

Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar: Summaries of Ten Significant Topics

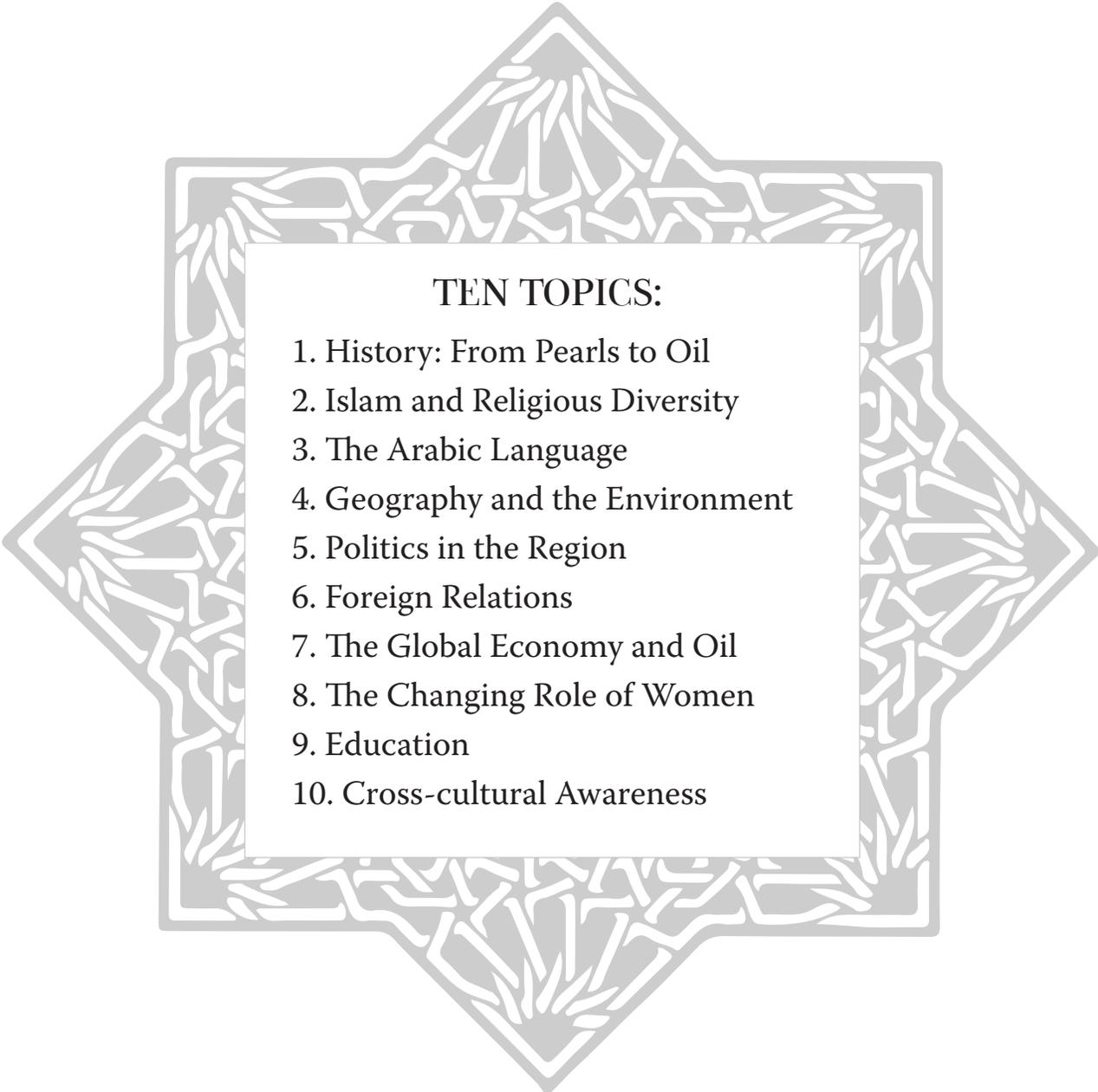
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2015 delegation of teachers at the home of Mr. Hameed Yousif Rahma and Dr. Fatima Eid, Joan Brodsky Schur 2nd from right bottom row and Denise R. Ames middle seated with blue vest. (Photo courtesy of TEACH fellowship)



Welcome to resources for the TEACH program, part of the Bi-lateral Chamber of Commerce, Houston, Texas. The following summaries of ten important topics related to three of the Gulf Coast countries—Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar—are designed to give teachers traveling to the region and other interested people basic background information. These resources are also open to anyone who is interested in learning more about this very important and strategic region of the world, and for use in the classroom. These summaries have been written and researched by two 2015 Fellows—Denise R. Ames and Joan Brodsky Schur—who have volunteered to share with future travelers their impressions, research, and thoughts on the region. Special thanks to Sarah Sheesley for her graphic design and layout.



TEN TOPICS:

1. History: From Pearls to Oil
2. Islam and Religious Diversity
3. The Arabic Language
4. Geography and the Environment
5. Politics in the Region
6. Foreign Relations
7. The Global Economy and Oil
8. The Changing Role of Women
9. Education
10. Cross-cultural Awareness



1. History: From Pearls to Oil

Joan Brodsky Schur

When we talk about Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE we are referring to modern nation-states on the Arabian/Persian Gulf that gained their independence from Great Britain in the early 1970s. Historically the region sits at the crossroads of Islamic history, beginning in the seventh century CE, and millennia earlier of ancient civilizations like the Dilmun (centered in Bahrain) who were trading partners of the Mesopotamians. Because the Gulf empties into the Indian Ocean its ports have always been strategically important and the region subject to the cross currents of cultural exchange.

Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE share similar environments, with desert interiors and coastlines along the Persian/Arabian Gulf. For thousands of years Bedouin tribes adapted to desert life by moving in the face of contingencies and scarce resources (especially water). Despite the harsh interior, fishermen found wealth in the shallow waters offshore, an ideal climate for oyster-bearing pearls. (These waters did not extend to the Persian side of the Gulf.) Thus residents of an otherwise resource-poor region found a highly marketable commodity traded throughout the Indian Ocean.

By the early 1500s European ships entered the Indian Ocean. First came the Portuguese ships that roamed the Gulf coastlines demanding acquiescence or death. The Portuguese abandoned their foothold in the Gulf as other empires vied for power in the Indian Ocean, including the Ottomans, Dutch and French. Once the British East India Company secured dominance of India (1757) Britain was determined that no resistance on land or sea threaten her safe passage to India. In 1819 the British made their push at Ras Al-Khaimah (now in the Emirate of Sharjah) with a fleet of twelve warships and a force of three thousand (largely Indian) soldiers. By 1820 the seven emirates that now form the UAE had each signed a treaty with Britain. Qatar and Bahrain also came under the aegis of the 1820 General Treaty of Peace; thus all became known as *trucial* states of Britain. According to Allen J. Fromherz the *trucial* system, "... left local sheikhs to their own affairs as long



Pearl divers in Qatar (Photo courtesy of Wikipedia)

as they could be held responsible for maintaining maritime peace." (49). However, Britain favored some tribes over others and this left its legacy on which tribes gained ascendancy after independence.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the valuable pearling market dried up when it was co-opted by Japan, whose entrepreneurs learned to produce artificially cultured pearls. The decades between the end of pearling and the rise of the oil economy witnessed a precipitous decline in the region. But with the discovery of oil in Bahrain in the 1930s and the development of the oil industry in the 1970s, the smallest countries of the Gulf became



Persian Arabian Gulf Region (Image courtesy of Wikipedia)

societies of astonishing wealth. Today the region is governed by hereditary monarchies who distribute oil wealth to their citizens liberally in exchange for their political fealty. The wealthiest citizens spend lavishly on luxury goods, while their governments import (to a greater or lesser extent) the guest laborers needed to support an unparalleled building boom. The question is, how sustainable is a lifestyle built on only one resource?

Geographically Bahrain, the UAE and Qatar remain small states tucked into the eastern side of a powerful Saudi Arabia to the west, and Iran directly across the Gulf. The region's politics derive from this geographical fact. It is one reason that the United States has been welcomed as a "protector" as Britain once was. Despite the astonishing adaptation

of modern technologies, tribal ways of life—learned through centuries of survival in a harsh environment—persist. Even today wealthy city dwellers retire to family compounds in the desert, and tribal affiliations, values, and systems of patronage affect social relationships.

Questions to Consider:

1. How has Western imperialism in the 19th and 20th centuries affected the region?
2. Do you think the U.S. is accepted or rejected as a "protector" in the region?



2. Islam and Religious Diversity

Joan Brodsky Schur

Bahrain, Qatar and Abu Dhabi are three small countries that lie between Shi'a Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia. Differences between Sunnis and Shi'a—while having a basis in religion—have been politicized, acerbating the rivalry between two oil-rich nations. Smaller Muslim countries, depending upon their populations and the persuasion of their leaders, are often caught in the middle.

The Shi'a and Sunni sects evolved after the prophet Muhammed died in 632 CE. The question was who should succeed his leadership of the *ummah* (community) and on what basis. The Sunnis favored relying on the process of consensus in choosing a leader, or caliph, to succeed Muhammad, while the Shi'a favored Ali, Muhammad's nephew and son-in-law, whose hereditary ties were closest to Muhammad. Over the centuries which branch of Islam dominated which regions of the Middle East has varied, but overall adherents of the two branches of Islam lived side by side. Over the centuries, as they do today, Shi'as and Sunnis make the pilgrimage to Mecca (the *hajj*) wearing the same simple white robes that represent the equality of all believers.

During the Arab Spring of 2011 Bahrain was the only country in the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) in which demonstrations posed a challenge to the ruling family. The Al Khalifas are Sunni, while more than half of Bahrain's population is Shi'a. In 2011 Bahraini Shi'a and Sunnis demonstrated together for greater political freedoms, but the royal family blamed social unrest squarely on the Shi'a and accused Iran of subterfuge in stirring the pot. With military help from Saudi Arabia, the Arab Spring of Bahrain was brutally squashed. Tensions within Bahraini society are still palpable as a result.

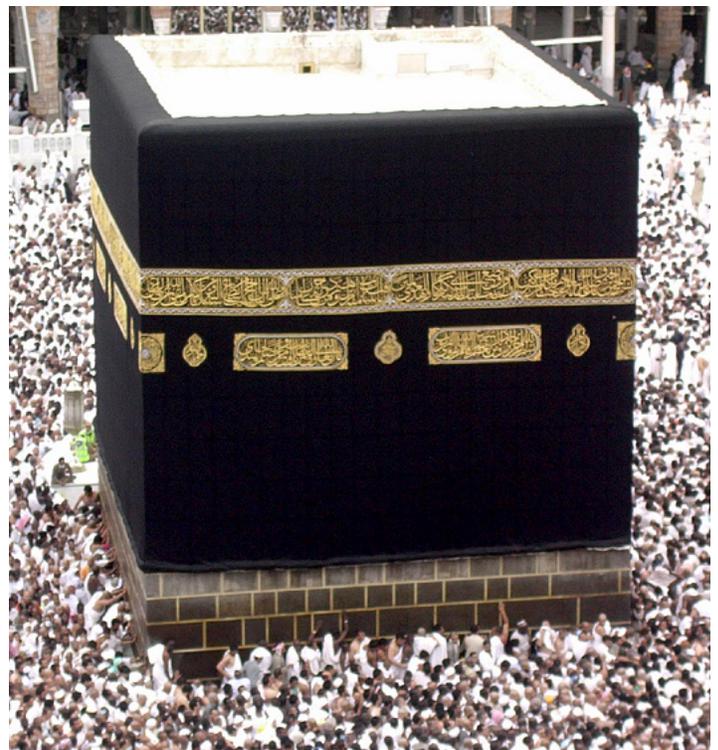
Today Sunnis are the worldwide majority of Muslims, but they face inner turmoil in response to several fundamentalist interpretations of Islam, one of them developed by Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792) in Arabia. He led warriors fired by missionary zeal to fight other Muslims on the Arabian Peninsula deemed to have gone astray from "true" Islamic practice. Wahhabism was adopted by the Saud

dynasty and after World War I it became the official doctrine of the newly-created state of Saudi Arabia. Today Saudi Arabia controls the holy cities of Mecca and Medina and has the funds to proselytize its interpretation of Islam to other Muslims worldwide. Qatar is the country with the closest ties to Wahhabism but is less rigid in application of Wahhabi principals than its large and powerful neighbor.

When visiting Bahrain, Qatar and Abu Dhabi, it is important to understand the extent to which all three countries rely on guest workers and expatriates from many non-Muslim countries, who are allowed to practice their own faiths while living there as non-citizens. Part of what gives the region its distinctive character is the cosmopolitan and international population it attracts, including its religious diversity.

Questions to Consider:

1. What are some of the factors that have led to religious diversity in the Gulf region?



Pilgrimage to Mecca (Photo courtesy of Wikipedia)



3. The Arabic Language

Joan Brodsky Schur

Over 250 million people speak Arabic in the countries that comprise the League of Arab States, including Qatar, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. Arabic is also one of only six languages officially used by the United Nations. Despite Arabic's importance in world discourse, its use in the three Gulf states mentioned above is being marginalized as English becomes the lingua franca of globalization.

The origin of the written Arabic we know today lies in the Qur'an. Muslims believe the Qur'an contains the words of God (Allah) as received by Prophet Muhammad beginning in 609 CE and ending with the Prophet's death in 632 CE. These words were transcribed into written Arabic after the Prophet's death. The poetic beauty of the Qur'an is unsurpassed in Arabic and set the standard for literary Arabic for centuries to come. This highly prized elegant and poetic form of Arabic is referred to as Qur'anic Arabic, or sometimes Classical Arabic. Reverence for the word led to one of the high arts of the Muslim world: calligraphy. In Bahrain, the Beit Al Qur'an museum displays examples of Qur'anic calligraphy collected from around the world.

Qur'anic Arabic is recited in prayers across the Muslim world. Arabs (for whom Arabic is also the mother tongue) comprise approximately 20 percent of Muslims worldwide. The language of modern, educated discourse is known as Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). It is derived from Classical Arabic, and is the language of modern literature, business, government and the media. However, it is not the language Arabs speak in their homes and in the streets. This is because Arabic is a diglossic language, meaning that the vernacular language of everyday conversation is not the same as the "high" language, which is written. Arabic has approximately six dialects spoken in different regions spread geographically from the Gulf across North Africa to Morocco. The dialects vary in pronunciation as well as vocabulary, such that a Moroccan speaker of Arabic cannot converse with a Gulf Arab in their native dialects. None of the dialects is written. Thus, MSA creates the linguistic bonds that tie Arabic speakers together; but it must be learned in school.



The Muslim invocation and blessing known as the Bismillah in Arabic calligraphy (Image courtesy of Wikipedia)

English has made deep inroads in Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE for numerous reasons. First is the high proportion of their expat communities, from executives to laborers. Arriving worldwide from Europe to the Indian Subcontinent, this community has little incentive to learn Arabic because access to citizenship in the region is highly limited, if not off limits. Whatever their native tongues, the most widely used language among expat workers is English. It enables this huge international workforce to speak in one language and thus to function efficiently. English is the preferred language of the worldwide business community, for which Qatar, the UAE, and to a lesser extent Bahrain form an important hub. Today, in medicine, engineering, and the sciences, groundbreaking scholarship is published in English. Thus across the Gulf advanced studies are completed in English, not Arabic. This is not to mention the appeal of American youth culture and the Web to young people in the region. According to Fatima Badry, in the UAE "English is seeping into domains that that are beyond professional needs and into family and social interactions. For example, when meeting a stranger these days in the cosmopolitan UAE, Arabs tend to converse in English even among Arabs. Given the multitude of national dialects, Arabs find it easier to use English than make the effort of adapting other's dialect" (98).

On the one hand the rapid adoption of English in Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE is a great advantage for the region in a globalized world. On the other hand, the adoption of English at the expense of Arabic threatens traditional values, pride, and culture. How best to prepare future generations to learn to speak and write *both* Arabic and English is the conundrum facing school systems in the Gulf.



Muhammad's name in calligraphy (Image courtesy of Wikipedia)

Questions to Consider:

1. If you were an official in the administration of one of these countries, how would you propose to keep the Arabic language relevant in a globalized world?

بأدر بتقدير طلبك الآن

تستقبل الطلبات من 1 إلى 3 نوفمبر 2015

فئات جائزة التميز العلمي

- 01 طلبة المرحلة الابتدائية
- 02 طلبة المرحلة الإعدادية
- 03 طلبة الشهادة الثانوية
- 04 خريجو الجامعات
- 05 حملة شهادة الدكتوراه
- 06 المعلم المتميز

Effort to keep Arabic the official language in Qatar (Photo courtesy of Denise Ames)



4. Geography and the Environment

Denise R. Ames



Water desalination plant in the UAE (Photo courtesy of Wikipedia)

The geography of the three countries plays a significant role in their way of life today, as in the past. Flanking the Arabian Peninsula on the east, these countries border the Persian/Arabian Gulf and have a strategic position amid the Gulf's shipping lanes. They straddle two powerful and contentious neighbors: Saudi Arabia (Sunni) to the west and Iran (Shi'a) to the east. Their populations with mixtures of Sunni and Shi'a reflect this geographic placement. They all have an arid climate with little rainfall, extremely hot summers and mild winters.

Qatar is a thumb-like appendage jutting into the central Persian/Arabian Gulf from the Arabian Peninsula. Bahrain is a cluster of 33 Persian Gulf islands whose inhabited areas add up to the size of New York City. United Arab Emirates is on a strategic location along northern approaches to the Strait of Hormuz, a vital transit point for world crude oil, and also borders the Gulf of Oman.

The GCC have experienced tremendous economic

growth while situated in a fragile and arid environment. Their unsustainable human activities and desert setting have contributed to environmental problems. In fact, the World Wildlife Fund Global Footprint ranking was not good for the three countries, with all three falling into the top 10 least sustainable countries per capita: #2 Qatar, #3 UAE, and #9 Bahrain (incidentally Kuwait was #1). We have identified three important and interrelated environmental issues facing the three countries in profound ways: desertification, lack of fresh water, and climate change. We will highlight these three issues.

All three countries rely on desalination, and the U.A.E. is the third largest water consumer per capita in the world. Desalination removes salt and minerals from salt water to produce fresh water. It requires a high input of energy for this process, a natural resource these countries have in abundance. The saltiest water in the world is in the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf region, (around 40%) due to very

high evaporation and little fresh water inflow. The extracted salt from desalinization plants is dumped into the Persian/Arabian Gulf adding to its already salty composition and adversely affecting marine life.

Second, desertification has resulted from periodic droughts, extensive overgrazing, unrestrained cultivation, fuel wood gathering, wind-blown soil materials, inefficient use of irrigation water, rampant urbanization, and sand encroachment. In fact, all three countries are classified as 100% desertified land. For example, desertification and climate change are altering agricultural production in the U.A.E., once a food exporter that now must increase their importation of food.

Third, the three countries face a difficult situation regarding climate change as they depend mainly on fossil fuels — the main cause of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions — and their economies are dependent on the oil, gas, and petrochemical

industries. However, they recognize this contradiction and, for example, Abu Dhabi is constructing Masdar, a carbon-free city as a new vision for a “green community.” Dubai is also aiming to become the “most sustainable city in the world.” But does this mesh with also having the world’s largest shopping mall? This is an interesting question to raise on your travels.

Questions to Consider:

1. Can the contradictory forces of desertification, climate change, oil production, and the rapid urbanization be reconciled in these three countries? How?



Masdar City, UAE Podcar at a PRT personal rapid transit station (Photo courtesy of Wikipedia)



5. Politics in the Region

Denise R. Ames

Bahrain, U.A.E, and Qatar are not democracies. For Americans, this is one feature about our country that we hold dearly, even though there are many flaws in our system. We have promoted democracy around the world, most recently and forcibly in Iraq in 2003. I would argue that the absence of democracy is the most contentious issue for Americans as they travel to this region. I have grappled with my thoughts and feelings about this issue, since I clearly believe in a democratic political system that promotes citizen involvement. But I also want to try to avoid judgments about labeling our system as “better” and try to understand their political system.

In analyzing this touchy subject, I believe we need to make a distinction between Western political values and others. Originating during the Enlightenment period in Europe in the 18th century, the Western ideals of representative government, citizen involvement, human rights, democracy, voting, and checks and balances on the powers of the rulers took root and spread throughout Europe and other Western-connected areas such as the U.S. and later Japan. But other areas of the world, such as China, most of the Middle East, parts of Africa, and parts of Asia, have not adopted democratic principles. Should the U.S. support authoritarian governments if they promote stability and security but not democracy, or is it best to push for democracy and live with the consequences if factions, such as what we would consider Islamic extremist, consolidate power? After all, the Arab Spring didn't have very good results in Syria. Democracy requires well-entrenched institutions and a well-informed public that accepts diversity and a variety of opinions, a situation that is not as easy to acquire as it appears. Therefore, my advice to travelers in regards to the political situation in the region is to have an open-mind and evaluate how well the system works for them rather than hold a preconceived ideal of how we think it should operate. The following is a brief paragraph about politics in each country.

The political story of Bahrain is how a minority Sunni family rules over a restive majority of Shi'a. This is of deep concern to the reigning Khalifa



Leaders of Bahrain (Photo courtesy of Denise Ames)

family, which has ruled the country since 1783. Sheik Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa assumed the throne in March 1999 upon the death of his father, Sheik Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa, the ruler of Bahrain since 1961. He implemented political reforms, including moving the country from a hereditary emirate to a constitutional monarchy, and in so doing changed his status from emir to king. The constitution enshrined the hereditary leadership of the al-Khalifa family and called for the establishment of a 44member National Assembly. The Judiciary of Bahrain is divided into two branches: the Civil Law Courts and the Shari'a Law Courts. Arab Spring-inspired protests erupted on February 14, 2011 by the country's Shi'a majority that sought greater political rights from the ruling Sunni minority. Street protests were violently suppressed by police, resulting in civilian deaths. Authorities crushed the protests within weeks after getting help from Saudi and Emirati security forces.

Established in 1971, the United Arab Emirates is a confederation of seven emirates, each with its own ruler: Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras al-Khaimah, Sharjah, and Umm al-Qaiwain. The form of government is referred to as a federal presidential elected monarchy, as the president is elected from among the absolute monarchs who rule each of the seven emirates. Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al

Nahyan, known as a pro-Western modernizer, was elected President in 2004. The UAE's judicial system is derived from the civil law system and Shari'a law. Judicial corporal punishment is a legal form of punishment in UAE according to the Shari'a courts.

The government responded to the Arab Spring protests with a \$1.6 billion program to improve the infrastructure in the poorer northern emirates and by expanding the number of people allowed to vote in the 2011 elections for the Federal National Council. The UAE clamped down on Internet activism in 2012 and imprisoned 68 Islamists for allegedly attempting to seize power in 2013.

[Click to watch the short film, "Then and Now: United Arab Emirates," for insight into modernization in the UAE.](#)

The political system of Qatar is an absolute monarchy, with the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, serving as head of state and

government. The emirate is hereditary, so there are no elections for this position. There is also a cabinet/council of ministers, which is appointed by the Emir. An Advisory Council can draft and approve laws, but final say is in the hands of the Emir. The Council has 45 members, 30 of whom are elected by direct, secret ballot, and 15 of whom are appointed by the Emir. According to Qatar's Constitution, Sharia law is the main source of Qatari legislation. There has been no serious challenge to Al Thani rule.

Questions to Consider:

1. Do you think the absence of democracy is a contentious issue in the region?
2. Should the U.S. support authoritarian governments if they promote stability and security but not democracy, or is it best to push for democracy?



Qatar ruling family (Photo courtesy of Denise Ames)



6. Foreign Relations

Denise R. Ames

Bahrain, UAE, and Qatar are very wealthy and strategically important countries in the oil-rich and volatile Middle East. The U.S. has worked to maintain friendly relations with these three countries to protect oil supplies and fight extremism in the region. This was highlighted when Secretary of State John Kerry visited the UAE at the same time as our TEACH visit to the embassy, apparently about the Paris/Beirut November 2015 attacks that happened at the same time as our visit. All three countries have had to balance relations with their powerful and adversarial neighbors Iran and Saudi Arabia and the U.S. resulting in sometimes confusing and contradictory foreign policy stances. I will briefly explain the foreign relations of each country, primarily with the United States.

Bahrain is a small and vulnerable state in the region and since independence in 1971 Bahrain has established close ties to Saudi Arabia. When Iraq invaded fellow GCC member Kuwait in 1990, Bahrain sent a small contingent of troops to the front lines and permitted U.S. military forces to use its naval and air facilities. After the Persian Gulf War, Bahrain signed a defense cooperation agreement with the U.S. The U.S. Fifth Fleet is headquartered in Manama, Bahrain, allowing the United States to project its naval power across the Gulf, and roughly 8,500 Americans live there. Bahrain plays a key role in the Gulf's security strategy and is an important member of the U.S.-led anti-ISIS coalition.

Despite its size, Qatar is an important player in the region. Because of geographic proximity and religious affinity of the two ruling families (both adhere to the conservative Wahhabi interpretation of Islam), Qatar follows the Saudi lead in many regional and global issues. Qatar also has had cordial relations with Iran, despite Qatar's support of Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War. Qatar plays an outsized role as a U.S. military partner. In 1992, they signed a bilateral defense cooperation agreement that provided for U.S. access to Qatari bases, especially the al-Udeid Air Base. Qatar has a reputation as a supporter of Islamist groups disfavored by the U.S., however, officials have unequivocally denied

that it supports ISIS. Qatar awkwardly balances its desire for good U.S. relations and its efforts to maintain influence closer to home. For example, it somewhat supports Hamas, a Palestinian militant organization, but also maintains ties to Israel. It supported Islamic groups in Libya, in opposition to the U.S. backed democratic groups. Qatar is also a major buyer of U.S. advanced weaponry. In 2014, Qatar closed an \$11 billion package deal for the purchase of U.S.-made Apache attack helicopters and air-defense weapons. Although it hosts U.S. military bases, it requests that Washington does not publicly acknowledge that it flies combat missions from its bases. Like other Persian Gulf allies, they don't want to be seen as "too cozy" with Washington. The U.S. has complied.

The UAE has a moderate foreign policy stance, in which it has worked to build cooperation-based relations with all countries. Generous development assistance has increased the UAE's standing among recipient states and the world community. Most of this foreign aid (in excess of \$15 billion) has been to Arab and Muslim countries. The UAE and the U.S. have had friendly relations since 1971. The UAE is the U.S.' single largest export market in the region, with \$14.4 billion in exports in 2008 and more than 750 U.S. firms operate in the country.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why are there so many contradictions in the foreign policies of these three countries, especially with the U.S.? How would you reconcile these contradictions?



Qatar, al-Udeid Air Force Base, U.S (Photo courtesy of Wikipedia)



Manama, Bahrain, U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet (Photo courtesy of Wikipedia)



7. The Global Economy and Oil

Denise R. Ames

Oil is the catalyst for the region's economy. The first discovery of oil in the region took place on the Island of Bahrain in 1932, more followed. Bahrain and Qatar were all significant oil producers by the early 1950s, while Abu Dhabi and Dubai made their discoveries in the late 1960s. In the seven GCC countries, oil contributes about one-third to total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and three-fourths to annual government revenues and exports. Although the three countries are diversifying their economies to wean themselves from oil dependence, it would be fair to say that without oil there would be a very different economic story.

Both the U.S. and the three countries have a capitalist type of economy. Since both have a capitalist system, we assume that the differences are minor. However, I found that there were substantive differences in the economies, since there are different forms of capitalism. The U.S. has a

neoliberal (free-market) type of capitalism in which the forces of supply and demand direct business enterprises. Of course, there is a public sector but businesses must make a profit or perish. The three countries along with China, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and others have a type of capitalism called state capitalism. The government is primary in directing the economy in a way that benefits them. Although capitalist principles are important, they are not primary. I will argue that all three countries have a state capitalist economic system.

Examples of state capitalism abound in the three countries. For example, the government in Abu Dhabi contracts with a business, such as the Cleveland Clinic, to build a state-of-the-art hospital for its citizens. Upon closer inspection, the hospital is practically empty and not used by those it is supposed to benefit. In Dubai, despite low occupancy rates for offices and apartments, state-



Cleveland Clinic in Abu Dhabi, UAE (Photo courtesy of Denise Ames)



Qatar Airport in Doha (Photo courtesy of Denise Ames)

owned enterprises are financing the construction of megalith projects in preparation for the World Expo 2020. Qatar is also lavishing money on massive construction projects related to its hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup soccer tournament, spending more than \$200 billion on new infrastructure.

Qatar Airways, one of the Gulf’s “big three” carriers, has become fully state-owned after the nation’s sovereign wealth fund bought out private shareholders. As a result, three large airlines — Delta, United and American — are accusing the UAE and Qatar of unfairly subsidizing their state-owned airlines, Emirates, Etihad Airlines and Qatar Airways, by \$40 billion since 2004. Although other countries have state-owned airlines, the three American airlines argue that the Gulf state subsidies are so extreme that they are losing market share for flights to and from American cities to regions like South Asia, because the Gulf airlines can afford to sell those flights at incredibly low prices and sometimes even at a loss. The Gulf airlines deny that they benefit from unfair subsidies.

Questions to Consider:

1. What do you think would be the economic story in these three countries if they did not have oil?
2. Do you think that the three GCC have a state capitalist type of economy?



8. Women's Changing Roles

Joan Brodsky Schur

Women's roles in Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain are in flux, defying easy stereotypes. Demographics explain much of the rapid evolution. Each of these countries has a minority of citizens compared to populations of imported labor. Qatar has the most extreme ratio: its citizens represent just 12% of its total population of 2,269,672 people, according to BQ Magazine. Not wanting to entrust their countries' prosperity to the expertise of outsiders, the ruling families are on a crash course to prepare their citizens to take leadership roles in public and private sector jobs. But here is the catch: when you have such a small number of citizens to begin with, you cannot afford to overlook the potential of women in the workforce. Now female citizens are graduating from university in greater numbers than men, and are assuming roles in most sectors of society. According to Allen J. Fromherz "[Qatari] women are prominent at almost all levels

of Qatari government and society except the oil and financial sectors" (28).

In the Gulf region, however, working outside the home still tests traditional values, both Islamic and tribal. Traditionally, women were to marry their cousins of which there were many choices in large polygamous families. This insured the maintenance of tribal lineage, increasing the family's influence and prestige (*waqfa*). The organization of the home reflected a society segregated by gender: the *harim* was restricted to the women and close male relatives of the household, whereas the *majlis* was a devoted reception area reserved for male visitors. Within the world of the household, women exerted considerable power, but there they were supposed to remain.

Many aspects of this model are breaking down. Birthrates have dropped throughout the region,



Qatari woman and TEACH Fellow (Photo courtesy of Denise Ames, TEACH fellow in foreground)



Bahraini students at technical school (Photo courtesy of Denise Ames)

reflecting women's changing roles. *Al Arabia* reports that UAE birthrates have dropped precipitously, from seven childbirths per woman in the 1970s, to approximately two today. It also reports that polygamy, while legally permitted, is declining. In 2010 only 4% of Qatari men took second wives. Women's access to work outside the home is one reason why. Given the choice between becoming a co-wife or seeking a divorce, women now have the means to choose divorce. Legally, Islamic law still holds sway over family law, but this has not impeded the rights of women in the public domain. Women in Qatar and Bahrain can vote (in the UAE virtually no one can). In the 2011 Bahraini uprising large numbers of women took to the streets to protest the current ruling royal family. However, their presence was used by some government supporters to discredit their reputations as daughters and wives, and even the protests themselves.

Another consequence of the region's skewed demographics is its endemic prostitution. In *City of Gold* Jim Krane reports that in 2009 the population of Dubai was 75% male, leading to an

inevitable demand for prostitution. Women from Eastern Europe, Africa and South Asia who are lured from their homelands to work as maids, waitresses and hairdressers, can find themselves forced into prostitution by trafficking rings. Krane writes that, "The State Department estimated in 2006 that Dubai held some ten thousand victims of human trafficking" (215). Government crack-downs are routine, but are never intended as permanent solutions. Extending citizenship to guest workers is also not an option that is seriously considered. And taking a blind eye towards prostitution is good for business in Gulf cities where high-level expat men arrive to wheel, deal, and fly home.

Questions to Consider:

1. Tribal society and modern society have different attitudes and roles for women. What are they in the GCC?
2. How are these three countries dealing the changing roles of women?



9. Education

Joan Brodsky Schur

Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates became independent kingdoms in the early 1970s. Up until then, education on the whole took place in the home or in a mosque-based school—the kuttab—that taught reading and rudimentary math. Elites went abroad to other Arab countries for higher education, or to Britain. In 1972 the United Arab Emirates had just 16 boys' and 12 girls' schools. Since that time these Gulf states have prioritized education. Today all three have achieved high literacy rates for both men and women. According to the CIA Factbook, literacy rates for Qatar are 97.4% for males and 96.8% for females. In the UAE females surpass literacy rates of the men.

This major achievement, accomplished within decades of independence, tells only part of the story. For the most part, citizens of Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE have been unable to compete for jobs with the highly educated expats who come to work at high-tech jobs in the region's energy-based economies. In the UAE citizens represent a mere 20% of the total population. Citizens' incentive to become competitive is dampened by the largess of the emirs who run the state and the economy. As of 2009, male citizens of the UAE are entitled to free housing, electricity, water, and healthcare, in addition to benefits of \$55,000.00 a year. Yet citizens of the UAE, as well Qatar and to a lesser extent Bahrain, will remain beholden to outsiders to run their economies unless they become better educated. For this reason, all three nations recognize the imperative to educate their citizens. With relatively small numbers of citizens to begin with, female citizens cannot be left behind. There is also a consensus that oil money must be used now for a competitive future beyond oil-based economies.

In Qatar, Sheikh Khalifa of the ruling Al-Thani family built the national education system from scratch, beginning in the 1970s. The effort to modernize education in Qatar is credited to two prominent women, Sheikha Ahmad Al-Mahmoud who brought in modern methods of assessment and evaluation, and Sheikha Abdallah Al-Misnad who oversaw the modernization of the curriculum itself.



Students in Abu Dhabi (Photo courtesy of Denise Ames)

From 2003 to 2015 Al-Misnad served as president of Qatar University, founded in 1973.

Efforts to improve educational outcomes in Qatar (as in Bahrain and the UAE) have gone through a succession of reforms. The establishment of Education City in Doha in 1997 was one such effort. It was established by Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser, the second wife of Sheik Hamad Al-Thani (ruling Emir from 1995-2013). Currently, six American universities have campuses (leased from the Qatar Foundation) in Doha, including Carnegie Mellon and Georgetown University. The goal is to offer students in the region the same top-notch education they would receive if they studied in the U.S. at the same universities. Some dispute that this is possible and many top Gulf students continue to go abroad to obtain college and graduate degrees.

Despite the nearby offerings of Education City, it was found that many local students were not prepared for the rigor of study at the Education City universities. This was one reason that Qatar hired the RAND Corporation to assess the nation's educational policies. In 2007 the RAND Corporation published *Education for a New Era: Design and Implementation of K-12 Education in Qatar*. Among

its many recommendations was to strengthen accountability, measure performance, and train teachers. It recommended the establishment of independent schools (the equivalent of charter schools) as well as better monitoring of the many private schools that primarily serve the expat communities. The Rand report found that, “The Curriculum in the government (and many private) schools was outmoded and emphasized rote memorization, leaving many students bored and providing little opportunity for student-teacher interaction.” It recommended that the Supreme Education Council oversee all reform. The following year Qatar unveiled the Qatar National Vision 2030, which laid out plans to equip the country to compete in a knowledge-based economy.

What we see in Qatar, Bahrain and the UAE are similar successive efforts to improve education, with ensuing gains that also lead to considerable confusion. Rather than refashioning the educational system from within their own societies, Gulf education leaders look to international experts from abroad. The latest in Qatar is a partnership with educational experts from Finland and the establishment of the Qatar-Finland International

School. Project-based learning and student-centered curricula are grafted onto societies where respect for authority and elaborate hierarchies predominate. Respect for Arabic culture is also threatened by the widespread use of English in education and in elite society at large. English is the lingua-franca of the region, enabling locals and expats from around the world to communicate and so do business. Fatma Badry claims that, “... an overview of schools’ websites throughout the major cities of the UAE shows that a majority of educational institutions do not incorporate biliteracy as a major objective in their mission statements.” The effort to improve the education of Gulf citizens continues in earnest, but with mixed results. The good news is that women are the beneficiaries and among the leaders of this effort.

Questions to Consider:

1. What obstacles do the GCC face in implementing modern educational standards?
2. What of their traditional education do you think they should continue?



Model of Education City educational campus in Qatar (Photo courtesy of Denise Ames)



10. Cross-Cultural Awareness

Denise R. Ames

Gift, gifts, and more gifts! Our suitcases were bulging. We, educators from the U.S., were unaccustomed to the generosity of our hosts in all three countries. But on a closer look, what we considered extravagant gift-giving was a reflection of cultural differences between our countries. Although there were many cultural differences that we encountered, four stand out as important for traveling educators. In describing these four cultural traits, I will use a model that I developed drawing on the work of Milton Bennett and others.

Americans like to get things done! We pride efficiency, competency, and productivity. In the GCC countries “relationship is everything,” according to one of our sponsors. Relationships and associations are instrumental in maintaining group harmony and

friendliness and commanding more importance than achievement. Hence, our mountains of gifts. Second, Americans promote equality and democracy as core values. In the GCC countries, inequality is endorsed by followers as much as by the leaders as evidenced by the unequal status of migrant laborers. There is a large gap between haves and have nots that results in high stratification. The less powerful accept power relations that are autocratic or paternalistic; thus, the formal hierarchical positions of the ruling families.

Third, Americans are generally long-term orientated holding values, actions, and attitudes that affect the future. The GCC countries embrace values and attitudes that are short term and affected by the past or the present. They value stability, respect for tradition, and reciprocation of greetings, favors, and gifts. They are generous and hospitable. Fourth, Americans, generally have a monochron sense of time that is measured and scheduled. We like to be “on time” and get agitated when schedules don’t go as planned. The GCC time follows a polychron sense of time that is continuous, flowing from the past through the present and into the future. It is unstructured and can change from one activity to another. Don’t be surprised if what you expect to be a short dinner turns into a long evening of entertainment and conversation. Just say to yourself, it a polychron view of time!



Gift-giving in Bahrain (Photo courtesy of Denise Ames)

Questions to Consider:

1. How do these four cultural differences affect relations with the people of these countries? How would you deal with them?



Traditional school in Bahrain (Photo courtesy of Denise Ames)



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