Tribalism, Borders and States in the Middle East

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This article reviews the terms "tribe" and "tribalism" in general, and their specific relevance, use and meaning in the Middle East and North Africa. It describes the borders of tribal migration and expansion and the diverse social, political and cultural impacts on other populations in a given area and the regime in various states. The article explains the difference between Arab tribes and the meaning of the term "tribe" in other parts of the world. It views the origin of the Arab tribes, their role in the spreading of Islam and their connection to the Arabic language, culture expansion as well as dominating the Middle East and North Africa. It looks at the status of tribes today in various countries in the region, and the return of tribal dominance in the post-Arab Spring era. The article reviews the political structure of various states in the region and discusses the administrative, social and political differences between countries whose administration remained tribal, or was built according to the tribal model, and states operating in different political systems. It also discusses the impact of the Arab Spring on the region; it describes tribalism's challenge to various states, the politicization of tribalism, and the status of tribes in various states, explaining why different regimes had been influenced differently by the return of tribalism dominance. It discusses the regimes that did not lose control or managed to deal with the phenomenon and those that could not cope with the events, and either fell or are still struggling. Today, the embodiment of Arab culture and tribalism within Islam impacts everything from family relations, to governance, to conflict inside the state and conflicts with other states.

Keywords: *Middle East, Islam, Bedouin, Borders, Tribalism, Culture, Regime, Governance*

INTRODUCTION

It is not uncommon that the terms "tribe" and "tribalism" are viewed as belonging with the past. This view might be correct in some parts of the world, but in other parts, especially in the Middle East and North Africa, these terms remain relevant. Tribalism is an important component in the social and political fabric of several

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states in the region, and its existence is recognized and respected in countries where only a segment of the population perceives themselves as members or descendants of a given tribe. In recent years, scholars of different disciplines and living in different parts of the world, or come from different cultures, attribute different meanings to "tribe" and "tribalism". Thus, the issues of borders and tribe-state relations often depend on the specific definition of tribalism.

In the past, the term "tribe" referred to an early stage of civilization, the transition from small family groups of hunters and gatherers, to a much larger blood-related patriarchal group, a clan, or "Hamula" (the Arabic word for clan), that shares culture, traditions, lifestyle and resources, who live by their own rules, operate as a collective and are led by a person or persons that the members trust and respect. In various parts of the world, tribes evolved differently; people who live near the ocean or big rivers became fishermen, people who lived in good fertile land with plenty of water became farmers, and those in semi-arid planes or on the vast steppes learned to raise livestock and became shepherds or herders. Thus, the climate, the terrain, its resources and major geographic features, influenced the borders between tribes and between tribes and other communities.

Communities that lived on islands or in very remote parts of the world, did not change much in time as they were less affected by the cultures of other people. However, people who live in the multi-ethnic continents, where human migration is almost a constant phenomenon, were exposed to other types of people, other cultures and customs, and other innovative or derogatory ideas. Furthermore, migration waves, for whatever reason changed the demographic structure of the land. However, the results of demographic change were not always the same: some civilizations vanished, languages and cultures became extinct, in other cases certain groups had been exiled or subjugated, while in other cases people of different origins integrated with others and formed new entities. Sometimes, people of smaller groups assimilated into the majority, and under different circumstances, certain minorities accepted the change but also managed to keep some unique characteristics of their own. These migratory waves not only affected the population and the political organization but also the borders, as cultural elements, specifically language, religion, tradition and way of life, became important indicators of borders.

Strakes (2011) explains that Arab tribal systems predate the present geographic boundaries of the modern Middle Eastern states and as the tribes are still distributed across the borders of Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Iran, and Turkey, they paradoxically occupy recognized territorial spaces, a characteristic that satisfies one of the necessary conditions of statehood in the Western social science tradition. As interactions, alliances and conflicts between informal social units such as tribes and clans predate formal cooperation between modern states, it is imperative to recognize the fact that the origins of functioning of political relations between diverse ethnic, religious and tribal groups in the Middle East, dates to a considerably earlier period than conventionally understood in Western political science. In the

modern era, political borders are the dividing lines between states. Sometimes these lines fit previous borders between different people or follow a distinct geographic feature, while in other cases they are imposed by others or the result of treaties or agreements.

This article provides a general theoretical background of borders among people, states, and cultures, and various views of the term tribalism, and the way various types of borders relate, affect or are affected by tribalism. It describes the dominant social and political role of tribalism in most states of the MENA region and the way it affects internal and external pacts, alliances and rivalries within and among the states in this region. After a brief review of tribalism in the Middle East, it goes into definitions of borders, explains the issues arising between tribalism and the state, describes the situation is specific states, and the status of tribalism in non-Arab states and concludes with discussion and summation.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Borders are boundaries between a given group and the others. Borders can be a physical geographic feature, they could be political, either agreed upon or imposed, and they can also be cultural. Sometimes one element depends on or corresponds with the other and sometimes one type of border is incompatible with the other. Such situations may lead to clashes. Border disputes can break out among tribes, between tribes and other communities, between tribes and the regime, and between tribes and the state.

In ancient times, the term "tribe" referred to a form of society based on kinship. Its members share ethnic and cultural characteristics, such as language, religion, tradition, and lifestyle, which is organized in specific social and political systems. Most scholars today agree on the definitions of borders but have a difference of opinion about the appropriate definition of the terms "tribe" and "tribalism". Their views often relate to their academic discipline: history, anthropology, sociology or political sciences.

According to Rowland (2009), a tribe is

"A group of people related by birth or by marriage who come together and act in concert to control a territory and appropriate its resources, which they exploit – together or separately – and which they are ready to defend by armed force." (p. 11).

While Gardner, in his article: On Tribalism and Arabia (2018), explains that:

"Tribe and tribalism are an important feature on the palette from which individual and collective identities are constructed, both in the Middle East and elsewhere, it is one aspect on a diverse palette of options from which many peoples construct their individual and collective identities in the contemporary era." (p. 3).

Maurice Godelier (1977) explains that tribalism in modern social systems does not look the same as it did in ancient times or even a century ago. It is not a rigid social structure but instead a personal sentiment that successfully organizes the given society and provides an identity, a safety net, social structure and moral values. Mohammadpour and Soleimani (2019) observed that tribalism is defined in several alternative ways. It is defined as a quasi-biologized principle of social organization; a political coalition, ethnic or kin-based identity or a localized group.

Earlier generations of anthropologists often defined *tribes* as "A stage in an evolutionary sequence, distinguished from less developed bands and more advanced chiefdoms." (Godelier 1977, p. 42).

Others observe that tribes are not confined to the specific land they own, as tribal territory may refer to a city, town, trade routes, or other areas. What makes a tribe unique, and different from an ethnic group of shared lineage, is its political organization based on hereditary political power construction, the general patriarchal tradition, a social system based on equality between the different segments of the tribe, and the primacy of the collective over the individual. The tribal system emphasizes equality through its fierce protection of any member threatened by another tribe or any external power (Rowland, 2009).

Panossian (2021) observes that the existing literature in political anthropology has identified significant distinctions in the structural arrangement of tribal systems across geographic regions.

> "These distinctions provide an analytical point of departure for the comparison of conflict and cooperation among tribal aggregates of differing ethnic categories. Ethnicity constitutes the third dimension of variation in tribal systems after kinship and religion. The notion of tribalism refers to the inter-group loyalty brought about by the trade of identity for the sake of security. Tribalism was a fundamental contribution to social stratification systems of various socialities…" (p. 2).

One trend of political sciences scholars claims that the use of the term "tribalism" began with modern colonialism, while others point out that the policy of "divide and rule" was used in ancient times, and is generally attributed by most historians to the Romans. Earlier literature (Assyrian, Egyptian, Hebrew, Persian and Greek), refers to tribes and even points out the similarities and differences between tribes within a given a province, nation or kingdom, who share ethnicity, language and certain [but not all] cultural and traditional characteristics.

According to Panossian, who studied tribalism in Lebanon via the advancement of time and urbanization as well as modernization in the state, it may seem that there is no longer a need for tribal identification. However, as in most of the region, records and registration started only in the early 1920s; people whose ancestors came from a specific tribe, share the same surname, thus,

> "These surnames function as social markers. They do not only signal which tribe one belongs to, but they also carry crucial information regarding the

person's place of birth, economic status, their family's political affiliation as well as religion. The defining factors of the self are assigned to the child as soon as they begin to carry the surname; thus, the tribe becomes an identity. This not only abolishes the need for individuation, but it also hinders the path of intellectual advancement. It does not leave room for the manifestation of diversity or curiosity; as the recipe in a cookbook that always results in the creation of the same cake, these tribal expectations dubbed within the parasol of the surname become a stamp that guides the person's choices and decisions" (Panossian, 2021, p. 2).

According to Gardner (2018),

"Tribe as a social form is often recognized as the segmentary lineage system of political and social organization frequently interwoven with arid environments. The segmentary logic of tribalism was ideally configured to weld together a population dispersed over vast tracts of land and who, as a result, may encounter one another only sporadically or seasonally. In this dispersed existence, kinship, genealogy, and ancestry allow individuals to socially place almost anyone they encounter" (p. 2).

Khoury and Kostiner, who conducted extensive research on the subject of tribe and tribalism, concluded that due to the multidisciplinary nature of the issue no one academic speciality is equipped to address the question of tribes and *qabaliyya* alone (Khoury & Kostiner, 1990). Therefore, it seems that:

"…analysts and scholars should draw upon history, anthropology, political science, philology, and sociological fieldwork to achieve an appreciation of tribal identity (Del Río Sánchez, 2019, p. 368).

A thorough study of history reveals that tribalism was present in all continents of the globe, and still exists in the Middle East, parts of Africa, Central Asia, and among the native people of the Americas. But, as scholars observe, the survival, integration, assimilation or extinction of tribes and tribalism, often depend on circumstance. Social change occurs in different places and at different times for various reasons. When it happens, some tribes vanish, some tribes assimilate completely with either the newcomers or the dominant group, while other tribes integrate into the greater society by accepting and adopting certain cultural elements of the dominant group, while on the other hand managing to preserve certain cultural elements, such as language (Welsh, Basks, Catalans, Valona, Cherckes, etc.), religious affiliation, lifestyle and other traditional aspects, such as names, architectural features, cuisine, and various folk arts. This article concentrates on tribes and borders in the Middle East and will use tribes-state relations in modern Israel, to depict the complexity of the issue.

TRIBALISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Tribalism was always present in the Middle East and is still today. Records and legends show that since the dawn of history, tribalism fulfilled an imperative role in the creation and dismantling of kingdoms, lineages and states. There were times when tribes formed alliances and contributed to the formation of new entities, while in other times tribes threatened the order and stability in existing societies. A thorough examination reveals that tribal values had and still have a strong impact on the politics, culture, geography and society at large in the entire region of the Middle East and North Africa.

Already in ancient times, the regional powers, the Assyrian and the Babylonians of Mesopotamia, their contemporary rival empires of the Egyptians and the Hittites, and the empires that followed them, the Persians, the Greek and the Romans/byzantine, recognized the importance of tribes and tribalism in the region. In order to control the vast multi-cultural areas, they used to exercise the policy of divide and conquer by exploiting ethnic, cultural and religious differences among their subjects.

For many years, scholars and politicians have shown a great interest in tribalism, ethnicity and religious identities in the Middle East, and have attempted to study their influence on the stability of the states. However, regardless of national declarations negating sectarianism of all sorts, national leaders, as well as external rulers, never hesitated to seek the aid of tribes to guard the borders and suppress uprisings of other minorities (Khoury & Kostiner, 1990; Suwaed, 1992; Masharkah,1988; Al-Fwal, 1974).

Borders

As mentioned above, tribal borders (whether for roaming or inhabiting), could be physical, cultural or political. Physical borders are obvious; they are geographical features such as extreme breaks in the terrain; a body of water, mountain ridge or densely wooded area that either blocks or makes advancement too difficult, or an extreme change in the nature of the land, where a vast, open, sparsely-populated area with enough water sources to support herds of livestock turns into either dry bare rocky ground with no water sources and vegetation at all, or into a fertile cultivated and densely-populated area with paved roads and fences, whose inhabitants are strong enough to protect their property.

The second border is cultural: the tribe may stop moving or spreading into a given area if it encounters a different culture or a strong, organized community whose customs and lifestyle are entirely different. They may speak a different language, practice a different religion, or maintain different values. A tribe might learn to co-exist; it could develop mutual respect and good relations with others, it can tolerate such neighbors but keep to itself, but it can also develop animosity and rivalry for the right to use the resources of the land.

The third border is political, a line drawn on a map which determines the absolute limit that all the people who live in one state cannot cross without the permission of the authorities of the neighboring state.

As many of these borders were not reached by agreement but imposed by external powers, they often reflect the interest of these external powers and their alliances rather than natural or traditional borders between diverse segments of the population. This historical event is the cause of several present conflicts, as interests of local populations were completely ignored; some groups realized that crop fields and orchards that had been their property for generations were suddenly situated inaccessible beyond the border. Other groups, especially nomadic tribes whose compounds and season-camps were spread throughout the vast territory, or even a large nation that inhabits a strategic territory (e.g. the Kurds), found out that their land has been divided between two to four different states. Family members were cut off from each other, the borderline cutting communities apart, and each part of the collective found itself the subject of a different ruler.

According to Del Sarto (2014), the nature and origin of the various challenges to borders and statehood in the region are widely disparate, as they have been established either during the process of state- and nation-building, set as the result of specific domestic policy choices over time, or are the consequence of regional politics of external actors and/or global processes. The different factors and developments originating at domestic, regional and international levels tend to intersect and interlink, often with region-wide implications.

Profound disjuncture's between state authority, legitimacy and territoriality lie at the heart of the state-formation process in the Middle East, due to the fact that the borders in the Middle East had not been drawn by the people who live there but imposed by external factors. After the Ottoman Empire was disintegrated after WW1, the victorious European powers took the mandate to reorganize the area that was ruled by the Ottomans for four centuries, and change the status of the former provinces into states. The Sykes-Picot agreement signed on 1922 between France and Great Britain determined the borders of the newly established states of Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan (and as a later consequence Israel/Palestine) and the smaller gulf monarchies. In some cases, state border lines follow specific geographic features, some border lines were drawn according to previous lines of the last division of the Ottoman Empire's provinces, (as the border of provinces were constantly shifted according to local or administrative interests), and some were drawn to accommodate various political and economic interests. Thus, in some cases, the state line cut off and divided tribes and even nations, and in other cases a newly founded state was comprised of various ethnic groups of diverse religious affiliation, and even multi-language multi-cultural population. The new colonial powers ignored long lasting conflicts, rivalries and hostile relations. Thus, some of the new states had never unified into a nation, and as state apparatus was barely functioning, for many people, the framework of the tribe and/or a given specific group, (ethnic or religious) remained the only system they could rely on.

According to Salzman (2008), to understand the influence of tribalism on the development of both Arab culture and, by extension, Islam, one must understand the basic characteristics and dynamics of Middle Eastern tribalism. A tribesperson is required and expected to do their best to maximize the number of both children and livestock. The reasons for these requirements are children's aid in labor. Nomadic pastoralism requires several workers to perform many tasks simultaneously. Family members are more committed to common interests than hired help. Large families also enhance political status. As technology remains constant across tribal societies in any given area, the factor that determines military strength is how many fighters a given leader can master.

Tribes and Tribalism

At the beginning of the Arab conquest and the spread of Islam, there was an intention to unite the different tribes and build a united Arab nation. However, with the expansion of the occupation and the logistic difficulties that had ensued, the Arab rulers also followed the path of the empires that preceded them. They made pacts with specifically selected tribes, and suppressed, pushed or reached agreements with others. So, in practice, any foreign regime that has taken over the region since the ancient Egyptians until the end of colonialism in the mid-20th century preferred to encourage tribalism and use it for its own purposes. Governors appointed by the Ottomans and the colonial powers that succeeded them in ruling the Middle East and North Africa, as well as rulers and governments of states who achieved independence, attempted to cope with tribes and tribalism with varying degrees of success.

Seventh-century Arab tribal culture influenced Islam and its adherents' attitudes toward non-Muslims. Today, the embodiment of Arab culture and tribalism within Islam impacts everything from family relations, to governance, to conflict. In the Middle East, the terms "tribe" and "tribalism" refer to nomadic and semi-nomadic people that came over to the region from the Arabian Peninsula. The Bedouin warriors were the core of the Muslim armies that moved from the Arabian Peninsula northwards and westwards. The women and children followed and brought over the herds and the movable property, and the territories they left were soon claimed by other local tribes. These other tribes were compelled to move and seek new pastures, either because they were pushed from their traditional grazing territories by the expansion of stronger tribes, or by drought. There were also occasions in which a specific tribe was encouraged to move to a different location by a contemporary ruler. In time, some of these tribes became completely nomadic, some became semi-nomadic, and others settled and changed their lifestyles. These tribes formed various alliances with both the local population and the contemporary regime. I wish to point out that the Middle East is not a unified society. It is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious region, since, in addition to the tribes and other social strata of a given nation, most Middle Eastern countries host diverse ethnic groups, including Jews, Copts, Druze, Cherces, Armenians, Turkmen, Assyrians, Yazidi, Alawites,

and others. Some foreign writers mistakenly call these ethnic or religious minority groups "tribes", but except for the Turkmen, none of them is.

Today, many scholars believe that colonial policies towards different ethnic and religious groups contributed considerably to the friction between the legitimacy of state authority and its territorial control. While Middle Eastern borders did not usually delineate ethnic or religious communities, the colonial powers often manipulated ethnic and religious divisions for their own interests, following the old Roman strategy of divide and rule.

Tribalism is a key feature in the area, as many of the Middle Eastern cultures are tribal; some states in the region are even organized as tribes. So, one can observe that tribalism is a social characteristic that differentiates the Middle East from many other parts of the world. Tribes and tribalism fulfilled a central role in the history of the Arabic speaking region, as most of the population of the Arabian Peninsula in the pre-Islamic era comprised Bedouin tribes, and the majority of the warriors in the ranks of the Muslim forces that conquered the Middle East and North Africa were Bedouin. The armies that conquered the region and helped spread Islam changed the demographic structure of the population, and by so doing, affected the culture and concepts of the Arabic societies that evolved later in this region. Thus, several states in the Middle East were either established on a tribal basis, like Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and the Emirates or others, like Iraq and Libya, which are multi-ethnic countries, whose societies were partially based on tribal heritage. While in the past, the word "tribe" referred to groups of close kinship or shared ancestry (both rural and urban populations) residing in a specific territory which they consider their own or have right to, for example, the ancient Israeli, Amorite and Canaanite tribes, the Cretans, Nubians etc., they could also be nomadic, like the Ishmaelite & the Amalek, or semi-nomadic like the Midianites. Some ancient records refer to various marine people also as "tribes", although today it is known that many of them came from or were affiliated with distant highly developed civilizations.

However, concepts change in time and circumstances. Since the Arab expansion and the zealous spreading of Islam, the term "tribe" in the Middle East means a group of blood-related people of nomadic Bedouin heritage, with ingrained collective loyalties and commitments. The tribe ["Ashira" in Arabic], is a collective of enlarged families of the same ancestral origin, who shepherd their flocks together, farm their land together and fight together to protect their fields, their pastures and their water sources. The memory of the common ancestor unifies the tribe, and the most important person of the tribe is its leader, the sheikh. In most cases, people of a given tribe live in a certain district they consider their homeland; speak the same dialect that distinguishes them from other tribes, and have homogeneous culture and solidarity that manifests itself mainly in loyalty to the tribe and a zealous attitude towards external factors". (Suwaed, 2022).

According to Del Río Sánchez (2019) Arab tribalism, (*qabaliyya* in Arabic), has been traditionally associated with nomadism, deserts, and rural populations.

This view is common not only among people from different parts of the world, but it is also present among urban dwellers in some Arab countries. Despite this misconception, it is well known that several tribes had settled and established new villages near essential resources within "their" territories, and tribal people had settled in cities and towns for decades. Thus, the author sums it up by saying that:

> "Arab tribes have assumed urban models of social organization in order to adapt to their relationships and assure the preservation of personal identity, protection, group solidarity and their capacity for collective action." (p. 367).

One must keep in mind that the Middle East was never isolated from the rest of the world. Thus, when occurred, the consequences of the Industrial Revolution and products affected the life of all people, including the people who lived in the Middle East. Firearms changed the skills and training required previously from people who either attacked or protected caravans, communities and property; big steamers enabled ocean crossing and safer use of inland waterways; and trains shortened distances and provided security to travelers.

Thus, Bedouins no longer rode camels and roamed the desert. This romantic image does not fit today's Middle East, as modern technology as well as education, is present, available, accessible and used by most of its people. Although there is a distinction between nomads and settlers, many people who were nomads or semi-nomads in the past, settled or now live in urban centers. However, even though millions of Arabs live in modern global cities, tribal identity is socially and politically rooted.

Thus, tribes and tribalism, in general, pose a very serious challenge to the political elite of the Arabic states. The relations between the regime and the tribes, regardless whether it is local leadership or foreign administration, are subject to changes in governance and security; when the central regime weakens, the tribes strengthen. Thus, the power of the tribes strongly depends on the power and governance of the country's central government. The states in the region had diverse approaches to tribalism; while certain states suppressed tribes and forced them to settle in permanent settlements, in other states like Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Jordan, Libya and Iraq, the tribes remained a major political factor.

Tribal identity continues to play an important role in the shaping of the decision-making process and the formation of the state and the national identity in these countries. In fact, the tribal identity in these countries is so strong, that it competes with the other two major identities in the state: the religious Islamic identity and the national identity (Suwaed, 2022).

The significant political impact of tribes in the region illustrates how vulnerable modern systems are, and probably will remain, to the reality of tribal culture. For example, Jordan is based on pacts and alliances between tribes, and its king is considered a supreme tribe leader. [Sheik of sheikhs], while states like Yemen and Libya could not exist as independent political entities; their governments could not

function without the support of the tribes. Decades after gaining independence, the loyalty to the tribe and its leadership in these countries is much stronger than the loyalty to the state. The stubborn persistence of tribal identity in the Middle East is the result of failure of the "artificial" national project, the attempts to apply modern politics, and the addiction of Arab autocrats to survival policy (Suwaed, 2022; Rowland, 2009; Brehony, 2020).

Tribalism and State

> "Historically, it was unlikely that states could impose effective control over the tribes in their vast territories because the cost of policing and maintaining control would likely be much higher than what taxes could be extracted from the small number of tribesmen. To guarantee a continuous and safe passage through tribal regions for the purposes of travel and commerce, states would "buy" the support of the tribes by catering to their leaders". (Dukhan, 2014, p. 13).

Saltzman (2008) explains that tribes operate differently from states since the latter have an entirely different organizational structure: they are centralized and operate by political hierarchies. They also have specialized institutions such as courts, police, tax mechanism, and an army to maintain social control, security, and defense from external threats. They also provide various social services, while tribes are collectives of enlarged families who share tradition, heritage, economic and political interests. A tribe is led by a leader or a group of leaders who have everyone's loyalty and respect. This loyalty to the leader and the collective is not always compatible with the interests of the state.

The breaking of the Arab Spring in 2010 shook the political leadership and the political administration in several Arab countries. In the aftermath of the riots, some countries like Egypt, Morocco and others, managed to retain control and reorganize, while in other countries and the regions, at large, tribalism regained its dominance, proving that blood relations are stronger than political ties, and that loyalty to the tribe is a priority. When political interests clash with tribal interests, Bedouins prefer to back up the interests of the tribe. They see the tribe as the source of stability that gives them power and status, while the political interest is perceived as a passing phenomenon (Suwaed, 2022).

In January 2019, the Jordanian journalist Yasser Abu-Hlala, published an article in *Al-Arabi Al-Jedid*, an Arabic newspaper published in London , under the title: "The tribe is under the state or above it", in which he presents and discusses the recent dominance of tribalism:

> "The power of the tribe returned and recovered in the Arab world, due to the fragility of the state and the collapse of the civil institutions. The tyrants realized that they need an alternative power to the political parties, trade unions and other civil associations…We are witnessing the revival of political tribalism in most of the Arab world, the tribe has been taken out of social context to the political sphere based on polarization and conflict". (Abu-Hlala, 2019).

Abu-Hlala provides examples to his arguments. One of these examples is a description of recent events in Yemen where the state had an army that was supposed to protect it from internal and external threats, but the previous president, Ali Abdallah Al-Salah, did not trust the army and managed to turn the entire country into tribal militias and increase factionalism and regionalized trends. He concludes his article with the opinion that the Arab world has no way out of the impasse in which it lives except by returning to the sovereignty of the state. In his opinion, the political use of the tribe is returning to the Al-Jahalia – the pre-Islamic period (Abu-Hlala, 2019).

CURRENT RELATIONS BETWEEN TRIBE AND STATE

> "Every human society must establish order if it is going to survive and prosper. Arab culture addresses security through "balanced opposition" in which everybody is a member of a nested set of kin groups, ranging from very small to very large. These groups are vested with responsibility for the defense of each member and responsible for harm any member does to outsiders. If there is a confrontation, families face families, lineage faces lineage, clan faces clan, tribe faces tribe, confederacy faces confederacy, sect faces sect, and the Islamic community faces the infidels". (Salzmann, 2008, p. 23).

In the Arab world, current relations between state institutions and tribes are expressed mostly by patronage ties of a government official with strong influential tribe leaders. Rulers' patronage can take many forms: it can consist of monthly payments, highly appreciated "gifts", like cars, houses, lands, access to resources, seats in parliament and the government, official appointments generating a substantial regular income, specific privileges like tax exemption, etc. For example, during the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, the Iraqi government set up a tribal legal system and even provided tribal leaders with diplomatic passports. Saddam even went further and declared that the reigning Ba'ath party to be "the tribe of all tribes" (Baram, 1997).

Nomadic tribes were always "on the move" all over the globe, including the Middle East. But the term "Arabs" had never been recorded before the work of Yosifun (Yosifus Plavious), who mentions Arabs as allies of king Herod roaming in what would now be considered Jordan. The word "Arabs" is a derivation of the Hebrew word "Arava" meaning wilderness, a reference to the people that came from the desert, from the Arabian Peninsula into the Fertile Crescent. Although there are several states in the Peninsula today, all of them – from large Saudi Arabia to tiny Qatar – are still organized and operate as either chiefdoms, run by or controlled specific tribe, or by a tribal coalition with hereditary rights, bequeathing ranks of authority and in some states, tribal superiority. The rapid development of the oil-rich countries changed the lifestyles of many people in the area. However, all the states in the Arabian Peninsula and its neighboring Jordan are still tribal (Suwaed, 2022).

In tribal states like Jordan and Yemen, tribal leaders played a central role in shaping the mechanisms and determination of strategies of not only the government but also those of the opposition parties. Tribes have a central role in elections, both local and federal, since their members' loyalty is to the tribe, and they all vote for its candidate. Voting to the parliament is not ideology-based, as a tribe member's vote is based on social commitment and tribal affiliation. In Arab states of large tribal populations, the division into administrative units like district municipal borders is based mostly on tribal lines, and the local tribe leaders are the local administrative officials.

In the wake of the Arab Spring, tribalism became even more dominant in Libya and Yemen. Historically, these two countries were born and established as artificial national entities with serious geographic and demographic faults; they have trouble functioning due to the lack of harmony between the external modern form and their internal traditional content. Thus, these two countries suffer serious legitimacy problems and weak institutional structures. In fact, they cannot function as political units and their governments cannot run the states without the support of the tribes, as decades after these states received independence the loyalty to the tribe and the tribe's sheikh remained much stronger than the loyalty to the nation and the state. This situation makes these countries vulnerable to regional and international geopolitical interests (Suwaed, 2022).

There is a strong tribal component in the current violent riots in Yemen and Libya; tribes residing in the eastern part of Libya were the central powers that carried the revolt against the Libyan regime. These tribes were not included in Kaddafi's administration that favored the tribes that live in and around Tripoli. The revolt in Yemen had the same characteristics: tribes that the administration kept marginal rebelled against the Yemenite president and his tribal coalition. Thus, the presence of the tribal factor in both Libya and Yemen turned non-violent protests into bloody civil wars. Scholars claim that tribal cultural identity's politicization in the area is one of the problematic symptoms of several Arab states regarding citizens' perception of state legitimacy, therefore, to neutralize the influential political role of the tribes, the administration in Arab countries in the Middle East will have to deal with tribalism by forming and implementing political reform based on the national state legitimacy (Suwaed, 2022).

Tribalism in the Levant: Syria, Lebanon and Iraq

These countries differ from many other Arab countries since the imposition of borders by external powers resulted in becoming multi-ethnic and multi-religious, with a significant tribal element. In Lebanon ethnic and religious affiliations play a major part in the social structure, the political parties and the composition of the government. In Syria and Iraq, however, where there is tribal presence, including a small group of non-Arab tribes, in order to govern the regime must reach agreements not only with the leadership of the larger ethnic communities but with tribal leaders as well.

In the last third of the 20th Century, Iraq and Syria were ruled by authoritative secular rulers. Both leaders, Saddam Hussein of Iraq and Hafez Al-Assad of Syria, rose by a military coup and were considered secular representatives of the Ba'ath party. These rulers invested vast efforts in overcoming tribalism and promoting nationalism. However, as the borders of both countries were imposed by external forces, local interests were ignored, and the "nations" were and still are an artificial assembly of diverse groups of people who have very little in common (Baram, 1997; Panossian, 2021; Dukhan, 2014).

While ethnic and religious affiliations are important in both Syria and Iraq, tribalism is a major characteristic of these states' society. Unlike the situation in Iraq, where the Bedouin tribes hardly mix with other segments of the population and most of them are dispersed over vast tracts of land in specific territories, the Bedouins tribes in Syria are practically everywhere; they are in the desert as well as in rural and urban areas; there are complete suburbs of Bedouins in the large Syrian cities like Damascus, Aleppo and Homs, as well as in smaller towns throughout the country. In 2010, just before the beginning of the Arab Spring and the consequential riots that started in Syria and developed into civil war, it was estimated that Bedouins and Bedouin-affiliated people comprised about 40 to 45% of the state's population. Loyalty to the tribe is important in Syria as it is in other Arab countries, and blood relations are more important than political ties, and hence tribalism had weakened the political parties in these states, as whenever there is a conflict between political interests and those of the tribe, the Bedouins choose the tribal interests. Therefore, tribalism continues to play a central role in Syria. During the reign of the Assad family, there was a serious attempt to reduce other loyalties and direct all the population segments to aim their loyalty to the Ba'ath party. For some decades, the tribes had no clear political organization. The regime sought the support of the tribes and bought the loyalty of important tribal leaders with money, lands, and other gifts, including few seats in parliament. However, in practice, like other representatives of ethnic or religious groups, they had no political weight. When the revolt against Bashar Al-Assad started, tribalism returned to the social and political arena as both supporters and opponents of Bashar were reorganized on a tribal basis (Suwaed, 2022; Dukhan, 2014).

However, unlike Syria, Iraq was blessed with natural resources, used to be a rich country, and thus, the regime had fewer difficulties in imposing nationalism and reducing diverse aspects of segmentation. The regime under Saddam had the means to develop the country. It also used its vast profits to build and equip a modern army, increase its police force and develop a significant military industry. One of the ways used by the regime to reduce tribalism was to make pacts with tribal leaders, improve tribal access to resources and integrate tribesmen in the army and other law enforcement agencies used by the regime to impose its social and political doctrine on the state's population (Baram, 1997). When Saddam Hussein and his administration were removed from power, segmentation returned and today, the Bedouin tribes in Iraq often clash with the new Iraqi government (Myers, 2013).

North Africa

More established regimes in North Africa, like Egypt, the largest Arabic country, and also Algeria and Tunisia, managed to recover from the Arabic Spring and its implications, including Morocco, which was not as affected by it as its neighbors. Thus, although there are some Bedouin tribes in Egypt and other tribal minorities in Algeria and Morocco, they do not affect the state's nature and policies.

However, in states like Libya, Sudan and Mauritania, in which the regime was either based on the tribes or used and sought the support of the tribes, the dominance of tribalism had returned. Tribal culture still characterizes Mauritania's society as the national state failed to erase tribalism. Thus, regardless of the efforts of the governments since independence, and the calls of intellectuals to reduce the influence and dominance of tribalism, fifty years after independence tribalism affects the culture, society and the internal and external politics of the state. The larger the tribe, the stronger its influence on decision-makers. Thus, the tribal leaders use their political power to promote personal interests. It is worth noting that the government perpetuates tribalism by exploiting the tribe's electoral power; the rulers of Mauritania gain the support of the tribe by ensuring that their government includes representatives of the powerful tribes. As the political parties are tribal-based, tribalism fulfills a central role in the state's political behavior. Regardless of the liberal intellectuals' struggle against tribalism, tribal dominance is still a major factor in the state (Suwaed, 2015; Del Sarto, 2017; Cherstich, 2014).

Sudan is considered an Arab state, although its population is mostly of African origin. Until recently Sudan was the largest territorial state in Africa. In 2011, after a long civil war, the state had been divided between the Muslim Arabic speaking north which retained its name, Sudan, and the non-Muslim south called South Sudan or Darfur. The Arabs, or Arabic speaking Sudanese, ruled the country for decades. Nomadic tribes that happened to wander through or migrate from the neighboring countries, are often welcomed by the authorities and in general, are treated fairly, but they do not influence the regime's administration or policies (Chigudu, 2019; Zain, 1996; Paglia, 2007; Musa, 2018).

Tribal Status in Non-Arab States

The historical expansion of Islam in the Middle East, North Africa and beyond, had spread Arab tribal culture and influenced Islam and its adherents' attitudes toward non-Muslims. On the borders of this Arab region there are several non-Arab states with an Arab minority. However, the civil status of these minorities in these states differs according to the size of the given minority, and the number and status of other minorities, in the given state. Two of these non-Arab states, Turkey in the northwest Middle East and Iran in the northeast of the area, are officially Muslim countries, though each of them has a non-Muslim minority. These two countries have three common denominators: they both were important empires and ruled vast

parts of the Middle East in the past, both of them have their own language, tradition and cultural heritage whose people are proud of, and in both of them there are tribes of non-Arabic origin (Turkmen, and Kurdish). The language and cultural heritage are important factors of nationalism, and minorities of different cultural heritage are tolerated to a degree, but their political status depends on the contemporary government and its relations with other states the given minority is considered to be affiliated with (Chatty, 2018; Khoury & Kostiner, 1990; Tapper, 2011).

Until recent years, when Turkey was flooded with Syrian refugees, the Arabs in Turkey were a small, marginal minority, half of whom were Bedouins or of Bedouin extraction. Arabs living in Turkey, Bedouin included, are Sunna, meaning, they share the same version of Islam with more than 90% of the state's population. As a small minority that lives mostly in the periphery, they pose no threat to the regime, and generally, are treated better than other minorities in the state, and maintain good relations with the authorities. In Iran, a country whose majority follows a different version of Islam, Shi'a, most of its Arab minority is concentrated in an oil-rich district near the border with Iraq, and are suppressed by the authorities. Distrust, coupled with religious and ethnic tension, results in a persecutory and discriminative attitude of the authorities. The few Arabic tribes that live in that area and on the shores of Shat Al-Arab (the Persian Gulf), fair no better than the rest of the Arab population. According to journalists who managed to get information from these districts, the Bedouin tribes in Iran are constantly pushed by the authorities to leave their hereditary territories and move on, preferably across the border into neighboring Arab states (Suwaed, 2015; Bruinessen, 1992; Salzman, 1971; Salzman et al., 1995; Mencütek, 2018; Tetik, 2020).

The last non-Arab state in the region, Israel, although much smaller in size compared to the other non-Arabic states, is not a Muslim country. Most of its people are Jewish, a nation having its own faith, language and cultural heritage. In Israel, like in neighboring Lebanon, which is a multi-ethnic multi-religious country whose governance is based on agreements between the three major sectors, (Muslim, Christians & Druze), an Arab person's surname reflects his ethnic and religious affiliation. Although 80% of the state's population is Jewish, its non-Jewish minority,is sub-divided into Muslims, Christians and Druze. The Bedouin tribes comprise 3.5% of the state's population, which is about half of the Muslim population in Israel. In the past, most of the tribes were nomadic but today they are settled. Some tribes have always maintained good relations with the Jewish population since the time of the Ottoman Empire, while others had historical alliances and/or rivalry with other tribes or other Muslim sectors. The tribes, loyal citizens of the state, maintain good relations with either the authorities or the Jewish population or both and many serve in the Israeli Army and other law enforcement agencies. Most of them live in their own villages or towns, speak Arabic, attend Arabic-speaking schools and maintain Arab cultural religious customs, tradition and lifestyle. Like other minorities in the state, most of them also speak Hebrew

and integrate into the state's society and economy. Other Bedouin tribes, mostly in southern Israel, are closer to the Palestinian cause and have difficulties in various aspects of integration within the state (Suwaed, 2015; Jamal, 2011; Zeedan, 2019; Plonski, 2018; Meir & Karplus, 2018; Kohn et al., 2020).

DISCUSSION

This article presents and discusses the issue of tribalism, in general, and in the Middle East in particular, due to its returning to dominance in the region over the last two decades. The article also looks at the geographical, cultural and political borders of tribalism. Recent political developments in the Middle East and North Africa reveal the failure of the national project and modern state organization in developing countries with traditional tribal and feudal patriarchal societies. In recent years, several countries in MENA that reached independence from foreign colonial regimes during the previous century experienced social, political and structural changes. Although tribalism as a phenomenon was present in the region for a millennium, countries having either strong national agricultural tradition or a relatively large urban population, maintain the state's administration and find ways to control, integrate or distance the tribal population. Multi-ethnic multi-religious states whose political borders had been determined by external factors are less successful in dealing with the returning dominance of tribalism.

Some of the states in the Middle East are kingdoms, chiefdoms or emirates based on a tribal model; the ruler is a tribe leader coming from a historically important and highly-respected dynasty, and his leadership is hereditary. The largest and most populated states, Egypt, Iran and Turkey, are nations of great and glorious past who accepted Islam but are also proud of their historical achievements. While Egypt accepted not only Islam but also Arabic language and culture, and is considered a leading Arab state, Iran and Turkey, large and important Muslim states that contain a national majority and also ethnic and religious minorities, kept their unique national heritage and cultural identity.

Other states in the region are composed of diverse groups whose leadership had not been elected but is a result of agreements, favoritism or a military coup. Until recently, these rulers managed to control the population, but the absolute power led some to extravagance and to disregard the rights and needs of the people. Other rulers, who did not possess the good fortune of ruling a state rich in natural resources, used the politics of survival addiction.

Higher education and social awareness of human rights, together with availability and accessibility of information, led to unrest in several developing countries, especially in countries where the upper class enjoyed greater privilege than the rest of the state's population, which had been ruled by a ruler (or rulers, in case of a junta), whose rise to governance was via a military coup.

The "Arab Spring" was a game-changer, as long-suppressed cultural and political trends regained dominance and challenge the legitimacy of the state. The politicization of the tribal cultural identity in the region is one of the alarming syndromes of the Arab state's legitimacy. In the era of "post Arab Spring, the political administration in Arab states will have to contend with the problem of tribalism. The first step in diminishing the influential political role of tribalism in the Arab Middle East will have to be political reform based on legal legitimacy.

CONCLUSION

Throughout history, tribal values have significantly affected society, culture and politics in the Middle East and North African countries. Rulers in the region attempted to deal with tribes and tribalism with diverse degrees of success and failure. In the last two decades, particularly after the Arab Spring that challenged the authenticity of nationalism and the stability and relevance of a nation-state in the Arab world, tribal dominance returned to Arab countries, indicating that blood relations are stronger than political ties and that loyalty to the clan and the tribe outweighs loyalty to the state. When political interests clash with the interests of the tribe, the Bedouin choose the interests of the tribe. They perceive the tribe as the source of stability, the crust that gives them power, while the political issues are seen by them as temporary situations that may or may not last. Today, the embodiment of Arab culture and tribalism within Islam impacts everything from family relations, to governance, to conflict.

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