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## A Precarious Balancing Act

*Globalization, Political Legitimacy, and Higher Education Expansion in Qatar and the UAE*

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**ABSTRACT** This paper explores the dynamics between globalization and local culture in analyzing how higher education (HE) has expanded in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) through internationalization. It contends that HE expands through internationalization in part because these Arab Gulf states use higher education institutions (HEIs) to legitimate themselves and gain prominence as internationally competitive societies in a globalized world. At the same time, however, these Arab Gulf states face push back from their more conservative, traditional constituents who criticize the state for “Westernizing” education. Hence, these states simultaneously pursue anti-liberal practices in public HEIs to manage state–society relations, enabling them to maintain both national and global legitimacy. This effort to balance what appears to be two competing interests creates a “dual higher education system.” **KEYWORDS** globalization, higher education, internationalization, political legitimacy, Arab Gulf

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### INTRODUCTION

Higher education (HE) enrolment and the number of HE institutions (HEIs) have increased around the world over the past century, with the most extensive growth in HE enrolment occurring since the 1940s (Schofer and Meyer 2005). Although this phenomenon has been most acutely experienced in Western, developed societies such as those in North America, Western Europe, and East Asia, nearly all regions of the world have experienced massive HE expansion in the past few decades (Trow 2007). Such expansion has been attributed to HE being increasingly perceived to play a critical role in providing individuals with an array of specialized skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for the efficient and productive functioning of a modern society, thereby contributing to national economic growth (Bernstein 1971; Hanushek 2013). In addition, the prevalent notion of building a “knowledge

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economy” has led states, participating in the global arena, to be more involved in promoting HE and training (Kirk and Napier 2009).

As participants of the global economy, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states<sup>1</sup> too have expanded HE to equip young people with knowledge and skills in order to develop human capital with the aim of building a “knowledge economy” at the center of their HE policies (Nasser 2017). The GCC states have brought education, especially HE, to the center of political discourse by engaging in overt education reform and rapid education development in the last decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century (Wiseman 2010; Alfadala 2015). Moreover, smaller Gulf states such as Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have also aggressively expanded and developed HE largely through privatization and internationalization (Donn and Al Manthri 2010; Buckner 2011).

Yet, in considering the context of wealthy, smaller Arabian Gulf countries such as Qatar and the UAE, simply attributing these countries’ efforts to build a knowledge economy through human capital development limits an understanding of why and how HEIs have expanded the way they have. Qatar and the UAE derive an overwhelming majority of their revenues from petrochemicals, but are now preparing for a post-oil future by engaging in financial investments outside the region. Furthermore, given their small national populations, these countries import labor from other countries to fill their labor needs. This means these countries do not necessarily need HEIs to produce national human capital for their economic development. In fact, these Gulf countries in some ways disincentive their citizens from building up skills and knowledge to compete in the labor market through their extensive social welfare systems (Lee 2016). So then, why has HE expanded so rapidly and become so central to social, political, and economic policy issues in the Arabian Peninsula? And why have internationalization and privatization been critical to HE expansion in Qatar and the UAE?

Some studies on HE expansion in the Arabian Peninsula have provided a historical analysis, tracing HE developments and reforms in the context of globalization (Donn and Al Manthri 2010; Badry and Wiloughby 2016). Others who have examined HE in the region have either focused specifically on the patterns of internationalization of HE in the Gulf countries (Almarri 2011; Vardhan 2015; Miller-Idriss and Hanauer 2011) or HE development

1. GCC states here refers to countries that are members of the GCC: Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Oman.

processes of single Gulf countries (Kirk 2010; Khodr 2011). A small number have related HE development to the need for the Arabian Gulf countries to develop a globally competitive knowledge economy for a post-oil era (Miller-Idriss and Hanauer 2011; Badry and Wiloughby 2016). This paper contributes to the literature on HE in the Arabian Peninsula by positing that HE expansion in Qatar and the UAE is not just about building a knowledge economy but that it is also a matter of legitimacy.

Drawing upon world society theory and literature on political legitimacy, this paper asserts that HE in Qatar and the UAE is being expanded through internationalization, in part, because these countries use HEIs to legitimate themselves and gain prominence as internationally competitive modern societies in a globalized world. At the same time, however, Qatar and the UAE face pushback from their more conservative, traditional constituents who criticize the government for liberalizing and “Westernizing” education and eroding Islamic values and Arab identity in the modernization process (Wiseman 2010). Drawing upon literature on political legitimacy and the limited state, this paper explores how Qatar and the UAE, in response to and in anticipation of conservative pushback, simultaneously pursue what appear to be anti-liberal practices in public HEIs to manage state–society relations, thereby enabling them to maintain both national and global legitimacy. In doing this, however, what appears to result in Qatar and the UAE is a “dual HE system” that stratifies society along cultural and ideological lines among its national population, reflecting its desire to pursue both modernization and the preservation of its Arab and Islamic orthodoxy.

#### **WORLD SOCIETY THEORY, EXPANSION, AND INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN QATAR AND THE UAE**

According to world society theory, scientization, democratization, expansion of human rights, the rise of development planning, and structuration of a world order with the rise of transnational organizations in the post-World War II era have led to a new model of an institutionalized world society (Meyer *et al.* 1997). In this world society, the extent to which countries orient their identity and purposes to the institutions prescribed by the world society legitimizes their commitment to their country’s identity as a rational, modernized nation-state. States assert their rationality and modernity by embedding the larger institutional culture into their national policies, whether it be in policies for national development, individual citizenship and

rights, environmental management, or education (Meyer *et al.* 1997). As education came to be perceived, not only as a functional necessity but also as a human right in the post-World War II era, it became a core component of the nation-state model. Its collective standardization signified the sovereignty and purposiveness of the state (Meyer, Ramirez, and Soysal 1992). In other words, institutionalization of education serves a legitimating function for countries to be recognized as rational, modern, nation-states by the world polity. The legitimating function impels states to adapt their local education systems, structures, and goals in alignment with the wider global institutional environment, partially explaining the evident isomorphism in HE (Meyer and Rowan 1977).

Henceforth, it is unsurprising that Qatar and the UAE developed and reformed their HE policies, practices, and curricula in ways that resemble patterns of HE development located elsewhere, in line with the needs of the modern, globalized world society. These states began to adopt new organizational forms in developing HEIs, focusing their attention on accreditation, quality assurance, and qualification frameworks (Donn and Al Manthri 2010). Furthermore, discourse and practice around HE development and expansion in Qatar and the UAE reflect the global idea of the “socially useful university.” As Table A1 in Appendix A shows, the mission and purposes of HEIs in Qatar and the UAE, especially that of public HEIs, are often framed in terms of national development, and this reflects the world model of progress where “well organized and efficiently managed universities are imagined as engines of development” (Ramirez and Christensen 2013, 707).

At the same time, Qatar and the UAE have imported “best practices” to develop their respective education hubs. This approach has been particularly the case in the planning of Education City in Qatar, where foreign universities were invited to establish branch campuses and offer specific, renowned academic programs (Khodr 2011; Ibnouf, Dou, and Knight 2014). The Emirati case is more extensive than that of Qatar, with the UAE hosting 40 international branch campuses, with two-thirds of these foreign campuses being located in education hubs such as Dubai Academic City and Knowledge Village. The most overt symbol of a movement towards Westernization and internationalization of HE in the UAE is the NYU-Abu Dhabi campus (Becker 2015; White 2015). Table A2 in Appendix A includes a select list of international branch campuses in Qatar and the UAE.

Expansion of HE in Qatar and the UAE has inevitably been accompanied by substantial internationalization of HEIs, which drastically increased

numbers of non-national students, including those who grew up in the region as expatriates, attending these private HEIs in Qatar and the UAE (Badry and Wiloughby 2016; Fox and Al Shamsi 2014). Given these Gulf states' goals to develop knowledge economies and prepare for a post-oil era, some may assert that importing established HEIs from abroad to deliver HE locally is potentially economical and efficient. This strategy would allow states to achieve the goals of providing nationals with knowledge and skills that will allow them to participate in the labor market and contribute to the national economy without having to build a nascent system themselves. In fact, Qatar's American branch campuses in Education City are an investment in a knowledge economy that primarily fosters nativist national identity and Qatarization, with the purposed goal of "unlocking the human potential" of Qataris themselves (Qatar Foundation 2010; Vora 2014). Furthermore, increased numbers of international students in local HEIs could allow for national students to engage and interact with a more diverse, international group of individuals, which would help young nationals build intercultural communication skills, useful in a globalized labor market.

Contrary to what would be a presumed expectation based on this type of nationalistic rhetoric, however, the majority of students who attend these Western universities are non-national foreign students. Only a small percentage of national students are enrolled in these HEIs, as few nationals actually qualify to enroll in these competitive, more elite universities (Buckner 2011). This is especially the case in the UAE. In Qatar, the Qatar Foundation has established explicit targets for the number of Qatari students enrolled in each of the six American branch campuses (White 2015). Approximately forty per cent to forty-six per cent of the student population in these campuses are Qatari; however, the total number of student enrollees per class is not large, with total enrollment being under 400 students in each of these branch campuses (Vora 2014).

If these countries are concerned with ensuring that their national citizens enroll in these institutions to contribute to national development, then they presumably would work actively to increase access to the more global, internationalized HEIs for their national populations. However, increasing access to these Western, international branch campuses of universities, which tend to be more elite and of higher quality than state-run institutions, does not seem to be a priority for either Qatar or the UAE. This is evidenced by how neither of these two countries actively engages in efforts to provide greater access to these institutions for its national population. Qatar does have the

Academic Bridge Program (ABP), a one-year program meant to prepare students, primarily Qatari high-school graduates, for an English-language university education. However, it has been found that the ABP is unable to achieve the necessary benchmarks of academic readiness for the vast majority of participants to gain acceptance to the American HEIs located in Education City (Mitchell 2013). Furthermore, the UAE and Qatar have not introduced any direct initiatives to improve the quality of their state-run HEIs that enroll the majority of their national students (Vardhan 2015). The fact that there is limited engagement of the national population in these branch campuses raises the question of whether such patterns of HE expansion in Qatar and the UAE serves purposes that are different from that of building a knowledge economy through national human capital development.

As small states that have developed rapidly over the past few decades, Qatar and the UAE engage in global reputation-building and status-seeking in order to locate themselves in the international arena (Davidson 2005; Ulrichsen 2016; Ennis 2018). In fact, these two states are arguably the most internationally ambitious when it comes to national branding among the Arab Gulf states. These states have heightened the attractiveness of domestic markets to foreign capital by creating special economic zones and free zones (Davidson 2007). Likewise, by attracting not only foreign universities but also international students to these universities, both Qatar and the Emirates are able to demonstrate that they are places that could be regional economic hubs and educational ones.

In pursuing global recognition and international status to garner international legitimacy, however, both Qatar and the UAE risk another legitimacy concern. These countries face resistance from their more conservative, traditional constituents who criticize their respective governments and raise local concerns about too much Western influence, which might result in the erosion of Islamic values, traditional local Qatari/Emirati social relations, and the loss of the Arabic language (Wiseman 2010; Vora 2014). This criticism is of grave concern for these states, as it addresses the core Islamic religious identity and anti-Western anti-colonial historical legacy that serve as the foundation for both states' respective civic, national identity narratives maintaining their political legitimacy beyond economic means. Therefore, it is important for these states to simultaneously cater to this more conservative, religious population as it modernizes and liberalizes in context of a globalized world polity.

## MAINTAINING POLITICAL LEGITIMACY: MANAGING STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS THROUGH THE PRACTICES

Classic rentier-state theory assumes that economic allocation is the only relationship that states need to cultivate in their populations. It assumes that rentier states, who derive all or a substantial portion of their respective national revenues from the rent of indigenous resources such as oil to external clients, can exercise autonomy and authority over their citizenry by selling rents (Mahdavy 1970; Luciani 1987). Henceforth, it could be presumed that hydrocarbon wealth would be sufficient to buy political legitimacy. However, as Migdal (1988) contends, even rentier states are limited in their autonomy and authority, as isolation of the state from society mystifies rather than clarifies the state's capacity and its ability to garner support from its population. Rentier states need to engage in normative socialization of their citizens, including the development of legitimizing symbols and the creation of a founding civic myth, in addition to demonstrating concern for society in order to maintain their political legitimacy as a modern state beyond economic means (Migdal 1988; Crystal 1995).

As wealthy, rentier states, Qatar and the UAE have, in fact, actively engaged in efforts to foster a sense of civic, national identity in order to unite pre-existing factions under one nation. However, these societies in reality contain salient distinctions based on geographic region, religious sectarianism, and cultural traditions (Nagy 2006). Geographically, people in Qatar and the UAE are separated by whether they are considered originally from the Arabian Peninsula (*arab*), originally from the Arabian Peninsula but with migratory ties to and from Iran (*huwala*), originally from Iran (*ajam*), or originally from Africa (*abd*). Religiously, they are separated by the Islamic sects of Sunni (the majority sect within the Arabian Peninsula) and Shi'a. Culturally, they are separated in the tradition of Ibn Khaldoun's "dichotomy of sedentary and nomadic life" (Althani 2012).

Furthermore, as traditionally tribal societies, peoples' primary affiliations and loyalties lie with their tribe. Hence, when nation-states arose in the area after World War II, the ruling families in Qatar and the UAE had to create a civic identity and narrative to unite different tribes and factions under one state. They did this by developing legitimizing symbols and a civic narrative around the nation-state to secure their political legitimacy, in addition to providing economic rents to their respective constituents. With wealth from hydrocarbons, Qatar and the Emirates used their resources to build a national

identity by standardizing cultural references, rewriting modern history, creating symbols, reinventing customs and traditions, re-appropriating Islam, and promoting the state as the preserver and protector of Islam, especially in the light of anti-colonial legacies (Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983; Valerie 2009). Additionally, Qatari and Emirati leaders have their respective development narratives of how they have rapidly built modern, globally competitive states to shape and build national identity and status domestically as well (Ennis 2018). In fact, the development narrative that links the pursuit of global recognition and competitiveness to a sense of national identity is also reflected in HE, as a public institution (Table A1 in Appendix A shows national university mission statements).

Whilst much of Qatar and the Emirates' modernization efforts have had a global orientation, for example, wanting to be "world class," to the point where such pursuits have become increasingly identified with what it means to be Qatari or Emirati, contestation exists (Ennis 2018). Thus, these small Gulf States have simultaneously had to manage contention from powerful religious conservatives who raise issues of "too much Westernization" such as English-medium education, regulations controlling alcohol distribution and consumption, and open access to technology, in order to sustain domestic political legitimacy (Heeg 2010). In other words, appearing to be "un-Islamic" or "too Western" would be a betrayal of the Arab Gulf States' Islamic national identity, which would seriously undermine their legitimacy. Henceforth, the Qatari and Emirati ruling families face a particular situation of having to balance precariously the international norms of modernity with traditional Islamic norms and views ascribed by various factions of society.

In the arena of HE, some religious conservatives have been critical of the influx of private, internationally influenced HEIs and offshore campuses as eroding religion, culture, and heritage by "Westernizing" society (Heeg 2010). International branch campuses are often underpinned by liberal ideologies such as multiculturalism, egalitarianism, secularism, and feminism that do not always match local understandings of national futures and traditional values (Vora 2014). Moreover, foreign branch campuses such as Education City's American branch campuses and NYU-Abu Dhabi deliver English-only education in gender-integrated classrooms and teach curricula that foster critical thinking on topics such as religion and sexuality. The American-style education delivered in these campuses, in addition to many programs even in public universities being taught in English, have heightened local concerns about too much Western influence and potential subsequent

loss of the Arabic language, Muslim values, and traditional local/national social relations (Vora 2014).

Chief among the areas of contention is that of the language of instruction. Opinions and editorials throughout the Arab Gulf, especially in Qatar, have voiced concerns that Arabic is “dying” (Ahmed 2011; Raddawi and Meslem 2015). Subsequently, initiatives have been launched by government officials, academics, and associations holding meetings to discuss the necessity of protecting and safeguarding the Arabic language and identity. There have also been pressures from the community, including parents, calling for a reversal of the current approach of using English to teach science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) to use Arabic instead and make Arabic instruction compulsory for universities in order to preserve national and Arab cultural identity across the GCC (Badry and Wiloughby 2016).

Given the call to preserve national and Arab cultural identity in education, the UAE and Qatar have responded in different ways. The UAE, for example, began promoting Arabic as the “official” language when it declared 2008 as the “Year of National Identity” and has been cautious about the extensive use of English seen in government schools, including public universities where the medium of instruction is often in English (Patrick 2009). Furthermore, the UAE has addressed critiques about HE being “too Western” through the adoption of Emiratisation practices. In fact, the appointment of a new Minister of Higher Education in 2013 led to seismic shifts in public HEIs. Foreign presidents and provosts were abruptly replaced by Emiratis, and Zayed University, one of three public universities, was instructed to Arabize the curriculum (Badry and Wiloughby 2016). Nonetheless, English has remained the primary language of instruction.

In contrast to what took place in the UAE, Qatar directly addressed concerns about how “Western” education institutions and English medium of instruction was harming the notion of Arabic as a symbol of national identity and culture. In response to claims of how imported education (e.g., international branch campuses in Education City) and the emphasis on English, alongside the rampant spread of American pop culture, was sidelining Arabic and resulting in linguistic and cultural loss (Ahmed 2011), the Supreme Education Council issued a decision to reinstate Arabic as the language of instruction in public K-12 schools as well as in Qatar University, in all areas of social sciences (Mustafawi and Shaaban 2019). This effort was further supported by H. E. Sheikha Moza bint Nasser’s visit to Qatar University, where she praised the Arabic language and emphasized the

importance of reviving the language for science and research, given the rich Arab history and legacy of science and research. She also accentuated how Qatar University is a “national” university, with high significance as a major player in the country’s national strategy and development (Al-Kuwari 2012; Tok, Alkhater, and Pal 2016).

It is important to note here that the type of institution in which the Arabic language, and its close connection to Arab identity and heritage, is emphasized and revived is in public universities. Not only are public HEIs easier for governments to influence compared to private HEIs, but they are also important in that they are purposed to serve the public interest and enroll the greatest proportions of nationals. In fact, public universities have served as places for political leaders to support their regimes both materially and ideologically in creating loyal citizens with the of the emergence of the new nation-state in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Perkin 2007; Altbach 1998). Hence, by focusing on what may seem like a “reversal” of previous liberal approaches to HE in public institutions in promoting Arab identity over Western influences while simultaneously letting foreign campuses continue to have academic autonomy, these Gulf states, especially Qatar, are able to display a public commitment to preserving Arab identity and heritage. This, then, allows these states to ameliorate pressures and criticism from conservative factions of society and also to stay true to their national identity narrative that helps them maintain legitimacy beyond economic means.

Both the UAE and Qatar have managed to cater to both their liberal and conservative constituents in how they have expanded and developed HE. By expanding HE through privatization, where the majority of private HEIs have some connection to international, mostly Western HEIs, Qatar and the UAE are able to provide opportunities for access to a more liberal, global curriculum. This satisfies the desires of the more liberal, progressive citizens who want to be linked to a global ethos while enabling them to expand and internationalize HE in a manner that signals to the rest of the world that they are internationally competitive, modern states. At the same time, the UAE and Qatar have been able to address contestations and pressures from factions of society that call for the restoration of Islamic and Arabic identity in education through public institutions of HE. Public universities do have global aspirations and orientations, but they have adopted narratives and practices that are more locally rooted, that is, speak to local heritage, culture, and language. UAE University, for example, has explicitly articulated its value and goal to “respect the deep-rooted values and rich heritage of UAE and

seek to sustain them,” signaling that the university, as a public institution, cares about the preservation of Emirati values and heritage, which are rooted in Arab and Islamic culture. Qatar has more explicitly addressed ideological concerns and local critiques relating to language and identity by reintroducing Arabic as the primary language of instruction in public education institutions. These efforts in Qatar and UAE have accommodated and negotiated the pressures that call for the restoration of Islamic and Arabic values and identity in education.

By engaging in policies and practices to gain international legitimacy and status as a part of their respective development and modernization processes while addressing local concerns of “too much Westernization” as HE expands, what appears to arise in Qatar and the UAE is a “dual-track” HE system. In other words, there appears to be two streams for locals when it comes to HE choice based on cultural ideology. First, the private, international HEIs that contribute to international legitimacy and status attainment for the small Gulf states (Ennis 2018) cater to (and are arguably more exclusive for) those who are more globally oriented and open to Western models of education. Second, the public HEIs, which are national institutions tied to matters of national identity and domestic legitimacy, cater to a broader local and Arab population, especially those who may not select the private, international HEIs for cultural and/or ideological reasons.

#### **HAS THERE BEEN THE CREATION OF A “TRACKED” HE SYSTEM IN QATAR AND THE UAE? CONSIDERATIONS AND POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIETY**

Further research needs to be conducted to assess the extent to which a “dual-track” higher system is in place in these two Gulf countries. However, patterns of HE development in both Qatar and the UAE indicate that HE is a marker that likely stratifies these societies along ideological lines, with families who are open to more Western styles of education, including co-educational settings, preferring private HEIs, and more conservative citizens preferring public HEIs.

These ideological leanings are likely tied to the ways Qatari and Emirati societies, like others in the Arab Gulf, have been separated culturally and ideologically in the tradition of Ibn Khaldoun’s “dichotomy of sedentary and nomadic life” (Althani 2012), based on whether their families were desert nomads (*bedu*) or settled townfolk (*badar*). Those who identify with *bedu*

backgrounds and/or traditions tend to be more religious and value Islamic heritage relatively more than those who identify with *hadar* background/traditions who tend to be more open to the “outside world,” including Western models of education and development (Althani 2012). Therefore, it is unsurprising to find that national students who enroll in private, Western-orientated HEIs, especially international branch campuses in places such as Qatar’s Education City, tend to be students from families that are “less traditional” and “less culturally conservative,” as these families are more likely to consent to their children’s attendance of American, co-educational universities (Heeg 2010). In other words, cultural and ideological “self-selection” is likely when it comes to school choice.

If this “self-selection” into particular models and systems of HE were simply a matter of cultural and ideological preference and yielded similar outcomes, then such HE systems may be advantageous for Qatari and Emirati regimes to manage state–society relations while pursuing international status-seeking and legitimacy. However, if HE outcomes do differ for individuals based on the ideological/cultural preferences (e.g., the ideological/cultural divide is correlated with tribal/class divide), then these states are likely to face tensions in managing state–society relations in a way that satisfies all its citizenry. In fact, the ideological and cultural tensions may become conflated if these tensions are coupled with economic and class tensions to which patterns of HE development in the Qatar and the UAE contribute.

Despite the ostentatious wealth of Qatar and the UAE, a significant middle and even lower middle class exists within each state (Mitchell 2013). Ruling families of Qatar and the UAE and their associated elites come from *hadar* family backgrounds who tend to be more open to Western ideologies and culture and are subsequently more likely to send their children to be educated in more liberal, “Western” settings. In fact, these families have long sent their children to be educated outside the Arab world, mostly in the United States and Britain, and if not abroad, they send them to international, private K-12 schools and HEIs, including the offshore, international campuses, as these institutions have been perceived to be of higher quality (Badry and Wiloughby 2016; Abdulla and Ridge 2011). This is in contrast to those who (often associated with *bedu* backgrounds and traditions) send their children to public K-12 and HEIs and prefer a more conservative, gender-segregated education that preserves traditional Islamic values.

Considering the state sponsorship system of HE in Qatar and the UAE, where students do not bear the financial cost of attending HEIs, financial

considerations do not appear to be a significant factor for access to HEIs. Rather, what matters more for access to HEIs, especially the more elite and competitive international branch campuses, is meeting admission requirements. One of the reasons why there are not many local nationals in the more elite, international branch campuses is the bifurcated primary and secondary education system in Qatar and the UAE. Public schooling for nationals is in Arabic and is not as competitive or as preparatory for American and/or British-style HE compared with the mainly English-medium private (international) school options that serve expatriate populations and elite nationals (Heeg 2010). And since it is the more “Western” *hadar* background families who are more willing to send their children to international private schools that have co-educational and English instruction, children from these families are more likely to choose to attend private, international HEIs and also be better prepared to be admitted to the more prestigious and globally recognized international branch campuses. Therefore, it can be presumed that ideological and cultural preferences that often fall along lines of tribal/family background help drive HEI choice. Moreover, between the UAE and Qatar, the role of family culture and ideology in influencing student choice and access to international HEIs is likely to be more salient in Qatar. This is because the primary language of instruction in Qatar’s public university is in Arabic and because instruction in Qatar’s public university is gender segregated, unlike the co-educational settings in Qatar’s private, international branch campuses, located in Education City.

Given that both Qatar and the UAE are rentier states with an extensive system that provides sufficient support to their respective citizenries beyond what they need for basic survival, one may presume that providing its citizens with a choice of university system that suits their own cultural and religious values and identity is more of an effective strategy to maintain domestic legitimacy while, at the same time, pursuing international status. However, what needs to be considered is how choice of HE institutions could influence individual life outcomes, especially in the context of the labor market.

In discussing individual life outcomes for Qatari and Emirati nationals, it is important to remember that both these states, as rentier states with an extensive social welfare system provide sufficient support to their respective populations that allow their citizens to receive more than basic needs as perceived by states outside the region. Nevertheless, within-country class differences do exist, and skills do matter for gainful employment, especially in the private sector. Given that the majority of the population in Qatar

and the UAE are expatriates, the language of business in both countries is English. Furthermore, the business environment, with the exception of few government offices, necessitates that employees interact with both genders and a diverse, international community. Hence, the labor market gives advantage to people with not only English skills but also an exposure international, co-ed settings.

The bifurcated society, which essentially tracks nationals to either public or Western-private universities, provides labor market advantages for individuals with degrees from private HEIs, especially the offshore campuses and/or HEIs with greater international connections compared with those who graduate from public HEIs. Furthermore, graduates of the more elite private HEIs, having had a similar educational background as the ruling elite and possibly even being a part of or having interacted with the ruling elite, are likely to have more of the social capital required to advance in society, especially in a society that highly values personal networks and relationships (Schwarz 2008; Tlaiss and Kauser 2011).

If this is the case, then the existing divide along cultural and ideological lines is likely to converge with social and economic class differences despite the presence of the states' redistributive economic rent allocation. An accentuated divide, based on HE outcomes, then, could undermine the Gulf states' efforts to foster a unified sense of a civic, national identity. At the same time, it could also challenge the legitimacy of these Gulf states as guardians of Islam and Islamic values. Those who are already criticizing the state for being "too Western" could claim that the state is not only un-Islamic or un-Arab and in favor of liberal Western models of development but also that the state has systematically structured society to favor those who have received a Western education if labor market outcomes are better for those who graduate from private, international branch campuses compared with those who graduate from national, public universities. Further research that explores labor market outcomes of university graduates in relation to HEI type would allow for empirical examination of the propositions presented by this paper.

This study is limited in that it does not examine, in detail, or empirically test the extent to which family and tribal background affects school choice at the K-12 and HE level and how HE choice influences societal and labor market outcomes. However, this paper is important in that it proposes arguments and a conceptual framework for how the structure of the HE system in Qatar and the UAE, that is, a bifurcated system along cultural and ideological lines, may be a result of the states' efforts to balance dual interests

of pursuing international legitimacy and global recognition with the need to assert local, conservative legitimacy in a way that embeds socially important ideas of heritage, culture, and religion in its national development trajectory.

Thus far, Qatar and the UAE have been able to prevent alternative interpretations that could influence economic and/or political processes by controlling interpretations of the national civic identity narrative and other culturally, historically, and religiously poignant symbols (Mitchell 2013). However, the challenges of a volatile oil and natural gas market, depleting hydrocarbon wealth revenues, dealing with the fallout of the failed Yemeni state, demographic pressures of the youth bulge, traditional threats from Iraq and Iran, and threats of transnational terrorism have the potential to gravely challenge the social contract and redistributive mechanisms that enable Gulf states to manage state–society relations and maintain legitimacy (Kabbani and Kothari 2005; Ulrichsen 2011; Foley 2010). In fact, these Gulf states have been experiencing political, social, and economic dynamics that have been brewing beneath the surface for more than a decade. This is slowly shifting the balance of political power in a way that threatens the status quo to which the expansion and development of HE in Qatar and the UAE have contributed. Unless these Gulf states are able to effectively negotiate the dynamics between the global and the local in HE successfully, as they become more limited in their ability to practice autonomy and authority as rentier states, then their failure to negotiate these dynamics could result in precarious threats to their sense of identity, stability, and legitimacy both in their national populace and in relation to the global community. Henceforth, studies on how ideological and cultural preferences of individuals and/or family units influence school choice, in addition to studies that examine the extent to which school choice and subsequent labor market outcomes lead to further bifurcation within society that polarizes citizens along ideological lines, would be beneficial and important. Such studies could provide insights into the tensions Arab Gulf states, such as Qatar and the UAE, face between modern–international identity and local–conservative legitimacy.

## CONCLUSIONS

In analyzing HE expansion in Qatar and the UAE, this paper explores the dynamics between influences of globalization and local culture. It finds that HE is an area where tensions that arise from trying to balance and negotiate two competing interests become apparent in Qatar and the UAE. The first is

the goal of legitimating themselves as modern, internationally competitive states in a globalized world. The second is the goal of preserving local Islamic and Arab tradition and heritage, as this is vital to maintaining local political legitimacy. The tensions that arise from having to balance a globally oriented modernization process while fostering a national narrative that speaks to the preservation of cultural, religious, and linguistic heritage and identity are not unique to HE, as it reflects the larger existential question facing the wider Arabian Gulf region in a post-9/11 era. The region is under greater international scrutiny, and debates, with competing paradigms from liberal, progressive, conservative to Islamic ideologies are prevalent in the attempt to reconcile seemingly competing values while reinforcing a coherent national identity.

Nevertheless, this struggle has led to what appears to be the creation of two streams (or tracks) within HE that stratifies society along cultural and ideological lines in the Arabian Peninsula. Considering the risks to political legitimacy and the sustenance of a unified national identity associated with this “dual higher education system,” where is the future of HE and what should the role of HE be for Qatar, UAE, and the wider Arab Gulf region? Qatari and Emirati leaders have thus far succeeded in transforming their sheikhdoms into modern societies to become part of twenty-first-century world society by concentrating on education reforms. However, the challenges of fostering a sense of national identity, rooted in the local context through education, still remain. To consider that these states have to choose either to adopt more Western global models of education with the risk of losing local identity or to remain underdeveloped is unproductive. If HE indeed does have a critical role to play in the national development of Qatar and the UAE, respectively, then it appears that these states should be asking how HE can engage their national population in both a global and a local culture. Further research into the experiences of students in HE and resultant attitudes towards and conceptions of their global and national identities would provide insights into this question. ■

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## APPENDIX A

TABLE A1. Mission Statements of Select Public Universities in Qatar and the UAE

University	Country	Mission Statement
Qatar University	Qatar	The university is the national institution of higher education in Qatar. It provides high-quality undergraduate and graduate programs that prepare competent graduates, destined to shape the future of the country. The university community has a diverse and committed faculty who teach and conduct research, which addresses relevant local and regional challenges, advances knowledge, and contributes actively to the needs and aspirations of society
Zayed University	UAE	Globally recognized as the leading university in the region for excellence in educational innovation, research, and student leadership development that serves the changing needs of the nation in economic, social, and cultural advancements
UAE University	UAE	UAEU will continue its positive contribution to the advancement of the UAE by delivering undergraduate and graduate education that meets international standards, engaging effectively with the community and the world to foster knowledge creation and dissemination, and enhancing the research capacity of the country
Higher Colleges of Technology	UAE	Provides applied higher education to equip generations with knowledge, skills, and competencies that meet international standards and future needs of the UAE's industry and society

TABLE A2. Select International Branch Campuses in Qatar and the UAE

Location	Branch University Campuses
Education City, Qatar	Georgetown University, School of Foreign Service Qatar Texas A&M in Qatar Northwestern University—Qatar Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar Weil Cornell Medical College in Qatar Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar University College London Qatar HEC Paris-Qatar
Qatar	College of the North Atlantic
Dubai International Academic	University of Birmingham, Dubai
City/Knowledge Village, UAE	Heriot-Watt University Dubai Hult International Business School Rochester Institute of Technology—Dubai University of Waterloo Dubai Murdoch University Dubai University of Wollongong Dubai
Saadiyat Island, UAE	New York University Abu Dhabi