Political Elites and Tribalism in Palestine

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Key Words: PLO, New Political Elites, Tribalism in Palestine, Tribes in Palestine, Palestinian Political Organization, Palestinian Democracy

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1. Introduction

This research paper is devoted to the study of the relationship between political elites and tribalism in Palestine. It is an attempt to examine the social backgrounds of political elites, whether in power, or in the opposition or on the side, and to see if tribal delineation or ancestry has an impact on the shaping of political elites. To put it in another way, the research studies the possibilities of becoming part of the political elites due to tribal backgrounds. The major question in this regard is: does tribalism play a role in deciding who should or can become part of the political elites? If yes, to what extent?

The justification for this study is that tribalism is part of Arab culture that has a big role in shaping political, cultural and economic behavior, and any study of Arab moods or ways of thinking and conduct wouldn’t be exhaustive unless tribalism is given special attention. It is known in different scientific circles that tribalism is prevalent in different Arab states, a fact that dominates the political life. Political decisions are made almost by one person; i.e. the sheikh (the head) of the tribe. He is the one who is supposed to know every thing, and the absolute representative of the truth. The rest of the tribe obeys without any institutional right to participate in the decision making. This imposes a huge challenge to democracy and requires great efforts toward social change. This is true for Palestine which might be experiencing a degree of tribal organization lower than that in other Arab states. Regardless of the intensity of tribal impacts, still Palestine falls under the tribal mood.

This research is of significance because it sheds light on Palestinian political organization and structure; and it might help in understanding political behavior and institutional building. If tribalism is predominant in Palestine, then the political life is expected to be predominantly tribal; but if it is mildly practiced, then its influence on the political life will be mild. This, for sure, is of considerable importance in understanding political decisions. This means that the affiliation of political elites is
influenced to a great extent with the degree of tribal dominance

II. Tribalism

1. Concept definition

To make it clear, I should say that tribalism is mostly the word used to describe a social structure based on blood delineation. This is organic tribalism. This concept is used in Arabia to point at very big extended families who share the same ancestry or blood delineation. Some tribes are huge in numbers and might be of 200,000 people, while some others are smaller in numbers. Members of the tribe might not know each other, but mostly they gather and ally with each other whenever they see necessary and compatible with tribal values, customs and habits.

Tribal interests that take priority to national and individual interests are an essential determinant of tribal behavior. Tribes, in general, don’t have a concept of national or individual interests because they look at themselves as distinct and independent entities. This is a very important and crucial key in understanding political behavior in Arabia and in assimilating the process of political elites building.

Some other expressions are sometimes used instead of tribes and tribalism particularly when the tribe is not big enough. It is very hard to define what big means, but in Palestine the word clan is of common use. Sometimes the word family, to mean extended family is used.

Due to the intricate concept of tribalism, it is actually very hard to understand its off-shots and the political ramifications without understanding how it works in Arabia or in Palestine in particular. That is why it is imperative for those who study the role of tribalism in Arab politics to first understand tribalism as an Arab social phenomenon.

1) Rida, Mohammed. 2006, the Conflict Between the State and the Tribe in the Arab Gulf, Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, pp. 104-107

2) Al-Fakhouri, Hanna. History of Arab Literature, without publication facts, (year of publication is unavailable) p.43.
As far as political elites are concerned, it is an uneasy job to give them an exact definition. Scholars and researchers differ in their approaches and emphases. But due to my knowledge of Palestine and of Arabia in general, I define political elites as the ruling people and those in whom the power of making institutional decisions, whether social, political, cultural, educational or economic are vested.

Here, it should be brought to the fore that tribalism might be organic as described above, or spiritual. It is spiritual if groups who aren’t related by blood behave socially and politically as if they are organically related. Political parties might be of a tribal nature if they spiritually guided by tribal values and method of decision-making. This isn’t far from reality in Arabia since there are tribes who are officially registered as political parties, and there are political parties who are actually tribal.

The descriptive analytical approach is the most suitable method toward the fulfillment of this study. First, previous literature will be briefly reviewed, and political elites will be defined conceptually and in space. Concentration will be given to the ruling people and to those who make decisions on the level of institutions.

The hypothesis of this study is that the ruling elites show characteristics of organic tribalism, but the most prevalent is spiritual tribalism. Exactly, I hypothesize that Palestinian political factions or parties or organizations aren’t really modern and reflect traditional tribal values in their structure and conduct. Individual merits aren’t tied primarily to the individual but are mainly associated with the tribe.

An historical background based on authentic literature will be provided. Then the fluctuations in tribal influence and spirit will be considered in view of the development of Palestinian efforts toward liberation, self-realization and statehood. That is, this study isn’t restricted to the moment, but extends to the study of different factors that have an impact on the ups and downs of tribal behavior and its embodiment in political elites.

2. Literature Review

There are many Palestinian researchers and scholars who tackled with the subject from different angles. Hisham Sharabi, for instance, a prominent scholar wrote a book about Arab social organization with special attention on the Palestinian society. Faysal Horani also wrote on the subject and concluded that elites still show traditional behavior although the Palestinians are living a period of liberation that requires social cohesion and political unity. Mohammad Jaber also wrote in his plays about family ties that might serve or stand against national interests.

Hanna Fakhouri explained the theme of tribalism in his book on Arab Literature, and described how the forces of tribalism work in the Arab society. Mohammed Al-Jaberi put so much emphasis on the issue in his book: Problems of Contemporary Arab Thought. He ascertained that the tribal mentality is a great obstacle toward building the Arab Nation, and it is even a problem for the existing Arab states. Muwatten, a Palestinian non-governmental Organization, issued a book on the deadlock of the Palestinian political parties. Some writers referred to tribalism as an obstacle.

The study consists of the following elements:

1-Historical background: this will provide a brief historical assessment of tribal influence in Palestine. It is important in understanding the development of social organization.

2-Rules of conduct within Palestinian parties and organizations. This is supposed to provide for the political culture within these parties that evolved during what is called the revolution which eventually established the basis for the Palestinian political autonomy. Of course, it is far from reality to talk about a Palestinian state or Palestinian independence, but we can talk about self-rule or autonomy that is still under tangible Israeli influence.

3-The interaction or contra-action between occupation and the Palestinians in the making of political elites. Israel has its agents who are sometimes chosen on the tribal basis and who very often jump to the board of political actions; and the Palestinian Authority has its own people who are either chosen on tribal or organizational basis.
4-The responsiveness of the political system: the political system needs the support of tribes and extended families in assuring its legitimacy, and these entities need the political system so as to insure their interests. It might be a game of mutual interests that might not come into conformity with the national interest.

5- Conclusions: the study sums up the results in this section.

To understand Arab politics internally and externally, one needs to have a grip of the main features of tribalism because most Arab countries are of tribal social and political structures. Some Arab countries such as Jordan, Saudia Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates are governed by tribes, the rest of the Arab countries are of semi or tribal political systems.

Tribalism is based on kinship, ancestry delineation. Those who are related to each other on kinship bases stay together to form a unique and distinct society, and they mostly practice their own life with very little attention to the society at large. They mostly form an organic society in which individuals have no meaning without the tribe, and all individuals work together for the welfare of the tribe. The common good of the tribe is necessarily the good of the individual. The following points sum up the consequences based on this definition:

First: the patriarchal structure of society. There are the rich who sit at the top of the society, and could be surrounded with elderly people from the different influential tribes. Power and class are inherited. Rich tribes have the advantage, and poor tribes generally occupy the lowest status. Military power is a detriment of status, but it remains hard for poor tribes to attain.

Second: the elderly rule, the rest of the society obeys. Those who disobey are descents and should be eliminated or, at best, isolated. If any sort of public participation is allowed, it is only limited to consulting the elderly.

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Third: tribal interest is above and before public interest. Once tribal interest is in contradiction with public interest, tribes are ready to fight for the fulfillment of their own interests at the expense of others.

Fourth: one doesn’t feel secure outside the tribe due to an assumption that other tribes are antagonistic. One doesn’t feel that he/she belong to the society at large but to his/her tribe. He/she is ready to fight fiercely for the tribe, (The war between Jordan and Syria is an example), but is ready to flee the battlefield if a war erupts between the society at large and an outside enemy. (The war of 1967 Between Israel and the Arabs is an example).

Fifth: because tribal interest has a priority over all other interests, opportunism is a main characteristic of tribal behavior. Tribal people don’t care that much about principles, and are always ready exchange principle for expedience. If they seem, at certain times, honoring principle, that is because of observing their own interests. That is why tribal people are always ready to furnish loyalty to any power, whether internal or external, that fulfills their narrow aspirations. Tribes have been very helpful for Arab dictators and for colonial powers. In Palestine, influential families have been of a great help for the Israeli occupation. Sixth: tribal rivalry generally dominates the relationship between different tribes. Arab tribes are very proud of themselves, and always try to show distinction and superiority. They are ready to make all necessary sacrifices to remain dignified in comparison with other tribes. At so many times, they choose to serve an external power if that power gives

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them the leverage to dominate over other tribe or to free themselves from the domination of other tribes. External domination isn’t an important factor when it comes to internal rivalry. At some other times, these tribes are ready to fight each other endlessly for self-assertion, but they surrender to an external occupying force such as Israel. At other times, the tribe is ready to sacrifice some of their sources of living so as to appear generous. Generosity is an important tribal value to which Arab tribes adhere all the time. Again this has to do with dignity and pride.

Seventh: Arab tribes are excellent conspirators. Since they are closed societies and care mainly about their own interests regardless of principles, they don’t like to discuss things in the open, or face their rivals frankly, but they resort to conspiracy and betrayal. This is so much reflected in Arab TV series. That is why the sense of doubt and lack of confidence characterizes inter-tribal relations.

3. Regression and Advancement

In regard of the above features of tribalism, tribes are the enemies of advancement and modernity. Tribes are a traditional form of social structure that describes the source of authority within the tribe. It is based on inherited status, and unwilling to accept achieved status. Those who receive education or accumulate wealth should remain under the umbrella of the recognized traditional source of power, and those who wish to deviate become unacceptable, and they have to choose between isolation and departure. Education itself doesn’t mean more than a

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14) Jordanian Bedouin TV Series. This TV series is very educative on the issue of Arab Tribalism.
16) Holiday, Fred. 1981, Political Struggle in the Arabian Peninsula, third edition,
diploma that qualifies the person for a job that is a source of income and pride for the tribe. It doesn’t mean knowledge and scientific advancement because no body needs that.

Educated and enlightened people should listen to their superiors who are the heads of the tribes. These heads are inspired figures who mostly know everything, and those educated people should remain obedient and ready for giving advices that might not be observed. And those who prove to be excellent businessmen should remain within the confines of traditional authority. Success is only regarded when it receives the blessing of the head of the tribe.

This is logical because modernity certainly means and requires the development of new concepts of power and authority. Redefining power is absolutely rejected and the heads of the tribes are ready to wage war to evade it.\(^\text{17}\) If modernity to be achieved, according to tribal values, tribal structure must remain in tact. This is of course impossible because of the contradiction between the old and the requirements of the new. The tribal mentality doesn’t oppose the use of modern products, but is incapable of digesting the social changes needed as a pre requisite for scientific and technological progress.

This explains why Arab leaders have been concentrating on importing goods and services instead of producing them. These leaders have so much oil money and can buy whatever they wish without endangering the social structure that keeps them in power. Most Arab regimes such as the Saudi, the Kuwaiti, the Moroccan and the Jordanian are tribal and reflect tribal values. They are adamant enemies of modernization, and depend on foreign countries for their own security. (This is absolutely evident in presence of American forces in most Arab Gulf states. without these forces, these Arab governments could have disappeared a long time ago.)\(^\text{18}\) They don’t care about the security of the nation, and are always

\(^{17}\) Rida, Mohammed. 2006, *the Conflict Between the State and the Tribe in the Arab Gulf*, Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, p.103.

ready to equate the well-fare and the well-being of the nation with their own. It is evident that some Arab countries particularly the oil rich states have a very high level of consumption but a very low level of advancement and self-dependence.

Due to this, progress in Arabia has been mostly a product of evolution rather than revolution, objective rather than subjective, revealed rather than planned. Most Arab countries are influenced by the international technological revolution, and they themselves aren’t participants. This is to a great extent due to the awkward social and political structures. They have the money to buy, but don’t have the will to produce.

III. Tribalism in Palestine

Compared with other Arab areas, it is very hard to say that Syria (Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon and present smaller Syria) has been embracing huge tribes similar to those in Iraq or Yemen or Saudi Arabia; rather, extended families have been the dominant type of social structure. This doesn’t mean that tribal mentality has been absent; on the contrary, it has been there but at a lower gear. Influential families have been there for centuries and assumed so much social, political and economic power. They haven’t been big feudalists compared to the European type, but they owned huge pieces of land compared with ordinary farmers.

In Palestine, extended families had been dominant in the period before 1948 (before the creation of Israel. Some big families owned thousands of acres of fertile land. Ash Shawwa family, for instance, used to own

House for Publication, pp.144-146.


around 25,000 acres; and this is a huge sum in consideration with the total area of fertile land in the country. Other families such as Abdul Hadi, Hejje, Husseini, Rock and Al Fahoorn used to own wide areas. 21) These families had so much economic power, and, consequently, political power. That is why the heads of these tribes resided atop of the political scene during the British Mandate (1918-1948).

The heads of Palestinian extended families formed the political elite during the British Mandate. Almost they hadn’t been challenged by Palestinians mainly because there were no intellectuals at that time outside these families, and because wealth was monopolized by these families. 22) Only these families could send their sons to educational institutions such as the American University in Beirut or French and English universities. These young people used to come back to Palestine and hold prominent administrative jobs.

These influential families, in line with tribal features, cooperated with the British Mandate. The British Mandate was an external power that didn’t have anything to do with tribal or family rivalries, and wasn’t a factor in stimulating animosities on the national level. As was indicated earlier, tribal mentality doesn’t pay so much attention to external powers, and it concentrates mainly on the well-being of the tribe on the internal level. That is why tribes might find external colonial power as an asset. The British found this mentality relaxing and providing comfort. They didn’t need to mobilize their forces to face a revolutionary political elite, 23) but they needed some administrative wisdom to maintain a balance among the different influential families. They had to provide enough prominent jobs in their administration for the educated people who belong to these families.


The British played it well and could avoid animosity and gain the friendship of these families. They satisfied the ego of these families through giving them jobs that were sources of pride. The British found that these families had no national consciousness, and had no sense of social cohesion.

What was striking that these families established some friendly relations with the Jews who were migrating to the country. It is documented that many of these families sold Palestinian land to the Jews, a thing that was considered high treason. The heads of these families used to give hot political speeches and make promises that they would establish an independent Palestinian state, and at the same time they were dragging the Palestinians into disaster. The land that these land-lords sold to the Jews was very helpful in building Jewish settlements, facilitating the establishment of Israel, and uprooting the Palestinians to become refugees in several Arab states.

These influential families were not highly regarded by the Jews. In 1948 when Israel was announced as a state, these families were forced to leave their properties and seek refuge in the neighboring Arab states the same as other people. These political elites favored their own interests, detached themselves from their own people, and finally they had to pay the price. This is the true spirit of tribalism.

During the Hashemite rule over the West Bank (1951-1967), the remnants of Palestinian influential families played a major role. As I said earlier, the Palestinian influential families in the areas that were taken by the Jews lost their influence because they were uprooted and forcefully expelled from the country, and became refugees. The influential families in the West Bank and Gaza remained in tact. These families did not surrender their traditional role, and managed to make political arrangements with Arab governments. Those of the West bank

coordinated their efforts with the Jordanian government, and those of Gaza coordinated with Egypt.

The heads of the influential families of the West Bank met in Jericho to discuss the fate of the West Bank after the establishment of Israel. This elite decided to join the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.\(^{26}\) The Jordanian parliament discussed the matter and decided to broaden the Kingdom to include what started to be known the West Bank and the East Bank (Trans-Jordan).\(^{27}\) The King himself is the descendant of an influential Arab tribe, and found no problem in allying with an elite that share him the same mentality. Besides, the social structure in the East Bank at the time was predominantly tribal, and found easy to share the Palestinian elite in accepting a political regime that draws its legitimacy from tribalism. It is well-known that the British provided the Hashemites with the needed power to reign over Jordan. Due to this external factor, influential tribes didn’t fight each other and depended on the regime to make the necessary social balance.

The situation in Gaza was essentially the same although the form was different. The influential families were unchallenged by the rest of the population, and practically there was no alternative for their leadership.\(^{28}\) The Egyptian regime found comfortable to deal with these families because it is the extension of a traditionally ruling family. The mentality caused no problem and each side had a grip of the rules of the game - obedience in return of expedience.

The status of influential families didn’t suffer noticeably after the Egyptian coup d’état in 1952. The new Egyptian leaders came from humble and small families, and pledged that they will be revolutionaries in all aspects of life. They started confiscating land from big land-lords, talking about the liberation of Palestine and fighting colonialism. But in Gaza, these leaders didn’t try to make systematic efforts to undermine


the influential families that are traditionally friendly to the colonial powers particularly the British. New forces started to appear in Gaza especially those who started fighting the Israelis across the cease fire line, but they didn't gravely undermine the status of these families. Generally speaking, the political elite under the Egyptian rule remained strong enough to defend its status and positions.

The status of the political elite in both Gaza and the West Bank was shaken with the advent of the Israelis in 1967. The Israelis didn't take any step to undermine this traditional elite, and, on the contrary, they tried to strengthen it due to the mutual interests that were explained earlier. The main problem for this elite came from the unstable situation under occupation which meant that new forces will appear as a reaction to occupation. These forces proved to be anti-occupation and, consequently, anti all internal forces that cooperate with the Israelis.

The Israeli occupation tried to establish good relations with the tribal political elite, and the members of the elite weren't hesitant. As expressed before, tribes or influential families care primarily about their interests even at the expense of the national interest. As long as the authority, any authority, satisfies private interests, these family heads are ready to cooperate. The Israeli occupation had good knowledge of Arab social structure and tribal ethics, and it had a good understanding of the Palestinian society, and had no problem in gaining the friendship of so many tribal influential figures.

However, the new political reality under occupation looked very much different from stable political atmospheres. New political forces came to the fore, and many Palestinians started thinking of resistance. The values of confronting the occupation are very much different from tribal


values, and require so many sacrifices that tribalism doesn’t accept or understand. In other words, new social elements started to appear that curbed the influence of traditional forces.

The 1967 war witnessed a tremendous and effective growth in the Palestinian fighting factions. There was FATAH which was established in 1965 for the sake of liberating Palestine, and the Pan-Arab movement which started mobilizing in order to face the Israelis. This Pan-Arab movement changed its Pan Arabism to become the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). These two movements and many others who appeared later started recruiting revolutionaries who were ready to fight the Israelis. These recruits, similar to other nations that fall under external aggression or occupation, belong mainly to poor classes, although some of them belong to the middle class. Influential tribes don’t believe in revolution, and rarely any of their members join revolutionary organizations.

New political elites developed. Leaders of the Palestinian fighting factions became the dominant political elite. These factions took over the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and became the only legitimate representative of the Palestinians. Tribal elites were pushed to the back, but they remained there idle, but awaiting the right time to re-appear. These tribal elements never detached themselves from the Israeli occupation because of their economic and social interests, kept good ties with the Jordanian regime, and held some strings with the PLO. These elites have never been happy with the new political elites and always hoped for a change.

IV. The PLO and the Rise of Tribalism

There were indications throughout the history of the PLO under the leadership of Arafat that the organization didn’t want to sever the ties with the traditional tribal leadership. On the Arab level, the PLO

observed a good relationship with some Arab countries that have tribal regimes such as Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Kuwait. It didn’t have a relaxing relationship with Jordan, but once it started a process of reaching a peaceful solution with Israel, the relations strengthened and a process of coordination between the two parties started. The relations with Kuwait became tense after Saddam’s adventure in Kuwait. Arafat sided with Saddam.

On the Palestinian level, Arafat didn’t disregard traditional tribal leaders, and always gave them access. They could meet with him, and convey their points of view on the ways of how to solve the Palestinian problem. That is to notice that these leaders always favored the Jordanian solution; that is, for Jordan to come back to the West Bank and restore the territorial integrity of the Hashemite Kingdom. However, Arafat always thought that these leaders make an asset for him if he decides to go along with a peaceful approach toward the Palestinian question.33 I, the writer, know for sure that Arafat could receive help from these leaders who worked as liaison officers between the PLO and Israel. At the time that Israel was subjecting those who make contacts with the PLO to interrogation and imprisonment, these people were free to commute to Beirut or Tunisia where Arafat was seated.

The role of these traditional tribal elites intensified with Madrid conference of 1991, and with the Oslo Accords in 1993. Some prominent educated figures from the influential families started to take a major role in the negotiations process. These leaders who were regarded by so many grass root freedom fighters as traitors became leaders and regarded as patriotic authorities. (for instance: Oreikat, Shaka, and Freij. all were viewed with suspicion and became leaders) Things have changed, and those who were revolutionary leaders had to as: for financial help from tribal leaders, and if messages to be sent to Arafat, these tribal leaders had a leverage.

Of course we have to be careful here. Extended influential families in the West Bank and Gaza suffered a big blow in 1948 when Israel was

established, but the remnants remained active and continued to align with regimes that serve their tribal interests. at the same time, these remnants never tries to gain the animosity of any authority in the area because this is the wisdom of achieving private interests.

From the very beginning of their establishment, the Palestinian organizations vowed to fight the Israelis until the liberation of Palestine. They started recruiting people on the basis of the armed struggle that was described as the only effective means towards the fulfillment of total victory over Israel. The leaders of these organizations described themselves as revolutionaries, and established strong ties with countries described as revolutionaries such as Cuba and China, and made many visits to Vietnam to learn about guerilla warfare.

As mentioned earlier, the recruits of these organizations came from the poor, and it was very hard to see a recruit coming from wealthy influential families. But it was discovered later, that tribalism isn’t a characteristic of influential families only, but it is a mentality that describes the Palestinians and the Arabs in general. Tribal values and behavior aren’t a monopoly of the powerful tribes, but they are part of a culture, and once a one gains power, he/she resorts to tribal values. Tradition tribal power caused the Palestinians so many agonies, frustrations and disasters, and the new powerful elements didn’t seem to behave differently.

A problem with the tribal mentality of the Palestinian organizations was first encountered in Jordan where these organizations had their main organizational and military headquarters. The Palestinians, due to the public support they received at the beginning of active resistance against the Israeli occupation, started to act as the sole dictatorial power in Jordan. The Arab governments among of which the Jordanian were very weakened after the 1967 defeat, but resisting people gained


popularity because they pledged to fight Israel. Instead of taking advantage of this support and popularity by extending participating and establishing friendship with all segments of the Jordanian society, the Palestinian resistance people started to behave on tribal basis.

The Palestinians started asserting their Palestinian ship in a way similar to traditional tribal assertion. They asserted their superiority to the Jordanians and required indirectly that the Jordanians should look at the Palestinians as masters. They also carried out acts to undermine the King and his government. What was very dumb is that they treated the heads of influential tribes with despise and ridicule.\textsuperscript{36}

The leaders of these organizations never deterred their subordinated, and failed to maintain discipline. The leaders behaved in the same way a traditional tribal leader would behave. They appeared as if they were hungry for power and needed so much to imitate the dictatorship that was traditionally practiced against them.\textsuperscript{37} Most probably, they gained the tribal values of enslaving others, and they expressed them once the chance arose.

In their internal policies inside the organization, the leaders of the organizations acted as tribal sheikhs. They weren’t true revolutionary leaders, but tribal in the form of a revolutionary. They always insisted on total obedience and used money to buy loyalties. Arafat, for instance, was a true reflection of a traditional Arab leader who monopolized all the wealth and distributed it according to his wishes and interests.\textsuperscript{38} In this way, he was not looking for professional people who could do the jobs necessary for achieving the objective of liberation, but was interested only in people loyal to himself but not to the cause. Other Palestinian leaders, although had less wealth, were no different.

The spirit of tribalism grew and was nourished also on the level of the


PLO which Arafat led. He turned the PLO into a tribe of his own. He gave Palestinian organizations other than Fatah a minor role, and gave his affiliates a majority in all councils of PLO administrative activities. He was the sole leader, and the others were mere subordinates. Exactly, this is tribal organization.

The tribalism of the Palestinian organizations has been reflected in their inter-relations. Each organization has always behaved like a tribe with its chauvinism, close mindedness and the feeling of superiority to others. Each organization behaves in a way that reminds the observer with the main features of tribalism. Each is centered around itself believing that it holds the whole truth that the others don’t have, and believe that their interests is the true reflection of the Palestinian national interests. This is extremely noticeable in the speeches and the public statements made by the leaders. This explains why the Palestinian organizations have failed so far to coordinate their efforts in facing the different challenges confronting the Palestinians. They are capable of coordination on marginal issues, but major issues touch directly on their egos.

The tribal mentality of the Palestinian organizations is also reflected in the way they treat their members. Traditionally, the young just listen and obey, and the elderly plan and issue orders. The young don’t need to know because the whole wisdom is there in the head of the leaders. The members of the organizations aren’t educated on the basic principles of their organization and they find it difficult to make an educated and enlightened conversation with their opponents or critiques. The individual, to a great extent, is lost in the ranks of the organization, and he/she hardly find space for self-assertion. This has been weakening the organizations publicly and in their efforts to face Israel.

Another major similarity with tribalism lies in the big mouth and little achievement. The leaders of the tribes always make exaggerations about

their achievements and talk proudly about the unique courage and iron will of the tribe. This big mouth takes place even at times of defeat by other tribes. The Arab governments, for instance, talked about victory when they were defeated in 1967. (Look into the declarations of all Palestinian organizations concerning military actions against Israel. This is repeatedly noticed in the mass media.) The PLO was raising the figures with the sign of victory while being driven out of Lebanon by Israel in 1982. The leaders of the Palestinian organizations still use very hot rhetoric, but don’t do much. As another example, the observer can easily notice the wide gap between the military announcements of the organization and the actual Israeli losses. The organizations usually talk about heavy Israeli losses without any kind of documentation or a way of verification.

To make this clearer, Arafat and his PLO recognized Israel and decided to negotiate. The Oslo Accords were signed and described as a Palestinian victory. Actually what happened is that the Palestinian leadership accepted all the Israeli conditions reiterated over the years. Instead of telling the people the truth, the leaders talked fake and imagined victories. It took the Arab people some a long time to discover that the tribal leaders have been lying to them, the Palestinians have experienced the same thing.

V. The PLO Turn to Tribalism and The New Elite.

The PLO suffered a very severe blow in 1982 when Israel invaded Lebanon and expelled the PLO. The PLO leader, Yasser Arafat, decided afterwards to go along with the peace process which Egypt started after the war of 1973. To go along, Arafat needed people who are ready to sit with the Israelis and negotiate. Most Palestinians who thought that the armed struggle was the most effective way to retain the Palestinian rights weren’t ready to accept Arafat’s new trend. Within the PLO, Arafat managed to find some people to carry out his new project, but he
also started opening new channels with influential tribal figures who have ties or certain relationships with Jordan, Egypt and Israel. (examples are individuals from ShShawa, Kanaan, Natsche and Masri families)

Apparently Arafat was aware that the time to negotiate with Israel was coming, and he never severed ties with those who were labeled as traitors. Many opponents of the PLO started to find chairs in Arafat’s court, and started receiving financial support, and received promises from Arafat to improve their images in the West Bank and Gaza.

Arafat went on with his steps toward negotiating with the Israelis. Those steps headed toward the acceptance of the three American conditions required from the PLO: the recognition of Israel, the recognition of the Security Council of the UN resolutions 242 and 338, and renouncing terrorism. (Arafat’s Declaration, Geneva, Dec. 1988; and the Palestinian National Council held in Algiers in 1988) Arafat’s turn toward tribal leaders intensified as he accelerated his steps toward the Americans. In 1985, he renounced terrorism, and 1988 he accepted the American conditions.

With the take off of negotiations in Madrid in 1991, new political subordinate leaders to Arafat started to appear. Of course it is very hard to talk about a new leadership because Arafat was the only leader, and he never left space for rivals or equals or dependable leaders. Even those who were thought to have a potential for leadership were killed. (such as Yusof Orabi, Abu Jihad and Salah Khaled) Arafat conducted a statesmanship with different staffs according to the different epochs or stages through which the Palestinian causes passes. At times of war and bloodshed, he would have revolutionary subordinates, and at times he would think of improving conditions with Jordan he resorted to those favored by Jordan, and so on. So at times of seeking peace with the Israelis, he thought of those who the Israelis would accept as negotiators.

Together with some figures from the PLO who always thought that negotiations was the best approach to the Palestinian question, influential family figures started to have front line positions. Figures from Gaza families and of the West Bank came to the fore, and some of them were
very close to Arafat. The Americans expressed there satisfaction with this development, and the American secretary of foreign affairs said that America prefers to deal with influential families. As such, one can make the conclusion that as the PLO turned its back to the idea of liberation wider space for the influential families to be in the leading positions emerged.

The Palestinian National Charter stated clearly that the Palestinians have the right to their homes and property in Palestine, and the demographic balance should be restored to its level before the Zionist invasion of Palestine. It insisted that Palestine is the homeland of the Palestinian Arabs, and its liberation is a national must. It also rejected all UN resolutions concerning Palestine because they are, as stated, imperialist resolutions imposed by imperialist countries. Over the years, it had been understood that any Palestinian deviation from these principles is treason.41) Arafat himself said over and over that the acceptance of autonomy was treason, and thus was the recognition of Israel as a legitimate state that has a right to survive on the Palestinian land.

Gradually since 1982, these Palestinian taboos have been eroded in favor of their opposites. Together with it, those revolutionary figures who insisted on fighting Israel gradually started to diminish in numbers, and gradually those who wanted to turn their back to the Palestinian national Charter gradually increased in numbers. Influential tribal figures never thought that the Palestinian Charter was realistic, and never thought of fighting Israel. They always adopted the approach of tribal Arab regimes.

The Arab regimes, although talked so much about the liberation of Palestine in the fifties and the sixties, they started talking about ending the occupation of Arab land subdued in the War in 1967, and ended in adopting a plan in 1982 calling for the recognition of Israel and undermining the Palestinian rights. Most Arab regimes started talking openly about the impossibility of the return of the refugees, and the inevitability of the supremacy of Israel in the area. Many Arab countries such as Egypt started normalizing relations with Israel. This new Arab

41) The Palestinian National Charter: Resolutions of the Palestine National Council
July 1-17, 1968
trend was very much relaxing for Palestinian influential families.

The new Palestinian political elite had no problem, ethical or psychological, in sitting with the Israelis. For the tribal leaders, this was ordinary because they used to meet with the Israelis to discuss different issues. The negotiations, for them, were just a continuation of an old habit. Arafat himself recognized Israel, and, in his letter to the Israeli Prime Minister, pledged to fight terrorism; that is, his own fighters. In other words, Arafat’s new approach was compatible with the background and the approach of the tribal elite.

Finally, the PLO signed the Oslo accords which jumped over the traditional Palestinian national taboos. Israel has been recognized, and a Palestinian Authority has been established according to the wishes of Israel. The Palestinian have been given the right to run the affairs of their daily life, a thing that the Israelis never liked to do. In return, the Americans and the Europeans decided to finance the Authority. Of course the PLO is responsible for all of these developments, but its leadership found subordinates of tribal orientations to carry them out.

It has been clear and extremely evident that the Palestinian Authority has been no different in its administration than any traditional Arab tribe. Arafat reigned there monopolizing all powers in his hands, and holding Palestinian money in his pockets. He acted as an absolute king with heavenly ordained power, and had all strings in his hands. He used to form the government according to his wishes, and used to decide on every little activity in the Palestinian occupied land. Briefly, he acted as a sheikh.

Arafat’s government and subordinates such as the consultants were similar to a tribal council where the head finally decides everything. He had a lot of money and through bribery and generous donations, he could keep them obedient and thankful.42

Arafat didn’t limit his tribal form of political behavior to his subordinates, but he extended that to the people. He started giving people

42) The Petition of the 20, (This is a statement signed by 20 prominent Palestinians accusing Arafat of Corruption and published by the international mass media among of which the Associated Press on Nov. 28, 1999)
untrue jobs and put them on the pay rolls. Thousands of idle jobs were created through which he thought would be gaining political support. He created security service department that actually had nothing to do except putting around 60,000 Palestinians on the pay roll that keeps them away from thinking of resisting the Israelis. Instead of financing productive projects, he thought only of political loyalty. That is clearly tribal thinking and behavior although Arafat himself doesn’t belong to an influential tribe.

Arafat’s subordinates and cabinet members worked on the same tribal behavior. They used their positions to serve their own interests and the interests of their families and friends. Most positions in different ministers were occupied not by qualified people but by people who had access to the minister or the manager of the institution.\footnote{Aman, Society. 2004, Corruption: Reasons And Methods of Facing it, Ram Allah: Aman, p.3} That is why different institutions were known as the institutions of those who run them. Tribal mentality was present in every bit of activity within the Palestinian Authority.

This brings back the points that are presented at the beginning of this paper. Traditional tribalism isn’t necessarily present, but the mentality has a thrust that is no different from the traditional. Nepotism an favoritism proved to be the prime values of allocating money and jobs.

The overwhelming majority of the employees in the Authority are Fateh members and supporters. The Authority is actually Fateh tribe, and it is just a copy of an Arab tribe. The Palestinian Authority proved to be no different from tribal Arab regimes such as that of Morocco or Saudi Arabia. People from the society at large had a chance to get jobs but only in institutions that do something good for the Palestinians such as the ministries of health and education. These ministries need so many personnel and Fateh didn’t have enough people to carry out the jobs.

The other Palestinian organizations didn’t stand against this kind of awkward and backward policy. They started easing their opposition to Arafat’s policies in return of receiving jobs and donations. Along the lines of tribal mentality, they traded principle for expediency. But the
situation was difficult for Hamas and Jihad Islami because they refused to act in a tribal manner. These two organizations were approached several times by Arafat and promised to be given certain privileges if they agree to the negotiations process, but they refused. They always argued that Islamic principles couldn’t be traded for earthly goods.

Due to this tribal form of administration, corruption spread everywhere in the West Bank and Gaza. The most damage has been done to the social and ethical fabrics of the people. This ultimately weakened the Palestinians vis a vis the Israelis. What was also extremely harmful is the total dependence on the Western countries for survival. That was a grave strategic mistake that put the Palestinians under the mercy of others. Only the Palestinians had a sense of this sin after the victory that Hamas achieved in the legislative elections. The Americans and the Europeans decided to halt their financial aid to the Palestinians.

The tribe of Fateh has Fallen, will there be a tribe of Hamas? Most probably yes. Until now, the indications are strong that Hamas will be just another tribal organization that favors its members. The cabinet members are Hamas, the rest of highly qualified Palestinians have not been given a role. It is expected the nepotism and favoritism will be part of Hamas employment policies.

Will Hamas resort to leaders of influential families? Most probably yes. Hamas needs the influential families in order to socially strengthen itself. These families have economic capabilities and have good contacts with important political players in the area such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Some of them maintain good relations with the US and some European countries. For any political activity, Hamas will need these leaders.

It is too early to give conclusions about Hamas and the tribal mentality because it has just started. Hamas needs some time to overcome the difficulties imposed by the Arabs, the Israelis, the Europeans, the Americans and internal tribal enemies. Tribal feuds will consume so much of Hamas efforts. Fateh is unwilling so far to accept the defeat, and some of its figures are ready to cooperate with the Israelis in order to topple Hamas. It is very hard and beyond imagination
for the tribal mentality to respect the outcome of democracy.

VI. Conclusion

From the above analyses, the following conclusions could be drawn:

1. Traditional Arab huge tribes don’t exist in Palestine. There are few extended families, but couldn’t be looked at like other huge tribal aggregations in other Arab countries.

2. Although tribal social structure isn’t a main Palestinian feature, family ties still play a major role in political behavior. At critical moments, members of the same extended family stand with each other regardless of ethical evaluations.

3. Tribal behavior is strongly present in Palestine through tribal education received at different levels. However, the most effective is that education adopted by the Palestinian organizations. The organizations behave in a way to own the members and rob them their individuality.

4. Organizational rivalry is extremely similar to tribal rivalry, and it causes so much harm to the Palestinian people.

5. Instead of strictly observing the values of liberation, the PLO has been observing tribal traditions and habits. Nepotism and favoritism have been destructive and led to the fragmentation of society. Besides, the PLO and the Palestinian Authority have restored the traditional influence of influential Palestinian families who are close to Arab regimes, and have some ties with Israel.

6. It so far expected that Hamas will behave in a way similar to that of the PLO.
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팔레스타인 정치엘리트와 부족주의

사타르

본 연구는 팔레스타인 정치엘리트와 부족주의의 관계를 규명하기 위한 것이다. 즉, 부족과 가문이 정치엘리트의 형성과정에서 어떤 영향력을 갖는지 를 연구하는 것이다. 이 연구에서는 다음과 같은 문제의식을 가지고 출발한다. 부족주의가 정치엘리트를 결정하는데 중요한 역할을 하고 있는가? 만약 그렇다면, 그 영향력의 범위는 어디까지인가?

이 연구의 중요성은 아랍문화에서 부족주의가 정치, 문화,경제적 행동에 큰 영향력을 가진다는 것과 부족주의를 주목하지 않고서는 아랍사사고와 감정에 대한 연구 수행이 불가하다는 데 있다. 아랍세계에서 부족주의는 정치 결정과정에서 중요한 역할을 수행하고 있다. 즉, 일반적으로 부족장이 정책 결정을 하고, 전리를 대변하는 실제적인 대표자이다. 부족의 구성원들은 그 결정을 무조건적으로 수용한다. 이는 민주주의에 대한 키다란 도전을 의미한다. 다른 아랍 국가들에 비해서 팔레스타인 사람들은 부족체계에 관한 경험이 상대적으로 미약하지만, 그들도 여전히 부족적 분위기의 영향력 아래 놓여있다.

이 연구는 팔레스타인의 정치 조직과 구조의 이해뿐만 아니라 팔레스타인의 정치행동을 파악하는데도 매우 중요하다. 만약 부족주의가 팔레스타인에 일반화되어 있다면, 정치적 삶은 대개 부족적일 것이다. 하지만 만약 그것이 완전적으로 실행되어 있다면, 정치적 삶에 대한 영향도 완화할 것이다. 따라서 부족주의는 정치결정을 이해하기 위한 중요한 요소가 된다. 즉, 정치엘리트의 관계는 부족의 영향력 정도에 따라 결정된다고 볼 수 있다.

[주제어: 팔레스타인 해방 기구, 신홍 정치 엘리트, 팔레스타인 부족주의, 팔레스타인 부족, 팔레스타인 정치 조직, 팔레스타인 민주주의]