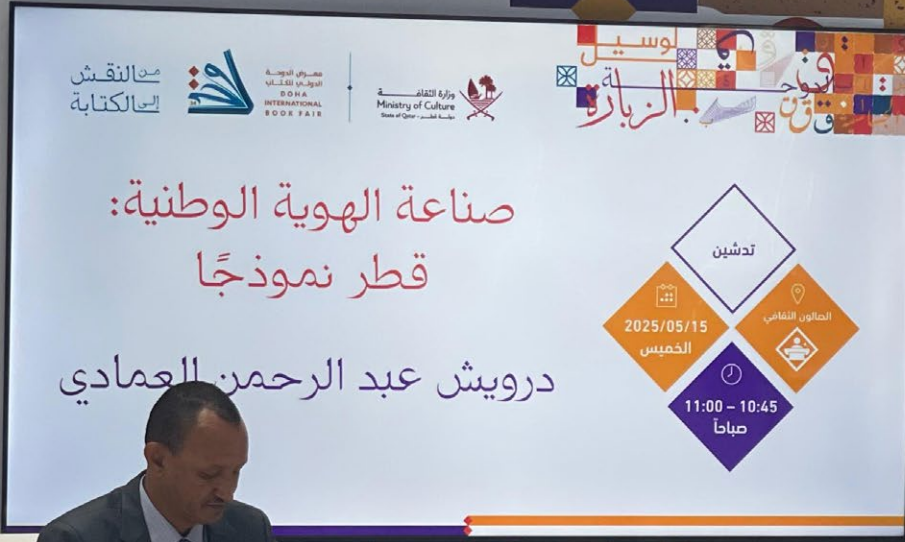


Interview with an Author:



Prof. Darwish Abdulrahman Al-Emadi,

Ex-Advisor to the President of Qatar University, Author of the book *“Engineering National Identity: The Case of Qatar –A Historical, Social, Economic and Political Perspective”*

“Identity is one of the issues that has emerged on the national, regional, and international scene, especially with the emergence of modern states in the context of renewed ethnic and sectarian conflicts and waves of migrations to northern countries, especially Europe.’ To delve deeper into the topic of national identity in Qatar, we will travel through the book entitled *“Engineering National Identity: The Case of Qatar –A Historical, Social, Economic and Political Perspective”* with its author, Prof. Darwish Abdulrahman Al-Emadi, who has been a member of the faculty at Qatar University for more than four decades.



11:00 – 10:45

صباحاً

Dr. Darwish, how would you introduce yourself to the readers of Qatar University Research Magazine?

I am Dr. Darwish Abdulrahman Al-Emadi. I graduated from the University of Edinburgh in January 1986 with a degree in sociolinguistics and worked in the Department of English at Qatar University. I served as Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, the founding director of SESRI (Social and Economic Survey Research Institute), and Head of Strategy and Development at Qatar University, retiring from the University in 2022.

What is the story of this book?

Every book has a story and a beginning—and this one is no different. When I started teaching the National Identity course to students in the National Defense Program at Joaan Bin Jassim Academy for Defense Studies and Joint Staff at the master's

level, it became clear that the Qatari library needed more research on the issue of national identity. I also noticed, from the students in the program, how keen and passionate they were about this issue, despite their different perceptions. For instance, I asked the students to define their identity in one or two words. The answers were mixed: Some referred to personal qualities such as magnanimity or generosity, some referred to transnational collective identities like religion, using the term 'Muslim', others referred to nationalism such as 'Arab', and others referred to tribalism such as 'I am from Bukwara' or 'from Hawajir', and a good number of learners identified themselves as 'Qatari' and others as 'Qatari Arab Muslim'. That was the reason why I embarked on this book to be an academic reference for researchers in the field of identity in general, and in the field of Qatari identity in particular.

What is your definition of national identity?

'Identity' in Arabic is a word derived from the pronoun "he" ("huwa" in Arabic), which refers to the "other", not the "self". In other words, identity establishes the other before it establishes the self. We cannot know who we are in the absence of the other. I mean that when I define myself within a particular group, such as 'Muslim', I first recognize a set of categories that are similar in terms of the constitutive characteristics of that group. In my mind, there are, from the beginning, other groups that share some similarity to and differences from the Muslim group, such as 'Christian', 'Buddhist', 'Hindu', 'Atheist', etc. Without this difference, it is difficult to define the group as 'Muslim' in terms of identity.

Identity in its abstract form is a set of characteristics that distinguish an individual or a group of people from others. In the absence of these characteristics, a person or group cannot be distinguished from others. However, this definition is unable to determine whether identity is fixed or changing; whether the term "identity" is equal to a sense of belonging or whether one is part of the other; which part is the origin from which the other part emerges; and whether there can be an identity in the absence of the other.

Thus, the questions associated with identity are not always clear-cut. Identity, whether individual or collective, is like a body with multiple dimensions and many sides, like a crystal, that cannot be seen together at the same time. We often see one

side in isolation, partially see neighboring sides, and the other sides remain completely hidden. What constitutes the essence of the thing, that harmonizes the sides, remains hidden. In this sense, the identity of an individual or group is greater than the sum of their attributes, like a crystal that is greater than the sum of its sides. Since humans change and evolve at different stages of their lives, it is more difficult to identify the sides of them than doing so in an inanimate crystal.

Identity is not a fully constructed system for either the individual or the group, but rather an open-ended project that is open to the future. In other words, identity is shaped by changing circumstances and contexts. This dynamic nature is in constant interaction, changing broadly and narrowly according to the circumstances that the group, state, or tribe is going through.

National identity is a psycho-social structure that contributes to achieving psychological security and emotional stability by enhancing a person's sense of status, respect, and dignity associated with a positive image of the collective self. It is closely related to the process of producing, reproducing, and constantly interpreting the symbols, values, memories, and heritage that distinguish a particular society from others. National identity is linked to the homeland, just as collective identity is linked to the group, tribal identity to the tribe, and religious identity to the religion. In other words, defining the homeland in question is essential to defining national identity. The definition varies depending on the situation. It is influenced by spatial and temporal factors, some of which are visible to the individual and many of which are not clearly defined. However, we can offer the following definition: **National identity is based on loyalty and belonging to the homeland. It draws upon a set of characteristics and common denominators derived from historical memory, including language, literature, religion, law, political structure, social surroundings, cultural specificity, and geographical boundaries. These elements have evolved over generations, and are the basis that distinguishes 'us' from 'them', whether they differ from us completely or partially according to circumstances and national interest.**

What questions does the book try to answer?

This book was an attempt to answer several basic questions, including:

- What is the nature of the relationship between the concept of '*identity*' in the origin from which it originated, and the different forms of identity: national, Arab, Gulf, Islamic, and global?
- What are the most important historical events that contributed to the formation of the Qatari identity?
- What are the most important social factors that contributed to forming and strengthening the Qatari national identity?
- What is the impact of the educational system on the Qatari identity?
- Is the tribe still a major player in shaping the national identity in the Qatari society?
- What are the challenges to Qatar's national identity?
- How to address these challenges?

Given the space available, I will answer some of the aforementioned questions, and the reader can return to the book for more details.

What is the impact of the educational system on the Qatari identity?

Education, as a system, is one of the most important institutions through which society and authority control the nature and content of the messages conveyed to learners. Education is a relatively long stage of an individual's life and one of the most important stages of his/her development, especially since individuals enter the stage almost, at the age of 5 years and do not leave it until they reach adulthood. It forms and shapes our perspective of the world in some ways. In the light of this, we can confidently say that educational institutions in Qatar — and around the world — have always worked, not only to provide students with knowledge and information, but also to instill values and attitudes that enable them to engage with and contribute to their society. These institutions also worked on affirming the role of the legitimate authority in building and developing the nation as well as maintaining its stability. This, in turn, strengthens the students' awareness of their rights and responsibilities toward their homeland, their loyalty to it and its legitimate institutions, and their commitment to defending its national unity.

The processes of operating and reprogramming in the educational system take place in a systematic, continuous, and cumulative manner without real pressures on the recipient. Because

it's continuous for many years and unilateral in its impact, the individual eventually leaves this "factory" as a copy of the vision of the ruling elites in their perception of events and matters in terms of importance or seriousness, and in terms of being acceptable or unacceptable. This does not deny that the family (the small community) also has a role in building attitudes, values, and beliefs. The individual may change these attitudes, beliefs, and values at the advanced stages of life according to the experiences s/he go through. However, the prevailing opinion is that the school has a major role and impact on the personality of the individual, not only through the knowledge s/he obtains, but — more importantly — through the experiences and situations s/he is exposed to during their educational career.

Schools have always worked to balance between educational goals and societal transformations at all stages of the development and growth of society. So, we found out that reconsidering the curricula and contents of the courses is not limited to the cognitive aspect only, but also addresses social developments. This was evidenced by the addition of lessons on the blockade that the country was subjected to in 2017 and the reflection of this in the curriculum of social studies for the preparatory stage. Given the importance of national

identity in the context of nation-building, a course called National Education has been introduced since the early years of formal education, with the main purpose of promoting national identity in the modern State. More recently, a section on citizenship has been added to the social studies curriculum. This change has huge implications for the relationship of these curricula to national identity.

What is the main message you would like to convey to the reader from your book?

We live in a world where technology shapes our values and concepts, our social relationships, and the way we communicate. This is done through a one-sided current flowing at an increasing speed. It is not wise or sensible to retreat under the pretext of the danger of this technology and boycott it to avoid the symptoms associated with it. It is virtually impossible to avoid this technology because it has penetrated every aspect of life at the moment and is expected to become even more pervasive in the future. Wisdom lies in engaging with this technology on its terms, not with the mindset of past generations. This required us to reinforce the societal values that stem from our religion and cultural heritage. It also required that our presence in this technology should be a positive one in which we actively contribute, rather than remaining passive recipients all the time.

