

**“Out with the New, in with the Old? Navigating the Interplay of
Modernity and Traditionalism in Qatari State-Led Nation-Building”**
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Course “States and Societies in the Gulf Monarchies”
Taught by Professor Laurence Louër
Spring 2018

This paper has received the *Kuwait Program at Sciences Po
Student Paper Award*

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'Modernity in the desert! The latest joke in a world full of jokes.' – Qatari poet Soad Al Kuwari (quoted in Cooke, 2014: 163)

I. Introduction

The above quotation is telling in discussing the processes of modernity in the Gulf in a wider context and certainly in reference to Qatar specifically. While the terminology of 'modernisation' and 'modernity' carry an aspect of imprecision, they are equally of utility. Modernity in the Gulf resembles initially the embrace of the 'nation-state framework' (Rabbat, 2014: 23), and subsequently the drive to adapt the state and society to oil production, including high infrastructural modernisation, educational reforms and an influx of foreign labour to meet the demands of rapid development. As such, the reference to 'modernity' in the Gulf is not a pejorative one, nor is it presented as a binary dichotomy against some sort of 'primitive' native population (Cooke, 2014: 7). Indeed, this essay argues that it is the state that fails to reconcile modernity in Qatar, and not that there is a fundamental incongruity between the 'modern' and 'traditional' in the Gulf. The prevailing significance of the influx of a foreign population – comprising a diverse multitude of cultures – has been the creation of demographic imbalances, that in most cases has put indigenous citizens in a minority in the Gulf (Gulf Labour Markets and Migration, n.d.). As such, to adapt to these trends, Gulf states – to varying degrees – 'have undertaken steps to promote national identity' and promote 'a stronger sense of national belonging' (The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, 2016: 1). Demographic concerns remain 'a prominent feature of policy agendas across the GCC states' (Sleiman-Hadar, 2014: 4) and are a residual aspect of post-oil development agendas (as will be discussed).

Focusing on Qatar more specifically, the state is one that resembles an example of pervasive rentier wealth, demographic imbalance and a dedicated nation-building agenda; a key mixture of dynamics that make it vital to study. Additionally, as argued by Fromherz (2012: 31), Qatari society is composed of a 'complex and real set of historical and social influences' which continue to shape and impact the population, and therefore – as forwarded in this essay – Qatar should not be considered simply as 'an empty container into which oil and progress are poured'.

This essay will, having established the theoretical and practical foundations for Qatari nation-building, examine a collection of the methods through which the Qatari state has attempted to build a nation in practice. After this, an answer will be provided as to the extent that the Qatari state has offered a clear national-identity to which the population of Qatar can assimilate. The indications are that the Qatari state is implementing an unclear and imprecise vision of an ideal national-identity, which has produced similarly inconsistent approaches toward the nation from below. This stems from the fact that the Qatari government, under the watchful eye and hand of Shiekh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, is simultaneously appealing to a limited Qatari national identity and to a more holistic one encompassing the inclusion of the foreign worker population. This inconsistency is transposed into a confused conception of national identity, whereby it simultaneously seeks to placate reactionary conservatives resistant to change *and* promote inclusivity and all of its discontents. Said result is somewhat predictable owing to the foundations of Qatari

citizenship - predicated upon political, legal and societal imbalances between the native and foreign populations – and the Qatari monarchy's resistance to reforming said system for fear of destabilising an established status quo.

II. Framing national-identity and nation-building in the Gulf

In addressing theoretical approaches towards nation-building in the Gulf, it should be noted that the rentier state Gulf monarchies have traditionally been 'largely excluded' (Mitchell, 2016: 59). At least part of this can be explained by a strong focus on resource wealth as the sole legitimiser under earlier rentier state theorists (see Luciani, 1987: 76). This logic renders nation-building strategies unnecessary in Gulf elite approaches with generous disbursements and neopatrimonialism preventing the necessitation of concerns for 'domestic bases of support or legitimacy' (Gray, 2011: 6). Nonetheless, these early rentier theoretical formulations fail to answer questions as to why a state like Qatar – 'the quintessential rentier state' (Mitchell, 2016: 67) – would dedicate so much time, attention and resources to nation-building. Instead, oil has been both a blessing and a 'curse' for the Gulf states (Gray, 2011: 24) - like Qatar - that have opened their doors to large numbers of foreign workers and other processes of modernity as an intrinsic aspect of quickly adopting an oil economy. Adaptation has remained a perennial concern for the Gulf states, but the necessity of further nation-building and identity construction has been given real impetus under the 'grand reform plans' (Mills, 2018) – such as Qatar's National Vision 2030. These plans seek to adapt the respective states to a post-oil future and will inevitably restructure the 'social contract(s)' of state-society relations (Kinninmont, 2017: 26). The careful maintenance of a national-identity represents an attractive parallel source of legitimacy and cohesion.

As such, Qatar has sought to meet foreign demographic and internal tribal dynamics from early post-independence (discussed later) and legitimation of reform in a modern-context, with top-down nation-building aimed at providing a cohesive national identity. Theoretically, this assertion is also based on Paul Brass' instrumentalist approach towards ethnicity and nationalism as 'social and political constructions', in which elites 'draw upon, distort, and sometimes fabricate materials from the cultures of groups' often 'to gain political and economic advantage' (Brass, 1991: 8). National identity is therefore not always something primordial and bottom-up (see Geertz, 1973) but also a top-down tool that serves elite purposes, i.e. delivering cohesion in the absence of a primordial cohesive identity.

The implication is therefore that identities are forces that can be co-opted by states and elites to serve political purposes, and that this is a process that is occurring in the Gulf, including Qatar. This is especially true considering the forces at play, balancing historical traditions with rapid modernisation, within a wider context of the minority demographics of the Gulf respective countries. Such processes have opened the door to nation-building practices, with the aim to 'establish group cohesion, legitimize institutions and authority, and inculcate particular values and behaviours in society' (Mitchell, 2016: 59). Additionally, Al-Malki (2016: 268), conceptualises successful contemporary nation-building as a consistent agenda that can 'promote inclusiveness', and 'embrace previously marginalized identities'. It is this framing that gains credence under the 'Social Development' pillar of the National Vision 2030 (2008: 11). These nation-building interests occur despite predictions to

the contrary by early rentier state theorists, as well as by hyper-globalists such as Ohmae (1995), who would predict a diminished role for the nation and state institutions in an increasingly globalised world.

III. The emergence of the Qatari nation-state and the necessitation of nation-building

The internal dynamics of Qatar before *and* after independence in 1971 are integral to understanding the decisions undertaken by the al-Thani ruling family. Qatar, for example, 'had a population of less than 30,000 up until the start of serious oil exploitation in the 1950s' (Mednicoff, 2016: 112), and was still heavily influenced by 'tribal arrangements' (Fromherz, 2013: 21). The growing oil economy and 'the desire on the part of the government to develop the non-oil sectors of the economy' contributed to a high population growth rate, with the developing economy attracting foreign labour immigration of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labour (Nafi, 1983: 4-6). This labour supply of varied skill sets from outside of Qatar's borders enabled rapid development both in terms of natural resource extraction and infrastructural projects (Babar, 2015: 138). The development program proved financially and politically advantageous to the ruling al-Thani dynasty through entrenching the dynasty with rentier income, while enabling the provision of highly lucrative socio-economic benefits for the Qatari citizens, and employment for foreign workers. Nonetheless, changes to the demographic profile of Qatar - occurring in tandem with oil discovery and ferocious extraction - had incumbent upon it some poison in the otherwise very rewarding chalice.

While the British protectorate period between 1916 and 1971 certainly involved consistent exertions of interest and control in both internal and external affairs (Fromherz, 2012: 74-6), it did not involve drastic reformulations of the 'cultural context' of Qatar (Al-Malki, 2016: 254). Instead, Al-Malki argues that the alterations to traditional Qatari culture came with the arrival of 'foreign workers, satellite and the internet, and Western education' (Al-Malki, 2016: 255). Furthermore, contemporary concerns of demographics are reflected in the hesitance of the Qatari government to draw attention to data on Qatari versus non-Qatari population statistics, in order to avoid displaying 'fragility', 'imbalance' (Babar, 2015: 139; Fargues, 1993: 3) or cultural erosion. In a country where Qatari citizens have been a minority population for the entirety of its independence and stood at 17% of total population in 2010 (Babar, 2015: 139), identity and cohesion are certainly factors to be considered by policy-makers. As a result, while Qatar does not exhibit the same commitments and push-pull dynamics as that of a liberal-democratic state, it is certainly not unaware of the unique component parts of its own society (Babar, 2014: 406). It is unsurprising therefore that its demographic make-up 'interacts with almost every facet of domestic policy-making in the country' (Babar, 2015: 145). This further signifies the aforementioned limitations of early rentier state theory.

A key manifestation of the concerns and balancing act performed by the government in regard to native and non-native has been the legal exclusivity of citizenship, which has key implications for the state's nation-building agenda. Notably there have been the 'norms of exclusion' (Babar, 2014: 403) ingrained in Qatari citizenship. This is a key foundational point of division in Qatar, as outlined in Edward Said's discourse on identity and *otherness* (1993: 35), in which groups are 'constructed in counter-distinction' to one another (Brian, 2002:

1008). The conferral of citizenship by *jus sanguinis* is a stark example of this otherness and exclusivity, in which legal status is based on descent, as opposed to *jus soli* (citizenship determined by place of birth). Babar's examination of Qatari citizenship law reflects that the 'rights to nationality are heavily guarded' and the exclusivity of citizenship is in plain sight (Babar, 2014: 414); a fact that owes itself to the valuable nature of Qatari citizenship itself, and the desire of the government 'not to dilute these benefits by naturalising the foreign workers' (Kinninmont, 2013: 51). Owing to this value, as argued by multiple academics (Mednicoff, 2016: 114; Kinninmont, 2013), citizenship rules are unlikely to see drastic reform towards inclusivity, which therefore maintains an important distinction between Qataris and non-Qataris. This distinction in one sense resembles an ethnic national identity through tightly-controlled legal distinctions but does not resemble the presence of a national identity in a more *holistic* sense. As such, the above represents a key exploration of the presence of cultural and legal dichotomies within the state of Qatar.

Closely related to this persistent distinction between Qataris and outsiders has been the existence of the *kafala* sponsorship system and the implications of such for nation-building. Said system involved the regulation of foreign workers in Qatar, in which said workers must obtain 'a work visa under the sponsorship of a Qatari national' (Babar, 2015: 142), thereby making them legally dependent on the employer. This results in a 'profoundly unequal ... power dynamic' that can ultimately result in exploitation (Babar, 2015: 143; Dito, 2015: 79-100). While Qatar has previously stood out as the Gulf state 'most wedded' to the system and least reformist (Babar, 2015: 143), there are growing indications that this is liable to change (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Nonetheless, the *kafala* system has traditionally offered economic and symbolic benefits to Qatari citizens, with the economic benefits of the cost suppression of employment for Qatari employers, as well as the symbolic assertions of the raised legal status. The *kafala* system therefore represents this exclusive Qatari national-identity in one sense but has been incongruous with the wider national cohesion that the Qatari government seeks to attain under its nation-building agenda, especially under National Vision 2030 (as will be discussed below). Qatari nation-building policy faces an inherent tension in the sense that reform to the *kafala* system appears an ongoing beneficial process towards modern nation-building through removal of legal distinctions between Qatari and non-Qatari citizens but is naturally not something to be embraced by all of the domestic Qatari population. Consequently, the protracted reform plans to the *kafala* system stand as an uneasy and unresolved stumbling block for enacting group cohesion in a wider context.

IV. The nature of nation-building in Qatar

a. Sources of nation-building

There is a tendency to focus on the international source of the state's nation-building, framing Qatar's cultural and heritage projects, for example, predominantly as 'branding' for international consumption (Peterson, 2006: 732-748). Peterson depicts the use of said projects as a promotion of the '*gestalt*'; an 'emotional branding' or image designed at elevating Qatar's world standing as part of its foreign policy agenda (Peterson, 2006: 744). Little attention is therefore given to the domestic implications other than legitimisation deriving from Qatar's increased status (Eggeling, 2017: 720-7). While the notion of

international branding is certainly true, especially when considering Qatar's undeniable assertions regionally and globally since 1995 (Kamrava, 2013: 69-104), it still does not tell the full story. This is particularly true when considering the very selective *type* of heritage that is being promoted, which have certain domestic implications that will be discussed below. Furthermore, while Eggeling argues that this cultural promotion began under Sheikh Hamad from 1995 (2017: 719) – the start of Qatar's truly activist foreign policy - in fact processes of cultural promotion were occurring from independence and even slightly before (Mitchell, 2016: 60; Exell and Rico, 2016: 117-123), prior to Qatar's real international assertiveness. Suggestions therefore are that Qatar's nation-building policies, including the promotion of Qatari heritage and traditional culture through museums and the media, are not simply for an easily-consumable storytelling narrative that can be 'sold' internationally as a component part of foreign policy. This state policy also has domestic implications before Qatar's attempts to exert influence regionally. Nevertheless, Eggeling's notion that heritage and museums are a 'top-down, unilateral tool' to project an 'idealized sense of national identity' (Eggeling, 2017: 727) appears highly relevant, albeit on the domestic population simultaneously.

Another important, more contemporary source of nation-building is National Vision 2030; a vision of future Qatar that entails not just post-oil economic sustainability, but also moulding 'modernization around local culture and traditions' (Qatar National Vision 2030, 2008: 2). Said document, first released in 2008, 'is the main reference for nearly all policy justifications in the country' (Koch, 2014: 1124), and serves to – amongst other things – shape a future vision for a socially cohesive Qatar, both as means to an end (to legitimise potentially unpopular austerity measures) and an end in itself. Mitchell's assessment of the National Vision asserts that the al-Thani monarchy seeks the 'reshaping' of 'a contested and ill-defined view of what it means to be a Qatari national to fit its preferred narrative' (Mitchell, 2016: 60); one that seeks to simultaneously promote the 'uniquely' Qatari traditions and heritage, while reconciling this with the diversity and multiculturalism that modernisation has wrought. This approach is not one that appears altogether coherent in practice, as discussed below. Evidence of this is the supposedly progressive approach to gender in its nation-building program, which remains simultaneously 'grounded in conservative values' (Exell and Rico, 2013: 678). This reform agenda of nation-building has been legitimised and promoted by 'the wife of the former emir, Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, and the former president of Qatar University, Sheikha Abdulla Al-Misnad' (ibid.). Implicit, therefore, is an approach by the Qatari elite to project a new formulation of the Qatari nation, that simultaneously promotes a conciliatory role towards women and foreign workers as part of a modernist cohesion agenda, while seeking to placate Qatari conservatives through appeals to a distinct historical and 'Islamic' identity (Qatar National Vision 2030, 2008: 11).

b. The methods of Qatari nation-building

A key part of the state's nation-building agenda has been the *use of state media*; an agenda that appears to lack a clear approach under the Qatari state's national goals of identity construction and reformulation. Qatar TV, for example, funded through 'the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage' (Oxford Business Group, 2009: 201) is significant and distinct

from Al-Jazeera in the sense that it markets itself as a *national* media outlet that is inward-looking (Miles, 2013: 42), as opposed to the often outward-looking nature of Al-Jazeera. A comparison between Qatar TV and Al Rayyan TV yields two distinct approaches to nation-building that are not entirely compatible. Qatar TV offers a good example of what Cooke refers to as 'tribal modern' (2014), with programming that well-reflect 'the negotiation between modernity and traditions within the youth culture' (Al-Malki, 2016: 259). Examples of such include programs like *Min Albidaya* (From the Start), that profiles pioneers of Qatar 'from different nationalities who contributed to the building of Qatar' (ibid.); a distinctly modernist approach that promotes the role of foreigners in narratives of Qatar's development. This is balanced with the retention of traditionalism, such as the presenters' strict adoption of 'conservative national attire' (ibid.). This message signifies a clear approach towards retention of tradition *while* promoting an inclusive Qatari national identity. Nonetheless, Al Rayyan TV and the Qatari print media challenge this, with the recently-created Al Rayyan – also a 'state-owned company' that draws upon 'the goals of Qatar National Vision 2030' (Al Rayyan Media Company, n.d.) – promoting 'a distinctive Qatari identity – a tribal one' (Al-Malki, 2016: 258). Through the framing of Qatari identity in the discourse of heritage and tribalism, and the self-description as 'Qatari cultural guardian' (ibid.), the message is that of an exclusive national-identity that does not seek to incorporate the cultures and values of the foreign population. Similarly, the local state-controlled print media goes even further than Al Rayyan in not only 'promoting traditionalism' but also projecting a 'fear of loss of identity' (ibid.); posing itself dichotomously against external cultural influence. The result of such is an inconsistent message on the part of the Qatari state, that simultaneously promotes an inclusive *and* exclusive framing of Qatari national identity, with the Qatar National Vision 2030 failing to provide a clear guide.

Another important aspect of nation-building has been the '*tribal modernity*' of *cultural and heritage projects*, which have occurred since independence, although have increasingly gained impetus. Said projects have provided the dual role of projecting historical continuity from Qatar's pre-statehood and projecting the notion of reconciliation of the traditional and the modern – with the promotion of 'heritage' converting traditions and historical practices into 'resources for the present' (Graham, 2002: 1003). As argued by Exell and Rico, 'national heritage discourse' depicts heritage as 'interacting' with the process of modernity and 'not in opposition to it' (Exell and Rico, 2013: 680), however there remains an air of indecision over the authenticity of these accounts of heritage (Exell, 2014: 54). One major example of said projects in Qatar is the National Museum, which repeatedly promotes the 'al-Thani monarchy as a political and historical reference for the nation' (Al-Malki, 2016: 263), with Al-Mayassa bin Hamad – the sister of the current emir – overseeing the Qatar Museums Authority. The National Museum goes far in promoting reconciliation of the *hadhar* (settled) and *badu* (Bedouin) populations through a melding of narratives, thereby forwarding the notion of a historical unity (Mitchell, 2016: 67). This occurs despite Nagy's notion that the *badu/hadhar* distinction remains relevant today and is 'an important source of social differentiation among Qataris' (Nagy, 2006: 129; see also The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, 2016: 6). As such, said reconciliation attempts are clear evidence of the role of the state in promoting a distinct narrative of cohesion, even if not entirely reflective of reality. In addition, the National Museum depicts viscerally 'the ancient and recent past side by side' (Exell and Rico, 2013: 675), with the architect Jean Nouvel explicitly describing his

intention to display the 'vanishing Bedouin cultures of Qatar in an effort to embrace the realities of a rapidly urbanizing society' (Nouvel, 2014: 81-2). This is equally reflected in the Museum of Islamic Art that combines 'cubism' (an originally European modernist artistic movement) with 'Islamic motifs' (Mitchell, 2016: 67). Here, the Qatari state's desire is clear in using culture and heritage projects as a symbol of the legitimacy of a historical identity coexisting in the context of modernising forces.

A final example is the *nationalist rhetoric of urban development* in Qatar, with urban development described by Koch as 'central to the monarchy's domestic nation-building agenda' (Koch, 2014: 1121). Gharipour (2012: 203), for example, notes that since the 1970s, architects in Qatar have sought to incorporate contemporary reconstruction techniques into 'historical architectural traditions' since the 1970s, including the Um Said Mosque and the University of Qatar. Again, this shows a drive to create a clear synthesis of tradition and modernity, which serves symbolic purposes in reconciling modernity as an aspect of the Qatari nation. The Msheireb project in downtown Doha, that begun in 2010, is another contemporary example of this. The goal, as expressed through the Msheireb *Enrichment Centre* is to 'showcase Qatar's glorious past and soaring ambitions for the future' (Koch, 2014: 1128). This phraseology is steeped in the predominant Qatari state language of nation-building as embodied in National Vision 2030; combining tradition with modernity and multi-culturalism. The Lusail City project offers similar rhetoric aiming at retaining 'heritage and traditions, especially in a challenging world where globalisation and worldwide communication threaten to dominate' (Lusail City website, quoted in Koch, 2014: 1130). Taken as a whole, there appears a continued instrumentalisation of architecture and urban development post-independence as part of the nation-building agenda, that serves to adapt the traditional to the modern. This is certainly explained by the cultural infusion that occurred as a result of high foreign labour immigration and a general trend of modernisation over a short period of time.

V. Assessing Qatari nation-building: The failures of unifying a diverse population

In assessing the Qatari nation-building agenda, it must be considered that the Qatari government has been anything but consistent in its approach at delivering a clear national-identity. The necessity is evident, owing to the needs of legitimising a National Vision that will inevitably involve compromise on the part of the citizen population, as well as reconciling the protracted demographic imbalance that pits Qatari citizens as a clear minority within their own borders. While attempting to promote unity, and narratives of 'generosity or openness to outsiders' including, for example, National Day celebrations (Koch, 2016: 50), the Qatari state continues to favour the citizen population in key ways. As a result, nationality remains an integral axis 'of social differentiation in Qatar' (Nagy, 2006: 122), especially considering the elevated status of citizens in comparison to the migrant population. While other Qatari nation-building initiatives tend to suggest a desire to incorporate diversity into its conception of the nation, the citizenship and the legacy of the *kafala* system resemble key obstacles. Said systems reaffirm a 'hierarchy of power between Qatari employers and their foreign employees' (Nagy, 2006: 122), and is in many senses incongruous with modern 'human rights norms' of legal equality within a nation-state

(Babar, 2015: 142). As a result, the *kafala* system has represented until now one of multiple indications of the current tensions in Qatari nation-building, with the citizenship system continuing to represent this. The fact that Qatar recognises that foreign labour dependence will continue into the future (Babar, 2014: 420), but is inconsistent in attempting to reconcile said population into a coherent nation-state, indicates a lack of consistency.

Moving away from the symbolism of legal parameters, issues also lie in the active attempts to promote the unification agenda, for example the National Day (a celebration of Qatar's supposed unification of distinct tribal groups into statehood in 1878) which only began in 2007. While the intention is clear in projecting a notion of unity amongst the citizenry, representing continuity from Qatar's initial creation, this belies the truth. A glaring example of such, as noted by Koch (2016: 51) were the 'large numbers of single East and South Asian men ... denied entry' to National Day in 2013, on account of the supposed protection of 'family-only zones'. This rejection during the rhetorically inclusive National Day is symbolic and indicates a residually prejudicial approach towards some 'outsiders'. In addition, events after the 2009 National Day sparked an 'online culture war' (Rajakumar, 2014: 246) displaying further dichotomies of 'otherness'. This occurred after an *expatriate* professor posted a blog entitled "Shame on Qatar on National Day" criticising the raucous and occasionally aggressive behaviour of Qatari youths during National Day. The result was a tense online debate within Qatar over 'who had the right to criticize the country' and displayed a clear 'Us Against Them' dialogue amongst the domestic Qataris and the expatriate population (Rajakumar, 2014: 247). Taken together, what these examples symbolise is a discrepancy between the state-level narrative and realities, thereby indicating a policy that, at best, is still in development stages and, at worst, is failing.

In addition, the promotion of the heritage projects for cohesive purposes - a narrative that carries with it clear importance for encouraging conciliation amongst potential societal cleavages - has encompassed failures and has not truly come to bear fruit. Predominantly, this is clear in the continuation of the *hadar-badu* distinction in reality and in popular discourse (Mitchell, 2016: 67; Nagy, 2006: 129), as well as the continuation of a tribal hierarchy that is a 'widely acknowledged, albeit surreptitiously discussed truth' amongst Qataris (Al Naama, 2013). Examples of such are clear in the perpetuation of *wasta* - or social relationships and advantages accrued based on 'who you know' - which is closely entwined with residual tribal links and is a 'glass ceiling in terms of careers in certain fields' (Al Naama, 2013). Ultimately, the Qatari state's promotion of inclusion has failed to overcome these societal exclusivities within the nation thus far, with the print media and Al Rayyan TV certainly not aiding the cause through continuing to support a focus on traditional allegiances and a resistance to wider inclusivity.

A final area of failure relates to gender. While discussions of gender in Qatar certainly warrant more attention than space allows in this work, in reference to the modernisation agenda, it can be said that, somewhat unsurprisingly, reconciliation of women in the nation-building agenda has been mixed. This is in spite of claims of the National Vision 2030 (2008: 11) to wholly promote the role of women. While Sheika Hind (daughter of the emir) has been a strong advocate of women's advancement in education, for example, Al-Malki argues in her blog (2010) that residual gender roles remain, as a 'sign of traditions' that continue to determine 'power relations'. The government in reality tends to promote a gentle reform agenda - with vague talk of enhancing 'women's capacities' (National Vision

2030, 2008: 12) - that simultaneously allows for the appeasement of conservatives within modernisation. For example, within the context of modernisation, Al-Dosari (2014) writes of her experience in being rejected from a Qatari event celebrating the women of jazz (an event that is certainly an example of modernity and globalisation in Qatar), on account of being a woman. While this is anecdotal, the suggestion is clear that the Qatari state's attempt to reconcile the population - foreigners and citizens, men and women - under a cohesive agenda of modernity has been inconsistently delivered, with a continued tendency from the state to appease conservatives within society on certain key issues.

Clearly, the above indicates the presence of dual trends within Qatari society: modernity of openness to 'other cultures' (Al-Malki, 2016: 266), as well as a traditional and conservative culture that focuses on a uniformity of distinctly Qatari identity and is reactionary against foreign influence within Qatar. Qatari nation-building, as such, has failed to reconcile these dual trends, and in a broader sense failed to decide on which version of the nation it would like to promote, especially considering the current political and economic system of vested interests that Qataris have in the status quo.

VI. Conclusion

Ultimately, in Qatar there appears equal part pride and fear of modernity. Said phenomenon has enabled the respective Gulf monarchies to develop and offer unprecedented quality of life to their citizens, while continually challenging the very conception of what constitutes their respective nations. Echoing the epigraphic quotation at the beginning of this paper, scepticism remains over how comfortably the effects of modernity have been reconciled in contemporary Qatar.

In regard to Qatari nation-building, the intention is clear but the methods lack clarity and represent a major obstacle to fulfilling the wider goals of uniting a diverse population. There appears a dual track, in which, firstly, there is a national-identity that is constructed in a very limited sense – rooted in the language of tradition, and promoted by many within the media, for example. Secondly, there is the more inclusive national-identity, that seeks to reconcile the foreign population and the processes of modernity with the traditions and heritage of the indigenous Qatari population, as embodied in the cultural and heritage projects, the conceptualisation of National Day, and through Qatar TV.

As mentioned, Al-Malki (2016: 268) - for one - depicts successful nation-building as a program that can 'promote inclusiveness', 'eradicate discrimination', and 'embrace previously marginalized identities'. This is more symbolic of the second track mentioned above, but Qatari nation-building as a whole cannot be considered to deliver on these lofty targets. Considering the foundations of exclusivity built into Qatari citizenship, and the hesitance that the monarchy has in upsetting the conservative sectors of Qatari society, progress towards 'inclusivity' and 'eradicating discrimination' will remain hampered. As a result, reform to this sector will be integral to making any sort of substantive progress towards an inclusive national identity, while the presence of external cultural influence will continue to undermine restrictive conceptions of national identity. Inherently therefore, Qatari nation-building remains trapped between ambition and reality, and between inclusivity and exclusivity.

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