

# Fragmentation as a Challenge: Tribal and Sectarian Identities in the Middle East

**Asst. Prof. Kleantis Kyriakidis**

American University in the Emirates, UAE  
[https://doi.org/10.35609/gcbssproceeding.2020.11\(85\)](https://doi.org/10.35609/gcbssproceeding.2020.11(85))

## **ABSTRACT**

---

In the Arabian Gulf two identities can be really considered almost as important as the national one: the tribal and the sectarian ones. Someone should expect that the reinforcement of these identities is a direct response to inequality and processes of exclusion. Furthermore, parochial tribalism is expected to arise as the protector of cultural heritage, especially in a region where the ex-pats vastly outnumber the locals. Nonetheless, both statements are far from truth. In this paper we will analyze how in the Gulf, sectarian identity came to play a significant role only after the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran and it keeps on surviving through mainly instigations and Iranian propaganda, provocations and support. It should be noted that Sunni identity has been allegedly subjugated in other Middle East States (mainly in Syria and Iraq) but in the Gulf the sectarian challenge stems from the Shia communities, openly supported by Tehran. Strangely enough, the tribal identity does not pose that much of a challenge, since tribes are more the friend than the enemy of all Gulf States. Actually, these countries could not have survived without the loyalty and commitment of the tribes not only to the Royal families but also to the idea of the State and the ideal of the Nation – and Gulf Nations do protect their cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** Gulf, Globalization, Fragmentation, Sectarianism, Tribalism