

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS FOR PRESERVING ARABIC NATIONAL
IDENTITY IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION

Azizjon Rizayev

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Political Sciences
Researcher at Tashkent State University of oriental Studies

Abstract: This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the mechanisms for preserving national identity in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman) under conditions of globalization. The study examines the role of the state as an architect of national identity, the system of monarchical legitimacy, the function of Islam and the Arabic language as the “hard core” of identity, and the significance of tribal and family-clan structures as a social framework. The author reveals the role of national development strategies, cultural policy, media, and the digital environment in shaping identity within the framework of the “managed modernization” concept. The article elaborates on demographic factors, migration policy, as well as internal contradictions and vulnerabilities of identity mechanisms. A separate analysis is devoted to the unique identity model of Oman based on Ibadism.

Keywords: national identity, globalization, Gulf states, Arabian Peninsula, monarchical legitimacy, Islam, Arabic language, tribal structure, managed modernization, Ibadism, cultural policy, soft power, migration policy, social contract.

The Arab countries of the Persian Gulf demonstrate that the preservation of identity under conditions of globalization is possible but requires an active and deliberate state policy, investment in culture and education, and the capacity to adapt to change without losing the core of identity. In the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, identity constitutes an actively constructed, managed, and continually revised project, the success of which depends on political, economic, social, cultural, demographic, and geopolitical factors. Identity in the Arab-Muslim world represents a complex phenomenon composed of religious, ethnic, tribal, linguistic, and civilizational components.

In Arab perceptions, globalization is a contradictory process. On the one hand, it opens opportunities for cultural exchange, economic development, and technological progress. On the other hand, globalization poses a threat to Arab-Muslim cultural diversity, eroding cultural boundaries and local specificity while imposing a Western universal model. In the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf, globalization is perceived through the prism of the need to strike a balance between modernization and the preservation of cultural distinctiveness. The Egyptian scholar Abdul-Fattah al-Fawi¹ characterizes this as a form of “colonialism of consciousness” carried out through contemporary means of communication. The process of globalization contains an inherent tendency toward “cultural expansion,” the universalization of cultures in the developing world, and the imposition of Western values.

Identity in Arab societies is multiple in character. Samuel Huntington distinguishes cultural, political, social, territorial, and economic types of identity. In the context of the Arabian Peninsula, all these dimensions interact, producing a complex pattern of self-identification. The

¹الفاوي ع. العولمة والهوية الثقافية: استعمار الوعي / ع. الفاوي – القاهرة: دار الشروق، 2018، - 87 ص.

specificity of Arab nationalism lay in its outward orientation, with an anti-Western stance constituting an integral component. The borrowing of Western ideologies occurred simultaneously with the rejection of European models of social organization. This duality continues to shape attitudes toward globalization in the countries of the region.

In the states of the Arabian Peninsula, central authority acts as a key actor in the process of constructing and sustaining national identity. This role of the state differs from the European model, where national identity was formed primarily through civil society and cultural self-determination. In the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf, the state pursues a deliberate policy of shaping identity as a managed construct.

An important element of the state architecture of national identity is the monarchical system of governance. In Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman, monarchies have become the symbolic center of national identity. The legitimacy of monarchs is not called into question, as they operate within a system of dynastic succession sanctified by tradition and religion². Unlike the republican regimes of the Arab world, where rulers often lost legitimacy due to the refusal to ensure elite rotation and the development of democratic institutions, the Arabian monarchies have successfully combined traditionalism with selective modernization. The Qatari political scientist Abdullah an-Na'imi notes that “national identity in the states of the Persian Gulf is not a static category but a dynamic construct actively managed through state policy”³.

Islam constitutes a core element of national identity; however, states do not permit the autonomy of religious institutions. Religious structures are integrated into the state apparatus, and religious authorities are appointed and supervised by the authorities. This enables the state to employ religion to legitimize political decisions while preventing religious institutions from becoming an alternative source of power.

An important aspect of state identity policy is the management of ethnic and confessional diversity. In countries with heterogeneous populations – for example, Bahrain, with its Shi'a majority under a Sunni dynasty, or the United Arab Emirates, with its multiple emirates – the state constructs specific balancing mechanisms aimed at preventing internal conflicts and sustaining an overarching national identity that prevails over subnational loyalties.

The state actively employs foreign policy instruments to strengthen internal identity. The promotion of a “national brand” on the international stage, the organization of global events (such as the FIFA World Cup in Qatar and Expo in Dubai), and cultural diplomacy all contribute to the creation of a positive national image, which is subsequently transmitted back into society, reinforcing civic pride and a sense of belonging to a successful nation⁴.

Under conditions of globalization, religion and language become foundational elements of the national identity of the Arab countries of the Arabian Peninsula, serving as a “hard core” that resists the homogenizing impact of global cultural flows. In Saudi Arabia, Islamic identity is particularly strong due to the kingdom's special status as the custodian of the Two Holy

²الأحمد، ع. التعليم وتشكيل الهوية الوطنية في المملكة العربية السعودية / ع. الأحمد – جدة: دار المعرفة 234 – 2019، ص.

³النعيمي، ع. بناء الدولة والهوية في قطر / ع. النعيمي – الدوحة: دار الشرق، 2019، ص 112-.

⁴العطية، أ. كأس العالم 2022 والهوية القطرية / أ. العطية // مجلة الدراسات الخليجية – 31. – 2023. – ص 223-256.

Mosques (Mecca and Medina) and the historical alliance between the House of Saud and the religious movement founded by Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Under these conditions, religious legitimation of state authority remains a key mechanism. In Saudi Arabia, the king's title, "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques," directly links the monarchy to Islamic identity. The religious establishment legitimizes the political decisions of the House of Saud, while the dynasty, in turn, ensures the protection and support of religious institutions.

In Oman, Islamic identity is grounded in Ibadism, which differs from both Sunnism and Shi'ism. Ibadism has become a crucial marker of Omani national distinctiveness, serving as an element that distinguishes Oman from other Arab states of the Persian Gulf⁵. The Omani leadership actively promotes the idea of religious tolerance and "moderate Islam," which also serves as an element of national identity⁶.

In Bahrain and Kuwait, the confessional structure is more complex, with a significant presence of both Sunnis and Shi'a⁷. This generates tensions, as confessional identity may compete with national identity. These states are compelled to balance the recognition of confessional pluralism with efforts to construct a supraconfessional national identity grounded in a shared affiliation with Islam.

Institutional mechanisms play an important role in preserving Islamic identity in the Arabian monarchies. Religious education remains a mandatory component of school curricula in all the Persian Gulf countries. Religious norms regulate a substantial part of public life, ranging from dress codes to working hours during the month of Ramadan, from restrictions on alcohol to norms of family law.

Political scientists draw attention to an existing paradox in Arab countries, where globalization simultaneously weakens and reinforces the role of religion in identity. On the one hand, the spread of Western mass culture, secular values, and consumer lifestyles poses a challenge to traditional Islamic religiosity. On the other hand, recourse to religion becomes a form of resistance to the "spiritual impoverishment" of globalization and a means of asserting cultural distinctiveness.

The Arabic language constitutes the second pillar of the "hard core" of identity. Despite the de facto dominance of English in business, science, technology, and higher education, Arabic retains its status as the state language and the most important symbol of cultural affiliation.

In the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, where citizens constitute a minority of the population, the Arabic language becomes a marker that distinguishes nationals from the numerous expatriates⁸. Proficiency in literary Arabic and knowledge of the local dialect become forms of cultural capital accessible primarily to native citizens. In this context, state cultural

⁵ Wilkinson, J.C. Ibadism: Origins and Early Development in Oman / J.C. Wilkinson. – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. – 456 p.

⁶ الهاشمي، س. التحولات الديموغرافية والهوية في عُمان / س. الهاشمي // المجلة العمانية للدراسات الاجتماعية – 2021. – № 8. – ص. 145-178.

⁷ النفيسي فهد. القبيلة والسياسة في الكويت / ف. النفيسي // مجلة العلوم الاجتماعية الكويتية – 2017. – ص. 145-178.

⁸ الصباح ف. المواطنة والانتماء في الكويت / ف. الصباح – الكويت: دار الوطن، 2017. – 78 ص.

policy is aimed at the preservation and development of the Arabic language. Language academies are established, poetry festivals and literary awards are organized, and programs for the preservation of the classical heritage are implemented. States invest in the Arabization of the digital environment, the development of Arabic-language content on the internet, and the creation of Arabic media platforms.

Despite urbanization, technological modernization, and the formal establishment of contemporary state institutions, tribal and kinship structures continue to function as the social framework supporting national identity in the countries of the Arabian Peninsula. In Saudi Arabia, state formation occurred as an alliance between the House of Saud and major tribal confederations. The tribal structure was not eliminated by the process of state-building but was incorporated into it. Tribal leaders were granted positions within the structures of power, and tribal loyalty was redirected to serve the national state. To this day, affiliation with a particular tribe influences social status, access to resources, and career opportunities. In the United Arab Emirates, the federal structure of the state reflects a balance among the different emirates, each governed by its own ruling family. Within the emirates, divisions into tribes and family clans are preserved. The ruling families maintain loyalty through a system of patronage, the allocation of state positions, and economic privileges⁹.

The mechanisms for reproducing tribal and familial identity are diverse. Marital strategies play a key role. Marriages within a tribe or family clan strengthen solidarity and preserve resources within the group. In the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf, formal and informal barriers exist to marriages between citizens and non-citizens, as well as between members of different tribal groups. Endogamy functions as a mechanism for reproducing social boundaries.

Tribal and familial narratives are preserved in oral culture, genealogical traditions, and poetry. Knowledge of one's genealogy (nasab) and the ability to trace lineage back several generations remain important elements of social identity. Tribal poetry (shi'r nabati) continues to enjoy popularity, with poetic competitions regularly organized, broadcast on television, and attracting large audiences.

Modernization has not eliminated the tribal structure in Arab society but has transformed its functions. Tribes "adapt and continue to construct a sense of 'we,'" albeit in new forms. Tribal solidarity can manifest in the creation of business associations, charitable foundations, and informal political blocs. Tribal leaders have become contemporary political actors, leveraging traditional legitimacy to participate in modern politics. The state, aware of the strength of Arab tribal structures, engages with them in a dual manner. On the one hand, it seeks to monopolize loyalty by requiring that tribal affiliation be subordinated to national identity. On the other hand, it utilizes tribal mechanisms to mobilize support, maintain social control, and legitimize authority. Ruling dynasties emphasize their tribal genealogy, which serves as an additional source of legitimacy.

The late Sultan of Oman, Qaboos bin Said, actively employed traditional institutions – majlis (councils), where citizens could address the ruler directly. This practice, rooted in the tribal tradition of consultation, was integrated into the modern state system, creating a sense of accessibility to power and a connection between the ruler and the people.

⁹ Karam A. Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism in Dubai / A. Karam // British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies. – 2011. – Vol. 38, № 2. – P. 145-167

However, the tribal and familial structure also generates challenges. In Bahrain, the conflict between the Sunni ruling dynasty and the Shi'a majority population is partly articulated in tribal terms. In Kuwait, parliamentary politics is largely organized around tribal and family blocs, which hinders the development of ideological parties and programmatic policies. However, according to Professor Fahad al-Ahmad, in countries where the budget is largely derived from natural resource revenues, identity and legitimacy are closely tied to the state's capacity to finance the social contract and symbolic politics¹⁰.

An important component of managed modernization is the selectivity of borrowing. The Arab states of the Persian Gulf actively import technologies, attract foreign specialists, send students to study at Western universities, and establish partnerships with global corporations. At the same time, they seek to construct a "protective barrier" around the sphere of national values, family norms, and religious practices. Arab monarchies invest billions of dollars in the creation of modern universities, often in partnership with leading Western educational institutions. Students receive an education aligned with global standards and study contemporary sciences, technologies, and business in English. However, courses in Islamic culture, the Arabic language, and national history remain compulsory. University campuses may be ultramodern, yet in some contemporary universities of the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, regulations such as gender-segregated education or dress codes reflecting local Arab-Muslim cultural norms continue to be enforced.

In light of the foregoing, it should be noted that mechanisms for preserving identity under conditions of globalization demonstrate that Saudi Arabia represents a case in which identity is closely intertwined with religion. Since the establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Islam has constituted the foundation of state legitimacy and a core element of national identity. Under the leadership of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud, Saudi identity has been undergoing a process of reconfiguration from a religiously conservative model toward a nationally oriented modernization paradigm, while retaining Islamic symbols. The United Arab Emirates, by combining tradition with the ultramodern features of both East and West, have successfully constructed an identity that functions as a "brand." At the same time, the federal structure of the state generates certain complexities, as both an overarching Emirati identity and localized identities of individual emirates coexist. Qatar employs a strategy based on cultural capital and "soft power" to assert its identity. Qatar's policies aimed at preserving national identity contribute to shaping citizens' self-perceptions as members of a successful, influential, and culturally significant nation. Qatar positions itself as a mediator, an intellectual leader, and an innovative state that preserves Islamic and Arab values. Kuwait's identity is closely linked to the notion of national sovereignty; however, Kuwaiti society remains fragmented along tribal and sectarian lines. Identity formation in Kuwait thus involves balancing these sub-identities with an overarching national Kuwaiti identity. In Bahrain, national identity is undermined by deep sectarian divisions. A Sunni ruling dynasty governs a state with a Shiite majority, and efforts to construct an inclusive Bahraini identity encounter resistance from the Shiite opposition, which perceives the regime as sectarian and discriminatory. As a result, Bahraini identity remains divided and contested. Oman demonstrates a distinctive model in which identity is constructed around the figure of the ruler (the Sultan) and the specific religious tradition of Ibadi Islam. Ibadism differentiates Oman from other Arab states and serves as a key element of its national identity. Oman presents itself as a tolerant, neutral, and peaceful country that seeks to

¹⁰الأحمد ف. الدولة الريعية والعقد الاجتماعي في الكويت / ف. الأحمد //مجلة الدراسات الخليجية - 28. - 2020. - ص 178.

avoid regional conflicts. Omani society is diverse, and the state plays an integrative role in maintaining social cohesion.

References:

1. Beblawi H. The Rentier State in the Arab World // The Arab State. – London: Routledge, 1990. – P. 85-98.
2. Gause III, F.G. Kings for All Seasons: How the Middle East's Monarchies Survived the Arab // Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper. – 2013. – № 8. – P. 1-32.
3. Herb M. The Wages of Oil: Parliaments and Economic Development in Kuwait and the UAE /– Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014. – 288 p.
4. Karam A. Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism in Dubai // British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies. – 2011. – Vol. 38, № 2. – P. 145-167
5. Ross M.L. Does Oil Hinder Democracy? / World Politics. – 2001. – Vol. 53, № 3. – P. 325-361.
6. Wilkinson, J.C. Ibadism: Origins and Early Development in Oman / – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. – 456 p.
7. الأحمد ف. الدولة الريعية والعقد الاجتماعي في الكويت / ف. الأحمد //مجلة الدراسات الخليجية – 2020. – 178-2020. – № 28. – ص.
8. الأحمد ع. التعليم وتشكيل الهوية الوطنية في المملكة العربية السعودية / ع. الأحمد – جدة: دار المعرفة – 2019. – ص. 234.
9. النفيسي فهد. القبيلة والسياسة في الكويت / ف. النفيسي //مجلة العلوم الاجتماعية الكويتية – 2017. – № 45. – ص. 145-178.
10. الخليفة ح. الأعياد الوطنية والهوية في الخليج / ح. الخليفة – المنامة: دار الأيام، 2019، ع. 256، ص.
11. الدخيري خالد. الإصلاحات السعودية والهوية الوطنية / خ. الدخيري // مجلة السياسة السعودية. – 2021. – № 12. – ص. 289-256.
12. الصباح ف. المواطنة والانتماء في الكويت / ف. الصباح – الكويت: دار الوطن، 2017. – ص. 78.
13. العطية أ. كأس العالم 2022 والهوية القطرية / أ. العطية //مجلة الدراسات الخليجية. – 2023. – № 31. – ص. 223-256.
14. عياش م. الجزيرة والقوة الناعمة القطرية / م. عياش //مجلة الإعلام العربي – 2019. – № 24. – ص. 156-189.
15. الفاوي ع. العولمة والهوية الثقافية: استعمار الوعي / ع. الفاوي – القاهرة: دار الشروق، 2018، ص. 87.
16. المناعي جاسم. المتحف الوطني القطري وسردية الهوية / ج. المناعي //مجلة التراث والثقافة – 2020. – ص. 56-89.
17. النعيمي، ع. بناء الدولة والهوية في قطر / ع. النعيمي – الدوحة: دار الشروق، 2019، ص. 112.

JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY SCIENCES AND INNOVATIONS

VOLUME 05. ISSUE 01
MONTHLY JOURNALS



ISSN NUMBER: 2751-4390

IMPACT FACTOR: 9,08

.18 الهاشمي، س. التحولات الديموغرافية والهوية في عُمان / س. الهاشمي //المجلة العمانية للدراسات
الاجتماعية - № 8. - 2021. - ص. 145-178 .