



Mass social change and identity hybridization: the case of Qatar and the 2022 FIFA World Cup

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ABSTRACT


This paper examines how the 2022 World Cup has transformed national and cultural identity in Qatar, and residents' responses to such change. Our discussion draws on interviews with Qatari citizens and those working within Qatar's cultural, education, policy, and sports sectors, as well as document analysis. The paper is in four parts. First, we present background information on Qatar, before discussing our chosen methods. Third, we discuss four themes generated from the data. The first focuses on changes to the built environment and how this has impacted perceptions of cultural life in Qatar; second relates to how World Cup infrastructure is also seen as a continued expression of Qatar's heritage; third centred on the perspectives of Qataris as a cultural minority in their country; and fourth shed light on how certain everyday cultural practices of Qataris has survived modernization attempts, albeit, in hybrid forms. We conclude by suggesting that though Qatar's World Cup has brought challenges to Qataris, they actively maintain celebratory heritage customs.

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Introduction

In 2010, Qatar was awarded the rights to stage the 2022 FIFA World Cup. At the time, Qatar was involved in an ambitious nation-building project that sought to convert the state into 'an advanced country by 2030' (Qatar General Secretariat 2008, 2). One outcome of this ambition has been that, in a matter of decades, Qatar and its capital city, Doha, have endured significant cultural change, the type seen elsewhere across the Arabian Gulf in places such as Abu Dhabi and Dubai, encapsulated by the phrase 'instant urbanism' – the rapid development of small towns into extensive, global cities (Bagaeen 2007, 174). Qatar's implementation of World Cup-related infrastructure has only added to the rate of change underway – by 2017, the state was spending

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\$500 million a week on construction projects at home in preparation for the tournament (The Guardian 2017).

To-date, research on the 2022 World Cup has overwhelmingly focused on the opportunities and challenges the tournament presents Qatar's international identity. Many scholars, for instance, have suggested that the World Cup acts as an instrument of 'soft power' – a tool through which Qatar looks to carve out an attractive global profile (see also: Brannagan and Rookwood 2016; Grix, Brannagan, and Lee 2019). Some, for instance, have pinpointed how the World Cup intends to showcase to the world Qatar's myriad of modern architectural wonders, and in doing so, position the state as an attractive, innovative and forward-thinking destination (see: Scharfenort 2012). In similar terms, others have located how the World Cup looks to act as a 'bridge' of communication between East and West in order to demonstrate the cultural similarities that exist between Arab and non-Arab populations (see: Henderson 2015; Brannagan 2017). Finally, others have sought to examine how the World Cup has come to damage Qatar's image abroad (see: Brannagan and Giulianotti 2015, 2018; Reiche 2015; Millward 2017). These authors point particularly to international critique by global media networks and various non-governmental organizations of Qatar's human rights record. Presently, Qatar criminalizes homosexuality, foreign workers are forbidden to unionize, and women enjoy limited socio-political rights with a discriminatory guardianship system in place. Since 2010, the harshest scrutiny has however been over the working and living conditions of blue-collar expatriate construction workers – the majority of whom hail from some of the poorest countries in South Asia – which has been described as a form of 'modern slavery' (see: *The Independent*, 21 November 2022; see also: Brannagan and Grix 2014).

Despite minor exceptions (see: Griffin 2019; Al-Emadi et al. 2017) little research has, however, been conducted into how the World Cup has impacted Qatari citizens themselves. In seeking to fill this void, this article makes an original continuation to knowledge in three ways. First, through interviews with Qatari citizens and those working within Qatar's cultural, education, policy and sports sectors, we explore local perceptions on how the state's World Cup preparations have come to transform Qatari national and cultural identity. Second, this paper is the first to document the ways through which Qataris seek to respond to the pressures that come with such high levels of mass-cultural change. While Qatar provides us with a case study through which to add to existing research on how major events can impact the host, as the smallest state to ever stage a World Cup, and the first Arab nation to organize an event of this magnitude, so too does Qatar offers us new, unique insights into how small, non-western hosts confront the many challenges that accompany the organization of a major tournament that is accompanied predominantly by western values and norms that do not fit

neatly with Arab socio-cultural practices. It is because of this that, in this paper, we seek to locate the perspectives of Qataris themselves – that is, those who hold a Qatari passport and can be considered to be ‘Qatari citizens’. In doing so, our results show that, while the World Cup has impacted the day-to-day cultural fabric of life in Qatar, Qataris have nonetheless come to retain their sense of identity, albeit in hybrid forms. Finally, the paper adds to literature on culture and identity hybridization, and acts as the first attempt to showcase how these hybrid forms materialize in the context of a major sports event in the Arab world.

The remainder of the paper unfolds as follows. In the next section we present crucial background information on Qatar. We then discuss our chosen methods, providing detail on our interviews. We then present our findings into the ways through which Qataris’ have perceived changes to their cultural identity at home since Qatar’s awarding of the World Cup, and how they have sought to respond to such changes. We conclude by summarizing our key findings and contribution to literature.

Qatar

The State of Qatar is a sovereign state, located in the Arabian Gulf. Qatar is governed as an ‘absolute monarchy’, a form of governance within which the monarch holds supreme authority. Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani is the Emir of Qatar, and has ruled over the state since 2013. Regionally, Qatar is a founding member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), an alliance of six Gulf countries (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar) with the goal of ensuring a stable environment for fast-paced urban development. As of August 2022, Qatar’s total population stands at 2.94 million (Qatar Ministry of Planning and Statistics, 2022). Coupled with its landmass – covering an area of 4,473 square miles – Qatar is the 7th smallest country in Asia, and the 3rd smallest in the Middle East (World Bank 2019). Of note is that 87% of Qatar’s total population is made up of expatriate workers, the majority of whom hail from developing countries across South Asia (Snoj 2019). The result is that Qataris – who are largely direct descendants of various nomadic and settled tribes – are today a minority in their own country, acting as the fourth largest national group in the country after people from India, Bangladesh and Nepal (Snoj 2019). The ‘official’ language of Qatar is Arabic, although English has become the *de facto* second language. Islam is the dominant religion amongst Qataris, with the vast majority of citizens adhering to the Sunni doctrine of Islam (U.S. Department of State, 2021).

Economically, Qatar records some of the highest gross domestic product (GDP) per capita incomes worldwide. The state’s nominal GDP per capita is currently the 9th highest in the world, standing at \$84,514,

while it is ranked the 6th highest in the world for its GDP per capita at purchasing power parity (at \$112,789) (International Monetary Fund 2022). Qatar is the world's largest exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG), exporting on average 77 million metric tons per year. Furthermore, Qatar produces on average 1.3 million barrels of crude oil per day, making it the 15th largest exporter worldwide (see: U.S. Energy Information Database, 2021). Proceeds from the sale of oil and gas currently contribute to 70% of Qatar's total revenues, 85% of its export earnings, and 60% of its gross domestic product (Brannagan and Reiche 2022).

In seeking to safeguard the state's long-term survival, Qatar has sought to invest its wealth towards achieving its 'Qatar National Vision 2030' (henceforth 'QNV'), a nation-building project launched in 2008 with the objective to turn the state into 'an advanced country by 2030, capable of sustaining its own development and providing for a high standard of living for all of its people' (Qatar General Secretariat 2008, 2). Guided by two iterations of the Qatar National Development Strategy (henceforth 'Qatar General Secretariat (2011-2016 and 2018-2022)', the state's blueprint for achieving the QNV, Qatar's nation building project is built on four pillars: *economic development*; *human development*; *social development*; and *environmental development*. The first of these pillars helps explain Qatar's rationale for mass urban development at home. These urban projects look to help Qatar attract overseas investors and tourists, and in doing so, support the state achieving the core objective of the Qatar General Secretariat (2008, 11) economic pillar: the development of 'a competitive and diversified economy capable of meeting the needs of, and securing a high standard of living for all its people for the present and for the future'.

The three other pillars of the QNV relate to developments at home. The social development pillar – which focuses on the identity and culture of Qatar, and thus concerns this paper the most – locates how Qatar sets out to promote 'tolerance, benevolence, constructive dialogue and openness towards other cultures in the context of its Arab and Islamic identity' (QNV, 2008: 19). Thus, on the one hand, the state encourages its citizens to embrace 'openness towards others at the national and international levels', while, at the same time, so too does it seek to 'preserve Qatar's national heritage and enhance Arab and Islamic values and identity' (Qatar General Secretariat (2008: 22). In terms of the former, one-way Qatar has sought to open up society is through its staging of sports events. Alongside staging the 2022 World Cup, in recent years so too has Qatar hosted the 2015 International Handball Federations World Championships, the 2019 World Athletics Championships, and the 2019 and 2020 editions of the FIFA Club World Cup. For Qatar, staging these sports events and competing at athletic tournaments are considered to be pivotal 'mechanisms' through which to 'develop

and activate' increased forms of 'regional and international cooperation and communication' (QNDS, 2018–2022: 257).

In subsequent sections we examine how the World Cup has come to impact Qatari citizens in cultural terms, and if, in their opinion, the state has successfully opened up to external influences whilst maintaining its Arab and Islamic identity. Before doing so, we first disclose our research strategy.

Methods

This paper draws on three types of qualitative data obtained between 2015 and 2022 into the impact the 2022 World Cup was having on the lives of Qataris – that is, the 13% of Qatar's overall population who hold full Qatari citizenship. The first type of data collection included 14 semi-structured interviews with policy-makers, academics and public service personnel located within Qatar's political, cultural, educational, tourism, health and sports sectors. These interviewees were not Qatari nationals/citizens themselves, but through their employment occupied what was considered to be a high-level of knowledge of the socio-cultural changes taking place within Qatar, and sport's role/impact in this regard. All of these interviewees were – at the time of the interview – at the level of 'manager' or 'director' within their respective organization, and had lived and worked in Qatar for at least 12 months prior to being interviewed. Furthermore, all interviewees were over the age of 18, nine were male and 5 were female. Ethics approval was awarded by Loughborough University, UK, prior to data collection. Each interviewee was required to sign a consent form. Due to confidentiality agreements, the names and organizations of our interviewees have been hidden. Each interview lasted on average 45 minutes to one hour. A purposeful sample approach was implemented where we identified each participant and contacted them directly via email; in some cases, interviewees put us in contact with further interviewees as part of what can be considered to be a snowball sampling approach. Some interviewees were conducted face-to-face (in Qatar), while others were conducted online, depending on each interviewee's preference and/or availability. Each interviewee centred on three broad themes: the perspectives of each interviewee on the socio-cultural changes Qatar was currently going through; the challenges that Qataris were facing in socio-cultural terms; and, the impact the World Cup was having on socio-cultural life in Qatar.

Second, interviews were then conducted in spring 2022 with twelve 'Qatari nationals' – that is those who can be considered to be 'Qatari' in both national and full citizenship terms. All of the Qataris we interviewed were female aged between 20 and 30 years old. All were graduates from American universities based at Doha's Education City who had recently entered the job market in both public and private sector employments. All interviewees lived in Doha,

Table 1. ~TC~.

Document	Publication Date
Qatar National Vision 2030	2008
Qatar National Development Strategy 2011–2016	2011
Qatar National Research Strategy	2012
Qatar Social and Economic Survey Research Institute Report	2015
Qatar National Tourism Sector Strategy	2015
Qatar Sports Sector Strategy	2015
Qatar National Development Framework 2032	2016
Qatar Public Health Strategy	2017
Qatar National Development Strategy 2018–2022	2018
Qatar National Health Strategy 2018–2022	2018
Qatar Census Report 2020	2020

the state's capital, and Qatar's most populated area, housing two-thirds of the state's overall population. To protect the identities of those we interviewed, we have also hidden their names. Before we considered publishing any data from our Qatari interviews, interviewees were required to sign a consent form.

The third and final form of data collection was the analysis of policy documents. We ensured that we only analysed documents that were available in English, and that we could directly access from an official Qatari state website. We only included in our final sample those documents that were published from 2008 onwards – when the Qatar National Vision was first introduced – and those which covered any aspect related to the QNV's social development pillar. In total, 11 official state documents were incorporated into our final sample (see [Table 1](#) above).

After transcribing our interview data, we subjected our data to a thorough thematic analysis. In doing so, it should be noted that our 'data corpus' – that is, the entirety of our data – stems from two separate research projects on the 2022 World Cup, one that took place when one of the authors was at Loughborough University, and the other an ongoing project at Georgetown University in Qatar. Our data corpus therefore included all of the data sets mentioned above – that is, interviews with policy-makers, academics and public service personnel, interviews with Qatari citizens, and the analysis of policy documents. To clarify, we did however analyse our interview data and document analysis separately, albeit using the same analytic procedure on each. This specific analytic procedure saw us adhere to the following five stage process, suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006):

- (1) We read and re-read our two data sets until we became familiar with the breadth and depth of the content we were dealing with.
- (2) We then created initial codes. Working through our data, we pinpointed key points/aspects/issues – these were then colour-coded using highlighter pens, and each highlighted passage was allocated a few words of text.

- (3) Once data had been coded, we progressed towards the identification of themes. Here, we sorted all codes into categories, providing consideration towards how various codes could be combined to form overarching- and sub-themes.
- (4) We then ensured each theme consisted of coherent data that came together meaningfully; we also ensured that each theme was significant and unique in its own right. Once all the codes and themes had been through this review process, we were left with a list of themes and their corresponding sub-themes.
- (5) Once we were satisfied with our thematic map, we then went about defining and further refining our themes. Here we focused on defining and refining the essence of each theme. By the end of this stage, we were able to provide a concise account of the content and significance of each overarching and sub-theme.

Findings and discussion

Qatar's built environment

Our thematic analysis generated four themes. The first centred on Qatar's 'built environment' – that is, 'the human-made or human-altered space in which individuals live out their daily lives' (Renalds, Smith, and Hale 2010, 67–68). Crucial here was the state's changes to its built environment, and how this was viewed with much unease amongst Qataris, particularly given how such developments were occurring at a highly unprecedented rate. Indeed, one interviewee from Qatar's public service sector proclaimed that Qataris had 'grave misgivings around their beautiful desert country going under concrete'. In offering more detail on how the state's urban progression had affected daily, cultural life in Qatar, one interviewee from the state's education sector advocated the following:

... I think the development and building and influx of things has been incredibly rapid. When we [first] got here ... what I would call the 'central business district' part of town ... there were about twelve buildings there and now there's more than two hundred and fifty. So, in this period of time, it has literally transformed in front of our eyes ... [and] Everyone here talks about the traffic ... it had I think an impact on everyone's daily lives. It's gone from a society where you had your job, you went home at two o'clock and had your siesta and then you headed over to your mother-in-law's house at seven in the evening, to where everything has now changed, you get out of your house at seven in the evenings and it will take you an hour to get anywhere. It would take you twenty minutes to reach the end of your street. So, a lot of that has also been a little overwhelming.

As discussed in the introduction, Qatar has undergone significant urban changes in recent decades. The result is that, unlike cities such as London,

New York or Paris which have developed over many centuries, the cities of the GCC have been subjected to immense urban and cultural change in a very short space of time. In large-part, such miraculous changes have been driven by what Rizzo (2014, 51) calls Qatar's 'megaproject phase', referring to the state's 'tendency to build large, themed urban projects in an effort to emulate similar, popular developments taking shape in the rest of the Gulf region'. Examples include the ongoing construction of 'The Pearl', a 2 square mile man-made island north of Doha, housing luxury apartments, a marina and various high-end shops and restaurants. Then there is Lusail, an entire new city being built from scratch on the outskirts of Doha that will host the 2022 World Cup final, and comprise a mix of residential and commercial neighbourhoods, hotels, a golf course, high-end restaurants and shops, and a theme park. Upon completion, Lusail will be able to house up to 450,000 residents (The Independent 2021). These projects have taken place alongside the ongoing expansion of Qatar's 'West Bay' area (referred to by one of the above interviewees as the state's 'central business district'), which, over a 15-year period, starting in the late 1990s, has witnessed the construction of 88 high-rise skyscrapers (see: Mirincheva, Wiedmann, and Salama 2013). Projects such as these have fostered the development of modern skylines, facilities and accompanying 'wowarchitecture' which have been used to project an international identity of Qatar as a highly entrepreneurial, competitive state (Rizzo 2013).

However, a point located by the above interviewee was that the state's rapid infrastructural developments have also brought about a number of evidential – and in some cases 'overwhelming' – changes to the lives of Qataris. With the rate at which historic neighbourhoods have been replaced by modern high-rise towers, it is not perhaps surprising that Qataris might express trepidations over the changes to Doha's 'city identity' – that is, the sense and feel of a city that distinguishes it from other cities (see: Boussaa, Alattar, and Nafi 2021, 296). This is a point located by Ibrahim (2013, 299), who notes how the introduction of modern architectural styles have, in many cases, become 'completely detached from the traditional ones that reflect the country's identity'. In seeking to identify the attitudes of Qataris themselves in this respect, Nagy (2000, 126–136) pinpoints how this has led to many citizens demonstrating a 'longing and nostalgia of the past' for its 'traditional urban design and forms', which have largely been lost to the 'bulldozer of progress'.

According to several interviewees, one factor which had added to the intensity of urban changes has been the World Cup. Our findings here thus support a recent study by Al-Emadi, Sellami, and Fadlalla (2022, 13), who found that younger Qataris in particular felt the state's staging of the World Cup would 'disrupt everyday lives of people in Qatar', and

'increase traffic congestion and reduce available parking' across Doha. In unpacking this further, one interviewee from Qatar's public services sector explained:

I mean if anything it's [the World Cup] accelerated the changes. It will mean we get to 'end state' . . . you know, at the moment, Qatar and Doha are a work in progress from an infrastructure point of view. Now, what the World Cup is doing is providing a sense of urgency around getting the infrastructure in place, and I'd say from living here, one of the biggest issues is the traffic, and it's just every time you get stuck in traffic and all the rest of it, that's just . . . with the continual road works and roads being diverted for pouring concrete for this or that, you know. So, I would say the World Cup has exacerbated that pace of change.

Preuss (2007, 219) argues that one incentive of staging sports events is that a city can foster 'accelerated development', benefitting earlier from the completion of pre-planned construction projects in order to 'better position itself in relation to global competition'. However, despite how beneficial this 'accelerated development' is in terms of international competitiveness, the above demonstrates that, domestically, the staging of sports events can be accompanied by a significant number of unwelcome changes and disruption to residents' lives. In the case of the Sochi 2014 Olympics, for example, Vetitnev and Bobina (2015) note how unprecedented levels of construction, traffic congestion and dirt created by the organization of the event negatively came to seriously affect local inhabitants' attitudes towards the Games. Since its acquisition of the 2022 World Cup, construction costs in Qatar have regularly remained the highest of all GCC states due to the country's recent 'rush to build new roads, railways, homes, schools and stadiums' in the lead-up to 2022 (Doha News 2015). The state's ever-expanding construction projects in already congested parts of Doha generate regular complaints from commuters, who continuously have to navigate their way through traffic jams and ever-changing diverted routes. The direct impact of the World Cup in this respect is evident by survey results that suggest 73% of 18–30 year-old Qataris believe the tournament would 'increase noise pollution in Qatar' in the short-term, while 61% of all Qataris surveyed agreed that the World Cup would 'disrupt everyday life' (SESRI 2015, 10–12).

Urban hybridization

Despite such disruption, a further theme centred on how interviewees demonstrated an awareness of how the state's urban developments were also contributing to the continuation of Qatari culture and heritage. Crucial here was how Qatar's built environment sought to maintain a Qatari and Arabic identity and feel, something that was considered to be a tourism 'niche' for the state, as explained below by interviewees from Qatar's media and education sectors:

... Qatar Tourism Authority plans to focus its promotional and funding efforts on tourism products and services that fall into ... 'authentic Arabic experiences' ... so that's the plank right there of Qatar Tourism Authority's platform. And then, staying on that, that's also one way Qatar would like to distinguish itself from the region. They're very careful not to name names, but they basically assess the region ... Dubai has skyrocketed to become known as a modern, twenty-first century glittering, urban experience. Our [Qatar's] niche is then that we can offer that authentic Qatari, Arabic experience to visitors.

I think they want to showcase the country, and, you know ... I think that's something [heritage sites] they want to showcase [to international tourists] ... You know, part of what they're doing ... sport is one pillar of their development strategy, but also culture ... and heritage is another ... Qatar doesn't have much to offer in terms of many other things people want in terms of tourism ... So they're going towards the specialized events and specialized tourism rather than mass-tourism.

In offering further insight into the centrality of Qatar's ancestral past, the Qatar National Tourism Sector Strategy's front cover positions the state as 'a world-class hub with deep cultural roots' (Qatar Tourism Authority [n.d.c](#)). Through the cultivating of a 'rich collection' of 'cultural highlights', the strategy argues that what makes Qatar 'unique' for visitors is the 'chance to embark on authentic experiences of the Qatari and Arab culture' (Qatar Tourism Authority [n.d.c](#), 8–21). The belief amongst state authorities is thus that the conservation of heritage sites and new, Arabic-inspired infrastructure will give Qatar an edge in tourism terms (20). Examples of infrastructure projects that seek to offer this 'authentic' Arabic feel includes Katara Cultural Village, situated just north of Doha on Qatar's eastern shoreline. Opened in 2010, Katara is a purpose-built, 'innovative interpretation of the region's architectural heritage' (Qatar Tourism Authority, 'al Zubarah', [n.d.](#)). The Village stages regular historic art and music exhibitions, all with the aim to serve 'as a guardian to the heritage and traditions of Qatar', offering onlookers a place where the 'grace of the past meets the splendour of the future' (Katara, 'about', [n.d.](#)). Furthermore, is the redevelopment of 'Souq Waqif'. With its age-old Arabic-like shops and stalls, the Souq provides an 'authentic taste of traditional commerce, architecture and culture' (Qatar Tourism Authority [n.d.a](#)). Then there are the 2022 World Cup stadiums themselves, which have been inspired by the state's 'rich traditional architecture' (QSCDL 2015). 'Al Bayt' stadium, for instance, 'takes its name from "bayt al sha'ar"', referring to 'tents historically used by nomadic peoples in Qatar and the Gulf region' (QSCDL [n.d.](#)). For Amara and Bouandel (2022, 247), 'these stadiums have been made to reflect the local identity and culture as well as Qatar's ambition as a nation'.

Examples such as the above resonate with what has been termed as 'urban hybridization'. As opposed to seeing culture as a static entity, one that can *either* survive or decline in the face of external forces, a hybridization

approach adopts a middle-ground, pinpointing how national cultures are continuously in a state of evolutionary flux. Crucial to a hybridization perspective is the belief that, as modern ideas and designs from global locations are thrust into new local settings, they do not necessarily obliterate age-old identities, but rather become rapidly indigenized and transformed by the host; in other words, what we are witnessing here is 'the interdependence and interpenetration of the local *and* the global', resulting in the emergence of a number of hybrid forms across the globe (Robertson, 1992: 173–4). Our case study of Qatar demonstrates such hybrid cultural forms through the 're-imaginings of indigenous architectural styles', which serve as an evidential conscious concern for the continuation of attachment to traditional identity, albeit within the confines of the contemporary era (Exell and Rico 2013, 675). Harkness (2020, 98) refers to this as Qatar's 'modern traditionalism', correctly pinpointing how modern forces and local traditions have been deliberately adapted into new, hybrid forms of thought and action. Consequently, while the 2022 World Cup has brought many perceived challenges to Qataris' sense of local identity, so does it seek to act as part of Qatar's desire to ensure the continuation of the state's cultural heritage.

Qataris as a cultural minority

The third theme to emerge from our analysis centred on how Qataris felt about being the minority nationality in their country. One sub-theme here focussed on the influx and presence of such a large number of expatriates, who were perceived to be threatening cultural life in Qatar. As mentioned, Qataris themselves today make up 13% of the state's entire population, and have witnessed themselves becoming more of a minority in their country – note, for example, that Qataris accounted for 40% of the state's entire population in 1940, with this number falling to 27% in 1997, 24% in 2004, and then 15% in 2010 (Snoj 2019). According to one interviewee from Qatar's media sector, the large presence of non-Qatari residents has created 'some tension around notions of erosion of identity' amongst citizens. In commenting on this, one interviewee from Qatar's education sector advocated the following:

... one of the impressions I have is that there is quite a strong part within Qatari society who would just love all these foreigners to go away! Of course, they don't think it through as suddenly they would have to do all the work that these foreigners are doing at the moment. But clearly it is a challenge for them to live as a minority ... to live as a minority in their own country.

The core reason behind so many expatriates in Qatar relates to the plethora of employment prospects available across the state's construction and domestic sectors, on the one hand, and the country's lack of on-hand national expertise

in specific areas on the other (see: Babar 2014). The consequence of this, as Rizzo (2014, 52) reminds us, is that in under two decades, Qataris have been forced to witness Doha's transformation from 'a small, port city to a bustling capital region with global ambitions'. The above premise that a significant proportion of Qataris would 'love all these foreigners to go away' is a point supported by Gengler (2012, 70), who suggests that, after witnessing 'record-setting immigration patterns', the 'limits of Qatari's tolerance for expatriate workers' has indeed become 'stretched'.

However, many scholars have argued here that the hostility shown by Qataris towards expatriates is not simply due to issues of overcrowding, but an awareness of the need to avoid the fate of places such as Dubai. This is a point Kapiszewski (2006, 12) identifies by suggesting that, across the GCC, there is a growing anxiety exhibited amongst native citizens over the ever-concerning 'negative influence of expatriates on the national cultures, identities and values' of these once largely Arab populations. This is confirmed by a study by Diop et al. (2017, 150–153) who explain that, while Qataris 'recognize and value the contribution of foreign workers to the economic development of their country', they nonetheless view expatriates as 'a direct threat to Qatari life and culture' – indeed, from their own data collection, the authors found that 73% of Qatari respondents agreed that the high presence of foreign workers 'threatens traditional Qatari customs and values'. Furthermore, 56% of Qataris feel the 2022 World Cup will 'change the traditional Qatari culture' (SESRI 2015, 16), supported by the fact that, since 2010, when Qatar was awarded the tournament, the state has welcomed 'an additional one million foreign workers, increasing its population by more than 50%' (Harkness 2020, 97).

Hybrid cultural practices

Similar to our findings on urban hybridization, our final theme focused on the ways through which Qataris were themselves demonstrating evidence of everyday hybrid cultural practices. Three key points emerged in this regard. The first related to how Qataris had maintained their traditional Arab dress, yet how new fashions and trends had emerged in this regard, as one Qatari woman explained a few months prior to the staging of the 2022 World Cup:

It is still common for women to wear abaya and shayla and for men to wear thobes. Few women only wear abaya but no shayla, but a vast majority still does. However, what has changed is the abaya itself. Five, six years ago, when you saw a group of Qatari women, it was like a black block. Now there are different colors for the abayas and different designs. And it has become common to wear below the abaya western clothes ... The traditional dress is a cultural and not a religious practice. When Qatari people travel abroad, men

don't wear a thobe and women don't wear the Abaya. However, many but not all women wear a headscarf abroad.

The above showcases how Qataris continue to adhere to their traditional Arab dresswear whilst in Qatar. However, as highlighted above, a recent phenomenon has been the emergence of designer 'traditional' Arab clothing for women, with new styles and colours that mark a change from previous generations. Commenting on this, Lindholm (2014, 45–48) locates how, across many parts of the Arabian Gulf, traditional dresswear has been 'undergoing external influences and modernization at many levels', where garments that were originally designed for women to 'actively avoid attracting attention to themselves', have gone from being 'plain, utilitarian' objects to more recently being used as something of a 'fashion object'. The result is that, in the contemporary epoch, the wearing of traditional yet stylish dresswear for women, made and branded by leading clothing designers, has become 'an important symbol of status and modernity in the Middle East' (Lindholm (2014): 49). Furthermore, outside of Qatar, a vast majority of Qatari men and women abandon their traditional Arab dresswear which shows that this is rather a cultural than a religious practice. For example, Sheikha Hind bint Hamad Al-Thani completed her first Olympic distance triathlon in the German city of Hamburg in September 2021. She did not wear a headscarf, and local Qatari newspapers such as *The Peninsula* printed a picture with Sheikha Hind proudly holding a medal and a Qatari flag without her being fully-covered, something that would not happen at any public appearance in Qatar (The Peninsula 2021).

A second key point here related to Qatari's use of their spare time, and how age-old practices had continued alongside modern forms of living. One example here related to the way Qataris continued to meet through the traditional 'majlis' – referring to traditional, informal 'sitting places' which 'serve as important forums for political debate, career networking and other topics' (Doha News 2015). Indeed, as one Qatari explained:

Men regularly go, often on a daily basis, to Majlis. My dad goes every day to a Majlis. He is hosting twice per week a Majlis at our home, and goes the other days to Majlis from our neighbors or relatives. Younger men also go to Majlis, but their life is more happening between the gym, coffee shop, malls, and Majlis. If one does not go to a Majlis, people start asking where have you been. There are also Majlis for women, but they are less often and inside the house, while men meet more publicly around the house at spaces dedicated for this.

While attending Majlis is particularly a social norm for men, there are also women's gatherings, a phenomenon which Mitchell et al. (2015, 11) suggest reveals the conflict between, on the one hand, Qatari women's increased ability to pursue higher education and enter the public sphere through participation in the workforce or political arena and, on the other hand,

traditional social norms and attitudes that prioritize domestic life. Although women's majlis was not established to compete with men's majlis, and is, in many cases, used by Qatari women as a form of social gathering, the authors suggest that 'Qatari women use the spaces of majalis al-hareem to wrestle with the complex issues of joining a knowledge economy while also maintaining social and cultural traditions' (Mitchell et al. (2015).

Linked to the example of Majlis is Qataris' (continued) love of desert life, which one interviewee from Qatar's public sector explained:

I often get from the younger Qataris that their grandparents like to see them when they're out in the desert camping ... so the desert camps. So, each year just about every Qatari family has a desert camp ... So essentially Bedouin tents and in this day-in-age toilets and satellite dishes and toys and all the rest of it. But essentially, they maintain that connection with the desert through these desert camps during the cooler months of the year. And the old folks just love going out there to sort of get away from the trimmings of modern life and go back to their roots. And it's really interesting the draw back to that aspect. And that's from quite traditional tents from where your grandparents might live for potentially weeks on end and you go see that out of cultural respect and all the rest of it ... So, you know, there's still that cultural connection ...

Key here is that Qataris are largely the modern-day decedents of nomadic, desert tribes (known as 'Bedouin'), as well as coastal, settled tribes (known as 'Hadar') (Al-Hammadi 2018). As described by the above interviewee, one way through which Qataris' tribal tradition survives is through the desire to retain a connection to desert and coastal life. According to the Qatar Ministry of Municipality and Environment (MME), the popularity of this contemporary cultural practice is on the rise: in 2016, the MME recorded a thirty percent increase in permit applications for the winter desert camping season (Doha News 2016). The growing popularity of the camping season in Qatar is perceived to stem from Qataris' 'boredom with city life' (Doha News 2016). This resonates with McCoy's (2010) contention that the seasonal drawback to the desert is not only a 'popular pastime amongst Qataris', but also widely seen to be one way to 'get away from the stresses of city life and to remind themselves of their nomadic desert roots'. Whilst in the desert, one way Qataris seek to 'remind' themselves of their more nomadic, desert roots is through traditional Arabic sports. One interviewee from Qatar's media sector commented on the growing popularity of 'the sport of falconing, right, in a hot, air-conditioned country, the amount of people who own falcons and go to the desert and hunt with falcons, that's pretty incredible in and of itself'. Consequently, whilst on the one hand state authorities seek to acquire and host a plethora of global sports events, such as the World Cup, on the other, it would appear Qataris also maintain age-old, more local-favoured sports such as falconry and camel racing, which is considered to be an active 'celebration of Qatar history and tradition' (Qatar Tourism Authority n.d.b).

Examples such as the above once again demonstrate the existence of hybrid identity forms across Qatar – that is, the coming together of modern and traditional styles, habits, practices and behaviours. Crucial here too is the way such examples reflect what Smith (2004) calls ‘ethno-symbolism’, referring to how national cultures and identities are based on the continuation and adaptation of ancient, pre-modern ethnic roots. For Smith, national affiliation is not simply a modern or ancient tradition, but rather a process of ‘subjective rediscovery’, whereby long-established cultural repertoires (myths, symbols and memories) are consciously ‘carried’ into the contemporary era and reshaped when populations become faced with perceived challenges to their cultural survival (Hutchinson and Smith, 2000). As one form of cultural hybridization, Smith’s subjective rediscovery helps explain Qataris’ desire to ensure the continuation of age-old practices and behaviours, albeit within the confines of modern life. For Qatari authorities, these hybrid forms of subjective rediscovery act as evidential examples of the state’s desire to ‘maintain a proper balance between modern life and the country’s cultural and traditional values’ through ‘moulding modernization around the preservation of Qatari culture and traditions’ (Qatar General Secretariat 2011, 2–20).

Conclusion

Qatar acts as one example of the process of cultural ‘retraditionalization’, whereby tribal affiliations, symbols and myths are adapted and reshaped to ensure their survival in the modern-day era, underpinned by the conscious desire to respond to modernizing forces (see: Hutchinson and Smith, 2000). As we have seen, Qataris have not broken from their past, demonstrated by their determination to resurrect, maintain and re-live celebratory tribal practices, construct new buildings that encapsulate age-old Arabic styles, and ensure the continuation of symbolic sports, such as falconry. The result is the hybridization of Qatari culture and identity, whereby modern forces are moulded to fit age-old practices, and vice versa. As we have seen, such hybrid forms have been actively championed by the Qatari state as part of its attempt to successfully balance tradition with modernity. Whilst the preparations for the 2022 World Cup have evidently brought many challenges to Qataris’ perceived sense of local culture and identity survival, the tournament also acts as a continuation of Qatar’s Arabic past.

The paper also highlights the need for future research on emerging economies to recognize how, through state-led efforts to carve out new identities on the global stage, such attempts can come to impact the perceived identities of local and national citizens themselves. This is perhaps most important for research that focuses on small states and/or ones that have developed at a fast pace. Qatar, along with many of its regional neighbours, are both small and rapidly changing states, and thus attempts at global

image promotion by their governments/leadership can impact the citizens of these states in much more pronounced ways than those living in larger and/or more evenly paced developing countries. Indeed, as we have seen here in the case of Qatar, not only has the state's faced-paced efforts to modernize the country directly impacted Qataris' unease over the fate of their cultural and national identity, but an indirect consequence has been that such anxieties have been heightened in response to the rate at which they as a group have diminished in number compared to the ever-growing expatriate population living in Qatar.

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