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The Process of Building Identity in the Gulf / the Case of Qatar

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The massive influx of foreign residents and workforce led to the exacerbation of the demographic imbalance in the GCC countries. As the rise of expatriate population may contribute to the economic growth, it may have an enormous impact on the regional social landscape. Therefore, the governments of the GCC States are trying to shape the process of national identity construction and attempt to rediscover their sense of self. During the past years, the debate about demographic imbalance has intensified in the region. It could be argued that the phenomena of “a minority in their homeland” mainly occurred due to the expansion of the oil industry, which has led to the inflow of a massive number of foreigners, leading to raise the concerns among GCC countries about the stability of the national identity in light of the disproportionate population demographics. Since the concept of identity from the social science perspective projects it as a fluid and a dynamic concept. This means, identity undergoes changes and transformations but this occurs in a state of relative stability. Consequently, this helped the Gulf States have led an up-bottom process of national identity construction by applying certain strategies for two related reasons. First, to establish a common sense of national identity among the locals that would make them feel distinctive from other countries. Secondly, through this instrument of building a national identity the GCC States would balance between the rapid modernization that is occurring within their borders and their indigenous values. Qatar is no exception in regard to what is happening in the Gulf. In fact, the last years has witnessed a rapid increase in the foreign population. This has resulted in establishing a number of cultural and national projects that aim to consolidate a sense of a Qatari national identity among the locals. The paper argues that Qatar has followed several procedures in order to construct and consolidate the sense of national identity within its nationals. First, this is done through revitalizing their heritage and past. Second, Qatar started to focus more on celebrating national occasions and creating a common sense of al-mwatana, belonging or loyalty. Third, they have put significant emphasis on the educational system. Finally, the use of Arabic language in Qatar University is considered as a mean to enhance the sense of national identity. In order to pursue this argument, this paper first discusses the concept of identity and how countries built their national identities. Secondly, the paper addresses the debate about the absence of a nationalist

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history in the GCC as understood elsewhere in the Middle East. In this regard, it would focus on how tribal and religious identities were reinforced by the GCC states and how this has influenced the emergence of a coherent national identity. The second part will discuss the construction of Qatari heritage in the context of pre-conceived ideas of 'cultural heritage' predominant in the global and regional spheres that operate in this country. In the third part, the article would examine the process of constructing this national idea and how it's been done. Finally, the paper would assess the measures used by Qatar in order to build a coherent national identity, and address what may challenge such coherence.