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Regionalism in Crisis: GCC Integration *without* Democracy

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ABSTRACT

At the core of "disembedded regionalism" in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is an incapacity to foster more representative forms of politics that are responsive to citizens. Instead, elite-to-elite relations are a salient feature that characterises Gulf politics. A radical re-reading of Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls, applied to the GCC in the first two decades of the 21st century, confirms that top-down management of politics is conducive to conflict and disintegration as against integration, marginalising the agenda of multi-level governance within the subregion. Set against the backdrop of the current blockade/crisis, this critical rendition throws into sharp relief the non-democratic brand of GCC regionalism.

Regionalism in the case of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has thrown into relief the competing interests, goals and motivations existing among member states. This article departs from the assumption that regionalism can act as an effective dynamic to empower bodies of citizens across borders. Political actors recognise the relational inequality vis-à-vis other regions and power blocs. Thus, at the core of regionalism is an empowering imperative. However, the objective of greater regionalism in the GCC context should concern integrational and relational problems within the region – not only outside of it. This article uses the notion of "disembeddedness", that is, "disembedded regionalism" to stress the primacy of the concurrence between vertical and horizontal dynamics in arriving at "embedded" integration. As research has implications for policymaking and indirectly shapes Gulf and Arab opinion about integration schemes, deploying the notions of embeddedness and, more precisely, embedded regionalism as a two-way process involving the structural composition, both vertical and horizontal, of institutions speaks to a normative point about the role of democratic arrangements, rights and peoples in integration.

Yet, the direct "transference" of Western theories of regionalism to the Arab context is a risky endeavour (Fawcett 2017, 17). Eurocentric conceptions of the prerequisites of regional integration tend to "crowd-out" alternative potential explanatory frameworks, often assuming that "non-European cases and experiences" are inhospitable to any kind of genuine regional integration (Söderbaum 2016, 62-78). Instead, a more "nuanced" constructivist, interdisciplinary approach is needed, taking into account local history, culture and society (Fawcett 2017, 16-8).

While the Gulf states play an increasingly influential role across the Arab Middle East, a narrowed, more contextualised focus on subregions, utilising theoretical and methodological "pluralism", may yield important analytical insights (Harders and Legrenzi 2008). The present article seeks to shift attention away from the elite nature of the political relationships in this subregion, usually based on a shared "cognitive framework" and "paradigm" involving meetings in the GCC's Supreme Council composed of heads of states (Abdulla 1999, 161-5). In contrast to this, the article follows a line of inquiry that reconfigures the investigation of Arab regionalism as a "process" shaped by popular collective (Arab) identities and emancipatory leanings vis-à-vis Western domination, interacting dynamically with elite discourses (Ferabolli 2015).

Drawing on (normative) theories of democratic integration from the European Union (EU) in the works of Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls, this article seeks to explore how the absence of democracy inhibits attempts at sub-regional integration in the GCC. The suggestion here is that this is the key issue in understanding the current rift in the GCC and the impact it has on citizens in the Gulf. In so doing, the article aims, first, to provide a conceptualisation of (dis)embedded regionalism applicable to subregions. Second, it introduces the centrality of the "missing people" in analysing disembeddedness with respect to the GCC crisis by elaborating on: a) popular activism, generally ignored by both elites and scholars; b) electoral politics and fetishism; c) the impact of the GCC blockade/crisis on peoples of the subregion; and d) the overall lack of popular sovereignty. Taken together, these factors constitute the subregion's disembedded regionalism, which bodes ill for states and societies alike.

To undertake this analysis, the first section conceptualises (dis)embedded regionalism, applying it to the GCC region. The second section further explains disembedded regionalism as not being grounded in popular legitimacy. In particular, it brings in Deleuze's conception of the "missing people", the sidelining of popular (democratic) inputs into national *and regional* political management. Integration anchored in norms of *democratic regionalism* – and attendant institutions, cadres, practices – is the missing link in academic discussions of the GCC. To further develop this focus on democratic norm-making, the next section features a radical re-reading of Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls, re-appropriating some of their ideas about popular sovereignty, democratic norms and community-building in the EU to the problematic of Gulf regionalism. The article closes with some policy-relevant reflections on the shortcomings of security-focused approaches to GCC regionalism that ignore the underlying issue of democracy (or lack thereof). The article does not assume the diffusion of the idea of regionalism from the West to the rest. Nor is it a comparative exercise in regionalism, between the EU and the GCC, which would be beyond the scope of this paper. The gist of the exercise is an attempt to identify the resources for regional cooperation in the grassroots, and among peoples who have a shared history, culture, religion, etc, and finds them "missing".

(Dis)embedded regionalism

Karl Polanyi's (1944) concepts of embeddedness and disembeddedness primarily referred to the disjuncture between capitalism and society. This article employs these dual concepts to contextualise GCC (sub)regionalism. Rather than the economy being embedded in society, Polanyi contends that "social relations are embedded in the economic system" (57). By

the same token, it is contended here that regionalism is not embedded in society: no public approval and ownership, no social scrutiny and a predominance of (rather than aversion to) personalist politics. Various actors in the context of regionalism interact through both "vertical" (top-down and "command and control") and "horizontal" relations ("collaboration", more communication, greater parity and, potentially, "trust and norms of reciprocity") (Hawkins and Andrew 2011, 392). These actors are local government, federal/national government, NGOs and regional organisations. The concept of horizontal relations adopted in this article refers to popular sovereignty enshrined in democratic institutions. In addition, horizontal relations are distinguished from vertical relations by their embedded regionalism (the EU is one such model/experience).

This conceptualisation moves away from the dominant paradigms of neofunctionalism (Haas 1958), supranationalism (Sandholtz and Stone Sweet 1998) and intergovernmentalism (Moravscik 1993). Instead, it pursues an interpretative approach to popular sovereignty as a driver of regionalisation. In doing so, the suggestion is that a potential mutuality exists between democratic citizenship at the national and supranational level.

Embedded regionalism goes beyond the contractual stage of agreements between states that are "focused on self-preservation, material interests and the keeping of promises" while lacking community undergirded by notions of morality and rights (Stirk 2005, 166-7). This section defines embedded regionalism according to six dimensions that illustrate the complex phenomenon of regionalism in the Gulf subregion. First, the contractual dimension is based on a vertical structure involving interstate cooperation and elite agreements. Second, market arrangements characterise the relational dimension that serves to deepen contractual arrangements. Third, the legal-institutional dimension is diversified to encompass rights, finance, industry, banking, culture and education. Fourth, the democratic dimension is marked by the upgrading to a quasi-political union that provides mechanisms for upending vertical arrangements through referenda, parliaments and people-people civic democratic processes. Fifth, the geostrategic dimension encompasses security, from the Peninsula Shield Force to counter-terrorism agreements. Finally, a sixth, integrational dimension consist of popular sovereignty. By contrast, the Gulf Cooperation Council, founded at the start of the Iran-Iraq War, features partial, security-based cooperation (*Al Jazeera* 2017) and modest economic cooperation (World Bank 2010) and lacks the fourth and sixth dimension. This is an inversion of embedded regionalism, yielding disembedded regionalism (Figure 1). A lack of horizontal relations within the GCC and its six states have rendered it crisis-prone since its founding in 1981, long before its disembeddedness culminated in the current 2017 crisis.

Embedded regionalism's "Maastricht effect"?

While avoiding a dual 'exceptionalism' that either excludes the GCC from being treated as a functioning regionalism or democracy, or concomitantly valorises the European Union – itself crisis-riddled – as the idealised, unachievable model of regionalism and popular sovereignty, the European Union's 1992 Maastricht Treaty still offers an instructive example for comparison. Through Maastricht, the EU attempted to widen the scope of popular sovereignty in decision-making processes and bodies (institutions) and membership (EU citizenship). Importantly, the treaty was born almost in crisis, amid
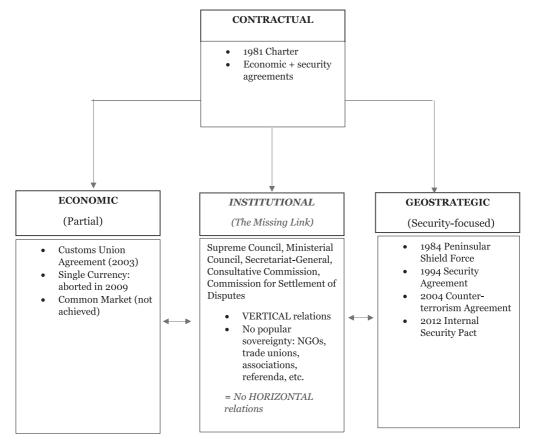
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                        ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                        │        CONTRACTUAL          │
                        │                             │
                        │  • 1981 Charter             │
                        │  • Economic + security      │
                        │    agreements               │
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ECONOMIC	INSTITUTIONAL	GEOSTRATEGIC
(Partial)	*(The Missing Link)*	(Security-focused)
• Customs Union Agreement (2003) • Single Currency: aborted in 2009 • Common Market (not achieved)	Supreme Council, Ministerial Council, Secretariat-General, Consultative Commission, Commission for Settlement of Disputes • VERTICAL relations • No popular sovereignty: NGOs, trade unions, associations, referenda, etc. = *No HORIZONTAL relations*	• 1984 Peninsular Shield Force • 1994 Security Agreement • 2004 Counter-terrorism Agreement • 2012 Internal Security Pact

Figure 1. GCC *Iqlimiyyah* (disembedded regionalism)

significant international events: the end of the Cold War and violent conflicts in the Balkans (Christiansen *et al.* 2012). Yet, crisis need not become a death sentence for regionalisation. It can prompt problem-solving by taking into account democracy, legitimacy, sovereignty. Maastricht's provisions did not attract initial consensus. Its passage was negotiated amidst challenges by member states in popular referenda influenced by national party politics (Franklin *et al.* 1995). The compromises reached allowed certain states (Denmark, France, the UK and Germany) to opt out of some provisions (Christiansen *et al.* 2012, 687). The point here, then, is not to idealise the EU as the embodiment of embedded regionalisation that has *neatly* resolved competing priorities of member states and democratic equality for citizens. The Brexit saga suggests long-standing tensions, both institutional and popular, within the EU. In fact, Habermas' (2012) constitutional proposal for the EU years after Maastricht (and Nice and Lisbon) confirms the open-ended nature of democratic regionalisation in practice. Rather, the reference to Maastricht takes stock of "actually existing" experiments in regional governance that do not sidestep the issue of democracy, but have tried to incorporate a modicum of popular sovereignty as a basis for legitimacy. Read thus, the treaty can impart valuable signposts for disembedded GCC regionalism which sorely lacks horizontal relations of national and transnational popular sovereignty.

'Missing people' and absence of democracy

Inquiring more deeply into disembeddedness and illustrating this for the GCC, Gilles Deleuze's (1989) concept of the "missing people" provides a fitting theoretical complement to the disembedded character of the GCC. It refers to "a becoming", people who "invent themselves […] in new conditions of struggle" (217). Gulf politics is marked by the absence of "the people". For Deleuze, an artist/storyteller or author – that is, any author, should identify this problem of the people who are missing, having been "subjected" and tyrannised (216-7). An author's words are "like the seeds of the people to come", constituting a double decolonisation by the artist: of externally imposed stories and locally internalised myths that have reduced people to "impersonal entities at the service of the colonizer" (221-2). Thus, the postcolonial scholar participates in the process of interpreting his/her immediate political context and its historical journey shaped by analytical and normative concerns. These normative concerns are central, even when scholars and researchers fail to exercise sufficient self-reflexivity to become aware of them in framing the scope and focus of research.

Decolonisation consists not of representing the voiceless, but in the performative acts of resistance in cooperation with the formerly colonised. The missing people of the Middle East comprise subjects (in tribal or parochial dynamics), privileged elites (tribal, ethnic, sectarian, patrons/clients, etc.), some newly empowered citizens granted the vote, minorities (racial, ethnic, religious, etc.) and the marginalised and indignant (those facing socio-political exclusion). The Arab Spring *hirak*, the bottom-up groundswell of missing people-led struggles, language, symbols (Sadiki 2016), while stronger in other Arab contexts (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen) also left its mark on GCC states. It is by being declared "absent" and subsequently *resisting* designation that a "people" is paradoxically constituted, through "legending" according to Deleuze. "Once [a people] have been thrown out of [any presence], then to the extent that they resist they enter the process of constituting a people." The constitution of a people is thus a type of "minority [counter]discourse" disputing that of the "colonist" (Deleuze 1995, 126).

'Missing' in the Gulf?

Several interrelated issues pertain to the dimension of the GCC's missing people. These are presented here through an indigenous prism, blended with inputs from a wide body of scholarship on the dynamic of change within the Gulf. In applying the notion of missing people, one caveat is in order. The intention is not to engage in Orientalist profiling of the Gulf peoples. They are not to be stigmatised as 'passive' actors, culturally, politically or socially. One eminent scholar of the Gulf mentions activism in the sub-region, including by women from Marxist Yemen in the South to Dhofar in Oman in the 1960s. Fred Halliday (1974, 449) also refers to an uprising in 1963 in Qatar and demands for a budget and representative council. However, with a tinge of Orientalism, Halliday describes the Al-Thani family as known in "the Gulf as the meanest and most thuggish of all British clients" and links Wahhabism with political repression (Ibid.). In a fascinating study on the Qatari *hirak* during the 1960s, Ibrahim Shahdad (2012, 605-10) indirectly debunks stereotypes about the country. He captures the *Zeitgeist* of that period, noting how the onset of the petroleum industry in the 1940s and 1950s helped create new forms

of socio-political networks and groupings, forming the first link in a continuous chain of activisms up to the 1960s. Deploying theatre, journalism and strikes, citizens, especially students and petroleum workers, were driven by infectious pan-Arab ideas, labour syndicalism and overall nationalist mobilisation. Up to the first half of the 1960s, before they were suppressed, these actors were at the forefront of socio-political activism across Qatar and the Gulf (Shahdad 2012, 603-33; Al-Zaydi 2004).

The Arab Gulf has not been a blank page. Ali Khalifa Al-Kuwari (2001, 35-48) argues that the petroleum boom contributed immensely to the socio-political transformation of the GCC, negatively and positively. Firstly, Al-Kuwari stresses the question of the incommensurability between oil wealth and citizenship rights. The distribution of 'favours', that is, goods and subsidies (geared towards consumption not production), has been at the expense of the distribution of power. Political management, he observes, is aimed at cultivating deference not participation (37-41). In fact, the former is used to limit the latter. Secondly, this particular criticism features as an article of faith in his assessment of the GCC's brand of nation- and state-building. As he puts it, rentierism contributes to the shrinking of popular presence and the citizenry's activism (Al-Kuwari 2009, 41). He seeks to extrapolate the financial returns from the oil booms, noting how Gulf nationals are not given full accounting of the exact figures from oil rent (Ibid.). Lastly, despite his affirmation of this negative linkage between hydrocarbon abundance and citizenship rights, he views material development as a foundation for engineering lasting and substantive political and socio-economic transformation (Al-Kuwari 2001, 37-47), a kind that restores tribes, collectivities and individuals to their pre-petroleum presence and popular activism of the 1950s and 60s. Such activism advanced demands for political participation, leading to the creation of *shura* councils, legislative and municipal bodies (for example, in Kuwait) and other civic bodies made up of health and education councils. These, he adds, did not necessarily produce effective popular representation, despite the creation of a nucleus of labour unionism and political opposition. He mentions Bahrain's National Union Association as the epitome of formidable opposition in the Arab Gulf between 1954 and 1956 (45). The bottom line is that the GCC has a dynamic history, tribal and socio-political, and the resource endowment to pursue reform trajectories towards citizenship rights along legal and democratic lines (50).

Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Steven Wright (2007) also record brands of socio-political activism and elite-led reforms within the GCC (917-29), including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) (926-7). This coincided with the presence of Western troops in the Gulf during the 1990s. The conclusion of these lines of argument is that, with the qualified exception of Bahrain (918-21) and Kuwait (Herb 2014), GCC countries are currently noted for the absence of participation by citizenries and of democratic checks on ruling elites.

GCC disembedded electoral politics

The explanatory utility of electoral politics as an analytical concept for Gulf rule and reform has its limitations (see the excellent essays in Khalaf and Luciani 2006; also Rathmell and Schulze 2000). With electoral activities within the GCC on the rise across the board, voting rights include women, but politics remain gendered, even in Kuwait despite its impressive civil society and history of elections (Shultziner and Tétreault 2011;

Rizzo 2005; Al-Najjar 2000). Since the mid-1990s, Qatar has steadily been introducing reforms, including elections for the Central Municipal Council (Weaver 2000). Nevertheless, in the interim it has shelved plans to have two-thirds of its Consultative Council elected; this will now happen before the FIFA World Cup (Al-Shafi 2019). An article in *The Economist* (2011) notes that, despite snazzy optics, GCC "election season-[s]" will be of little substantive democratic decision-making consequence.

The rentier context of distributive politics, and the postcolonial context of mutually reinforcing interests between local and globally powerful actors contribute to slowing down political reform (Ibid.). With or without the cosmetic façade of the high rituals of democracy (Sadiki 2011), namely elections, Gulf citizens do not have access to channels of direct participation within the state. Bottom-up demands are constrained through and by complex social networks of tribal, religious and economic ties. The absence of civic participation is replicated in an organisational GCC hierarchy led by those at the top of the social network in individual Gulf states.

Representations of the region as a hub of globalisation owing to oil production and labour markets miss issues of politics and economics debated by locals. One question is how income from huge oil sales is sucked up by wars and crises that seem to follow oil booms (Al-Faris 2009). A second addresses powerful links, a result of oil income, between local and global business elites. The rise of this local merchant class (the oil booms' *nouveaux riches*), or a local bourgeoisie as Ehteshami and Wright (2007) call it, and which Al-Kuwari (2001) considers unaccountable, has yet to result in the distribution of power, as foreshadowed by liberalism (Crystal 1990; Al-Sayegh 1998). The observation that processes of reform remain "ponderous and reverse-prone" (*The Economist* 2011) makes sense when looking at the Kuwaiti setting. Nevertheless, the fanfare of elections (procedural democracy) has delivered minimalist reform (Sadiki 2013; 2009, 132). Seven elections held in Kuwait between 1961 and 1997 were punctuated by several parliamentary dissolutions and, as a result, a total of eleven years of direct rule (Sadiki 2009, 130-1).

Non-conversion of oil wealth into political development is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the GCC's failure to adopt substantively democratising measures (Bishara 1998; al-Janahi 2003). State-led elections are mostly geared towards absorbing pressure from below, but regime survival still relies on distribution of goods, not power (Yom 2011; Ghitis 2011). Quite plausibly, GCC rulers are introducing limited reforms, as can be gauged by elections following the Arab Spring (Zaccara 2013), part of what William Dobson (2012) calls the "dictator's learning curve". This is aimed at conditioning political know-how to new realities. In the Arab Spring context, there is scholarly consensus that the GCC, in general, and KSA, in particular, have erred on the side of "counter-revolution" (Gause 2011; Jones 2011; Ulrichsen 2011) and, by implication, resistance to demands for political reform by protesting Arab youths. The qualified exception is Qatar, whose support for the Muslim Brotherhood, especially since the 2013 anti-Morsi coup in Egypt, has drawn opposition from fellow GCC countries. Reliance on distribution of goods (not of power) and/or on coercion cannot smooth out domestic contradictions and tensions, such as in Bahrain (Gengler 2015). Failure to democratise will be the one thing that could diminish ownership of reform processes.

The blockade/crisis: effects of disembedded regionalism on the people

During the summer of 2017, the disembedded character of the GCC proved to be incapable of staving off a crisis. It may have contributed to a regional crisis. Qatar was subjected to a policy of isolation by the 'Arab Quartet blockade', consisting of KSA, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and Egypt. Elite-to-elite relations had broken down among the GCC states. While the input of people-to-people relations was not factored into the decision-making processes of regimes, the subregion's citizens bore the brunt of the blockade. Indeed, no factor reveals more clearly the idea of missing people, shorthand for the absence of popular sovereignty, than the Gulf nationals finding themselves implicated in a dispute not of their making.

In interviews with a limited sample population from victims of the blockade, the Doha International Family Institute (DIFI) recorded examples of trauma, including uncertainty and "fear and anxiety", of mixed Qatari-Gulf families, and the loss of income of traders and business people. Students have suffered interruption to their education in KSA, the UAE and Bahrain (DIFI 2018, 16-38). Tamara Kharroub (2018, 93-8) concurs: in seeking to punish Qatar, KSA, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt in effect punished the Qatari people, causing them material, legal, financial and psychological hardships. These have extended to the private sphere, to the affective side of human relations in a region where families and tribes continue to criss-cross the Gulf's geographies. Bahrain and the UAE introduced draconian measures punishing citizens with jail terms and fines for mere acts of "sympathy" or "favouritism" towards Qataris (DeYoung 2017). Steep economic, but also social losses from the blockade/crisis have affected not only Qatari citizens, but also those of Bahrain, KSA and the UAE (Kabbani 2017). At least one Saudi observer concurs that families in both countries have shared the cost of the blockade/ crisis (for example, family members unable to visit each other), even if Qatar has borne the brunt of the economic impact (Hassan 2018).

No one wins: the losses are universal across the GCC peoples and states, according to the French newspaper *Contrepoints* (Belfellah 2018). The region's peoples, lacking institutional and parliamentary checks on the political class, have not been spared the burdens of the sanctions imposed by KSA, the UAE and Bahrain. F. Gregory Gause (2015) eloquently notes: "None of the leaders (with the partial exception of Kuwait) has to face an elected parliament with real powers, or a free press. Strong lobbies on foreign-policy issues do not exist; public opinion is a minimal constraint." The inference of personalist politics within the GCC is supported by Kristian Coates Ulrichsen (2018, 49). Gause (2015) adds a point concerning the 'securitization' of power relations in the aftermath of the 1990-91 Gulf War. This has reinforced local/global power linkages, with consequences for sovereignty but, most importantly, for unfettered political management, "behind the shield of American guarantees", that is, military bases (Ibid.).

States may be inclined to play down the effects, but that does not mean the people concur (Hubbard 2018). Qatar has sought to limit the blockade's burdens on its people (Gengler and Al-Khelaifi 2019, 412). There appears to be no logical explanation of why the GCC's peoples have been involved in the unprecedented imbroglio, yet, imposition of such burdens on Gulf peoples strengthens the impression advanced by local critics of the existing political systems. There is a gap between popular inputs and state policies, and disregard for the Gulf publics' preferences in political management. Ehteshami and

Wright (2007) explain the material and immaterial underpinning of power, including tribal, within the GCC, with the resulting power structures having long predisposed the powerholders to act as "owners", rather than "rulers", of their countries (915).

Searching for popular sovereignty

A number of observations on the problematic of missing people and the absence of democracy were poignantly highlighted in a March 2014 Shell report on the GCC's failure, as published by Arabic-language *Alrai Media* (2014). According to the report, although one-third of a century has gone by since its formation – the same time span in which China was able to build up the world's second largest economy – the GCC has no major achievements to show for it: the customs union, for example, remains ink on paper, and the common market and single currency union never saw the light of day. Indeed, moves to create a Gulf Union prompted Oman to threaten to leave the GCC in November 2013. Failure no longer shocks Gulf nationals, in what seems to be a move from the euphoria of a political union to the withdrawal of ambassadors and the rupturing of intra-GCC relations. The reasons for the withdrawal of ambassadors from Qatar by three GCC member states of the Arab Quartet in 2014 remain unknown to Gulf citizens. How is it that the concurrent crisis in Ukraine did not provoke similar drastic measures (recalling of ambassadors) among Ukraine, the EU, the US and Russia? Finally, by way of comparison, small states have been able to sway big issues in Europe: Denmark almost halted the EU Maastricht process in the 1990s; and the independence referendum in Scotland in 2014 threatened to break the 300-year union with Britain.

The reference in the Shell report to an agreement between GCC leaders (details unknown) hammered out in Kuwait in November 2013 reveals a great deal – not about stealth diplomacy, which is commonplace, but rather about the fact that such an agreement was kept out of the public domain. This is a recurring theme in GCC politics: bypassing Gulf nationals in all governance matters. It points to a top-down mode of steering political affairs within the GCC. This reflects the centralisation existent at the level of national political units. Ulrichsen (2018) sums up this problem, suggesting that "personalization of policy-making" works at odds with wider "institutionalization of authority within the GCC" (51). He also gives examples of how multi-level governance, already plagued by weaknesses, is vitiated by non-compliance. For example, the UAE's withdrawal in May 2009 from the GCC currency and monetary union planned for 2010, was in protest against the decision to make Riyadh the location of the GCC Central Bank, instead of Abu Dhabi (Ibid.); or Oman's threat to leave the GCC because it refused the single currency, interrupting plans for the Gulf Union in 2013 (*Alrai* 2014; Ulrichsen 2018). The idea of 'failure' prevails widely. First-hand accounts by Qatari citizens, Consultative Council deputies and members of the elected Central Municipal Council express dismay at the absence of "the GCC in the conflict resolution of the blockade"; the GCC Secretary-General's failure to carry out his duties can be judged by the absence of any meetings on the crisis (Yusuf 2017).

The GCC and democratic or embedded regionalisation

Scholarship has inquired into the relationship between democracy and regionalism. As Amitav Acharya (2003) has pointed out for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations

(ASEAN), a more or less functioning "region" with strong norms of non-interference and sovereignty among (dictator) elites, democratisation's effect on regionalism may be mixed. Even more relevant, Latin America's regionalism has been driven by heads of state, with its executive summits a regular institutional feature (Malamud 2010, 652). Despite its limitations, from the Latin American Free Trade Agreement (LAFTA) to Mercosur, the trajectory of regional organisations before, during and after democratisation appears the opposite of the GCC: where even this basic level of leader-based mobilisation is absent, discord and disarray amongst political elites weaken regionalism. Probing differences in empirical pathways, scholars have looked at *theories* of European integration (such as (inverted) neo-functionalism) to understand the development of other regionalism experiences (Malamud 2010). This section pursues a radical reading of Habermas and Rawls in a theoretical synthesis prior to its application to Qatar and the GCC. This is not a comparative (GCC-EU) exercise, but an attempt to glean insights from normative democratic theory to diagnose ill-functioning (disembedded) GCC regionalism, linked to domestic deficiencies in political management.

Re-reading Habermas and Rawls

In the GCC, crisis-riddled since its inception, both regional and national democracy remain wanting. Following on from the above, it is argued here that only when democratisation takes centre stage domestically can the second challenge of democratic regionalisation be seriously and steadily tackled. In the context of the GCC, the global advance of the market seems secondary to the global advance of democracy, if not inimical to it. Membership in the former has not guaranteed accession to the latter, as neoliberals argue. The expanding role of GCC states in the global arena is not a measure of democratic norms and rights, but simply of ample purchasing power (Miller 2016). Democratisation theories have in fact a blind spot: in relation to multi-level forms of governance and supranationalism. It is here that Habermas and Rawls provide food for thought, on the dynamics between democracy and regional integration.

Habermas' (2012) preoccupation with Europe and deepening EU constitutionalism, despite its limitations, links national and transnational popular sovereignty. In the case of Rawls (1999), the "law of peoples" can be applied to a subregional context in which most states lack democratic legitimacy. He suggests that democracy, while normatively desirable, need not be a precondition for building relations between peoples. While both Habermas and Rawls suffer from the tunnel vision that still divides the world into liberal and illiberal, this section seeks to appropriate critically their decades-old engagement with the pressing issues of a common basis for a liberal society and the challenges posed by multiculturalism. The engagement here with the EU as a foil to the GCC analyses the latter primarily through the prism of Habermas: mutuality of interests, values and worldviews within the confines of the Gulf region cannot be taken for granted.

Habermas (2012) suggests that, in the EU, there does not have to be a trade-off between transnational and national popular (democratic) sovereignty. Embedded forms of regional cooperation are compatible. An end to elite-negotiated and ratified agreements in a constitutional project must involve "an institutionalization of joint decisions with irreproachable democratic credentials" (4). Citizens would enjoy a quasi-dual political identity – of their respective nation-states *and* the EU – building on the

premise of political equality. Existing treaties have already established "the people" as a basic building block of the supranational organisation: "shared sovereignty" between states and citizens. Bureaucratically, more checks and balances are required between EU bodies (European Commission and Parliament) with an eye towards popular input. Habermas adds the notion of transnational "civic solidarity" between EU peoples/citizens. "Shared political and cultural attitudes" help "reinforc[e]" formal (constitutional and legislative) EU institutions (46). In Habermas' opinion, inculcating such civic solidarity is not far-fetched, even given the varying cultural values and repertoires, and nationalist impulses. Media should provide platforms for (rational) argumentation and debate, highlighting the relevance of the EU to people's lives (48).

Popular sovereignty emerges from civic solidarity while democratic legitimacy stems from legally enshrined human rights (Habermas 2012). Habermas considers "human dignity" the general normative imperative from which more specific rights, political and civil (liberal/democratic), social, cultural and economic, can be derived. The "indivisibility" of all human rights ought to translate into a universalised consensus on the indisputability of human dignity (80). These claims indicate a Eurocentric bias that conceals their local provenance and limited contents to the detriment of the inclusion of other different local claims. However, Habermas' insights into liberal society and multiculturalism can be critically appropriated for this article's focus on the GCC and its missing people.

Human rights need not be confined to the domain of international relations, says Habermas. They can be made binding at the supranational level through constitutions guaranteeing and reflective of democratic citizenship. A "*self-created* political order" links human dignity and legally consecrated equality: citizens "unit[e] as authors of the democratic undertaking of establishing and maintaining a political order based on human rights". This order is reinforced by a "corresponding orientation to the public good" (Habermas 2012, 86-8). Legal institutions are complemented by the enactment and practice of civic or democratic values.

Rawls' Kantian framing of community-building is founded on what he calls "the law of peoples" with peoples being separate from states but not preclusive of them (Rawls 1999, 6-7). This notion of people-to-people solidarity allows Rawls to conceive of relations, an insight pertinent to this article, outside the boundaries of the modern state. In this way, his intention is to extend the theoretical parameters of his liberal concept of "justice as fairness" (3-4). While Rawls' law of peoples is not devoid of "realistic utopianism", by his own admission, it is nonetheless grounded in the values of a just, moral, peaceful and cooperative international political order. Thus, Rawls in effect transcends the Thucydides-Morgenthau threshold of realist power relations as the fulcrum of international politics (Morgenthau 1985).

Rawls differs from Habermas in his wider legal and political horizon. His law of peoples speaks to the world's rich socio-political diversity. Unlike Habermas, who tends to think within a strictly Eurocentric and liberal straightjacket, Rawls refigures international politics as necessitating moral and legal synergies between democracies and non-democracies, liberal and non-liberal societies. His typology of societies rejects liberal democracies as the yardstick for membership of international association (Rawls 1999, 82-4). It encompasses "outlaw" societies opposed to reasonableness as a principle (89-90), "benevolent absolutist" and "decent hierarchical" ones containing degrees of justice within them, relying on diplomacy and non-belligerence (63-7). Muslim societies are subsumed under

non-democratic hierarchical societies. Associational values of community-building emerge in the foreground.

In this section, an expansion of my radical re-reading of Habermas, regarding the construction of regionalism based on popular sovereignty, civic solidarity and democratic norms, incorporates the notion of solidarity *qua* association animating Rawls' politico-ethical imaginary: between peoples, inevitably their nations and states. Association presupposes the existence of "decent peoples" (Rawls 1999, 62). Rawlsian peoples associate on the basis of mutually shared rights and interests, fending off injustice (5-7) both in their states with elected governments (10-24) and without them. A normatively compelling international order is to be founded on equal association and shared reasonableness. Community-building of liberal societies with decent hierarchical societies as envisaged by Rawls in the above discussion is relevant to Gulf and Arab polities.

Habermas' value establishing the people as a foundation for regionalisation lends itself to critical appropriation, including within the GCC. For such popular sovereignty to diffuse from national political units to regional institutions, his civic solidarity is required as a socio-cultural 'glue'. Just as it has functioned in the EU, despite ups and downs and problems continuing into the present with Brexit (Knight 2019), the EU provides the kind of coherence between the particular and the global, the national and the supranational, underpinned by popular sovereignty as the medium of democratic legitimacy. The notion of double sovereignty is not easily practicable. However, it is not, as the EU case shows, unattainable, even if the GCC remains far off the mark in relation to this ideal (Del Sarto and i Lecha 2018, 8-11). Democratisation at national levels is a prerequisite to its regionalisation across all the bureaucracies required for the functioning of self-regenerating multi-level governance. GCC agreements lack the elements of popular sovereignty, civic solidarity, and the legal framework (human rights) that protect citizens (from, for example, the burdens imposed on GCC citizens by the 2017 blockade/crisis). Deleuze's missing people in the Gulf are marked not by their lack of presence – they occupy the public spaces allocated to them in society and the economy – but by their absence in the concealed places of decision-making. This is at the core of the values championed by community-building, or the building of a community of interests (Lucarelli 2002).

Conclusions

Some policymakers have contributed to naturalising security as the *sine qua non* of GCC integration (Gause 2003; Ryan 2009). Public discourses in Arab and Gulf media and even centres of learning have adopted the securitisation paradigm. For academy, media and political practitioners to normativise security, to the exclusion of democracy, is to reify power relations antithetical to another norm: community-building. Until democratic integration is included as part and parcel of the academic, cultural and political governing modes of thought/practice, GCC integration will continue to fade and evade future fruition. This is vital for going beyond current trends of fetishising GCC integration as a function of common security. Community of interests founded upon democratic ideals beckons.

It is true that Brexit clouds the EU political space as its own "autumn" (Della Sala 2012) at the time of writing, but the point remains that community of interests, inclusive

of common security objectives, is feasible via democratic institutions, modalities, procedures, processes, cadres and values. As Sonia Lucarelli (2002, 4) puts it, "the so-called European security architecture" involved identity-making as well as strengthening security through "democratic principles and norms". Even within a political community initially founded on the premise of continent-wide cooperation, the twin normative values of legitimacy and democracy are unavoidable. Supranational institutions composed of states are involved in a process that can potentially produce a type of embedded regionalisation empowering national bodies of citizens.

Striving for Arab Gulf embedded regionalisation must not underrate two interconnected challenges. The GCC, once it heals current rifts, must deal with another challenge: democratic deficits. Since the 2011 uprisings, and despite violence, war and foreign meddling (including by GCC member states in Libya, Syria and Yemen), renewed popular pressure across the Arab region (Algeria, Sudan, Iraq, Lebanon) is resulting in the carving out of new politics and margins of existence, aided by rising electoral contests (Tunisia, Morocco, Kuwait). This should not overshadow reversals and setbacks to democratising norms and practices (for example, Egypt). But grasping the full scope of the democratic deficit in internal politics must be on the agenda of the GCC's diagnosis of existing political systems. Widening the franchise and routinising electoral politics are welcome institutional mechanisms for power sharing but not sufficiently deep and broad to provide checks on singular and patrimonial impulses, in the absence of constitutionally binding and popularly mandated self-government arrangements. Institutional investment needs to be poured into elite-to-elite and people-to-people relations to foster formal channels of decision-making that can empower Deleuze's missing people. A search for a *modus operandi* accommodating differences is an urgent priority in a subregion and region afflicted by hostile rivalries between political elites. Further, GCC systems and rulers are buoyed by globalising economic performance. Even if politically illiberal, they have gained a place on the biggest stage of liberalism: the market. Their global advances as agents of petrodollar largesse are not hampered by problems of human rights or autocracy. Western leaders and their market-driven democracies willingly embrace GCC states and rulers as legitimate partners in the globalising of capitalism. Furthermore, events of the Arab Spring up to the Yemen war have demonstrated Western pandering to the GCC's geopolitical drive to reshape the internal politics of several Arab states – sometimes with the help of allies (NATO in Libya) and cover (the US in the Yemen war).

Regionalisation as a problem is not specific to the GCC. Processes of regionalisation everywhere are facing challenges, some very serious like the 2017 blockade/crisis or Brexit in the EU. These are formidable problems for pundits, opinion-makers and political practitioners. Omission, scholarly and political, of the popular sovereignty and democratic norms needed for community-building, is glaring. Conflict resolution to the GCC crisis that does not take these values into account will engender other problems. For scholars, tiptoeing around the absence of popular sovereignty renders analysis of the subregion's politics wanting. It limits diagnoses and assessments of the current blockade/crisis, as well as of pathologies of governance and state-society and state-state relations in the GCC.

Situating disembedded regionalism at the centre of the analysis can be one avenue for future research and empirical analysis. Doing so can provide the link between domestic and regional politics in a poorly understood subregion for which data is scarce and where

scholars struggle to sort through the thicket of personalist and partisan narratives. Through a parsimonious Habermasian-Rawlsian framework, this article has sought to delineate inherent problems in disembedded GCC regionalisation, that is, one in which democracy and popular sovereignty are lacking, advocating that both become norms of community-making. These solutions cannot be ignored. A Maastricht effect beckons.

Acknowledgments

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