

Tribalism: the Key to Understanding Arab Society, Present and Future

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The conventional view of sociologists and academics used to be that tribalism would be swept away by the momentous events of the past two centuries as a result of colonialism and the introduction of the capitalist system in countries of the south, including the Arab world; regionalism and its effect on society at the local level; and, finally, the social and economic effects of modernism and globalisation.

Yet today we find that tribalism has endured in the face of these events and, contrary to expectations, has become a significant part of the contemporary scene whether in Sudan (Darfur), Iraq (Al-Anbar and Najaf) or even in

Arabian Gulf states such as Kuwait, where tribal affiliation played a not-inconsiderable role in recent legislative elections.

In the Arab world the consensus of the intellectual and political elite has been that with the onward march of modernism, tribalism would be replaced by other concepts such as citizenship and nationalism. As President Habib Bourguiba ringingly declared on the eve of Tunisia's independence from France, 'You were nothing but fragmented individuals but I will make you into a nation, after we have got rid of tribalism and sectarianism.' Sociolinguists confidently predicted that social class would replace tribalism in the Arab world, drawing on the sociological theory that the feudal and primitive concept of community would fade away with the spread of liberal capitalism.

In this paper I will attempt to sketch the features of tribalism in the contemporary Arab

world through two case studies, one in Darfur and one in Iraq, in the hope that, taken together, these will present a comprehensive view of how tribalism is located in Arab social and political structures. Secondly, I will seek to bring out hidden aspects of tribalism and their continuity, whether in hierarchical or other forms of tribalism. My overriding aim is, thus, to lay bare the foundations of tribalism and ascertain its effects on the workings of Arab society now and in the future.

The Tribal Scene: Past and Present

Tribalism is the innermost building block of Arab communities and the feature that gives Arab society its distinctive character, in the same way that class can be said to be the defining feature of European society. When Jacques Berque entitled his magnum opus *The Arab Maghreb from the 15th to the 19th Century* he was referring directly to tribalism. As a sociological researcher, his lifelong

interest in tribalism stemmed from 1932 when his father, who was a senior French government official during the period of Algerian colonialism, sent him to the remote desert region of Al-Hudna in Algeria. Here Jacques Berque came to know the indigenous (to use an expression beloved of sociologists) tribes of 'the desert and the mountains'.

The behaviour of Jacques Berque's father towards his son is profoundly significant for it reveals the desire of the occupying power to know the innermost secrets of the occupied people in order to tighten its hold on them. To be fair to Jacques Berque, this was not his motivation, but his father's attitude is typical of colonial campaigns that were both military and scientific in nature. The scientific aspect was generally represented by a team of anthropologists and sociologists who prepared the ground for a military victory through information gathering according to well-established field techniques and methods. Although the motivation for these studies was

undoubtedly political and imperialistic, they nevertheless added to the stock of academic knowledge. On this basis tribal surveys were carried out in the Arab Maghreb during the colonial period with the aim of providing the occupying power with the most detailed information of remote desert areas, as well as settled conurbations. The former areas, referred to as *as-seeba*, were generally far from the centre of power and characterised by lawlessness and subversion, while the latter, known as *al-makhzan*, were loyal to the occupying authority and in return benefited from cash handouts and employment.

This was the traditional tribal picture in the Arab Maghreb, which evolved over hundreds of years, but can the same be said for today? Do the same conditions apply to those who wish to penetrate Arab society in order to find its strengths and weaknesses? In order to answer these questions, let us turn our attention to the contemporary situation in the eastern part of the Arab world.

Iraqi Tribalism: Loyalty or Disaffection?

After their invasion of Iraq in 2003, when the American military were faced with the prospect of engaging politically with the 'indigenous inhabitants' (it is noticeable that the terminology has not changed a jot), the decision makers in the American administration became convinced of the need to deal with the subject of the local tribes in order to gain an insight into the Iraqi community. Accordingly, Colonel Alan King, a senior official in the Defense Department, went to Iraq with the delicate mission of forging close links between the American military and Iraqi tribes. The initial area of operations was the region between Tikrit and Kirkuk, strategically important since the oil pipeline passed through it. After this first test phase, sociological researchers such as Ishaq Naqqash and Amizia Karam advised the Bush government not to neglect the tribal dimension

if they wished to tighten their grip on Iraqi society. They added, 'The military victory is easy; much more difficult is to gain control of the community.' These researchers were clearly mindful of the way the tribes (mostly of Arab origin from the Yemen and the Arabian Peninsula) rose up against British colonialism in the 1920s. The power of these tribes was never broken in spite of the thousands of tribesmen killed - a large number by the standards of the time. In 1958 the tribes returned to the fray once again, in opposition to the government of Abdul Karim Qasem, which plotted to deprive them of their traditional lands.

Dealings between the Ba'ath Party and the Tribes

The period of Ba'ath rule was characterised by shifting alliances between the government and the tribes according to the degree of engagement or disengagement between the

party and Iraqi society. The more long-running periods of veiled and secret struggle were interspersed by shorter periods of open conflict. An example of the hidden conflict was the decision by Saddam Hussein to grant the title of sheikh (or head of a tribe) to all those whom the government wished to use against the real sheikhs in order to undermine their authority. The exponential increase in the use of the title had the intended effect of trivialising both the title as well as marginalising its holders, resulting in a loss of their credibility in the eyes of the Iraqi people. The number of titles of sheikh conferred by Saddam Hussein eventually reached 7380, as revealed in the archives of the former regime and considered to be highly useful by the American military in their efforts to gain control of the country.

In point of fact, the list was only of limited use, as Alan King discovered after contacting three thousand sheikhs and realising that only

a hundred of them were tribal heads, if indeed their claims were to be believed.

A second more blatant aspect of Saddam Hussein's dealings with the tribal leaders was his earnest appeal to Iraqis to abstain from using their tribal affiliation in their identities. Saddam Hussein himself set the example by omitting his tribal name of Al-Tikriti and becoming known as only Saddam Hussein. This became the practice for two decades, during the 1970s and 1980s, until external circumstances changed in the 1990s, leading to a change of heart by the government towards the tribal question. The aim now was to restore the bonds between the people (with their tribes) and the Ba'ath party as the country united around the threat of external aggression. Tribalism once more became part of the fabric of daily life, being in evidence on such occasions as wedding feasts and circumcision festivals. Some newspapers supportive of the regime went so far as to praise certain tribal leaders for their valour against foreign

aggressors from the Sumerian era up to the present time.

The picture sketched above of the tribal situation in the modern era is not essentially different from that of 19th-century Algeria. Whether we are dealing with the Atlas Mountains or desert wastes or the banks of the Euphrates, from the west to the east of the Arab world the same elements are always present - colonial (or external) power, national (state) power and tribal (local) power, with patterns of alliance and misalliance constantly shifting according to historical circumstances.

Tribal Allegiance: the Shi'a Tribes in Iraq

The question of allegiance and the relationship between tribe and government differs between Shi'a and Sunni tribes in one important respect, which is that Shi'a tribes have a more tightly woven religious

organisation than their Sunni counterparts. This hierarchical structure gave the Shi'a tribes an immediate advantage over the Sunni tribes right from the outbreak of the war and the beginning of the occupation in terms of bargaining power. Ayatollah Sistani was able to play realpolitik because of the need to weaken those ideologically committed to Saddam Hussein and encourage the hope that supreme power in Iraq could be in the grasp of the Shi'a.

This 'decorous' allegiance with the Americans lasted long enough to see Al-Maliki take power. By giving the Shi'a the opportunity to gain power, even though by constitutional and electoral means, the Americans expected a full-scale civil war, especially since the Sunni had been so cleverly and comprehensively outmanoeuvred by democratic means (elections, constitution, laws, consultative procedures). However after this period of open allegiance between Ayatollah Sistani and the occupier, the Shi'a

tribes began to have reservations about his policy and began to rally around the forces of Moqtada Sadr, thus changing from alliance to misalliance. One could argue that the allegiance between the Shi'a and the Americans was never really interrupted since Al-Maliki's coming to power represented a continuation of that allegiance at least at the level of government. Nevertheless, the conflicts that broke out between Moqtada Sadr's forces and Al-Maliki's police and regular army are indicative of a continuation of disaffection among the Shi'a tribes.

It should be said that the concepts of loyalty and disaffection often overlap and are not entirely separable. The first sign of this was when the first crack appeared in the coalition of Shi'a tribes, with some tribal leaders expressing reservations about the Ayatollah's pro-American stance. The second - and more visible and damaging - rupture was the military stand-off that developed between Al-Maliki as head of the government,

representing a number of tribal groupings in which Shi'a tribes played a restricted role, and the Najaf-based Al-Mahdi army.

Sunni Tribes in Iraq

We previously alluded to the fierce opposition to British colonialism and the high price paid in blood by the tribes at the beginning of the 20th century. From this earlier disaffection, we now turn our attention to tribal allegiances in the succeeding periods, which affected all tribes in the same way.

At the beginning of the occupation some Sunni tribes showed their loyalty when the Shammar tribes proposed that their tribal leader, Ghazi Al-Wa'r, be head of the new regime in Iraq. This post entailed many responsibilities during the transitional period, as well as notional submission to the American occupation. It was said that the Shammar tribe

numbered six hundred thousand but some, like Professor Saad Naji Jawad Al-Saati of Baghdad University, considered that this figure was exaggerated. Whatever the number, the tribes - or at least a good proportion of them - fell into line behind their representative without a murmur of dissent. However, according to press reports after the initial military campaign, when the Americans tried to win over these same tribes, they spurned their overtures and with a great deal of fanfare pledged their allegiance to the Sunni First Minister, Iyyad Al-Alawi.

The same kind of conniving attitude was shown by tribes that released a group of hostages from the clutches of the rebels. In 2004, Sheikh Hisham Najem Al Hassan Al-Dulaimi announced that he would intervene with his tribe (the Muhamada) to free four hostages (two Japanese and two Russians). The tribe was playing the role of local expert with detailed knowledge of the remotest corners of the country as represented by its

wise and all-powerful leader who operated with a mixture of ruthlessness and compassion. The above mentioned, rival of the leader of the two hundred and fifty thousand-strong Bani Aamer tribe in the Rashidiyya region, publicly intervened in front of the European press to resolve a dispute between two branches of this tribe that had erupted over a woman. This in itself shows the extent to which tribalism had infiltrated into society at that time. However, the factor of tribal allegiance was not only operational in the social sphere but also in the political, and sometimes took the form of armed conflict.

A significant number of Sunni tribes signed up to the creation of the Al-Anbar Salvation Council, among whose less publicised aims was the containment of Al-Qaeda. For a large cross-section of Iraqi society, Al-Qaeda constituted a national resistance movement, and some said that this council was set up at the insistence of the Americans in hope of deflecting attacks by Sunni tribes against

American forces towards Al-Qaeda itself. Al-Anbar had been the heartland of resistance against the occupying forces and the Americans also tried to woo the tribal leaders in the province of Salah Ed-Din, traditionally loyal to Saddam Hussein. It is impossible to explicate patterns of shifting loyalties and allegiances in the early years of occupation without factoring in the variables of tribal tactical positioning according to circumstances.

By nudging a large proportion of the Sunni tribes into opposing Al-Qaeda (or what was referred to as 'terrorism'), the Americans hoped to achieve a domino effect, in which increasing defections and in-fighting would lead to a collapse of the tribal coalition.

The Americans encouraged the Sunni tribes to coordinate their efforts by establishing the Al-Anbar Salvation Council, which came into being on 17th October 2006 in Al-Ramadi. As

its political role expanded, the council came to be known as the Sahwa Council, under the leadership of Abdul Sattar Abu Risha, and its jurisdiction was extended to cover Ba'quba in the province of Diyala. The Americans hoped that their tactic of encouraging the Sunni tribes to oppose Al-Qaeda and support the American military would succeed, and their hopes were greatly bolstered when many tribal leaders signed the Tikrit Agreement in the province of Salah Ed-Din (homeland of Saddam Hussein). Their plans received a setback when the new council's president, Sheikh Hamid Ibrahim Salem Al-Jabouri, ran into stiff opposition from tribal leaders from Tikrit itself. Sheikh Al-Jabouri, who was of the Abu Nasr tribe of Biji, summoned a meeting in the Saddam Hussein Mosque in Tikrit at which the attending tribes agreed to exclude the boycotting tribes from participating in the council. A few days later Al-Jabouri's house was destroyed by the Sunni opposition and four of his sons were abducted.

A subsequent leader of the Al-Anbar Salvation Council, Sheikh Ali Hatim Al-Dulaimi, announced that the government would not support united initiatives undertaken by the council, representative of thirty-two thousand Sunni tribesmen of different tribal affiliations in Al-Anbar. The reason was that the government wished to deal directly with the tribes on an individual basis, fearing that negotiations would be difficult with a united tribal block.

These patterns of allegiance and disaffection show the extent to which the tribal factor became part of the Iraqi political scene. We shall see in the section on Sudan how tribal relationships were played out against a background of economic and social factors in the 1970s and 1980s, taking on a more overtly political character in a subsequent phase that was characterised by violent and protracted armed conflict.

Sudanese Tribes: the Economic and Social Imperative

In this section we shall focus on the Darfur tribes, whose numbers vary between five and six million. Darfur tribes can be divided into African and Arab tribes, although this binary classification is overly reductive since the actual situation is considerably more complex. Many tribes are African in origin but Arabic in language and culture, and Islamic in religious orientation. There are also Christian African tribes related to Arab tribes by bonds of intermarriage.

Academic studies unanimously reject the binary classification but reports and other media-based writings that tend towards propaganda adopt a more superficial and reductive approach to the subject.

In order to understand the nature of Sudanese tribalism we must consider the natural environment and living conditions. The ambient environment is characterised by scarcity of water and restriction of cultivation potential because of desertification. The climate is dry and there is a lack of animal pasture. Taken together, the effect of these factors is devastating when we consider that the tribal economy in Darfur depends on peasant farming for settled tribes and animal husbandry and pastoralism for nomadic tribes. It is clear from this brief survey that the main determinant in intertribal relationships is the search for sustenance, often at a minimal level of subsistence.

If education and instruction was generally available at all levels, this would mitigate the harsh conditions of existence, but this is not the case, with only a third of girls and only 44.5% of boys in full-time education. In the absence of educational and cultural support to help overcome the severity of the environment, the productive base is restricted

by the infertile soil and subsistence pastoralism. In short the tribal economy in Darfur is an economy based on self-sufficiency, not open to primary accumulation, which is a prerequisite for a growing economy.

In the light of these economic conditions, it is possible to identify two socio-economic groups in Darfur: settled peasant farmers, who use traditional cultivation techniques, and nomadic pastoralists, who are constantly searching for pastures and water for their flocks of cattle and camels.

The harsh natural environment in which these two groups live out their daily lives is sufficient to account for the outbreak of social tensions among tribes in two respects. Firstly, the fact that existence is primarily at subsistence level, and secondly the lack of adequate cultural and educational support to break the cycle of hunger and thirst. These two external factors - rather than internal

individual or collective attempts at dominance - account for the violent and lawless nature of intertribal relationships in Darfur. Far from being able to practice tribal responsibilities, they are in the remit of the central and provincial governments who need to ensure a minimum nutritional level. Thus we find that the majority of tribal conflicts in Darfur centre on basic issues such as water wells, grazing areas and transhumance or nomadic rights.

These economic determinants of conflict or conciliation, and war or peace between tribes, are essentially the same that govern individual and collective relationships within or between tribes. Disputes arise over control of water resources and ownership of wealth and property - the same critical situations that can be observed in African farming tribes and which face nomadic pastoral tribes.

In the first two decades following independence, social needs were not addressed

through a vertical axis between the centre (Khartoum) and the periphery, but through a horizontal axis of tribal conflict. These conflicts operated on three levels: between African and Arab tribes, within the same type of tribe (according to the complex parameters discussed above) or even within the same tribe. In these two decades, conflict was primarily socially and economically determined and had not taken on political overtones either at intertribal or tribal/governmental levels.

The Pre-political Era: the 'Leopard Man' and Conflict Resolution

Overall, Darfur comprises approximately eighty tribes, of which the principal African tribes are: Massaleit, Dajo, Berti, Zaghawa, Meidob, Mayma, Buju, Tama, Mararit and Tanjur. The principal Arab tribes are Habaniya, Beni Hussein, Zeiyadiya, Beni Helba, Humur, Khuzam, Khawabeer, Beni

Jarar, Mahameed, Djawama, Rezeigat and Ma'aliya. For the previously mentioned reasons, relations between these tribes have always been tense but in the pre-political era disputes centred around mutual plundering and property theft with victory going to the strongest, until the central government stepped in to restore order. However, during this period a number of customs and traditions were in force, especially in the more remote areas.

Disputes and conflicts between tribes or between sections of the same tribe were submitted to the tribal council, which consisted of tribal elders who were wise and sometimes charismatic individuals who used peaceful techniques of amicable persuasion to resolve matters in the public interest. Even if disputants came to blows, the weapons used were traditional ones that had been used down the centuries in tribal conflicts, such as spears, sticks, and bows and arrows. In order to preempt the recourse to force, intermediaries were

often used. Writing of the Nur tribes in Darfur in 1937, Evans-Pritchard discusses the relatively civilised use of a 'leopard man' ie. a man who wore a leopard skin, not as a symbol of force but as a sign that the disputants were prepared to heed his advice to resolve disputes peacefully and amicably, a method of conflict resolution agreed upon by all tribes.

This is not to say that violence was never used in tribal conflicts but simply to point out that peaceful resolution of disputes was the traditional means of promoting intertribal stability in the pre-political era. The onus today is on the national government to restore these values in tribal society through the spread of education from pre-primary to university levels. This is easier said than done, and the introduction of universal education is only part of a massive infrastructural campaign to encourage political development at a local level in order to control the present violence and lawlessness.

Rising Political Tension: the Background

The current topographical and climatic environment in which the Darfur tribes live is conducive to the resolution of conflict by violence of arms, but it has to be said that over the centuries there evolved natural laws that governed life in a desert climate characterised by drought, scarcity of water and the presence of sandy and unproductive soils. However, in addition to natural disasters that overtook the region in a random and haphazard manner, we have to add another factor that has become increasingly serious in recent decades viz. the spread of industrialisation in Western countries, which has created a loss of balance in the environment, particularly in polar and desert regions. The environmental context of the region we are dealing with has, accordingly, become much more complex since we now have to deal with the global as well the local level.

An additional factor that contributed to the rise in political tensions was the influx of automatic weapons into the region. This is a fact seldom commented upon and one is entitled to ask, 'Could this be because the West is the main manufacturer and seller of such weapons?' This is a relevant question since it is the West that dictates whether such issues are raised at a global level. The 'southern' countries generally do not have the means to bring these matters to the attention of world public opinion and herein lies the conundrum. We can attribute the rising political tensions in the region to the area being flooded with lethal weapons but others can reply that they are attributable to climatic and environmental factors such as desertification, drought and lack of water resources, all of which inevitably lead to tribal instability. However, the importation of weapons is a man-made problem that aggravates the situation, while the latter is the work of nature against which man is powerless.

A third factor is that the tribes find themselves in a vicious circle from which they cannot escape. They will only be able to turn their lives around and improve their quality of life through development aid and assistance provided by the central and regional governments. Many surveys and studies indicate that the central government is not doing enough in this regard, but it should be mentioned that the central government itself is surrounded by competing regional states, presenting it with substantial challenges. It is reasonable to suggest that at the very least the national government should limit the ambitions of the great powers with regard to its internal affairs.

Phases of the Crisis

The successive disputes that broke out among the Darfur tribes were indicative of a

tribal phenomenon referred to in some theories as bilateral conflict. According to Robert Montagne, the French sociologist and anthropologist, this bilateral conflict provides a balance of power in the general tribal context, which is achieved by means of mutual surveillance between a tribe and its neighbour. This regime of mutual surveillance can be said to have a political value and we can even say that republican systems are founded on this basis. It is a principle that limits aggression and the spread of injustice. It is not surprising that Robert Montagne talked of 'Berber republics' in his book on the Berber tribes of the Atlas Mountains published in 1927. Montagne postulated a method of tribal coexistence that differs sharply from the rise in political tensions between the tribes of Darfur. It would appear that tribes possess a reservoir of goodwill on which they can draw in suitable conditions in order to ensure conditions of general stability. It is this that has led many to ask, 'Are the political systems in existence today inevitable or could there be some alternative form of government, the key to

which lies in tribal societies, which generally coexist peacefully, except when other contingent factors prevent that?’

Clearly Montagne's model of bilateral conflict cannot be applied in the case of the Darfur tribes since their conflicts have gone beyond two tribes and become multilateral. This hypothesis is confirmed by an account of tribal conflicts in the region, which is multilateral as well as bilateral in nature. In this account we will rely on the work by David Hoyle (see bibliography) that details these conflicts since the 1950s. We will sketch the main features of this process in the light of Hoyle's work, according to the theoretical perspectives of anthropology, sociology and political science.

The decades of the 1970s and 1980s in Darfur were marked by tribal unrest, which was economic and social in nature. 'Social' is used in the sense of a community not

necessarily a polity. Thus we are using the term in its conventional and not its colloquial or literary sense. This clarification is necessary since anthropological and sociological studies tend to give the term 'society' a political dimension (see the work of Pierre Clastres) and even more so in the use of the term 'state'.

The following phase (1990-2003) can be characterised as a political phase since from 1989 onwards tribal tensions began to be described as political conflicts, in particular with regard to the following events:

- 1990: the establishment of the People's Liberation Army under the leadership of Daud Bilad
- 1996: serious conflicts between two major tribes, the Zurayqat and the Zaghawa.
- 1997–1999: serious conflicts between the Massaleit and certain Arab tribes.

The 1990s were marked by the increasing use of weaponry to a much greater extent than in previous decades, as well as the creation of political movements whose programs overlapped with tribal agendas. This second phase was a period in which tribal issues came to dominate the political agenda and whose ramifications began to spread outside Darfur and even outside the borders of Sudan.

During the third and final phase (2003 to the present), tribal conflicts began to take on regional and even international dimensions, with interventions by neighbouring states such as Chad and the Central African Republic, as well as by sister states and organisations (in the form of the League of Arab States and attempts by Libya to narrow the differences between Chad and Sudan in 2007). There were also great power interventions under the pretext of 'the right to intervene' in the name of human rights, a principle proposed by Ronald Dumas, French Foreign Minister in the Mitterand era. This principle is also applied by

Bernard Kouchner, French Foreign Minister in the Sarkozy government.

Lastly, we should mention the initiative of the United Nations, the global forum used by the United States in pursuit of its policy of intervening in all parts of the world, which has led to a serious escalation in the situation in Darfur and still continues at the present time. The regional repercussions of this escalation have led neighbouring states into 'tribal' confrontations that are multilateral in nature, such as the hostilities that broke out between Sudan and Chad as a result of tribal conflicts spilling over their borders. For example, the Salamat tribe, which is African and Muslim, has a presence on both sides of the border in Darfur and Chad. When the situation became critical, the Darfur section of this tribe took refuge with their brothers in Chad. They, in turn, helped form a resistance movement composed of tribal refugees fleeing the harsh conditions of drought and famine in Darfur. Analysts state that factors motivating tribes to

flee from Darfur were twofold. On the one hand, military or semi-military repression such as that carried out by the Janjaweed groups (armed groups composed of Arab tribesmen) and on the other hand, the harsh climatic and economic conditions in Darfur. If we recall the terrible drought in the Darfur region in 1984/5, which resulted in a hundred thousand deaths, we can easily imagine the pitiless landscape where rain does not fall for eighteen months at a time, inevitably leading to competition for scarce resources and tribal conflict. During that drought the mostly Arab pastoral tribes, after their fruitless search for pasture, were forced to settle in the lands of farming tribes, who resisted their incursions by force of arms. A further factor causing tribes to flee was the armed intervention of the central government, leading tribes to seek refuge with their brethren across national borders.

As a result of these tribal displacements, relations between Sudan and Chad have deteriorated sharply and the two countries

have come close to open warfare, with mutual accusations of incitement of tribal unrest and encouraging sedition being traded, not to mention the charges of training and equipping rebel armies. The crisis between the two countries reached its peak when the Chadian rebels took themselves to the seat of President Idris Dibli's government in Chad.

Sudan's relations with several of its neighbouring states have become strained, with forty-eight thousand inhabitants from Darfur fleeing to the Central African Republic and two hundred and thirty-two thousand to Chad (according to United Nations' estimates). Tensions have also spilled over the border into Ethiopia where the Armed Darfur Movement has relocated under the banner of Imra Muhammad Abdurrahman Musa Abu Sirra. These neighbouring states also complained about the failure to treat tribal issues at their economic and social roots through a policy of comprehensive development, without infringing individual or communal freedom so

as to encourage social inclusion through education and acculturation.

The other aspect to this third phase was the international ramification of the situation in Darfur, with the consequent threat to the unity of Sudan and the continuation of the political regime. The Darfur question took on an international dimension when the great powers began to use it to draw up a charge sheet against the Sudanese government. It was even hinted that borders should be redrawn on the grounds that the presence of a single tribe in both Sudan and Chad was inherently destabilising. It was recalled that African tribes had fled to join their brethren in neighbouring Chad in a state of terror, subsequently forming an armed rebel movement. Chad became the launching point for military operations into the Darfur region, at the insistence of Western powers, which helped arm the rebels. This, in turn, provoked the Janjaweed into pursuing them into Chadian territory. Some observers feel that the

deteriorating relationship between Sudan and Chad warrant United Nations or international intervention on the grounds of human rights violations. Justification for such intervention is not hard to find in view of the flight of refugees from Darfur into Chad, the stoking of dissensions in Darfur by the Chadian government and the dire state of relations between Chad and Sudan. The upshot is that the Sudanese regime now faces a charge of genocide and may be required to appear before the International Court of Justice in The Hague.

Summary

The social and economic imperative dictated that the Darfur tribes should be permitted to live in dignity in a secure and stable environment. The fact that this was not provided by the central or regional governments led to an outbreak of tribal disputes, which would previously have been settled by traditional methods. With the

outbreak of armed conflict in the 1990s (the second phase), the situation became politicised and volatile, and from 2003 took on regional and international dimensions (the third phase).

During the long period from 1950-1990, which we have labeled that of the 'economic and social imperative', tribal dissensions could have been addressed if the Sudanese authorities had provided the necessary economic and educational infrastructure, which would have mitigated tribal dislocation. The central argument of my doctoral dissertation (defended in 1991 at Université VII Paris) is that dislocation and disequilibrium in Arab society can generally be traced back to the tribe. The solution, however, is not to destroy the tribe but rather the factors that hinder the dynamic of self-development. Indeed, tribal culture possesses many features that are worth preserving and cherishing, such as honour, chivalry, pride, respect for one's word, loyalty, good neighbourliness and respect for the aged, as

well as traditions of consultation, brotherliness and solidarity in difficult times etc. However, this stock of tribal wisdom was not utilised, nor was the social and economic imperative addressed by means of wise policies with the resultant adverse consequences for the whole of Sudanese society.

The tribal scenario in Iraq differs from that of Sudan because of the factor of national loyalty. This evolved through the long war that Iraq entered into with the West and some of its neighbours under the regime of Saddam Hussein. It is clear that tribalism played a major role in shaping nationalism in Iraq if we accept the current period in which tribes have vacillated between allegiance and disaffection. The common thread between Iraqi tribes - for all their diversity - has been the phenomenon of national resistance. Tribalism has thus risen above its inherent divisiveness and mutated into a kind of social inclusiveness, above and beyond parochialism or the bonds of kinship. In contrast, the scenario in Sudan is murky and

indistinct, in the absence of a national issue around which northern and western tribes can unite. Tribalism might have followed the same route in Sudan if the central government had developed the educational, economic and social infrastructure in Darfur, the effect of which would have been to divert tribes away from their fixation with territorial and kinship issues.

Tribal bonds do not necessarily have to be so close and it is possible to imagine more mixed patterns of intermarriage between the black African tribes and the Bedouin Arab tribes. Accordingly, it is possible to discern at least four types of tribal affiliation in Darfur:

- Originally Arab tribes eg. Djawama, Zeiyadiya, Rezeigat and Beni Hussein
- Assimilated Arab tribes that have adopted Arabic as a means of communication
- Half-assimilated Arab tribes

- African non-Arab tribes that have no contact with Arabic and no intermarriage with other tribes

The above classification of predominantly Arab tribes indicates the direction in which the Sudanese could move, always remembering that a tribe's African roots must be respected and developed through traditions and values that have the effect of leading the individual to adopt the principle of citizenship and the public interest rather than narrow tribal and factional loyalty. The African tribes of Massaleit, Yirti, Mima, Tama and Kanein have a store of tribal culture that could be utilised to fashion a distinctive and multilayered national identity, combining both Arabic and Nilotic linguistic and cultural elements.

Our vision of a future tribal scenario is one in which the national government implements far-reaching reforms while respecting individual and group freedom, including

freedom of expression, freedom of association and employment, based on universal justice free from the negative and injurious regional, factional or kinship alliances, which have had such a deleterious effect on the fabric of society, whether in Iraq or Sudan.

Conclusion

The structure of present-day tribal society as a result of developments over the period 1950-2008 suggests that a traditional schismatic analysis is no longer adequate to explain the complex and mysterious phenomenon of the tribe. The tribe, which is the object of our research, whether in Darfur, or Al-Anbar or Najaf, is that familiar construct in Arab history based on the well-known schismatic paradigm 'I against my brother; my brother and I against my cousin; I, my brother and my cousin against the tribal subdivision.' The schismatic principle has dissolved in the face of new realities, which have outpaced the traditional

tribal mechanisms of conflict resolution. These new realities centre on the competition for economic, political and cultural influence at local, regional, national and international levels.

Over the past half century, the 'old' tribe has been replaced by a 'new' tribe, which participates in elections in Kuwait, contributes to the democratic process in Mauritania and is involved in multi-party systems in Algeria and Morocco. This is testimony to the adaptability of the tribe and its ability to join the trend of modernisation without losing its fundamental values of kinship and territoriality in Arab society, which now attaches less value to the traditional tribal qualities of honour, chivalry, loyalty, respect for religion, reverence for the elderly, courtesy to women, solidarity, respect for lineage and magnanimity.

The Arab tribe has adapted to the trend of modernisation but it has paid a heavy price,

losing its soul in the process. The modern tribesman now has employment and deals with financial and economic matters, learns foreign languages, wears a suit, holds degree certificates, drives a car and is computer literate etc. Which brings us to consideration of the future of Arab society - will it be based on tribalism with its attendant features of group affiliation and noble lineage, or will it be based on class with the advantages it confers of social and economic mobility? Or will it be a blend of the two?

To put it another way, how will tribalism and class intersect in Arab society in the future? How far will this be dictated by external (foreign) influences and how far by internal (adaptive) influences? The class paradigm has a number of defining features: the written contract is privileged over word of mouth, the language of self-interest is privileged over the language of solidarity, utilitarianism trumps aesthetics and the search for power is at the expense of ethics. These are the symptoms of

the liberal model, which is slowly gaining ascendancy. But, meanwhile, tribalism endures in Arab society and shows signs of staying power in the Arab world in contrast to medieval hierarchical structures and tribal and military alliances, which composed the social fabric of European society before the advent of capitalism. The panoply of medievalism was swept away by the Renaissance in the 15th century, the French Revolution of 1789 and the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century, which, taken together, altered the whole basis of society and ushered in a new social order.

Is the class-based society, with its emphasis on the public good and its uncompromisingly materialistic orientation, able to subsume tribalism? Can a tribal/class social model subsist without collapsing under its internal contradictions? In particular, with regard to the Arab world, is it possible to imagine a model in which materialism can coexist with honour and economic assertiveness and concern for lineage and ancestry?

Iraqi history provides some answers with its many instances of tribal groups gaining positions of power and influence in society, in a social rather than tribal manner. In the Ba'ath era the military could be characterised as a social class, although their roots were undoubtedly tribal. And not just in the Ba'ath era but under the regimes of Abdul Karim Qasem, Abdul Salam Aref and Abdul Rahman Aref. Nor was this phenomenon confined to the army; it applied equally to Ba'ath Party members, government administrators and businessmen. The governments that succeeded the fall of the monarchy in 1958 were all based on the twin foundations of the tribe and the army. Abdul Salam Aref (1963-1967) embodied the military hierarchy and had close blood ties with the Jumailat tribe. However, the tribal/class social model is far from an established concept. It is no secret that tribes are in a delicate situation and the temporary alliance of tribalism and class cannot endure for long in the face of the money-power

paradigm. We need look no further than Europe and America, where socially and historically the reality of power has triumphed over idealistic ethical values. All indications are that the historical trend is for power and might to prevail over ethics and culture. We are not in an era of cultural dialogue for the simple reason that the concept of culture is in retreat - especially in Western countries - and not in the process of renewal and regeneration. In short, we are witnessing a struggle between conflicting powers at the global level.

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