occupational hazard since foreign domestic helpers cannot socialize together publicly the way they can in most other countries.<sup>92</sup>

## Transportation

Taxis, yellow cabs, are easy to find in all Saudi cities. They are privately owned and not part of a national franchise.

### Exchange 27: Where can I get a cab?

Soldier:	Where can I get a cab?	wayn alga sayaarat ijra?
Local:	Over there.	hnaak.

Taxi drivers are eager to undertake take customers to distant points, but the fare should be negotiated in advance. Passengers are advised to shop around for a cab that appears to have good tires and appears to be in good working order. Admittedly, it is often difficult to tell if a vehicle is in good condition.

### Exchange 28: Can you take me there?

Soldier:	Can you take me there?	tagdar twadeenee hnaak?
Local:	Yes, I can.	ee, agdar.

Rental cars are available at airports, major hotels and at multiple locations in major cities. Rates are competitive and major international companies like Budget, Avis, and Hertz are

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89 Christian Science Monitor. Farrell, Michael B. "In Riyadh 'Saudi Jeans' and Calls to Prayers." 8 December 2006. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/1208/p07s02-wome.html>

90 Human Rights Watch. Saudi Arabia: Foreign Workers Abused. 2006. <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2004/07/15/saudia9061.htm>

91 UNICEF. "At a glance: Saudi Arabia." <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/saudi Arabia.html>

92 Geocities.com. Evans, Brian. "The Plight of Foreign Workers in Saudi Arabia." Spring 1999. <http://www.geocities.com/capitolhill/Parliament/3251/spring99/saudi.html>

represented. Usually, only a valid U.S. or international driving license and a major credit card are required.

**Exchange 29:** Where can I rent a car?

Soldier:	Where can I rent a car?	wayn agdar asta-jir sayaara?
Local:	Downtown.	wasT al madeena.

Short-term visitors who are male may use their state-issued U.S. driver's licenses to drive in Saudi Arabia. U.S. males who enter Saudi Arabia on work visas can obtain a local driver's license through the Department of Traffic Police. Foreign women are not allowed to drive or ride bicycles on public roads.

**Exchange 30:** Is there a gas station nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a gas station nearby?	Holakum maHaTat banzeen?
Local:	Yes.	na'am.

Motoring in rural areas can be enjoyable, but urban highways are very dangerous owing to the local disregard of speed limits and traffic ordinances. Gasoline is inexpensive and gas stations are plentiful along highways; they provide expert service carried out by mostly by Asian mechanics.

**Exchange 31:** Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?	Holakum mekaneekkee zayn?
Local:	Yes.	na'am.

SAPTCO, the national bus company, operates a large fleet of air-conditioned buses that connect all major cities with rural points throughout the Kingdom. The service is punctual, efficient, and inexpensive.

**Exchange 32:** Will the bus be here soon?

Soldier:	Will the bus be here soon?	al baaS beyeejee gareeb?
Local:	Yes.	na'am.

Passenger train service in the Kingdom is currently only available to and from Riyadh and points east, i.e., Hofuf and Dammam. There are two trains in each direction daily and the trip takes about four hours.

**Exchange 33:** Is there a train station nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a train station nearby?	fee maHaTat giTaar gareeba min hina?
Local:	No.	laa.

Traveling distances greater than 500 km (300 mi) is best accomplished by air. Saudi Arabia Airlines has regular service to more than 50 domestic airports. Service between cities is regular and reliable. However, only those travelers with a passport or *iqama* (national residence permit) are permitted on board an airplane.

**Exchange 34:** Which road leads to the airport?

Soldier:	Which road leads to the airport?	ay Tareeg yewadee 'al maTaar?
Local:	The road heading east.	aT Tareeg alee raayiH sharg.

A high incidence of traffic accidents poses a significant safety hazard in Saudi Arabia. Accidents involving vehicles driven by minors are not uncommon.<sup>93</sup> In the event of an accident resulting in bodily injury, all parties involved, including those who might require hospitalization, may be taken to the local police station.

**Exchange 35:** Is there a hospital nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a hospital nearby?	fee mistashfa gareeba min hina?
Local:	Yes, in the center of town.	ee, fee wasT al madeena.

Drivers without influential connections among the traffic police, regardless of fault, will likely be held for several days until responsibility is determined and the compensation adjudicated by enforcement authorities has been paid. During this period of investigation, access to outside assistance will typically be denied.<sup>94</sup>

**Telecommunications**

Saudi Arabia features state-of-the-art telecommunications. For individuals who do not have a landline connection in their homes, there are international call cabins in most cities and villages.

**Exchange 36:** May I use your phone?

Soldier:	May I use your phone?	mumkin astaKhdim talifonak?
Local:	Sure.	Tab'an.

The technology revolution is evident on the streets. In shopping malls, even small children in the company of their parents can be heard chatting with friends on cell phones.<sup>95</sup>

**Exchange 37:** What is your telephone number?

Soldier:	What is your telephone number?	wish ragam talafonak?
Local:	My phone number is 400252716	talafonee arba'meya wu Khamasa wu 'ishreen, alfayn wu sabi'meya wu sitTa'ash

News from around the globe is instantly available via the internet, and Saudis living and studying abroad remain in daily communication with home.

93 UNICEF. "At a glance: Saudi Arabia." No date. <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/saudiarabia.html>

94 U.S. Department of State. "Consular Information Sheet: Saudi Arabia." 9 May 2007.

[http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1012.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1012.html)

95 Saudi American Forum. Long, David. "The Role of the Extended Family in Saudi Arabia." 10 March 2003. [http://www.saudi-american-forum.org/Newsletters/SAF\\_Essay\\_09.htm](http://www.saudi-american-forum.org/Newsletters/SAF_Essay_09.htm)

Internet access is filtered, however. In 2001 the Council of Ministers Resolution prohibited internet users within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from publishing or accessing web content which might cause users to question the strict belief system or cast Saudi culture in a negative light. As with most regimes that filter the Internet, there is no list of blocked sites but rather general categories of material, e.g., pornography, which have been deemed offensive.<sup>96</sup>

### Restaurants

Major Saudi cities have all manner of trendy restaurants serving a variety of international cuisine. The best of Asian, European, and American cuisine come together in the hotels and restaurants of Jeddah, Riyadh, and Dammam-al-Khobar.

#### Exchange 38: I'd like some hot soup.

Soldier:	I'd like some hot soup.	mumkin shoraba.
Local:	Sure.	Tayib.

The marquees of the fast food giants of Europe and North America, like Burger King and Kentucky Fried Chicken, can be seen along the main streets of the big cities. They are popular with young Saudis.

#### Exchange 39: Are you still serving breakfast?

Soldier:	Are you still serving breakfast?	baagee itgadmoon fuToor?
Local:	Yes.	na'am.

Restaurants are also subject to the law concerning closing during prayer times. When the prayer call is given, all businesses have five minutes to close their doors. In the case of a restaurant this means that new guests cannot be admitted until prayer has finished (usually about 20 minutes).

#### Exchange 40: May I have a glass of water?

Soldier:	May I have a glass of water?	mumkin ti'Teenee kaas maya?
Local:	Yes, right away.	hal Heen ajeeba.

Guests who are enjoying their meal must also wait until prayer is finished until they can leave. The penalty for violating this strictly enforced law can be imprisonment or a large fine for the restaurant proprietor.

#### Exchange 41: Do you have a dessert?

Soldier:	Do you have a dessert?	'indikum Hala?
Local:	Yes, we have <i>lokmat</i> .	ee, 'indana ilgeymaat.

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96 Harvard Law School, Berkman Center of Internet and Society. Zittrain, Jonathan and Benjamin Edelman. "Documentation of Internet Filtering in Saudi Arabia." 12 September 2002. <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/filtering/saudi Arabia/>

Dining establishments likewise enforce strict rules on gender segregation including separate entrances for single male guests and families.<sup>97</sup>

**Exchange 42:** Can I have my total bill, please?

Soldier:	Can I have my total bill, please?	mumkin ta'Teenee il iHsaab?
Local:	Yes, of course.	ee, Tab'an.

This means a family cannot dine together in public. Men must go to the men's section while women and children are seated in the family section. Women, moreover, can be denied admittance without the written approval of a senior male member of the family.<sup>98</sup>

**Exchange 43:** Where is your restroom?

Soldier:	Where is your restroom?	wayn al Hamaam?
Local:	That room to your left, over there.	al ghurfa ilee 'ala yisaarak, hnaak.

Saudis, who for one reason or another are unable to invite foreign guests to their homes, often invite their foreign guests to one of the major hotels or international restaurants.

**Exchange 44:** I would like coffee or tea.

Soldier:	I would like coffee or tea.	abee shaay aw ig-hawa.
Local:	Sure.	Tayib.

If a visitor is assigned a driver or helper from Africa or Asia, many of whom work for as little as USD 75 per month, it is good form to invite him to lunch or dinner and to pay for his food.

**Exchange 45:** Put this all in one bill.

Soldier:	Put this all in one bill.	Khalaha kilaha 'ala iHsaab waaHid.
Local:	Okay.	Tayib.

**Marketplace**

Until one shopping center introduced segregation by floor, all sales attendants were males, typically foreigners, even for women's intimate apparel. The Ministry of Labor has implemented a ban on lingerie shops selling to male customers, opening the door for an all-female staff to serve an all-female clientele.<sup>99</sup> This change has met with resistance from shop and mall owners, however. Despite the prospect of hefty fines for non-

<sup>97</sup> Chicago Sun Times. Abu-Nasr, Donna. "Service with a smile? Not in Saudi Arabia: Rules go beyond sex." 17 April 2006. [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qn4155/is\\_20060417/ai\\_n16162699](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4155/is_20060417/ai_n16162699)

<sup>98</sup> Washington Post. King, Colbert I. "Saudi Arabia's Apartheid." 22 December 2001. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A15193-2001Dec21?language=printer>

<sup>99</sup> Guardian. Whitaker, Brian. "Men barred from selling women's lingerie." 21 March 2006. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,,1735527,00.html>

compliance, a survey in the city of Jeddah revealed that out of 247 shops selling lingerie and cosmetic products, only three employed women.<sup>100</sup>

While there is no shortage of Saudi women eager to take up these jobs, employers are decidedly less than enthusiastic about staff gender diversification. Hiring women requires that business owners comply with regulations that men and women be separated in stores. This means families could not come to shop. In addition, female employees must be concealed from public view. Even though some discretion has been promised by the government on how this is implemented, businessmen view these changes as imposing extra expenses that will reduce their profits. Moreover, few want to hire married women who would not be willing to work the same long hours for modest pay which foreigners accept.

The traditional marketplace, the *souk*, can still be found in Saudi Arabia. The following are the best known traditional markets in Riyadh:

Al Bat-haa Souk: The busiest shopping day at this centrally located *souk* is Friday. It is known for electronic goods and watches, including imported knock-offs of famous brands.

**Exchange 46:** Is the market nearby?

Soldier:	Is the market nearby?	as soog igrayib min hina?
Local:	Yes, over there on the right.	ee, 'ala il yimeen.

Al Deira Souk: This *souk* is best known for traditional wares including men’s clothing, garments, antique accessories, silverware, and spices.

Al Zel Souk: This *souk* is famous for its rugs, antiques and ancient swords. Shopping has been described as akin to sightseeing and it has become a tourist draw.<sup>101</sup>

**Shopping**

Although there is no shortage of 21st century glass and steel shopping malls in Saudi cities, the traditional marketplace, the *souk*, can still be found in all Saudi cities and towns and is a preferred way for middle class Saudi families to shop.

With the exception of meat, fish, and produce markets, the souk opens at about 9 a.m. and stays open until lunch or the midday prayer, whichever comes first. Often the markets will not reopen until the afternoon prayer has finished which can be as late as 4 p.m.

**Exchange 47:** How much longer will you be here?

Soldier:	How much longer will you be here?	ilmita raayiH tabga hina?
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<sup>100</sup> Guardian. Whitaker, Brian. “Sex and Shopping in Israel and Saudi Arabia.” 19 April 2006. [http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/brian\\_whitaker/2006/04/war\\_on\\_sex\\_in\\_israel\\_and\\_saudi.html](http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/brian_whitaker/2006/04/war_on_sex_in_israel_and_saudi.html)

<sup>101</sup> Asharq Alasat. Al Sabban, Dania. “Saudi Arabia’s Famous ‘Souks.’” 15 July 2007. <http://www.aawsat.com/english/news.asp?section=7&id=9583>

Local:	Three more hours.	il thalath saa'aat.
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Merchants can be aggressive and eager to make a sale.

**Exchange 48:** Please, buy something from me.

Local:	Please, buy something from me.	takfa, ishir minee.
Soldier:	Sorry, I have no money left.	mit-asif, maa biga me'ee floos.

Some items in the traditional *souk* such as perfumes, clothing, appliances, and toys are subject to a retail price agreement or bargaining.

Traditional items such as the ubiquitous head cloth, the *shomagh* (more commonly known as the *ghutra* ), are available almost anywhere.

**Exchange 49:** Do you sell *shomaghs*?

Soldier:	Do you sell <i>shomaghs</i> ?	tbee' shamugh?
Local:	Yes.	na'am.

This is an ancient fact of commercial life in the region, and there are a few rules to bear in mind while bargaining. First, it is a very honorable way of doing business. Secondly, the customer must know the market value of the item and where it might be bought cheaper.

**Exchange 50:** Can I buy a carpet with this much money?

Soldier:	Can I buy a carpet with this much money?	agdar ashtiree sijaada ibhal mablagh?
Local:	No.	laa.

Bargaining is not a sport for those looking for spirited verbal exchange, despite the dramatic appearance of those engaged in the process. Lastly, bargaining is only undertaken if there is a legitimate intention of buying the article when a desired price has been reached.

Merchants often put one item on display, but have a larger selection of different colors and sizes, in a nearby storeroom. One should ask if there is a broader selection in the store room.

**Exchange 51:** Do you have any more of these?

Soldier:	Do you have any more of these?	buga 'indik min haThayn?
Local:	Yes.	na'am.

Merchants are eager to make a sale and to please potential customers. It is also acceptable to question the quality of an item, and to hold and examine it.

**Exchange 52:** May I examine this close up?

Soldier:	May I examine this close up?	mumkin ashooof Thee?
Local:	Sure.	Tab'an.

Purchases are transacted in the native currency, the Saudi Riyal, and customers should carry sufficient currency with them to cover purchases. Modern shopping centers and boutiques frequently accept international credit cards; traditional markets prefer native currency and usually do not have provisions for credit card sales.

**Exchange 53:** Do you accept U.S. currency?

Soldier:	Do you accept U.S. currency?	taaKhThoon floos amreekeya?
Local:	No we only accept Saudi Riyals.	laa maa naKHiTh ilaa reeyalaat su'ooodeeya.

Since 9/11, currency conversion and trading has come under greater scrutiny by the police. As a result, established merchants are reluctant to act as currency traders. The place for currency exchange is a bank or hotel reception desk.

**Exchange 54:** Can you give me change for this?

Soldier:	Can you give me change for this?	tagdar ta'Teenee faka il Thee?
Local:	No.	laa.

**Crime**

With the high rate of unemployment among Saudi youths, most of whom live in large cities, has come petty crime and theft. Popular outdoor markets and traditional older markets are frequently the venue of petty nonviolent crime, e.g., theft of mobile phones and valuables left in unsecured vehicles.

**Exchange 55:** Did these people threaten you?

Soldier:	Did these people threaten you?	haThoola an naas yehadidoonak?
Local:	No.	laa.

Begging, which was unheard of a generation ago among Saudi youth, is now commonplace.

**Exchange 56:** Give me money.

Local:	Give me money.	'aTnee floos.
Soldier:	I don't have any.	maa 'indee shay.

The social transformation wrought by urbanization has been profound. Cut loose from traditional tribal authority, youth can discover that crime pays more than hard work, particularly when merit is not perceived to count as much as personal connections in landing good paying jobs. The demographic trend only makes the situation more ominous.

Almost 75% of the Saudi populace is under 30 and the male unemployment rate for men under 25 years of age is reported to be as high as 30%.<sup>102</sup>

Though foreign visitors are unlikely to be victims of violent crime, Shari'a law does not deter thievery. Indeed, Saudis are very concerned about the security of their belongings, be they in unattended homes or parked vehicles.<sup>103</sup>

In addition, children have been trafficked into Saudi Arabia from Yemen, the poorest country in the Middle East, and from Africa and Asia for purposes of begging, prostitution, and petty theft. Their parents are often complicit in the trafficking, which they are told will lead to legitimate employment. The child is supposed to help support his or her family via remittances.<sup>104</sup>

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102 Christian Science Monitor. Moss, Dana and Zvika Krieger. "A Tipping Point in Saudi Arabia." 15 August 2007. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0815/p09s02-coop.html>

103 *Saudi Arabia Exposed: Inside A Kingdom in Crisis*. Bradley, John. Chapter Seven: "Urban Crime Wave [p. 144]." 2005. New York: MacMillan.

104 Yemen Times. Willems, Peter. "Rude awakening." 17–19 May 2004. <http://www.yementimes.com/article.shtml?i=738&p=culture&a=1>

## Chapter 5 Rural Life

### Introduction

Rural inhabitant for Saudi Arabia has traditionally meant: Bedouin. Writing about the Bedouin, the famous English explorer Wilfred Thesiger remarked more than 60 years ago: “I went to Saudi Arabia only just in time. Others will go there to study geology and archaeology, but they will never know the spirit of the land nor the greatness of the Arabs.”<sup>105</sup> He was referring to the fast disappearing Bedouin culture. The word Bedouin comes from *bedawi*<sup>106</sup> meaning a person who lives in the desert. Today, desert dwellers fall into two basic groups. One is the authentic Bedouin, an ever shrinking number who continue to live as nomadic shepherds. The other group is *fellahin* or subsistence farmers.<sup>107</sup> With the wide-spread use of irrigation, *fellahin* are able to lead a settled life year round on the edge of the desert. The nomads, by contrast, take up residence in the desert during the rainy winter seasons and then migrate back to the desert’s edge during the summers.

### Nomadic Pastoralism on the Arabian Peninsula

Pastoral nomadism is a way of life that evolved to enable humans to survive in a harsh arid environment. Traditionally, the Bedouin of Saudi Arabia roamed widely in their search for sufficient camel pasture. They pitched large tents made from goat hair and sheep wool wherever they found water and grazing land. The animals provided them with everything they needed to survive; meat, milk, butter, and wool for weaving.

To protect their camps at night from wolves and livestock raiders, as well as to hunt wildlife such as hare and gazelle, it was common for the Bedouin to raise greyhound-like Saluki dogs. While most dogs are considered unclean by Muslims, the Saluki proved so useful they were allowed inside the tents and treated as pampered pets to the extent possible. Able to outrun gazelles and renowned for their keen eyesight, Salukis have been used for hunting in Arabia since ancient times. To supplement their meager diet, the Bedouin also trapped migrating falcons, which were trained to hunt smaller prey.<sup>108</sup>

When King Abdulaziz unified territories in the first quarter of the 20th century, numerous changes were implemented with respect to grazing and water rights. As a consequence of apportionment and restrictions placed on the use of land and water by each tribe; tribal warfare, especially in border regions, was reduced. After the establishment of the Kingdom in 1932, restrictions and allocations in grazing and water rights became government policy, though it was difficult to enforce. As a result, overgrazing the land frequently occurred and water supplies to nearby agricultural settlements were disturbed. Serious droughts between 1955 and 1963 in northern Saudi Arabia intensified the trend toward resettlement around permanent water locations. In that same period, 90% of some

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<sup>105</sup> Washington Post. International Spotlight: Saudi Arabia. Venditti, Mario. “Desert Culture.” No date. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-adv/specialsales/spotlight/saudi/art15.html>

<sup>106</sup> *Bedawi* singular, plural *bedu*

<sup>107</sup> The Countries & People of Arabia. 2003. <http://www.hejleh.com/countries/>

<sup>108</sup> explore saudi arabia. “Bedouin – footsteps in the sand.” No date. <http://www.exploresaudiarabia.com/factfile/file01.htm>

herds were lost, not only to hunger, but disease. Camel scab was rampant during the drought and it spread quickly through the congregated herds. This crisis accelerated the need to create a better system to manage the Kingdom's water, agricultural and grazing resources.<sup>109</sup>

In the early 1960s, the government understood the advantage to internal security of having a stable non-migratory population, particularly in border regions. In 1961, the first settlement scheme was implemented in Wadi Sirhan near the Jordanian border. This involved the settlement of Bedouins onto small plots of land. Wells were dug and pumps installed to provide irrigation for crop farming. The scheme failed, however, in part owing to limited knowledge of land cultivation practices of those who were resettled.

**Exchange 57: Do you own this land?**

Soldier:	Do you own this land?	hal arDh milkik?
Local:	Yes.	na'am.

For many Bedouins the change from animal husbandry and nomadic lifestyle to that of plant husbandry and settled farms was too difficult. Subsequent resettlement projects showed greater success and coincided with the Kingdom's efforts to become self-sufficient in grain crops. To accomplish the latter goal, the government relied heavily on capital-intensive technology imports. This in turn resulted in agricultural products which cost eight times the world market price.<sup>110</sup> Other factors also affected the viability of the nomadic way of life such as the shift from rearing camels to sheep. This was officially encouraged as a means of feeding the fast-growing Saudi population. By the dawn of the 21st century, over twelve million sheep a year were being imported into Saudi Arabia annually from places as distant as Uruguay and New Zealand.

**Rural Economy**

For the 12% of Saudi citizens who live outside the major cities, rural life doesn't mean poverty or misery. Those Saudis who don't commute to urban centers to work are mostly self-employed in farming.<sup>111</sup> In order to promote rural economy, the government has heavily subsidized rural development programs, providing deep wells for irrigation as well as agricultural expertise and veterinary assistance for the farms. Cheap labor to man the farms comes in the form of Asian migrant workers who often work for less than USD 75 per month. For those Saudis who want to get started in the sheep business, the start-up costs are substantial. Guaranteed government loans to underwrite the start-up of farms are readily available. Typically, the initial investment for sheep farming, for example, can be up to USD 100,000. Among the equipment necessary is a five-ton tank truck to haul

<sup>109</sup> The World Conservation Union. Heady, Harold F. "Ecological Consequences of Bedouin Settlement in Saudi Arabia." No date. <http://www.iucn.org/themes/ceesp/publications/SL/CT/Chapter 36-The Careless Technology.pdf>

<sup>110</sup> American University. "Saudi Arabia Wheat Exports." No date. <http://www.american.edu/TED/SAUDI.HTM>

<sup>111</sup>MSN Encarta. Saudi Arabia Facts and Figures. 2007. [http://encarta.msn.com/fact\\_631504853/Saudi\\_Arabia\\_Facts\\_and\\_Figures.html](http://encarta.msn.com/fact_631504853/Saudi_Arabia_Facts_and_Figures.html)

water as well as a lighter vehicle to carry barley feed and grain.<sup>112</sup> The livestock itself is worth approx. USD 35,000 at USD 133 a head. The nomad of yesteryear is fast disappearing and in his place Saudi ranchers are appearing. An American anthropologist observed in 1997 that Bedouins have to learn to manage their farms as economic entrepreneurs while maintaining their privileged and mythical position in Saudi society.<sup>113</sup>

### Rural Transportation

Of more than 150,000 km (90,000 mi) of roadways in the Kingdom, 45,461 (27,277 mi) are 2-, 4-, 6-, or even 8-lane paved roadways.<sup>114</sup> The major arteries are heavily traveled and gasoline service stations and roadside motels in rural areas are located at intervals of approximately 75 km (45 mi).

#### Exchange 58: Is there lodging nearby?

Soldier:	Is there lodging nearby?	fee findig gareeb min hina?
Local:	Yes.	na'am.

In most areas there are no speed limits and car drivers take advantage of this fact. Multiple car accidents are commonplace. These factors make driving dangerous. Visitors are well advised to avoid the fast lanes and to drive defensively.

### Education and Health Care

The Kingdom contributes vast resources to providing rural citizens with education and health care. Schooling is free in Saudi Arabia, but attendance, though not compulsory, is strongly encouraged. The Ministry of Education has a good record of making accessible basic education through secondary level in rural areas. One Bedouin, whose children make the 30-minute trip to school in a jeep the government provided to the family, observed that as a boy, it used to take him half a day on camelback to go to school.<sup>115</sup> Likewise, the Ministry of Health monitors the availability of health care facilities in rural areas.

#### Exchange 59: Is there a medical clinic nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a medical clinic nearby?	fee 'iyaada gareeba min hina?
Local:	Yes, over there.	ee, hnaak.

<sup>112</sup> Saudi Arabia has become the biggest world market for feed barley. Sydney Herald. "ABB wins Saudi barley supply deal." 27 June 2007. <http://www.smh.com.au/news/BUSINESS/ABB-wins-Saudi-barley-supply-deal/2007/06/27/1182623986421.html> <[Original URL leads to a website that gives some information from the original source (above). It seems more appropriate to simply cite the original source completely.

<sup>113</sup> International Herald Tribune. Covington, Richard. "The Nomadic Way of Life Dries Up in Saudi Arabia." 22 March 1997. <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/51/083.html>

<sup>114</sup> CIA World Factbook. Saudi Arabia. 18 October 2007. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/print/sa.html>

<sup>115</sup> Library of Congress Country Studies. Saudi Arabia. Health. 1992. <http://countrystudies.us/saudi-arabia/32.htm>

A network of rural clinics throughout the Kingdom provides primary health care and dispenses prescription drugs.

**Exchange 60:** Is Dr. Khalid in, sir?

Soldier:	Is Dr. Khalid in, sir?	ad diktur Khalid mawjood?
Local:	No.	laa.

Official policy in both cases is that no family should be without ready medical care and no child without a place in school.<sup>116</sup>

**Exchange 61:** My arm is broken, can you help me?

Soldier:	My arm is broken, can you help me?	eedee maksoora tigdar itsaa'idnee?
Local:	Yes, I can help you.	ee, agdar asaa'idk.

**Who's in Charge?**

On departing an urban area, one automatically enters a tribal region.

**Exchange 62:** Do you know this area very well?

Soldier:	Do you know this area very well?	ti'rif hal manTiga zayn?
Local:	Yes.	na'am.

There are few areas of the Kingdom other than government military reservations that are an exception to this. The tribal chieftain, or *umdah*, for each region is the first and most important link in rural administration.

**Exchange 63:** Does your leader live here?

Soldier:	Does your leader live here?	shayKhakum ye'eesh hina?
Local:	Yes.	na'am.

It is reasonable to say that he is aware of all significant events that occur in his area.

**Exchange 64:** Can you take me to your leader?

Soldier:	Can you take me to your leader?	tagdar twadeenee ilshayKhakum?
Local:	Yes.	na'am.

A visitor and newcomer to an area would do well to make the acquaintance of the local *umdah*. The role is usually passed from father to most able son.

**Exchange 65:** Respected leader, we need your help / advice / opinion.

Soldier:	Respected leader, we need your help /	yaa Tuweel al 'umur, nabee
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<sup>116</sup> Encyclopaedia of the Orient. Saudi Arabia: Health and Education. 2007. [http://i-cias.com/e.o/saudi\\_3.htm](http://i-cias.com/e.o/saudi_3.htm)

	advice / opinion.	musaa'adatcum / naSeeHatcum / raayakum.
Local:	Yes.	na'am.

### Identification Cards

The Ministry of Interior issues a *bitaqa shaksia*, or identity card, to each male above the age of 18. Foreign residents are issued a document called the *iqama*, or residency permit.

#### Exchange 66: Is this all the ID you have?

Soldier:	Is this all the ID you have?	haaTha il-ithbaat al waHeed alee me'ik?
Local:	Yes.	na'am.

Controversy continues over whether to grant Saudi Arabian women ID cards in the absence of consent from a male family member. Among the objections are that women would need to uncover their faces, thereby violating Islamic norms. Without an ID card, however, identity theft is an ever present problem for Saudi women. Impersonation is easy, for example, in banking transactions when the customer is veiled and has no ID card.<sup>117</sup>

### Checkpoints

Checkpoints along major highways have become important features in the Kingdom's war against domestic terrorism.

#### Exchange 67: Where is the nearest checkpoint?

Soldier:	Where is the nearest checkpoint?	wayn agrab nigTit tafteesh?
Local:	It's two kilometers.	ba'ad ithnayn keelo.

Traffic police and forces of the Ministry of Interior routinely operate checkpoints at measured intervals along the country's major highways.

#### Exchange 68: Please get out of the car.

Soldier:	Please get out of the car.	law simaHt inzil min is sayaara.
Local:	OK.	Tayib.

Their principal task is to interdict the movement of terrorists and illegal armaments.

#### Exchange 69: Show us the car registration.

Soldier:	Show us the car registration.	warana istimart as sayaara.
Local:	OK.	Tayib.

<sup>117</sup> BBC News. "Saudi women get identity cards." 10 December 2001. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/1702342.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/1702342.stm)

This is particularly true in the somewhat porous northern border regions near the frontiers with Jordan and Iraq. Yet, concern for possible movement of insurgents also exists along the lengthy border with **Yemen** in the south.

**Exchange 70:** Are you carrying any weapons?

Soldier:	Are you carrying any weapons?	me'ik asliHa?
Local:	Yes.	na'am.

Movement in border regions is particularly dangerous, because of the existence of anti-personnel mines and other ordinance from the Gulf War era and earlier.

**Exchange 71:** Is this area mined?

Soldier:	Is this area mined?	hal manTiga imlaghama?
Local:	Yes.	na'am.

## Chapter 6 Family Life

### Introduction

No Saudi is ever completely alone. His tribe or at least his family travels with him in body or in spirit. The family is the key social unit in Saudi Arabia and gender division of labor remains the traditional norm. Men are the breadwinners while women care for the home and the family. Demographic changes such as higher birth rates and increased life expectancy have altered family dynamics. Families can contain three or four generations. While the wisdom and authority of elders remains unchallengeable, younger men and women must wait much longer to reach this vaunted status.

### The Impact of Demographic Changes on Family Life

In 2002, the fertility rate for Saudi women was 5.7 children, reflecting the absence of any public family planning program.<sup>118</sup> This high birth rate has dramatically lowered the median age of the Saudi population to the teen years. At the same time, because life expectancy has risen, elders do not relinquish their leadership roles within the family as early as was customary in the past. The growing size of families has induced change in the model where men work outside the home in business and public affairs while women have authority within the household, particularly with regards to child-rearing.

#### Exchange 72: Is this your wife?

Soldier:	Is this your wife?	haaThee zojtik?
Local:	Yes.	na'am.

In recent years these lines of distinction have become blurred. Larger families necessitate greater earning power, forcing younger women into the labor market and requiring their husbands to assume duties within the household which would have been unthinkable in their parents' generation.

#### Exchange 73: Are you the only person in your family who has a job?

Soldier:	Are you the only person in your family who has a job?	int ash shaKhS al waHeed ib'aa-iltik ilee 'inda 'amal?
Local:	No.	laa.

### Typical Household

It is not uncommon for households to include three or even four generations, grandparents to great-grandchildren, living under one roof. Once settled and away from Bedouin life, multigenerational families seldom move.

#### Exchange 74: Did you grow up here?

Soldier:	Did you grow up here?	tarabayt hina?
Local:	Yes.	na'am.

<sup>118</sup> Population Resource Center. "Executive Summary: The Middle East." 2003.  
<http://www.prcdc.org/summaries/middleeast/middleeast.html>

Families are patriarchal. The oldest male or the father of the family is generally considered to be the central authority figure. In decision making, sons defer to their older brothers or fathers.

**Exchange 75:** Do you have any brothers?

Soldier:	Do you have any brothers?	'indik iKhwaan?
Local:	Yes.	na'am.

Since unmarried females are not permitted to live alone and without male protection, a household may include daughters who are yet unmarried. Spinsterhood and bachelorhood are virtually unknown and same-sex marriages are illegal and non-existent.

**Exchange 76:** Are you married?

Soldier:	Are you married?	int mitzawij?
Local:	Local : No.	laa.

Many families in Saudi Arabia have male and female domestic servants who may live in attached **servant's** quarters. Married women commonly have a maid and a nurse if there are more than two children.

**Exchange 77:** Does your family live here?

Soldier:	Does your family live here?	ahlik ye'eeshoon hina?
Local:	Yes.	na'am.

Because women are not permitted to drive, the family frequently has an immigrant driver who also assists with maintenance work around the house. If the family has a farming business, there might be several African or Asian male laborers belonging to the family. They belong in the sense of chattels, but are not part of the family.

**Exchange 78:** Are these people part of your family?

Soldier:	Are these people part of your family?	haThoola min ahalk?
Local:	No.	laa.

African and Asian laborers work for as little as USD 75 per month and have no access to medical care.

**Exchange 79:** Where do you work, sir?

Soldier:	Where do you work, sir?	wayn tishtighil?
Local:	I am a farmer, sir.	anaa imzaari'.

**Status of Women**

The Quran and the Sunna (the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) allow for women to inherit, hold, and bequeath property in their own right. Today, Saudi women claim legal ownership rights over securities, real estate, automobiles, shops and other businesses. The

working mother, as a contributor to the gross family income, has acquired some latitude in the management of an otherwise patriarchal unit. In the case of family-owned businesses, women often have large behind-the-scenes management roles. In short, restrictions on their physical mobility and being segregated from men in the public sphere have not prevented women in the Kingdom from gaining control over a share of Saudi Arabia's wealth.

### Status of Elderly, Young Adults, and Children

Elders simply do not relinquish their leadership roles as early as in the past. This means the most powerful authority figure for a young wife may not be her mother-in-law, but her husband's grandmother. A generation has now come of age which finds itself stymied in carving out an autonomous sphere within the extended family. Children, who now have more adult family members to dote on them, are the primary beneficiaries. They can do no wrong in the eyes of adults.<sup>119</sup>

### Marriage and Divorce

According to Islamic law, a man can take up to four wives. In reality, only a very wealthy Saudi could afford to support four wives and all the children which could be born to these unions.

#### Exchange 80: How many people live in this house?

Soldier:	How many people live in this house?	kam huma ilee ye'eeshoon ibhal bayt?
Local:	Ten.	'ashra.

Two wives are the most a man earning a decent salary could afford. In that case, the wives either live in separate houses or in separate quarters within the same compound. The two families do not socialize together.

#### Exchange 81: Is this your entire family?

Soldier:	Is this your entire family?	haaThee 'eltik kilaha?
Local:	Yes.	na'am.

Consanguineous marriages, or marriages within the bloodline, i.e., marrying first and second cousin, is still considered good eugenics among Saudi tribes. The practice is one way of limiting outsiders' access to family wealth, but it is a practice that can result in physical weaknesses in the offspring.<sup>120</sup>

Saudi women in the 21st century tend to wait longer before marrying. Although most marriages are still arranged, couples are able to get to know each other better than in the past aided in part by modern technology such as personal computers and cell phones. By

<sup>119</sup> Telegraph. Moss, Fiona. "My Life inside the Saudi kingdom." 4 June 2004.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/arts/main.jhtml?xml=/arts/2004/06/04/ftsaudi04.xml>

<sup>120</sup> Journal of Community Health. Al-Abdulkareem, A.A. and S.G. Ballal. Consanguineous Marriage in an Urban Area of Saudi Arabia: Rates and Adverse Health Effects on the Offspring. February 1998.

<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/klu/johe/1998/00000023/00000001/00290939>

tradition, married women do not take the family name of their husbands. In the event the marriage ends prematurely, either as a result of a divorce (which is uncommon) or young widowhood, women may reunite with their own families.

### **Naming Conventions**

Nationals of Saudi Arabia use four-part names comprised of a first name, father’s name, grandfather’s name and family name. The last is a tribal name, e.g. Otaibi, Harbi, Qahtani, Ghamdi, or Yami, which can be shared with as many as half a million other people.<sup>121</sup> A representative male name is Ali bin Ahmed bin Saleh Alghamdi. He would be known as Ali to his close friends and family. He is the son of Ahmed who is the son of Saleh. Alghamdi is his family name reflecting membership in the tribe of Ghamd. His married sister Haifa would be named Haifa bint (daughter of) Ahmed bin Saleh Alghamdi.

**Exchange 82:** Are these your children?

Soldier:	Are these your children?	haThoola 'iyaalik?
Local:	Yes.	na'am.

Since Saudi last names convey family relationships, the most important words are Abu, Ibn or bin, and Abd. They mean father, son and slave or servant respectively. So Abu Hasan means father of Hasan whereas Ibn Hasan means son of Hasan.

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<sup>121</sup> [www.bankersonline.com/](http://www.bankersonline.com/)."Middle Eastern Naming Conventions." 14 January 2002. Richards, James. <http://www.bankersonline.com/tools/namingconventions.pdf>