RESEARCH ARTICLE

Presentation of Qatari Identity at National Museum of Qatar: Between Imagination and Reality

Mariam I. Al-Hammadi

This article discusses the proposal of the presentation of a single homogenous identity at the new National Museum of Qatar (NMoQ), due to open in 2019, presenting a discussion of Qatari identity and the historical factors that create such an identity. The article raises a series of questions for the theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of presentation of the Qatari identity, such as which form of Qatari identity should be presented at NMoQ: a single homogenous identity, or the diversity that exists within the national population? If the Museum's presentation focused on a single identity, how far would such a presentation be accepted and perceived by the Qatari public? This paper also considers the impact of the current political crisis, the blockade against Qatar by some of its neighbours and the severing of diplomatic relationships, which has resulted in Qatari citizens coming together in a show of unity.

Introduction

Recently, national museums have mushroomed in the Arabian Gulf to become a regional phenomenon. Evident within this phenomenon is the intention of the Arabian Gulf countries to exhibit their national identities, a challenging process in terms of representing the diverse national communities; such a focus reflects the important roles that museums play in the politics of culture. In the Arabian Gulf, museums are principally founded and financed by the state, which makes the state the main architect and policy-maker of the museums' ideologies. States in the Gulf refer precisely to the power and interest of the ruling families; therefore, the ruling family in Qatar has full sovereignty and ultimate authority over museums and national cultural representation policies. Cultural representation and museums in Qatar thus follow the ruling family's interests, who initiate policies that support them by connecting loyalty to the state with loyalty to the ruling family. This is the case especially if we consider that since its establishment in 2005, the head of the Museums Authority in Qatar has been HE Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the sister of the current Emir. Furthermore, the organisation of Qatar Museums is supervised directly by the Emiri Diwan, the seat of Government, which is unlike other organisations in Qatar.

This article discusses the concept and challenges of presenting a single Qatari identity within the forthcoming National Museum of Qatar, due to open in 2019, a concept that assumes that Qataris traditionally lived a dual lifestyle as one people, moving seasonally between the sea and desert. This single-identity concept and its assumed presentation at the National Museum was first developed by a political scientist based in Qatar, Jocelyn Sage-Mitchell, in a paper entitled 'We're all Qataris here: the Nation-Building Narrative of the National Museum of Qatar' (2016), and has been subsequently discussed at academic workshops; the National Museum itself has not disclosed its approach to the narrative of Qatari identity. Therefore, this paper considers whether such a theoretical presentation of identity is a good fit for the complex reality of Qatari identity, and what might the challenges be if the National Museum followed this approach.

The National Museum of Qatar

Since 2007, the Qatar National Museum has been under undergoing redevelopment as the new National Museum of Qatar (NMoQ), designed by the French architect, Jean Nouvel. The NMoQ project is scheduled to open in April 2019 with a series of galleries representing different aspects of Qatar's history and heritage. The Museum is the vision of the Father Emir, HH Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani and his daughter, the Chairperson of the Qatar Museums, HE Sheikha Al Mayassa. The new architecture is built around the historic palace of the previous ruler, Sheikh Abdulla bin Jassim Al Thani (1913–1948), which also housed the old Qatar National Museum (1975–2007) in a renovation that won the Agha Khan Prize for Architecture. The palace has political significance as the place from where Sheikh Abdulla ruled the country during the presence of two political competitors in the region: the Ottomans and the British. Through its programmes, exhibitions, media and publications, the first Qatar National

Qatar University, QA
m.alhamadi@qu.edu.qa

Museum strived to develop experiences that showcased Qatari communities, identities, heritage and culture, distinguishing *Bedouin* and *Hadar*, two distinct forms of Qatari identity connected to life on the coast (*Hadar*) and life in the desert (*Bedouin*). The museum was developed to interpret Qatar's history through objects and archaeology. The first section included the Old Emiri Palace, and consisted of nine buildings which presented the material culture of *Hadar,* including everyday objects, jewellery, domestic interior and decoration, costumes and traditional architecture. In addition to that, the Old Emiri Palace displayed and presented the history of the royal family and their personal objects, as well as their diplomatic relationships, especially with the British during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The second section was a new building called the Museum of the State that presented the chronological development of Qatar from pre-history to the discovery of oil in the mid-twentieth century, and included archaeology, Islamic history, natural history, geology, oil and the material culture of the *Bedouin*. The third section was the Marine section, added in 1977, that included an aquarium and the historic pearling industry, representing the longstanding relationship between Qatar and the sea. This continued in the fourth section, the Lagoon, a natural extension of the sea which was used to exhibit different types of historic *dhows* and boats used by *Hadar* in their pearl fishing and trading. The fifth section was the Garden, which was built for scientific as well as aesthetic purposes. The Garden contained all kinds of desert plants, especially those of economic importance, such as palm trees, medicinal plants and plants protecting the desert soil from the creeping sand dunes (Exell 2016; Al-Mulla 2013; Al-Khulaifi 1990; Al-Far 1979).

The displays broadened Qatari people's perspective, knowledge and attitude about themselves and their distinctive culture. For instance, until 1975 there was no official historical and cultural archive for the country apart from some political historical documents that had been preserved at the newly-built Emiri Diwan. At that time, the only resource for Qatari people for their culture, history and heritage was through family oral histories and traditions passed down the generations. In 1975, the National Museum came to fill a gap in popular and general knowledge of what was meant by Qatari culture and heritage, and to present the key distinction within Qatari culture that exist between the *Bedouin* and *Hadar* (Al-Mulla, 2013).

However, even such a binary presentation of identity is not representative of the complex reality of Qatari identity, concealing other identities in Qatar, for example the *Hwuil,* and *Baharna*, the African-Qatari, divisions which manifest today in social tensions. Within this discussion, I highlight the inaccuracy and potential negative impact of reducing the complexity still further to a single identity, as argued to be the intention of the new National Museum by Sage-Mitchell (2016). The inaccuracy is highlighted, for example, by the presentation of the identity of African-Qatari people in the Bin Jelmood House Museum (BJH), which opened in Doha in 2015. It is worth

mentioning that BJH was established to display a part of Qatari history, historic slavery in Qatar, that had never been publicly discussed before, rather than focussing on the identity of that society, but inevitably this ethnic and cultural identity is evident in the displays (Al-Mulla, 2017). The next section introduces different approaches to thinking about identity, before moving on to a consideration of the different components of Qatari identity.

What is Identity?

Recently, there has been broad-ranging interest in the concept of identity (Hall 2003, Chandra 2006, Gotham 1999, Ibrahim and Heuer 2015, Fearon 1999). Identity is understood as historically contingent, complicated and socially constructed (Hall 2013, Fearon 1999). Presuming our current concept of identity is trans-historical and transcultural, people's historical understanding of identity remains similar (Fearon 1999, p. 10). This makes it quite difficult to give an adequate statement that can introduce what identity now means. To understand what identity means, we need a theory of discursive practice rather than a theory of knowing the subject. This does not mean, however, abandonment of the subject, but rather a reconceptualization and thinking of the subject in its new displacement within the paradigm (Hall 2003). Identity could refer to any social category that an individual belongs to (Chandra 2006). Chandra states specifically that ethnic identity includes subjective and objective elements. He defines ethnic identity categories as a subset of identity categories, in which an individual obtains membership by descent-based attributes. Those attributes are broad, since they could be associated with descent or even acquired genetically, moving from social identity to ethnic identity and including elements such as height, physical features, skin colour, eye colour and hair type. There are also attributes acquired through historical and cultural inheritance such as place of birth, ancestors' origin, name, language, religion, clan, region, caste, nationality and tribal name. Thus, the subset of ethnic identity is defined by certain restrictions that are impersonal and could only make part of a population, but not a whole (Chandra 2006). In this sense, in Qatar for example, identity could reflect social or ethnic category: social categories include *Hadar,* the elite tribal, *Huwela,* the returning Arabs who travelled to Persia and *Bedu,* the nomadic tribes. Ethnicity is represented by Sunni, Shia' and the descendants of enslaved Africans.

Scholars in history, social science and the humanities raise questions about identity with a strong focus on political science. In political theory, the definition of identity highlights endless arguments on ethnicity, personality, gender, sexuality, nationality and culture in terms of tolerance (Fearon 1999). Furthermore, in international relations, state identity lies at the heart of productive analyses of realism and evaluations of state sovereignty. Fearon argues that identity has a dual sense: social and personal. In a social sense, identity refers to a specific social category, in which people are 'marked by a label and distinguished by rules deciding membership and characteristic features or attributes' (Fearon 1999, p. 2). In contrast, in a personal sense, identity is a distinguishing

characteristic in which the person adopts superior pride or possesses unchangeable social views. Therefore, identity in its present incarnation refers to social category and, simultaneously, to the sources of a person's self-respect and dignity, and sense of self.

As a central point in identity construction studies, the defended community illuminates how unification of a community, for example a national community, strengthens in response to an outside threat. As the forthcoming discussion reveals, the unified nature of Qatari society illustrates the dynamic bond that exists within the complex Qatari social fabric, on the one hand, and between Qatari society and its government on the other hand. Such a bond cannot be easily broken, as the Qatari community identity is a product of social attributions 'and a reflexive process involving internal and external forces and actors' (Sadeq, 2017, p. 109). The Qatari community does not struggle with the what might appear to be the competing interests, traditions, heritages and histories that exist within it; rather, these factors make the Qatari society an interdependent community. Within my discussion of the Qatari identity, I focus on the concept of how the Qataris understand themselves and wish to be recognised according to their historical backgrounds, and how the forthcoming National Museum might productively represent such a complex socio-historical reality.

Qatari identity: A Historical Perspective

By reviewing the historical factors that created Qatari identity, this article argues that any attempt to present Qatari identity as a single homogenous entity would be inaccurate; in addition, the article argues that the cultural diversity of the Qatari community deserves elaboration rather than opacity. A series of questions relating to the theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of presentation of the Qatari identity is raised here, such as: which identity is worth presenting at National Museum of Qatar, a single or a diverse identity? If the Museum's presentation focusses on a single identity, to what extent would this be accepted and how would it be perceived by the Qatari public? Sage-Mitchell's above-mentioned paper (2016) discusses how the State of Qatar is actively promoting symbols, imagery and a particular narrative in order to moderate the social distinctions in favour of creating an inclusive national identity which emphasis the *Bedouin* cultural past, ignoring the existence of the majority *Hadar*, or coastal, community. Furthermore, at the 2017 annual workshop of the three-year QNRF-funded research project, *National Museums and the Public Imagination: A Longitudinal Study of the National Museum of Qatar,*[1] Sage-Mitchell discussed the creation of thousands of photographs and a 20-minute film by the Danish expedition to Qatar in 1959, including the work of the photographer Jette Bang, who documented *Bedouin* culture in Qatar. Sage-Mitchell discussed how these historical artefacts present an undeniable *Bedouin* past which might contradict a single national identity narrative, a narrative that elides the differences between the *Bedouin* and *Hadar* and is arguably the intention of the Qatari state, to present one single identity that the ruling family and Qatari elites belong to.

I ask, would it not be more productive to develop a presentation that could correct misperceptions of Qatari identity, through which it could eliminate internal prejudices against certain Qatari groups, e.g., the *Hawila* and *Baharna*?[2] There is still in the twenty-first century a disdain and indifference within the Qatari community towards the *Hawila* and *Baharna* groups, who in their turn continue to emphasise their Arab identity. Although the historical evidence shows that they are of Arab ethnicity in a Qatari context, prejudicially some Qataris believe that the *Hawila* and *Baharna* are as much Persian as they are Arab. One should remember that there can be no way forward when there is no complete presentation of history; there can be no positive change when elements of change have been denied.

This discussion of the historical construction of Qatari identity refers specifically to the tribes and Arabs who lived in Qatar, and those who were in Qatar and emigrated to Persian coastal regions at certain periods for different economic reasons and then came back to Qatar at different times, resulting in the creation of differences between tribes. If we take society in Qatar and concentrate on identity, for example, we will find that membership in a group is claimed through hierarchy and historical factors. In terms of historical factors, the movement of groups back and forth in the Gulf region and beyond plays a significant role in their recognition of identity. Such hierarchy and historical factors create in Qatar different components of national identity: *Bedouin*, semi-*Bedouin/Hadar* and *Hadar*, which includes *Hawila* (*Arab AlHawila*) and *Baharna* (Al-Nuaimi 1998–99). These components created deep-rooted and robust cultural divisions within the Qatari community itself that cannot be denied, such as distinct cultural traditions, geographic origins, religious sectarianism and economic classes (Sage-Mitchell 2016). To clarify the differences between these components, the following section will reflect briefly on the historical background of each group.

Bedouin or *Bedu* are nomads who wandered the vast desert of the Arabian Peninsula and did not settle in one place for more than one season. They were indifferent to any political territories and boundaries. They did not recognize any political authority or laws other than the authority of the Sheikh of the tribe and the law of the tribe; not that of the state. Those *Bedouin* tribes were not indigenous Qatari, but migrated to Qatar from different places (Al-Shawi 2014). For example, Bni Moura and Al-Ajman migrated from Najd and Ehssa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the Manasir and Nuaim migrated from Trucial Oman. Those tribes entered Qatar in large numbers during the winter season, when the scrub was growing, for grazing their camels. Only two *Bedouin* tribes are considered indigenous Qatari tribes: the large Bni Hajar, and Al-Kabaan, which was a relatively unimportant tribe. Nonetheless, they had branches outside Qatar, Bin Hajar in Ehssa and Al-Kabaan in Bahrain (Zahlan 1979).

Semi-Bedouin/Hadar is not a common term among the Qatari people, nor do many of the authors who have researched Qatari social history, such as Sharon Nagy (2010), Allen J. Fromherz (2013), Ali Alshawi and Andrew

Gardner (2013), mention it. It is a concept developed by Khalid Al-Nuaimi in his study of Qatari society where he identified Qatari tribes who were originally *Bedu* but later on for economic reasons lived a dual lifestyle, moving seasonally between the Qatari desert and coastal villages, tribes such as Al-Maadhid, Al-Douasir, Al-Subai, and some Al-Bu Ainain (Rahman 2005). Thus, Qatar had both settled *Hadar* sections and *Bedu* sections (Al-Nuaimi 1998–99). The royal family considers itself one of those families that is originally *Bedu* but lived a dual lifestyle mostly for economic reasons. The family originally were Al-Thani descendants from the Al-Maadhid tribe, which at the end of the 17th century migrated from Al-Ashayqir in central Najd, a home for various *Bedouin* tribes, and then to Qatar where they moved into different places—Sikak, Al-Ruwais, Al-Zubara, Fuwairet and finally Doha (Rahman 2005). Soon after moving from the desert at Al-Ashayqir to the Qatari coastal towns, as a result of their trading and pearl fishing, they became well-known among the Qatari tribes for their modernisation and development (Al-Abdulla 2006). Their economic activity gave them social and economic status above other Qatari tribes (Zahlan 1979), as did their alliances with the Ottomans and British, even though they were not large in number (Al-Abdulla 2006). Perhaps this is the main reason there is huge emphasis nowadays in Qatar on the *Bedouin* culture and heritage, which the ruling family encourages.

Although these semi-*Bedouin/Hadar* tribes wandered the desert, they did not venture further than the Qatari political boundaries. They settled in one place for a maximum of one generation. In the winter, they moved to the desert, where there were pastures for their animals; in the summer, to the coastal villages where they joined the pearling boats, which were the main source of income for Qatar. For example, in 1829, the actual population of Al-Bida (now Doha) was four hundred people belonging to Arab tribes, but during the pearling season the population grew to about twelve hundred (Rahman 2005). Those tribes were known for their social and trade relationships with the *Hadar* community (Al-Nuaimi 1998–99). For example, tribes such as Al-Maadhid (Al-Thani part of), Al-Bu Ainain, Al-Muraikhi, Al-Bu Kuwara, Al-Musallam, Al-Mohannadi, Al-Mannai, and Al-Nuaimi were involved together in trade and pearl fishing (Rahman 2005).

Hadar is the community that inhabits coastal villages all over the Qatari coast; they do not experience desert life. Examples include Bu-Kuwara, Al-Mahandah, Al-Mannai, Al-Bin Ali, Al-Sulithi, Al-Sada, Al-Khulifat, Al-Sudan, Al-Bu Samait, Al-Bu Ainain, Al-Kubaisi, and Al-Hmaidat (Lormier 2013). The *Hadar* community was known for its large dependence on the sea, which was the main element of the community's commercial life. Some *Hadar* tribes monopolized coastal villages or specific neighbourhoods as their homes and did not share them with any other *Hadar* tribes; therefore, these areas are known by the tribe's name.[3] However, there also were many neighbourhoods and coastal areas inhabited by multiple *Hadar, Al-Hawila* and *Baharna* families and tribes, so it was not necessary to be of the same tribe (Al-Jaber 2002).

Al-Hawila families consisted of, for example, Al-Marzuqi, Al-Obaidli, Al-Hammadi, Al-Jaber, Al-Nasuri, Al-Fakhro and Al-Mahmoud. J. G. Lorimer defines *Al-Hawila* as Sunni Arabs living in Bahrain, Al-Ahsa, Qatar and the coast of Oman. They moved and lived for years on the Persian coast, and returned individually and in groups to the Arabian Gulf later on. The name *Hawila* is a title given to them by the Arabs when they returned from the Persian coast to live again among them. Lorimer states that *Al-Hawila* in Qatar included about 1000 inhabitants and another 1000 in Al-Wakra (Lorimer 2013, v. 16). *Baharna* families consisted of Al-Sayigh, Al-Hadad, Al-Majid and Al-Safar. Most *Baharna* obtained their family names from the professions that they inherited in the family.

Given the differences in lifestyle of those three groups, their material cultural differs as well, such as clothing, everyday objects, customs and traditions. These differences are well-documented in studies such as *The Saduoo in Qatar: Technique and Values* (2000) by Khoula Al-Manai, *The Qatari Women's Costumes and Ornaments* (1997) by Al-Hamdan et al., *The Treasures of Qatar National Museum: Qatar National Museum* (1984) by Najla Al-Ezi, *Al-Qesas Al-Shabia fe Qatar* (1984) and *Al-Owghnia Al-Shaabia fe Qatar* (1990) by Mohamed Al-Douik, *Qatari Costume* (2003) by Najla Al-Wahabi, *The Economic and Social Development of Qatar* (2002) by Moza Al-Jaber, *Directory of the Gulf, Oman and Central Arabian Peninsula* by G.G Lorimer, and *Qatar on Directory of the Gulf* by Department of Documents and Research Emiri Diwan (1981).

The Persian coastal region of the Arabian Gulf was the scene of the migratory movements of Arab tribes from the Arabian Peninsula to Persia because of conflict or the desire for better opportunities, commercial or political ambition, or fear of Mongol invasion (Siddiq 2012). It was also noted from the names of Arab migratory tribes that most returned to the Arabian Peninsula, such as Al-Kaabi, Al-Kuwari, Al-Mohannadi, Al-Hammadi, Al-Mazouqi, Al-Sulaiti and Al-Obaidli (Siddiq 2012). In correspondence between Sheikh Abdulla bin Jassim and the Emir of Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, Bin Jiluwi on 28 March 1955, Sheikh Abdullah answered Ben Jiluwi's question about the residents of Al-Odaid area, explaining that the first inhabitants of Al-Odaid were people said to be Bni Hammad (Al-Hammadi) and Abadlah (Al-Obaidli). They descended from Najd, and their Arab roots were preserved. They lived in Al-Odaid for a long time. However, they quarrelled and fought with each other and went to stay in Qatar for a long time before they migrated to the Persian coast (Abu Aliya 1991).[4]

Today, we note the differences in the identification of these tribes returning to the Arabian Peninsula, depending on the period of time when they returned. Consequently, classifying them into two groups—Arab tribes nicknamed *Qbaeil,* who returned earlier than the second group of Arab tribes nicknamed *Al-Hawila,* created discrimination between the two groups (Siddiq 2012). Even the Qatari constitution differentiates between the *Al-Hawila* group according to the time of their return home, regardless of their original Arab roots. Some of them hold passports as Qatari nationals and some hold Qatari passports as

naturalised Qatari, which is written clearly in the passport. Other members of tribes that have branches in Qatar and have lived in Bahrain since the nineteenth century, such as Al-Bu Kuwara, Al-Mannai, Al-Kaabi and Al-Sulaiti were given Qatari nationality immediately after they moved to Qatar during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries without questioning their loyalty.

It is worth reflecting here that Law No. (38) for the year 2005 of the Qatari constitution considers that Qataris are mainly (1) those who settled in Qatar prior to 1930 and maintained their normal residence therein and retained their Qatari nationality until the date of employment, (2) Law No. (2) for the year 1961 referred to, (3) Whoever has been proved to be of Qatari origin, even if the conditions stipulated in the preceding clause have not been met and issued as an Emiri Decree, (4) the Qatari nationality has been returned to them according to the provisions of the law, (5) a person born in Qatar or abroad to a Qatari father under the preceding clauses. Whereas, Qatari by naturalization is given to, (1) those who were born in Qatar or abroad to a Qatari father by naturalization, and (2) the naturalization of a child born in Qatar shall be for unknown parents. The latter shall be born in Qatar unless proven otherwise (Al-Meezan 2018). This law raises the question of how a Qatari person defines him- or herself as a Qatari if it is not through nationality, and if the constitution differentiates between people from the same origin.

Variation in the return time thus leads to discrimination, which is the basis for the new identity groups that arrived later (Lorimer 2013, V.16). This new identity and the Qatari nationality law are a sign of questioning their Arab identity. Similar discrimination faces the *Baharna* group as a result of differences in doctrine between the *Baharna* and the *Hadar* tribes, which has also led to a questioning of their Arab identity and a consideration of them as outsiders. I also note a tendency by the Qatari tribes to refer to the Shi'ites and the *Baharna* as one unified group.

The complex historical factors that make up the Qatari community cannot be easily overlooked in the context of national identity debates. This is particularly so if we consider the arguments in the Arabian Peninsula states regarding the effects of globalization, modernization and rapid change on the creation or presentation of identity and Islamic modernity. This debate has focused on the rupture with the past, the relationship between tradition and innovation, and the relationship between heritage and modernity in the region (Exell 2016). The tensions inherent in the changes and adoption of new values and practices, and the threat that faces local cultural identity as a result of mass foreign population migration to the country all affect the important question of identity construction and presentation at the new National Museum.

Museums, Identity and Community
Museums differ considerably in the way they understand their roles in the community, country, nation and presentation of ethnic, national and cultural identity (Loukaitou-Sideris & Grodach 2004). Traditionally museums have been deeply involved in the construction and interpretation of identity and cultural history. Instead

of serving as democratic arenas that debate and exchange ideas, they have been places that legitimated and consecrated the principles of the bourgeoisie and the state; thus, they strengthened the values of a selected segment of society while excluding other segments (Loukaitou-Sideris & Grodach 2004, Alexander & Alexander 2008). As museums became more culturally prominent, they have become central arenas in the 'culture and history wars' (Loukaitou-Sideris & Grodach 2004, p. 50). Ever since the 1970s, European museums have been concerned with social responsibilities and identity presentation. Consequently, museums transformed their presentations from traditional grand narratives to a larger acknowledgement of local and community histories (Grincheva 2015). Museums became social forums, where different perspectives and voices were shared and highlighted (Grincheva 2015). Therefore, museums have become vehicles that construct and articulate new forms of societies and identity, whilst also serving as sites of conflict, where groups fight for appropriate representation, interpretation and definition. In this, museums have played an important role in generating nation–states and national citizens (Levitt & Cali 2016).

The function of national museums generally focusses on defining national culture and national identity; national museums can be considered as a signature and statement of the nation and its identity, cultural heritage and traditions (Newton 1996). Thus, the effect of a national museum's presentation and interpretation on the audience has the potential to be nourishing and good, and could result in a positive impact on the conception of citizenship (Barbour 2008). This takes us to a discussion of the direction in which the new National Museum of Qatar is moving in presenting and interpreting the Qatari identity; NMoQ is a new governmental instrument which will have a vital role to play in Qatar's current and future development process.

Identity Preservation and Presentation in Qatar
Despite its small size, Qatar is rich with archaeological sites and ethnographical materials that reflect the country's varied and multifaceted cultural heritage and identity. Today, its economy and wealth are increasing rapidly, with rapid modernization and engagement with globalization processes. This development will benefit the country in different ways, however, such rapid growth and global exposure imposes a serious threat to its culture, heritage and national identity (Muhesen, Al-Naimi & Thuesen 2012). To confront such a threat, the country has increased its strategy and plans for preserving and protecting national heritage and identity (Muhesen et al. 2012). However, we ask: what strategies the state is following to protect the national historical identity? And, does the museum authority consider that the presentation of single identity is one way to protect the historic national identity?

For several reasons, the Arabian Peninsula archaeological and heritage research and management activities started late in comparison with other Arab countries, such as Egypt and Iraq. The Arabian Peninsula remained

free from any interest of Western researchers, scholars and European Institutes until the early 1950s. Prior to this, the difficulty in accessing the area due to its harsh environment, tough geography and unstable socio-economic conditions made it a less attractive (Al-Belushi 2015, p. 40). However, later, European interest began to focus on the region resulting in the accumulation of substantial knowledge about the area (Al-Belushi 2015, p. 39). Expeditions, research and studies devoted to the Arabian Gulf multiplied dramatically with the discovery of oil in the early twentieth century. *The Danish Expedition to Qatar 1959: Photos by Jette Bang and Klaus Ferdinand* (2009), mentioned above, used photographs and films to document the *Hadar* and *Bedouin* communities in Qatar. The expedition's collection of photographs, which includes around 2,200 pictures, forms part of the Ethnographic Collection at Moesgaard Museum in Aarhus, Denmark (Crawford 2009, p. 3). Recently, Qatar Museums bought the collection to add to its large project of cultural and heritage preservation (Højlund 2018). The acquisition by Qatar's museums of the Danish mission's archive, and the publication of the archaeological and ethnographic material is an indication of Qatar's interest in preserving its national heritage and identity. In her introduction to the book, HE Sheikha Al-Mayassa mentions that the book depicts *Bedouin* life in Qatar and their adoption of an urban life style (Crawford 2009 p. 2). However, scrutinizing and studying the photographs shows that the Danish documented two different communities: the *Bedouin* and *Hadar*, not just the dual life of the *Bedouin*.

HE Sheikha Al-Mayassa envisages the new national museum as Celebrating Qatar's proud identity and connecting the country's history with its diverse and cosmopolitan present. Not only will it redefine the role of a cultural institution, but it also marks another major milestone in Qatar's development as an arts and cultural hub. (*The Peninsula* 2017b).

The statement of Sheikha Al-Mayassa contradicts assumptions discussed in this paper that the National Museum will present a single identity rather than the diversity of the Qatari community, or indeed the diversity of different cultures and nationalities living in Qatar. However, identity is an essential constituent of state-building, and Qatar is trying to articulate a national identity that can unite its citizens around political leadership. In the Gulf states in particular, museums are highly politicized and have been employed to legitimize the ruling families (Exell 2016). The new NMoQ, with its marvellous architectural language and contemporary galleries is considered a significant instrument of state publicity. The main role assigned to the Museum is the presentation and interpretation of contemporary Qatar, which includes culture, politics, economy and identity. The Museum is also meant to symbolize the achievement, greatness and robustness of the state of Qatar. In other words, the purpose of the reconstruction of the National Museum is to highlight and promote Qatar and create a sense of national pride and patriotism amongst its citizens.

Within this, the construction of single and unified Qatari identity would reflect an intention to construct a recognition of belonging to one political entity and simultaneously a recognition of a distinctive single history, culture and heritage. The emphasis on establishing a unified national identity in Qatar is happening today in an indirect way through the presentation of the *Bedouin* culture and identity in most heritage celebration and activities. We should question how far such a presentation would be accepted and perceived by the Qatari public, particularly if we consider the potential damage such a presentation could do if excluding the history of, for example, the *Hadar* culture and identity, which also includes the Arab *Al-Hawila* group. An activist on social media, Abdulaziz Al-Khatir, has criticized the national emphasis on one single identity:

> We fought diversity until who is not Bedouin became a Bedouin. We fought diversity until who does not know falconry became falconets. We fought diversity until the patron of the sea became patron of camels. We fought the diversity of the dialect, so that everyone began to speak in a dialect that is not his dialect nor the tone of his fathers and grandfathers. (Al-Khater 11 September 2018).

Such an exclusion might serve to increase discrimination in society. Deliberate emphasis on one specific identity, the semi-*Bedouin/Hadar*, could increase tensions and create antipathy toward the Museum's presentation if it seeks to define the Qatari audience as having one specific identity.

In an original survey regarding the presentation of unified identity at the National Museum conducted among 350 Qatari and non-Qatari students who study the course Qatar History at Qatar University (Al-Hammadi 2015), the students were asked, how would they like to see the presentation of the Qatari identity at the National Museum? Almost 87 per cent of respondents preferred a presentation of different Qatari cultural identities, rather than politically accepting the idea of a unified identity. The students expressed a concern that presenting all Qataris as a homogenous whole could be a problematic; Qataris themselves might refuse the idea of homogenous whole, and would rather prefer to have a clear and distinguished presentation of different Qatari identity components. Below are some examples of how the students responds to the idea of unified identity:

> 'Sure I would like to see a presentation of all identity components', commented Jenan Al-Saada; 'I think the museum should focus in presenting *Hadar* and *Bedou*, especially that *Hadar* represents big number of the society', said Suhila Tareq; 'of course a presentation of *Bedouin* and *Hadar*', emphasized Asma Al-Mari and Ghada Saleh; 'I wish to see [a] museum presentation that includes [a] variation of Qatari identity in [a] harmonious way', added Abdulrahman Rajabadd. (Al-Hammadi, 2015)

This suggests that in terms of identity presentation, NMoQ should focus on social and ethnic inclusion and representation, considering the historical factors that

have contributed to the complexity of Qatari identity, and acknowledging the existence of a social hierarchy with diverse customs and traditions which can exist alongside and within a unified national identity. Arguably the way forward for museums in Qatar is to identify the unique lines of this nation in consideration of its diverse nature. NMoQ could well serve the purpose of public instruction by not denying the autonomous identity or historical existence of a certain Qatari groups; museums should ideally present history in a way that legitimizes the existence and roles of all Qatari groups, regardless of any periodic differentiations in their movement. There will be no correction of identity stereotypes in Qatar without acknowledgement of the past; the evidence of the past is still present in every contemporary moment. Today, there is no official authorised narrative in Qatar regarding the history and movements of its people. The production of a new, joint history and a new identity is a mission for the future, and one NMoQ can play a part in. Arguably, it is not true that to be a unified nation, historical facts and events should be forgotten or concealed. The recent political crisis that Qatar witnessed revealed that even though Qatar does not in reality have a single social and cultural identity, this does not jeopardize the existence of a strong sense of national identity and belonging to the nation.

Conclusion

Regardless of the historical existence of different components of Qatari identity, the 5th June 2017 blockade proved that Qatar is socially unified when it comes to its national security. On 5th June 2017, three GCC countries—Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates—cut diplomatic ties with Qatar (CGTN 2017, Al-Jazeera English 2017, The Peninsula 2017a). In a study of the blockade effect, Al-Kabbi and Soliman (2017) note that the siege has severed families and tribal ties, and has caused large humanitarian repercussions that affect people's social lives, education, work, and the Gulf's social fabric. Consequently, the blockade has affected citizens psychologically not only in Qatar but in siege countries as well (Al-Kaabi & Soliman 2017). The Gulf community that used to share similar services, amenities, counselling, military and schooling has been badly torn apart (for more information on the impact of blockade see Al-Kaabi & Soliman 2017).

As a reaction to the blockade, the whole Qatari nation has united in one voice to support the Qatari Emir. The Qatari people began to introduce themselves on social media as descending from one tribe: Qatar. They replaced their family or tribal name with their new tribal name—Al-Qatari—such as Ali Al-Qatari, Ibrahim Al-Qatari, Ahmed Al-Qatari, Wadha Al-Qatari, Noof Al-Qatari, and so on. The blockade was a test of the patriotism and loyalty of the Qatari people. Perhaps the blockading countries succeeded in tearing the intertwined Gulf society apart; however, the social Qatari fabric has been strengthened and empowered significantly by the political crisis. The Emir himself, on 19 September 2017 at the United Nations, thanked his people for the great cohesion among themselves and with the government.

This reaction raises the question, for the sake of Qatar's immediate future, of how the past should be framed in terms of changing conceptions of belonging. The current strong bond within the Qatari social fabric reflects a historically strong social bond that dates back to the nineteenth century. This study of Qatari identity and the discussion of the proposal made by some scholars of its presentation in the new NMoQ as a single identity omitting mention of any historical and contemporary complexity reveals how complicated the relationship between a museum narrative and a country's history can be. Museums as formal and academic institutions are persuasive and powerful instruments of nation-building when they construct a presentation of national identities and symbolize the unification of a nation under certain values, culture, history and knowledge that are accepted by the majority of the nation that is represented (Khazanov 2000, Lanz 2016). The presentation of single identity could create a new system of knowledge that might risk destroying previously-known histories; Qataris might start to question their system of identity construction and its interpretation. Consequently, the Museum itself could risk direct criticism as it will become apparent that new socio-political agendas have contributed largely to its Qatari identity narrative. Alternatively, a clear display of the complex historical factors is necessary to correct misconceptions of Qatari identity, and would arguably create an even more robust future. The complex past is very much relevant to today, as evidenced by the Qatari people's reaction to the blockade where the diverse community came together as a nation in response to an external threat, revealing that denying historical complexity is not necessary to demonstrate the unity of the community. Arguably, if the complex history of Qatari identity were to become the main subject of the Museum's presentation, such a presentation would give great value to Qatar's rich history, culture, diversity, history, identity and heritage.

Notes

[1] This research project is funded by the Qatar National Research Fund and led by Dr Karen Exell based at UCL Qatar; the research team consists of Dr Exell, Dr Jocelyn Sage-Mitchell (Northwestern University in Qatar), Dr Sherine El Menshawy (Qatar University), Dr Andrew Gardner (Puget Sound University) and myself.

[2] *Al-Hawila* are sunni Arabs who moved from the Arabian Peninsula and lived for years on the Persian coast, later returning individually and in groups to the Arabian Gulf. *Baharna* are non-sunni Arabs, some of whom live in Bahrain, Qatar and Al-Ahsa.

[3] Many villages and neighbourhoods in Qatar still preserve their historical or recent names by following the old custom of naming the neighbourhood after the tribes or urban families that inhabited them. For example, there are the villages Al-Kaaban and Sunae Humaid, and the neighbourhoods Al-Khoulifat, Al-Sulita, Al-Sudan, Al-Hitmi, Al-Ali, Al-Manaseer, Al-Murra and Al-Nuaim, etc.

[4] Historically, the Arabian Peninsula witnessed several economic and political difficulties, in which some

Qatari and regional tribes (e.g., Al-Bu Samait, Al-Bu Kuwara, Al-Kabaan, Al-Hammadi, Al-Obaidli, Al-Mahandah, Al-Marzuqi and Al-Sulaiti) emigrated to the coast of Persia, to places such as Busheab, Shivuh, Jishm, Kaeese, Linjah, Kalat, Al-Mahamarah and Arabstan (Lorimer 2013, V. 3, 11, 15 & 16). Furthermore, the region always had commercial and trade relationships with Persia. Notably, at the end of the nineteenth century, trade in the south Iran was dominated by Arabs (Nadjmabadi 2009). In *Tribes of Arab Al-Hawila in Eyes of Oriental Travelers: Their History, Tribes, and Famous* (2011), Jalal Aldeen Al-Ansari explains that the geographers were mistaken when they explained that the Persian Empire controlled part of the Arabian Peninsula (Al-Ansari 2001). In fact, immigrant Arabs controlled the entire Persian coast overlooking the Arabian Gulf Basin. Jalal Aldeen called these areas colonies that separated the Arab colonists after their settlement (word choice?) from Persian power. Each geographical segment became independent and was ruled by an Arab, who also was independent politically and economically from the Persian country. Historians documented the first arrivals of Arabs to Iran during the Nadir Shah and Sultan Husain Safavi period. They settled temporarily as a result of internal political chaos and engaged in agriculture and grazing (Nadjmabadi 2009). However, the weakness in the central government of Qajars at that time led to the increase of Arab power and influence in relationship to the Iranian state. Thus, their leaders called themselves 'Emir' and 'Sheikh' (Nadjmabadi 2009). The Arab population of these colonies maintained their habits, culture, traditions and mother tongue. The Persians did not influence them; they were Sunni and refused to unite with Persian Shi'ites. For example, until 2006, Gavbandi province consisted of fifty-four settlements, with 37,400 persons in 8000 households, with a majority Sunni population. Only twelve villages were inhabited by Arabs, whose Arab culture and heritage were very much in evidence in festivities, food, clothes, marriages, funeral ceremonies and birthing rituals (Nadjmabadi 2009). However, the end of Arab domination and settlement in Iranian coastal areas was associated with the reforms that Reza Shah (1925–1941) implemented. New restrictions included replacing traditional clothing with European clothing and women uncovering their faces, resulting in many families moving to the Arab countries (Nadjmabadi 2009). This explains the mass immigration of both Arabs and Iranians alike from Iranian coastal regions to the Arabian Gulf countries beginning in the years 1936/37.

Competing Interests
The author has no competing interests to declare.

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