BAHRAIN CULTURAL FIELD GUIDE

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Foreword

The Bahrain Cultural Field Guide is designed to provide deploying military personnel an overview of Bahrain's cultural terrain. In this field guide, Bahrain's cultural history has been synopsized to capture the more significant aspects of the country's cultural environment, with emphasis on factors having the greatest potential to impact operations.

The field guide presents background information to show the Bahrain mind-set through its history, language, and religion. It also contains practical sections on lifestyle, customs, and habits. For those seeking more extensive information, MCIA produces a series of cultural intelligence studies on Bahrain that explore the dynamics of Bahrain culture at a deeper level.

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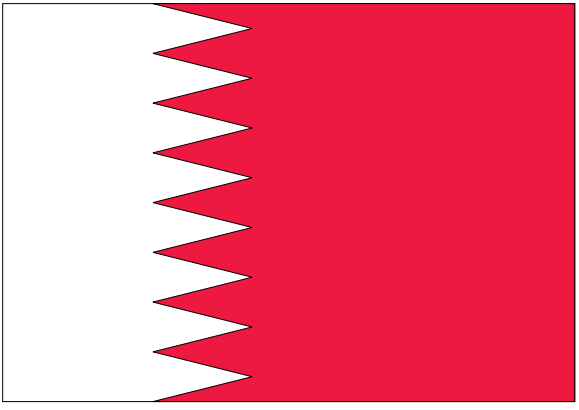
CULTURAL FIELD GUIDE: THE KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN

Bahrain is an island archipelago in the Arabian Gulf, 15 kilometers (9 miles) off the eastern coast of Saudi Arabia and 18 kilometers (11 miles) north of Qatar. Of the 33 islands that comprise the archipelago, only 7 are inhabited. The largest and most populated of the islands, also known as Bahrain, is home to the capital, Manama, and most of the population. Bahrain Island is 30 kilometers long (18.6 miles) and 10 kilometers wide (6 miles) and connected to mainland Saudi Arabia by the King Fahd Causeway, which was built in 1986.

Bahrain's second most significant island is Muharraq, home to Bahrain's second largest city, al-Muharraq, and the international airport. The other inhabited islands are Sitra, the site of Bahrain's oil refining plants; Nabih Salih, an island of date palm groves;



National Flag

Umm Nasan, the private island of the king; the Hawar islands next to the Qatar coast; and Jiddah, home to Bahrain's state prison. Most of Bahrain is desert, and most of the population lives in the northern third of the country.

Bahrain

Manama

National Statistics

- **Total population.** 727,785; includes 235,108 non-nationals (2009 estimates)
- **Gross national income per capita.** US$17,231 (2005)
- **Life expectancy at birth.** 73 males/78 females
- **Percentage of population below 15 years.** 25.9 (2009)
- **Adult literacy 15+ years.** Males 88.6%/females 83.6%
- **Unemployment.** 15% (2005)
- **Population with access to local health services.** 100

Bahrain's population of approximately 700,000 is religiously and ethnically diverse. Bahrain has been a significant regional trading center, and diverse groups of Persians, Arabs, and Indians have settled on the island. Sectarian differences have a significant impact on the lives of many Bahrainis; approximately 60 to

70 percent of the national population is Shi'a Muslim and 30 to 40 percent is Sunni Muslim. Tensions exist between Sunnis, who dominate Bahrain's economic and political systems, and Shi'a, who feel isolated and repressed. Foreign workers in Bahrain total approximately 40 percent of the population. Most foreign workers are from South and Southeast Asia. Accusations of abuse against these workers are common.

Bahrain is a constitutional monarchy that has been ruled by the al-Khalifa family since the 18th century. Although the current king, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa, has enacted political reforms, authority remains firmly in the hands of the monarch and other members of the ruling family. In 1934, Bahrain became the first country in the Arabian Gulf to export oil, and it will likely be the first to deplete its oil resources. Oil exportation has brought dramatic changes to Bahrain's economy, culture, and society.

King al-Khalifa

At the beginning of the 20th century, much of Bahrain was rural and underdeveloped, with an economy dependent on farming, fishing, and pearling. Today, Bahrain is a highly developed and urban country, with an oil-centric economic system.

CULTURAL HISTORY

Bahrainis are proud of their country's long history as a regional power and prominent trading and cultural center. Bahrain is believed to have been the center of the ancient civilization of Dilmun — a religious, cultural, and trading center dating to 4000

B.C. Bahrain's successful economy, based largely on its pearling industry, and strategic location attracted many foreigners.

During the course of its history, Bahrain was influenced by Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, Persians, Europeans, South Asians, and Arabs. European influence arrived in the Gulf in the late 15th century when the Portuguese forcibly occupied Bahrain in 1521. During their 80 years in Bahrain, they ruled the island with a heavy fist, causing animosity in the population. In 1602, the Portuguese were defeated by Persian forces interested in Bahrain's pearling industry and location near the coast.

The al-Khalifas

The growth of regional trade and the pearling industry also attracted many Arabian tribes to the Bahrain coast. Some tribes consolidated their power in coastal towns, and conflict frequently arose between regional tribes over control of the coastal towns and

Portuguese Fort

Riffa Fort

pearling resources. The al-Khalifa, the Sunni tribal family that continues to rule Bahrain, came to the Gulf region from central Arabia in the 17th century. Their initial attempts to settle in Bahrain were prevented by Sheikh (tribal leader) Nasr al-Madhkur, who ruled the island as a dependency of Persia. In 1763, the al-Khalifa settled in Zubarah on the northwest coast of present-day Qatar and transformed the town into a trading center that competed with Bahrain. In 1783, Bahrain's ruler, Nasr al-Madhkur, launched an attack against the al-Khalifa. The al-Khalifa defeated Nasr and settled in Bahrain, ushering in al-Khalifa dominance of the islands.

The al-Khalifa relied on assistance from local tribes to establish their authority in Bahrain. These tribes became an integral part of Bahraini society and remain strongly allied with the contemporary regime. Before the al-Khalifa family came to Bahrain, the population was composed predominantly of Shi'a Arabs organized into

villages and smaller cities with localized power structures. The al-Khalifa brought many Sunni Arabs to the islands. They quickly came to dominate Bahrain's main economic enterprises, including pearling and palm cultivation. In palm-cultivating areas, the al-Khalifa confiscated land and established a feudal system. Palm groves were divided into estates, each of which was governed by a member of the al-Khalifa family. Shi'a were predominately farm laborers, although some were employed by the landlords as tax collectors and estate managers. Most Shi'a felt alienated and repressed by these changes to Bahraini social structure. Each estate also had groups of strongmen, called *fidawi*, to maintain order and enforce the landlord's rulings. The *fidawi* were typically non-tribal Sunni Arabs from present-day Saudi Arabia.

The ruling family was also closely aligned with the Sunni tribes that controlled the pearling industry, which in the 19th and early 20th centuries employed approximately 70 percent of Bahrain's population. Scores of divers were hired by ship captains to do the often dangerous work. Pearling production was seasonal, and during the off-season, divers were dependent on loans from their captains. Although many ship captains were tribal leaders, Indian and Persian merchants also bought and traded the pearls. These merchants had significant influence in Bahrain, and many retained close ties with their home countries. This prompted a growing fear among the al-Khalifa that foreign states could exert influence over Bahrain through these merchants.

During this period, the authority of the al-Khalifa was limited outside Bahrain's major towns. Power was widely dispersed between family members, and each local sheikh was responsible for maintaining law and order and collecting taxes within his estate. Likewise, merchants remained powerful and had influence over a large sector of the population. The ruler was financially dependent

on money from merchants, as a large source of the ruler's revenue was derived from custom duties at Bahrain ports. The al-Khalifa also faced external challenges to their rule during this period. The strongest of these came from Oman, which briefly occupied Bahrain from 1801 to 1802.

The British

During the 19th century, Britain's interest in the Gulf increased, in part due to a desire to protect its ships and citizens in Arab waters. This became increasingly difficult as the Qasimi tribal confederation, based in present-day United Arab Emirates (UAE), grew in power and eventually controlled the Strait of Hormuz. The Qasimi demanded tribute from all passing ships. The British refused to pay this tribute and deemed the Qasimi actions as piracy. Great Britain launched an attack against the Qasimi, defeating them in 1820. Following this defeat, the Qasimi signed a General Treaty with Britain. Other Gulf rulers, including the ruler of Bahrain who sought British recognition and protection against the lingering threat from Oman, also signed the treaty. The General Treaties constituted the genesis of the Gulf States as separate political powers. These treaties also recognized the authority of the ruling sheikh as the legitimate power within each territory.

Bahrain signed a series of treaties with the British that gradually increased British involvement and influence. The most significant were the Maritime Truces. In these, Gulf leaders agreed to abstain from maritime aggression in exchange for British protection. Bahrain signed the Maritime Truce in 1861, and in 1880, signed the Exclusive Agreements, which gave Britain control of Bahrain's foreign relations. Through these treaties, the Gulf rulers gained recognition and an external source of legitimacy, while Britain gained control of the defense and foreign relations of the Gulf

States. As tribal authority within each state solidified, the inter-tribal power contests common before the 19th century decreased. However, intra-tribal rivalries increased. Internal conflicts between al-Khalifa sheikhs were common and became so destabilizing that the British intervened, installing Sheikh Isa bin Ali as ruler and establishing a system of hereditary descent in Bahrain in 1869. These changes brought a period of stability to Bahrain and marked a period of increasing British involvement in Bahraini internal affairs.

Despite the strong British influence in the Gulf and Bahrain, the British maintained only a limited physical presence in the region. Within each state, the British relied on native representatives to serve as intermediaries with local rulers. These representatives were typically merchants from leading Arab, Persian, or Indian families who had extensive knowledge of the local culture, language, and politics, and could provide the British with valuable inside information. The Safar family, a wealthy merchant family with Persian roots, served nearly uninterrupted as the native agents in Bahrain from 1833 to 1900.

British internal involvement in Bahrain increased in the 1920s as it pushed through a series of domestic reforms that dramatically changed Bahraini society. These reforms abolished the feudal estate system, replacing the *fidawis* with a municipal guard force and eliminating the ability of local sheikhs to collect taxes. A government bureaucracy was established, and tribal chiefs and religious jurists were incorporated into the state system. Merchant freedoms were also restricted as taxes were instituted. The state took over customs collection, and a central court system replaced tribal courts. Tribal leaders and merchants resisted these reforms, which eliminated their economic and political autonomy. However, villagers and the lower classes accepted the reforms, believ-

ing they would gain more freedom and equity. Sheikh Isa bin Ali resisted the reforms, and the British replaced him with his son, Hamad bin Isa, who implemented the measures.

Other reforms aimed to limit the influence of foreign governments, specifically Iran, in Bahrain. Segments of the Persian community were powerful within Bahrain. During the 1920s, the pearling industry expanded drastically, giving merchants greater influence. Many foreign merchants bought land throughout Manama. Persians were the largest community of foreigners, and most retained allegiance to their homeland. In 1937, the government attempted to limit Iranian influences by declaring that only Bahraini nationals could own property. This forced many Persians to renounce their allegiance to Iran to maintain their personal property and assets in Bahrain.

Oil Production's Effect on Society

The discovery and production of oil had a profound effect on Bahraini society. In 1932, Bahrain became the first Gulf State to export oil, and the ensuing social evolution has been dramatic. Oil greatly bolstered the economy, which had been suffering under a declining pearling industry due to the global depression of the 1930s and competition from cultivated Japanese pearls. Politically, oil consolidated the power of Sheikh Isa, giving him greater autonomy and ending his economic dependence on merchants. The size and role of the government increased as revenues expanded, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s.

Oil exportation brought rapid social change to Bahrain. Bahrain's population grew as mortality decreased and birth rates remained high. Urbanization accelerated and brought together communities that were previously segregated. Urbanization also changed the

landscape of Bahrain as the state dealt with the increased urban population by filling in swamp land, building high-rise housing, and expanding the cities into surrounding rural areas. The demand for higher education and job training increased as it became evident that the native workforce was ill prepared to fill new positions in the oil industry. Foreign workers brought in to fill the gap competed with Bahrainis for jobs, resulting in social unrest in the 1930s and 1940s. Many Bahrainis were unable to advance to higher positions held by foreigners. Unrest continued in the 1950s, highlighting the social discrepancies that were emerging in Bahraini society. Among these was the growing disparity between the richest and most connected Bahrainis and the poor.

Independence

In 1970, Britain announced that it would be withdrawing from the Gulf and proposed a union between the states of the UAE, Qatar, and Bahrain. This was to mitigate threats to these small nations from their bigger neighbors, particularly Saudi Arabia and Iran. The threat from Iran stood in the way of Bahraini independence. Iran believed that it should control Bahrain, due to its historic role in the country and geographic proximity. However, the Shah of Iran agreed to a referendum in Bahrain to determine the wishes of Bahrainis. This was carried out by the United Nations, and the results showed an overwhelming desire among Bahrainis for independence under al-Khalifa leadership. The Emirate of Bahrain became independent from Great Britain in 1973.

After British withdrawal, Bahrain sought to build new alliances to protect its independence, particularly from Iran. The most important alliances were with the United States and Saudi Arabia; both continue to be strong allies. Bahrain historically had a close relationship with Saudi Arabia because many Bahraini families

trace their roots, often through tribal connections, to eastern Saudi Arabia. Bahrain also depends on Saudi financial aid and investment. Shortly after gaining independence, Bahrain also strengthened its relationship with the United States. Although this relationship has occasionally been contentious with sectors of the population, the Bahrain government relies on U.S. military and economic aid. The United States' fifth Navy fleet is currently headquartered in Bahrain.

External alliances are significant to the Bahrain government, due to the country's small size and hostile regional environment. After the Iranian revolution in 1979, Iran re-asserted its claim to Bahrain and began supporting subversive groups within the country. Many Bahraini Shi'a felt that they had not been adequately included in the country's emerging wealthy class and were inspired by the revolution in Iran, which provided some Shi'a with a religious framework to express their opposition to the regime. In 1981, the regime discovered a coup plot by the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain that was accused of having Iran's support. Aware of the growing discontent of the Shi'a population and frightened about the coup, the government took a more active role in the Shi'a community. The government sought expanded economic opportunities for the Shi'a, while clamping down on opposition activities and increasingly monitoring Shi'a religious and social groups. However, some Bahrainis, particularly Sunni Bahrainis, continue to feel threatened by Iran, which has made claims on Bahrain as recently as July 2007.

After gaining independence, Bahrain enacted a constitution and established an elected council. The consultative assembly was established in 1972 and had 22 elected members and 8 appointed members. Although the powers of the assembly were limited, the population was excited about the prospect of representative rule,

and 80 to 90 percent of the electorate voted in the first election. However, the assembly only served two terms. In 1975, the government enacted a National Security Law that enabled the detention of anyone considered a threat for 3 years without a trial. The assembly opposed this measure, and after a political stalemate, the ruler dismissed the assembly and suspended the constitution.

In the early 1990s, Bahraini reformers organized a petition drive that called on the emir (ruler) to reinstate popular representation and re-affirm the constitution, both of which had been dismissed since 1975. The emir initially responded by establishing a consultative council, but changed his approach when the movement grew and gained more than 25,000 signatures. Feeling threatened, the emir responded by arresting the petition's organizers. Although the movement began as a joint Sunni-Shi'a effort aimed at political reform, it increasingly transformed into a Shi'a movement driven by economic inequality. The Shi'a were increasingly targeted by the regime, and many were jailed or exiled. Demonstrations and protests increased after three prominent Shi'a religious jurists were arrested by the government. The unrest led to 30 deaths, hundreds of injured people, and between 3,000–5,000 arrests, virtually all of which were Shi'a. Although the intense strife of the 1990s has ceased, sporadic outbreaks of violence, particularly in Shi'a villages, have continued and taken an increasingly sectarian tone.

Emir Isa died in 1999, and his son, Hamad, came to power. Emir Hamad initially undertook reforms and liberalizing measures, most of which have stalled in recent years. A new constitution passed in 2000, renamed the emirate the Kingdom of Bahrain, and placed Hamad as king. The constitution allowed for the formation of political parties and established a bi-cameral legislature. Despite these changes, the system of rule remains highly personal with power concentrated in the hands of the ruling family and

tribal elites. Bahrain continues to face massive economic problems, including high unemployment, a large population of foreign workers, and massive wealth inequalities.

CULTURAL IDENTITY AND PERCEPTIONS

Dominant Values and Beliefs

Bahraini values and beliefs are largely influenced by religious beliefs, the central role of the family, and, for some, tribal culture. Most Bahrainis value hospitality and generosity and are willing to open their homes to guests. Turning away a visitor and not providing a guest with food and beverages are considered rude. Honor is also a key Bahraini value. Honor is typically held by families, and the actions of individuals affect the entire family. A significant aspect of honor is maintaining ascribed social norms governing interactions between genders.

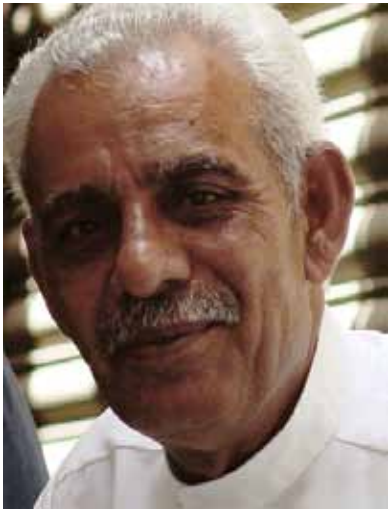
Identity and Affiliations

By the beginning of the 20th century, Bahrain had a diverse, identifiable population of Sunnis and Shi'a, Persians and Arabs, and urban and rural communities. Sectarian, ethnic, and regional distinctions remain in Bahrain and continue to be factors in Bahraini identity. Oil wealth and the subsequent economic and political development have deepened disparities between social groups and enhanced segmented identities based on class, ethnicity, and religion.

Community

Tribal, peasant, and urban communities in Bahrain have distinct lifestyles and identities. Urbanization has not eliminated these communities, which retain their distinct characteristics even as they are incorporated into urban areas. However, distinctions between these

communities may not always be clear due to their geographic and economic integration.



Typical Bahrani Man

Most Bahrainis live in urban areas organized into ethnically and religiously homogeneous communities. Urban Bahrainis tend to be more socially liberal; they have the highest rates of education in Bahrain and are more exposed to other cultures. Technological advancements have increased international travel and have given many urban Bahrainis access to the internet and satellite television. Urban Bahrainis are more likely to have a stronger identification with their occupation, education, and residence than Bahrainis in rural or suburban communities. For some urban Bahrainis, kinship ties are weaker because extended families do not reside near each other.

Village communities in Bahrain are composed primarily of Shi'a and are bound together through community intermarriage. Urban expansion has transformed many villages into suburban communities. In the face of economic challenges and rapid social change, many village communities have turned inward, and members have a strong and localized identity.

Although traditional tribal lifestyles have largely vanished from Bahrain, tribal identity remains strong. Tribes continue to form distinct communities bound together through kinship ties and marriage. Bahraini tribes remain close allies to the regime, and

tribal connections influence an individual's access to employment, education, and state services.

Religion and Origin

Religion is a significant factor of identity for most Bahrainis. Islamic identity in Bahrain varies based on religious sect, ethnicity, gender, class, occupation, and ethnicity. Approximately 98 percent of Bahrain's citizenry is Muslim, of which an estimated 60 to 70 percent are Shi'a Muslims and 30 to 40 percent are Sunni Muslims. Sectarian and ethnic distinctions create strong divisions in Bahraini society. These divisions have widened in recent years, as increasing numbers of Shi'a feel socially marginalized and economically disadvantaged by Bahrain's ruling Sunni elite. Sunni

Grand Mosque of Manama

and Shi'a Bahrainis also have different religious practices, social customs, employment opportunities, and dialects. Despite these differences, interaction in schools and offices is increasing and levels of intermarriage are growing moderately.

Sunnis

Despite their minority status, Sunnis dominate Bahrain's political and economic systems. The ruling family is of Sunni Arab descent and favors other Sunni Arabs in positions of power and authority that garner wealth and influence. Sunnis tend to be somewhat more socially liberal than Shi'a Bahrainis, although both are typically conservative. Bahrain's diverse Sunni community is composed of the al-Khalifa family and other tribal Arabs, Nejdi Arabs, and the Hawala.

The al-Khalifa and other tribal Arabs are in the upper classes of Bahraini society and form a tightly knit community. The consolidation of al-Khalifa rule in the early 20th century weakened the authority of other tribal leaders, who previously had significant autonomy over their tribes. However, some tribal leaders have retained significant authority through alliances with the ruling family. Tribal and kinship ties are key sources of identity for tribal Bahrainis.

Nejdi Arabs settled in Bahrain following the al-Khalifa conquest, migrating from the Nejd in Saudi Arabia. They do not have tribal ties and are mostly urban and involved in commerce and trade. They are major allies of the al-Khalifa and often placed in positions in the security apparatus. Non-tribal Sunnis predominantly live in al-Muharraq, al-Hidd, and the Arab sectors of Manama.

The Hawala came to Bahrain from Iran during the 19th and 20th centuries. Despite having settled in Iran for many generations, the Hawala trace their roots to the Arabian Peninsula and consider

themselves Arabs. Many Hawala take great pains to emphasize their Arab lineage and their tribal descent. Some Hawala have been in Bahrain for generations and came to the islands due to the rise of pearling and the shift in trade routes from the eastern gulf to the western gulf. Others have settled in Bahrain more recently, and some of their fathers and grandfathers still speak Persian. However, most Hawala are indistinguishable from other Sunni Arabs in customs and language. Like other Sunnis, they form the upper classes of Bahraini society.

Shi'a

Bahraini Shi'a are estimated to be 60 to 70 percent of the citizenry. In the 1950s, the proportion of Sunnis and Shi'a in Bahrain was roughly equal. However, in recent decades, the Shi'a have become a clear majority in the country, partially due to their continued practice of early marriage and the emphasis that they place upon large extended families for economic and social support.

What's in a Name?

"The failure to build a common sense of the past history between Sunnis and Shi'as is well expressed by the significance Baharna attribute to the word "Bahraini." While it refers to the official status of citizen of the modern state of Bahrain, they have turned it into an ethnonym specially naming the Sunnis. They the people of Bahrain, they often say, are the Baharna, pointing out that the name "Bahraini" is a pure creation of the Sunni Bedouin conquerors in their attempt at pretending to belong to a country they have stolen from their owners."

Laurence Louer, "Transnational Shia Politics."

The Shi'a are generally more conservative and have a stronger religious identity than Sunni Bahrainis.

Many Shi'a are economically disadvantaged compared to Sunni Bahrainis and live in poor villages and suburban communities that are physically and socially segregated from wealthier Bahrainis. In these communities, living conditions are often poor and unemployment is high. Although wealthy Shi'a are in Bahrain, most of the poor, unskilled, and unemployed population is Shi'a. Poor economic conditions — a factor in the growing discontent in the Shi'a community — have led to multiple uprisings since the mid-1990s. Government efforts to repress these have led to increased Shi'a identification and unity.

A key divide within the Shi'a community is between the Baharna and Ajam. Baharna Shi'a are Arabs and claim to be the original inhabitants of Bahrain. They traditionally worked as date farmers and cultivators and were organized into small villages with localized centers of authority. They refer to themselves as Bahrani, not Bahraini, which is the term they use to refer to Sunni Bahrainis. Most Shi'a in Bahrain are Baharna, and many feel that they are politically and economically discriminated against by the Sunni elite. Some harbor resentment against the Ajam, who they believe increase the competition for scarce jobs.

The Ajam are approximately 15 percent of the Shi'a population in Bahrain. Ajam are Persian immigrants, many of whom came to Bahrain only in the past century. Some Ajam were traditionally wealthy merchants with considerable influence in Bahrain and who renounced their allegiance to Iran in the 1930s to retain their assets in Bahrain. Some of the Ajam have adopted Arabic surnames and deny their Persian origins. Many impoverished Ajam are in Bahrain. They have had a more difficult time assimi-

lating into Bahraini society, and some have been denied Bahraini citizenship, even though many are third-generation residents. The Ajam are generally not represented in opposition movements in Bahrain. They were largely silent during the labor demonstrations of the 1950s and in the Shi'a unrest since the 1990s.

Foreign Workers

Historically, Bahrain was a transnational state and home to many foreigners. Bahrainis had many connections with foreigners within Bahrain and in their home countries. However, the recent scale and composition of foreigners has changed significantly. With the exportation of oil, particularly after the oil boom of the 1970s, the presence of foreign labor in Bahrain increased dramatically. Foreigners comprise approximately 40 percent of Bahrain's population and 64 percent of its workforce. Most foreigners are employed in industry, construction, or as domestic workers. Many foreigners are from South and Southeast Asia, with smaller numbers of Persians and Westerners. This is partially due to a concerted effort by the government and job agencies to attract more Asian workers instead of Arabs or Persians, who are a concern for the government given their potential loyalty to neighboring countries and their ability to integrate into Bahraini society. Asians have fewer ties with Bahrainis, are easier to layoff, and are less likely to bring their families. Even so, some Bahrainis fear that foreign workers may demand citizenship and rights.

Foreigners are socially and physically separated from Bahrainis and are often made subservient to them. The treatment of workers often varies based on country of origin. Westerners are grudgingly respected and typically have only intermittent social interaction with Bahrainis. Arab workers are able to integrate into society depending on their personal economic standing. Asian workers

are generally treated poorly and segregated from Bahrainis. Some Bahrainis demonstrate contempt and blatant disregard for Asian workers. However, professional workers from all countries are treated better than low-skilled workers, who must deal with poor working and living conditions and the threat of being expelled. The poor treatment of foreigners is in part due to the lack of government oversight of foreign migration, which is handled by private job agencies. Currently, foreigners work under a strict system of sponsorship called *kafala*. Contracts are decided between a sponsor and the foreigner; a contract determines salaries, restricts employees from changing jobs without their sponsor's consent, and gives employers the right to retain workers' passports. Laws that limit foreigners' ability to own businesses or remain in Bahrain without a Bahraini sponsor have also placed many foreigners in subservient positions. In May 2009, Bahrain announced that it would end the *kafala* system by August 2009 and that all foreign workers would be sponsored directly by the government. This is intended to control the overall number of foreign workers allowed in the country and to eliminate some of the abuses that foreign workers face under the *kafala* system.

Despite their social segregation, foreign workers play a key role in Bahrain's economy and society. Many Bahrainis are not trained

Wages

"Expatriates simply had much lower salary expectations, were ready to work longer hours and more days per week, and were often better trained. Unlike migrants, Bahrainis expect wages that allow them to live up to high social expectations and obligations."

Laurence Louer,
"The Political Impact of Labor Migration in Bahrain."

Privileged Few

"Ruling families are also distinctive for their social superiority as a caste. This is most obvious in the use of special forms of address and titles: amir, shaikh, sayyid, and their female equivalents. They also enjoy special privileges, such as influence (wasta), free air travel, de jure or practical exemption from payment of utilities, traffic regulations, and so forth. They receive allowances or stipends, often from birth. They form closed patterns of marriage, and their ranks are especially closed for female members. Furthermore, they are virtually guaranteed access to government employment, or, if they are not interested, they can exercise options for a plethora of economic opportunities."

J.E. Peterson,
"Rulers, Merchants, and Shaikhs in Gulf Politics."

to fill the positions held by foreign workers or do not choose to fill these positions because they consider them ignoble. Foreign workers have also had a large cultural influence on Bahraini society. Their presence has brought foreign food, language, and clothing into Bahrain. These workers also fill positions in Bahraini homes as nannies and maids, raising Bahraini children.

National and Regional Identity

Most Bahrainis have a strong sense of national identity and take great pride in their country. This is true of Baharnas, who identify themselves as the original inhabitants of the land, and Sunnis, who are the most integrated in the modern nation-state. However, identity has become a political issue in Bahrain, as sectarian and ethnic identities determine access to the resources of the state. The large

foreign presence in Bahrain has also prompted a national identity that is preoccupied with an Arabian and Islamic national culture. This is apparent in efforts to promote "national" dress and culture. These efforts began in the 1970s, when Western cultural influences were pervasive. Western dress was abandoned, and native Bahrainis adopted Gulf national dress, which remains a mark of citizenship across the Gulf region. Arab culture, particularly tribal culture, has also been emphasized and is showcased in museums, mosques, and buildings. The state also subsidizes traditional crafts associated with the region's heritage, such as shipbuilding. The focus on Arab and tribal cultural traditions has alienated some Shi'a and non-Arab communities.

Regional identification has also risen in recent years. Across the Gulf region, strong supranational communities are based on tribal, religious, and ethnic ties that have fostered a sense of regional identity among many Bahrainis. The formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1981 helped spur this trend, as did the shared Arab and tribal traditions that have become the hallmark of national identity across the region. Efforts have been made to harmonize education, and integration has been facilitated by the extension of roads connecting the

Man Wearing Gulf National Dress

region. As integration within the GCC continues, regional identification will likely increase as citizenship, residency, and marriage become more fluid throughout the region.

Social Organization

Bahraini society is structured around the family. Kinship ties are significant and among the most relevant factors shaping an individual's identity and place within society. Family structure within Bahrain is diverse and influenced by region, religion, ethnicity, and class. However, Bahrain is a patriarchal society, and many families are dominated by a senior male figure. Hierarchies based on age and gender determine an individual's position within the family. Children are valued highly in Bahraini society, which has a very young populace. Fifty-nine percent of the population is under 19 years of age. Children enhance their parents' social status and are expected to provide for their parents in old age. Having children is significant for women, since only through motherhood is a woman able to fully integrate into society. Fertility rates in Bahrain remain high, at approximately 2.8 percent.

Bahraini men have more authority than women, and many legal and social constraints have reinforced male dominance. Some Bahrainis believe that a woman's proper role is as a housewife and mother and do not believe that a woman should be active in society outside the home. Other widely held beliefs are that men are supposed to support the family and that a woman working outside the home would bring shame upon her male relatives. These beliefs have contributed to the low level of participation of Bahraini women in the workforce. However, employment levels for all Bahraini women have risen in recent decades. In 2007, the number of Bahraini women employed in the public sector equaled the number of Bahraini men. However, in the private sector, Bahraini

men outnumbered Bahraini women two to one. Some Bahraini women serve as ministers and ambassadors, including Huda Nonoo, a female Bahraini Jew appointed as Bahrain's Ambassador to the United States in 2008.

CULTURAL AUTHORITY

The Ruling Family

Power within Bahrain rests firmly in the hands of the ruling family and its close allies. Although the king wields significant authority, his power is shared with other members of the ruling family, some of which, such as the prime minster, have considerable authority. The al-Khalifa family occupies 17 of 28 cabinet ministries and holds 100 of the top 572 positions within the state bureaucracy. However, power can also be held informally by family members who are not in official government positions. Members of the ruling family not in official positions receive government allowances. Decisions are often made through informal networks organized along traditional lines, such as kinship ties, and governance is highly personal. As relations move away from the ruler's line of descent, power and privilege decrease. However, absolute family loyalty is expected of all family members. Although the king is willing to negotiate with the legislature and community leaders on some issues, particularly social and moral issues, he remains the firm decider on issues of power and security.

The Legislature

Prior to independence, the Bahraini system was one of consultative representation. The ruling family was constrained in its authority due to a lack of economic independence and a reliance on leading notables and merchants, who were consulted in informal

councils or *majlis*. The *majlis* were forums for discussion and arenas in which participants could voice concerns and try to influence policies. If the ruler did not consult the *majlis*, notables could band together to encourage consultation. This system changed after oil exportation increased state revenues and freed Bahrain's rulers from their economic dependence on notables and merchants. Bahrainis were no longer able to address the rulers directly; instead, they had to work through the established bureaucracy. Although the king still holds *majlis*, the formalized forums now display loyalty rather than invite discussion of policy concerns.

Other than a short-lived experiment with representative government following independence, Bahrain did not have a legislature or an active constitution until 2002. In 2000, Sheikh Hamad announced a strategy for limited reform measures, including enacting voting rights for men and women, allowing the formation of political societies, and establishing a bi-cameral legislature. Although opposition groups initially found these measures promising, many became disillusioned when Sheikh Hamad rewrote the constitution in 2002 without popular consultation. The new constitution limited the power of the legislature, which was divided into an elected Chamber of Deputies (*Majlis al-Nawaf*) and

Supreme Court

an appointed Shura Council (*Majlis as-Shura*). Laws must be approved by both chambers before going to the king for ratification. The king has the ability to veto all measures passed by both houses. The king has tried to diversify the Shura Council. In 2000, four women, a Bahraini Jew, and a Bahraini of Indian origin were appointed to the council, and approximately half of its members were Shi'a.

Political Societies and Opposition Movements

Despite the limited authority of elected representatives, many Bahrainis have actively participated in the electoral process. Under recent reforms, political societies have been allowed to organize. However, the regime has limited the influence of these political societies by limiting the power of the legislature. In 2002, the regime also gerrymandered electoral districts to guarantee Sunni domination in the legislature. Tensions over government interference in the legislature peaked in 2006 after a former government worker, Salah al-Bandar, released a documented report claiming that the government was plotting to rig the 2006 elections by co-opting Sunni political societies and extending citizenship to thousands of non-Bahraini Sunni Arabs to ensure Sunni domination. Although the government denied the accusations, the scandal, known as "Bandargate," has angered many Bahrainis.

Islamist societies now dominate Bahraini politics. This is a stark difference from Bahraini politics of the 1970s that were dominated by secular and Arab nationalist ideologies. Political societies in Bahrain are divided between Sunni and Shi'a affiliation. The key Sunni societies are the Islamist Platform and al-Islah (reform). The Islamist Platform is the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood in Bahrain and attracts mainly non-tribal Sunnis, particularly the Hawala. Membership is drawn primarily from the middle and

upper classes and focuses on issues such as health care and pensions. Al-Islah, a Sunni party with a strong tribal membership, has demands more ideological than those of the Islamist Platform. Both Sunni parties have good relations with the regime and have a vested interest in maintaining Sunni rule in the country.

The largest Shi'a political society is al-Wifaq (Islamic Accord). This society tries to incorporate a diverse support base by focusing on broad issues, such as economic and political inequality, which affect most of the Shi'a community. Members of the Islamic Action Society (IAS), the second largest Shi'a political society, are followers of Grand Ayatollah al-Shirazi in Iran. This party is considered more militant than al-Wifaq. Both parties call for expanded democratic and constitutional freedoms in Bahrain. Al-Wifaq boycotted the 2002 elections after the electoral district realignment, claiming the government was attempting to politically constrain Shi'a voters. This boycott allowed Sunni parties to dominate the legislature. In 2006, al-Wifaq decided to end its boycott and gained a majority of the seats in the legislature. Some members of al-Wifaq supported the decision to participate in the elections, believing that it was better to have some voice in the legislature, even if meaningful change was unlikely. Al-Wifaq's decision to participate in the elections prompted some members to form a splinter group, al-Haq, which continues to boycott the electoral process. Often considered the most vocal group in opposition of the government, al-Haq seeks to build grassroots support and has primarily attracted disaffected young males.

Citizenship

Citizenship is a contentious subject in Bahrain because it determines who has rights to the country's resources. Some residents, particularly among the Ajam, have not been granted citizenship.

These Ajam are referred to as Bidoon, meaning "without" (citizenship). Noncitizens cannot travel because they cannot obtain passports. They also cannot own government houses or obtain government jobs and risk being deported at any time.

The issue of citizenship has become more controversial since 2005, as the government began to offer citizenship to thousands of Sunni foreign workers from Yemen, Syria, and Jordan. Some Bahrainis believe this is an effort to balance the demographic dominance of Bahraini Shi'a by granting citizenship to Sunni Arabs. The government denies these claims. Since 1995, treatment of Bidoon has improved somewhat. However, citizenship remains an issue because many Bidoon resent their unofficial status, and the government is concerned with limiting the size of the Shi'a population in Bahrain for fear that they would increasingly demand better representation in the government.

Religious Institutions

The influence of religious institutions remains strong in Bahraini society, although greatest among Bahraini Shi'a. These institutions have considerable popular authority due to the importance of religion in Bahraini society and are granted significant authority on social and moral issues by the government. Key Shi'a institutions include mosques and *ma'atam* (funeral homes). Mosques are primarily places of prayer and are considered sacred by Bahraini Shi'a; nonbelievers are not allowed to enter them.

Each Shi'a village and neighborhood has a *ma'atam*. Traditionally, *ma'atam* were places where Shi'a gathered to mourn the dead. However, *ma'atam* have become social and political centers in Shi'a communities that host meetings, teach social and religious classes, and collect and distribute alms. Seeking the guidance of

leading clergy is a main element in Shi'a theology, so Shi'a clerics have a central role in local society. No formal hierarchy in the Shi'a religious community exists; clergy acquire status through their religious learning and personal appeal. Emulating the most respected clergy, who currently reside in Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran, is a popular aspect of Shi'a beliefs. Shi'a reverence for these leaders has led some Sunnis to question Shi'a loyalty to Bahrain.

Sunni religious institutions are centered on the mosque. Most Sunni clerics work for the government. Numerous Sunni religious centers offer opportunities for education, training, and socializing in Bahrain. Religious institutions have been increasingly monitored by the government. This is particularly true of Shi'a institutions, which played a large role in the petition drive of 1994.

Civil Society

Bahrain's civil society is among the most complex in the Gulf. However, civil society activities are heavily monitored and restricted by the government. The most prevalent civil society organizations are sports and cultural clubs, professional associations, and voluntary associations. Almost all Bahraini men belong to one of these organizations. Sports and cultural clubs are often segregated by religious sect and ethnic group, although professional associations include diverse members. These groups have also become avenues for political activity, and many are closely aligned with political societies. Bahraini women commonly participate in voluntary associations that practice philanthropy. Some women have also joined sports clubs and professional associations. Expatriate workers have many clubs that enable new migrants to maintain ties with their fellow countrymen and provide an avenue for socialization.

Information

Informal social networks remain a common means through which information is distributed in Bahrain. These may include family, religious, and social gatherings. Information is also distributed through local *majlis*. Informal sharing typically occurs within religious sects and ethnic groups.

Bahrainis increasingly receive information from media sources and the internet. Newspapers, radio, and television are available to most Bahrainis. Freedom of speech and freedom of the press are limited in Bahrain, and the media is monitored and restricted by the Ministry of Information. Most media outlets practice self-censorship and avoid contentious issues. The popularity of the internet is also growing in Bahrain, which has one of the highest usage rates in the Middle East. Access is relatively unrestricted, although the government does block sites it considers oppositional or immoral.

CULTURAL ECONOMY

Bahrain's economy has greatly affected its culture and society. As the pearling industry gave way to oil production, the importance of the economy rose and the pace of social change increased. Bahrain's economy is characterized by excessive consumerism, and the government derives substantial revenues from oil sales. A fragile base of local productivity exists, and almost everything consumed is imported. Even non-oil sectors of the economy depend on oil, which bolsters government spending and the general economic health of the country.

Labor Force	471,088
Private Sector	430,882
Public Sector	40,206

Occupation

Agriculture	1%
Industry	79%
Services	20%

Bahrain's economy has become increasingly integrated into the world system. The importance of oil to the West has brought significant Western involvement into the country, including military aid and economic investment. Signs of Western influence, from skyscrapers and automobiles to U.S. films and fast-food restaurants, have changed the Bahrain's landscape and culture. Additionally, Bahrain's economy is highly dependent on financial support from its neighbors, particularly Saudi Arabia. Bahrain's largest source of income is from oil production at the offshore oil field of Abu Sa'afa, which lies in Saudi waters and is jointly owned by Saudi

Bahrain World Trade Center

Arabia and Bahrain. Bahrain also receives large amounts of annual aid from Kuwait and Abu Dhabi. The GCC has also influenced Bahrain's economy. Regional agreements for economic cooperation have called for coordinating and integrating economic activity. Although many Bahrainis are optimistic that integration will improve their economy, they are frustrated that several of the GCC promises of integration have yet to be fulfilled. The GCC and Saudi Arabia influenced Bahrain to limit some practices that these countries considered immoral, such as selling alcohol to foreigners. Some perceive Bahrain as becoming more conservative due to the influence of its neighbors.

Building in Manama

Who is in Control?

"Until today, for example, Baharna often complain that dominant positions in BAPCO and ALBA are controlled by the Huwala, a group of Sunnis who came from the Iranian coast in the late 19th and first half of the 20th centuries. They claim ancient Arab tribal origin, which the Baharna usually deny by saying they are Iranians who try to pass as Arabs to gain the favor of the al-Khalifa."

Laurence Louer,
"The Political Impact of Labor Migration in Bahrain."

Pearl Tower

Economic Boom

Oil transformed Bahrain's economy from a relatively impoverished system based on pearling, palm cultivation, and fishing into a large economy based on oil production. Oil allowed rulers to centralize their power and establish a welfare state, appease rivals, and build the military. Oil resources improved the standard of living for many Bahrainis, while simultaneously heightening wealth discrepancies.

The overall strength of Bahrain's economy is closely tied to the price of oil. In the 1970s, oil prices rose dramatically and greatly increased government revenues. Government spending increased and unprecedented growth and structural development occurred. The government expanded its bureaucracy as a means to distribute patronage and buy loyalty. From 1971 to 1981, public sector employment increased by 140 to 150 percent. The government

also expanded state services, such as health care, education, and subsidies, to distribute resources to the population. However, oil prices fell in the 1980s, and the decrease in revenues prompted the government to impose restrictions on the generous welfare state of the 1970s. This increased popular discontent with the government, particularly among the poor, who were most affected by the reduction in services. However, even when oil revenues are low, they are substantial enough to enable a large portion of citizens to live in relative luxury.

Oil wealth sparked many social changes in Bahrain. Urbanization increased to the extent that Bahrain is now one of the most urban societies in the world. Expanded employment opportunities brought an influx of foreign workers. In addition, Bahraini women began to enter the workforce. This altered the basic family structure and delayed marriage for many Bahrainis. Oil wealth has also caused many Bahrainis to disdain manual labor and has decreased the im-

Western Influence

"Bahrain is quite Westernized with McDonald's, Burger King, Seattle's Best Coffee, and J.C. Penney's stores, as well as many other American and European chain stores, are found throughout the island. English is spoken everywhere. There is a large Christian presence as well: some churches have been active since the late 19th century, when they were established in Bahrain for missionary purposes. Bahrain, a British protectorate from 1869 to 1971, is still home to many British people, as well as Americans. The Bahrainis, while some might benefit from and appreciate the wealth that has come in part from Bahrain's ties to America, also resent the encroachment onto their own culture.

Sophia Shehadeh,
"Women's Religious Practices in Bahrain."

portance of job performance, punctuality, and work regulations. Due to the ample revenues from oil and the presence of foreign and lower-class labor to fill low-ranking positions, many Bahrainis are able to live comfortably without strenuous work. However, Bahrain has a large community of poor Bahrainis, who are more willing than other Gulf nationals to work in low-status jobs.

Diversified Industries

Bahrain has the smallest oil reserves of all the Gulf States. This, and the fact that Bahrain was the first Gulf State to export oil, has made it one of the first Gulf countries to confront the issue of economic diversification. Beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, Bahrain undertook efforts to broaden its economy. Currently, non-oil industries such as tourism and finance make up a large portion of Bahrain's economy. The most successful of these endeavors was an aluminum manufacturing plant, Aluminum Bahrain (ALBA), and a shipbuilding company, the Arab Shipbuilding and Repair Yard Company (ASRY). Neither ALBA nor ASRY require oil inputs. Bahrain also attempted to develop a financial industry and

Tourism Makes up a Large Portion of the Economy

was a leading offshore banking center during the 1980s. Bahrain is the largest center for Islamic banking in the region, and 24 percent of its GDP came from the financial sector by 2003. These diversified industries have faced significant competition from other regional centers, particularly Dubai and, more recently, Qatar. Bahrain's diversified industries have also been negatively affected by falling oil prices and internal unrest, which have discouraged foreign investment. Despite these challenges, diversification remains a top priority for Bahrain, which has been more successful in diversifying its economy than many neighbors.

The Bahrain government would like to further develop the country's tourism industry. Most tourists come to Bahrain by way of the King Fahd Causeway, which connects the country with Saudi Arabia. Bahrain's relatively relaxed social environment, with fewer restrictions on gender relations and limited alcohol sales, brings many weekend tourists from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Tourism has become a major contributor to Bahrain's economy and expanded the demand for commercial venues and real estate.

The Tree of Life is a Popular Tourist Attraction

The government is hoping that a causeway connecting Bahrain to Qatar will increase trade and tourism between the countries. An agreement to build the causeway was finalized in 2008, and construction has begun. Although tourism has become a significant part of the economy, it faces opposition from certain sectors of the population. Many conservatives do not approve of developing the tourist industry, fearing that it would bring foreign and immoral influences into the country.

Labor Segregation

Economic segregation is common in Bahrain, and employment is strongly correlated with ethnicity, religion, and gender. The main divide is between native Bahrainis and foreigners. Most Bahrainis are employed in trade and the public sector, while foreigners are employed in the private sector and service industries. Many private industries are dependent on foreign workers, who are cheaper to employ because they are willing to accept lower wages and do not require the extensive benefits that are required (by the government) for native workers. Many Bahrainis believe this has given foreign workers an unfair competitive advantage and has contributed to the high levels of unemployment among lower-class Bahrainis.

Economic segregation is common between Sunni and Shi'a Bahrainis. Sunnis are given preferential treatment in public and private sector positions, and they dominate nearly every sector of the economy. Shi'a are found in high numbers in noncritical ministries, such as health and education, while Sunnis dominate ministries associated with power and security. Although some of this segregation has been deliberate due to the government's distrust of Shi'a, some of it is also due to the prevalence of *wasta* in Bahrain. *Wasta* is the use of personal connections for economic or political gain and is strongest within religious sects and ethnic groups.

Women are segregated in specific economic niches, such as nursing and teaching. Cultural constraints keep many women out of the workforce. Although Bahrain has the second highest rate of female participation in the workforce in the region, only 25 percent of Bahraini women are employed. However, women are the fastest growing group in the workforce, in part due to increasing rates of female education.

Class Divisions

Class segregation has increased in Bahrain, changing the urban landscape and limiting interaction between classes. While most Bahrainis are better-off since the discovery of oil, the discrepancies between classes have greatly expanded. The wealthiest Bahrainis live in immense luxury, while about 53 percent of Bahraini workers earn poverty wages.

In Bahrain, the overlapping of class divisions with ethnic and religious divides adds to tensions. In addition, the overall economic development in Bahrain has raised expectations and increased the desire for a higher standard of living. Oil production spurred the creation of a new middle class, composed of previously wealthy merchants and those with "new" money. The middle class remains largely dependent on the state's goodwill and subsidies for its position.

CUSTOMS

Bahraini customs have been influenced by the large Persian, Indian, Asian, and Western presence in the country. Some Bahrainis fear that their culture is being challenged by these outside influences and have tried to reinforce what they view as traditional Bahraini customs and practices. Many foreigners in Bahrain maintain the culturally distinct customs and practices of their homelands.

Street in Bahrain

Language

Arabic is the official language of Bahrain. Modern Standard Arabic is used in schools, media, and government. Bahrainis speak different dialects of Arabic based on residence, location, religious affiliation, and education. Dialect is an important marker of geographic and social identity. Sunnis speak the Arab dialect of Arabic, which is similar to that spoken in the UAE, Qatar, and Kuwait, and is generally considered to be the Gulf dialect. The Baharna speak a dialect similar to that spoken by Shi'a in Saudi Arabia, which has roots in southern Arabia and Yemen. The Arab dialect is prestigious in Bahrain, and over time, it has been adopted by many Baharna.

Other languages, including Malayalam, Urdu, Farsi, and Tagalog, are spoken by foreign workers in Bahrain. English, also very

common, is the language of business and, increasingly, education. Some Bahrainis fear that Arabic is losing ground—more Bahrainis use English and many Bahraini children are being raised by non-Arabic-speaking domestic workers, and speak only limited Arabic by the time they enter school.

Diet

The Bahraini diet is similar to that of other Gulf Arab States. Common foods include rice, bread, fish, dates, yogurt, and dips. *Shawarma*, or meat wrapped in a pita, and *mackboos*, or fish or meat with rice, are popular dishes. Bahrainis frequently drink tea and coffee, particularly when visiting or entertaining guests.

Dates have a special cultural significance to Bahrainis. Prior to the discovery of oil, dates were the staple of the Bahraini diet and were an integral aspect of Bahraini lifestyle. Date palms, with cultural significance similar to the camel among desert nomads, are included in songs, stories, and legends. However, with the discovery of oil, many date farmers traded their farms for more lucrative employment, which made dates a less common food in the region.

The Bahraini diet has also changed due to foreign influences. Many visitors introduced new foods and dietary habits to the country. Fast-food venues are increasingly common, and foreign coffee shops, such as Starbucks and Caribou Coffee, outnumber local coffee shops. Although it is illegal for Bahrainis to drink alcohol, alcoholic beverages such as beer and *arrack* (grape liquor with anise seed) are served to non-Muslims in hotels, restaurants, and specialty stores.

Clothing

Gulf national dress is a hallmark of Bahraini identity. Through the 1960s, Western-styled attire was prominent among Bahraini men.

Fear that this was eroding national culture, combined with a desire to be distinguishable from foreign workers, prompted the emergence of national dress. This includes a long, white robe, called a *thobe*, and a white head cloth with a black *aqal* (rope) holding it in place.

Many Bahraini women wear a long, black robe (*abaya*) and head scarf in public. A few Bahraini women also wear veils that cover their faces. Younger women, at times, wear elaborate and decorative *abayas*.

Dwellings

Traditional Bahraini homes were built with limestone and contained separate spaces for public and private living. Oil revenues brought significant investment in architecture and construction. Contemporary Bahrain's landscape has changed dramatically. Homes are often made from concrete and designed using European styles with

Men in the Old Market in Muharraq

large windows, greater living room space, and a Western-styled, enclosed kitchen. Skyscrapers fill the skyline, and concrete apartment buildings and large residential areas are also common.

Dwellings in Bahrain differ based on class and income level. Rich Bahrainis may live in single-family homes, while the poor often live in houses called *hawsh*, which are enlarged by adding additional rooms to accommodate extended family members. Poor Bahrainis live in overcrowded conditions, often among livestock. Traditional neighborhoods, which once housed poor and rich, have been replaced with segregated neighborhoods.

Holidays

Bahrainis celebrate a combination of Islamic and national holidays. Non-Muslim foreign workers also observe non-Islamic religious holidays, such as Easter and Christmas. One of the most important Muslim holidays is *Eid al fitr,* which marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, during which observant Muslims fast. *Eid al fitr* is celebrated for 3 days by attending parties and visiting relatives and friends. Another important Islamic holiday is *Eid al-Adha*, which commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son. Shi'a Muslims also celebrate *Ashura*, which marks Hussein's death at the battle of Karbala. The Shi'a observe *Ashura* for a week. Observance includes a reenactment of Hussein's death, along with ritual flagellation (*ta'ziyan*), which is intended to symbolically demonstrate the injustice in the world and emphasize the importance the Shi'a place on justice.

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