Introduction: Tribes and the Complexities of State Formation in the Middle East

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In recent years anthropologists, historians, and political scientists have discovered fruitful opportunities for intellectual exchange and even collaboration in their efforts to understand continuity and change in different societies. Historians and political scientists have turned to the concepts and tools of anthropology to examine certain questions the written record has failed to address. Similarly, anthropologists have taken greater cognizance of the importance of studying the historical record to understand the contemporary cultural and socioeconomic phenomena they encounter in their fieldwork. Today historical research based on documents and anthropological inquiry based on personal observations increasingly complement one another. Such scholarly interactions, as difficult as they are to sustain, have become indispensable to the study of Middle Eastern states and societies.

This volume brings the disciplines of anthropology, history, and political science to bear on a topic that none is adequately equipped to address alone. Although the study of tribes and states has long been a preserve of Middle Eastern anthropologists, historians and political scientists have always had more than a marginal interest in the role of tribes in the construction of major political systems and institutions. Several contributions to this volume vividly illustrate the variety of ways in which the three disciplines have begun to interact. They reach beyond limited historical case studies, narrow legalistic analyses, and anthropological microstudies of specific communities by combining the study of socioeconomic and cultural change with that of political and institutional development over a long historical span.

The focus on tribes and state formation in a Middle Eastern context is significant for at least two reasons. First, for long periods of

history large parts of the Middle East were not effectively dominated by the imperial states that otherwise ruled the region. Although tribes played a significant role in the creation (and, with some exceptions, disintegration) of such Islamic empires as the Umayyad, Abbasid, Fatimid, Ottoman, Safavid, and Qajar states, they also populated and dominated at various times vast areas of the Middle East that did not come under effective Islamic imperial authority; such areas included the Iranian and Turkish plateaus, the Syrian desert, the Arabian Peninsula, the Upper Nile, and the deserts, mountains, and plateaus of North Africa.[1] Only since the mid-nineteenth century have tribal populations in these areas begun to be incorporated, at different speeds and with different rhythms, into the modern states that grew up in the Middle East and North Africa. But, as some of our contributors suggest, tribes did not necessarily cease to exist because states were formed. Even when tribal forces contributed to the formation of states in regions as different as Iran and Morocco, they might remain much as they were in spite of state formation or they might just as easily become different kinds of tribal entities. In fact, it was not uncommon for the very process of state formation to encourage already existing tribes to reach an accommodation with the state authority in order to retain their autonomy or to create new tribes that might organize themselves around other, more dynamic loyalties, especially those associated with ethnicity, thereby enabling them to oppose the state and even seek independence from it.

A second significance of the volume is that it contributes to the efforts of social scientists to bring the "state back into political analysis."[2] Political and institutional studies of Islamic states in the Middle East belong to a long historiographic tradition, dating at least as far back as the fourteenth century and the writings of Ibn Khaldun. However, studies of state formation in the Middle East that are concerned with the state as an autonomous political actor that both instigates and reflects social change are few in number and of recent vintage.[3] Their inspiration derives in large part from the intensive examinations by scholars of state formation in Europe, Latin America, and, most recently, the United States.[4]

Discussions of state formation in the Middle East, however, pose certain difficulties that are not easily resolved. To start with, the term *state* is associated with modern European conceptions and institutions that do not necessarily correspond to Middle Eastern realities, even in the late twentieth century. Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner have written that "the state implies a sovereign authority, a

sovereignty based upon both consent and coercion. The state is associated with a particular bounded territory over which it exercises a monopoly of coercive authority. Legitimacy implies myths and symbols which provide a kind of ideological rationalization and justification for this monopoly of coercive authority."[5] But in the Middle East, the monarchs, military officers, and other elites that have come to power in the twentieth century have faced varying degrees of difficulty in building exclusive monopolies of coercive authority and control largely because they have been unsuccessful in developing the forms of popular legitimacy necessary to support their rule. As a consequence, they have faced opposition and resistance from a variety of social and political forces, including tribes, as the history of Afghanistan in the 1980s would suggest.[6] At the same time, however, the very process of state formation across the Middle East and North Africa during the last century has led to the voluntary or forced breakup of traditional forms of tribal authority and the erosion of old tribal loyalties; the result has been the emergence of new groupings and movements that retain certain tribal characteristics but that are also heavily conditioned and shaped by other factors, including class, ethnicity, and even nationalism.

The important point to underscore here is that the contributors to this volume approach the historical relationship of tribes and states from several different perspectives that suggest a certain tension in current scholarship on tribes and state formation. This tension is reflected to some extent in the different approaches or slants adopted by some of our historians, on the one hand, and several of our anthropologists, on the other. Whereas all agree that there are no examples of a "pure" tribal society in the Middle East, Ira Lapidus and Joseph Kostiner, both historians, adopt a nuanced evolutionary approach in seeking to explain how and why certain tribal societies lacking the dominant political and institutional characteristics of states metamorphosed over the *longue durée* into states. Richard Tapper and Lois Beck, both anthropologists, generally take exception to the notion of an evolutionary sequence in which tribes are precursors of the state; they are more concerned with the coexistence of tribes and states over time and with how far each can be defined in terms of its relations with the other, rather than with the transformation of tribes into states. Indeed, they suggest that although many tribal systems were part of states and manifested certain state structures, rarely were they transformed into states. Bassam Tibi and Lisa Anderson, both political scientists, adopt a third approach. They are mainly concerned with the identity and structure of Middle Eastern

states; they demonstrate how tribes and tribal modes of behavior have exerted influence on the collective identity and decision-making processes of states.

Ultimately, the volume provides an examination of the definition, function, and interrelationship of tribes and states at different times and in different parts of the Middle East, and of the cultural and ideological assumptions behind the different usages of the terms *tribe* and *state* in the specific context of Middle Eastern society and Middle Eastern scholarship. Our contributors examine the continuous interaction of tribes and states, changes in that interaction over long spans of time, the similarities and differences those changes produced across the Middle East region, and the reasons tribal structures and systems continue to be viable in contemporary times, when comparatively powerful Middle Eastern states dominate the region.

When considered as ideal types, there seems to be an incompatibility between tribes and states, particularly nation-states, as Tibi suggests in his essay. Tapper has noted elsewhere, for instance, that "tribal groups in Iran and Afghanistan are conventionally viewed as historically inveterate opponents of the state," and this same view has applied to much of the Middle East.[7] As ideal types, tribes represent large kin groups organized and regulated according to ties of blood or family lineage; states, by contrast, are structures that exercise the ultimate monopoly of power in a given territory. In this normative typology, states require loyalties of a more complex kind than ties of kinship can provide. In Emile Durkheim's words, states are based on a kind of "mechanical solidarity," that is, on the cooperation of a multiplicity of ethnic, economic, bureaucratic, and political groups.[8] To become states, therefore, tribal societies must undergo tremendous changes; basically, they must radically alter their tribal ethos.

The problem with such ideal typologies is that they fail to express a much more complex reality. They adopt a definition of tribes and states, and posit an understanding of their relations with one another, that historical and contemporary evidence from the Middle East fails to corroborate. As Tapper notes, the typology of tribes assumes, for instance, that their members are essentially pastoral nomads and "isolated groups of 'primitives,'" when, in fact, tribes in some regions have been "settled cultivators who had little or no leaning to pastoralism or nomadism." Whereas in western Iran nomadic tribal groups, including some Kurds and Shahsevan, were prevalent, in eastern Afghanistan there existed settled tribal groups, such as

the Pathan.[9] The typology also posits that tribes historically have been "remote from contact with states or their agents" and have existed in a relationship of opposition to each other, when, in fact, "tribes and states have created and maintained each other as a single system, though one of inherent instability."[10]

Because the term *tribe* has been used to describe many different kinds of groups or social formations, a single, all-encompassing definition is virtually impossible to produce. Tapper's essay in this volume underscores the problem of definition by illustrating not only the myriad ways the term has been used but also the ways anthropologists and historians have misused it. He has suggested elsewhere that it is most advantageous to examine tribes at their different levels of organization, "from camp to confederation," and by the different kinds of processes that affect them at each level. He offers some helpful hints in that regard:

> *Tribe* may be used loosely of a localised group in which kinship is the dominant idiom of organisation, and whose members consider themselves culturally distinct (in terms of customs, dialect or language, and origins); tribes are usually politically unified, though not necessarily under a central leader, both features being commonly attributable to interaction with states. Such tribes also form parts of larger, usually regional, political structures of tribes of similar kinds; they do not usually relate directly with the state, but only through these intermediate structures. The more explicit term *confederacy* or *confederation* should be used for a local group of tribes that is heterogeneous in terms of culture, presumed origins and perhaps class composition, yet is politically unified usually under a central authority.[11]

Albert Hourani suggests in his essay that tribes owe their solidarity not to kinship per se but to "a myth of common ancestry." Other contributors to this volume argue that tribal solidarity was often based on a much more complex set of loyalties than kinship, actual or mythical, especially under twentieth-century conditions. Political, social, cultural, ethnolinguistic, and territorial bonds could produce tribal solidarity. Tapper points out that some tribes in Iran never subscribed "to an ideology of common descent, organising as explicitly political local groups with a common leadership." Most tribes, however, "ascribe[d] common descent to all those who, by whatever means, . . . acquired rights in the territory"[12] they inhabited. The ideal typology of tribes has also failed to consider that tribes could exist in different ecological systems, that some could be nomadic and others sedentarized, and that they could even have different ethnic origins. Sometimes tribal segments, such as clans, coalesced on

their own initiative into tribes;[13] at other times tribes might literally be created through state intervention.

In separate studies Dale Eickelman and Paul Dresch have catalogued the various limitations of kinship analysis, more specifically segmentary-lineage theory, as a means for distinguishing tribes from states. Their emphasis is on such features of tribes as cultural distinctiveness and political autonomy and not on segmentation (which posits that members of a segment or kin group are expected to come to the aid of their fellow group members against other groups, in a system of "balanced opposition") and tribal egalitarianism, as emphasized by earlier generations of anthropologists.[14]

Similarly, the ideal typology of the state has been subjected to considerable criticism by historians and political scientists of the Middle East who are no longer satisfied with the notion of the state as a single, monolithic entity that exercises the ultimate monopoly of power in a given territory. They prefer to depict the state as one of a number of social formations whose structures and functions do not necessarily correspond to the model of the modern European state, on which the ideal typology is based. Roger Owen, for one, warns us that although the term *state* "carries with it multiple associations of thingness, or Leviathanness, encouraging us to think of *it* as a single entity, of *it* 'penetrating' something called society, of *it* having capacities, of *it* inhabiting a different area of space from the people it seeks to manipulate and control," its "reality...is much more complex, more fluid and much more difficult to conceptualise."[15] Ronald Cohen suggests that "the state refers to any and all variations in power, authority, structure, and values that support the organizational framework of society."[16] For Tapper, "the existence of territorial frontiers (however vaguely defined), a central government (however weak and limited in its aims) and a heterogeneous population, are enough to define the state. In these terms some confederacies constitute states, while some states operate on the basis of tribal ties, or, in the form of empires, recognise the autonomy of other states and tribes within their territories."[17]

In these and other new definitions of the state, state power, state legitimacy, and judicial sovereignty in a demarcated territory are implicitly regarded as aspirations. All states aspire to such features, but in reality the degree to which they are successful in acquiring them varies. Their legitimacy and territorial sovereignty can only be defined as partial. Different groups within the state or regional and international powers can limit the state's strength in these two spheres. Joel Migdal emphasizes the diversity of society; it is "a mélange of social organizations" in which "the state is one organization

among many."[18] Gabriel Ben-Dor suggests that the state's effective-
ness depends on the historical, cultural, economic, and political cir-
cumstances in which it finds itself at any given time. The strength or
viability of the state, that is, its "stateness," can change over time in
terms of its ability to govern, enforce laws, and accommodate plural-
ism, social mobility, and political representation.[19] Hence, as their
level of stateness changes over time, states accommodate tribes in
varying degrees of social integration and political participation. As
tribes also change over time and form a variety of social categories
within a state, they maintain varying levels of autonomy and subor-
dination. Tribes and states thus form a dialectical symbiosis: they
mingle and sustain each other; each part changes owing to the oth-
er's influence; and sometimes they seek to destroy one another.[20] The
nature of this dialectic emanates not only from tribal military prow-
ess and political organization but also from tribal values and life-
styles and the wide range of influences they exert on society. Even in
the absence of a common definition of *tribe*, some scholars seem to
agree that as a collective, tribal society possesses what Fuad Khuri
calls a "cultural substance,"[21] namely, a typical mode of behavior
and a value system, or what Tapper calls a "state of mind." Because
values and beliefs exist in the abstract, they can have more lasting
endurance than the changing ecological and social conditions faced
by a given tribal society. Tribal values therefore exist and can influ-
ence state and society even if their bearers do not subscribe to a sin-
gle, clear-cut definition of themselves.

    In short, the picture that emerges is much more complex than the
one that is ascribed to ideal typologies of tribe and state. In their re-
lations to states, tribes have acted in various ways. At times they have
fit into the fragmented societies of Muslim empires by linking dis-
tant centers to one another through the provision of important mer-
cantile and military services.[22] At other times, they have hardly fit at
all into the wider social and political systems associated with Islam,
especially as manifested in cities.[23] Occasionally, tribes have inter-
acted with other tribes to form states or, more commonly, with states
to form other kinds of states. Moreover, tribes are just as likely to re-
sist states by acting as antistates as they are to coexist with states.[24]
It is these different permutations that interest the contributors to
this volume.

    Let us first look at the circumstances in which tribal societies ac-
quire more stateness, namely highly centralized political features
that are embodied in statelike institutions. Some anthropologists
and historians have addressed this question from an evolutionary

perspective that emphasizes the formation of chiefdoms (also re-
ferred to in this volume as chieftaincies) in tribal societies. Chief-
doms may be viewed as one type of intermediate political formation
between tribes and states, incorporating some features and institu-
tions of both. Allen W. Johnson and Timothy Earle have written that
chiefdoms "develop in societies in which warfare between groups is
endemic but becomes directed toward conquest and incorporation
rather than toward the exclusion of defeated groups from their
land." Chiefdoms are therefore not sudden creations, nor can they be
explained by a single causal factor. This perspective suggests that
they evolve gradually and in response to changes in the size of popu-
lation, wealth, and production and in their degree of political and so-
cial stratification.[25]

A chiefdom is a relatively homogeneous confederacy by compari-
son to more organized states, which are higher political forms on the
evolutionary scale. But it may also exhibit a certain degree of hetero-
geneity in terms of its origins, culture, and class composition. It is a
power-sharing partnership involving pastoral nomads on the mar-
gins of cultivation, semisedentarized (especially agriculturalist)
tribesmen, occasionally urban dwellers, and a ruler or chief domi-
ciled in a town or in the countryside. In a chiefdom the nomads and
semisedentarized tribesmen are expected to refrain from internal
disruptions and to contribute military forces for protection and ex-
pansion. In return, town dwellers are expected to provide these rural
forces with access to marketing and organized religion. The chief's
function is to supervise the partnership. In chiefdoms the bonds be-
tween the chief and society are not necessarily institutionalized;
they tend more often to be based on personal or ad hoc arrange-
ments. In such circumstances the various societal segments of the
chiefdom, notably the tribes, remain intact and still enjoy a consid-
erable degree of political maneuverability and cultural and eco-
nomic autonomy.

Underlying this evolutionary approach is the notion that chief-
doms are based on a segmentary division of society, in which tribes
or tribal segments are bound together by a common identity based
on kinship. The problem with this approach is that chiefdoms cannot
be defined by kinship alone, given that the chief or ruler is central to
the existence of the chiefdom. In depicting chiefdoms considerably
more attention must be paid to their leadership systems and politi-
cal processes. Clifford Geertz and Fredrik Barth, among others, have
suggested that political motives expressed in symbolic language and
practices are more important than kinship and segmentary lineage
in the creation and maintenance of chiefdoms.

One vital characteristic of chiefdoms, therefore, is the status and role of their chiefs. Tapper has suggested that for a tribal leader to become a chief, he must first combine a certain "moral authority" over his fellow tribesmen with the ability to deliver a "continuous flow" of goods and services to his other followers. "To retain his wider leadership," however, he must eventually establish a "heredi-tary dynasty" or acquire "recognition by a more powerful ruler as the legitimate, official leader of his followers."[26] Here it is important to examine the different economic and social systems that tribes in-habited in order to understand their development into chiefdoms. Tribes that became chiefdoms usually had to be comparatively well-off; they had to produce a regular surplus that could "support a class of leaders" and at the same time attract the interest of more powerful rulers or heads of states, who could offer these leaders offi-cial recognition in return for state access to, or control over, a share of the surplus. Some tribes that became chiefdoms had, according to Tapper, a "long history of at least nominal subordination to sur-rounding states: Ottoman, Safavid and Qajar rulers insisted on a measure of administrative control over the tribes, however indirect," using official recognition of "chiefships to this end."[27] Essays by Ernest Gellner and Steven Caton focus on the reasons and ways tribes and tribal leaders contributed to the formation of chiefdoms, including the needs to combat seasonal hardships, mediate feuds, distribute the surplus, and expand the territory by conquest.

Another characteristic of chiefdoms, underscored in the essays by Gellner and Ira Lapidus, is the importance of religion to their main-tenance. Religious ideology could enhance the legitimacy of the ruler or chief by granting him religious or saintly authority; more-over, infused into the ideology of the chiefdom, it could strengthen existing bonds between ruler and ruled and provide a raison d'être for a chiefdom's expansion. Religion, however, was not always impor-tant in the creation or maintenance of chiefdoms. Most of the chief-doms that arose and fell in the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa over the centuries were not distinguished from their rivals or ene-mies by religion. The rule or mediation of the "saints," therefore, was an exception, although an important one.[28]

Caton, in his essay, evaluates different modes of analysis scholars have adopted in examining the relationship of tribes and chiefdoms by highlighting the central features of each, from the Marxist mode to segmentary-lineage theory. He also critically examines Ibn Khaldun's assumptions and relates them to anthropological studies that are accepting of these assumptions, in particular those of Gellner. Tibi's essay complements Caton's by critically examining lit-

erature in political science on tribes and states. Lapidus enumerates
the frequency of chiefdoms throughout Islamic history and suggests
that many of the conquest movements that resulted in the creation of
empires owed their success to the resourcefulness and expansionary
drive of tribal chiefdoms. Thomas Barfield's essay offers an interest-
ing glimpse into the differences between ecological conditions in In-
ner Asia and in the Arab Middle East; these differences help to
explain why the Turkish and Persian tribes of Inner Asia generated
larger and more durable chiefdoms. Here we may add that chief-
doms in sub-Saharan Africa were also more durable, though not nec-
essarily larger, than those in the Arab Middle East.[29]

Although tribes might coalesce into chiefdoms, they rarely were
long-lived or durable entities. The principal problem faced by chief-
doms was how to endure the powerful fluctuations and disruptions
that occur over time in any human society. In the absence of a strong
central authority, clearly defined territorial boundaries, and popula-
tion with a cohesive value system, chiefdoms could hardly cope with
dramatic upheavals and change. Several essays in this volume sug-
gest that their fragility was inherent, for two reasons.

First, there was the unstable nature of the chiefdom, with its weak
or nonexistent institutions. It served only limited purposes—
shouldering existential hardships and minor territorial expansion.
Only a minimal government and a fragile alliance among tribes and
between them and their chiefs undergirded the chiefdom. Beyond
this, the spectrum for instability was vast. Because the bonds be-
tween tribes in a chiefdom and their chief were personal and ad hoc
in nature, they could be rendered defunct or rescinded any time one
party deemed the partnership unsatisfactory. Tribes might defect
from the alliance, or they might withhold recognition of a particular
chief or openly defy him; at the same time, chiefs could manipulate
tribes and play them against one another. Consequently, chiefdoms
were unstable entities with limited staying power.

A second trait that created difficulties for some chiefdoms was
their tendency to expand. Barfield places greatest emphasis on the
existential necessities that urged chiefdoms, particularly in Inner
Asia, to fight one another and expand by conquest. Lapidus posits
that either a fundamentalist or a Sufi (mystic) brand of Islam loomed
behind expansion. There is no real contradiction in these two kinds
of explanations, however; it was not uncommon for conquests for
control of trade and agriculture to be intertwined with expansionary
drives in the name of religion. No less a student of tribe-state rela-
tions than Ibn Khaldun argued that tribal solidarity (*'asabiyya*) was

most effective in the establishment of alliances and as a force of conquest when it was infused with religious ideology.[30]

During expansion, and especially after it peaked, the anomalies of many a chiefdom surfaced as their minimal and unstable governmental arrangements proved unfit to cope with the challenges of expansion. The most serious challenges posed by the acquisition of new territories and peoples were the need to regulate the culture, economy, and political life of newly conquered areas, to integrate them into the dominant administrative system, and to keep the entire realm from disintegrating after the peak of expansion was reached and the anticlimactic routinization of life set in. An Ibn Khaldunian apocalypse, in which tribal 'asabiyya eventually undermined the chiefdom, haunted chiefs. Thus, chiefs with a vision of longer-lasting edifices turned to new strategies. They needed to replace the precarious foundations on which expanded chiefdoms rested with new ones. H. A. R. Gibb's analysis of the evolution of government under the Umayyad Caliph Hisham (724–743) offers a typical characterization of the evolution of chiefdoms into states. After years of expansion, Hisham had to channel the expansionist forces within his domain by directing their energies toward state building; he had to strengthen the institutions of the Islamic Empire to enhance its stability and thus extend its duration.[31] Although only partially successful, Hisham provided a model for ambitious chiefs. Their mission became one of overcoming the limitations of chiefdoms by transforming them into more fully developed states.

It was when chiefdoms established themselves in cities and drew on urban financial and human resources that they became something different. Expansion led to the incorporation of new populations, territories, and sources of wealth in a chiefdom; consequently, tribal society became increasingly stratified. In such circumstances political and economic power might become centralized in the hands of the chief and emerging regional elites, who were often linked to him by a mix of kinship and socioeconomic ties. The demands of warfare, distribution, and trade created the need for centralized control, as distinct from centralized management.[32] Occasionally, chiefdoms became imperial states. In time, rulers became stronger than their tribal allies. They established new, more centralized institutions to administer their enlarged territories. They replaced tribal forces that conquered these territories with standing armies. They began to emulate the imperial traditions and practices of earlier non-Muslim empires, such as Byzantium and Sasanid Persia. Lapidus illustrates how Islamic empires from the Umayyads to the Ottomans and Safavids evolved in this fashion. Gellner stresses the

critical role of military-administrative elites (his *"mamluk* solu-
tion") in the evolution of chiefdoms into imperial states. Because
these slave elites were not bound by kinship or blood ties, they could
be completely loyal to their rulers and hence were instrumental in
maintaining control and in expanding the frontiers of large states
such as the Ottoman Empire. Lapidus again highlights how Islam
continued to function as a force for empire building, which gave em-
pires both ideological legitimacy and a sense of continuity with their
tribal past. Governments became more bureaucratic and militarily
centralized. But the dynastic nature of their leaderships still re-
quired consultations with next of kin at the highest governmental
level. Interestingly, these empires housed a mix of tribal formations.
In fact, both tribes and chiefdoms were more likely to coexist and
coevolve with states and empires than they were to evolve into states
and empires.

One pattern of state formation involved tribes on the margins of
the different imperial states in the Middle East. In the peripheral
desert and mountain regions, where central government could not
reach, autonomous tribal organizations not only survived but were
even granted semiofficial recognition by the imperial government. At
different times, such tribal confederacies dominated Kurdistan, the
Arabian and Syrian deserts, and the desert and mountain areas of
North Africa. Although their distance from the centers of these em-
pires allowed them sufficient autonomy in which to develop their
own independent governing structures, the most successful among
them became only chiefdoms and not fully developed states, whether
in Arabia, along the Upper Nile, or in North Africa. They engaged in
conquests, which they justified occasionally by religious motives.
These were typically articulated by a religious reformer who emerged
from within the tribe or connected with it. Prominent examples in-
clude the first Saudi state (1744–1822), the Mahdiyya in the Sudan
(1881–1898), and the Sanusiyya in late nineteenth- and early
twentieth-century Libya. As a consequence, they formed what Bar-
field calls "regional states." These states were rarely long-lived, how-
ever; inevitably, they ran up against the superior forces of the
imperial state on whose frontiers they had established themselves.
Some regional states were destroyed; others found only limited op-
portunities to consolidate their expansion and never became any-
thing more than chiefdoms. Because they remained isolated from
Ottoman and European imperial influences, these chiefdoms were
not inspired to transform themselves into something else.[33] Paul
Dresch's essay demonstrates in the case of the Yemen imamate that
such tribal formations or polities did not develop according to a lin-

ear process. The local chronicles he exploits suggest just how
ephemeral the Yemen imamate was. In the absence of any recogniz-
able forces of stability, the imamate tended to take form and then
disintegrate quite rapidly. Dresch's analysis would seem to have ap-
plications in other regions of the Middle East and North Africa
where tribes existed on the margins of large imperial states.

Tribal formations not only existed in those areas beyond state con-
trol but were also prevalent in rural districts over which the state
could adopt a form of indirect rule.[34] Tapper has written that
"stronger rulers would control the tribes by nominating leaders,
keeping chiefly members as hostages, establishing marriage alli-
ances between chiefly and royal families, executing dissidents, or
fostering dissension between rivals for leadership or between
neighbouring tribes." In such circumstances tribes might accept in-
direct rule, resort to armed resistance, or try to avoid central control
by relocating or reducing their production to a bare subsistence level
so as to dampen the state's interest in extending its authority.[35]

These vast, pluralistic imperial states were obliged to accommo-
date within them different religious and ethnic communities, profes-
sional organizations, and groups bound by ties of region and
descent. Indeed, group identity was shaped by the ties of particular
communities to the different religious, professional, regional, or
descent-bound groups that were characteristic of these empires. Im-
perial states such as the Ottoman Empire and Safavid (and later Qa-
jar) Iran were characterized by a shifting balance of power between
tribal and ethnic groups, on the one hand, and bureaucratic and
slave institutions, on the other. The tension produced by this shifting
balance could at times be creative, though it could just as easily be
destructive.

As the twentieth-century successor states emerged from the Otto-
man Empire, the tension between tribes and central government
could still be detected, though it was expressed in new ways. In the
regions over which the imperial state had exercised effective rule
(Turkey, Syria, Palestine, and, to some extent, Iraq and Libya) or
where European colonization replaced that rule (Algeria, Tunisia,
and Egypt), the foundations of the modern states were built on the
old imperial framework of institutions or on the new colonial or-
der.[36] In addition, tribal formations still persisted as chiefdoms, par-
ticularly in the desert and mountain peripheries where they
remained beyond the reach of the Ottoman and Iranian governments
and where they continued to thrive and to maintain the traditional
cultural basis for their group identity. For instance, the Ottomans

adopted a policy in the last decades of the empire to sedentarize the
nomadic and seminomadic tribes by force or by financial induce-
ments in order to bring greater stability and state authority to the
countryside. Britain, France, and Italy not only encouraged this pol-
icy in the former Ottoman territories they occupied but also en-
hanced it by playing the countryside against the towns, and the
nomadic and seminomadic tribes against the new, urban-based na-
tionalist elites. This policy could be seen most vividly in the case of
the British in Iraq and Transjordan in the years between the two
world wars, but it is also apparent in Syria under the French.[37] By the
time that most of the newly independent states had emerged in the
aftermath of World War II, such policies had actually helped to pre-
serve and even reinforce certain tribal societies. Consequently, as
newly independent states attempted to impose their hegemony, they
faced considerable difficulty bringing central government to all cor-
ners of their territories. Not surprisingly, the urban-based national-
ist elites who came to govern these independent states retained the
generally hostile attitude toward the tribes that earlier generations
of town dwellers had expressed, one that spoke in pejorative terms of
the "tribal problem" and that deemed the tribes unruly and "savage"
and therefore in need of rapid incorporation into the state system.[38]

Beck's essay underscores the persistent tension between tribes
and states and the new ways it expressed itself in Iran. She illus-
trates how the Qajar and especially the Pahlavi governments used
the military might of the state to weaken autonomous and some-
times rebellious tribal groups. To impose state authority over the
countryside, these governments even created "tribes" by combining
different rural groups. Moreover, they commonly turned tribal lead-
ers into government agents. But governmental dependence on tribal
infrastructures in the armed forces and in the tribal areas only
served to bring greater vitality to tribes and tribal identities.

Beck illustrates how the Pahlavi dynasty in Iran harbored a per-
ception of the modern state and sought to introduce reforms in the
areas of education, finance, and economic infrastructure. The
Pahlavis also propagated a nationalist ideology, one that regarded
tribes as backward elements that stood in the way of the state's ef-
forts to control remote areas of the country and impose a national
identity throughout Iran. The Italians, as Anderson suggests, re-
garded the tribes of Libya in much the same manner as the Pahlavis
did those of Iran. Kostiner shows in the Saudi case that the tribes
were part of a formidable expansionary force on which the Sa'ud
family depended until the process of consolidation required them to
be subjugated by force to a centralizing, urban-based administra-

tion. In Yemen Dresch describes how the Imam Yahya set out to strengthen his rule by reinforcing his family's grip on the state's provinces and by taking hostage family members of recalcitrant tribal chiefs.

The important point these contributors all underscore is that the new states failed to form completely centralized bureaucracies and therefore a monopoly of authority. The transition period from empires or chiefdoms to modern territorial states was either too short or too abrupt and uncomfortably fashioned from European models of state formation. Consequently, the new states still reflected certain tribal habits and had to accommodate a certain measure of tribal power. In Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Libya, tribes constituted the main element in the peripheral areas of each country. In Yemen the tribes were strong, autonomous forces that played a major role in determining the outcome of the civil war in the 1960s. In Saudi Arabia and Iran, tribes suffered military defeat, yet they still maintained considerable control over their internal affairs. Tribal chiefs in Iran even became the linchpin of regional administration in rebellious peripheral districts.

In the decision-making sphere, patrimonial practices evolved in several Middle Eastern states. The absence of centralized planning, administrative appointments based on kinship ties, and ad hoc taxation arrangements characterized the situation in Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Yemen until the 1960s. Pahlavi rule in Iran was considerably more institutionalized, though it was not free of domestic societal pressures, including tribal ones.

The new states that emerged in the twentieth century had to adapt to borders that had not previously existed. Encouraged by the European powers, several states signed treaties among themselves in the 1920s and 1930s demarcating these borders. Nonetheless, the frontier territories became particularly difficult to administer; their inhabitants were not willing to surrender their autonomy to a new central authority that wished to establish sovereignty over them. Moreover, neighboring states also treated the inhabitants of these frontier regions as part of their own constituencies or as agents through whom to extend their influence into the other state. Frontier areas thus became hubs for domestic and interstate rivalries, in which local tribes were often found maneuvering among the surrounding governments. Territorial sovereignty as such hardly developed in Saudi Arabia and Yemen until the second half of the twentieth century, when frontier disputes began to ease.

The new states described in this volume have been unable to develop fully integrated communities along the lines of the European

nation-state. Tibi suggests in his essay that throughout much of the Middle East the term *nation-state* is only a nominal cover for a mé-lange of ethnic groups and tribes with different kin-based, regional, and linguistic and cultural identities. Governments clearly have attempted to integrate these groups more effectively by introducing new means of transportation and communications to bring society closer together and by applying a uniform law and religious doctrine to establish general norms of public behavior. In Iran, new dynamics have altered the structures of some tribes, created other tribes, and made some tribes adopt the dominant ethnic and cultural identity of the state. In Saudi Arabia, the royal family has become a cluster of tribal segments; it is heavily intermarried and bound by its elite interests, but it has not been completely successful in imposing a single, unitary identity upon Saudi society. The state identities that emerged after mid-century in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Libya have been based more on "compliance" with the state's existence rather than on modern legitimizing forces.

Several Middle Eastern states have experienced over the past forty years dramatic, even revolutionary changes that have greatly enhanced state formation and altered tribe-state relations in particular. In Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Libya such changes were generated by rather sudden infusions of vast oil revenues, which encouraged rapid urbanization, the spread of modern education, and even industrialization. In Yemen, Libya, and Iran there were revolutions: in Yemen a military coup in 1962 led to an internal war that lasted almost a decade; in Libya the military coup of 1969 sparked substantive ideological and social changes; and in Iran the Islamic revolution of 1979 destroyed the ideological foundations of the Pahlavi state. New social and economic formations and ideological commitments replaced traditional parochial loyalties and sentiments. But the values of tribal society kept affecting states. Indeed, from the perspective of the state, modernization and rapid social change were often counterproductive in that tribes were given a renewed role through their participation in the conflicts these changes inevitably produced.[39]

The essays in this volume illustrate that behind each case of state formation special circumstances loomed: massive European, Turkish, or Arab intervention and sometimes occupation, world and regional wars, and the economic changes and upheavals caused by Western imperialism and vast oil revenues. These forces changed the rules of the game for chiefdoms, forcing them either to strengthen their state functions or dissolve.

Some chiefdoms even established administrations that embraced
specifically defined territories, integrated rival segmentary groups,
and created the foundations of state legitimacy. Kostiner, Anderson,
and Dresch demonstrate that state building was a dialectical pro-
cess: brief periods of sweeping change were followed by longer peri-
ods of adjustment and absorption. Saudi conquest and expansion in
the 1920s, the rapid injection of oil wealth in the 1970s, and the intro-
duction of a populist-nationalist ideology in Qaddafi's Libya in the
1970s (which was also accompanied by vast oil wealth) were such
sweeping periods of change. The establishment of central and cen-
tralizing governments coupled with new opportunities for economic
growth and social mobility not only created some movement toward
national integration (more in Saudi Arabia and Libya than in Yemen)
but also strengthened the territorial integrity of these states. In
some instances ethnolinguistic loyalties expressed in the new lan-
guage of modern nationalism supplanted traditional forms of tribal
authority, as in Iran; these new loyalties at times undergirded expan-
sionary states, and at other times they formed the basis of opposi-
tion and resistance to states.[40] In other instances tribal and sectarian
identities mixed to form subnational movements; the 'Alawis of
Syria, as Tibi illustrates, are such a tribe-sect. For the first time the
forces of urbanization, modern transportation and communications,
and nationalism created new forms of social interaction and bond-
ing. But, as we have suggested, these same external forces encour-
aged not only state formation but also tribal formation within these
states, which could preserve and even strengthen older tribal loyal-
ties. As Beck and other contributors to this volume posit, tribal for-
mation was much more likely to coexist and coevolve with state
formation than tribes or chiefdoms were to create states.

Bursts of rapid change were often followed by protracted periods
in which adjustments and accommodations to these changes could
take place. Here tribalism could play a significant role. Tribal
groups, after all, were among the autonomous elements at whom the
centralizing and modernizing reforms initiated by the state were di-
rected. Their tendency was to try to slow the reforms down in order
to maintain their autonomy. By reasserting familiar tribal traditions
and practices, tribes buffered society against the abrasive waves of
change. Although they could not nullify reforms, they could help to
modify them and thus render change more acceptable to society.
"Primordial groups," to offer a variation on a Geertzian theme, not
only disturbed the formation of new states; they also helped these
states undergo change by providing a practical and symbolic coun-

terbalance that eased the process of state expansion. The ways this happened differed, of course, from country to country. In Libya and Yemen, where governments could not dismantle the tribes, they had to compromise with them at the policy-making level. In Saudi Arabia the patrimonial values of tribalism constitute the bases for group identity and enable both rank-and-file tribesmen and the royal family to preserve that identity. For example, both have been able to employ tribal practices to shortcut bureaucratic procedures.

New forms of patron-client relations have grown up in these states. They play an important role alongside bureaucratic practices in facilitating the distribution of goods and services among the population and in harnessing popular political support behind leaders. Such relations are rarely based on ties of kinship alone but rather are a mix of kinship, class, and political interests.

It is important to reemphasize here that tribal societies rarely formed modern states, though they were often significant contributors to Middle Eastern state formation. Indeed, many Middle Eastern states today still contain tribal societies within them, but tribal states as such do not exist in any meaningful sense of the term. Rather, tribes are one of several dynamic forces that have contributed to state formation. In the Middle East, tribes might be forced to reach an accommodation with the state simply to survive; they might apply leverage on the state to enhance their opportunities vis-à-vis other competitive groups or organizations living within or alongside an expanding state system; or they might try to resist incorporation within the state system and, if successful, even create their own independent governing institutions.

States that contain, or coexist with, tribal societies have encountered difficulty developing the efficient administrative machineries and compelling ideologies necessary to achieve legitimacy. Instead, they have depended heavily on physical and psychological coercion to expand their control. Although such states have acquired powerful repressive apparatuses, tribal practices have provided a practical and symbolic counterweight to state coercion. The degree of legitimacy attained by many Middle Eastern states has depended on the government's ability to establish broad, effective societal coalitions in the service of state ideology. To draw on Alexandre Passerin d'Entrèves, states that seek to incorporate tribal societies wish to create an arrangement between government and society that converts "force into authority," that is, to minimize the abrasive effects of governmental power on society.[41] Rather than framing the contract in terms of sovereignty and natural rights, however, it is framed in

terms of tribal concepts relating to the distribution of power among the tribes and between them and the central government.

Unlike the imperial states of Europe and the Middle East, tribal societies have not generated highly developed theories of statecraft. Even the theory of the caliphate, as epitomized by al-Mawardi, is not directly applicable in tribal societies. Although there has been an absence of theory, tribal societies have nonetheless evolved over the centuries their own ways of legitimizing themselves through the formation and management of coalitions.

Hence, modern states that have emerged in societies in which tribes are not marginal have left a special mark on the Middle East. They have not conformed to models of state formation as known in the West because they have not developed the kinds of legitimizing institutions and ideologies that have been common in the West. Similarly, tribal societies have not evolved into modern nations as in Europe or in certain parts of the Middle East itself, as Tibi suggests in his essay. Nor have tribal societies assumed the classical characteristics of the Islamic *umma*, or community of believers, which transcends the concept of the tribe.[42] Rather, they have been built on a series of coalitions that formed over long periods of time and occasionally also generated the institutions of central government. Here the formation of chiefdoms was a much more common occurrence than the formation of states, but even these enjoyed rather limited life spans.

This volume aims for a fuller understanding of the complexities and particular patterns of state formation in regions where tribes have exercised significant influence. One of its central concerns is the continuing viability of tribal structures and systems in contemporary times, within contemporary nation-states. It offers some hypotheses and answers as to why these polities have managed to survive and what impact they have had on modern states. And it points out directions for further research on this important topic.

NOTES

1. As Hodgson has noted, these regions were not hubs of civilizations. Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago, 1974), 2:69–78.

2. Ghassan Salamé, Introduction to Salamé, ed., *The Foundations of the Arab State* (London, 1987), 1:1. Also see Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (New York, 1985).

3. For example, Richard Tapper, ed., *The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan* (London, 1983); Gabriel Ben-Dor, *State and Conflict in*

the Middle East (Boulder, Colo., 1983); Lisa Anderson, *The State and Social Transformation in Tunisia and Libya, 1830–1980* (Princeton, 1986); John Davis, *Libyan Politics: Tribe and Revolution, Society and Culture in the Modern Middle East* (London, 1987); John Wilkinson, *The Imamate Tradition of Oman* (Cambridge, 1988). The plenary session of the Twenty-third Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association of North America, Toronto, 15–18 November 1989, was devoted to new ways of thinking about the state in the Middle East.

4. For example, Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge, 1979); Charles Tilly, ed., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, 1975); Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol, *Bringing the State Back In.*

5. Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner, eds., *The State, Religion, and Ethnic Politics: Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan* (Syracuse, 1986), p. 7.

6. Banuazizi and Weiner, *State, Religion, and Ethnic Politics*, p. 8.

7. Richard Tapper, Introduction to Tapper, *Conflict of Tribe and State*, p. 4.

8. See the discussion by Ernest Gellner, "Cohesion and Identity: The Maghreb from Ibn Khaldun to Emile Durkheim," in Gellner, *Muslim Society* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 86–98.

9. Tapper, Introduction, p. 47.

10. Tapper, Introduction, pp. 4, 8.

11. Tapper, Introduction, pp. 6, 9.

12. Tapper, Introduction, p. 66.

13. Tapper defines a clan as "a group of people, part of a larger nation or ethnic group, who claim common ancestry, though without necessarily being able to trace it." A clan "may be seen as the cultural or ideological dimension of tribes and their sections, when they are politically-defined groups." Introduction, p. 10.

14. Dale F. Eickelman, *The Middle East: An Anthropological Approach*, 2d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1988), pp. 126–150; Paul Dresch, "The Significance of the Course Events Take in Segmentary Systems," *American Ethnologist* 13 (May 1986); Paul Dresch, "Segmentation: Its Roots in Arabia and Its Flowering Elsewhere," *Cultural Anthropology* 3 (1988):50–67.

15. Roger Owen, "State and Society in the Middle East" (Plenary address to the Twenty-third Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association of North America, Toronto, 15–18 November 1989). The editors wish to thank Dr. Owen for permitting us to quote from his address.

16. Ronald Cohen, Introduction to Ronald Cohen and Elman R. Service, eds., *Origins of the State* (Philadelphia, 1978), p. 2.

17. Tapper, Introduction, p. 11.

18. Joel S. Migdal, "A Model of State-Society Relations," in Howard J. Wiarda, ed., *New Directions in Comparative Politics* (Boulder, Colo., 1985), p. 47.

19. Ben-Dor, *State and Conflict*, pp. 1–34.

20. Maximal stateness means a centralized, bureaucratized administration that permits little autonomy for tribal groups; it means that the society

acknowledges the state's legitimacy over a clearly demarcated territory with established frontiers and that it is fully assimilated into a single nation, with the state being the embodiment of the society's collective will. Minimal stateness, by contrast, means a highly decentralized state authority that permits vast autonomy for tribal groups who do not accept state authority over the territory within the specific borders claimed by the state and who do not subscribe to the same ideological precepts that the state wishes to impose on the society. In the Middle East, because the degree of stateness varies widely between maximalist and minimalist, interactions between states and tribal groups also vary widely. In general, however, modern state identities are considerably diluted in comparison to those in Europe because they remain based both on ascriptive, parochial loyalties and on categorical, national ones. This is bound to be the case where political coalitions among tribal segments are fostered by intermarriage but also are influenced by state-initiated integrative policies, such as the application of a uniform law, religious norms (even revivalist norms), and a national ideology to the society as a whole. See Migdal, "Model of State-Society Relations."

21. Khuri made reference to "cultural substance" in the brief paper he presented to the conference that led to this volume.

22. Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, 2:62–151.

23. Eickelman, among others, has taken issue with Gellner's theories accounting for "how presumably acephalous and egalitarian tribes organized by segmentary lineages coexisted with the inegalitarian and stratified social order of the cities and states of the [Middle East] region." Eickelman, *Middle East*, pp. 137–138; Gellner, "Political and Religious Organization of the Berbers of the Central High Atlas," in Ernest Gellner and Charles Micaud, eds., *Arabs and Berbers: From Tribe to Nation in North Africa* (London, 1972), pp. 25–58; Gellner, "Flux and Reflux in the Faith of Men," in Gellner, *Muslim Society*, p. 185.

24. Eickelman, *Middle East*, p. 130.

25. Allen W. Johnson and Timothy Earle, *The Evolution of Human Societies: From Foraging Group to Agrarian State* (Stanford, 1987), pp. 21–22.

26. Tapper, Introduction, pp. 54–55, 57.

27. Tapper, Introduction, p. 60.

28. Tapper notes that in Iran and Afghanistan, when religious leaders were able to unite large groups into confederacies, "the hope of material gain and the absence of material cause for conflict" were often more important factors than religious ideology. Introduction, p. 50.

29. Eickelman, *Middle East*, p. 130.

30. This is one of the main theses presented by Ibn Khaldun in *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Frantz Rosenthal (Princeton, 1967).

31. H. A. R. Gibb, "The Evolution of Early Government in Islam," in Gibb, *Studies in the Civilization of Islam* (London, 1962), pp. 34–45.

32. Johnson and Earle, *Evolution of Human Societies*, pp. 244–245.

33. Yitzhak Nakash, "Fiscal and Monetary Systems in the Mahdist Sudan, 1881–1898," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 20 (August 1988):365–385.

34. It is doubtful that tribal formations existed in the main urban centers. Certainly, kinship units were (and are) important in cities, but what was lacking was precisely the kind of authority we have associated with chieftainship. In cities, chieftainship only came into being in a condition of political anarchy and social disintegration. Beirut in the 1980s is one contemporary example of city-based chieftainships.

35. Tapper, Introduction, p. 54.

36. See Albert Hourani, "The Ottoman Background of the Modern Middle East," in Hourani, *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East* (London, 1981), pp. 1–18.

37. For example, Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton, 1978), pp. 63–152; Mary C. Wilson, *King Abdullah, Britain, and the Making of Jordan* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 85–102; Philip S. Khoury, "The Tribal Shaykh, French Tribal Policy, and the Nationalist Movement in Syria between Two World Wars," *Middle Eastern Studies* 18 (April 1982):180–193.

38. Tapper has written that "the general view of tribal society among contemporary writers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries opposed it to settled urban society, the civilised Islamic ideal. While the city was the source of government, order and productivity, the tribes had a natural tendency to rebellion, rapine and destruction, a tendency which might be related to the starkness of their habitat and its remoteness from the sources of civilisation, and also to the under-employment inherent in their way of life. Such a view has some justification, but it is superficial and over-simplified." Introduction, p. 6.

39. Milton J. Esman and Itamar Rabinovich, eds., *Ethnicity, Pluralism and the State in the Middle East* (Ithaca, 1988), pp. 3–24.

40. Banuazizi and Weiner, *State, Religion, and Ethnic Politics*, pp. 3, 19–20.

41. Alexandre Passerin d'Entrèves, *The Notion of the State: An Introduction to Political Theory* (Oxford, 1967).

42. Joseph Kostiner, "State and the 'Crisis' of Legitimacy in the Arab World" (Paper presented to a joint session of the Emile Bustani Middle East Seminar at MIT and the Harvard Center for International Affairs Middle East Seminar, Cambridge, Mass., 7 April 1988).