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Prospectus

The Effects of Tribal Identity in Jordan

Introduction

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan as it is today is unlike its nineteenth century counterpart of Transjordan as it was under the Ottoman Empire. The harsh climate and weak economic prospects discouraged economic, political, and agricultural cultivation of the area, and the Ottoman Empire left Transjordan without any meaningful centralized government until its "imperial self-rejuvenation" project reached Transjordan in the 1860s, and the empire started pushing groups to settle in the region[1]. As such, tribes dominated the economic, political, and social spheres and tribal identity surpassed any feelings of a national identity. Pastoral nomadism was a large source of income for nomadic tribes such as the Bedouins, but a smaller percentage were artisan-traders who traveled and acted as a bridge between peasants and nomads through bartering[2]. Additionally, affluent tribes such as the Bani Sakr served as a protection squad for Ottoman state convoys. Meanwhile settled tribes, including the Shraidah, the Nusayrat, and the Khasawnah, were under strong leadership by the hand of the Sheiks and established a dominant tribal culture in the communities they built, which highlighted "noblesse oblige", the "obligation of honorable, generous, and responsible behavior associated with high rank or birth"[3][4]. In an attempt to understand tribal identity in Jordan and its evolution from the fall of the Ottoman Empire to the modern age, my research question is as follows: How does change in tribal identity over time affect state capacity and regime legitimacy in Jordan?

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[1] Robins, *A History of Jordan*.
[2] Robins.
[3] Robins.
[4] "Noblesse Oblige." 2022

The fall of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I brought on the creation of new governments across the Middle East, one of these being the establishment of the Emirate of Transjordan by Abdullah I bin Al-Hussein who was installed by Great Britain, and during this transition period the task at hand was creating autonomous administrations throughout Transjordan in Ajlun, Salt, and Karak operated by British officers and led by local councils[5]. However, the attempt at an autonomous administration at the hands of the British was preceded by the imperial self-rejuvenation project of the Ottoman Empire. Fully reaching Transjordan in the 1860s, the project had some success in establishing administrative districts in the north and partnered well with tribes due to their common goal of defense and economic security and this resulted in the settlement of new villages made up of refugees, local peasants, and sharecroppers. But the fall of the Ottoman Empire and its rejuvenation project and subsequent switch to the British autonomous administrations was not a successful recipe for creating a system of reliable local governments within Transjordan[6].

State building in Jordan is nuanced due to the blurred borders around the Levant after World War I and, consequently, various coexisting identities within the region and in Transjordan, specifically. The north, south, and east regions of Transjordan had cultural and political overlaps in Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq, respectively, and from 1948 to 1967 Jordan maintained control over the West Bank, so once Abdullah I became Amir, he began the state building process with the help of tribes who, despite not holding a strong national identity, began to support him due to his Hashemite lineage[7].

The establishment of Israel provided greater momentum for Palestinian nationalism which intervened in Abullah I's attempts to build a Jordanian national identity, an already

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[5] Kazziha, "The Political Evolution of Transjordan."
[6] Robins, 2019.
[7] Jureidini, *Jordan: The Impact of Social Change On the Role of the Tribes*.

difficult task considering the large population of Palestinians, so large that by 1983, roughly 1.3 million of Jordan's 2.5 million inhabitants were Palestinian[8]. When Abdullah I came to the throne in 1921, he first established support with tribes, but it was not a simple process. Nomadic East Bank tribes, like the Bedouins, were not as urbanized or settled as the tribes in the West Bank and were not as multireligious, so these nomadic tribes held much contempt for their counterparts across the Jordan River. However, new governments across the Middle East disliked the nomadic nature of East Banks tribes because of the security risk they posed and much of the region started imposing forced sedentarization[9]. Abdullah I did not agree with forced sedentarization, but he understood why it could be necessary, so he offered incentives for tribes to evolve their practices in a way that would complement new state governments. One such incentive was tax exemptions and the ability to keep their land, but control over tribes was evident through the beginnings of bedouin customary law in 1924[10]. Nevertheless, as Abdullah I continued the task of state building, he consulted tribal leaders throughout the process, some of whom put in economic and political positions of power in return for their support[11]. Palestinian families who moved succesful businesses to the East Bank and were able to establish a customer base amongst East Bank businesses saw success similar to the Transjordan tribes who supported Abdullah, but those who moved from the West Bank and opposed the regime did not see the same economic prosperity. However, the majority of West Bankers were low or middle class and still had the skills and education to secure work, mostly in the private sector, and the Jordanian government tried to provide equal opportunities for the large Palestinian population, such as implementing quotas for cabinet posts. Still, there were West Bank families who struggled to

[8] Day, *East Bank/West Bank: Jordan and the Prospects for Peace*.
[9] Jureidini, *Jordan: The Impact of Social Change On the Role of the Tribes*.
[10] Alon, "The Tribal System in the Face of the State-Formation Process: Mandatory Transjordan, 1921-46."
[11] Day, *East Bank/West Bank: Jordan and the Prospects for Peace*.

stay afloat, socially, politically, and economically, despite, on average, being more educated, urbanized, and politically aware, and they gave more fuel to brewing a front for Palestinian nationalism, and the establishment of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964 only intensified matters[12].

The PLO was established by the Arab League after Ahmad Hilmi Pasha, prime minister of the All-Palestine Government and representative of Palestine in the Arab League, died in 1963; Ahmad al-Shuqairi, a politician, was named his successor, but in the PLO as the All-Palestine Government was now defunct. The All-Palestine Government, although led by Palestinian banker Hilmi, was the brainchild of Egypt and was created to prevent Jordan's eventual annexation of the West Bank, and Jordan was the only member state of the Arab League that did not support the All-Palestine government. But this did not stop Abdullah I from calling the Jericho Conference, one of the four Palestinian conferences held by Abdullah I, where he announced the union of Transjordan and Palestine, essentially making the Palestinian question Abdullah's to solve, a move that no other Arab League members states recognized. al-Shuqairi believed in the creation of a Palestinian entity without the unison of the West and East Banks and the interference of the Hashemite regime. He and Jordan held opposing views: al-Shuqairi that a Palestinian entity must be the main priority while Jordan believed that Palestinian land must first be liberated[13].

The PLO maintained al-Shuqairi's belief of creating a Palestinian entity and working towards Palestinian liberation, but, like the All-Palestine Government, the PLO was at the whim of Egypt and supported Egypt's goals for the Arab League which did not aligne with King Abdullah I's. The PLO was supported by West Bankers who did not agree with Jordan's

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[12] Day.

[13] Abu-Odeh, *Jordanians, Palestinians, and the Hashemite Kingdom in the Middle East Peace Process.*

annexation of the West Bank and were not in a position to be financially hurt by the Hashemites due to their involvement in the community, such as the working class and youth[14]. Calls for Palestinian nationalism strengthed throughout the 60s, but after Jordan's loss of the West Bank during the Six Day War in 1967, support for the PLO exploded and mobilized, which contributed to the start of the Jordanian Civil War, otherwise known as Black September, in 1970.

Jordan's history is short, just a hundred years, but, even so, this prospectus only briefly touches on the parts of the history that are relevant to tribal identity and its relation to state capacity and regime legitimacy. But through this brief review, it is evident that multiple identities coexist in Jordan, especially tribal ones, Jordan has been an outlier amongst its Arab neighbors, and tribes played a role in the state building process. This thesis will track the evolution of tribes throughout Jordan's short, but complex, history and its effects seen in the 21st century.

Literature Contribution

This thesis will mainly attempt to contribute to existing literature on the survival of autocratic regimes. Historically, Jordan is cited as a "success story" in this sphere. The monarchy has remained intact since its implementation in 1921 even amidst its tumultuous history including revolts, assassinations, a civil war, and the Arab Spring. There are many theories as to how Jordan's regime has survived the past one hundred years, and one of the common reasons used is the relationship between the monarchy and the tribes. Tribes are the original settlers of Transjordan and arrived in the region long before the birth of Islam, so much importance is put on this relationship and for good reason. Tribes had their own hierarchies and rules and did not want nor need the authority of a monarchy. Yet, Abdullah I was able to win them over enough to successfully build up Transjordan. It is also naive to say that the tribes blindly trusted the monarchy and were not critical of the regime. Not all tribes supported the monarchy, so some

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[14] Abu-Odeh.

were favored over others. This thesis establishes an understanding of the relationship between the monarchy and the tribes; that is, how Abdullah I and his successors treated the tribes and how the tribal identities that evolved from their relationship contribute to regime survival.

Additionally, I will add to the progressing research that aims to rectify the information gap found in Jordanian history. The new generation of tribe members remember their history differently than the generations before them, and this affects the actions they are willing to take against the regime. This is also affected by tribal identity and its evolution. As the meaning of tribe and tribal identity evolves throughout the generations, tribe members have the ability to attach new significance to past events that past generations may not have realized in the moment. In this thesis, I hope to connect current tribe values to tribal identity to put into perspective the significance of past events.

Methodology

I will be using a mixed methods approach to understand tribal identity and how it affects tribepeople's attitudes toward the regime and, ultimately, regime survival. First, I will use secondary sources such as academic journals to provide important historical context. I will dedicate an entire chapter of my thesis for historical analysis, and this is critical to my research because it establishes a base order of events that explain the survey results from the Arab Barometer. In this chapter I will cover the end of the Ottoman Empire and post World War I, the Arab Israeli War, the Six Day War, Black September, the Arab Spring, and numerous other events in between that provide context for why tribal politics are important to Jordan as a state. Additionally, I will use the Arab Barometer Survey and to identify specific information on Jordanians' opinions on tribal and political issues. Survey questions important to this research include "To what extent do you think that there is corruption within the national state agencies

and institutions in your country?" and "How would you evaluate the current economic situation in your country?" as they provide insight into how stable a country is and tribal-state relations play a role in maintaining stability in Jordan[15]. The survey questions will be used in tandem with social media platforms such as Facebook and TikTok, and Jordanian based newspapers including AlRai and The Jordan Times. These primary sources will include the perspectives of Jordanians and offer auxiliary details that will supplement the results of the surveys and provide insight on what issues require more research. Social media could be an extremely useful source for my thesis because of how updated it is. Academic journals and books require lengthy research and must be published, which can take years, but social media users are constantly uploading content on Tiktok which makes the information on it more relevant than what may be written in primary sources.

Research Agenda

    I. Chapter 1: Introduction

        A. Research Question

        B. Contribution to literature

        C. Conceptualization

        D. Theory and Hypothesis

    II. Chapter II: Historical Analysis pre and post World War I

    III. Chapter III: Change of tribal identity in the 21st century and the effects on state capacity and regime survival

        A. Youth values shown through social media and surveys

        B. Tribal values shown through social media and surveys

    IV. Chapter IV: State Capacity (may not need its own chapter)

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[15] Arab Barometer, "Arab Barometer."

A. Tribal youth involvement in politics

V.   Chapter V: Comparison with Iraq

VI.   Chapter VI: Conclusion and Implications

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