

ABSTRACT

ALIENS IN SAUDI ARABIA: ENFORCEMENT OF THE GUESTWORKER MODEL

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Over the last two decades, there have been impressive achievements in most sectors of Saudi Arabia. The Saudi authorities have vigorously pushed for transforming their tribal society into a modern state. Their recent rapid economic growth became possible by three major factors; the enormous oil wealth, the large number of guestworkers, and the Western technology. There are however very little assessments to these factors.

This study focuses on the second major factor, the guestworkers and their social condition in the Kingdom. Since the mid 1970s, Saudi Arabia urged unprecedented importation of migrant workers. Huge numbers of those migrant workers were called into the Saudi labor market. They apparently comprised more than one-half of the country's total employment work force, and about one-third of the total population. The core of the country's labor-force importation policies was the adoption of "a Saudi version of guestworker model". Enforcing this model has overridden many of the expatriates' rights. It left most of them living within physical and/or cultural enclaves. They experience maximum social distance and very limited interaction with nationals.

This study undertakes a review of the Saudi guestworker model and its main impacts on aliens in the Kingdom. The objective of the study, thus, is threefold. First; it explores the different circumstances of the Saudi mass labor force importation. It examines the national origin, size, ethnic composition, and occupations of guestworkers in the country. Second, the study discusses the Saudi extensive rules and regulations to govern the flow of guestworkers. These rules were designed to lessen the impacts of aliens on the indigenous population. Third; the study investigates the social interaction and intergroup relationships between Saudis and guestworkers. This investigation is based on a field survey conducted in an urban community in the city of Riyadh. It analyzes the nature and degree of social relationships between Saudis and six major foreign Arab ethnic groups, who comprise the bulk of the Arab labor force in Saudi Arabia.

The study assumes that the Saudi strict version of guestworker model, along with a tribal social structure and orthodox religious laws form solid bases for discrimination against expatriates. This presumably results in strained ethnic relations, diminished social interaction, declined community social participation, inspires group identities and provokes ethnocentrism in the Kingdom.