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: “Nationhood and citizenship - in general, in the UAE, in the Gulf and wider Middle East.

(N.B. This paper was presented by the author in the Gulf in October 2017)

We cannot discuss this topic without using two other key concepts: state and sovereignty. After all, a nation can be a state but a state isn't necessarily a nation. The vagaries of “nation” or “nationhood” are not interchangeable with the notion of a state: a state can mean so much more than a nation, states are often not nation-states, and indeed “the state” can mean so much more than just being a state!

Confused?

Here is a set of useful (but not perfect) definitions:

A state:

An entity with *international* legal recognition, that is sovereign, over a defined territorial space e.g. Kuwait or Canada

The state

The holder of legitimate authority (i.e. legitimate force or violence) throughout a defined territorial space e.g. the German state

Nation:

A people for whom a territorial space encapsulates their collective sense of self

Nationhood: the expression of collective territorial belonging

A nation-state: national territorial identification encapsulated in an internationally-recognised space

If we take the Palestinian example, hopefully this will help to clarify what I am trying to say. The Palestinian nation wants a state, an internationally recognised sovereign entity, but that state, should it ever come into being rather than just exist, as at present, on paper, may not control its own territory and may be subject to a dominating force from within and from without its territory e.g. Hamas in Gaza and Israel controlling its borders and periodically militarily intervening.

In other words Weber's definition of the state as the body controlling the majority of legitimate violence within a defined territorial area may not apply to the future state of Palestine. The Palestinian nation is still seen by many Palestinians as existing from the Mediterranean to the River Jordan, or even for some to encompass modern day Jordan, so, even if Palestinian state leaders exercise state power, the Palestinian state may not embody all of Palestinian national territory; the state would not be synonymous with the nation, at least for some Palestinians.

Or think of Iraqi Kurdistan. If it's allowed to secede from Iraq and to become a genuinely independent state, controlling armed force within its borders, it will not embody the Kurdistan nation. For most Kurds that would have to include the Kurdish enclave of north-eastern Syria, great swathes of south-east and eastern Turkey, and parts of western Iran. Should it ever do this, then these existing countries' sense of nationhood would in the process be literally reduced in the process.

To simplify this nation and state disconnect, think of such existing internationally-recognised states as The Vatican, Andorra, Lichtenstein, and arguably Belgium or Switzerland.

Is The Vatican a nation? Ambassadors from around the world are represented in it (usually, but not always, in tandem with diplomatic representation to Italy, a separate state) and The Vatican has its own diplomatic representatives posted around the world, including to the UN where it is recognised as a state. Few would claim though that The Vatican, to use my definition of a nation, is a territorial space encapsulating a distinct people's sense of self.

To use another, perhaps harder and more contentious example: Belgium. Divided between two peoples whose separate language and cultural affinity links them, respectively, to Holland on one side of the country and France on the other, can we say that there is a coherent Belgian nation?

Catalonia? If it secedes from Spain without being subject to the latter's direct or indirect intervention and can control its land and maritime borders and secure some form of international recognition then it can be a functioning state. Whether the majority of Catalans will identify with this "nation" or such a state, should it ever come into being, is another matter.

Legitimate state power

Now, to look at the "legitimacy" part of the equation. Weber argued the legitimacy was a crucial element of state power. Otherwise you can have the phenomenon of strong leadership, weak state e.g. Iraq from the 1980s until 2003. Until recently the Iraqi state did not exist. It may have been an imagined political community, i.e. a nation as the renowned writer on nationalism, Benedict Anderson, defined it. However what purported to be the Iraqi state didn't have the monopoly of legitimate violence, in fact it didn't control the monopoly of violence full stop, and its territorial scope was compromised by the cross border, so-called Islamic State. It's still contestable that the Iraqi state exists as the monopoly of legitimate force within defined boundaries (see map). It is *very hard* to argue that the state of Yemen exists in these terms at all.

Authority, as Weber also observed, can be traditional or charismatic, and accepted as such, as well as rationally or legally based, but in any of these cases is there a mechanism for legitimacy to be bestowed upon those exercising authority, and who or what is sovereign *if* there is such a mechanism?

Sovereignty definition:

The source of legitimate political authority. Traditionally the word is synonymous with the monarch. The British sovereign is understood in the UK and internationally to currently be Queen Elizabeth II,

but the UK has a system of parliamentary sovereignty i.e. the parliament and therefore ultimately the people are sovereign: the people are the ultimate source of political authority, mediated through elected, parliamentary, representatives.

Sovereignty in the view of Social Contract theorists

A term that often gets repeated without much reflection whenever western analysts look at governance in the Gulf is the social contract. This is a defining concept in western political thought. The English philosopher Thomas Hobbes supported the idea that sovereign *power* should be a centralised form of statehood (commonweal) to protect against the brutish “state of nature” experienced in the English Civil War. However he argued that the holder of ultimate power could no longer simply claim that the sovereignty they exercised came from God. To be and act as a sovereign, there had to be some form of recognised act of legitimation from the ruled to the state that ruled over them, and this would therefore apply to whomever or whatever ruled and shaped the state.

Aristotle and Locke

As Aristotle saw it, the correct basis of governance was the pursuit of the common good regardless of the model of government, but, like the leading social contract theorist (the English philosopher) John Locke writing two millennia later, Aristotle believed that an active, educated citizenry, “able to rule and be ruled”, was important to prevent tyranny. Locke’s notion of the social contract was more clearly defined than that of Hobbes and can be more easily categorised as liberal, even though Locke’s ideas were expressed in a pre-modern, pre-democratic context. Locke posited the then radical idea that there were such things as political rights and responsibilities and that these were based on property. In other words a pre-industrial notion of empowerment related to your ability to be economically independent from the state – this is its avowedly liberal component - but subject to the state’s “rational” authority. By definition, property owners were a tiny minority of the population in Hobbes’ and Locke’s time.

Property and political rights

The term “property-owning democracy” is a relatively recent UK Conservative Party appropriation of pre-democratic liberal thought, but with the same (admittedly only quietly voiced) conception that the only effective way to be a political participant was to have an economic stake in the system and to therefore, paradoxically, to have some autonomy from the state. Property owners (or at least mortgage holders) were a clear majority in the UK by the 1990s, a percentage that has fallen since.

Rousseau’s Social Contract

French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s take on the Social Contract (the title of his most renowned political philosophy) reflected the revolutionary era (late 18th/early 19th century) in which he was writing, although he was influenced too by the bourgeois political life of Geneva and only had in mind politics conducted in fairly small city states.

Similar to Locke though, while those writing in relatively recent times detected a pre-mature Leninism in his philosophy, Rousseau was advocating that popular involvement in decision making was needed in all aspects of public life in order that his (admittedly ambiguous) notion of the “General Will” be ascertained and the sovereign will of the people actualised. Through the thinking of social contract theorists writing in the 17th, 18th century and 19th century, we arrive at the idea that the *people* are sovereign.

Sovereignty over and against the state

The people, notwithstanding the idea that they may need key qualifications to be deemed proper ‘citizens’, are envisaged as playing an active part in the governance of the state, and, crucially, by being voluntarily active, putting desirable limits to the state’s imposition on the liberty of the individual. The liberal English thinker JS Mill at times flirted with socialist ideas thinking that this was a way to empower citizens economically, but didn’t want too much public ownership for fear of constraining the civil space. Governance is in this sense a shared, partly voluntary, enterprise, and involves society in the shaping of the nation, and this active citizenship may happen in the civic sector as well as in government. Nationhood and citizenship, are in these senses at least, intimately connected.

But what of conceptions of the nation that put *limits* on political participation based on factors that seemingly cannot change? Aristotle didn’t believe that birth-right was an essential qualification for citizenship, rather it was the economic and arguably intellectual capacities of individuals that should qualify them. Of course he also seemed to think that some people wanted to be slaves, and it can be seen that such a state of affairs was a necessary element of an economic order in which those who owned both property *and* people could be free to be active citizens. Slaves of course could never include the Greeks and were most likely to be those the Greeks defeated in war. The more enlightened and enlightening side of Aristotle’s argument is what the polity needed for effective governance and the avoidance of tyranny. A citizen body that is relatively open, albeit allowing for the contradictory upholding of *inherited* land rights, is also a notion of a collectivity i.e. what we would later think of as a nation.

In the 1940s, dominant western European political thought began to see *the* state, as in the machinery of legitimate force and governance, as a means to liberate (social democracy) as well as to oppress (Nazism or Bolshevism). This was the high water mark of liberal political philosophy. Before the shift back in the UK to citizenship defined by one’s relationship to property – a progressive idea in the latter 17th Century, rather less so in the latter 20th – then education, economic redistribution (not private property eradication) and the removal of class, racial and gender discrimination were seen throughout western Europe as necessary for all adult members of the political community to be able to function as the citizens that Aristotle thought only a tiny minority needed to be. In the UK’s case the state is arguably gradually coming back in fashion as part of how we can empower individuals, whether this makes good practical sense post-Brexit or not. However the contradiction of being subjects of a hereditary ruler and at the same time citizens (according to my UK passport) with, in Aristotle’s understanding, an equal ability to rule and be ruled, will probably continue to exist, even though some royal powers are autocratically exercised by democratic UK governments unlike in the other major European monarchies.

In any political system that does not confine the power of a hereditary, or other single, leader in order to empower the citizenry, a discussion about citizenship and the modern nation state cannot go far before its inherent contradictions limit the discourse, and more importantly the practise, of citizenship.

How does citizenship connect with the nation?

Nationhood and belonging

Ernest Gellner's relatively contemporary work on nationalism ('Nations and Nationalism') teaches us that a nation is a political community, and that nationalism is a sense of commonality among those within a distinct and defined territorial space, whether other "nationals" are known to you or not. Within this defined space the nation is supposed to constitute the preeminent loyalty, overriding loyalty to other affiliations, communal or otherwise. He recognised that there are liable to be minorities who might not be seen by all the other members of the nation as belonging to the commonality that underpins their nation, a tendency that, together with regional elite ambitions among the minority, might spark secession and the birth of a new nation, something familiar in Iraqi Kurdistan for example. So a notion of nationalism that is exclusive can be an inherent part of the notion of a nation. Otherwise it might be argued that all we have is a country that, because of a regime's ability to control its territory and garner international recognition, we then refer to as a state.

National allegiance in the Gulf – but to what?

If in addition we accept that nationhood is intimately bound up with citizenship, then in looking at the Gulf, and the UAE in particular, we have to wrestle with some key questions:

Is there a defined and accepted idea of a nation to which Emiratis feel overriding loyalty? If nationhood in the UAE is still evolving, as the outlined themes for this talk suggest, does this mean that there are other powerful social loyalties that are perhaps compromising or contradicting loyalty to the Emirati nation?

The UAE nation *is* the state of the UAE and is internationally recognised as such. It controls the use of violence, or armed force, within its territorial domain. Is it though the *legitimate* controller of this violence?

National self-identity in the Gulf is still paradoxical. States are constitutionally defined as Arab and Islamic/Muslim, and in their official self-conception they are also described as having distinctly Gulf characteristics in cultural and, by implication, governance terms. In all of the GCC member states there are payroll clerics, those whose religious authority at least in part stems from their appointment by the state. When Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed recently joined in with the Saudis' engagement of Iraqi Shia leaders, he helped the process by getting the UAE's top official cleric, a Sunni obviously, to meet the Iraqi Shia Islamist Moqtada Al-Sadr. So the

UAE as a nation is not a neutral construct. The state plays a big role in the Sunni fealty that the great majority of its nationals ascribe to, and its laws and social conventions are partly based on Shariah as well as on salafi traditions, and the UAE is affiliated to a wider (Sunni) Islamic collectivity that itself overlaps with an Arabism that is implicitly Sunni too. The foreign policy of the government of the UAE is anti (Sunni) Islamist, but the identity of the Emirati state is Sunni Islamic and is associated with a wider Sunni Arab/Islamic affiliation.

Emirati secularism and citizenship

In August 2017 the UAE ambassador to the US, Yousef al Oteiba, said that the UAE's vision of the region in 10 years' time is governments that are secular, strong and stable. The fact that *dunyawiya* (a translation of the relatively contemporary English word 'secular' into Arabic) sounds inimical to religion as it means 'worldly', doesn't detract from the political meaning of what Mr Oteiba was saying (in English). He made the point again in an interview with the US magazine *The Atlantic*, arguing that the UAE had learnt from the west to separate religion from governance, even if it has what he called its own form of Bedouin-style consultation rather than democracy per se underpinning that governance. Furthermore, a recent opinion piece published in the Abu Dhabi newspaper *Al-Ittihad* offered a critique of the "religious state"/"state of religion" advocated by the Muslim Brotherhood¹. The article accused the MB of both exploiting Muslims' reverence for the historic caliphate and the fact that many Muslims find it hard to accept the concept of separation of religion and state underpinning the "modern national state". It seems therefore that what Ambassador Oteiba is saying isn't just rhetoric to please a western audience and to differentiate the UAE from Qatar's perceived political ideology. The UAE's projection of an anti-Islamist foreign policy would suggest that Mr Oteiba is reflecting an official UAE desire for a region made up of secular governments i.e. ones that separate religion in the life of the community from religion in the operation of the state. If so, however, we have a couple of problems.

State/society separation not possible in the USA

One is that the social life of a country can create tensions if the state purports to be wholly apart from it. In the contemporary "secular" USA, different forms of identity politics seem to be at war with each other, and arguably they're conflicting about more than the *symbols* of historic southern white supremacy for example. They're arguing about the nature of the American state: secular as in open and respectful of the rights of all traditions, of all citizens, to play their part in the determination of the public life of the country; or resistant to the existing moves in this direction and sending out messages that a more traditional, white, Christian, heterosexual male-dominated order should prevail. Now, please note that the polarity I have suggested here is simplistic and written in an exaggerated manner to emphasise the point. It also disregards a wholly different aspect of the community that the US state, as well as many other states, may also be reflecting, what Marx called the infrastructure. These are the economic class interests that supposedly shape the superstructure

¹ "Between Extremism and the State of Religion", Dr Amir Ali Hassan, *Al-Ittihad*, August 25, 2017
<http://www.alittihad.ae/wajhatdetails.php?id=95379>

of the state, as well as the social ideas, including religious affiliation, that affect political consciousness (or the lack of its true form, Marx argued).

At present many European countries, including the UK, have a tension between what the political elite, or at least its more liberal components see as their country's inclusive, identity, and what some of the majority, white, so-called indigenous culture, are comfortable with. Whether the established norms and culture of the majority population, or the sometimes different practises of the descendants of third or fourth generation immigrants, secularism, as in a neutral governmental space without reference to religion and therefore without a "correct" or preferred culture, ethnicity, regional identification, or social mores, is supposed to prevent any one tradition from dominating. For one thing secularism, and associated multiculturalism, cannot do this because demography is its own reality. Also, the pace of social and economic change has created resistance to immigration and to the European political project, with its associated freedom of labour and capital and perceived denial of sovereign, national, identity. There are echoes of the Europe of the 1930s in some of this, but there is also an elite tendency to see any popular resistance to immigration as simply code for racism. In the UK today, after an assertion of national sovereignty, there is a new kind of nationalism that for some is about hostility to difference, that sets a more narrowly drawn definition of belonging. This can be chauvinistic and does not rest on a notion of citizenship that is inclusive and empowering, but simply as a marker of who is in and who is out, including in the labour market. For others Brexit means a chance for parliamentary sovereignty to be reasserted and for all UK nationals to have greater authority over decisions made in their name. So the secular state, with the implied erosion of national cultural difference, may be out of step with the population.

The other problem with the secular state, in the sense that the UAE seems to be advocating it as a regional model, is that, quite simply, the UAE is very far from being a secular state itself. Self-defined in at least partly religious terms, the Emirates maintains nationality (*muwatiniya*) for a small and select group of indigenous residents who are Sunni Arab, and is only able to conceive of granting improved residency rights for a small proportion of the balance of the population who reflect the hegemonic culture i.e. fellow Sunni Arabs or at least Arabic-speaking Sunni Muslims. Ironically Qatar has reacted to its current regional isolation by bringing forward long standing, Gulf-wide, consideration of a special residency status, but this is likely to be on the above limited terms and is partly aimed at encouraging foreign investment.

The UAE doesn't have a secular political system; religious factors create a hierarchy of belonging.

The Gulf states are not states practising secular governance in the political science sense of the term. Nor, by the way, is the UK properly a secular system of governance either. Bishops from the state church, which is headed by the head of state, the Queen, sit in the upper house of the legislative chamber. They are known as the Lords Spiritual to distinguish them from the majority of Lords, who sit as the Lords Temporal, a word which can also be understood to mean 'worldly'. This is not necessarily the case in terms of their personal persuasion, but simply in terms of them not being there to represent the organised, "nationalised", Church.

The UAE's state identification with Arabism and Islam is also a factor that impacts on the practise of citizenship and the conception of the nation. For the tiny minority of the population that are

muwatinoon (simply, and quite literally, 'nationals'), an informal hierarchy of belonging can also be detected, dependent on whether they are what one Emirati analyst referred to in speaking to me a few years ago as "the pure Arab thoroughbred stallion," or *hawala*, the many Emiratis who are seen by so-called thoroughbreds as at best "returning" (from Persia), or at worst, *ajam* (animals). Some of those whose ancestors were Iranian still speak Persian, or at least have Persianised cultural practises.

In theory at least, secularism positively embraces difference in order to prevent any one communal tradition from dominating the polity, but in practise some groups in avowedly secular societies may, to appropriate George Orwell, be more equal than others. This may be a matter of discrimination that contradicts the official and since the 1960s more inclusive narrative, as is still the case in the Afro-American experience, or it may be that the fierceness of state secularism that in the French case, *laïcité*, makes even communal identification at the sub-state level difficult, compounding the disadvantage of French nationals of third and fourth generation Maghrebi origin. Etatism in France is prescriptive, as opposed to the passive secularism of the US. The latter simply suggests that an equal platform for citizens to live, work and take part in public life is made possible by a non-religious state.

Out groups in the UAE

As in the west, so in the UAE and wider Gulf, there are a number of "out" groups; those not considered by some to be properly or fully national even though they possess a national passport. In the Gulf these are sometimes groups that do not fit even the official national narrative, and are sometimes discriminated against by national laws that set a qualifying year for full legal national belonging that massively pre-dates statehood. Such formal or informal exclusion, including of those who are otherwise considered "national", is itself sometimes partly informed by insecurity about those who may have a Persian heritage, for which read Shia and non-Arab even if neither is necessarily true. Legal variations between being a full or a naturalised national, dependent on a set year of qualification, can exclude or limit the entitlements of some, less desirable, "locals".

Foreigners: the ultimate out group

Or of course the state simply excludes from any kind of official membership of the nation those deemed to be foreigners i.e. those who have only a temporary status (typically a one year work permit), however much an economic contribution they and their forebears may have made to the state. This applies throughout the UAE, Qatar, Oman and Kuwait (in which an additional, perceptibly "Iraqi", *bidoon* (stateless) category applies to approximately 100,000 "Kuwaitis"); an increasingly narrowly drawn form of governance in Bahrain; and obviously a Saudi state that struggles to give itself a national identification due to the welter of anti-national traditions upheld by the state clerical class. The fact that the *hawala* are an out group in the UAE or Bahrain is obviously compounded when these states' relations with Iran are at their nadir. Interestingly, the UAE, in common with a number of other Gulf states, granted nationality in the early years of "independence" to some foreign Arabs who had played a part in state building, and periodically a few still get naturalised

(quite a few in the case of Bahrain's demographic politics). Invariably naturalised Emiratis, for example, were Sunnis; any future extension of citizenship or special residency is highly unlikely to be to foreign Shia.

Reimagining the nation

These days the *haweeya al watani* (national identity) debate is conducted in the same politico-cultural terms that a decade ago encouraged the Saudis to state-enforce a national day, and the UAE to emphasise what Hobsbawm and Ranger called "re-imagined" national traditions, or artificial bonds with those with whom there is no direct communal association. However these days there is an even greater concern in those Gulf states with a relatively small GDP per capita about the volume of foreigners. Toward those seen as more or less culturally alien, non-Arab, especially non-Muslim, the existential angst has grown. The current debate in Kuwait for example, where the economic challenge of immigration is less acute than in Saudi, Bahrain or Oman, can sometimes be reminiscent of the exploitation of popular fears in parts of Europe. The difference is that the rights of such workers in the Gulf are minimal. In much of Europe immigrants often have the right to work, if they're fellow EU nationals at least, and to become nationals of their adopted state, automatically so for their children in some cases. Underpinning some of the identity and demographic fears in the Gulf are security concerns that was already there in relation to those of a Shia or perceptible Persian heritage, and after 1990-91 toward Palestinians in Kuwait especially, and which has been compounded by worries about Sunni militancy in the wake of AQ, IS and, of course the Arab uprisings.

Political fears narrow belonging even further

The so-called Arab Spring narrowed the notion of belonging in the Gulf. State-sponsored cultural identification that projected a pre-modern sense of belonging that had said little about urban, let alone Shia, life is still promoted. Politically speaking though, Gulf autocracies that have gently reimagined the principle of *shoura* are keener, especially in the UAE's case, to stress that any incipient pluralism totally excludes Islamists. This is quite new. Sunni Islamists were prevalent among the state builders in the Gulf, escaping from hostile regimes and encouraged to find a home in the emergent states' education and justice ministries in particular. They are now, especially their indigenous counterparts, *persona non grata* in the UAE's domestic polity and a target of its foreign policy. Elsewhere in the Gulf the picture is more mixed, with the Saudis maintaining a resistance to any overt domestic role for the Brotherhood, but having resumed a more nuanced approach to them abroad. Qatar obviously differentiates between the foreign and domestic Brotherhood in a manner not unlike Saudi Arabia in the 1950s and '60s, albeit that foreign Sunni Islamists resident in Qatar have a foreign policy role more overt than the symbolism of those exiled in King Faisal's Saudi Arabia for example. A measure of how much the UAE's especially punitive approach to MB supporters is further narrowing the practise of citizenship among Emiratis can be gleamed by polling conducted in October 2014². This showed that the Muslim Brotherhood is rated positively by 29 percent of Emiratis (a figure that might understate their true support, given official sentiment). Furthermore,

² Conducted and published by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP).

31 percent of Saudis and 34 percent of Kuwaitis said the same thing (However in Kuwait the MB are semi-legal political players).

Using the notion of citizenship as active shapers of the public realm (Aristotle), then a polity that limits who can belong to the nation – formally or informally – therefore limits citizenship and even the opportunity to gain access to it in a meaningful way. This has happened in living memory in an extreme way in Europe, and is to a lesser but still important extent is happening again there now. The outgroups in communist Europe were initially those who rejected communism, but it soon became apparent that mass community party membership was a measure of top-down state penetration of society, not of the empowerment of those who perhaps subscribed to communism. The Polish nation, for example, did not die in this experience, and the state arguably positively helped a much greater number than the party elite, but nation and state ossified, and society did not dynamically shape the life of the nation nor the decisions of the state. Its inner and outer contradictions saw the Polish communist regime and its control of the state collapse as its illegitimate monopoly of violence rendered it impotent when its external guarantor, the Soviet Union, relinquished control.

Citizenship and nation-state legitimacy

So we can see that active citizenship is an integral part of a state whose authority is legitimate, and a nation-state is where the political community, for the most part at least, identifies itself with the territory of that state. This means that there are also those who are nominal 'citizens'. These include the *muwatinoon* of the Gulf, and myself as a British subject of a monarch to whom democratically elected politicians swear allegiance. And then there is the active citizen *in practice*, both shaping and containing the state. Penetrating the political superstructure and reversing, or at least contesting, the determinism of the economic infrastructure, is what modern citizenship is about.

Gulf states are maturer but are still not the preeminent loyalty?

In the Gulf, debating citizenship and its interdependence with nationhood is still premature. While the states of the area have moved on from the disparaging "tribes with flags" caricature widely used in the first decade or two after they became sovereign, it is still contestable whether the state is the preeminent loyalty, the fealty that trumps all others in this region. This is not to say that nationals of a Gulf state should, in a manner suggested by French-style *laïcité*, to feel a greater affinity to their nation than they feel, or at least express, to Islam for instance. However, if the conception of the state is largely rooted in para-state affinities - Arabism and Sunni Islam for instance - then this weakens both domestic inclusion and therefore the equal practise of citizenship, and it weakens the strength of national identity and thus nationhood too.

The nationalist narrative of states are usually steeped in hallowed accounts, myths, of national liberation, or at least defence. These in turn can promote chauvinism, even notions of national/racial superiority and in certain circumstances expansionism. It is arguable that nationalism, the assertion of a communal difference, of a belonging that can impinge on territory and associated identities claimed by others, is only ever chauvinistic as it cannot by definition be inclusive as it inherently

suspects the “other”. A former leading British politician, Michael Foot, distinguished between what he argued was a legitimate pride in his country, patriotism, best expressed for him in striving to serve the whole community, and nationalism as in blind allegiance that promoted dangerous division, at home and abroad.

National chauvinism in the Gulf

Sally Findlow argued that the UAE has not had this “negative facing outwards”, and that in fact it has a “positive facing inwards” due to its focus on development, its embrace of others etc.³ But there has been a growing inward facing chauvinism in the Gulf. The out groups have long been there, but fear of their size and to some extent their type is increasing, promoting what Gulf scholar Kirsten Smith-Diwan has called a “defensive nativism”⁴. This nativism may not be that native to the UAE, Kuwait or Qatar, however. Emirati academic Ibtisam al-Kitby has commented that the “national identity” that the UAE and others began asserting a decade ago was about “indigenous” identity rather than a specific Emirati identity⁵. Complicating matters more, the UAE state has also undertaken a broader campaign to propagate the idea that the nation is about more than the tiny minority: the so-called indigenous. The *Watani* (“my nation”) campaign has, since 2005, tried to promote shared national values among all Emirati *residents*, arguing that all those living in the UAE can share an affiliation to the state (“a common destiny”) and, seemingly, to each other, based on what they hold in common that is specific to the Emirati experience. In other words it is being argued that you might not wear a *dishdasha*, or even speak the official language, Arabic, but somehow you can be part of the Emirati nation. It might be said that this is a rather circular premise – the state wants you to feel at home whether officially you can regard the UAE as your permanent home or not, and therefore the common value among all residents is that the state is open to many different peoples and traditions. Certainly it has been recognised by some UAE thinkers that “nationhood” in the UAE cannot just be about the nationhood of those holding an Emirati passport. Said one who wished to be anonymous, “the mix of the country creates nationhood,” to pretend otherwise is what he called “the falsification of reality.” This implies legal rights and responsibilities, in other words citizenship, to give life and meaning to nationhood.

National occasions – state-enforced commemorative days, museum projects reimagining cultures, sporting events etc. – are in the Emirati, Qatari and Kuwaitis cases at least celebrated by nationals (and some non-nationals) with enthusiasm.

However if national fealty is officially compromised by a hierarchy of belonging, and if those who are full nationals aren’t equal in their legal as well as informal status, then the nation is a narrow, elite, project with little relevance to active citizenship. Nationals are in this case, simply, *muwatinoon*, holders of a *jinsia* (passport), not proper citizens.

³ Cited by the author in “Nationalism in the Gulf”, Partrick, LSE Kuwait Programme, London, 2009

⁴ Dr Kristin Smith Diwan’s summary of the June 2016 AGSIW seminar on national identity in the Gulf <http://www.agsiw.org/national-identity-and-national-projects-in-the-arab-gulf-states/>

⁵ Partrick, 2009, *Op.Cit.*

Tribes and national belonging

If the nativism is so select then little surprise perhaps if the tribe remains a potent force in Emirati and other Gulf states' political and cultural life. In Oman, tribe is nationalised in that chiefs are state appointed – a practise paralleling the statisation of the dominant Islamic identity in the UAE, Qatar and obviously Saudi Arabia. The seven emirates that made up the UAE, and the separate emirates of Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain, were forged from a prior and then British recognition given to a dominant family within a tribal grouping. These entities were defined by who ruled them and were recognised and legitimised on that basis. In the pre-state era, their territorial definition was that of the ruler's domain, not that of the emirate per se. Patronage of tribe had been an intimate part of the ruler's authority pre-state and continued to be after "independence" when nascent state affinities could and were weakened by tribal affinities that crossed state lines, and in some cases still do today e.g. the al-Murrah in Qatar, and the al-Shehi in Ras Al-Khaimah (UAE). Rulers to the present day try to weaken their neighbours by seeking to patronise tribes across borders, or import tribal members to sway their own political demographics. Tribe is still highly valued as an identifier among nationals, but it can also be a badge of perceived inferiority and of supposed anti-national tendencies. The *hadhari/Bedouin* divide in Kuwait and Qatar, where long term settled nationals sometimes paradoxically see themselves as better upholders of a national fealty, while Kuwaiti leaders have for many years forged a special political bond with so-called "tribals" to counter the Arab nationalism/liberal proclivities of the urban, settled, elite. What has been called "political tribalism"⁶ can in a sense reimagine the tribe as differentiated urban groups favoured on a differentiated, kinship, basis. That said, there are examples of what Longva has called the "nationalisation of tribe"⁷ whereby, regardless of whether supposedly politically or socially superior or inferior, long settled or Bedouin, state entitlements in Kuwait, for instance, are the same. This can co-exist with what a sheikh may do below the state level to build patronage and loyalty to his specific leadership as well as to the wider regime.

Sheikh not state

An Emirati academic privately informed me that, in the wake of the then widespread uprisings in the Arab world, a senior Abu Dhabi leader was disbursing money in person in the poorer northern emirates. Obviously this was wholly outside of any documented federal budget arrangements. In others words, the phenomenon of "loyalty to the sheikh, not to the state," is still quite widespread (Qatari academic; Partrick, 2008). It has been argued that in the Gulf even holding a discussion about non-partisan state loyalty, its basis and what it entails, is a preoccupation of a liberal, educated, urban elite. For those outside the wealthier city centre (literally further removed in the Kuwait City case), then the old loyalties of tribe, religion and to the sheikh are more likely to prevail. This is likely to be compounded if what is loosely sometimes referred to when looking at the Gulf as the social contract is weakened by a state unable to offer cradle to grave welfare certainties in exchange for

⁶ The late Professor Khaldoun Naqeeb, Kuwaiti sociologist, quoted by Diwan. *Ibid.*

⁷ Cited by the author in "Nationalism in the Gulf", Partrick, LSE Kuwait Programme, London, 2009

acceptance of its authority. If the state is in retreat, “I go back to the tribe,” said Saudi analyst Turki Al-Rasheed⁸.

If, for many nationals, affiliation to the nation is mediated by other loyalties, such as tribe or religion, or indeed to an individual sheikh, then the nation is still embryonic and rulers may feel that the state is in need of promotion amidst the competing loyalties of nationals and the perceived demographic threat of other residents. Self-servingly, and revealingly, in 2008 the director-general of Sharjah Museums Department, Manal Ataya, talked of the Emirati government needing to make a real effort to connect museums and schools in order ‘to create a collective memory.’ Polling when the UAE launched its *haweeya al watani* drive a decade ago showed that nearly half of Emirati nationals believed that ‘common cultural values and traditions’ were a key indication of National Identity, while over a fifth stressed religion as a key component⁹This is arguably encouraging for those who see the Emirati nation as having cohered, and the proportion of those emphasising common cultural or indeed national values might have increased since then.

Intra-UAE loyalties

However, although largely *sotto voce*, intra-Emirati political differences over the MB question, and the unresolved issue of how to institutionalise intra-emirate cooperation, arguably places limits on this. A decade ago the localism tendency was another factor encouraging the UAE specifically to promote the Emirati *ettihad* (union). The growth of distinct imaginings that saw two emirates in particular competing for attention both locally and globally encouraged a greater effort at federalisation through stronger central government oversight, although it was possible to read this as an extension of the same historic sensitivity being responded to by the most powerful emirate asserting its authority. The 2008 financial fallout emphasised this further, as did the renaming of the world’s tallest tower. Creating a more institutionalised, law-based, form of inter-emirate power-sharing is difficult if key decisions are made at the discreet level and only the formal outcome is publicised. The FNC might one day be an answer to this if it becomes a source of authority, popularly asserted. Anything else is noblesse oblige, conceding a voice to those who are outside of unequal ruling families but who remain wholly dependent upon them.

It has been argued that sub and para-state identities, whether tribe, Arabism, Islam, can be seen as actually underpinning or bolstering national affiliation, not undermining it.¹⁰

National identity weaknesses in the west

Plainly nationalism in the west, before it was reconfigured to embrace a more domestically inclusive approach, was not afraid to express para-state religious affiliations for example to tie certain imperial interests together. However the modern nation state, which arguably didn’t begin until the collapse of empires in Europe after World War One, and in western Europe began to be as focused

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ YouGovSiraj 2008, Partrick, p18. *Op.cit.*

¹⁰ Kirstin Smith, AGSIW, 2016. *Op.cit.*

on the rights and responsibilities of all its citizens after 1945, necessarily talked less of partial, sub-state, affinities and more of those held, nationally, in common. This was a process long in gestation. State sovereignty was not established on a fixed territorial basis until the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, but the apparatus for international enforcement did not properly begin to be attempted until the 20th century. Sovereignty of the people took much longer to be accepted, in principle let alone in practise.

It might be argued though that a problem with nationalism in Europe was a reason why one para-state affiliation, to the idea and political practice of Europe and European governance, was popular on the continent of Europe. Eventually the building of a new, para-state, political entity (federation) called Europe may, to adapt Ernest Gellner's argument, promote secession. The UK isn't leaving a European state as such, even if the perception that a para-state identity was weakening the sense, and practical meaning, of a national one played a part in encouraging this nationalist assertion.

By contrast the Gulf Union was a claimed para-state affiliation that never got off the ground. The common cultural, economic and political characteristics among most of its members at least made a defensive association, without a meaningful defence structure or a defined enemy, come into fruition. Sovereignty remained in the hands of the individual leaders until the Union idea, largely King Abdullah's response to perceived threats from the Arab Uprisings, suggested that authority might in practice be exercised more overtly in Riyadh. Saudi Arabia's leadership of the air war in Yemen may have made Saudi national identity cohere more meaningfully. The Saudi state as established in 1932 doesn't, or at least didn't, have a military tradition. The "national" museum in Riyadh has little to say, unlike other such bodies in the Gulf or more widely, about national myth. It presents totemic events in the imagined national narrative as the liberation of the Masmak Fortress from Al-Saud rivals, the Al-Rasheed, in Riyadh in 1902, as part of the unification of the Peninsula under the *muwahiddun* (unitarian or *Wahhabi*) tradition. The current Yemen conflict, despite the almost non-existent Saudi ground role, has required a mobilisation of Saudis behind a perceptible national struggle. Some of the conventional attributes of national myth, the struggle for independence and/or the assertion of national force against a neighbouring threat, have been present in the Saudi presentation of this conflict. Houthi attacks across Saudi territory have given seeming credence to this argument. This has also seen something of a rallying to the Saudi flag, including by *salafi* elements normally reticent, at best, to endorse incipient Saudi nationalism. The Saudi nation is being subtly asserted in contrast to the failings of Yemen (which are hardly helped by the Saudi-led military campaign) and, in a different context, Syria. Of course much of the official rhetoric has been the familiar assertion of an Arab and Islamic interest rather than a specific Saudi, much less Gulf one. The military coalition has been cast by the Saudi leadership in these broad terms, however limited the Arab and broader Muslim involvement in the military campaign. In the UAE, a far greater exposure to battlefield danger and a very public commemoration of national martyrs, alongside the decision to introduce national conscription (albeit not for battlefield fighting), has given the conflict and the Emirati military a more obvious role in cohering the UAE as a national project. There is still an intra-Emirate sensitivity about how this is applied in practice, as I assume there is about federal decision-making in general.

Gulf state nationalism with western features?

Since the outbreak of the Gulf Crisis in June, the inability of the Gulf to become a political project subsuming national difference has been made very obvious. National sensitivities and assertions – against Qatar or Qatar in its own defence – have been more stark. The contradictions of an anti-Islamist assertion (as mentioned) are evident. They may come more easily to the UAE than to Saudi Arabia as a public campaign; they also have an easier fit in foreign policy practice between these two ostensible allies. If nationalism in the west, Asia and indeed parts of the Maghreb and Mashreq has historically been expressed, even discovered, in hostility to an occupier and/or national rival, then the Gulf Crisis has found plenty of rhetorical and some practical opportunities to give vent to it. It isn't clear how much this form of national identity is a citizenship project however. Qataris queuing up to inscribe their sense of national belonging under the all-pervasive image of Emir Tamim are also helping to compound the state-promoted cult of the individual (leader). If national identity is too tightly bound up in one state founder, or founding family like *Sa'udi* Arabia, then arguably the nation isn't a reflect of its citizens' active role in it. If building, or defending, the nation is a top-down project without scope for any popular participation, by both men and women, beyond a competition to express a seamless devotion to state and (male) leader, then citizenship in any meaningful sense has become separated from nationhood. In my own country the royal, and formally speaking ruling, family are officially acknowledged as being used to promote national cohesion, even, arguably, national identity. This really took off in the second of half of the 1940s, even if there was also a reverence for the King's Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, regardless of the fact that he lacked a personal electoral mandate in part because democratic elections were suspended during wartime.

It is argued that defining the people of the UAE in terms of them being "sons of Zayyed" actually establishes a powerful political template against which careful criticism might be made of successors who may not perhaps always measure up.¹¹ The evidence so far throughout the Gulf however is that while in Kuwait you might be able to oblige the second in line to the ruler to answer questions in the national assembly, in general those with the ultimate authority use that very position to present themselves as above the political fray. In other words, Gulf leaders today are comparable to a British monarch still being politically sovereign whilst claiming to be neutral and therefore not needing to be accountable to his/her subjects. Absolute monarchs do not have citizens. If sovereignty is solely in the hands of the ruler, then citizens only exist in name.

Conclusions

To go back to Aristotle, monarchies (i.e. single person rule) or aristocracies become dictatorships or oligarchies respectively when the constant potential for tyranny isn't prevented by the active role of citizens. The rule of the mob (democracy) is tyrannous too as, without checks and controls, the rights of minorities can be threatened (American democratic tyranny, as De Tocqueville famously saw it). Nations, as we know from European history, can be mobilised against some of their own population, even defined as such. The social contract, to go back to Hobbes, requires an exchange: popular consent for protection (in his case, from anarchy). Authority is not a given, it *is* given. When there is a contract, consent can be withdrawn. Now Hobbes didn't seem able to envisage consent as having

¹¹ Unnamed participant, AGSIW, 2016, *Op. cit.*

been withdrawn until the state's (or leader's) protection of their subjects had collapsed. However from Locke onwards there is the idea of a more formal process of consent that eventually brought the idea that sovereignty is embodied in the citizens, not just acceptance of the sovereign. This isn't just a matter of whether you have elections, and whether they determine who is the head of state. We should not seek to obscure the question by arguing that democracy is from a foreign political tradition. Sovereignty is where power lies. Mao said it lay in the barrel of a gun. If so, the key question is who controls the gun? This is a question of sovereignty, not of democracy per se, and as such it directly relates to citizenship.

Providing advice *is* part of citizenship, and any wise leader is prepared to listen to advice. But Aristotle's conception of the citizen was, as I have been discussing, that they could both rule and be ruled. The polity was and is a community of those committed to a public good beyond the interests of their own family and to others known to them. In a larger, more contemporary sense, this gives us a nation, hopefully underpinned by legitimate state power, where our ability to give consent to those governing us reflects our knowledge and our involvement in the civic and political community. We are empowered and so we can, properly and legitimately, empower others.

(ends)

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