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ARTICLE

Nation-Building in the Post-Colonial Qatari State: The Politics and History of Nationalism

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Abstract

This article examines the process of nation-building in post-colonial Qatar. By using a postcolonial lens, the study discusses the historical context of Qatar's state formation, tracing the impact of colonialism and the role of external powers in shaping political structures and narratives. Through an analysis of key historical figures and events, such as Shaykh Jassim and the Qatari constitution, this article explores the use of tradition and indigenous modernity in the construction of Qatar's national identity. By drawing on theoretical frameworks such as "invented traditions," "imagined communities," and the politics of tradition and modernity, the article provides a roadmap to understanding the main tenets of the national identity politics of Qatar today and key factors of its national identity narratives, including ethno-political migrations, citizenship dynamics, and institutional frameworks established by the state constitution. It argues that while nation-building processes may share commonalities across different geographies, the specific historical, cultural, and political dynamics of Qatar shaped its unique trajectory. Ultimately, the article contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities of nation-building in post-colonial contexts and the construction of national identity in the Gulf region

Keywords: Qatar; Nation-building; National Identity; Colonialism; British; Citizenship

Introduction: Situating National Identity and Nationalism in Qatar

The article aims to outline and analyze the national and socio-political history of Qatar, thereby elucidating the foundational elements of the modern nation-state. This task is crucial to comprehending the nuanced layers of national identity and the ongoing discourse surrounding nationalism in contemporary Qatar. The article delves into how the country's historical trajectory and political

landscape were shaped by foreign influences, namely, the Ottomans, imperial British, and specific collaborationist tribal elites during the twentieth century. Furthermore, it elucidates how the political elites of the nascent state conceptualized a new national identity and established political and legal institutions, such as citizenship rules and the monarchy, to bolster stronger governance and pave the way for nation-building in the post-colonial era. Building upon this historical framework, the subsequent analysis examines the contemporary manifestations and evolutions of Qatari nation-building and national identity, providing insights into the dynamics shaping the discourse on nationalism at present.

Qatar's statehood emerged from a complex interplay between Western imperialism and Eastern influences, particularly evident in its political institutions. This intersection reflects not only a local sense of identity but also interactions with colonial powers, notably the British and Ottoman. Through a post-colonial lens, this article elucidates how Qatar's national identity was primarily a political construct rather than a social one, shaped by colonial projects. While acknowledging Qatari agency in nation-building practices, it is imperative to recognize the dominance of imperial powers during the colonial era, particularly in the context of British protectorate politics in the Gulf. This power dynamic underscores how significantly the early national history of Qatar was influenced by the interests and actions of colonial powers.

This analysis also highlights how the state and its subsequent practices and discourses have borne the imprint of colonial powers. Structural power dynamics and the dissemination of intellectual conceptualizations through discursive power mechanisms underscore the enduring impact of colonial legacies on Qatar's statehood and national identity.

The article then reviews the construction of Qatar's national identity from independence to the contemporary era as a synthesis between imagined "tradition" and "indigenous modernity" – as linked to the politics of national purity along ethnic lines. This paradox became more apparent as oil wealth created possibilities for more "modernity" in a Western-centric manner, but balanced by the concept of invented "tradition" rooted in an imagination of continued past, which proved to be more important as a basis for regime legitimacy. The binary of "tradition" versus "modernity" indicates the ongoing separation between inner and outer domains of Qatar's post-colonial national imagination. Through this paradox the "inner" domain becomes the site for creating national myths rooted in selected versions of the past to create an exclusive "Qatari brand," which navigates through the country's multi-layered identities while simultaneously fostering contrasting, competitive, and even disruptive national identities.

The article aims to offer a comprehensive analysis of Qatar's nation-building and national identity within a post-colonial framework. It interactions between Western imperialism and Eastern influences, particularly from the British and the Ottoman, and reveals how Qatar's statehood evolved as a complex fusion of local identity and colonial politics. The article thus provides a roadmap to understanding Qatar's contemporary national identity politics and narratives, while illuminating the foundational elements of these phenomena. Accordingly,

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the article is organized into eight sections: (1) introduction, (2) theoretical framework, (3) history and state formation, (4) British imperialism to state independence, (5) nation building and statehood, (6) constitution and national identity building, (7) the "Qatari Brand" – national identity projects and multi-layered identities, and (8) conclusion. This structure provides a thorough overview of the evolution of Qatar's national identity, highlighting the impacts of colonial history, state policies, and cultural strategies within both regional and global contexts.

Theoretical Framework

The article employs Benedict Anderson's theory of "imagined communities" as a framework to examine national identity in Qatar through a post-colonial lens, particularly focusing on the question of "Whose Imagined Community?"[1] While nations are indeed imagined constructs, this imagining occurs within diverse temporal and spatial contexts, mediated by various formats and tools. Consequently, the Eurocentric perspective inherent in nationalism theory underscores the necessity of adopting a post-colonial approach to understanding the nexus between colonized states like Qatar and the influence of power dynamics on national identity in the region.

Anderson contends that nations are imagined into existence, notably through institutional forms like "print-capitalism."[2] However, Chatterjee challenges Anderson's assertion by criticizing the notion that nationalist elites in Asia and Africa merely selected modular forms of nationalism from those available in Western Europe, the Americas, and Russia.[3] Scholars of post-colonial nationalism[4] further interrogate this critique, highlighting contradictions in nationalist theories and questioning their relevance in colonial contexts.

Chatterjee in particular critiques the concept of nation as rooted in Western philosophical thought and modernity, prompting scholars to reassess the notion altogether. In "Whose Imagined Community?,"[5] he challenges Anderson's theory directly, questioning why countries in Africa and Asia must adopt "imagined communities" based on modular forms presented to them, akin to the experiences of the Americas and Europe. This critique underscores the complexities of post-colonial national identity formation and highlights the need to reevaluate dominant narratives in nationalist discourse.

He highlights the pervasive influence of Western rationalism within post-colonial modernity and state-building endeavors, emphasizing its hegemony and the lack of available alternatives. This post-colonial perspective extends to

[1] Partha Chatterjee, "Whose Imagined Community?" *Millennium* 20.3 (1991): 521–25.

[2] Philip Spencer and Howard Wollman, *Nations and Nationalism: A Reader* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2010).

[3] Spencer and Wollman, *Nations and Nationalism*, 239.

[4] For further reading, see Chatterjee 1993, Spivak 2015, Said, 1978, Bhabha, 1994, Fanon 1952.

[5] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

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globally subordinated regions, and even indirectly to imperial powers during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Per this view, imperial nations remained dominant not only politically, but also intellectually as exporters of knowledge production, and notably of Western rationalism.[6] While acknowledging Benedict Anderson's "Imagined Communities" as a seminal theory of nationalism, Chatterjee contends that its application to colonial states is inherently flawed. He criticizes Anderson's treatment of nationalism as a component of the "universal history of the modern world."[7]

Chatterjee's concept of the "inner domain"[8] highlights how post-colonial states engage in nation-building and the cultivation of an "authentic" national culture within this inner cultural space. Yet, national politics transform this domain, challenging the notions of "cultural authenticity" and "tradition." Abu-Lughod critiques this by revealing that much of what is considered "traditional" or authentically cultural is, paradoxically, a manifestation of Western modernity.[9] This is evident variously among nationalists, traditionalists, and Islamists, who, despite their opposition to certain forms of modernity and advocacy for tradition, are products of modernity themselves – ever shaped by their modern ways of education, thinking, and experiences. They seek an alternative modernity that aligns with their own goals. Eric Hobsbawm further explores this paradox of "invented traditions,"[10] viewing nationalism as a modern phenomenon that arises when traditional societies transform and old traditions fail to meet contemporary needs. He argues that nationalism invents new traditions as replacements, seeing this process not as a failure but as an inevitability of modern society. For Hobsbawm, these "new traditions" emerge from the necessity to replace or adapt old ones, illustrating the intricate relationship between tradition and modernity in the context of nationalism. The concept of "Tribal-Modern,"[11] as described by miriam cooke, encapsulates how nationalist elites in the Gulf have crafted a new national identity by melding traditional elements with modern symbols. The "Tribal-Modern" portrays "tribal" lineage and national symbols as forms of invented tradition, which conjure an unchanging, historical narrative of Arab tribes in the Gulf. This notion aligns with the theories of Hobsbawm and Chatterjee; an imagined past that not only lends cultural and political legitimacy to the emerging national culture, but also differentiates it from the identities of neighboring Gulf states. The concepts of an invented tribal/traditional past versus new indigenous modernity are politicized for the purposes of creating cultural capital to feed the new national identity of Qatar.

cooke's "Tribal-Modern" framework is particularly significant in the Gulf, where it portrays a history untouched by foreigners before the discovery of oil to

[6] Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, 10.

[7] Ibid., 216.

[8] Chatterjee, "Whose Imagined Community?"

[9] Lila Abu-Lughod, *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

[10] E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[11] miriam cooke, *Tribal Modern: Branding New Nations in the Arab Gulf* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

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underscore a sense of purity. This selective remembrance supports the notion of an "uneasy cosmopolitanism"[12] today, fostering a new ethno-national identity that contrasts the *asala* (pure lineage)[13] of tribal populations with the perceived contamination of foreign influences. The emphasis on tribal lineage revolves around ideals of purity and authenticity, themes that will be further explored in subsequent sections.

History and State Formation

History is shaped by the subjective narration of specific events, often by dominant individuals within the power structure. Contrary to the foregoing assertion, nationalism is not solely a constructed narrative; rather, it is built upon empirical facts and historical realities. In essence, while narratives and discourses may offer interpretations of events, the events themselves possess a historical reality that transcends subjective constructions. Power is not just exerted through weapons; the colonial project shaped history and influenced political and social structures by privileging certain forms of knowledge. By understanding Qatar's colonial history, we can see how power is multi-layered. Therefore, understanding the construction of a historical narrative also means de-constructing that very narrative to attain a full picture of the complexity of events that have shaped the present reality.

The earliest reference to "Qatar" can be traced back to the ninth and tenth century when it was mentioned by Arab travelers like Ibn Khuradadhbah and Al-Hamdānī, who referred to "Qaṭar" as a town or a village.[14] It was not until the eighteenth and nineteenth century that Qatar started to appear on maps drawn by European travelers, such as Karsten Niebhur's famous Universal Atlas,[15] which was published in 1827 as part of Europe's expansion of colonial ventures in Asia and the Middle East.[16] The name "Qatar" was introduced to the West by the Portuguese adventurer Pedro Teixeira.[17] Vasco da Gama's voyage to Cape of Good Hope in 1498 marked the entry of the West into the East and exposure of the latter to foreign penetration. For the next five centuries, the Gulf region was influenced by the political and commercial rivalries of Western colonial powers. The reference to Qatar's official appearance on maps is relevant for two reasons: (1) the cartographic record imparts a sense of rootedness in the past and longevity, which provides solid grounds for national mythmaking through the "imagination" and the re-construction of historical narratives; and (2) knowing who created these maps, and how, helps reveal what kind of imagination was employed in creating contemporary Qatari national identity. These maps are displayed in the Qatari National Museum and National Library as part of national

[12] Ibid., 16-30.
[13] Ibid., 38.
[14] AlThani Mohamed A J., *Jassim, the Leader: Founder of Qatar* (London: Profile Books, 2012).
[15] Ibid., xvii.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.

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heritage projects, which are central to re-remembering key aspects of Qatar's history.

To the British, Qatar was considered a country of least interest, with little to no resources, before the discovery of oil. The geographical features and strategic location of Qatar played a central role in shaping its political and social characteristics. The peninsula is largely a desert landscape without any inland settlements and was mostly suited for nomadic pastoralism before the oil discovery. The only inhabited areas were eastern villages and towns located on the coast with Doha called Al Bidda, and the main occupations of the locals pre-oil were pearling and fishing.[18]

The social structure of the national population of what is today Qatar includes both Bedouin – nomadic tribes (*badū*) – and settled people (*ḥaḍar*) and the (*hwalah*), a group of people within the *ḥaḍar* who are considered to be Arabs from Persia who migrated back and forth to Qatar.[19] The population living in this shaykhdom were ethnically diverse, with ancestral and familial ties to Persia, the Asian sub-continent, and Africa, including the former slaves from different parts of the region.[20] The main references to tribal population in Qatar include the *ḥaḍar*, who came from diverse backgrounds and are characterized by their mostly sedentary lifestyle and referred also to as *Ahl al-Baḥar* (People of Sea), referring to their reputation for pearl diving.[21] The Bedouin tribes roamed the inland regions with their camels and sheep during winters and remained for most of the time in Najd and Hasa (present-day Saudi Arabia). Each nomadic tribe had their *dīra*s, a well-defined area for grazing livestock. Although Bedouins and *ḥaḍar* were migrants to what is Qatar today,[22] they are constructed as "indigenous" due both to their ethnicity as Arab tribes and also the time of their arrival prior to the discovery of oil in 1930.[23] In the present day, the distinction between "local" and "foreign" in the modern state narratives of Qatar is made based on ethnicity, familial ties, functions, and time of migration to Qatar (e.g., nomadic herds people versus settled mercantile people). This is where the first paradox of categories between "indigenous" and "migrant" appear. The Bedouin tribes' migratory nature and the trans-border nature of their multiple *dīra*s traversing Qatar and Saudi Arabia challenge any rigid delineation between local and foreigner, resident and migrant. While the Bedouin and even some *ḥaḍar* tribes that migrated to present-day Qatar were seen as local and indigenous to Qatar, Iranian, African, and Bahrinah migrants were regarded as foreigners and left out of citizenship status. Therefore, the Qatari social structure is diverse historically, and migration and the category of "foreigners" are integral to the socio-political fabric.

[18] Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Creation of Qatar* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

[19] Alanoud Alsharekh and Courtney Jean Freer, *Tribalism and Political Power in the Gulf: State-Building and National Identity in Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2023).

[20] Noora Lori, *Offshore Citizens: Permanent Temporary Status in the Gulf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

[21] Penelope Tuson, *Records of Qatar: Primary Documents 1820-1960* (Slough: Archive Editions, 1991), 214.

[22] AlSharekh and Freer, *Tribalism and Political Power*, 28-29.

[23] Zahra R. Babar, "The Cost of Belonging: Citizenship Construction in the State of Qatar," *The Middle East Journal* 68.3 (July 15, 2014): 403-20, https://doi.org/10.3751/68.3.14.

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Reassessing Colonialism: British Protectorate Status and Power Dynamics in the Gulf Region

While some argue that nations in the Gulf region were either incompletely colonized or merely semi-colonized under British protectorates, prominent scholars in Gulf studies assert that the British protectorate status entailed more than mere political alliances with ruling shaykhs. Far from equal, these power dynamics favored the British, who wielded significant influence over internal affairs akin to their involvement in India. James Onley delves into the legal nuances, noting that the distinction in the terminology of British colonialism between protected state and protectorate is not straightforward. He emphasizes that the term "external affairs" could encompass internal matters of a protected state, blurring the lines of control.[24] Moreover, Onley explains that in Arabia, the British Crown, though termed the "Protecting Power," exercised powers akin to those of the "Paramount Power" in India.[25]

Omer AlShehabi's analysis delves into British colonialism in the Gulf, with a particular focus on Bahrain. He elucidates the strategies employed by the British for direct involvement in Bahrain from the early 1900s, highlighting the utilization of "ethnosectarian cleavages" as a colonial governance practice, consistent with their approaches in other regions such as India and Southeast Asia.[26] Drawing critical parallels, AlShehabi underscores the shared practices, strategies, and overarching trends of British imperialism during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, characterized as the "Age of Empire" by Eric Hobsbawm.[27] Moreover, AlShehabi emphasizes the direct British intervention in local governance affairs in Bahrain by the early 1900s, underscoring the institutional framework under the Government of India's oversight. Notably, the personnel staffing these institutions, often referred to as "Gulfites," boasted prior experience in colonial administration in India.[28]

In addition to organizing society along ethno-sectarian lines, British rule in Bahrain promoted a narrative of "benevolent imperialism," purportedly aimed at improving the conditions of its subjects.[29] However, AlShehabi contends that this rhetoric masked deeper colonial penetration into Bahraini society, exemplified by the presence of Indian subjects who provided a pretext for British intervention in local affairs.[30]

A similar pattern of colonial strategies was observed in Qatar, initially considered a dependency of Bahrain before becoming a British protectorate in 1915.[31] Another example occurs in the attempt of Shaykh Jassim bin Mohammed of Qatar, the founder of Qatar, to expel Indians in 1882, only to be foiled by

[24] James Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[25] Ibid., 27.

[26] Omar H AlShehabi, *Contested Modernity: Sectarianism, Nationalism, and Colonialism in Bahrain* (London, England: Oneworld Academic, 2019).

[27] Eric John Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875–1914* (London: Abacus, 2014).

[28] AlShehabi, *Contested Modernity*, 27.

[29] Ibid., 28.

[30] Ibid., 29.

[31] AlThani, *Jassim the Leader*, 4.

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the British, who forced him to retain the Indian subjects and apologize. AlShehabi argues that these measures, under the guise of communal welfare, actually reinforced and bureaucratized colonial absolutist rule.[32]

However, the politics and complexity of indirect rule consist in the fact that colonial powers defined the "customary" institutions and laws that were supposedly based on "native traditions." The line between such indirect rule and customary laws is blurry, and such matters were far from black and white. It was not just about foreign conspiracy by colonialists (as some may frame it) or about just working with the local practices but rather concerned power politics. Indirect rule was "a site of struggle between various forces." In this context, it was the colonial powers whose interest came first and the native rulers that they put in place and chose to work with. "Power, and hence, the encounter, was not equal."[33]

The concept of indirect rule has been extensively utilized to analyze colonial governance structures, yet it presents significant limitations when applied to the context of Gulf states. While the concept suggests a clear dichotomy between indirect and direct rule, the reality is far more nuanced. As this article will explore further, the distinction between the two can often be blurry, overlooking the agency of local rulers and the complex interplay of various international forces, as well as unequal power relations.

Scholars such as Omar AlShehabi, James Onley, Michael H. Fisher,[34] and Mary Lewis have critically engaged with the concept of "indirect rule,"[35] considering it to comprise more of a spectrum than a fixed set of terms. Lewis introduces the term "divided rule" to analyze colonial politics in the Gulf through the lens of sovereignty. AlShehabi extends this analysis by proposing the concept of "co-sovereignty," elucidating how the British established dual centers of authority and jurisdiction in the Gulf, allowing local rulers to maintain their own systems of governance while introducing British courts and structures.[36] However, the delineation between "foreign" and "local" subjects under this arrangement was not always clear, leading to disagreements between British authorities and local rulers.

In Qatar, British involvement extended beyond external affairs. In addition to the importance of recognizing that the theoretical framework of "protectorate" is a contested concept, British archives concerning the Gulf reveal a rich tapestry of documentation that unequivocally demonstrates British involvement in the internal affairs of the region, including in Qatar. In my research at the British archives in London and the Qatar National Library, several records contain reports from British agents detailing their involvement in Qatar's internal affairs.

One such example is a confidential letter written by H. B. Walker, the British Political Agent in Qatar in 1961, which provides details of a dinner between

[32] AlShehabi, *Contested Modernity*, 29.

[33] Mahmood Mamdani. "Historicizing Power and Responses to Power: Indirect Rule and Its Reform." *Social Research* 66.3 (1999): 859-86. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40971353.

[34] Michael H. Fisher, *Indirect Rule in India: Residents and Residency System, 1764–1858* (India: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[35] Mary Dewhurst Lewis, *Divided Rule: Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia, 1881–1938* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

[36] AlShehabi, *Contested Modernity*, 33.

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Mr. Walker, his wife, and Dr. Hassan Kamil, an Egyptian legal advisor to the Qatari ruler at the time. The letter discusses Mr. Walker's wife's conversation with the Kamils about marriage, affairs, business, and local gossip among community notables.[37] Other records highlight the British political agent's specific concerns and involvement in the hiring of a financial advisor to Shaykh Ali during the 1960s. These documents detail the British agent's assessment of the suitability of the present financial advisor for the position and his influence on the shaykh in selecting a more suitable substitute.[38]

Moreover, these documents reveal the British imperial strategy, which I term as "indirect-direct control," in shaping Qatar's internal affairs. The British were not only concerned with financial and administrative aspects but also with Qatar's labor law, establishing the first labor court and influencing judicial practices and processes.[39]

The concept of "indirect-direct rule" suggests that although the British labeled their governance in the Gulf as a "Protectorate Status," granting themselves varying degrees of involvement in the region depending on their interests and resources, they were extensively engaged in the socio-political dynamics of society. The abundance of British records labeled "confidential" serves as evidence of their direct involvement and behind-the-scenes manipulation of the socioeconomic landscape in Qatar.

British agents wielded power through strategic manipulation, ensuring that advisors to the ruler aligned with British interests, and by directly intervening in policy and lawmaking, often disguised as mere "suggestions" to the ruler. Given the unequal power dynamics and the leverage the British held over the local ruler in providing protection and resources, they clearly had the upper hand in implementing these "suggestions." For instance, a confidential document from 1961 records a diary entry of the British political resident's visit to Qatar, wherein the ruler expressed his willingness to consult with him and the British agent before taking any action on the recommendations of Egyptian financial advisors.[40] Other key involvements included censorship of mail to help support the local shaykh,[41] and building the first Qatari hospital with key British staff.[42] The British were also a key factor in internal conflicts. They played a significant role in internal conflicts, acting to resolve, punish, and even shape these conflicts to protect their own interests in the territory. For instance, they intervened in the conflict between the ʿAmāmara and Āl bin ʿAlī tribes in the 1900s.[43]

Despite the significance of British involvement in shaping the Gulf's sociopolitical landscape, existing scholarship on colonialism often overlooks this region, relegating it to mere footnotes or neglecting it altogether under the

[37] Burdett Anita L P., *Records of Qatar, 1961–1965* (Farnham Common: Archive Editions, 1997).
[38] Burdett, *Records of Qatar, 1961–1965*, 90-92.
[39] Ibid., 295.
[40] Ibid., 267.
[41] Ibid., 106.
[42] Qatar Foundation, *The First Private Hospital in Qatar*, photograph (January 1, 1992).
[43] Tuson, *Records of Qatar.*

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assumption of its being "incompletely colonized." While various forms of colonialism, such as settler colonialism[44] and exploitation colonialism,[45] have been extensively studied,[46] there remains a notable gap in understanding the unique colonial dynamics of the Gulf.

In light of these observations, I propose introducing a new category of colonialism: "Protectorate Colonialism." This framework would elucidate the distinct nature of British colonialism in the Gulf, characterized by the strategic utilization of "Protectorate Status" to exert control, manipulate power dynamics, and exploit resources in the region. Despite its seemingly diluted presence compared to other colonial contexts, the British Empire maintained a firm grip on the Gulf's socioeconomic and political landscape, effectively shaping its trajectory to serve imperial interests. Through a focused examination of the aftermath of "Protectorate Colonialism" in Qatar, this article endeavors to illuminate a neglected facet of colonial history. Furthermore, it seeks to underscore the interconnectedness between colonial legacies and the process of post-colonial nation-building in Qatar. By exploring how the remnants of colonialism continue to influence socio-political dynamics and shape the trajectory of nation-building efforts in Qatar, this study aims to provide valuable insights into the complexities of the post-colonial landscape in the region.

Various foreign powers, including the Portuguese, Dutch, and Ottomans, exerted influence on the Gulf region alongside the British during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Toward the late-nineteenth century, the Ottomans vied with the British for dominance in the Gulf, leading to a complex geopolitical landscape. While some scholars liken Ottoman rule in Eastern Arabia to colonialism, debates persist regarding its theoretical and practical distinctions from British imperialism.[47] Initially rooted in the caliphate and dynastic sovereignty, Ottoman governance evolved to incorporate imperial capitalist strategies in controlled territories. Despite the significance of Ottoman presence, the latter part of the nineteenth century witnessed European powers, particularly the British, dominating the period of colonial expansion in the region.[48] This period also marked intense competition between the British and Ottomans, often manipulated by local shaykhs with conflicting interests.

In Qatar, the interplay between Ottoman and British politics significantly influenced pivotal events that shaped the country's trajectory prior to independence. Among these events, the Ottoman recognition of Qatar as part of its

[44] Adam J. Barker, "The Contemporary Reality of Canadian Imperialism: Settler Colonialism and the Hybrid Colonial State," *The American Indian Quarterly* 33.3 (2009): 325-51, https://doi.org/10.1353/aiq.0.0054.

[45] Martin J. Murray, *The Development of Capitalism in Colonial Indochina (1870–1940)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

[46] Róisín Healy and Dal Enrico Lago, *The Shadow of Colonialism on Europe's Modern Past* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[47] Selim Deringil, "'They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery': The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45.02 (April 2003), https://doi.org/10.1017/s001041750300015x.

[48] Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire.*

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province in 1871 stands out as particularly significant.[49] Additionally, the Ottomans maintained a permanent garrison in Al Bidda until their expulsion following the Battle of Wajbah in 1893,[50] eliciting British protests due to perceived threats to their regional interests. British archival records reveal their dominant role in the British–Ottoman rivalry, with documents from 1898 indicating British support for Shaykh Jassim bin Mohammed against the Ottomans. Despite tribal ties with the Ottomans, British intervention in internal disputes, such as the 1908 conflict between the Āl Bū ʿAynayn tribe and Shaykh Jassim bin Mohammed, showcased British efforts to assert control and maintain hegemony.[51] Ultimately, the Ottoman loss of control over the region stemmed from various factors, including communication irregularities, administrative neglect, and resource deficiencies.[52] With the Ottomans' withdrawal, the British emerged as the sole imperial power, shaping Qatar's state formation and early state-building efforts through colonial strategies and goals. This historical dynamic underscores the enduring influence of colonial power politics on Qatar's trajectory.

From British Imperialism to Qatar's Independence

The British defined the boundaries of Qatar during the 1930s after making an historical oil concession deal with mostly the tribal leaders.[53] Until that point, Qatar was treated as a dependency of Bahrain and part of the larger al-Hasa region stretching into Saudi Arabia. Even though there was no signed agreement with Qatar, it became a *de facto* subject of the British Crown under the conditions of the 1820 treaty, which was signed with various tribal leaders of the Trucial Coast and the East India Company.[54] British dominance over the area shaped the early political history of Qatar through the following aspects.

Maneuvering Inter-Tribal Rivalries That Led to a Distinction between Bahrain and Qatar

As Qatar lies midway to the Arab Gulf shore, along with the Bahrain Islands it was historically part of the Hasa region, the eastern coast of present-day Saudi Arabia. This strategic location and the British presence shaped Qatari history and led to the rise of the Āl Thānī as the ruling family.

British colonization of India paved their way into the Gulf region and established one of their main interests in the region, to safeguard the route to India. The main purpose of British relationships with each Gulf Shaykhdom and empowerment of certain tribes was to protect multifaceted British interests,

[49] Frederick F. Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

[50] Ahmad Zakariya Shalaq, Mustafa ʻAqil Khatib, and Yousof Ibrahim Abdulla, *Qatar's Modern and Contemporary Development: Chapters of Political, Social and Economic Develoment* (Doha, 2015).

[51] Tuson, *Records of Qatar*, 277-86.

[52] Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf*, 7.

[53] Shalaq, Khatib, and Abdulla, *Qatar's Modern and Contemporary Development*, 20.

[54] Zahlan, *The Creation of Qatar*, 33.

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and a series of developments at the end of the eighteenth century shaped the fate of Qatar through the rise of the Āl Thānī family. The key developments were British dominance over India, the Wahhabi movement into the Arabian Peninsula, and rise of Mehmed Ali in Egypt. These events contributed to the intersection of Islamic, Arab, and tribal identities, which would later be reflected in the multi-layered national identity in the postmodern state.

The tribal shaykhdoms, despite their own tribal rules and laws, had to abide by British laws and regulations through treaties and agreements that favored British forces at the hand of powerful tribes and, consequently, further privileged their position in the power structures.[55]

The politics of agreements and treaties, such as the 1820 treaty, was that they reflected unequal power relations between the British and local elite tribal leaders. The main motive of the former was to protect their land and sea interests in the region.[56] As a result, the British imposed laws and "order" on the residents of the Gulf, sometimes through force and violence,[57] even though the terms of their treaties were not always made in consultation with the people and tribes of that region.

Due to various reasons including the lack of unified power, Qatar was unable to separate itself from Bahrain until the nineteenth century. These circumstances gave rise to key historical figures who would emerge as political elites and plant the seeds of independence to create a new state from a sparsely populated desert. The first of these historical figures was Raḥma Ibn Jābir, a sworn enemy of Āl Khalīfa determined to claim power back from Āl Khalīfa.[58] To do this, he united with the tribes of Āl Bū Kuwārah, Āl Sulaytī, and Āl Musallam. Raḥma set the forces in motions that would shape Qatar's relationship with Āl Khalīfa and define the path for other historical figures to contest Āl Khalīfa's authority in Qatar. This process eventually led to the rise of Āl Thānī and the independence of Qatar,[59] with the British playing a key role in recognizing Qatar as a state separate from Bahrain.

Agreements with the Āl Thānī Family

The 1867 attack on Doha and Wakrah by Bahrain was disastrous,[60] leading to British involvement in providing dispute resolution. During the process, a British political resident met with Mohammed bin Thani, who represented the people of Qatar. This meeting led to the signing of the 1868 agreement and gave Mohammed bin Thani the recognition of a special leadership in Qatar through British's direct involvement.[61] At this point, Al Thani's leadership and, subsequently, the concept of modern nation state was institutionalized through the influence of

[55] Shalaq, Khatib, and Abdulla, *Qatar's Modern and Contemporary Development*, 36.
[56] Zahlan, *The Creation of Qatar*, 36.
[57] Tuson, *Records of Qatar*, 607.
[58] Zahlan, *The Creation of Qatar*, 29.
[59] Tuson, *Records of Qatar*; see also Rosemarie Zahlan, "The Creation of Qatar" and AlThani, *Jassim the Leader*.
[60] Zahlan, *The Creation of Qatar*, 42.
[61] Ibid.

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the British. The agreement confirmed Britain's control over Qatar's affairs and solidified Qatar's independent status linked directly with Al Thani's exclusive leadership of the land.

The Āl Thānī family dynasty was the starting point of transforming Qatar from a group of villages and towns that lacked a collective identity to a nation state. The role of local tribal leaders' engagement with various foreign powers in the region, by playing them off each other, made this possible. The most prominent of these political leaders, Qassim bin Mohammed Al Thani, also referred to as Jassim, was also regarded as the founder of Qatar.[62] Notably, very little is known about Qassim in the official narratives on Qatar's history of the time, there is no record of his real photos from that time. As a result, historical narratives are constructed orally (as was the tradition in Bedouin culture) and through the records of British archival history of communication with tribal leaders. The absence of a documented history made it easier for the creation of a new one.

The Creation of Titles and Roles for Tribal Leaders – Further Institutionalization of Their Rule

Qassim bin Mohammed was unpleased with the British presence and their treatment of Qatar. The lack of Britain's regard for Qatar was reflected in their treaties that were designed to impose British will on the ruler, with almost no protection.[63]

In Qatar's modern history and official state narrative, Qassim bin Mohammed is regarded as the founder of Qatar due to his success in uniting tribal loyalties under Āl Thānī rule, which would later act as a foundation for the modern state.[64] He played a major role in setting off the colonial powers, the Ottomans and the British, against each other. Through the Ottoman presence in Qatar in 1876, Qassim was given the title *Qāʾim Maqām*[65] and Governor of Qatar (a title given to the governor of the Ottoman district). Prior to this, his father Mohammed bin Thani had signed a treaty with the British in 1868, which recognized Qatar's sovereignty under his leadership. Both the titles *ḥākim* (ruler) bestowed on Mohammed bin Thani and Qāʾim Maqām for Qassim bin Mohammed were foreign and colonial constructions as a means to place their allies in the ruling positions. This could be considered the beginning of a new national awakening tied to a piece of land. Through these new official titles and given Qassim's dealing with numerous crises including Zubarah, he was able to mobilize tribal loyalties in his favor.

This tribal unity was displayed in the Battle of Wajbah, led by Qassim bin Mohammed against the Ottoman *wālī* who wanted to punish Qassim for not abiding by the Ottoman rules, not paying taxes, and refusing to follow the

[62] Ibid.

[63] Zahlan, *The Creation of Qatar*, 61.

[64] Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed Bin Thani | the Amiri diwan, accessed April 2, 2024, https://www.diwan.gov.qa/about-qatar/qatars-rulers/sheikh-jassim-bin-mohammed-bin-thani?sc_lang=en.

[65] Serim, "Qatari History: Pivotal Moments Revealed in India Office Records," Qatar Digital Library, August 8, 2014, https://www.qdl.qa/en/qatari-history-pivotal-moments-revealed-india-office-records.

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reforms. Qassim united thousands of Qatari men from different tribes, including Manāṣīr, Banū Hājir, Āl Thānī, to fight against the Ottomans on March 26, 1893, and defeated the Ottoman forces in just two days.[66] This marked the unification of Qatari tribes and made Qassim a national hero. As a key memory in nation-building, the Wajbah battle signifies the unification against a common enemy. Qassim had achieved recognition from the British, which conferred a status on him that would become crucial in his future leadership of the independent state.

The Wajbah battle serves as compelling evidence that a distinct local identity tied to the territory of Qatar indeed existed, showcasing the presence of local agency in shaping national unification. However, this nascent national consciousness underwent significant transformation under the influence of British imperialism. British involvement played a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of Qatar toward modern statehood, contributing to the establishment of a framework for national identity anchored in state institutions.

Helping Establish a Formal Territorial Identity of Qatar

The defeat of the Ottomans and the rise of Āl Thānī as the leading family was a turning point in the history of Qatar. As a result, new relationships were formed, and a series of agreements were signed with the British that eventually led to Qatar's recognition as a nation-state. Abdullah bin Qassim replaced his father after his death. During Abdullah bin Qassim's time, two crucial agreements were signed between Britain and Qatar, including the 1916 treaty[67] – the first official Anglo-Qatar agreement – and the 1935 oil concession agreement with the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC), which gave the British company exclusive rights to the production and marketing of petroleum and natural gases in exchange for the protection of Abdullah bin Qassim.[68]

These agreements and treaties highlighted the unequal and multi-layered power relations between political elites. The 1916 treaty was the first official treaty to be signed between Qatar and Britain and placed Qatar under British control. According to the treaty, Qatar had to establish post and telegraph offices, allow for the stationing of British agents in Doha, admit British subjects to Qatar, and guarantee their protection. The 1916 treaty like many other agreements between the British and tribal leaders was inconsistent and subject to interpretation. The articles of the treaty were far from being equal. The clause pertaining to abolishing the slave trade and piracy was more about favoring British interests in maritime trade rather than upholding moral values.[69]

[66] AlThani, *Jassim, the Leader*, 134-36.

[67] Shalaq, Khatib, and Abdulla, *Qatar's Modern and Contemporary Development*, 44.

[68] Serim, "Qatari History: Pivotal Moments Revealed in India Office Records," Qatar Digital Library, August 8, 2014, https://www.qdl.qa/en/qatari-history-pivotal-moments-revealed-india-office-records.

[69] Zahlan, *The Creation of Qatar*, 60.

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Establishment of National Identity Institutions and Sovereignty Recognition in the Territory

After oil was first discovered in Qatar during the 1920s, Qatar was bound by the 1916 treaty that prevented the ruler from granting concession rights without British approval. On May 17, 1935, a document was signed that gave APOC exclusive rights to produce, refine, and market petroleum and other natural gases.[70] In this document, a map defining Qatar's territory was attached. It is, therefore, crucial to recognize the centrality of oil discovery with the formation of the modern state in Qatar. The British recognized Abdullah bin Qassim as the leader/ruler of Qatar. This document framed the British relationship with Qatar within an imagination of relations between nation-states, paving the way for the Āl Thānī to build their own political legitimacy and rulership on that political construction

Abdullah bin Qassim deemed the British presence necessary due to the absence of robust military capabilities and local laws, leaving Qatar vulnerable to political pressures from neighboring powers in the Gulf Peninsula. During this period, the involvement of the British facilitated the resolution of border disputes between Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain. The Gulf region, characterized by diverse tribal populations, small towns, and villages, had not previously experienced strict border delineations and scaled lines.[71] These concepts were introduced through the influence of a foreign political elite, shaping the foundation of trans-border identities among tribes and families within modern states. Consequently, tribal institutions evolved in response to government-planned policies.

Nation-Building and Statehood

At this point, the two core elements of a modern state were defined: Qatar as a separate country occupied a limited piece of land and was ruled by political elites under the leadership of Āl Thānī. Through these two elements, the artefact of a Qatari nation would be created. Henceforth, a new community based on national cohesion would be imagined using specific political tools and institutional processes and national discourses. Some of these tools were imported into Qatar. The institutional processes were borrowed from the West and the how and why of this formula of national imagination were determined by the political elite internal (Āl Thānī) and external (the British as well as Arab political advisors).

In Qatar, the income from oil in 1949 finally provided the material base for the establishment of a legal framework for state-building processes and social development. It is through this income and economic development that the new national identity based on the concept of nation was then created. Unlike in the case of Europe, it is not a strong historical consciousness and education system that lead to the rise of national consciousness in the context of the modern state. Rather, it is a state-driven economic and social development

[70] Ibid., 77.

[71] Alsharekh and Freer, *Tribalism and Political Power in Gulf*, 26.

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project of national consciousness that led to contemporary state-building. The very concept of economic development, the idea, the discourse and processes, were imported from the West in terms of manpower and techniques, along with the financial framework of the oil companies.[72]

In the sparsely populated land of Qatar, migration was a norm and central to the lifestyle of Bedouin tribes, who seasonally migrated between their *dīras*[73] and the *ḥaḍar* tribes and their families, who moved in and out of Qatar due to economic hardships. Besides, there was a large population of Iranians, South Asians, Africans, and slave populations of various backgrounds who migrated to Qatar for trade and commercial purposes.[74] A population survey by Lorimer indicated that in 1939, most of the population in Qatar was Iranian or African,[75] who were considered foreigners. It was British migration policies and border controls which further determined which ethnic group should be considered citizen/local versus "migrant."[76] Both migration and diversity were two innate features of the Qatari state; it is the politics of nation building that defined what both of these categories would mean in the new national discourse. This is the basic contradiction between a "construct" of a piece of land with limited boundaries (contradicting the reality of a large migratory population) and a ruling elite, who represented tribal unity with a significant population ethnically not related to those tribes.

In the initial years after the discovery of oil Qatar lacked the resources for undergoing socioeconomic development. Above it states that oil was discovered in Qatar in the 1920s, it wasn't until the 1940s that all oil companies started operating and generating income. As a result, one of the first national institutions in Qatar, a hospital, was built in 1943 by Shaykh Abdullah and a school, in 1938.[77]

In the 1960s, ten years before its official independence, Qatar had significantly begun the state consolidation and state-building processes. 1961, Prime Minister Shaykh Khalifa bin Hamad created several judicial institutions and an official state *Gazette* was first published. One of the first laws laid down was the nationality and labor laws, which were to guide the economic expansion of the 1960s. The nationality law was the first step toward creating a national identity and consciousness in the context of a nation state within the framework of the modern-state. Through this law the status of the "local" and the "foreigner" was later be defined. Although there were no ministries at that time, various departments, including the Lands and Registration Department, Agricultural Department and Immigration Service, and the Department of Labor and Social Affairs were established.[78] This was all done through the help of the British and Egyptian advisers to the state.

[72] Zahlan, The *Creation of Qatar*, 92.

[73] The nomadic tribes in the Arabian Peninsula had more than one grazing lands (*dirah*) depending on seasonal migrations across the region. For more information on this, see AlAnoud AlSharekh 2023, Ang Lnga Longva 2009, Farah AlNakib 2006.

[74] Tuson, *Records of Qatar*, 214.

[75] Zahlan, *The Creation of Qatar*, 95

[76] Lori, *Offshore Citizens*, 28.

[77] Zahlan, *The Creation of Qatar*, 96.

[78] Ibid., 102.

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When the British decided to end their defense commitments in the region due to strong anticolonial attitudes and economic circumstances in the UK, the decision was less rejoiced by the Gulf leaders. Due to the atmosphere of distrust and political hostility in the past, the Gulf leaders looked for alternate ways to protect their interests in their respective pieces of land. At this point, a serious attempt was made to unite the nine Gulf states, including Bahrain, Qatar, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Sharjah, Um al-Qaiwan, Ras Al-Khaimah, and Fujairah.[79] This was the starting point of a common Gulf identity; it is also evidence of the commonalities that existed amongst the Gulf States. Since an agreement could not be reached between the states, the plans for federation were not accomplished. Given these disagreements, Qatar had to draft a provisional constitution for itself, the first of its kind amongst the nine states, with the help of an external legal adviser to the government of Qatar in 1970. This constitution would later be instrumental in helping Qatar gain its independence.[80] The idea of the constitution itself was new, not only to the region but also to the population, which was previously organized under tribal governance with unwritten laws. The constitution did not just represent power, but was also a reflection of power relations between the dominant colonial power structure and local political realities.

Through this constitution, independent statehood was confirmed. Article 1 of the constitution stated that Qatar was an Arab, independent, and sovereign state with a democratic regime.[81] The language of the provisional constitution was a clear reflection of an imported political language and a local multi-layered identity and contextual understanding of concepts such as democracy. The constitution led to the institutionalization of the ruling Āl Thānī family as a government and state entity; it provided a structuring means for governance and the framework for the state-citizen relationship. Through Article 3, the elements of statehood and a European sense were established, including the definition of the bylaws of the flag and national anthem, and the concept of citizenship in Article 4.[82]

The sum total of these developments was that by the 1970s, the Qatari state became an Arab tribal leadership ruling an ethnically diverse population, mostly lacking in "common" or shared collective memories, ethnic identity, or "national" commonality. Unlike non-oil states where the citizens are attached to the state through taxation and participation, the emir had to rely on "normative socialization."[83] However, it seemed that the challenge in Qatar was that this normative socialization did not have a single ideology, but instead had many different conflicting local myths, as mentioned above. The challenge was to reconcile "a monarchist ideology (for the ruler) with capitalist ideology (for the merchants) with a social entitlement ideology (for the population)."[84]

[79] Shalaq, Khatib, and Abdulla, *Qatar's modern and contemporary development*, 206.

[80] Ibid., 177.

[81] "The Amended Provisional Constitution of 1972," Almeezan, accessed April 2, 2024, https://almeezan.qa/LawView.aspx?opt&LawID=4360&language=en.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Jill Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 163.

[84] Ibid., 164.

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Shaykh Khalifa's regime had to engage in nation-building processes and creating a civic myth, i.e., a collective national identity that could be mapped onto the state of Qatar.

At this stage the ruler had to reconcile with the reliance on a certain concept of imagined "tradition" and its link to contemporary notions of national "authenticity" for the new national identity, with the impacts and requirements of a new Western-style modernity. This is a classic post-colonial formula of nation building vis-à-vis the "inner domain" and "outer domain." In the public sphere or the "outer" domain, the Western model of economic development was followed. This was done by implementing a top-down economic development strategy that was funded by income from oil. The process of economic development in Qatar was initiated by the government, which used the revenues derived from crude oil exports to finance development projects.[85] The economic development was a part of an effort to improve the overall standard of living "through improved housing, water, healthcare, education, transport and communications and electricity." This development was also linked to generous welfare measures introduced by Shaykh Khalifa as a strategy to connect with the citizens through a patron-client relationship. After coming to power, he instituted a series of welfare measures such as a "30 percent increase in social aid, a 20 percent raise in the wages of the armed forces and civil servants, and a 25 percent increase in old-age pensions."[86]

Qatar is described as one of the rentier states[87] in the Gulf, at least in the beginning of the state in 1970s. The main rentier state theory (RST) explains the political culture of Arab states and its linked to oil-rent driven wealth distribution. The state-society relations are therefore, explained through these distributive rent and related wealth that created a patron-client relationship between the state and society. However, given changes in the economies of the Gulf, including fluctuating oil prices, development policies, demographics, and globalization, RST no longer suffices as an explanation of the political culture and related national identity of the Gulf states.[88] However, at the beginning of state building, as a rent-driven Qatar witnessed a massive migrant inflow, citizenship laws remained very restrictive. In this sense, Qatar like most Gulf countries attracted a high number of migrants due to "the extremely high per capita earnings, deep rentier bargain arrangements" without much impact on citizenship status. Zahra Babar explained that in "autocratically governed countries, citizenship laws develop independent of external factors such as migration and are formed instead solely on the regime's choices at hand."[89] Simultaneously, the ruling regime in Qatar invested in citizen welfare by defining the patron-client relationship based on the rentier state system.

[85] Zuhair Ahmed Nafi, *Economic and Social Development in Qatar* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

[86] Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf.*

[87] Hazem Beblawi, "The Rentier State in the Arab World," *The Arab State* (July 24, 2015): 85–98, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315685229-5.

[88] Matthew Gray, "A Theory of 'late Rentierism' in the Arab States of the Gulf," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2011, https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2825905.

[89] Babar, *The Cost of Belonging: Citizenship Construction in the State of Qatar*, 408.

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The purposes of creating a nationality and cultural identity are to bind the citizens with the state as well as to strengthen the legitimacy and authenticity of the ruling regime.[90] In rentier polities, rulers distribute funds to "build a cohesive stable state and buy themselves the political consent of their people."[91]

Constitution and National Identity Construction

Qatari statehood was made official on 3rd September 1971[92] through a television broadcast by Khalifa bin Hamad. Here two points are paramount: first, the use of broadcast media for making an official national announcement. Daniel Lerner[93] suggests that through media, societies transition from "traditional" to "modern," in the sense of replacement of old forms of communications with new mass media. Media exposure by means of radio, newspaper, and others would inspire "empathy" amongst citizens. It would allow people to identify with their nation instead of simply being restricted to their local community, and also facilitate civic participation in the national sphere.

The second aspect is the nation's independence, which was achieved through a series of regional events and Britain's decision to withdraw. Despite some protests, a strong and unified independence struggle against the colonial presence in the country was missing. The third crucial aspect of the new constitution was the mention of democracy as a model of governance, but this democracy was to be different from the European model. The concepts of "democracy" and "human rights" were statehood idioms of borrowed political language that applied to the local context differently. The consul of ministers is a prime example of this. It does not signify the manifestation of the democratic system in the European-model style as the ministers were chosen by the ruler and did not represent any political parties. The "discourse" surrounding statehood was influenced from the imperial past, a cultural legacy which does not always reflect the political reality around the power structures and state-society relations in contemporary Qatar.

During Shaykh Khalifa bin Hamad's reign, beginning February 22, 1972, an advisory council known as the Shura Council was established. This marked a departure from traditional governance, as the council aimed to represent broader Qatari society. Initially comprising twenty to thirty members with a term limit of three years, its primary role was to approve draft laws proposed by the council of ministers, with decisions made by absolute majority. However, the council was only partially elected, and the ruler retained the authority to dissolve it at any time, particularly in matters concerning state interests.[94]

[90] Ibid., 409.

[91] Ibid.

[92] "Khalifa bin Hamad AlThani," Wikipedia, February 18, 2024, https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%AE%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%81%D8%A9_%D8%A8%D9%86_%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF_%D8%A2%D9%84_%D8%AB%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A.

[93] Daniel Lerner, Lucille W. Pevsner, and David Riesman, *The Passing of Traditional Society. Modernizing the Middle East* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1958), xiii, 466.

[94] The Amended Provisional Constitution of 1972, Article 68.

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Shaykh Khalifa's rule from 1972 to 1995 was pivotal in laying the groundwork for nation-building in Qatar. Key achievements during his tenure included the establishment of the Qatari constitution, the development of political institutions such as ministries, and the initiation of heritage projects like Qatari museums aimed at fostering a cohesive civic identity. The constitution, a cornerstone of national identity, reflected the complexities of blending Western-style structures with Gulf realities to create a "traditional-modern" model suited to Qatar's context. Notably, while Islamic law was emphasized as a governing source, the adoption of Western-style democracy introduced a tension between two seemingly contradictory ideologies. Additionally, the focus on Western concepts of citizenship underscored individual rights while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of familial ties. This blurred distinction between the public and private domains posed challenges to the democratic and Western ideals upon which the constitution was founded.

Another key paradox in the constitution is the emphasis on Arab solidarity, which poses challenges considering the significant presence of non-Arab migrants, including Persian Qataris. Article 1 states:

> Qatar is an independent sovereign Arab State. Its religion is Islam and the Shariʿa Law shall be the principal source of its legislation. Its political system is democratic. The Arabic Language shall be its official language. The people of Qatar are a part of the Arab nation.[95]

Hence, the challenge lies in constructing an identity based on shared culture, heritage, and ethnicity in the face of a diverse population. The explicit designation of Arabic as the sole official language and Qatar's affiliation with the Arab nation-states underscore its formal ethnic and cultural alignment with the broader Arab world over other subcultures within the society. This emphasizes fundamental aspects of Qatari national identity and outlines a trajectory toward fostering a relatively homogeneous national culture.

The paradoxes in the constitutional document initially reflected the imposition of foreign concepts on traditional forms of government. Additionally, ten ministries were to be formed within two months of the promulgation of the constitution, which included the ministries of finance and petroleum, education and culture, interior, justice, public health, communications and transport, labor and social affairs, industrial agriculture, electricity, and water.[96] It is crucial to know that the memorandum of the constitution clearly stated that shariʿa law would be the source of legislation for Qatar's constitution. Therefore, the values and principles of Islamic identity were integral to the Qatari state and its new national identity.

Article 29[97] states that, as prescribed under Islamic shariʿa law, duty would be imposed on those who take part in the consensus formalities and, through them, on the whole nation to promote loyalty and *absolute obedience* to the ruler by

[95] Ibid., Article 1.
[96] Ibid., Article 33.
[97] Ibid., Article 29.

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instilling the fear of God. The word "obedience" once again reflects the gap between imported foreign concepts and the local understanding of governance that is in many ways based on certain concepts of tribal laws. This new adaptation and political vocabulary created confusion amongst the people in terms of the meaning and difference between the "state" and the ruler. The two terms were used interchangeably.[98]

The constitution laid down the framework for citizenship once again based on the European model, according to which the state would ensure justice and equality for all of the citizens of Qatar.[99] What justice and equality would look like was far from clear. Another central feature of the constitution was that it institutionalized the concept of family. Article 7 stated that the family was the nucleus of Qatari society and its unity will be safeguarded by law.[100] Since Islam is the state religion, the state was to be responsible for instilling Islamic principles to protect the citizens from any future misconduct. Here, the concept of public and private was created, but the boundaries between the two were blurred.

During the 1970s, national symbols were created along with a national historical narrative, establishing the national story that the "original" Qataris can trace their origins back to the migrations that occurred in the eighteenth century. This narrative was propagated by the political elite headed by Shaykh Khalifa in 1972 as he wanted "an illuminating bridge that links the glorious present with the ancient past."[101] This national narrative capitalized on the concepts of "authenticity" and first- and second-class citizenship later.[102] However, as Crystal mentioned, the national myth was "not ancient" nor full of heroes and heroic acts.[103] The issue associated with this national narrative was that "it left a gap between the desert past and the present." Moreover, it did not explain how the Qataris' life today – "a life of oil and money" – was tied to "the lives of those in the desert myth."[104] The national narrative was focused on migrants from Arabia and also set a time period of how far behind in history should one travel to construct "authenticity" related to the concept of racial purity and hence first-class citizenship. The first step into reconstructing the past and strengthening the national dominant narrative was to commission an archaeological study by a British expedition.[105] The project resulted in the construction of a national museum in 1975, supervised by a committee of Qataris. This committee of mostly men was responsible for writing a new narrative on Qatari history. The museum was built in Shaikh Abdullah's palace.[106] The palace being the museum's centerpiece placed the ruling family at the center of national history, linking it to other aspects of the past: the stone age, the nomadic life, Islamic era, pearling, oil boom,

[98] Zahlan, *The Creation of Qatar*, 110.
[99] The Amended Provisional Constitution of 1972, Article 5.
[100] Ibid., Article 7.
[101] Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 162
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid., 163.
[106] "Mathaf Qatar Alwatani yajassad Tarikh Qatar wa AlAjdad," *HayatJamila*, accessed April 2, 2024, https://www.jamila.qa/Article/Id/20603.

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and other state projects, poems by Shaykh Qassim and photos of the ruling family.[107] The museum was the key institution in crystalizing an image of the ruling family as the founder and builder of Qatar.

Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa's Rule and Official Ratification of the Constitution

Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa's rule in 1995 was marked by a transition to a new era of nation-building projects and state "modernization" in the outer domain in terms of architecture, state structures, and national policies.

During Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa's rule a permanent constitution was ratified in April 2003 with a majority referendum. This constitution was built on the tenets of the preliminary constitution, with new articles highlighting Qatar's sovereignty and defining its political structure and citizen relationships.[108]

The constitution specifies a primogeniture law: article 8 designated hereditary rule for the Āl Thānī family.[109] The constitution also established Qatar as a democratic state; one of the most important articles, article 78, was about the establishment of the Shura (advisory) council. The Shura council, along with the municipal council, was meant to increase citizens' power in decision-making. Although this was celebrated as a reform, the Shura council's power was limited and the emir could dissolve it at any time.

One of the most important differences between the preliminary constitution and the permanent constitution lay in the way state and society relations were clearly defined through a framework for a new national identity. Part two of the constitution is titled "Guiding principles of the society," in which article 18 states: "Justice, benevolence, freedom, equality and high moral standards are the core values of Qatari society."[110]

These core principles provided a basis for new modes of national solidarity as a form of another top-down project. However, it was unclear what these moral standards would look like in practice. Article 20 confirmed the role of the state in creating national unity and identity: "The State shall strive to reinforce the spirit of national unity, solidarity, and fraternity among all citizens." Similarly, article 21 underlines the centrality of "family" in the national project: "The family is the basis of society. A Qatari family is founded on religion, ethics and patriotism."[111] A Qatari family is, therefore, considered a political unit and a tool for national imagination.

Additionally, it also mentions freedom of the press, and articles 47 and 48 guarantee free speech. Again, the concept of media freedom in civil society is Western based; but what that would look like in Qatar is not clear. Freedom of media was associated with the development of the Al Jazeera satellite channel

[107] Crystal, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf*, 164.

[108] "The Constitution," The Constitution - Hukoomi - Qatar E-government, accessed April 2, 2024, via https://portal.www.gov.qa/.

[109] Ibid.

[110] *The Amended Provisional Constitution of 1972*, Article 18.

[111] Ibid., Article 21.

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in 1996. Al Jazeera has been effectively used as a diplomacy tool "by influencing a pan-Arab feeling amongst all populations of the region."[112]

Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa also changed the orientation of Qatar's foreign policy toward greater decisiveness, influenced by the personal character of the emir. During Shaykh Hamad's rule, the U.S.-based Al Udaid facility was built in Qatar as the headquarters of the U.S. central command.[113] The long-term, hard-security arrangement guarded Qatar against security threats from its neighbors. These bold changes in foreign policy and emphasis on independence also led to a stronger focus on building an exclusive and cohesive national identity to strengthen Qatar's local and international legitimacy. The new approach to national identity was institutionalized through an ambitious national vision of 2030, introduced a decade after the constitution's finalization.

The Permanent Constitution, Nationality, Citizenship, and National Identity

The constitution institutionalized Qatari national identity and provided a new framework for national belonging. Article 38 established a nationality law that was later produced in a separate legislative act published in September 2005. This document presents the details of nationality law and establishes citizenship criteria and levels, crystallizing the differences between citizens through comparison between descent and naturalized citizenship.

According to article 12, citizenship may be withdrawn from a naturalized Qatari if they commit a crime against "honor and integrity" or are out of the country for a long period without "lawful justification" or others. Article 13 solidifies the second-class status of naturalized citizens with the following:

> Naturalised Qataris shall not be equated with Qatari nationals in terms of the right to work in public positions or work in general until five years after the date of naturalization. Naturalised Qataris shall not be entitled to participate in elections or nominations or be appointed in any legislative body.[114]

The political participation mentioned in earlier articles relating to the Shura council excludes naturalized Qataris as they are exempted from candidacy and voting for the Shura council. These differences between levels of citizenships also contributed to the narratives on belonging and "othering" of certain groups in Qatari society and the development of weaker national solidarity and a possibly confusing discourse on national identity.

In Qatar, national identity is strongly linked with citizenship status. Thus, if one is not a citizen of the country, they are excluded from possessing a national identity in the literal sense. In this sense, citizenship and related national

[112] "Qatar's Foreign Policy, the Challenges in the MENA Region," *Mediterranean Affairs*, December 22, 2019, https://www.mediterraneanaffairs.com/qatar-s-foreign-policy-the-challenges-in-the-mena-region/.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Law no. 2 of 1961 on the Qatari nationality (repealed), accessed April 2, 2024, https://www.almeezan.qa/LawView.aspx?opt&LawID=2578&language=en.

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identity discourse is built on the "norms of exclusion" rather than "norms of inclusion."[115] Similarly, Babar explained, "The continuous presence of a large number of foreigners has reinforced citizens' sense of their distinct Qatari-ness and shaped a sense of nationality along clear lines of cultural belonging."[116]

Qatar's case is also unique in the sense that its small population with high access to external rents enables it to engage in more distributive politics than some of its neighbors. In the past, the state has spent much money on its citizens to ensure strong legitimacy, popularity, and the regime's stability. Qatar's long-term developmental goals include the creation of a knowledge-based economy, which has further increased the need to bring high-skilled foreign workers for employment. This large number of skilled expatriates, have further impacted how the Qatari state and society view and guard their citizenship.[117] Due to the perceived threat to local identity and culture, the length of time that migrants can spend in Qatar is limited to a certain period, and the "sponsorship system" is structured to "bind foreign workers to their employers for a predetermined contractual period,"[118] though it was also influenced by border control policies introduced by British administrators.[119] AlShehabi explains in detail how the British colonial era in the Gulf introduced a system of sponsorship and surety that was meant to be compatible with Islamic principle and customs of *Kafala.*[120] He calls it a "cheap" system for controlling foreigners. Jurdeini and Hassan explain that despite its link at least linguistically and conceptually to Islamic tradition, the practice of the Kafala system evolved as a hybrid between colonial structures with local concepts.[121]

The politics of migration, exclusive identities, and the diversity of expatriate community cannot be solely explained through the Kafala system. Currently, the majority-migrant communities in Qatar are diverse on various levels (ethnic, cultural, religious, socio-economic). Many of the migrants are long-time residents and fall into the category of "residents" though they remain "migrants" legally. However, despite the long term presence and interaction with the citizen population, their impact on local culture is understudied.[122] There are long-term communities of Iranians, Pakistanis, Palestinians, Yemenis, and other Arabs in Qatar who have "inhabited the country for decades and have served as the backbone in certain sectors of public and private employment."[123]

[115] Babar, *The cost of belonging: citizenship construction in the state of Qatar*, 403.

[116] Ibid, 404.

[117] Ibid., 410.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Lori, *Offshore Citizens*, 41.

[120] Omar Hesham AlShehabi, "Policing Labour in Empire: The Modern Origins of the Kafala Sponsorship System in the Gulf Arab States," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (February 27, 2019): 1–20, https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2019.1580183.

[121] Ray Jureidini and Said Fares Hassan, "The Islamic Principle of Kafala as Applied to Migrant Workers: Traditional Continuity and Reform," *Migration and Islamic Ethics*, November 6, 2019, 92–109, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004417342_007.

[122] Lori, *Offshore Citizens*, 52

[123] Babar, *The Cost Of Belonging*, 410.

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The combination of this demographic imbalance and ethno-national nationality law and institutionalization are also reflected in a new state development vision in QNV 2030.[124] It provided a pathway and guidelines for the country's new policy orientations. To accommodate the long-standing communities with ethnic and linguistic similarities to the native population, Qatar's citizenship laws evolved to include naturalization laws. In Qatar, citizenship is conferred based on descent and having Qatari parents (*Jus Sanguinis*). This project of national-identity creation is built on multi-layered identities and rooted in ethnicity. The different citizenship levels in Qatar could explain the weaknesses of its national identity and confusing sense of solidarity in the past. One of the main layers of the Qatari national identity is Arab identity, as clearly mentioned in the constitution. However, the definition of "Arab" is far from clear, particularly as many Qataris trace their origins to predominantly non-Arab regions such as Iran, Africa, and India, as well as previously enslaved populations with diverse backgrounds. Therefore, the process of "Arabization" among non-Arab populations represents a classic nationalist project, characterized by the selective forgetting of historical elements and the collective remembrance of a new desired national narrative.[125] A prime site for such collective remembering is the Msheireb museums,[126] which are designed to replicate houses belonging to different Qatari families and exhibit artifacts from the recent past, serving as representations of national symbols. Notably, the slavery museum[127] within Msheireb stands out as a unique institution in the Gulf region, shedding light on Qatar's slave history and its evolution in the post-abolition era. The museum named Bin Jelmood House "tells of a time when there was a flourishing trade in enslaved people throughout the Indian Ocean World, a vast region of which the countries of the Arabian Gulf are a part of. The story in Qatar begins in enslavement but ends in shared freedom and shared prosperity."[128] This deliberate curation of national narrative, despite its selective nature, showcases the diversity of the past while fostering a new sense of national solidarity.

In Qatari national discourse, similar to that of many other Gulf countries, the formation of an exclusive identity necessitates the identification of an "other." In this context, the "other" predominantly comprises the expatriate community, depicted as a threat to the local culture.[129] Additionally, the naturalized Qataris can also be seen subjected to othering, viewed as newcomers or less native Qataris. This discourse serves to construct a particular notion of national identity that aligns with the distribution of socio-political power.

[124] Qatar National Vision 2030 - Government Communications Office, accessed April 2, 2024, https://www.gco.gov.qa/en/about-qatar/national-vision2030/.

[125] Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2018).

[126] "About Msheireb Museums," Msheireb Museums, accessed April 2, 2024, https://msheirebmuseums.com/en/.

[127] "Bin Jelmood House," Msheireb Museums, accessed April 2, 2024, https://msheirebmuseums.com/en/about/bin-jelmood-house/.

[128] Ibid.

[129] Neil Partrick, "Nationalism in the Gulf States," in *In The Transformation of the Gulf* (Routledge, 2013), 47–56.

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Throughout history, the Qatari Peninsula has been home to tribes and families migrating from Najd or Hasa, seamlessly integrating into the social fabric. However, contemporary discourse portrays recent migrants as foreigners, contrasting them with earlier migrants who are deemed indigenous. This narrative plays a pivotal role in creating exclusivity within the framework of Qatari national identity, despite representing a minority of the population. Moreover, the "other" is not a static category, as evidenced by the recent introduction of permanent residency law[130] in Qatar during the Gulf blockade, which selectively include certain segments of the expatriate community.

This project of exclusive national identity is further solidified through QNV 2030, which aims to "preserve Qatar's national heritage."[131] QNV can be considered as the single most crucial document in the last decade, reflecting the state's ideology and codifying its vision for a new societal order, state-society relations, and direction for top-down national identity creation.[132]

Through the institution of the family, multiple layers of identity are legitimized and institutionalized and systematically reproduced through an idealized plan for the upbringing of national citizens. The status of "culture" as an institution is further highlighted through the strategies that construct culture as a separate entity for producing national identity and national consciousness. The outcomes of this vision would be achieved through specific state-initiated projects. National identity was characterized, specified, and quantified through this approach. The major achievements of the cultural sector include the development of various infrastructures and buildings that would materialize the vision of national culture as a top-down philosophy.

The Qatari Brand – National Identity Projects, Navigating Through Multi-Layered Identities

Arab, Islamic, and Tribal Identity

In Qatar, Islamic and Arab identities are intertwined, but neither was equally used in an attempt to create a homogeneous Qatari identity through national culture. For example, the Wijdan Cultural Centre,[133] established in 2017, is, according to QNV 2030, a "cultural conscience" center. The center defines its purpose as to further the advancement of Arab societies in response to modern and contemporary challenges. As an advisory to the Ministry of Culture and Sports in Qatar, it is "responsible for the preservation of culture, arts and heritage, [and] highlighting [Qatar's] national and Islamic characteristics."[134]

[130] "Permanent Residency," MOI Qatar - Ministry of interior Qatar, accessed April 2, 2024, https://portal.moi.gov.qa/wps/portal/MOIInternet/departmentcommittees/permanentresidency.

[131] Qatar National Vision 2030 - Government Communications Office, accessed April 2, 2024, https://www.gco.gov.qa/en/about-qatar/national-vision2030/.

[132] Ibid., 165.

[133] "The Cultural Conscience Center Seeks to Promote Values," Wijdan Cultural Center, accessed April 2, 2024, https://www.wijdancenter.net/en/.

[134] "About Us," Ministry of Culture, accessed April 2, 2024, https://www.moc.gov.qa/en/.

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Arab identity is highlighted through the institutionalization of the Arabic language. In January 2019, a new law was introduced to make Arabic the official language for all government and private institutions,[135] in recognition of the threats of a diversity of languages in the country. Previously, mostly English was used as the preferred language of communication in most institutions due to the high number of non-Arab expatriates in the country and their lack of integration. This new law attempted to reinstate the importance of Arab identity in Qatar through the institutionalization of its major characteristic – the Arabic language. However, there is a lack of clarity regarding what constitutes Islamic values. For example, for women, Islamic values are highlighted through modest clothing such as *abaya* (long black/colored robe to cover the body), but what religious modesty means for men is more unclear. The mechanisms involved in shaping this national identity are usually carried out by state institutions and are also projected as participatory in character. Citizens are mobilized to participate in national identity creation and dialogue to make it seem a part of the process, instilling a stronger sense of belonging. This is done through lectures, symposiums, and lecture-discussion groups conducted by Qatar University, such as a symposium titled "Qatari Society and the Question of National Identity."[136]

Tribalism in Qatari National Identity

Neha Vora asserted that what makes the nation-building agendas of the Gulf states so powerful is the fact that "they have relied heavily upon purifying the imagined citizen 'self' from the non-citizen 'other.'"[137] Related to this exclusive citizenship is the concept of tribalism. Tribal identities exist simultaneously and distinctly from the others. Each tribe defines itself differently both from the other and more broadly in the distinction between *banū/ḥadar* (Nomad/Sedentary).

Each of the Gulf states has created its own "brand" to trademark their own unique identity rooted in a tribal past but connected to modern reality. Although Qatar takes pride in its tribal past and history of unification, there exists an "imagined" tribal past, which falls into the category of "invented traditions." The invented traditions and emphasis on tribal past are important for providing the regime with a symbolic "nationally legible cultural capital" based on claims of tribal purity.[138] Although what tribalism is and how it has evolved are topics that lie beyond the scope of this article, the symbols of tribal differences are worth mentioning.

An example of this merging of invention and history exists in two of the largest Bedouin tribes in Qatar – al-Hajrī and al-Marrī. They have a distinctively

[135] The Peninsula Newspaper, "New Law: Protecting Arabic Language," Peninsula, January 27, 2019, https://thepeninsulaqatar.com/opinion/27/01/2019/New-law-Protecting-Arabic-language.

[136] Ibn Khaldun Centre, "AlMujtam'a AlQatari wa Soal AlHawiya, Jamiat Qatar", accessed April 2, 2024, https://www.qu.edu.qa/sites/ar_QA/research/IbnKhaldon/events/qatari_and_identity.

[137] Neha Vora and Natalie Koch, "Everyday Inclusions: Rethinking Ethnocracy, Kafala, and Belonging in the Arabian Peninsula," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 15.3 (December 2015): 540-52, https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.12158.

[138] cooke, *Tribal modern*, 41.

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different accent from some of the *ḥaḍar* tribes and families such as al-Kuwārī, al-Malkī, and al-Emadī.[139] Both tribes embrace this distinction with pride and pass it on to their children as crucial tribe-specific cultural values. Thus, a clear distinction between local accents exists in Qatar, and language is used as a marker of diverse tribal identities.

The state in Qatar uses tribalism as a tool to create a specific form of national identity that is both inclusive and exclusive. It is a new form of tribalism that does not fit into the previous categorization or conceptualization of the tribe by anthropologists. For example, many Qatari National Day songs are written in Bedouin-style poetry[140] and sung in Bedouin accents, which some of the other tribes may not fully comprehend. Similarly, the *ḥaḍar* accent, which is advertised as the main Qatari accent, is mostly heard in local news channels, such as Qatar TV and Al Rayyan, and official interviews. Through these differences within the tribal cultures an obvious paradox emerges: the constructed Qatari national identity is built on claims of a shared tribal heritage, but the reality is that significant differences exist between tribes. The politics of national identity have in fact further perpetuated these differences rather than unify the national culture.

Another event where tribalism's impact can be clearly seen is the National Day celebrations. Qatar's National Day was officially moved from September 3rd to December 18th, which commemorates Qatar's unification in 1878 under Shaykh Jassim, the state's founder. "Qatar's National Day is about honoring the heroes, leaders and people who built this country."[141] The shift denotes a focus on the past, historical leaders, and tribal unity, celebrated through several events in December. The National Day celebrations are centered on "Darb Al-Saai," which means "routes of the messenger." This symbolizes the men with whom Shaykh Jassim entrusted messages and directions. Darb Al-Saai exhibit these traits and characteristics by conducting activities such as camel riding, horseback riding, shooting, poetry reading, and others that reflect "the Qatari and local culture and national identity."[142] All these are typical of the desert-nomadic lifestyle historically led by the Bedouin tribes. Additionally, another activity called *Al Maqtar*[143] exemplified the desert life, an activity through which a participant could learn more about their ancestry. These activities highlighted a connection with the past, i.e., tribal symbolism. At this juncture, the tribe had become a nation-building tool, a new form of tribalism that is fully compatible with national modernity as the new imagined tribalism builds on certain symbols of the past while letting go of the political strength of the tribe. In this sense, tribal history is being used as a state-building tool.

[139] "Lahjat AlArab AlQadimah" *qatarshares*, accessed April 2, 2024, http://www.qatarshares.com/vb/archive/index.php/t-372707.html.

[140] "Ya Mutataw'een AlSa'ib, AbdulAziz AlAlawi," YouTube, January 11, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PONAgoZcyH0.

[141] Dracula, "Qatar National Day. Why 18th December?," *Qatar Living*, September 25, 2014, https://www.qatarliving.com/forum/qatari-culture/posts/qatar-national-day-why-18th-december.

[142] *Ibid.*

[143] WGO Network, "List of Stalls and Activities at Darb Al Saai," *What's Goin On Qatar*, December 15, 2018, http://www.wgoqatar.com/2018/12/list-of-stalls-and-activities-at-darb-al-saai/.

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Al Shawi, a member of the Āl Murra tribe, one of the largest and most indigenous Bedouin tribes in Qatar, characterized contemporary Qatari history as an "assemblage of tribes and tribal belonging in flux."[144] Although most classic definitions of tribe focus mostly on Bedouin tribes, the rest of the Qatari population is seen as non-tribal. However, the non-tribal population is increasingly adopting the idea of the tribe by following certain patterns of created traditions and showcasing them on various occasions. This is usually done through "elections, National Day celebrations, and the social prerequisites by which access to the state and its resources is achieved, individuals are increasingly called upon to express and utilize the consanguineal linkages of tribe."[145] For example, families who do not have a particular tribal history or are not related to a long-established tribe use their family names to perform the same tribal traditions as the Bedouin or Hadhar tribes do. Al-Emadī and Āl Mulla are examples of traditionally non-tribal families that are increasingly following the performance of tribal traditions such as the tribal dance *Ardah*, which is performed mostly among Arab tribes of central Arabia. In this case, the state uses tribe as a conceptual tool to create and promote a certain version of national identity that follows a shared set of values and created traditions, some of which are borrowed from the past and some re-invented as tribal-modern culture. In this sense, the state is "tribalizing" the nation. The state remains the most important factor in these changes. In the early stages of statehood the regime drew support from the tribes, but as it was able to use oil money to construct a new national identity, it then began reconfiguring what it meant to be a tribe.

National Identity Projects – From Regional to Local

In the last decade, the Gulf states have taken substantial steps to promote national identity and deepen the sense of nationalism in its citizens. Several factors have given rise to the need to carefully promote and design this new nationalism. These factors include economic, political, and regional unrest. Considerable political competition within the Gulf Cooperation Council, the threat of Iran as a regional power, and the emergence of various transnational movements, such as Islamist movements, to name a few.[146]

Like its neighboring states, Qatar has taken significant steps to promote a strong sense of belonging, patriotism, and unique national identity among its citizens through various projects such as Qatar Museums Authority (QMA), heritage projects including Al-Zubarah, Cultural Village Foundation (Katara), Msheireb Museums (Msheireb Properties), Qatar National Library (QNL), Souq Waqif Art Centre, and Al Fanar Centre. These heritage projects highlight the importance of preserving local culture to respond to global influences in the country and promote various aspects of Qatar's national identity. QMA was

[144] A. Hadi Alshawi and Andrew Gardner, "Tribalism, Identity and Citizenship in Contemporary Qatar," *Anthropology of the Middle East* 8.2 (January 1, 2013), https://doi.org/10.3167/ame.2013.080204.

[145] AlShawi and Gardner, *Tribalism, Identity and Citizenship in Contemporary Qatar*, 56.

[146] Kristin Smith Diwan, ed, "National Identity and National Projects in the Arab Gulf States," Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, September 14, 2018, https://agsiw.org/national-identity-and-national-projects-in-the-arab-gulf-states/.

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established in 2005 by Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa to engage with the West through soft power.[147] Qatar invested in Western-style cultural projects through QMA. Qatar Museum Authority established the Museum of Islamic Art as the first Islamic museum in the Gulf region and also the Mathaf – Arab Museum of Modern Art, with a focus on art production in the Arab world. By establishing museums with distinct characteristics corresponding to the multi-layered Qatari national identity, i.e., Muslim and Arab identity, political elites have been strategically promoting Qatar's cultural power.

The National Museum of Qatar, designed by a French architect, Jean Nouvel, reflects "the vanishing Bedouin cultures of Qatar in an effort to embrace the realities of a rapidly urbanizing society and maintain a connection to this fading world in which the country sprang."[148] The National Museum of Qatar was designed such that it represents both traditional and modern aspects; it is a prime example of the "Qatari brand." The whole notion of "brand" is a cultural and discursive legacy of imperialism. Although the museum's spectacular architecture gives it strong cultural capital, locally, it seems to create a new narrative of belonging through a single history, culture, and heritage, overlooking diversity. At the time of its official opening in March 2019, the museum's main slogan was "Our ancient identity." In her remarks on the museum's opening, chairperson H. H. Shaykha Mayassa bint Hamad stated the following:

> Qatar is an ancient land, rich in the traditions of life in the desert and by the sea. It is also a country whose modern history has been defined by oil, with all the dramatic change that its discovery brought. Today, as we enter a new era, Qatar's trajectory onto the contemporary world stage has been just as rapid.[149]

The exhibitions and events in the museum provide an imagination of Qatar's ancestry. A prime example is the "Making of Doha" exhibition in March 2019, where selective versions of Qatari history, starting from independence to the present, were exhibited to showcase the nation's progress into modernity.

Another national identity project organized under QMA was *Mal Lawal* ("from the old days"). This exhibition is a prime example of mobilizing citizens to participate in building a new national identity with a combined focus on past and future. The exhibition "invited everyone in Qatar to share objects that have made an impression and resonated with them throughout their lives."[150] The project's rhetoric called for the representation of collective heritage.

To highlight Qatar's distinct history during the pre-oil era, the national identity projects have focused a great deal on heritage sites, as reflected in the huge emphasis on Al-Zubarah Fort in the north of Qatar Madinat Al-Shamal.

[147] Rory Miller, *The Gulf Crisis: The View from Qatar* (Doha: Hamad bin Khalifa University Press, 2018).

[148] Cooke, *Tribal Modern*, 81.

[149] Webmaster, "NMOQ a Source of Pride for Nation: Sheikha Mayassa," *Qatar Tribune*, March 28, 2019, https://www.qatar-tribune.com/article/159353/NATION/NMoQ-a-source-of-pride-for-nation-Sheikha-Mayassa.

[150] "Mal Lawal 4," NMOQ, accessed April 2, 2024, https://nmoq.org.qa/en/calendar/mal-lawal-4/.

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Although Al-Zubarah was always present in Qatar, it was not until 2009 that it was declared a protected area, becoming a research subject for archaeologists under QMA, and a UNESCO heritage site.[151]

Additionally, in 2009, the Qatar Heritage and Identity Centre (QHIC) was established to promote research and awareness in society of Qatari heritage and protect national identity. The executive director Dr. Khalid Al Mulla highlighted this during a seminar organized by the center:

> We aim to target the role of educational institutions in preserving national identity. We want to highlight the role of public, private or even foreign institutions in preserving our language, national identity, and our Gulf, Arabian and Islamic sense of belonging with openness to all noble humanitarian values.[152]

Following Qatar's national strategy, in 2016, the Ministry of Education[153] introduced three new compulsory subjects in private schools, including Arabic for both Arab and non-Arab students, national history, and Islamic studies. All schools under the Qatar foundation adopted a national heritage program for their students.[154] The use of education in reshaping and reforming national identity was also highlighted by higher educational institutions such as Qatar University, which in 2019 held a national conference titled "The determinants of national identity and the role of education in its promotion."[155]

At the conference, Dr. Ibrahim Al-Nuaimi, the undersecretary of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, addressed the ministry's role in

> implanting the concept and value of the national identity, stressing the ministry's keenness to include its curricula, programs, classroom and non-classroom activities, methods, methods and practices that enhance citizenship and national identity ... indicating that pride in the national identity is embodied in the meanings of loyalty, solidarity and national unity.[156]

Such examples demonstrate Qatar's concerted efforts, led by the state and its leadership, to construct and promote a distinct Qatari national identity by carefully intertwining it with a selective interpretation of the past. However,

[151] "Al Zubarah Archaeological Site - Qatar Museums," Al Zubarah: Qatar's Largest Heritage Site - Qatar Museums, accessed April 2, 2024, https://qm.org.qa/en/visit/heritage-sites/al-zubarah/.

[152] The Peninsula Newspaper, "Language and History Key to Building National Identity," Peninsula, March 22, 2016, https://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/22/03/2016/Language-and-history-key-to-building-national-identity.

[153] Ministry of Education and High Education Qatar, "Ministry of Education and High Education," الرئيسية, accessed April 3, 2024, https://www.edu.gov.qa/en/.

[154] "Pue to Host National & Heritage Programs Day for QF Schools," Qatar Foundation, accessed April 2, 2024, https://www.press.qf.org.qa/pue-to-host-national-heritage-programs-day-for-qf-schools/.

[155] Mutamir fi jamiat Qatar yanaqish muhaddadat Alhuwiya AlWatniya wa daur AlTa'aleem fi Ta'azeeziha..., accessed April 2, 2024, https://al-sharq.com/article/17/04/2019/-الوطنية-ودور-التعليم-في-تعزيز-هامؤتمر-بجامعة-قطر-يناقش-محددات-الهوية.

[156] Ibid.

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the effectiveness of these projects among the local population remains uncertain, given the inherently complex and evolving nature of national identity as a concept and lived reality. The perpetual reimagining of the past underscores this complexity, highlighting the paradoxes between the traditional and the modern and the simultaneous pursuit of a unified identity alongside the emphasis on tribal identities. These dynamics accentuate the multiple layers within Qatar's national identity, posing obstacles to the establishment of a cohesive national identity and civic belonging. The "inner domain" serves as both a canvas for the imagination of indigenous identity and a platform for the emergence of diverse and sometimes competing versions of national identity. Nevertheless, this intricate landscape of multi-layered identities offers the potential to cultivate a more adaptable and multifaceted sense of national belonging, a potential area for further research and exploration.

Conclusion

This article engaged with Qatar's national history, tracing the process of state formation from its colonial origins to the incorporation of tribes and engagement, or lack thereof, with Arab nationalism. It serves as a roadmap for comprehending the foundations of Qatar's present national identity and offers insights into existing narratives from the perspective of the national political elite. The roadmap highlights critical aspects of Qatar's evolving national identity, including its post-colonial history, oil wealth, key state institutions, and the national constitution. Moreover, it illuminates the major paradoxes and elements shaping an exclusive national belonging, such as the concept of the "other," migration, citizenship, and the complexities of multi-layered ethno-racial and religious identities. By following this roadmap, one can gain insights into the trajectories and shifts in Qatar's national identity narratives.

This article has demonstrated that in the contemporary state framework of Qatar, national identity is predominantly crafted by political elites through various means of socialization, such as education and mass media, in addition to political institutions, which shape citizenship laws and modes of governance. Moreover, selective employment of symbols and collective memories, often reformulated as national myths, plays a significant role in this construction. Through a post-colonial lens, this process is seen as continually influenced by the cultural, ideational, and discursive legacies of the colonial past. Initially, nation-building efforts sought to draw upon traditional norms and symbols, reflecting collective memory and providing legitimacy to the project. However, as modernization has progressed, the ruling elite must adapt these constructs to align with the features and demands of modernity.

Although Qatar, like other Gulf countries, is diverse in terms of tribal history, and also culturally, ethnically, and even linguistically, a homogenous identity is sought following the Western framework for the modern state. As a result, the creation of modern state structures and cultural institutions may not fit well in the local context, upon which a hegemonic debate between modernity versus

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tradition according to Western standards is imposed. In this case, Qatar, with its tribal, Islamic, and Arab and Persian identities, has to somehow co-exist and merge into one identity despite its inherent diversity.

A complete separation between the state and religious institutions as in the European context may not be applicable to Qatar and other Gulf states. The distinction between private and public is much more complicated, and the state and societal relations are intertwined. This is a result of the context and historical background of the country through which the state came into being, i.e., tribes and foreign protection and presence in the region. Qatar like many other states around the world uses selective re-imagining of the past as a tool of nation-building through constant everyday reminders invoked in historical and cultural touchstones. The focus of nationalist projects is mostly the past, and as such the present is mostly forgotten or remembered only subconsciously. This article highlighted the foundations of Qatari nationalism and how it has become influential and been communicated through and to the people.

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