



Universiteit
Leiden

Social and Behavioural Sciences

Tribes and States in the Middle East

Is Tribalism Driving Middle Eastern Countries to Endless Violence or Can It Be a Factor of Political Stability and Peace?

MSc Political Science Thesis: Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict and Development

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10th January 2019,

Abstract: *Tribalism has been studied in opposition to modernity and seen as a primitive structure that drives violence in the Middle East. Most scholars study the relationship between states and tribes in a unilinear approach, emphasizing the opposition 'tradition versus modernity' and the incompatibility between states and tribes. This argument assumes that as long as there are tribes in the Middle East, there will be violence. However, some countries such as Jordan and the Gulf States, have succeeded in maintaining peace and political stability for decades while having a significant number of tribes within their borders. Therefore, if tribalism is a factor of violence in the Middle East, how can some countries experience prosperity and political stability while having a significant number of tribes within their borders? This paper seeks to examine the relationship between tribes and states by using Joel Migdal's model of State-Society relations. I argue that tribalism, if well managed by a central authority, can be a factor of political stability. However, if the state undermines the tribes by denying their access to resources or by trying to erase their structure from the society, tribalism can foster violence.*

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“The tribal shaikh forms something of a problem in the northern Arab countries. He is insufficiently educated to enable him to become an official in the present government, although he still exerts considerable influence in the tribes. He constitutes a danger, so long as he possesses influence with the people, but enjoys no share in the government. It is therefore important to associate the shaikhs with the government in every way possible. To employ these shaikhs to assist in the work of government and the administration of justices the wisest of policies.”

General John Bagot Glubb, 1936.

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INTRODUCTION

In an article entitled *Tribalism drives Middle East Violence*, Philip Carl Salzman wrote that the “Arab Middle East is missing the cultural tools for building inclusive, unified states” (Salzman, 2016). According to him, the cause of violence in the region is due to the Arab culture of conflict which he describes as “displacements, “expansions (...) conquests (...) invasion and dynastic replacements” (Ibid.). He added by quoting Hussain Abdul Hussain that “the Arabs are not in a wretched state – they are in a tribal state, and they are doing what they have been doing since time immemorial: conquering each other, demanding allegiance, and living in a state of perpetual war” (Ibid.)

Most literature examines the relationship between tribes and states in a unilinear approach, emphasizing the opposition ‘tradition versus modernity’ and the incompatibility between the states and tribes (Jabar and Dawood, 2003, p.7). According to scholars, as long as there are tribes having influential power within a state, there can be no peace (Salzman, 2008 and 2011; Kressel, 1996; Kaplan, 2007; Ben-meir, 2005, p.3). This argument assumes that the Middle East is condemned to violence due to its tribal structure. Indeed, all countries in the Middle East have similar characteristics: they are new states that have been created after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and they possess a multitude of tribes within their borders. Thus, following the theory of tribal violence, which assumes that a state containing tribes cannot experience peace, the whole Middle East should be in a state of war. However, it is noticeable that numerous countries in the region experienced political stability for over twenty years such as Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Consequently, if tribalism is a factor of violence in the Middle East, *how can some countries experience prosperity and political stability while having a significant number of tribes within their borders?*

In order to answer the question, I will use Joel Migdal's model of State-Society relations through the case of Jordan, a country that is enjoying remarkable political stability over the past twenty years while being in the midst of turmoil. I suppose in this paper that it is due to its political structure based on the power-sharing system between the most prominent tribes and the central authority represented by the Hashemite Royal Family. I will therefore focus on the strategy of the state in accommodating the tribes and analyse whether tribalism has been a factor of stability.

Definition

As there is no consensus on the definition of tribes in the literature and for the purpose of this paper, I will use the definition of tribes provided by Rabi Uzi (2006). Uzi defines a tribe "as a political unit, consisting of a group of people who have shared a common territorial base, real or mythological kinship ties, and a corporate existence" (Uzi, 2006, p.2). In the Middle East, each tribe has a leader called *sheikh* whose role is to ensure the well-being of his tribesmen. In order to become more powerful in terms of resources and influence, these tribes often ally themselves with other tribes to form a confederation.¹ For instance, in Jordan, there are several powerful tribal confederations such as the Bani Sakhr, Tall, Howeitat, etc. (see Appendix 1). In each confederation, there is a leader to whom other tribes vowed loyalty, who is elected and is called the paramount leader (the leader of the leaders) or *sheikh al-masheikh*. These sheikh al-masheikh have significant social power as they control a vast population. For

¹ According to Steven C. Caton (1987, p.78) a tribe "possesses power to the extent that they can mobilize fighting men in defense of their interests (measured in land, cattle, women, water and so forth) while Ernest Gellner (1973, p.82) correlate tribal power to persuasion and the manner to control the society.

instance, in Jordan the sheikh al-masheikh of the Bani Hassan was controlling over 300 000 members in 2006, which represented over 5% of the total population (see WikiLeaks, 2006).²

Hypothesis

This paper attempts to explain peace in the Middle East by focusing on the influence of tribes on the stability of the states. I hypothesise that when the state decides to compromise with the tribal leaders by reaching an agreement that is beneficial for both, there can be political stability and peace. However, the state should accommodate the tribes by establishing a system of power-sharing which allows the tribes to access high positions in the government, and to gain wealth and privileges. In return, the tribes pledge loyalty to the central authority and use their tribal networking system to reach the mass population and ensure political stability and prosperity. In order to maintain peace, the state leader has to act as a neutral entity who is mediating and restraining rivalries between tribes. By sharing and dividing the power among different tribes, the central state is preventing the uncontrolled struggle for power that decays a civilisation.³ Thus, through a mechanism of power-sharing and “mutual beneficial alliance” (Alon, 2016, p.7) managed by a central authority, tribalism can be a factor of political stability and peace rather than a source of violence. Nevertheless, peace and stability in these countries come at a cost which results in the persistence of a weak state as demonstrated by Migdal (1988).

² According to the DataWorld Bank, the population in Jordan was counted for a total of 5 934 000 in 2006 (The World Bank Data - Jordan population, 2006) while the Bani Hasan were accounted for almost 300 000 individuals and thus represented 5% of the population.

³ See Ibn Khaldun’s theory of cycles referring to the rise and fall of civilisations (1377). Further explanations will be developed p.10

METHOD AND DESIGN

The methodology involves a single case study that I believe is relevant for the wider theory of tribal societies. I will study Jordan, a country that has experienced political stability for more than twenty years. By analysing its system of power and the history of the state formation, my aim is to identify the mechanism that allows Middle Eastern countries to coexist with the tribes and establish prosperity.

Case selection

Given the literature on violence and tribes in the Middle East, countries that possess tribes cannot experience political stability. However, Jordan is a particular case as it has experienced a great stability while having a significant number of tribes within its border, such as The Fayizn (Bani Sakhr), The Khuraysha, the 'Adwan, Majali, Tarawna, Shurayda, and others who represent the influential families today (Rabi, 2016, p.34). For example, in 2006, the Howeitat had ~30,000 members, the Hadid had ~ 20,000 tribesmen, the Abu Zayds had ~ 13,000 members etc. (see WikiLeaks, 2006). According to the Upsala Conflict Data Program, Jordan did not experience violent political changes or civil wars since 1970 (UDCP, 2018) while being surrounded by unstable countries such as Syria and Iraq. It seems that the state and the tribes have maintained an agreement over the years allowing the country to enjoy peace. Consequently, it appears that Jordan is a deviant case that might explain a pattern of political stability between tribes and states in the Middle East. Due to the lack of time, it is not possible to expose other cases such as Qatar or Saudi Arabia which are composed of tribes and which I suppose would have shown the same mechanism of political stability as the Jordanian case. While Jordan is not the only country experiencing political stability, it is yet the only one that is not a rentier state and thus cannot 'buy off' its stability from its resources which makes it interesting to study.

Data Collection and Operationalisation

The first stage of data collection involves a review of secondary literature that gathers more than thirty-two scholars and academic works on the theme: Tribes and States in the Middle East, such as Ernest Gellner (1990), Joseph Kostiner (1990, 2003, 2016), Sally Howell (2001), Norman Lewis (1987), Yoav Alon (2011, 2016). I will use newspapers written in French, English and Arabic, in order to find articles on: tribalism, political speeches made by Jordanian high officials and events that can show the ‘governance’ of tribes. I will also utilise some memoirs of state leaders such as the memoir of King Abdullah, founder of the Hashemite family.

I argued that if the central authority compromise with the tribes through a system of power-sharing, then the country is most likely to experience political stability. In order to evaluate the concept of power-sharing, I will look at formal electoral quota, governmental structure, patronage and clientelism that show that sheikhs have access to a form of power.⁴ For instance, if the state is sharing power with tribes then we should notice a quota of seats which allows tribes to be represented proportionally, or we should see that governmental agencies are shared between the most prominent tribes of the country. With regard to political stability, I will interpret this concept as the lack of civil wars within twenty years, a small number of political assassinations and few, if any, violent leader changes. I will thus look at historical archives, newspapers, and the UCDP to be able to determine whether or not Jordan is a stable country.

⁴ It can be political power where sheikhs have access to governmental positions, but it can also be economical power, i.e sheikhs being head of important public companies.

Structure of the Sections

The first part analyses the role of tribes in fostering violence in the Middle East in the light of the existing literature and uses Migdal's theory as a way to determine how states succeed in maintaining peace within their borders over time. The second part will focus on Jordan and examines in detail the mechanism of power-sharing that has been established between the tribes and the Hashemite and which enables the country to enjoy a long-standing peace. The third section analyses the findings by reflecting back to the theory of tribal violence. I conclude that the case of Jordan shows that if the tribes are integrated within the state apparatus through a mechanism of power-sharing, then, tribalism is a factor of political stability. However, it seems that stability in the Middle East does have a price, which results in the persistence of a weak state.

LITERATURE REVIEW: FROM VIOLENCE TO STABILITY

While studying tribes and violence in the Middle East, most literature relates to Mohammed Ibn Khaldun's theory of cycles (Ibn Khaldun, 1969, [1377]) referring to the rise and fall of civilisations (Salzman, 2008, p.214; Bonte, 2003, p.50-66; Kostiner and Khoury, 1990, p.2; Lapidus, 1990, p.25; Gellner, 1990, p.109; Caton, 1990, p.74). According to Ibn Khaldun, tribes are linked by the *'asabiya*, which is commonly translated as social solidarity or social cohesion, or fellowship that joins a community together sharing the same loyalties or allegiances (Ibn Khaldun, 1969, [1377]). In that sense, *'asabiya* is wider than kinship as it also bonds people through alliances and clientship, and is vital for survival (Ibn Khaldun, 1987, [1377]; Qassim, 2010).

It is argued that *'asabiya* fosters exclusiveness and focuses on the external threat, i.e defence and attack of other tribes (Ibn Khaldun, 1987, [1377]; Bonte, 2003, p.51).⁵ Consequently, tribes gather together as a strategy of survival by emphasizing on the 'common enemy' and 'us versus them' (Caton, 1990, p.75). In this setting, the survival of tribes is perceived as a zero-sum game, i.e wealth, success and power stem from prevailing over opposition groups as Alon Ben-Meir (2005, p.3) argues "The common perception a tribal society [is]... that any social contest is a zero-sum game in which the gain of one is considered as the loss to the other" which in the Middle East advises that violence is the only mean of guaranteeing victory and supremacy (Lindholm, 2002, p.262).⁶ Consequently, tribal rivalries in the Middle

⁵ "I.154 Attack and defence are organized through *'asabiya* because it touches the springs of group susceptibility (*nu'ra*): defence of family honour (*tadhmur*) and the spirit of sacrifice unto death between the members of the tribe. (French translation by Hamès, 1987)" Bonte, 2003, p.51

⁶ According to Charles Lindholm, "Compliance in the Middle East therefore has very often been a direct result of fear, since otherwise a man would not willingly obey another man who is, in principle, no better than he is" (Lindholm, 2002, p.262)

East are common as each of them seeks power at the expense of another tribe because the other tribes are considered as foes or rivals (Mhamad, 2015; Evans-Pritchard, 1949, p.55).

Furthermore, violence was reported as a “characteristic feature of Bedouin life” (Evans-Pritchard, 1949, p.50) which is always motivated by the control of territory and access to resources since memorial times and the Bedouin are described as “hardy wanderers of the steppe, whose history was nothing more than a long record of tribal wars...” (Ibid., p.160). For instance, Sam Dagher (2009) describes how tribes in Iraq, after the fall of Saddam Hussein, have fostered violence due to the competition over power and resources. It is reported that daily assassinations targeting tribal figures were happening in the period of elections and tribal conflicts were restraining peace in Iraq (Ibid.). Following this, some scholars argue that states in the Middle East are not modern as they are made of tribes who always seek power and resources leading to endless violence (Salzman, 2008 and 2011; Kressel, 1996; Kaplan, 2007; Ben-Meir, 2005, p.3).

While the literature on tribal violence in the Middle East seems to demonstrate that violence is a *quasi*-natural condition of the tribes, it does not explain the prosperity experienced in Middle Eastern countries that are mainly composed of tribes. In this respect, *‘asabiya* is also a notion of loyalties, honour, allegiance and alliance that is being used in some cases by the state in order to maintain peace and stability through the allegiance of tribes to a central leader (Alon, 2011, 2016, p.11-35; Yisraeli, 2016, p.98-100; Rugh, 2016, p.63-67; Rabi, 2006, 2016). For instance, in Jordan, the state represented by the Hashemite family has maintained “a balance of power between tribal families and includes tribal values in the national ethos” (Rabi, 2016, p.4) which has led to political stability. Indeed, tribes have been incorporated within the governmental structure as a form of power-sharing. Tribal practices, such as

consultation (*Shura*), and institutions, such as the informal advisory council (*majlis*), became a crucial symbolic aspect in the government's *modus operandi* (Kamrava, 2013, p.233). Consequently, tribal groups operate in every level of the government - from the ministry to the National Assembly and Municipal Council) (Ibid.). Patronage and clientelism are being used by the state to accommodate and strengthen the bonds with the sheikhs. As Kamrava (2013) noticed, "patronage enables the ruler to court the support of other tribal leaders (sheikhs) and to maintain his own position as the paramount sheikh (sheikh al-masha'ikh)" (Ibid.).

Consequently, by studying the mechanisms of power sharing that enabled state leaders and tribes to coexist within one entity, it seems possible to argue that tribalism does not necessarily lead to violence as argued in the literature, but can be a factor of stability under some circumstances.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE POLITICS OF ACCOMMODATING SHEIKHS

In his book *Strong Societies, Weak States* (1988), Migdal presented a theory of state-relations that might explain peace in the Middle East despite tribal diversion. Indeed, Migdal developed the concept of *Weak States* that are seen as unable to impose social control over the population within their borders due to the fragmented power structure of the society. For him, the society is "a mélange of social organizations" such as clans, clubs, families, and the state is only one entity among a multitude of organisations competing for social control (Migdal, 1988, p.28). However, in a heterogeneous fragmented society like the Middle East, social organisations are often represented as local constituencies which are seen as "weblike societies" that are governed by "strongmen". These strongmen are the local authority of the association and are comparable to the tribal elite in Middle Eastern countries, commonly

named sheikhs. Subsequently, there is a perpetual competition for social control between the state, which by nature, claims the monopoly of all social relations within its territory, and the sheikhs who refuse to abandon their powers. This quest for social control is, in fact, a quest for power and a matter of dominance as Migdal asserts, “Social control is power or, more precisely, what Michael Mann has called infrastructural power. Increased capabilities of state include and rest upon increased state social control” (Ibid., p.22-23).

Furthermore, Migdal explains that social control is built through the *strategy of survival* of individuals that is “the blueprint for action and belief” (Ibid., p.27). As the state is considered to be an organisation among many, it has to compete with other social organisations that offer incentives (prosperity, status or security) or menace with sanctions (ostracism or violence) to make members to conform to their sets of rules. In this respect, individuals have to choose “among competing components in making their strategies of survival” (Ibid., p.29). In adhering to an organisation, the individual accepts to comply with the rules of the organisation and is thus investing in its social control. Thus, the social control of an entity can be measured by the number of members it possesses, and an association has greater power when its members believe that they are legitimate (Ibid., p.22-33).

In the Middle East, it seems that the local population incorporates the sheikhs in their *strategy of survival*. Thus, by vowing allegiance to the leader and its tribe, they choose to adhere to the tribal rules and values. In this respect, the state is aware that in order to obtain political stability, it should compromise with the sheikhs to be able to utilise their tribal network for political stability. However, the state leader is often reluctant to share power by fear of creating “power centers” and being overruled by the strongmen (Ibid., p.201). This can be demonstrated through the example of the former Egyptian President Nasser, who employed

the Arab Socialist Union (ASU) as the state party and military forces led by the Fellow Free Office as they were the strongmen of Egypt who hold social power and thus brought peace and stability. However, by fear of being overruled by them and after his defeat in the Six Day war in 1967, Nasser began to weaken the state's agencies by dismantling them. He began with the military forces and arrested hundreds of officers who were the sole agencies able to check the ASU's growing influence. He then pursued his purge by demobilising the ASU who were acting as "power centers" which weakened the state in its core (Ibid., p.200-206).

Therefore, there are two options that a state can decide to follow: (1) sharing power through the empowerment of state's agencies with the risk of creating autonomous power centres within the governmental structure which may threaten the state leadership and lead to a weak state or (2) preventing potential centrifugal forces by weakening the state's institutions through several dismantlement of governmental agencies which usually leads to further instability and reinforces other social organisations (Ibid., p.200-205). My hypothesis is that when the state decides to compromise with the sheikhs by reaching an agreement that is beneficial for both, there can be political stability.

However, the state should accommodate the tribes by establishing a system of power-sharing which provides them power and wealth. In return, the tribes pledge loyalty to the state and use their tribal network's system to reach the mass population and ensure political stability and prosperity. In order to maintain peace, the state has to act as a neutral entity that is mediating and restraining rivalries between tribes. By sharing and dividing the power among different tribes, the central state is preventing the uncontrolled struggle for power that decays a civilisation as described by Ibn Khaldun. Thus, through a mechanism of power-sharing and "mutual beneficial alliance" (Alon, 2016, p.7) managed by a central authority, tribalism can be

a factor of political stability and peace rather than a source of violence. Nevertheless, following Migdal's theory, this solution will result in the creation of a weak state that appears to be a better solution than a strong state with endless violence.

The Power-Sharing System

The current political landscape in Jordan has been designed by Abdullah (I), first King of Jordan and aims at restraining tribal rivalries and containing them within an institutional framework in order to control them but also to make them dependent on the state. Indeed, when he arrived in Jordan as the Emir of Transjordan in 1921, he allied himself with the most powerful and richest tribal confederacies, such as the 'Adwin and the Al-Fayiz who were known to be able to mobilise several thousands of fighters (Lewis, 1987, p.124).⁷

The alliances between tribes and, more specifically, between sheikhs and state leaders were not a new phenomenon as it has been the case during the Ottoman era. Indeed, for the central authority it was a way to control the tribes who were usually challenging the government. Thus, the Ottoman Empire decided to recognise the sheikhs as the official representatives of local constituencies. The sheikhs became tax collectors and thus state vassals which pressured the tribes to recognise the central power (Jabar, 2003, p.76). By enjoying the recognition of the state, the sheikhs were securing their own power within the tribes but also the power of their family within the confederacies.⁸ In other words, the sheikhs and the Ottoman Empire created a mutual interdependence which was beneficial for both parties.

It is important to understand the role of the sheikhs as they are the strongmen of local constituencies who hold the social power because the loyalties of the population are vowed to them rather than to the state (Migdal, 1988, p.32). Indeed, the population's strategy of survival is to submit to the sheikhs who will ensure their well-being by providing them services and

⁷ Abdullah I was born in Mecca and not in Jordan. His father who was the sheriff of Mecca helped the British to defeat the Ottoman Empire by mobilizing tribal fighters along with Lawrence of Arabia. Thus, after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Abdullah -who aspired to one united Arab Kingdom- occupied Transjordan (ex-Jordan) in 1921 which was under the British mandate. The British accepted his presence as the Emir of Transjordan and he became King of Jordan in 1946, after the independence of the country (Encyclopedia Britannica, Abdullah I King of Jordan).

⁸ Cf definition of confederation p.5

goods and which also provide significant social control to the sheikhs (Ibid., p.22).⁹ Still today, among the new generation, many native Jordanians politically identify themselves with tribes (Sowell, 2017). Indeed, the most prominent tribes still exert significant influence notably during the election period. Tribal politicians and officials utilise the *'asabiya* to encourage individuals to vote in terms of their tribal affiliation. For instance, during the first local election held in August 2017, the *Albawaba News* published that “the strong majority of seats were won by candidates running on personal or tribal appeals, rather than a party platform [...] as the results came in, Al-Ghad estimated that around 85% of all seats were won by tribal candidates” (Ibid.). *The Jordan Times* notably published an article entitled *Tribal loyalties will be decisive factor on Election Day* claiming that “Tribal and geographical considerations will continue to have a strong influence on Jordanian’s voting decisions in the 20 September 2016 parliamentary elections” because electors prefer to vote in terms of tribal loyalties but also because the tribal leader is considered as the one better suited to secure individual interests (Obeidat and Malkawi, 2016). This example confirms that the sheikhs are integrated in the strategy of survival of the population and thus the strongmen still holds significant social control in Jordan (Migdal, 1988, p.32).

When 'Asabiya Overcomes Crises

Along the history, Jordan experienced many crises, such as the integration of the West Bank in the territory which tripled the population overnight after the 1948 war, the assassination of King Abdullah I in 1951, as well as the civil war in 1970, and, most recently, the Arab Spring in 2011. During these crises, tribal support played a primordial role in the

⁹ The role of the sheikh in Jordan as in other parts of the Middle East has always been important as it used to carry “a moral authority” as well as a responsibility for delivering a “continuous flow” of services and goods (Tapper, 1983). Even though the rise of the modern state has strengthened the central authority, the role of the sheikh never disappeared. Rather, it has taken a new form of leadership which can be perceived as the emergence of a new political elite within the state which is a key factor of stability (Khoury and Kostiner, 1990, p.2).

preservation of political order and the remaining of the Hashemite family in power (Alon, 2016, p.12-13).

Two particular events in the Jordanian history show how the *'asabiya* has been used to overcome political crises and maintain stability. For instance, in 1957, following the annexation of the West Bank by the Kingdom, the sheikh al-masheikh of the Bani Sakhr prevented a coup d'état which was led by the Prime Minister Sulayman al-Nabulsi. Officers within the army who were from the Bani Sakhr confederation warned 'Akif Al-Fayiz about the plot and gave him time to gather more than two thousand Bani Sakhr members in Amman to support the King and to arrest the conspirators (Dann, 1989, p.64; Tal, 2002, p.48).

Another more recent example was during the Arab Spring in 2011, when Faysal Al-Fayiz gathered thousands of members from his confederation to denounce riots and to reaffirm their loyalty to the King in front of the Palace in Amman. He notably threatened to “cut off the hand of those seeking to undermine the homeland and its leadership” and rallied all tribesmen to protect and defend the King. The pro-regime rally has been highly spread in the Jordanian media to pressure the protestors and to show that the King's leadership was secured (Alon, 2016, p.11-13; Al-Rai', 2011, 2012).

Even within their own confederacies, the sheikhs al-masheikh have been able to restore stability when sheikhs of other tribes were criticising the throne. For example, in February 2011, an open-letter denouncing Queen Rania of corruption was written by thirty-six sheikhs from the Bani Sakhr confederation threatening the King that if he would not launch political reforms against corruption, Jordan will endure the same destiny as Egypt and Tunisia

(Zecchini, 2011).¹⁰ In response, Faysal al-Fayiz convened another rally of the Bani Sakhr to express again the loyalty of the confederation to the Hashemite Family and claimed that “the King constitutes the safety valve of the Jordanian people” and any attempt to harm him would lead to bloodshed (Alon, 2016, p.33; Al Dustur, 2012).

As the sheikhs are sub-patrons who redistribute the resources among their tribesmen, they acquire the loyalty and the obeisance of their members. Thus, these examples illustrate that the strongmen do have social power, as they are able to “mobilize people for specific purposes” (Migdal, 1988, p.141). More importantly, it shows that the sheikhs are able to maintain political stability in the country by restraining their tribesmen’s passion. Consequently, by accommodating the strongmen through patronage and clientelism, the Hashemite’s ruler has access to “the social stability the strongmen [...] offer through their social control” (Ibid.). Hence, for the ruler, it is important to control the sheikhs by accommodating them in order to control the population.

The Hashemite Compact and the Design of a Power-Sharing System

In order to understand the mechanism that has led to stability, it is important to introduce what Moraiwed Tell (2003) calls the “Hashemite Compact” where the patronage networks and the social welfare system create an exchange of loyalties for economic security (Tell, 2013, p.12). In this setting, the social contract in Jordan is the following: in exchange for economic security, the sheikhs enjoy a high degree of autonomy in the state apparatus and pressure the population to submit to the state’s rules (Taller, 2013; Brumberg, 1995, p.233;

¹⁰ According to the Jordanian Electoral Law of 1986, the Bani Sakhr at that time comprised sixteen clans: al-Fayiz, al-Badarin, al-Qudah, Al-Ghbein, al-‘Amir, al Ka’abneh, al-Saleet, al- Hqaish, Al-Tayibeen, al-Khershan, al-Jbour, al-Salim, al-Hammad and al-Shra’ah, Jarayreh and the Mara’ abeh who are subdivided into smaller tribes. (Bin Muhammed, 1999, p.10). The Al-Fayiz being the paramount sheikh of the Bani Sakhr confederation. The work of Bin Muhammed (1999) is the only work found where tribal composition in Jordan is reported.

Rougier, 2016, p.1). More specifically, it is characterised by three levels: (1) The Hashemite as the guardian of stability, (2) the sheikhs as the intermediate, and (3) “the society as a passive political actor in the role of recipient of the state clientelistic system” (Rodriguez, p.195, 2018; see Appendix 2).

The tribes in this structure are competing between themselves in order to uphold their capacity to attract resources from the regime to be able to redistribute them among their tribesmen. This mechanism is based on the redistribution of the resources to the sheikhs in return for tribal loyalties, which contribute significantly to the long-standing stability of the country.¹¹ In other words, the tribes are clients of the state and the sheikhs who are considered as intermediate between the state and the population are sub-patrons towards their tribesmen clients (Rodriguez, 2018, p.192). In this structure, the state functions as a source of patronage and clientelism which uses the public sector as power and economic resource that is given to the sheikhs to be allocated among their adherents in return for allegiance.

Thus, when Abdullah I designed the current Jordanian state, he established a power-sharing system through a mechanism of patronage and clientelism which ensures complete loyalty and allegiance to the state by enabling the sheikhs to have access to any form of power.¹² This is, for instance, represented by the allocation of government’s positions which is commonly known as “sovereign portfolios” to the family members which include foreign affairs, defence, intelligence, security, the premiership and the interior ministry (Al-Qassemi, 2010).

¹¹ Tribal loyalty refers to the concept of *‘asabiya* previously explained (see p.9) which implies that tribesmen will vow allegiance to the sheikh meaning that they will obey to him. It is also correlated with the strategy of survival explained by Migdal (1988), where the sheikh is incorporated in the tribesmen’s strategy of survival and thus agree to submit to his set of rules. Thus, when the sheikh has the loyalties of his tribesmen, he is able to control them and to mobilise them.

¹² It can be political power where sheikhs have access to a governmental positions, but it can also be economical power, i.e sheikhs being head of important public companies.

Furthermore, Alon analyses the political system of Jordan as a system of expectation and rotation (Alon, 2007, p.152). He explains that the power-sharing system is based on a rotating scheme which enables every representative of the families to have a chance to occupy a high position such as Prime Minister, which reduces the risk of conflict as well as maintains an equilibrium between the tribes. This strategy is said to be based on the concept of expectation, as each family can expect to obtain the position desired at the next reorganisation (Ibid.). It seems that “these symbiotic relations have undergirded the state with wide-reaching social support, coherence, and stability” as the tribes have no interest in challenging the state (Alon, 2016, p.15).

Patron-Client Relationship (Wasta)

Since the formation of the state, the Jordanian central power became a pool of recruitment of tribes notably in the government, civil services, military and security services. The military forces are one of the main pillars of the Hashemite’s reign since the beginning of their arrival in Transjordan and constitutes “the most important client and distributive resource for the regime” (Rodriguez, 2018, p.200). Indeed, when the Emir came in Transjordan, he had no army and the tribes became his personal army, and later, the country’s military forces (Alon, 2016, p.28; Rodriguez, 2018, p.198; Alon, 2016, p.17). According to a diplomatic report, the armed force and the General Directorate of Intelligence (GID) - security services - are packed with tribesmen and the infantry-heavy army is considered as a “tribal program” which provides jobs for the tribesmen (leading to the overstaffing of the service) more than a fighting force (see WikiLeaks, 2006). Furthermore, the military service in the Middle East is known to be powerful and a potential threat to the regime if they are malcontents of their leader, that is why until the Arab Spring, the army was controlled only by the King himself (Yom, 2014, p.4). This can explain the fact that the King is surrounded by loyal tribes, hence

the domination of the Bani Sakhr's confederation – who are the King's closest allies- in the security services of Jordan.

With regard to the governmental structure, it seems that the government's agencies are given to the most prominent tribes such as the “the Fayizn, The Khuraysha, The ‘Adwan, Majali, Tarawna, Shurayda, Tall, Jazi Abu Taya, Rifa’I, Mu’ashir, Ka’war and others who represent the influential families today” (Rabi, 2016, p.34). Indeed, the King is able to unilaterally appoint the Prime Minister who is in charge of forming a cabinet with the consent of the Parliament. Thus, the role of the Prime Minister is important and is given to the most important tribes (or to a member of the Hashemite family) who gives governmental portfolios to tribal figures. For instance, when Hani al-Mulki was appointed Prime Minister in 2016 following the government of Al-Fayiz, he demanded a reshuffling of the Cabinet and appointed many other conservatives’ tribal figures (BIT-2016).

Similarly, the King is able to appoint the Senate (*Majlis Al-Ayan*) and, according to the BTI report on Jordan, since 2016, the King has the power to appoint the head of the GID, all members and chief judges of the Constitutional Court, the head of the Gendarmerie and commander of the army, as well as the Chief Justice, without requiring the consent of the Prime Minister (BTI, 2016). By being able to unilaterally appoint individuals in high positions, the state leader guarantees that the power is shared between tribes and that every administrative reorganisation will give access to power to different tribes as a rotary system which reduces the risk of conflict as well as maintain an equilibrium between the tribes. For example, in 2003, Faysal Al-Fayz sheikh al-masheikh of the Bani Sakhr was appointed Prime Minister. Although he has been dismissed from his function a year later, the King ensured him another position that satisfied his aspirations namely Chief of the Royal Court and a few

months later he was appointed as a member of the Senate (Alon, 2016, p.33). Only the chamber of deputies of the parliament function through an electoral system which is, however, still made in favour of tribes as the population has to vote according to their districts.¹³

The establishment of the electoral system ‘one-man, one-vote’ created by King Hussein in 1993 enabled the tribes to be reinforced and overrepresented in the Parliament (as the population tends to vote for an individual from their tribes) (Lust et al., 2011; Ryan, 2012). While it was reformed in 2016 by King Abdullah II, it seems that tribal districts are still overrepresented as they are allocated twice the number of seats compared to the actual number of residents. For instance, during the 2016 parliamentary elections, the tribal governorate of Karak won 11 seats (8.5% of the chamber) while having only 4% of residents (see Atlas of Electoral District, 2016). In contrast, major cities with the largest populations of Palestinian descent and Muslim Brotherhood were significantly underrepresented and reduced to almost half their weight compared to their actual population’s number (Middle East Institute, 2016). For example, one of Amman’s districts which contains 9.7% of the total population had only 5.2% of seats (Atlas of Electoral District, 2016).

Furthermore, each of Bedouin electoral districts has a quota of three seats which are not shaped along geographical criteria (as the rest of the country) but according to tribal criteria (Hussainy, 2014, p.3).¹⁴ Consequently, according to a policy paper made by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Institute (2014), “the electoral district with the highest voting power is the governorate of Ma’an [(a tribal district led by the Howeitat confederacy)], which enjoys a

¹³There are twelve governorates divided into forty-two electoral districts in Jordan (Hussainy, 2014)

¹⁴ The tribal name gives the right to vote in the specific electoral district. Thus, a tribesman /woman is not allowed to vote outside of her tribal district even though it does not correspond to the residential address.

voting power that exceeds 125% of the average. The governorate with the lowest voting power is Amman with 32% less than the average” (Ibid.). Despite electoral reforms, it seems that the central power intends to maintain outsized tribal influence in the government as a way of maintaining the alliance between the tribes and the monarchy.

Another example of this favouritism toward tribes can be demonstrated during the political reform of 2001 aiming at reducing the numbers of municipalities, but which has been criticised by the sheikhs claiming that it would undermine their abilities to secure employment and allocate resources to their members.¹⁵ As a response, King Abdullah II changed the law by allowing the government to appoint mayors rather than electing them in order to ensure that tribes remain at the head of municipal governments (see WikiLeaks, 2006). Thus, it is not unusual to see members of one prominent tribal house being represented in all levels of power. The Hadid tribe is a good example as their Sheikh named Barjes Al-Hadid is a member of Parliament, his son Nidal Hadid was mayor of Amman from 1998 until 2006, and Nidal’s son-in-law was the head of the GID until 2005 (Ibid.).

Another way to give particular attention to the tribes is to provide them with privileges and economic power through clientelism. Indeed, the Bani Sakhr and the ‘Adwan, for instance, were enjoying tax exemptions, government subsidies for food and fuel, lands and special titles when Abdullah I and King Hussein were in power. The emergence of the private market led to the rise of a new economic elite which is made of state insiders who have preferential access to lucrative investment deals and privatisation (Itani, 2013, p.2). For example, according to Ellen Lust-Okar (2009, p.125-26), the members of parliaments usually use their budget and network to obtain licences, lowering tax assessments, to sell governmental land

¹⁵ The Municipal Council enable the tribes to govern closely and allocate resource to the local population have the responsibility of the allocation of utilities notably water (with private operators involved) (BTI-report 2016)

below market price, and to provide employment in the private business. In that sense, the most powerful tribes obtained a significant parts of land, as for example, the members of the Bani Sakhr who control almost the entire territory and real estate in Amman's eastern suburbs. Furthermore, tribal areas more than others have been enjoying job-creation programmes in the region of Shobak, Tafileh and Karak making 25% of the workers in the Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZ) in 2006, according to a diplomatic report (see WikiLeaks, 2006). The diplomatic report also shows how tribesmen require their sheikhs to provide them jobs. For example, it is reported that one of the Hadid tribes demanded the Al-Jazi (sheikh al-masheikh of the Hadid confederation) to provide a job for his son in the only railroad of Jordan because he dropped out of high school (Ibid.). Lastly, the children with tribal affiliations are favoured in university admissions at the very competitive public universities which also give them the opportunity to enter governmental agencies and consequently, being part of the decision-making later (Ibid.).

The Remaining of The Status Quo

By making the sheikhs representatives of tribesmen *vis-à-vis* the central state, the Hashemite institutionalised them within the Modern State, which brought significant stability in Jordan and continuity in the tribal elite (Alon, 2016, p.30). Indeed, the sheikhs' families who were prominent in 1920 continued to lead throughout the years thanks to the King's appointment of positions. It is common that a son inherited the position of his father in order to keep the leadership within the family which also enhances political stability as the members, and their interests, remain the same.

For instance, when the sheikh Rufayfan al-Majali of Karak died in 1945, his son inherited the title of Pasha as well as his seat in the Legislative Council (Ibid.). The same has been noticed with the sheikhs 'Adwan and Bani Sakhr who have been granted by the King the title of their

fathers, sheikh al-masheikh, respectively. Subsequently, the sheikhs and their sons became the new Jordanian elite who developed interests in the survival and prosperity of the state but also maintained the status quo. Indeed, as tribes have been privileged more than other citizens and at the expense of the Descent Palestinian and non-tribal affiliated citizens, they have no interest in political and economic changes that would reduce their access to resources (Rodriguez, 2018, p.196).

In order to maintain the same elite, as well as the status quo, the King regularly interferes and ensures that the tribes with whom he allied remain in the core structure of the government. For instance, in 1967, the Tall tribes and the al-Fayiz politically fought over influence and tried to exclude each other from the power. Knowing that Miqtal al-Fayiz –leader of the clan– was dying, the Tall tribes were determined to exclude his son ‘Akif al-Fayiz from the government which they almost succeeded in doing as Miqtal’s died a day before the election which has led the King to interfere in Parliament’s election to ensure that the al-Fayiz would win the election, according to British diplomatic report (Alon, 2016, p.35).

Discussion

Findings

The case of Jordan illustrates that both state and tribes can work together toward maintaining political stability in the country. Indeed, through a patron-client relationship with the tribes, the Hashemite family ensures that the tribes will not withdraw their allegiances as they need government hand-outs. The alliance created a mutual interdependence where the central leader and the tribes need each other to survive. Consequently, the tribes played an important and deterministic role in overcoming political crises and in protecting the royal

family, and thus, they contributed to the stability of the country. The case therefore demonstrates that the theory of tribes and violence does not fit the Middle Eastern countries that have established a power-sharing mechanism between tribes and states.

On the contrary, the case shows that *'asabiya* that is said to lead to violence as it implies defence and rivalries, can be utilised as a tool of peace instead of violence. Indeed, the Hashemite's strategic gambit aims at ensuring the tribal presence within the core political structure as a mode of co-option, while playing on differences and utilising rivalries by stirring up conflict amongst the tribes in order to prevent a potential formation of united opposition (Rodriguez, 2018, p.198). It is what Lust- Okar (2007) calls "Divided contestation strategy" also called Divide-and-rule strategy: despite the fact that the system is based on a rotation scheme which enables tribes with no formal differences to expect to have access to power, the King utilises the traditional tribal rivalries –over land, resource and power- to prevent the creation of a united opposition and to maintain a balance of power. (Lust-Okar, 2007).

Consequently, they are in constant competition and the traditional rivalries -which can be inter-family or intra family- are expressed within a *quasi*-democratic framework, notably during the period of elections rather than through violence. For instance, the national and local elections' system of 'one man, one vote' means that the population has to vote for one name rather than one list and, most of the time, they have the choice between several individuals who come from the same tribes, and thus, sheikhs can peacefully fight to gain power (Middle East Eye, 2008). Additionally, it can be concluded that the tribal quest for power is represented within the institutional level and notably through diplomatic and networking channels rather than violence. For example, an American diplomatic report from

the National Archives of Washington describes how the leader of the Bani Sakhr in 1958 strengthened his tribes' power against the Majalis tribes from Karak by using his status of Minister of Defence (Keeley, 1958). This example illustrates that tribal rivalries are being used as the "politics of survival" of the state leaders as explained by Migdal (1988, p.224) where the central authority attempts to obstruct potential centrifugal forces. Indeed, it is noticeable that the Hashemite uses the 'natural rivalries' of tribes to check the power of every state's agencies which creates a balance of power and stability (Ibid., p.211).

Overall, the findings show that the theory of tribal violence has failed to explain peace in Middle Eastern countries that are enjoying stability while having tribes within their borders. I argue that this is due to the lack of consideration of the settings in which tribal violence appears. If the state is undermining the tribes as the Ba'ath party did in the 1960s in Iraq, before the reform of *retribalisation* led by Saddam Hussein, then tribalism fosters violence through conflict, civil wars and dozens of coups d'état (Yaphe, 2000). However, if the state shares power by accommodating the strongmen, then the tribes have no interest in driving violence as they are better off in maintaining stability. Furthermore, the case of Jordan also illustrates that tribes do not lead to violence as assumed by the literature if they are managed by a central authority who restrain their rivalries and ensure that the balance of power is maintained between the different prominent tribes. Nevertheless, it seems that this mechanism leads to "a vicious cycle of state failure" in creating a strong state that will ensure stability on its own (Migdal, 1988, p.203).

Weak State as a Price for Stability

In this system of power-sharing, sheikhs as sub-patrons receive the resources from the state that they would later redistribute among their own 'tribe clients'. In this sense, sheikhs as clients need the distributive patronage to survive, and reciprocally the authoritarian rulers

cannot survive without the tribes' support. Migdal (1988) describes the relationship between sheikhs and tribes as a paradox: "the paradox [...] is while the strongmen have become ever more dependent upon state resources to shore up their social control, state leaders have become dependent on strongmen, who empty those resources in a manner inimical to state rules and laws" (Ibid., p.141).

While this alliance has been successful in terms of stability, it seems that peace and stability do have a price that results in a weak state. Indeed, the Jordanian state has no resources but has based its stability on a semi-rentier state model using foreign aids in order to sustain the demands of the tribes' clients. It can be assumed that in other countries, such as the Gulf States, the rentier state is also a way to 'buy off' stability through a patron-client relationship. However, in this setting of patronage, clientelism and rivalries, the rulers are "reduced to ruses and stratagem; they must build (...) balances of power centers while using state resources to reinforce existing distribution of power and wealth in society. Such mechanism may at times encourage [Political stability] but they do not create a more capable, autonomous state" (Ibid., p.237).

Indeed, as we have seen, tribes have no interest in fostering violence as long as the status quo is maintained which leaves no space for political reforms and for the development of a strong state. For instance, King Abdullah II had to face the discontentment of powerful tribes when he attempted to lead some political reforms that would strengthen the rule of law rather than the rule of tribes. This event generated public riots of the al-Fayiz clan who used to be the most important allies of the Hashemite leaders and who threatened to "shake the pillars of the Jordanian state" if the King will not step back (Middle East Eyes, 2018). As soon as the tribes are unsatisfied with the regime, they do not forget to remind the ruler that his rule is tolerated

by the tribes, which is a manner of claiming that he is a guest in his own house who owes to the tribes (Middle East Eyes, 2018). Consequently, the state leader has the difficult task to ensure that two antithetical systems work together to satisfy the majority of the population by modernising and liberalising the country without undermining the tribal influence which implies a configuration of a weak state.

Additionally, in a letter addressed to the new Prime Minister in 2011 (following the Arab Spring), the King Abdullah II shared his frustration claiming that the inefficiency of the state results in the “fear of change by some who resisted it to protect their own interests [...] costing the country dearly and denying it many opportunities for achievement.” (Muasher, 2011). However, while tribalism led to a weak state in this context, it also leads to political stability and peace which appears to be thus far the best solution in a region troubled by conflicts.

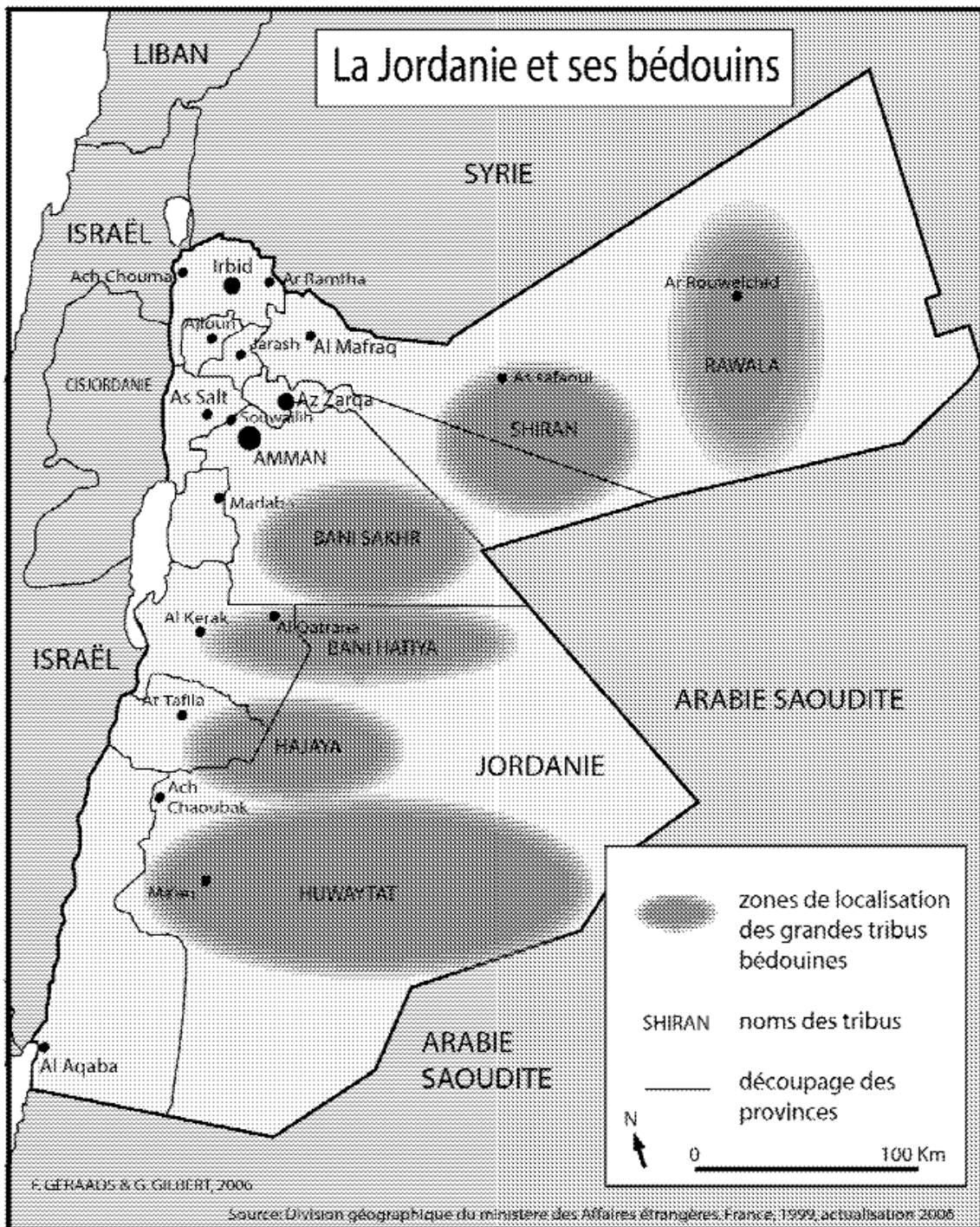
CONCLUSION

The case of Jordan illustrates the symbiotic *quasi*-biological relationship between the state and the tribes. In the Middle East, tribes and the state leader need each other to form and create a society as they complement each other but also deeply contradict each other. Indeed, as it has been analysed, the central authority is not able to rule in place of the sheikhs and has to rule through them. Thus, the state understood the necessity of compromising with the tribes through a system of power-sharing which enables them to have high positions in almost the entire government. From the beginning of the alliance, the King has created an elaborated and complex patronage system which provides employment, privileges, titles and wealth to the tribes. In return, the sheikhs have proved their loyalties by maintaining political stability through the control of their tribesmen. Thus, the pact has served to prevent a profound

political clash resulting from structural adjustment policies due to a survival strategy implemented by the monarchy through controlled political liberalisation (Robinson, 1998; Lucas, 2005).

While the political stability seems to be maintained through a patron-client system, it shows that tribes are essential and deterministic actors for maintaining peace in Middle Eastern countries that have tribes within their borders. Over many crises, tribal loyalties have been ensured and proved to be efficient in maintaining rare stability in the region. Thus, it appears that tribes do not lead to violence and conflict as presented by the literature on tribal violence, rather they can lead to peace and stability when it is not undermined and when the central state decides to share the resources of power. However, satisfying the tribes through the welfare state might not be sustainable, which pressures the King to launch political and economic reforms. Hence, King Abdullah II has to engage in important balancing exploit: implementing what the majority of the population demands, which is to move forward in reforming economic and political systems, while maintaining the loyalties of his most important column, which benefits most from the status quo.

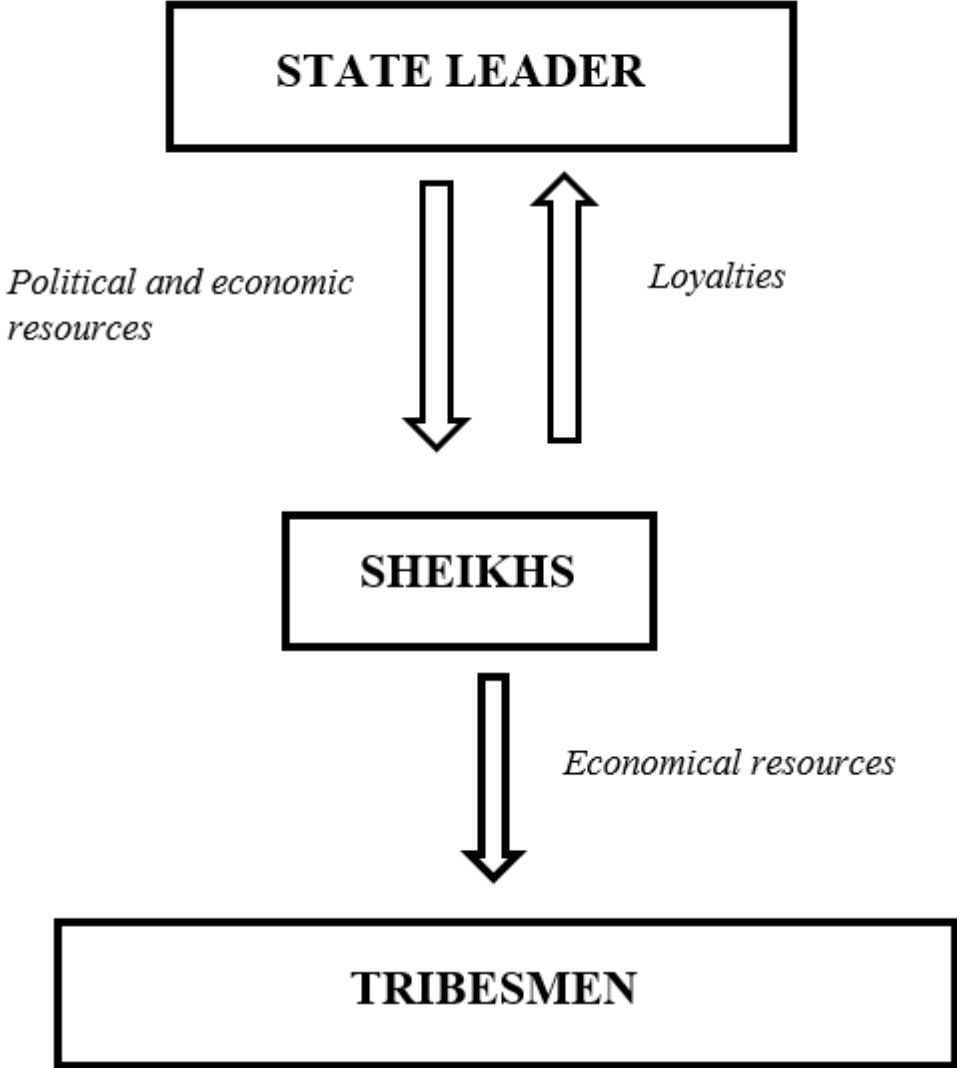
APPENDIX 1



The grey circles are the territories of the most prominent Bedouin confederation in Jordan with their names.

Source : *Jordan and Its Bedouins*, Division géographique du ministère des Affaires étrangères, France, 1999

APPENDIX 2



Appendix 1: The structural patron-client relations in Jordan

Source: Rajaa Gacem, Thesis Master, 2019.

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