

# The Representation of Qatari Nation on Television: The Qatari Nation as Traditional in Two Local Channels

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## **Abstract**

*This paper is a part of MA thesis, “The Representation of Qatari Nation on Television: Tradition, Modernity and Islam in Two Local Channels”. It examines Qatari national imagination in Qatari local television channels, are Qatar National Television and Al-Rayyan Channel. “National imagination” means here an imagined perception of the Qatari nation in which the social and the political factors are integral. The image of Qatari nation is continuously produced in Qatari television channels as a part of national building project. It is presented on television as traditional nation, modern nation and Muslim nation. For the representation of Qatari nation as traditional, there were two television programs chosen for research are Al-Sagar, and Fatah Al-Khair programs. This part contains anthropological and cultural analysis of the traditional television content. There were also numbers of people interviewed to understand the content presented in these television channels. This research aims to contribute to the literature of media, culture and nationalism.*

## **Keywords**

*television, culture, Nationalism, anthropology*

## **1. Introduction**

This paper discusses the representation of Qatari nation as traditional in two Qatari television channels, are Qatar National Television and Al-Rayyan Channel. The chapter will discuss how Qatari nation is presented as traditional in looking at the issue of “turath” literally means patrimony. The traditional portrayal of Qatari nation did not use to exist in the old television channel. As modern Qataris live in a modern society, they are committed to think of the past as a struggle of indigenous survival. Recalling the old national past and traditions on local television channels is not just a matter of cultivating the new generations about the national past, it’s rather a mean of establishing educational and national project “regardless its authenticity” for social and political reasons. Al-Sagar and Fatah Al-Khair are television programs chosen for analysis.

## 2. Methodology

As this research looks at the production side of Qatari local channels, Qualitative methods were used, such as in-depth interviews and content analysis. I made in-depth interviews for around 30 people working inside two local channels are Qatar national channel and Al-Rayyan Channel. For more clarifications about the changing content of Qatari local channels and how it's connected with audience, numbers of Qatari television viewers were randomly interviewed. For analyzing the traditional content, one programs from each channel was taken as an example. In order to get a better understanding, more than ten episodes been reviewed for each program. The chosen programs will be reflecting what is being established in these two channels including the theme, the orientations and the national culture that the two channels try to convey. Participant observation was planned earlier to be included, however regulations and restrictions of stranger presence inside these local channels made this method hard to be used. Oral history was used as method to collect elderly people views on television and transformations of visuals. Checking channels' main websites and social media accounts of the channels and number of people working inside these channels was done constantly. Snapchat App of Qatar television was used to watch closely day-to-day activities of television behind the scenes, and what are the scenes that mostly snapped.

## 3. Discussion

The paper main question is how the Qatari nation represented in Qatari television channels as traditional nation? First of all, the two television programs Al-Sagar and Fata'h Al-Khair, are examples of the Qatari traditional content and seems relevant to the discussions of the "invention of tradition" (Note 1). On analyzing the traditional content in Qatari television channels, we would want to limit the meaning of reviving the national past on the Arabic word "Turath", which means generally "tradition" in English language. It's used excessively in the Qatari local content in both channels. The concept of tradition is ambiguous to define as it falls between general and ideological definitions. The core meaning of "tradition" is the classic Latin word "traditio" means "handing over" or "delivery", which is the process of handing down a thought from generation to another. In slow changing societies the meaning of tradition comes closer to the meaning of inheritance; a style of life as well. In early times, the usage of the word tradition was entirely sociologized to some social groups, women, children, rural population and ethnic minorities as referring to their degree of locality. Tradition was used also in religion, and it was not just a word, but also a way of life of religious people who constitute the majority.

The word "tradition" can be found in many fields, a word that does not only associates with law and religion. Contemporary studies of anthropologists and folklorists would agree that the word tradition connotes something much deeper into the lives of individuals, groups and institutions. It's the continuous presence of ethos, sprit and attitude of life and rites, in which the word tradition by its

sacred meaning safeguards these ethos and spirit. Tradition is not about coercive conservatism, but it's rather about continuous principles that identities hold for generations. These principles link people together to stay on the same race and history against all odds and transformations. It is not simply the repetition of the past; it's a progress of reserving memory that feeds individuals experiences. We can describe the word tradition as a form of fidelity not servility. This is the way that we can come closer to what Qataris mean by "turath" in the televised local content.

The consciousness of tradition appeared when people went over several historical events led these people to become aware of the change and more importantly aware of "loss". The word "turath" again did not use to be a core subject in Qatar local channels. The content produced for showing traditional Qatar was rare and incomplete project. Nations were not self-conscious of handing down traditions until there was a clear threat to the continuity of their preserved traditions (Note 2). The usage of media in Qatar especially television production is quite significant and remarkable in reviving lost tradition. Therefore, "tradition was the name given to those cultural features which, in situations of change, were to be continued to be handed on, thought about, preserved and not lost" (Note 3). The forcing of continuity of "tradition" in Qatar after long period of pausing seems a national goal toward building the nation.

Forcing continuity of lost tradition, means that the invention of tradition seems inevitable, and for many reasons nations had to invent traditions. Invention of traditions is creating an imagined and supposedly a similar image of the old traditions; something new, different and nonexistent before, but somehow resemble the past. The word invention comes from a Latin roots "*venire*" means primarily as to come up with something or to discover something has been there. "*venire*" comes with other different meanings such as to arrange or to organize established things. The term "*venire*" also comes with different usage "*forcefulness*" means to establish, to institute, to plan, to bring something into use by authority. The word invention was found, but the invention of tradition as scientific issue recognized only at the very beginning of 1980s.

Furthermore, invention of traditions is a process of "creating" something out of an imagined perception of a story. A more nuanced definition of the invention of tradition is "a process of fictionalizing, it has an element of storytelling, that can on the one hand be as deceptive as the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, our identities, our communities or on the other hand be as untrue and deceitful as forgery" (Note 4). Inventing traditions is liberating process because the right to invent and at the same time it's a kind of oppressive tool, because it gives the storyteller a kind of privilege or control over the others. Invention is generally perceived as power, but it depends on what is been invented, how it's being invented, for what purpose, on what context and how successful it was.

It is important to note that social groups and individuals invent old traditions to revive their relations to the past for social and political reasons. "Invented traditions" can be a term associated only with the elites to manipulate and control the powerless. However, this practice of power can also be used to

unify the nation and the institutions from falling apart in face of social and political changes. Centralized power and political entity can cause public agreement over identity and traditions, but can cause also artificial communities to exist. Means communities that would believe in a national past that is largely factious.

The difficulty in studying the revival of the traditions depends on tracing back the exact origins of this practice. These questions of when, why and how traditions were invented remain complex questions to answer in paradoxical modern nations. However, in analyzing Qatari televised content the invention started massively after the modernization of Qatari Television stations in 2012, but the interest of reviving “turath” started much earlier in 2005. Over the last decades, the Qatari government was busy building modern Qatar (capital Doha in specific). This came through establishing all what a modern country needs such as facilitations for the coming generations. This includes paving roads, working on education, building schools, establishing learning centers and colleges, improving health care and building hospitals. Also funding projects inside and outside Qatar, making agreements with companies, brining all foreign famous brands of goods and services. Due to the economic boom, Qatar needed more “working people” from outside Qatar to achieve its goals in different fields. Qatar interest in building modern Qatar attracted large number of people coming either from Arab world or from the West for job opportunities. Huge number of teachers, workers, managers, advisors, specialists and many other occupations all moved to Qatar. Old Qataris as eyewitness recall the past saying that foreigners and Arabs started coming to Qatar in 1980s because they knew of this coming change, in which it will create many opportunities. The huge addition of non-nationals to the small Qatari population made a huge difference, in which nationals did not feel it until they became a minority in their own country in 2000s. Qatari officials paid attention to this imbalance and considered it a threat to the national survival. The interest of “turath Qatar” and “turath al-ajdad” seemed urgent matter for the small nation.

Historians such as Hobsbawm (Note 5) expect to see several examples of the inventions of traditions cases as long as societies experience social and political transformations. The industrial revolution is an example, but historically for the Qatari context the discovery of oil and modernization policies led to social and political transformations as well as loss of old tradition. Old traditions collapse when transformation occurs, and traditional social institution would be unable to change at the same time and become flexible, yet new inventions is needed. New invention of tradition again is not totally new invention, but is modified and imagined. Hobsbawm says that nations invent modified tradition because it cannot adapt the old version with all its characteristics that seem irrelevant to modern day, “one must beware of making the further assumptions, firstly the old forms of community and authority structure, and consequently the traditions associated with them, were unadoptable and became rapidly unviable, and secondly that new traditions simply resulted from the inability to use or to adapt old ones” (Note 6). The new television production of similar image of old Qatari past such as al-ghaws,

Sagara, established tents, camels and horse riding are all not the same old pictures of exhausted individuals in dusty hot weather, but rather a set up glossy production and colored photographs. Thus media production here in Qatar seems to be a vital tool used for invention.

The case of the invention of tradition cannot be separated from the state “nation” and history of nation. Ancient materials are archived in the past of all nations and largely used for historical continuity, in which this continuity can be also invented. The existing customary, folklore and so many other traditional practices were modified, ritualized and institutionalized to fit the modern day. National movements and states created entirely new symbols and devices in order particularize one image for a nation such as national anthems, national flag, and personification of a nation in symbol or image. This is all fall under the category of state nationalism in which it has the authority to create national tradition. What shown on Qatari local channels represent the national tradition that the state media manufacture; or the state media impose on the nation since it’s also imagined. Hobsbawm adds on this issue, “the element of the invention is particularly clear here, since the history which became part of the fund of knowledge or the ideology of nation, state or movement is not what has actually been preserved in popular memory, but what has been selected, written or pictured, popularized and institutionalized by those whose function it is to do so”.

Al-Rayyan channel and Qatar national channel as state television both are a big example of production tools of the nation’s tradition. Al Rayyan Channel seems to feed the Qatari audience very rich and dense traditional and national content. As result of talking to many people who watch Qatari local channels, it was understood that Qatari audience is glad mostly about the professional production of local events and activities. Number of Qatari audience is also amused about the degree of locality and traditionality that Al-Rayyan offers its audience, in which it was unimaginable years ago. Al-Rayyan established recently in 2012, knowing that there is well known national and local channel on stage “Qatar national channel”. It seems that Al-Rayyan channel chose to work on this line of producing rich local and traditional content for its imagined traditional audience. To be more traditional, is to be more down to the locals, and is to be a great nationalist in the minds of Qataris. Nationalism seems that it never perceived negatively but to be “watani” is a great example of loving this country “watan”.

The traditional content in these local channels especially Al-Rayyan channel promote Qatari nation as primordial. Means an ancient nation existed before times “primordialism”. In an old video picturing nomads living in Arabian Gulf, the voice over uses “Al-insan Al-Qatari” means the Qatari human to refer to nomads. Using this phrase the Qatari human means giving it a primordial meaning, telling the locals that there was a Qatari human ages ago (What generally known in scientific reports, the usage of al-insan al-bidaai such as nomads or Neanderthal rather than giving it a national identity). Television traditional content gives the Qatari audience a sense of ethnic past “Qatariness” rather than new formation of state and nation, “As groups and groups of people defines themselves in ethnic terms. The ethnic roots of the nation become increasingly visible, forcing even those groups which defined

themselves in civic terms to regard themselves increasingly as ethnic nations, as happened in late 19<sup>th</sup> century France” (Note 8). However, nations are only modern establishments this is how we reach to understand current nations and nationalism, especially in the Gulf. This is greatly agrees with Eric Hobsbawm’s (Note 9) argument that nation is very modern concept and it was recently introduced.

Compared to Al-Rayyan channel, Qatar national channel represents the moderate version of traditional content. The Qatari audience and people working inside the channel often describe the channel as not heavy nationalistic, because its target all the public. However, when Al-Rayyan channel was established, Qatar national channel increased “turathi content” and established it as core subject such as the sea and desert activities. This is in order to compete somehow with the new style of showing the Qatari nation as ancient and traditional. Al-Rayyan channel seems to win the competition on showing the traditional nation (Note 10). It is important to mention that the programs chosen for the research are only examples of the wide continuous traditional content in both local channels.

Qatar historically shared with Khaliji people some aspects, and did not allow the colonizer neither to define the Qatari traditions nor to invent it. On local channels, we watch a strong attempt to show Qataris preserving their traditional clothes, in which it pauses a challenge to show the difference between Qatari traditional clothes and other Khaliji clothes. Qatari dialect is known for its unique dialect that sounds like a mixture of both Bahraini and Kuwaiti dialects; televising Qatari dialect with the usage of Qatari local phrases is a way to address a one nation. Also these local television channels work on this aspect of “adding Qatari traditional phrases and sayings”. The “turath” is as what Frederick Ma’touq called it a “silent being” a silent object, in which it cannot say anything about the past and tradition. The television production is the tool used to make this silent object speak not by its words but by the television words and moving pictures.

### *3.1 Orientalism and Televising Qatari Nation as Traditional*

Orientalism is another possibility of influence of the traditional content in Qatari local channels. Qatar National television as the main first channel, got huge store full of old tapes about Qatar in black and white. These tapes picture Qataris life in desert, tents and many other old scenes of the country when there was no cameras in Gulf States, but foreign ones and used by foreign eyes. There are also tapes in colors included when the Qatari production started. This store supplies both television channels, if Al-Rayyan wants to use the content, it will take the tape and make it useable for the new channel. Both television channels offer old tapes that played weekly, in programs called “lawal or Qatar madi” means Qatar in the past. I had questions about the content that both channels have about the same traditional life of the nation, which looked to me similar to the content of orientalist who took as photographs and videos in the past. In a meeting with Mubarak Al-Awami, the director of television programs at Qatar National Television said that “we have a huge room full of tapes and with too much dust everywhere. The old tapes and books are listed in a very strange and hard order to follow, but precious to own. We cannot keep it like this undiscovered, we need to search every time and show the audience the past of

our channel, and how the television developed. We are planning to hire a company to help us discovering and re ordering these old television materials, and made it easily accessible. And we rely on old people who still work in Qatar television to check the content with us”. Al-Awami kept discouraging me from asking to enter this huge room, by explaining how its difficult to get into this room and review the content, and how its always unpleasant experience for television employees themselves.

I asked to meet Sheikh Abdullaziz Bin Thani Al-Thani who is the Head and the director of Qatar National Television. As for Head of Qatar Television, I expected to meet an old Qatari man, who probably has less intellectual capacity to answer any question and even a very strict person to allow me to enter the television for fieldwork. I entered a large room, found a huge desk in the middle surrounded by simple furniture and decorations. Television screen playing the national channel programs was set on the wall in front of the desk. Sheikh Abdulaziz was sitting on his desk and welcomed me in. Unlike some Qatari people I met for research purposes, Sheikh Abdulaziz was relaxed and flexible in exchanging ideas during the whole meeting. During our conversation, Sheikh Abdulaziz seemed young in age, highly educated, knowledgeable, and well-spoken person. Numbers of employees in Qatar national television often remarked individually in side conversations that they admire Sheikh Abdulaziz and that many things have become in a better order since Sheikh Abdulaziz took office. I asked Sheikh Abdulaziz these questions about the traditional content, what are the sources that supply the television? What are the references editors go back to once needed? Is there research team behind the channel? Is there a data gathering at least from old people outside television? How production works? He said frankly, “Have you ever knew a Qatari wrote or collect a reference about the history of Qatar? If there was a reference, was it used? No. Qataris did not bother to write about themselves. I haven’t met a Qatari researcher until I met you. All what I know is that Europeans have written about us more than we did. Orientalists pictured all the old scenes and stories and we have no source of ourselves but the sources they gathered”. We can assume these questions then, is orientalism has an effect on what Qataris watch on television as traditional content? Did editors went through the old tapes and imitated what was pictured?

I asked Sheikh Abdullaziz how the traditional program is usually produced? He said, “we usually welcome all ideas, from nationals and non nationals alike, if you had one idea of a program whether you are a Qatari or not, and we thought its good idea we can produce it”. Then he continued, “There is no one checking the programs, we only sit on a round table, discuss what can be a good traditional content, ...we do not use specialists in the subject matter”. These local television channels seem to rely on the past that is frozen in the historical archive, and in the memory of old people either Qataris or orientalists. There seems to be a possibility that there is a process of imagining content similar to the old existing materials. The non-nationals involvement in the production of Qatari traditional content seems crucial, the non-nationals are people usually perceived to be influenced by foreign culture and

most importantly orientalism (The representations of the East).

For Al-Rayyan Channel, I met employees working inside the channel; I began praising the content of the channel, and how it was professional to capture desert and falcons movements. I asked the same questions about how the traditional content is produced. The answer was that the person who decides the content is changeable and sometimes the decision is shared. For Al-Sagar program, I met Soud Al-Maadeed in an interview. Al-Maadeed is a young television presenter, who seemed unhappy about research questions. Al-Maadeed said that “The channel is very challenging, we are busy every day and we stay usually in the channel for almost the whole day. Because the TV presenters are not just showing up for the programs, but also do another work during the morning times which is (editing, social media and management)”. I stopped him in this line, and asked who is responsible of programs management? And who allows some content to pass or not to pass? He continued “the one who is currently responsible for this is Subah Alkuwari”. which is also a TV presenter, and whose is only on his 20s.

I pushed Al-Maadeed to speak about the national tradition that is screened in the channel most of the day. Al-Maadeed said in nervous tone that “these ideas aren’t just our ideas, imagine that most of the channels programs are collections of our viewer’s ideas. Which we are happy about making and producing their ideas if we liked and thought it would contribute so much to the channel image and aims. So means every Qatari can participate and put in the channel what they want to watch”. Al-Maadeed’s interview says quite a lot about Al-Rayyan channel that is not just a content influenced by foreign documents, but also influenced by massive ideas from Qataris traditional imaginations.

### *3.2 Al-Sagar Television Program*

From Al-Rayyan television channel, Al-Sagar program was chosen. It’s a program about the old sport of “falconry”; falconry means the art of hunting of a prey by using raptors. This is the forth-edited season since the channel opening. Falconry is a core subject in Al-Rayyan channel. The channel often promotes falconry as a reflection of Qatari traditional nation. Falconry is the “turath al-ajdad”, a sport that Qataris inherited from their ancestors as the channel usually repeats. Based on the channel description of the program, the channel says that this kind of sport is the favorite traditional sport in Qatar since ages; and it’s a big part of the Qatari turath. The aim of these kinds of television programs is to instill the values of falconry in the younger generations.

The origin of this ancient sport, falconry or hawking both geographically and chronologically remains vast and little vague (Note 11). For Gulf Arabs falconry was a vital practice for nomads and semi-nomads for survival. Bedouins did not think of falconry as sport of leisure. It started as a way of hunting for food and then evolved as a traditional sport and a social custom. Falconry has begun in the Arab Gulf when it was spread among the Bedouins of the desert. In the past, Bedouins used to capture falcons, train them and prepare them few weeks before the season of hunting. The relationship between the falcons and the Bedouins were transient, falcons get captured and then get released by the end of



the season to fly back to anywhere in Asia or Europe. The hot summer of the Gulf was considered quite deadly for these falcons. Also due to the harsh conditions, Bedouins could not feed or take care of these birds for long time.

Being a falcon's owner raised one's social status among Bedouins. In Arab Gulf States in fact, falcons and falconry have been only there at end of 1940s and in 1950s. After the discovery of oil, falconry shifted from being "a concrete means of survival to being a high end status symbols for an increasing class of well-to-do Arab Gulf citizens for whom falcons have become a leisure industry" (Note 12), and a mark of national identity. The perspective of Gulf Arabs changed over time, Bedouins either pay a huge amount of money to own a falcon or participate in away or another in falconry sport. Also the perspective of Gulf States toward such sport changed to become "heritage sport" (Note 13).

Bedouins are everywhere in the Arab Gulf, as mentioned earlier. They are scattered all in Gulf countries and they are called ahal al-bar (people of the desert). Bedouins, who later became the Bedouins of Qatar (Qatari nationals), are the reason behind the existence of falconry in Qatar. Bedouins sat the modern methods of how falcons should put down the preys, as they inherited it from their ancestors. Although this practice of falconry and owning a falcon was restricted in the past, in modern day it is common to find large numbers of Qataris owning falcons. Qatari people now Bedouins or hadhars can purchase falcons from the known stores in Qatar or from private dealers. Falcons cost thousands of Riyals, and some of them are given with identification papers. Qataris pay to get high priced items and equipment to practice falconry such as truckers, radio monitors, communication devices and other modern stuff like HD cameras. Some say that the high equipment is used for a purpose, which is to keep tracking the falcon until he is taking down the prey to arrive at the same moment and kill the prey based on the Islamic principle. Most popular prey is "Houbara" bustard a large a fast bird lives usually in most Middle East countries. Iraq is both great landscape for hunting and finding Houbara. Houbara is now endangered because of the frequent hunting practices and Qataris are trying to find other alternatives outside Qatar.

Falconry is one of the Al-Rayyan channel's core subjects. Al-Sagar program is one of the seasons or a part of series of the television production about falconry in Qatar. The program seems to imply that there is a huge community of "sagara" falconers in Qatar then any one could imagine. At first, one program produced named "al-tarah" about a Qatari sagar called Ali Al-Nuaimi. Al-Nuaimi traveled to Mongolia to show how to hunt great falcons with accompanying other Qatari Sagara. Although it is an enjoyable television program, this show seems not enough in terms of presenting Qatari falconry; because the focus is not about Qataris sagara in Qatar, but mostly about the beauty of falconry in Mongolia. Al-Ganes "the hunter" program as second part of the falconry series came on the screen to present to the Qatari viewers the activities of Qatari "sagara" or we can call them also "ganasa" means (falconers or hunters) as favorite sport for few Qatari individuals. All the episodes in Al-Sagar program begin with telling the audience by the "voice over" that "This sport al-ganas is an old traditional sport

‘turath’ of Qatar, and its rooted in Qatar since ages, ...everything has changed except the relationship between the alsagar and the falcon who both play falconry since the ancient times”. This seems an introduction of the value of “ganas or alsgara” with showing moving pictures of old Qatari people practicing “ganas” in 1950s and 1960s.

The program points to “Madena Al-Shamal” in Qatar to be the most important city for those who practice falconry, as an established natural community by the locals not by the law. In al-Shamal, for some Qataris the landscape seems prepared for falconry, several equipment spread everywhere, and the modern cars in the desert presents the strong traditional intention of occupying desert and practice desert activities in modern times. The program shows Qatari individuals stay for quite long time in the desert to train their falcons.



**Figure 1. A Photo Captured from the Program, Qataris Sagara Greeting One Another for the Blissful Hunt**



**Figure 2. A Photo Captured from the Program of the Winning Falcon Eating Its Prey**

While the sagara trains the falcon to catch a prey, the sagar throws a prey on the air and hoping that the trained falcon would be able to catch it while both are flying. The program offers a thrilling background

music such as an “orchestra” when the falcon on his way to catch the prey. Fancy modern cars go all around chasing both the prey and the falcon by monitoring, observing and asking each person who happens to be falconer about how he sees or evaluates the hunting on the air by using cellphones. After the sagara see that the falcon is determined to catch the prey, sagara ask each other to stop the car and watch the falcon catching the prey and by watching they give happy expressions and wishing remarks such as “ya Allah”, “ya rab”, “ya rab ink iteenah”, “Allah kareem”, “al sager imazem inshallah”, “inshallah allah ybarak”. Means (Oh God please help the falcon...the falcon is determined to do it...May God bless this hunt). After the falcon catches the prey and gets down on ground, the program offers an interesting scene of Qatari sagara. All Qatari sagara get down from their cars, and say comments like blessings to the falcon and to the owner of falcon. All come and shake hands, kiss cheeks and greet each other for this good hunt, saying like “mabrook Allah ybarik lek inshallah”, “tstahil alsyd”. Means (May God bless this hunt...you deserve this good hunt). This shown in the above Figures 1 and 2, Sagara all gather around the winning falcon while eating its prey and greet the owner.



**Figure 3. A Qatari Sagar, Ahmad Al-Kuwari**



**Figure 4. A Qatari Sagar, Mubarak Al-Subaey**

The program also offers clips of what few Qatari sagara think and how they manage being active in this traditional sport. Mubarak Al-Subaey, a Qatari sagar shares his experience with falcons and how it's hard to train one. He says that using these modern vehicles “cars” disturb the birds; and sometime it get

worse for them to control the birds, especially when training a new falcon. Qatari sagara however, depends very much on using cars while training their falcons, because they cannot walk and run after the falcons like in the old days, it would be hard for Qataris to do the same. They even use their cars to trace the footprints of Houbara; when in the old days Bedouins used to trace the footprints of Houbara by walking all around the desert.

It was said that traditional activities are not much practiced among large number of Qataris new generations. The locals seem that they do not know much about the local traditional events and large communal activities. Showing this traditional sport on local television is to make the Qatari public aware about this traditional community. It was assumed that there are no “sagara” Qatari falconers in reality, but very few. Especially after watching this season “al-ganes”, the viewer might think that this is a world of these falconers, not a world of whole nation so why I would be watching or being involved? However, the sagar Ahmad Al-Kuwari said that “before 20 years, this sport used to be different, in number and practice, but I noticed that its changing every period of time, and that Qatari youth are appearing on the scene adding to this traditional sport, my son when he grew up he loved being with ahal altayer”. Means (Al-Kuwari’s son loved to accompany the people who own birds such as falcons). The falconry community is getting bigger and bigger over time, and Qatari youth seemed to be the young falconers and the fans of old falconers as well. This is what “al-ganes” program did not much emphasis on the episodes. The program shows that few individuals practice this traditional sport, and it does not show still the whole broader picture of the traditional nation. It was likely to be understood as a force on the nation rather than a big part of reality of this nation.

Al-Sagar program as third season produced to complete the whole picture of Qatari falconry. Two young Qatari television presenters, Souad Al-Maadeed “Al-Rayyan’s anchor” and Nasser Al-Kuwari a “falconer” taken from the pervious season and became a presenter with Al-Maadeed for his interests and knowledge in falconry. The program is more educational; in which it presents for the viewers the details of falconry and falconers interests in Qatar. In each episode both Al-Maadeed and Al-kuwari show something related to falconry, either to meet Qatari specialists in falconry or Qatari falconers. They also show how Qatar is investing in making this practice more secure and easy through building facilities. For example the two presenters show several visits to some of these places such as visits to a veterinary clinic for falcons and give advices about what and how usually the cases are handled.



**Figure 5. A Photo Captured from the Program of a Young Boy being Trained to Hold a Falcon**



**Figure 6. A Photo Captured from the Program for a Group of Qatari Boys Lectured about Falcons**

In each episode, the program offers one part that deals with the details of falconry competitions. The competitions provide an overview of the Qatari local community consists of a large number of Qatari competitors, participants and fans as well. This quite says that there are Qataris in the field and many others are coming to play this traditional sport, not few individuals anymore. The show gives an emphasis on the numbers of people participating, and that they are around 700 sagara. The program focuses more on the number of chosen people around 134 people for the falconry championship. The program goes on showing how these events work hard on training young boys to become sagara, teach them all the basics about falconry and birds in general (ulom al-tayer) means Ornithology. The television presenter says that Qatari young boys are interested in learning falconry, and its enjoyable traditional lessons for them. There are even known personalities encouraging and supporting these sorts of events, such as Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa Al-Thani. Al-Kuwari made an interview with one of the officials, Hamad bin Lahdan Al-Muhannadi who said that “everything that has our turath, we shall bring it on so Qatari youth can learn much and continue this turath”.

This program gives a kind of promotion and support to the institutions that is specialized of falconry and falconry events. Both presenters show the importance of these institutions by going themselves and ask questions to the viewers. One of the places was the Qatari hunter association for the Qatari hunters

“jama’iyya al-ganas al-qatarya”. It was founded in 2008, but nobody seems to know about it, about its offers and conferences held for falconry discussions. On its website, the association says that it aims to support the traditional Qatari hunter, and represent the Qatari hunter in outside events. It aims also to spread this traditional practice to the coming generations, which all this came under the decision of the minister of culture and heritage. Further, the association mentions on its website that the main goals are to create a historical and traditional base for Qataris hunters, and to work on maintaining the Qatari identity. Repeating this for more than once in many episodes helps in establishing a room of this thought in Qatari imagined traditional nation. Qataris shall always believe that some specific components taken from “ahal albar activities” are really part of the Qatari identity and all nationals must pay attention to it.

The program promotes falconry stores for goods and equipment by visiting the souqs and most importantly by visiting the locally known falconers. Al-Madeed and Al-Kuwari present in each episode one Qatari sagar and show the viewers his life as Qatari sagar. The sagar is shown always happy about preserving his identity, nation and tradition in practicing falconry. This happens when the two presenters go to their homes’ majlis “room for male guests” and meet each one traditionally and drink Arabian coffee while falcons are set tied inside the majlis. One of the falconers whom they visited was very fond of falcons, his house’s majlis was full of falcons pictures and sculptures of falcons. The same falconer also owns a falcon sanctuary where he takes care of falcons and other people’s falcons.



**Figure 7. A Photo Captured from the Program of Two Program Presenters, Al-Maadeed and Al-Kuwari**

Falconry of ahal al bar is not a practice of its own, it has to do a lot with Bedouins poetry and sayings. The poetry can spread easier and faster; the subject of poetry can make an effect and the person who transmits the poetic verses also an important factor. Al-Maadeed and Al-Kuwari go around by their car to visit places of falconry and known poets of falconry. One of the Qatari poets of falconry and known among Qatari youth is Hamad bin Ghanim bin Ali Al-Maadeed. He became famous not because he is fond of falconry like so many others, but because he is a poet and he writes poems about falcons especially al-Shaheen “type of falcons”. The program intended to spread his traditional poems of

falcons to spread the love of falcons too, as one of the presenters says “the poem became very famous...that people appreciated and loved the love of the poet to his falcon Al-Shaheen”.

The poems describe the falcons’ features, eyes and many other actions the falcon does especially during hunting the prey or while flying during falconry season. The poem written in local Bedouin language of ahal al-bar, then it was taken and recited by famous local poet called Misha’al Al-Hubeeni. In which this made it famous; whenever people go to practice falconry they would open and listen to it (Qatari people call it locally Sheelah Al-mignas) (Note 14). The two presenters visit the falconer Al-Maadeed in his majlis and ask him to recite poems about falcons for television viewers, and then both listen carefully with amusement (Note 15). They give comments of joy like “sah Allah elsanik” means (May Allah bless your tongue).

There are three interesting things noticed during watching the programs of falconry in Al-Rayyan channel. First, falconry is no longer something that just ahal al bar would only do. It is true that Bedouins still hold positions of falconry issues in Qatar, because of their origins, but still its open for others to participate. Qataris who are originally from Iran or other places participate to become known sagara. It seems that it’s all about making the falconry community larger than in other places in the Gulf. It is also an inclusion to the Qatari traditional nation would make it larger and deep. Second, there is huge number of Qatari participants who speak “Bedouin” because they are into a Bedouin sport, but they are originally not Bedouins. It is even fascinating to see Qatari children know what the difference between being with hadhari family and with people associated with ahal albar, they would flip their accent to Bedouin immediately. Al-maadeed and Al-kuwari, are originally Bedouins but their family and ancestors been hadharized means they became hadhar and speak hadhary “urban” accent. Both presenters seem to struggle speaking Bedouin in the show, Al-Madeed speaks some Bedouin words but the rest of his accent is hadhari. Third, there is a floating concept appear in these falconry programs, which is the “rizq” sustenance. In past, falconry as mentioned earlier was a way of rizq just a mere hunting. However, now in modern Qatar, people do not need falcons to hunt food for them, yet Sagara still use the same word when the falcon catches a prey. Sagara would tell the falcon owner about the well trained falcon that hunts in a good way, “Allah yerziq zyada” means (May Allah provide you more good and you would find the al-rizq anytime inshallah). Means you may find the sustenance anytime sooner Allah willing. Also Sagara say to each other when anyone’s falcon hunts a prey “testahil kel khair w takil mn sydah inshallah” means (you deserve blessings and you shall eat the preys). Sagara say this although in all scenes the falcon hunts and eats the preys without sharing with the owner.

The production of falconry programs in Qatari local channel “Al-Rayyan” is a way of visual documentation of Qatari locals activities. The episodes offer the audience an education about falconry, from those Qatari specialists in falconry (ahal al-ekhtisas, ahal al-tayer), local names given to those who are specialists originally from their ancestors on practicing falconry. However, ahal albar in Qatar



and ahal albar of other Gulf States share number of similarities, even some similarities with other Arab States. These countries build and invent variations that can distinguish them from each other. It is important to note that the wave of traditional programs “showing the nation as traditional” and choosing falconry in particular came after a wave of traditional Emirati programs. Abu Dhabi is known on the West for its extensional work in falconry. Currently the Qatari content challenge the content of that produced in Abu Dhabi. We can assume now that we watch a real traditional sport of falconry, but it’s totally a reinvention of the past of Bedouins in particular. In fact, the people in the past were just scattered “Bedouins not Qataris” with no national loyalty to a specific country. Though still all Qataris refer to this sport as traditional rooted in Qatar and Qataris used to practice it. Historically falconry is also an ancient practice that existed even before the existence of Gulf States. Nations of empires before the Arab Gulf practiced it, what makes it now peculiar to Qatar? What makes it different then Abu Dhabi? These television programs produced in Al-Rayyan invented Qatari perspective on this practice. In order to establish that national linkage between this sport and Qatari nation, television programs show it practiced by Qatari inhabitants, with adding local and national characteristics. Therefore by watching Qatar on television, the land, the Qatari people and the dialect used all belong to Qatar, we can imagine and link between the nation and the practice. Falconry in Qatar is about re invention of the past, place it as tradition of the whole nation and manage a self-proclaimed heritage.

### 3.3 Fatah Al-Khair Television Program



**Figure 8. Qatar National Television Seems that It Made a Huge Effort to Produce Fatah Al-Khair Program**

People in the past would never imagine that this story could be produced on television. In the near past, due to poverty and the lack of resources Qataris as well as other Khaliji people used to struggle to get the basics of living. Prior to the start of oil discovery, Qatar as an Arab Gulf State is historically known of al-ghaws “pearl diving and fishing” as primary economic activity. Qatari Gawasa “sailors” were the



only source of hope for so many Qatari families. Currently however, al-ghaws subject is little vague to many Qatari new generations; its only briefly taught in schools and few information people know for sure. People would only recall them in situations like speaking about the discovery of oil, but with no clear attention to the period before the discovery of oil in details. Although in Qatar the ministry of culture and heritage deals with providing Qataris with all information possible through websites and printed materials, the new generations became interested in many fields except Qatar history, the life before the discovery of oil.

There is a group of Qatari people are an exception, because they belong to ahal al-bahar “people of the sea”, their predecessors were all sailors and pearl divers. There are families now in modern Qatar teach their children about the past, and how their grandparents lived it. It is surprising that there are groups of Qatari millennial generations knowledgeable of the past, the pearl diving and sea activities in specific. Qatari youth who had grandparents, as “sailors” seem more affected by the past. This is because of the continuous narrations of the heroic stories of Qatari sailors that usually narrated in informal gatherings. Fata’h Al-Khair is a program that produces the full experience of sailing in modern day. Fata’h Al-Khair was the name of the sailboat of known historical character in Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Abdullah Al-Thani who used to own boats and sail to reach India. For the second round, Qatar National television works with Katara heritage institution to produce this thrilling experience. The first season, the Qatari sailors moved from Qatar to Oman and then to Kuwait, but the second season the plan was different. The Qatari sailors will do the same plan that their predecessors used to have, which is sailing from Qatar to Bombay, India. Qataris around 20 people participated in making this program ready on the screen. The voice-over commentary of the program, designed with a serious tone to narrate the events in the whole trip from Qatar to Bombay. The voice over says that this program offers an opportunity to watch how Qataris appreciate the past, and how Qataris of origins are fond of sailboats “almahaml al-khashabya” and preserving old Qatari traditions got to be the dream of all “Qatari people”.

The first two episodes, the program shows two Qatari sailors and experts in this field, Mohammad Al-Sada and Hassan Al-Kaabi. Mohammad Al-Sada is shown to be working hard to find a suitable sailboat in Doha’s Kournish, by checking all the boats along with Indian workers. Once he finds a boat, he called it “al-boom” a name for a specific kind of sailboat. Al-Sada expresses a concern about the ability of sailboats to stand sailing for about 45 days, because they are all made of woods. The pervious trip to Oman and Kuwait, another type of sailboat was chosen, Al-Bateel. Hassan Al-Kaabi is the “Nakhuda”, it’s the same name was given to the man whose job to lead the sailors (Note 16). Al-Kaabi earned this name “Nakhuda” because of his knowledge of sailing, sailboats and fishing. The chosen sailboat was given to the “Nakhuda” in Mesaieed industrial area to be fixed including changing the woods and fixing the leaks. There are Indian experts in sailboats were also called to be working with the Nakhuda Al-Kaabi. By Al-Kaabi’s command, a new sailboat was invented. New wooden planks

were ordered from India such as Sayel, blewi and al-balanga. Also there were new machines inserted, a machine that controls the boat and the sail “cloth”. The sailboat became fully organized with navigation, voice call, Radar, GPS and Sailors can have iPads, and laptops to check the weather.

Weeks before sailing, the program team as well as some Qatari officials designed an awareness course for Qatari participants, where also Omanis and Bahrainis came as additional sailors. Navigation experts were brought to give the participants the guidelines and security measures about what they might face such as wind, storm, rain or even piracy. The program trains the participants on many important things to consider while being on the middle of the sea, such as floating if fallen, swimming and climbing a rope. They all get tests, including pulling the sail “cloth” and theoretical tests in order to see how much they are qualified and capable of such dangerous journey, as Al-Sada says. Al-Sada makes a lecture in Katara’s lecture rooms to teach the participants about some important concepts and names they have to know. The lecture room is fully equipped with latest technology.

Dr. Khalid Ibrahim Al-Sulaiti, a general director of the cultural village of Katara, and an organizer of this trip shares his thoughts on an interview, “We always work on promoting and strengthening the Qatari traditions”. This trip has goals of course, the main goal is to revive the old traditions “heritage of sailing” in our young generations. What the shabab “youth” would be doing is that they will experience what their predecessors used to experience daily. In the past, Al-Tawasheen “pearl merchants” used to take cloth fabric from number of Nakhudas and move to Bombay to sell it and get instead foodstuff and clothes. We again want to promote this old life among our children to watch it, to show also how our predecessors were struggling and sacrificing a lot to live good life. We may have put harsh rules for participants to be accepted, but this is how it was. Also, Al-Sada adds that this trip “got to be interesting” because it’s a “historical trip” it’s the only way we can revive “turath” and make it a real experience, and that to feel of the old history and its people, our people.

The program shows interesting scenes before the sailors move on to sail, which is the farewell moment. The scene creates the same atmosphere documented as story in archive, that this is the way that old “ghawson and bahara” divers and sailors used to say farewell to their families. All families would stand on the shore saying goodbyes and exchanging hugs and tears. On the same way, on Katara’s shore, the bahara have their families and Qatari officials saying goodbye. Daughters of sailors are shown to wear old traditional clothes, like thwb al-nashil and gold accessories “thahab”. The program depicts the same hard moments when Bahara and Ghawson were forced to leave for finding money and food. In a farewell event, the sailors moved leaving their families behind, in a moment where Qatari officials, Arabs and foreigners waving for them. Khalid Al-Sulaiti says in the event, “I thank Qatari participants for engaging into this, for this is the way we think it’s going to revive our past insha’llah”. The sailboat of the bahara leaves Katara’s shore with thrilling music background “Orchestra”. On leaving the shore the Nakhuda said May Allah bless the Al-yazwa, which is old local name given to the bahara, not found what does it literally mean.

Learning experience begins when the sailboat moves toward Oman “Soor Island” and then crossing the Indian Ocean to reach Bombay. In order to discuss an issue or receiving a guideline, or even having food, the bahara set in circle wearing “wzar” and “fanila” just like the old days “clothes of Arab Gulf males”. Sailing education goes on process, the Nakhuda and Al-Kaabi plays an important role in teaching alyazwa how to sail and live in the boat with frequent loud instructions. Al-Sada also gives extended lectures on sailing, for example, the way sailors pull the rope on the cloth is called in local term “al-Mukhayar”, one rope called “al-Yush”, the second helping rope called “ruwaisy”, and the bing wooden plank on the top of the cloth is “al-diqqel”. During sailing, the bahara ask questions and try to find answers to how to control the sailboat. Bahara also often recall the old days when they are thinking gazing the wide sea, how our grandparents experienced this life without even technology? They built the sailboat themselves without equipment and proper food but with little things they have like water and dates.

As the plan to go to Soor Island in Oman, people of Soor welcomed the Qatari team with folkloric Omani songs on a small boat, clapping and hitting drums. Omanis dance and sing “Khalijona wahed wa sha’abona wahid”, means (our Arabian Gulf is one, and we are all one nation). Omani Nakhuda Nasser Ali Al-Alawi says that “Its an honorable and glorious day to meet Qatari bahara coming on old sailboat, a tribute to the person who made this happen, the idea is a training for the new generations to see how their grandparents lived”. Also Omani Sheikh Rashid Al-Alawi says “many thanks to Qatar’s government for allowing this to happen, it’s a good thing to revive Qatari turath, and this means you made a huge step in renewing the pervious history”. The bahara made a visit to the bahara museum in Soor. Omanis gave Nakhuda Al-Kaabi a gift of small “sailboat” made of wood, and Qatari bahara in return welcomed Omani children to have a lesson on sailing on the Qatari boat. Qatari bahara went the “ferdha al-samak” a place for selling fish, to buy fish and ask about the Omani fish names; a typical activity of ahal al-bahar.

In reaching Bombay, the program shows a peculiar kind of Qatari national drama. Bombay is the point where “ajdad” used to stop and buy stuff. This was a dream for Qatari bahara and it became true. On Bombay, in Maharashtra State, the Qatari bahara received a warming Indian welcome where Khalid Al-Sulaiti and the Indian ambassador of Qatar meet them there. After the Indians played the Qatari anthem, Khalid Al-Sulaiti encourages the bahara in a speech “This trip is repeating the old trips of our ajdad from Qatar to Bombay...finally the dream came true”. Qatar ambassador of India Ahmad Ibrahim Al-Abdullah, says that “this trip is important to bring the past all again, by reviving the Qatari turath”. The consul Hamad bin Mohmmad Al Sanad Al-Dosari says “This trip fulfills the conditions of 2030 Qatar vision, which is to take care of Qatari turath and carry it to the younger generations”.

During the sailing trip the Nakhuda and al-Sada made sure that the Bahara sing the old song and clap their hands, and sing exactly what was sang. The Nakhuda would say while pulling the rope “Ya Kareem, and the bahara would reply Ya Allah”. Then bahara say to each other “qawakom Allah”,

means may Allah make you strong. One bahara sings “ya dandini ya dandini wl bom sahel mebteni” The rest of bahara reply, “eeh b allah eeh b allah”. Then one sings back “ya Nakhuda wadni Qatar” the rest reply again “eeh b allah eeh b allah”. The meaning of the song is praising the sailboat and requesting the sailboat to get them back home safe. The bahara made sure to tell the Nakhuda old expressions sometimes such as, “Enta Nakhudana w ehna qdam”. Means if you are our leader “Nakhuda” we are going to support you and stay hardworking bahara.

Moreover, at the end of the trip when Bahara reach Katara shore, an organized event also awaits for them. Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the Emir’s father waits for them to shake their hands and greet them for representing Qatar in Oman and Bombay. The same scenes of old scenes were re produced. The scenes that Qataris only taught about in schools, which in the past the sailors would reach the shore and find families are waiting with tears. All bahara get down and runs to meet his family with tears; and some bahara were really on tears for experiencing something was always written in books about old sailors meeting family after a very long and dangerous journey. One of the bahara said, “Now after coming back, I really do appreciate our ajdad for all of the struggle and things they have been through”.

Fata’h Al-Khair is a program can be both a way to visually revive the past and to feed the imagination of nostalgic people. The speaking of the importance of “turath” itself has greatly affected large number of Qataris, in which it stirred lots of emotions. Qatari participants were allowed to “entertain the thought” of reviving “turath al-ajdad”, imagining themselves to be the same old Qatari sailors. It seems that this program left a room for nostalgic Qataris to express their thoughts and devote their energies. This kind of adventures “historical” tells a lot about the people involved not just the initiators. Ali Saeed Al-Ali, one of the bahara comes in a scene setting with his family and saying farewell to his children and telling them to take care of themselves. The boy wears white thwb, and the girl wears thwb al-nashil “traditional clothes”. Al-Ali says that “my grandfather was a “Nakhuda”, my father used to take me to sailing and cooking on the boat, the food had a different taste as I remember. That is why “I wanted to try”. Some Bahara say that we are into this trip because we want to feel of what our “ajdad” used to feel, and some said we are in because our grandparents experienced this harsh journey. One of the bahara, from Al-Darweesh family says that “if you are really tired because of working on the sailboat but at the same time fishing, and got a fish out of waiting, you would forget how tired you are for this little thing”. Al-Darweesh meant that old sailors got to find happiness in getting small things after a struggle such as a small fish. The concept of “rizq” again.

In addition, we can also say that its not just a matter of nostalgia for individuals, for organizers and initiators it is a strong desire to resettle the past in order to stabilize the nation as ancient. The word turath “tradition” is excessively used by Qatari officials and bahara, and it’s the core reason for them being there on the sailboat, but what each bahara thinks the turath is? There is one general word chosen for all of the old activities. The word “ajdad” which means generally “predecessors” is excessively

used, makes Qataris seem unclear about the details of the past. The sailors and divers used to sail and leave the land behind, get in very dangerous unequipped sailboat for finding “rizq”, how Qataris turned this journey into turath? And what was turned into turath in specific? How this story is building the traditional nation? The Qatari traditional nation is getting powerful by repeating these stories of “asil”; the nation’s origin and more specifically ahal al-bahar journeys and activities. The re invention of asil is the re stabilizing of the nation as traditional and deeply rooted on the land of Qatar; which says that this nation is ancient and this nation has deep old roots.

Some photos captured of Fata’h Al-Khair program.



**Figure 9. Old Wooden Boat “Al-Boom” Sailing, behind it Modern Skyscrapers**



**Figure 10. Nukhatha Hassan Al-Kaabi**



**Figure 11. Bahara and Trainer Mohammad Al-Sada**



**Figure 12. Collection of Captured Photos from Fatah Al-Khair Program**

### *3.4 The Effect of Tribalism on Television Traditional Content*

Tribalism has a vital effect on the organization of Gulf States' traditional societies. As this research looks at the traditional content of Qatari local channels, the effect of tribalism on Qatari nation representation should be discussed. The following will discuss tribalism in Gulf States in general and in Qatar in particular. Then presenting the traditional content that is affected by tribalism. Although the study of tribal identity is a familiar topic in anthropology of the Middle East, there are few ethnographic works done on Gulf tribes, and almost no ethnographic research done on tribes of Qatar.

First of all, how the word tribe defined? According to Al-Fawal Saleh (1983), a tribe is people who come from the same ancestors and share the same language and culture, they have strong kinship, yet the tribe can be divided into lineages and can be divided into clans. These tribes also share territory (Note 17). Maurice Godelier a French anthropologist defined “tribe” as largest kind of social and political community that existed before the rise of the city-state, and a collection of clans. It is also a complete organized society that is able to reproduce itself as social organization (Note 18).

The number of tribes and the degree of strength of these tribes differ from one Gulf state to another. The size of the tribe or the ability of the tribe to exercise tribal rule over other tribes or nomads enable the tribe to become the ruling tribe. The ruling tribe gets support and allegiance from small tribes to form a strong unity against an outside threat. A tribal solidarity based on kinship or biological decedents, a group feeling, a social cohesion and an ability to cooperate with a tribal political entity are all termed by Ibn Khaldun “Asabiyah”. The solidarity of Asabiyah is not necessarily based on kinship it can be extended. It can arise within large anonymous tribal groups, where people are familiar to each other because they share the same social life and experience. This natural social process made tribalism connections much stronger.

“Asabiyah” is responsible of the rise of political state and leads to concentration of power according to Ibn Khaldun. Arab Gulf tribes communities transformed into political states. The governors, “Sheikhs” or “kings” of Arab Gulf states are descendants of different ancient tribes. Al-Khalifa, the Sheikhs of Bahrain, Al-Saud, the Kings of Saudi Arabia, Al-Sabah, the Sheikhs of Kuwait are from Aniza tribe. Al-Nahyan Sheikhs of United Arab Emirates are from Bani-Yas tribe. Al-Thani Sheikhs of Qatar are from Bani-Tamim tribe. The Sultans of Oman are from Abou-Saidi tribe. These ruling tribes are strongest tribes in Arabian Gulf, in which it led to the creation of strong tribal structure. Number of small size tribes supported these ruling tribes in order to create political and peaceful order. For example, Al-Murrah tribe and Al-Hawjer tribe were two of the tribes that supported Al-Thani to form a state in Qatar.

Al-Thani tribe is again descended from Bani-Tamim tribe, an old and famous Arabian tribe from the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century. Al-Thani tribe moved from Najd, which is currently located in the middle of Saudi Arabia to settle in Qatar peninsula. The tribal situation in Qatar was unstable. In pre oil phase, Al-Thani faced tribal conflicts with Al-Khalifa of Bahrain who used Qatar as a base for a seaport of merchants, but did not declare a state. Also Al-Moslalem tribe was in conflict with Al-Thani tribe over dominance of territory, Al-Saud tribe later joined the conflict. Sheikh Jassem Bin Mohammed Al-Thani was the first among Sheikhs to secure political territory of Qatar as new official state. In early development of the state there were even conflicts and divisions within Al-Thani tribe itself. The disagreement was among Al-Thani brothers and cousins over whose son must rule Qatar. Sheikh Abdullah Bin Jassim Al-Thani continued his father’s plan of dealing with British people for security. Since then Qatar became known to have a special relationship with Britain. Under colonial arrangement (was from 1916

until independence in 1971), the British controlled the foreign affairs and security of Qatar, where Al-Thani Sheikhs controlled only the domestic affairs.

Currently, Al-Thani tribe presented as the political elite of the state and maintained a strong relationship with other tribes. Stability and security of the state depend much on tribal support and loyalty. The government of Qatar worked on hiring tribesmen into governmental and military positions. This is to ensure tribesmen satisfaction in which it leads to strong loyalty to the state and to the state rulers in particular. Qatar believed to have about eighteen major tribes. These tribes share the same language and culture, and are considered to be an important part of the state social and political cohesion. Tribes play the party like roles in Qatar as they cause greater influence over some state policies, but there are no real political parities (Note 19).

After the discovery of oil, numbers of tribes were still living in the desert and traveling from one place to another for herding in the Gulf region. The sheikhs, the rulers of Gulf States encouraged these nomads to settle. Qatar attracted number of tribes to settle in Qatar. Gulf States governments including Qatar later provided free housing and job opportunities for all people nomads and non-nomads. Starting on 1970s, Qatar government was on the way toward transformation to become a modern state. Tribesmen over years became educated and more involved in modern life in Qatar. All forms of urbanity affected the sense of solidarity, loyalty and the concept of tribalism. Bedouins reacted positively to these transformations and modern changes, and started to adapt. The new generations came to prefer cities lifestyle neither traditional life nor deserts activities. The state later became more and more concerned of the decline of traditional society and traditional nation in Qatar. The role of Qatari local channels “Qatar National Channel and Al-Rayyan Channel” came to revive traditional nation and the tribal collective feeling. These are reasons to why visualizing tribalism as part of traditional content on television increased just on recent years.

In these Qatari local channels tribalism appeared largely effecting traditional content and events like national ceremonies. Tribalism does not affect however, modern and Islamic representations of the Qatari nation on television. Tribalism appeared irrelevant to these two representations “modern and Islamic” on television. Local television channels compete in producing traditional content that promotes “asil”. They produce heavy traditional programs of Bedouin heritage as nostalgia of vanishing traditions. There is known traditional “Bedouins” competition called “Al-qalayel” as previously mentioned (Note 20), which happens periodically in Qatar. Qalayel is a plural word of an old Qatari word “qellah” means desert’s dunes or hills. Qatari local channels became responsible of covering this competition and provide audience with highly television production. The competition aims to revive the old ways of finding food in Qatar’s past. There are number of teams consist of 6 to 8 members compete in desert to hunt preys “bustards and karawan”. Old tribesmen and young Bedouin men participate in this competition to win the prize. The televised competition Al-qalayel was criticized as sort of nostalgia, driving viewers to live in the past and never prepare for the future. A known Qatari



writer and thinker AbdullAziz Al-Khater, wrote in his blog that Al-qalayel competition should be reconsidered again, because the point of creating and producing such huge competition is clearly missing (Note 21). When I asked Sheikh Abdulaziz Al-Thani about Al-qalayel and some people complains, he said, “Its Beyond people’s knowledge to understand why Sheikh Jassim Bin Hamad Al-Thani supported such traditional competition, you don’t have to tell people directly that this is your past, this is your origins, you can just show it brilliantly on television”. Al-Sinyhar was another version of Al-qalayel, but was produced for ahal al-bahar as diving competition. Al-qalayel became more famous then Al-Sinyhar for the number of viewers and the Bedouin tribal connections in the Gulf hat helped in promoting it.

When Al-Rayyan Channel established and aired on television, most of Qatari viewers notice the channel’s interests on the first month. The channel is full of programs and activities of Bedouin life “ahal al-bar” in Qatar. This limited portrayal of Qatari nation, received harsh criticism. Al-Rayyan channel claim that this was not the aim of the channel to only focus on Bedouins life, it was the Qatari audience preferences. Al-Rayyan Channel started producing ahal al-bahar activities and pushed some hadhars males and females to appear on its programs.

The existence of Al-Rayyan Channel states that there was a shortage of traditional representation of the nation in Qatari national channel as Bedouin. Also there is no stories ever produced about Bedouins in Qatar national channel; Al-Rayyan stepped in to produce traditional content for a large number of Bedouins in Qatar. This tells also that the state is in need of showing primordial attachments in Qatar’s land. Qatar national channel started recently producing also these traditional programs and covering traditional activities that Bedouin tribes are usually involved in. This is in order to attract local viewers to its screen away from Al-Rayyan channel, and to stay relevant to the tribal Bedioun society in Qatar. By producing separate television programs of ahal al-bar and ahal al-bahar activities, it seems that these local channels acknowledged the distinctions between Bedouins and hadhars identities, the duality of Qatari national identity or the internal division in Qatari society over the unified national identity.

### *3.5 Televising National Tribal Ceremonies (Traditional Content)*

On televising Qatari tribal ceremonies in Qatari local channels, first of all Gabriella Elgenius defines national days as “national days enact institutionalized nations of sameness and oneness and contribute to making nations visible, and are in this capacity intimately linked with nationalism. As a part of official historical narratives appropriated by national elites, national days are usually officially recognized events that celebrate founding myths. As such they are socio-political in content and although they can appear as consensual, they are often outcomes of long periods of struggle and conflict between various elites or between elites and peoples. In fact, little remains uncontroversial about national celebrations and commemorations and their ongoing formations, despite honouring events of an often distant past” (Note 22).

The Qatari nation is presented on Qatari national ceremonies as completely ancient and tribal. The

national day was moved from third of September “Qatar independence day” to eighteenth of December, the day when Sheikh Jassim Bin Mohammad Al-Thani established the state of Qatar; and named as “The Founder Day”. The national day is also the commemoration of unification of tribes in Qatar, when these tribes used to suffer disorder because of disunity. The television content of these local channels often promotes an idea that Qatar is as old as Al-Thani presence. The Qatari nation seems that it was created after Al-Thani establishment of political state. On national day, the soul of the Qatari nation presented on television as the Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani and the Emir Father Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani. The national celebration in Qatar is, “increasingly organized around the idea of tribes, and takes form in the performance of tribal belonging, marks the resurgence of this social form in Qatar and in other parts of the khaleej” (Note 23).

On celebrating the national day, Qatari nationals and non nationals all gather in one place for celebration. The Emir and numbers of Al-Thani tribe come all on this day on public to watch the national ceremony. The role of Qatar local channels “Qatar national channel and Al-Rayyan channel” is to document each year’s national days from the start till the end. Then all of these television content would be later uploaded into the channel’s websites as a reference. Also in each year, both local channels prepare extensive work to cover the national days celebrations and news of Qataris celebrating. Each local channel produces tale of programs from morning until evening extended over a week of national celebrations. Television anchors wear usually the national flag, add some maroon and white cloths, and pictures of Sheikh Tamim Al-Thani and Father of the Emir Sheikh Hamad Al-Thani. The language used in television content of national days comes with different tone. Television presenters usually use more of poetic style, a language full of national devotion, sincerity and loyalty to the state and to the Emir.

The local channels usually play over the national week several national songs. For the first day, channels play national songs on every 20 minutes or more and the rest of the days after each program there are national songs played. The national songs come on television full of pictures and videos of national flag, the Emir Tamim Al-Thani and the achievements of Qatar as a state and the achievements of Emir inside the country and abroad, Qatar as old and modern state, Qatar military and Qatar police. In each year, there is a new national song, however in 2015 a type of popular traditional poems called “al-Sheelah” was introduced and set with a rhythm (Note 24). The poem verses praise Sheikh Tamim Al-Thani and his position as an Emir of the state. The verses repeats “Tamim is our Sheikh who is fair and impartial...Qatar be proud of Sheikh Tamim...” This popular traditional art is famous among Qatari Bedouins, who usually associated with traditional poetic society. Qatar local channels played this Sheelah every day over the week of national celebrations, until it became famous among Qataris especially youth. The recent “national song” Sheelah is centered on the personality of the ruler, the Emir of the state, and the head of all Qatari tribes. The content comes thicker than the talk about the homeland alone. This is to make further argument over the importance of the Emir of tribes in Qatari

nationalism; the Emir is Qatar and Qatar is the Emir.

For evening national celebration, Qatari tribesmen Bedouins and hadhars would prepare in a different way depending on each tribes' lineage and tradition. On the week before national day, tribes prepare large tents, traditional refreshments, nicely picked chairs and rugs. Each tribe hires traditional band for dancing, each tribe would have different traditional dance, but most tribes use swords in dancing. Each tribe organizes tribal celebration that would appear as a form of respect to the national identity and the Emir. Tribesmen gather the expenses of the celebrations from several members of the tribe. People who are going to join their tribe's celebration must pay amount of money, in which most of the times costs around thousands of Riyals. The Qatari local channels show over some days the tribal celebrations of Qatari tribesmen. Qatari local channels also show the visit of the Emir to some of the tribes. The fortunate tribe is where the Emir comes to visit their celebrations and they would appear on local television. Local channels show exactly how Qatari tribes welcome the Emir's visit, tribesmen offer Arabian coffee and dance in front of the Emir and the local television cameras.

There is a negative side of Bedouins affecting the collective national identity as mentioned earlier. There are several Qatari groups of different origins live in Qatar including Bedouins. One would feel alienated by watching on Qatari channels only Bedouins content. The traditional content in Qatari local channels is dominated by ahal al-bar's life, which is limited to only to one group in society no matter how large the group is. The traditional society is often viewed as Bedawi rather than hadhari. It affects also generally what people often perceived about tribalism as a concept, in which tribalism refers only to Bedouins tribes, not hadhars' tribes. As Qatar became a modern state however, does not mean abandoning these loyal tribal groups of the state and Bedouins life. Bedouins as mentioned earlier do have their own identity that is strong and that is shared with other Bedouins of other Arabs countries. From media perspective, presenting this large segment of society is for social and political reasons. Its to visually affect this large number of Bedouins and show that they are relevant part of this modern Qatari society not other society. Qatari local channels content show that the state does support activities and life of Bedouins such as camel racing, falconry, poetry and much other stuff that Bedouins wish to show it on national television. Also it comes easier for television production because of the several ideas that can be screened on television. We can say that there are currently numbers of ahal al-bahar ideas for television production, because of the dominance of ahal al-bar content. However, the people of ahal al-bahar seems that they are out of ideas for television production and cannot speed with ahal al-bar content.

There is another positive side of the argument of visualizing Bedouins in Qatari local channels. In the work of Western ethnographies, writing about tribes in Middle East would often frame tribes as nomadic people and unable to modernize. The Western notions of modernization and political development often shape the debate on tribalism. These debates seemed to be reestablished in Qatari local channels and showed how Western debates are quite irrelevant to the case of current Bedouins.

The understanding of Bedouin tribes as social organization prior to state does not mean that tribes are locked in between “primitive” and “civilized”. Tribalism as it seems in reality a productive and adaptive mechanism. Bedouins in Gulf States represent power, and the backbone of state and society as it promotes the “asil” an authenticity of national identity. Sociologically, scholars like Bourdieu and Lilia Abu Lughod wrote against showing Bedouins as radically different and segmented groups. Bedouins have been always existed, been engaging with sedentary people “hadhar” and helped in establishing political states and security.

Some young Qatari individuals “urbanized Bedouins” do not accept labeling them as Bedouins in some cases. Bedouins are perceived negatively in some Qatari hadhari social settings, as only unmodernized people, which often connotes Bedouins of old way of life “herding”. It seems therefore that state television channels are trying to take care of this wide segment of society and show them in a good way on screen. The use of traditional content of Bedouins reflects important change on the meaning of Bedouinness in Qatari television production. The work of Qatari locals channels stressed on presenting these tribal Bedouins as relevant to the modern Qatar today. Qatari television programs and traditional ads show the continuity, stability and coherence of Qatari society. The modern visualizing of tribes is to serve the national building project. In which this show that Bedouins moved from a certain way of life “herding” to a mark of the original Qatari identity. Bedouins in television content represents not just as a part of the past, but also as part of the modern present and future. Qatar local channels give Bedouin people the chance to express the genuine Bedouin self on television programs. In fact, the Bedouins of the Gulf States when been urbanized are no longer the Bedouins we knew in orientalist’s writings. Also most importantly this vision of Bedouin old way of life moved to be grounded in ecology and economy “tourism” as an authentic national heritage and culture (Note 25).

Qatar local channels, Qatar national television and Al-Rayyan Channel produce tribal content of Bedouins and hadhars content in order to change the perception about the national cohesion of Bedouins and hadhars together. It appears on television content that tribalism is strongly portrayed as Bedouin, but both Bedouins and hadhars constitute important social organization of Qatar’s national past. On the same way tribalism is an important social component of Qatari’s past and future. Al-Shawi a professor in sociology and Gardner a professor in anthropology say “Tribes and tribalism remain meaningful social facts in contemporary Qatar. They have been reimagined and rearticulated in the contemporary era, but still, they remain a functional aspect of human existence, at least in Qatar. This functionality is more than a vestige of the past. Instead, it is an active process by which extended families come into cadence with the contemporary state, and do so over the complex social heterogeneity characteristic of these societies. And the bond of belonging, as *asabiya*, remains the essence of tribalism’s contemporary manifestation in Qatar” (Note 26).

There is crucial point need to be raised regarding the Qatari local channels and practicality. After conducting in depth interviews inside Qatar National television, also in outdoors fieldwork for

Al-Rayyan Channel, the issue of tribalism seems almost blurred. The television work behind stage is not similar to what Qataris watch on the television screen. The nature of media in Qatar and elsewhere is to generate different nationalities in one channel station. In order to make use of all expertise and to achieve high standard television production, there are no defined tribal policies inside television. It would be impossible for national media in Qatar to depend only on Qatari tribesmen staff for television work, because there are still few of Qataris in the field and the number is currently growing in certain sections, but still not in the rest of television sections.

In Qatari National Television having Sheikh AbdulAziz Bin Thani Al-Thani as the Head of the Qatar national television, does not mean that there is a sort of strict tribal monitoring. It does not mean either that non-nationals employees receive tribal control based on tribal system. Employees in both channels enjoy freedom and treated as media practitioners. Qataris working inside these channels avoid speaking about tribalism in work, and some of them get disturbed when asked about tribalism saying that tribalism is no where here in television work, we are all employees. Appointing Al-Thani Sheikhs on big positions in Qatar including state television is to secure the national media and to ensure it goes with the government guidelines and policies. The government however affects the Islamic representation of the Qatari nation, depending on governmental policies of the television. We can still say that there is still a direct and an indirect Al-Thani effect on some of television policies for enhanced visual representation of the nation. All in all, there is a huge multinational and multicultural society inside Qatari local channels that contribute in producing content that presents the Qatari nation.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Due to the decline of traditional society in Qatar, traditional television content in Qatari television channels became a need over the recent years. The goal as it seems, is to build the traditional Qatari identity to challenge globalization. Televising the Qatari nation's origin and soul "regardless its authenticity" seems to be important for the small nation, for social and political reasons. The traditional content on television compared to other types of content is large, continues to reproduce, and reimagined again. These Qatari television channels added peculiarity to the traditional television content as Qatari, not merely just Arab Gulf content of television as in the past. These television channels are also on the process of building traditional documentation for the small nation as a mark of existence. The ideal Qatari nation as this television traditional content suggests, that is a nation preserves its turath through the revival of turath. Is there a limit for the traditional content represented in Qatari television channels? As it's on television, it is included in the national imagination; the national imagination therefore has no limits. It seems that the invention of traditions would continue in different ways as result of cultural and political insecurity. The limitless national imagination seems to feed the television production where media practitioners and Qatari audience can play an important role of encouraging it to grow. What is the negatives side of producing limitless traditional content? It

seems for Qatari television channels; the negative side would be creating an imagined national reality on television for a small nation living in a large population full of expats. This imagined national reality seems a way to create a Qatari national “Exceptionalism” within the state. The two sides of production and audience viewership can pass on several national imaginations; playing certain national content on television means prior acceptance of this content that would automatically make audience accept it as facts. The constant portrayal of national imaginations in traditional context, create nostalgic people yearning for the past. In which this again seems to clash with modern television content. The absence of research activity in both Qatari television channels somehow influences the process of selecting television content. As noted while interviewing, research activity for numbers of people was not a familiar subject and for some others a vague process that was never implemented in television channels. If research activities were to be made in these television channels, it would offer more studied steps to fill some gaps and to avoid redundant ideas. Qatari local channels are in face of two challenges; one challenge is that they are state channels “government owned”, thus large number of people seem to have less interest and trust of the their content because of content monitoring. Second challenge is the culture of both Qatari media practitioners and Qatari television viewers that greatly affect the content selections of what is considered a good television content and what is not.

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## Notes

Note 1. "The Invention of Tradition" edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger in 1983. The book contains collection of essays and narrative accounts that deal largely with Britain as an empire with great focus on its history. Hobsbawm offers a theme, which is the use of invented traditions in British history as European mass production. The authors of essays included explain how traditions became modern inventions and why were included in social practices and beliefs. Hobsbawm defines invented traditions in his introduction as "set of practices normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or a symbolic nature, which seek to incalculable certain values and norms of behavior by repetition which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with suitable established facts". Hobsbawm, E., & Ranger, T. (1983). *The Invention of Traditions*. UK: Cambridge University Press.

Note 2. For example, colonization was a form of a threat to the most of the indigenous nations. During and after colonization period, nations started to collect threatened ways of life, arts and heritage as national inheritance. Native people of North America are considered one of the nations that survived under pressure of assimilation or we can say extinction. In spite of all this, these Native Americans still hold much of their past "old traditions" in the modern world, in Modern America. However, holding old society and traditions alive in modern world, makes a perfect nostalgia of the past. One can see change on these native communities but cannot measure also progress. Native Americans look old and act as if they were in the old times, but they are living in modern days. As result, the picture of Native Americans have been easily used, commoditized and museumized in the American media as such only. On the other hand, Native Americans view this as a struggle of ethnic, national and traditional survival of the nation, and the land as well.

Note 3. Nelson, G. (2004). What Is Tradition? *Museum Anthropology*.

Note 4. Desai, G. (1993). The Invention of Invention. *Cultural critique*, 119-142.

Note 5. Hobsbawm, E., & Ranger, T. (1983). *The Invention of Traditions*. UK: Cambridge University Press.

Note 6. Ibid, p. 16.

Note 7. Ibid, p. 17.

Note 8. Smith, A. (1986). *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. UK: Blackwell Publishers.

Note 9. Eric Hobsbawm (1990) discusses the notion of nationalism in Europe following its path and its various changes since the enlightenment. A large part of his book is based on Wiles lectures at the Queen University of Belfast in 1985. In 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries these concepts like nation and nationalism were vague and there were only people defined as inhabitants of a land or a province, but not until 19<sup>th</sup> century, following the national movements in Europe, the word “nation” introduced as a modern concept: Hobsbawm, E. (1990). *Nation and Nationalism Since 1780*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Note 10. Watch Al-Rayyan Traditional Ads:

[http://www.alrayyan.tv/Arabic/Pages/VideoPreviewNew.aspx?VideoID=fsSF\\_uKzy6U&PlayListID=PLNI-cJa63vBIFE0fR\\_eOqRB4ILrwa2d9f](http://www.alrayyan.tv/Arabic/Pages/VideoPreviewNew.aspx?VideoID=fsSF_uKzy6U&PlayListID=PLNI-cJa63vBIFE0fR_eOqRB4ILrwa2d9f)

<http://www.alrayyan.tv/Arabic/Pages/VideoPreviewNew.aspx?VideoID=-sB7OiDhCQY&PlayListID=PLNI-cJa63vBLaEsteNyiKL4I2FCZiereY>

Note 11. See for more information about Falconry: Epstein, H. (1943). The Origin of Earliest History of Falconry. *The History of Science Society*, 497-509.

Note 12. Wippel, S., Bromber, K., Steiner, C., & Krawietz, B. (Eds.). (2014). *Under Constructions: Logics of Urbanism in the Gulf Arabs*. England: Ashgate Publishing.

Note 13. For more about Gulf States and Falconry read: Koch, N. (2015). Gulf Nationalism and the Geopolitics of Constructing Falconry as Heritage Sport. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 15(3), 522-539.

Note 14. Check the link: Sheelah of the famous poem of Hamad bin Ghanim bin Ali Al-Maadeed. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTV94PG3ecc>

Note 15. Read about Badu sensibility and the effect of poems as political and social act: Khalaf, S. (2000). Poetics and Politics of Newly Invented Traditions in the Gulf: Camel Racing the United Arab Emirates. *Ethnology*, 243-261.

Note 16. (nakhudas), who either owned or hired their boats and were responsible for feeding and clothing their crews. Pearl merchants (tawawish) in turn, forwarded advances to boat captains to finance the diving season. The tawawish paid the nakhudas upon the delivery of the pearls. The pearling industry therefore functioned on borrowed capital. See also, Hobbes, M., Divers are a Pearl's Best Friend: Pearl Diving in the Gulf 1840s-1930s. Qatar National Library. <http://www.qdl.qa/en/divers-are-pearl%E2%80%99s-best-friend-pearl-diving-gulf-1840s%E2%80%931930s>

Note 17. Al-Fawal. S. (1983). *The Bedouin Societies Social Structure*. Cairo: Dar Al-Fuker.

Note 18. Godelier, M. (1977). *Perspectives in Marxist Anthropology*. London: Cambridge University



Press.

Note 19. For more information about tribalism in Qatar see Al-Shawi, A. (2002). *Political Influence of Tribes in the State of Qatar: Impact of tribal Loyalty on political Participation*. Mississippi: UMI.

Note 20. Check the traditional competition website—Al-qalayel. <http://www.al-galayel.com/English/>

Note 21. A link to the blog post in Arabic. <http://www.azizalkhater.blogspot.qa/2015/02/blog-post.html>

Note 22. For more information about national days and nation representation, read: Elgenius, G. (2011). *Symbols of Nations and Nationalism: Celebrating Nationhood*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Note 23. Al-Shawi, A., & Gardner, A. (2013). *Tribalism, Identity and Citizenship in Contemporary Qatar*. Anthropology of the Middle East.

Note 24. A link to check the national Sheelah of the Emir Tamim Al-Thani. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTrkU0EPE9k>

Note 25. To read more on Bedouins' cultural representation and heritage of the nation, read: Cole, D. (2003). Where Have The Bedouin Gone? *Anthropological Quarterly*, 235-267.

Note 26. Al-Shawi, A., & Gardner, A. (2013). *Tribalism, Identity and Citizenship in Contemporary Qatar*. Anthropology of the Middle East.