**Research Paper**

# *The Tribe and Democracy:*

# *The Case of Monarchist Iraq (1921-1958)*

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# Contents

**Abstract**

The lack of success of democratic practice in monarchist Iraq (1921-1958) is partly attributed to the political influence of the tribe and its interference in political life in the era of the modern state. Some theorists, such as Abdel Wahab Rashid (2006) and Seymour Lipset (1994), argue that democracy, in order to be enrooted in society, requires a cultural host to found itself upon the three structures: the economy, politics, and society. In the Iraqi case, these were the structures that were influenced by the broad tribal presence that extends throughout Iraq. These were the conditions that engendered the tribes' influence over the political process during the monarchist era. What led to the demise of democratic practice in Iraq at the time was, in the first place, the despotism of the ruling political elite and the British support that it enjoyed. It appears that the tribe, as a traditional and influential social entity, had an important role in that process. Tribal loyalty, which is the source of the power of the tribal sheikhs and elites, was used time and again in political practice in order to support a political wing against another, to strengthen the ruling elite, or even to strengthen the opposition and escalate the confrontation with the state. This confirms the focal point derived by this study, which is that the tribe should not enter as "tribe" in the modern civic and political practice.

**Introduction**

This study attempts to examine the perpetual political usage of the tribe, and is concerned with the ways in which the tribe has been politically exploited in the processes of political change in the region, specifically in relation to democratic transition. Usually, democratic transition involves a free space, or a margin of action, because of the freedom associated with democracy. This transition process may reduce the space of hegemony occupied by the ruling regime, increasing freedom of expression and popular participation, which engenders a political space that can be filled by political powers that do not abstain from using the traditional structures in society, such as the tribe or the sect. In the case of the Arab state with a totalitarian regime, it is to be expected to have the tribe used politically and exploited in different facets. In the democratic environment, however, the prospective situation remains unclear and requires further research and analysis.

This study accepts that the tribe, as a social formation, has been politically used under the modern regional state, including the period of the democratic experiment in monarchist Iraq,[1] which is the case studied in this paper. This era of Iraq's history (1921-1958) is a suitable case for the topic of this paper, for Iraq is a tribal society par excellence, and has witnessed an early attempt in the region to embrace and practice the democratic experiment in the first half of the

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[1] Abdel Wahab Rashid, *Democratic Transition in Iraq: the legacy and the history*, (Arabic), (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2006).

20th century.[2] This study also focuses on the interaction of the "Arab" tribe with the political dimension in Iraq, as it represents the majority of the Iraqi popular body.

Examining the available historical material on that period allows us to understand general characters and patterns relating to the political/social dimension in Iraq, including the despotism of the ruling elite, the continuing British interference in Iraq, conflicts between the ruling wings, cultural rejection to the acceptance and assimilation of modern values, as well as the concept of patriotism. This study focuses on comprehending an important pattern from that period – "the political influence of the tribe" – looking at how it was an important factor in degrading democratic practice in Iraq, which could be seen through their use as a social entity by political actors. The study will also look at the influence of the tribe through its cultural rejection of democratic practice.

In each of these cases, the tribe would be used as a "block" in the service of a specific camp, whether inside or outside the tribe, in a manner not befitting the expected political standards in a modern state. Some studies have revealed that the tribe was not the main culprit behind the collapse of the democratic project in monarchist Iraq; rather, the main factor was the corruption of the ruling elites of the time, and how they, according to Abdel Wahab Rashid in his "Democratic Transition in Iraq: the Legacy and the History," reduced government to a few individuals who had embedded themselves in the court and its policies, and were supported by the strong families and clans.

This is to say that the tribe had a helping, but instrumental, role in this issue, which was visible in different facets, such as the financial support of one political front against another, the flaring of a revolt or political instability in a specific region, or voting and siding politically with a specific political current. These are all interferences that do not conform to modern political practices, which accentuates the importance of studying the political influence of the tribe – especially since it remains an under-studied question.

Thus, this study will attempt to examine the cases in which political powers used the tribe in the political process in Iraq; by describing the historical events of that period, we could track the specific political/social manifestation of the political usage of the tribe. These events can only be understood when examined within their historical context.

This study concludes that the political stature of the tribe in monarchist Iraq took many forms and shapes, according to each phase and its political circumstances. In one stage, for example,

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[2] Dawisha Adeed, (2005), "Democratic Attitudes and Practices in Iraq: 1921-1958", *The Middle East Journal*, 59(1), p.11.

the tribe could be a force of opposition to the political system, while, in another phase, it would enter into bitter conflicts with rival clans or against the government; alternatively, we could see a state of harmony and cooperation between the tribes and the ruling elites. These were all instances that have, as a general rule, hampered democratic and civic practice in the country.

This study shows that the tribe's structure and organization also exhibited different types and shapes; sometimes the clan would be united with shared goals and visions, beginning with the individual tribesman all the way to the sheikhs. In other instances, sheikhs would monopolize material and political gains at the expense of the tribesmen, engendering forms of exploitation that – in many instances – pushed tribesmen to rebel. These forms of exploitation included the acquisition of massive estates in what was known as the tribe's territory, and the use of the members of the tribe as hired hands in these lands. It became clear that the tribal sheikhs (especially those of Iraq's south) whose lands spread in all corners of the country were no longer focused, following the emergence of the modern state, on achieving material and moral gains for the tribe as a whole; instead,  they were – at least for a vast proportion of sheikhs – focused on personal gain and enrichment. Political elites exploited this greed and employed it in the service of many of its objectives, including the senior administrators of the British occupation.

### Between the regional state and the tribe

As a general rule, the modern Arab state has been unable to entice a sense of comfort among its citizens based on the achievement of social justice, the welfare of the citizen, the preservation of rights and security, and the permission for popular participation; additionally, over half a century, the state was unable to present itself as a unionist, patriotic, and mature experiment that could be relied upon by the individual citizen. At the same time, this was "the first Arab experience of statehood, the state in the organic, direct, and intimate sense on the practical and real dimensions. It was also the first 'unionist' experience, in the sense of real societal unity within the plurality in their society: tribalism, sectarianism, and small and divisive localisms within which they lived for many centuries."[3]

The failure in achieving this purpose can be referred to the Arab state itself, which was not a strong and mature state that is capable of fulfilling the requirements of this societal unity in an optimal manner; multiple reports by human rights organizations speak of the generalized deterioration in the respect of basic human rights in Arab countries.

Arab states then, appeared with a conjoined political/institutional deficiency, which dovetailed with the weakness of political awareness among the Arabs, a result of over a thousand years of

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[3] Mohammed Jaber Al-Ansari, *The Arabs and politics:* where is the shortcoming?, (Arabic), (London: Dar As-Saki, 2000), p. 118.

dark ages. It could be said that the formation of current Arab societies, along with their networks of social relations, are inherited from the Age of Decline, and not that of ascendance and prosperity. The Arab state is one where the ruling elite monopolizes power, the country, and the people. It is a state that tends to be servile to external powers, where the interests of specific sections of the population are usually favored over the general interest of the public. There is also a deficiency in terms of development in the regional Arab state because their development began in the age of global capitalism; they have also exhibited structural and administrative deficiencies in the exploitation of resources and potentials.

The modern Arab state did not adopt the modern forms of administration, nor did it develop a national spirit of reform, or allow civil society organizations the space to work freely to be an "independent monitoring eye" for society, through which it can perform the functions of pressure, supervision, and representation. Instead, the Arab state paved the road for "traditional organic structures" to plant themselves in the heart of the country and to perpetually reproduce its old culture and coalitions. This occurs in addition to the Arab state's constant excuse of the West's enmity, and the protracted conflict with the Israeli entity, which has become a weakening factor rather than a reason for resurrection, and is one among the many justifications and arguments that have offered the apparatus of the state a long path of autocracy and domination.

In this context, it was normal to see the Arab individual retreating to the traditional entities that – from his perspective – could afford him protection and maintain stability and enhance his material and moral being; with these structures, the individual had more freedoms than with his modern state, in addition to the fact that the values of the clan are already present and rooted in being and behavior of the individual, remaining a central element in his negative or positive practices. Such values as nobility, chivalry, and magnanimity remain a social regulator for rights and duties.[4]

The Arab man's receptivity to the culture of the tribe has made this culture and its notions persist with him in urban areas as they do in the desert or the countryside. This culture is as active and influential in the modern state as it was in the time of caravans and Bedouin modes of living. The current social fabric of most countries in the Arab world is a mixture between the urban and Bedouin values, with the Bedouin and tribal values being more influential, and with an implicit and patterned existence that expresses itself clearly in every crisis or conflict.[5] Many Arab cities remain centers of tribal concentrations more than veritable urban cities. The influence of the

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[4]  Ahmed Al-Soubeihi, *The Future of the Civil Society in the Arab Homeland*, (Arabic), (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2000), p. 86.
[5]  Ali Al-Wardi  *The Nature of the Iraqi Society*, (Arabic), (London: Dar Al-Waraq, 1998) and Al-Ghouthami Abdallah, *The Tribe and the tribalism*, (Arabic), (Beirut: Al-Marqaz Al-Thakafi Al-Arabi, 2009).

tribe's culture not only extended to the individuals and groups, but also to political parties and modern movements in the Arab and Islamic world, including Marxist and Islamist movements and currents of other stripes that were not only affected by the tribal culture, but also retreated to it in order to strengthen themselves through the old traditional belongings. This was exhibited with the Afghan Jihadi movement, which split into warring clans, and the (south Yemeni) Socialist Party, which reverted to its tribal roots and conflicts.[6]

The tribe, then, is a deeply entrenched component of the Arab social culture. In most Arab countries, this component is implicit in political identities and is a magnet for loyalties. Khaldoun al-Naqeeb argues that the tribe is an accepted and vaunted model because it is "simple and primitive, and deep and engrained in the most profound human consciousness, in a manner that cannot be reduced or deconstructed into simpler relations. This is why Clifford Geertz refers to these loyalties as 'primordial attachments/sentiments'; when society is enduring a crisis or a grave threat, we return to these primordial belongings where we find security and comfort, or we use them as tools to achieve interests and gain benefits."[7]

This renewed surge in the influence of the tribe's culture necessitates a revival in scholarly interest and research into the question of the tribe. Our problems, as Arabs, are often problems of "relations and belongings," problems of collective identity more than problems of "individuals"[8]; the structure of social relations and the current network of relations follow old patterns that were vigorous in the past, and effective in a certain time and place, but have become more of a hindrance and a burden than a helping element.

### The construction of the Arab tribe
According to Khaldoun al-Naqeeb, the process of joining collectivities in Arab history falls under four types:[9] tribal or ethnic origin, religion or sect, profession or guild, and locality (neighborhood, region, etc.). For centuries past, the tribe was an essential unit in the body of Arab society. The expansive deserts that dominate Arab regions, and present a harsh and autarchic mode of living, had an important role in strengthening the role of the tribe, which embraced and protected its members in this difficult world. "Tribal" or "sectarian" organizations are considered to be among the most influential and dangerous in Arab society because they enjoy strong loyalties that permit them to direct the masses, and some could even direct these energies in paths that are incompatible with realities or with the natural sociological make-up of society.

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[6] Al-Ansari, Ibid., p. 52.
[7] Khaldoun Hassan Al-Naqeeb, *The conflict started from the beginning,* (Arabic), (London: Dar-Al-Saqi, 1997), p. 415.
[8] Al-Ansari, Ibid., p. 52.
[9] Al-Naqeeb, Ibid., p. 44.

Most modern definitions of tribe center on it being a broad assembly of people in which members are linked by blood relations and descend from a "common ancestry". Usually, they have the same dialect, and tend to live in the same area.[10] In tribal societies, Arabs placed a high value on the matter of genealogy, to the point of edifying a specialized field of study "the science of lineages". Nevertheless, the tribe tends to expand over time; the land had a role in tribes mixing, in addition to alliances and affiliations and protection pacts, as well as the adoption of members from outside the tribe. The tribe is not necessarily linked to the desert, for it is also present in urban centers where it often maintains its strong moral bonds, along with an official social and political presence, as with the large tribes in Yemen. The tribe is thus capable of adapting to the modern and urban world. As a result, tribes began to change their character, interacting with other structures of modern society, and have become more porous – capable of affecting and of being affected.[11]

There is a lot to be studied regarding the Arab tribe, but we are interested in identifying the most important features relating to the structure of the tribe on the one hand, and the features relating to the subject of this study on the other hand. These features are: *esprit de corps* and allegiance, the collective logic and the cultural resistance to the notion of "citizenship," which represents the "essence" of society in the modern state.

### Esprit de corps and allegiance

*Asabiya* (esprit de corps) is a central concept in a tribe; it is the result of the bonds between individuals due to shared lineage and family relations. This idea is represented in the values of mutual support, solidarity, and mutual defense. *Esprit de corps* was the key notion through which Ibn Khaldun viewed the events of Islamic history. Muhammad Abed al-Jabiri defines *asabiya* as "a social-psychological bond, conscious and unconscious at once, linking the members of a community, based on blood relations, its constant bonding intensifies and becomes more prominent when a danger threatens these individuals as individuals and as a community."[12]

Al-Jabiri argues that the shared and continued interest of the group is the main basis of *asabiya* and claims, along with Ibn Khaldun, that this bond goes beyond shared ancestry, and is not limited to blood relations alone; in fact, lobbies and coalitions that form within modern institutions are an illustration of the esprit de corps when solidarity is created among the group's members. Despite the fact that the Arab tribe adopts blood lineage in its genealogies, the entry of

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[10] Mohammad Najib Abu Taleb, *The Sociology of the Tribe in the Arab Maghreb,* (Arabic) (Beirut: Center for the Arab Unity Studies, 2002), p. 54.
[11] Azmi Bishara, *On the Arab Issue: an introduction to an Arab democratic Manifesto*, (Arabic) (Beirut: Center for the Arab Unity Studies, 2007), p. 114.
[12] Mohammed Abed Al-Jaberi, *The Factionism and the state: the aspects of an Ibn Khaldoun theory in the Islamic history*, (Arabic), (Beirut: Center for the Arab Unity Studies, 1994), p. 168.

many to its ranks by allegiance, especially during the days of Muslim conquests, and by being assimilated into a victorious tribe according to tribal custom, made the future generations of these "converts" into a pillar of the tribes. This applies perfectly to the tribes of the Iraqi south. Khaldun al-Naqeeb carves the concept of "the political tribe" as a modern form of social organization that is distinct from the traditional notion of the tribe, which is based on the unity of lineage. It is a general "mental state" that imbues the collective memory of the group, it is also an evolutionary concept that adapts to new conditions, and leads to forms of solidarity similar to those of a tribe over an interest or an objective. It is an esprit de corps that colors itself by the colors of the classes and sects, in the city or the countryside, because the structures of traditional systems keep reproducing themselves throughout historical cycles.[13]

Old and entrenched notions like *asabiya* resurface through modern forms, and communities can work to evolve their shapes and structures and methods, but the concept of the *asabiya* remains active, for it knows that it is – as a community – stronger and more solid with such a moral bond. This is something that we widely observe in our societies today, such as coalitions and party allegiances that affect the administrative and political processes, as well as other forms of competition and practices that we even see in the workplace, which affects the effectiveness of behavior and practice in modern societies.

The traditional concept of the *asabiya* that is being cloned by these groups cannot be divided or relativized. In its traditional form, the tribe rejects non-conformity and individuality and does not recognize opposition; whoever goes against the grain is excluded from the group and exiled from the tribe, which is one of the most difficult situations that an individual could face in a traditional society. The esprit de corps protects the coherence of the tribe, and is the standard against which the behavior and actions of the tribesmen are judged. The tribal elite and gentry are usually charged with perpetuating it, and are careful to assure its continuity, for it is what makes the tribe's members coalesce around the tribe in hard and easy times, always being ready to offer strength and support to the clan. The extent of bias and fanaticism varies according to the context and the situation, as is evidenced by the common Arab adage "me and my brother against my cousin, and me and my cousin against the stranger". The nature of the *asabiya* and its intensity vary according to the strength or weakness of the tribe in question, and as Ibn Khaldun asserts, *asabiya* is endowed with "shapes and cycles".

As a vital concept, the esprit de corps engenders certain "intellectual postulates" that inhabit the mind of the tribe, such as allegiance and the obedience of the individuals to the tribe's direction regardless of the usefulness of this agenda. The effectiveness of this concept, however, does not

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[13] Khaldoun Hassan Al-Naqeeb, *The Conflict Between the Tribe and Democracy: the Kuwait case* (Arabic), (London: Dar Al-Saqi, 1996).

entail that the position of the tribe is always unified and shared by all its members. It often happens that gaps and varying opinions emerge within the same tribe, whether these differences emanate from individuals or groups within the tribe, such as tribal sub-divisions and sections and families.

The tribe can be a critical social entity when it intersects with the modern political world because it assimilates in this world in a manner that stresses "solidarity and mobilization," without intellectual coherence, which leads to disastrous results on the political and social planes. The concept of fanaticism is, at heart, an element of division, not of unity, because it creates social bodies with their own internal allegiances that compete and conflict with "others" within the same society. This is a negative matter that was pointed by Hisham Sharabi who said: "the main dynamism of the tribal structure lies in *asabiya*, and this is a negative trend because it creates a separation between the 'me and the 'others'. Furthermore, and on a higher level, it divides the world into two opposing halves: the related and the non-related, the clan and the opposing clan, Muslims and non-Muslims, and so on."[14] This leads us to a component of the tribe that intersects with *asabiya* and is a product of it: tribal loyalty. Loyalty to the tribe is considered among the main features of the Arab society, both in the past and in recent times, and is an internal essence of the tribe, without which the tribe would not be a tribe, and would have no structure. Loyalty is the internal mechanism that makes the tribe into a single unit, and a strong and influential social coalition.

In his book *The Culture of Democracy in the Political Life of Yemen's Tribes*, Sameer al-Abdali enumerates the main political features of the Arab tribe as an organization, which are:

- The simplicity of political power within the tribe, and the easy interaction between the sheikh and the tribesman.
- The primacy of loyalty to the tribe, with its legitimate sovereignty represented by the sheikh and the tribe's council.
- The tribesmen's observance of the tribal custom in political organization and hierarchy within the tribe, and the tribesmen's respect of the tribe's leaders (the sheikhs).
- The importance of the factor of tribal esprit de corps, with everybody resorting to it in their social and political behavior.[15]

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[14] Hisham Sharabi, *The patriarchal system and the problematic of the underdevelopment of the Arab society*, (Arabic), (Beirut: Center for the Arab Unity Studies), p. 14.
[15] Samir Al-Abdali, *The culture of democracy in the political life of Yemen tribes*, (Arabic), (Beirut: Center for the Arab Unity Studies, 2007), p. 67.

Leadership in the tribe is inherited, and has a pyramidal structure with the sheikh at the summit. The power of the sheikh in the tribe is not a repressive one; rather, he is obeyed by his tribesmen without coercion or force, based on the agreed-upon tribal custom and solidarity, which are intensified during times of crisis and war.[16]

Ali al-Wardi recounts that tribesmen are extremely loyal to their elders, affirming that the loyalty of Bedouins is distinguished by its stability no matter how circumstances change. Regardless of the matter of right and wrong, the tribal slogan is always "support your brother, whether aggressed or aggressor".[17] Through this near-total loyalty, the might and influence of the tribe are engendered, an influence that depends on the size of the tribe and the number of its members.

Dawisha argues that this culturally entrenched acceptance of these forms of hierarchies in Arab society – represented in absolute obedience to those on top of the pyramid (sheikhs) – has weakened the sense of opposition and resistance to the authoritarian and totalitarian practices of the modern Arab state.[18]

The modern Arab state emerged in societies that already had their established social patterns; the centrality of rule in the person of the tribal sheikh was one of these patterns that keep affecting the collective consciousness and prefaces the modern authority's monopoly over government. Despite the obvious differences between the nature of modern authority and the governance methods of traditional sheikhs, centralization remains a shared feature of both because of the monopoly of power over all else.

Sharabi believes that tribal loyalty is not "an ideological expression, but is based on upon basic needs," which are the functional services that the tribe offers the individual.[19] The concept of loyalty is a self-reinforcing one within the tribe because the tribe is centered on the idea of the "booty," and the spoils of victory are a form of return – or implicit reward – for loyalty and solidarity. According to al-Jabiri, the tribe is, at the end of the analysis, but a social cadre through which booty and spoils are earned and distributed. Therefore, booty ultimately decides "the influence of the tribe", because "a tribe isolated from booty" is a theoretical concept and an empty mold.[20]

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[16] Albert Hourani, *Tribes and States in Islamic History*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), p.5.
[17] Al-Wardi, (1998), Ibid.
[18] Adeed Dawisha, "Participation and Legitimacy in the Arab World", *World Policy Journal, 3*, p.523.
[19] Sharabi, Ibid., p. 47.
[20] Mohammed Abed Al-Jaberi, *The Arab political mind*, (Casablanca: Al-Marqaz Al-Thaqafi al-Arabi, 1990), p. 60.

We shall see how the concept of "booty" is still an active and effective factor in the behavior and logic of the tribe, and how it gets recycled to adapt to the structure of the modern state, in a manner allowing the tribe to extract gains from this modern apparatus: the apparatus of the state.

If the members' loyalty to the tribe were coercive, that of the tribe to outside powers is flexible and can be re-oriented according to "interest," and in search of "booty". It could be mentioned here that some Iraqi tribes inhabiting the border areas with Persia during the Ottoman era used to switch their loyalty between the two powers according to their momentary interests. The same was practiced by Iraqi tribes with the new conditions of the modern state, where loyalties were divided between the tribe, the government of British occupation, and the Iraqi government.

With the birth of the modern Iraqi state, the state was unable to replace the widespread loyalty for the tribe with loyalty for the country and the homeland because the notion of the "homeland" was exotic to the tribesmen, who tended to mistrust men of the state and had a similar skepticism regarding modern state institutions and mechanisms. When new Iraqi cities were erected along the Tigris and Euphrates' basins beginning in the mid-19th century, such as Ramadi, Aziziya, Numaniya, al-Amara, and al-Nasiriya, Iraqi tribes began flocking towards these cities and abandoning their tribal lands in the countryside and the desert; this movement was not only directed towards the new cities, but also towards the old ones. Marr holds that the tribesmen migrated in large numbers to Iraqi cities in the early phases of the formation of modern Iraq. Despite the fact that the organizational structure of the tribe had waned in influence, until it almost disappeared in the city, tribal customs and codes maintained a strong presence in urban areas. In political life as well, links to the family and the tribe remained stronger than loyalty towards the homeland.[21]

Even though patriotic features began appearing in Iraq due to the stability of the state and the exchange of services and favors between the state and the citizens, the frailty of this patriotic concept and its lack of entrenchment – in addition to the political conditions that swept the country – contributed to the demise of the notion of patriotism. As Sharabi asserts, the continued allegiance to the tribe or sect in modern society is due to the modern society's inability to produce "alternative authentic structures, which keeps blood relations and religious belonging the main basis for loyalty and alliances, more so than any abstract ideology."[22]

As an influential social bloc, the tribe is not always negative. It may play positive roles through its political and social influence, such as supporting noble values and ethics, or strengthening the immunity of society. This was exhibited in the partaking of Iraqi tribes in the 1920 Revolution

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[21] Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, (Westview Press, 2004), p.19.
[22] Sharabi, Ibid., p.48.

against the British occupier. Azmi Bishara speaks of the tribe as an element of moderation that is capable of creating a social counterbalance to "absolutist ideologies".[23] In his thesis on "The Sociology of the Tribe in the Arab Maghreb," Abu Talib says that the fragmentation of the tribe that was exercised by the French occupation in Algeria was one of the reasons for the spread of violence and radicalism, which appeared later in society. Traditional social structures, such as tribes, could have had a role in keeping social restraint and balance after the trauma of occupation, which was the case in the next-door Libyan society.[24]

Furthermore, Khaldoun al-Naqeeb argues that the tribe has historically maintained the cultural unity and homogeneity of Arab society, and has functioned as a social safety valve.[25] Al-Subayhi goes even further by proclaiming the tribe as one of the natural "incubators" of the individual, and that it is endowed with a social bond that can perform the functions of the modern civil society and its institutions, in the face of authority.[26] In monarchist Iraq, tribal sheikhs marshaled their "social power" whenever they wished, and this power consisted of the support of their tribesmen and their loyalty. Imposed loyalty and solidarity have made the tribe into a peculiar entity in modern society, influential, and hampering the ability of many individuals to connect with the institutions of the modern state. It is also known that the tribe, as a social unit, cannot replace the political party in modern political activism, nor fulfill its functions; the individual's belonging to a tribe is a non-voluntary one, independent of the individual's "freedom" or his choice, while the individual is considered, in contrast, the basic "unit" upon which civil society is founded. This leads us to an important point: when the tribe enters as "tribe" into the political process it becomes ineffective, which is a problem with multiple dimensions.

1- The tribe itself is incompatible with modern civic notions; it monopolizes the "voice of the individual" through loyalty, and the standards applied among its members, such as equality and the respect of rights, are not applied in dealings with outsiders; in fact, as Ali al-Wardi stated in his book *Understanding Iraq,* there is a democracy in the tribe between its members, but they do not practice it with others.
2- With its pyramidal structure, the tribe does not follow standards of competence and skill in the management of the tribe's affairs, relying instead on inheritance and primogeniture, which tends to advance irresponsible and incompetent individuals.
3- Due to the administrative deficiency in its structure, the tribe has the ability to head in wrongful directions, such as its ability to submit or to compromise, or the potential that it be used by local or foreign powers. This ability to exploit the tribe has several reasons:

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[23] Bishara, Ibid., p. 123.
[24] Abu Taleb, Ibid., p. 100.
[25] Al-Naqeeb, Ibid. pp. 47-48.
[26] Al-Subeihi, Ibid., p. 87.

- The sheer effectiveness of using this entity and putting it in the service of politicians, for it would be enough to bribe a handful of members of the tribe's "elite" and win them over in order to gain the support of the entire clan.
- The absence of a "vision," or a modern political consciousness, among the tribe and its leaders, which would enable it to realize the importance of molding a modern society that guarantees the rights and equality of all individuals. The reason for that is the domination of the traditional culture, its effectiveness, and its persistence.
- The tribesmen's constant support and loyalty for the tribe, which is a crucial functional element in the composition of the tribe; a tribe recognizes no opposition within it, nor does it accept revision, criticism, or relativism; he who opposes is shunned, or is at least neglected and ignored.
- The tribal sheikhs' pursuit of prestige and their personal interests has had a major influence over the fragmentation of the tribal complex over time, along with the evolution of education and the awareness of citizens in modern society. This form of rent-seeking by the sheikhs led to the stagnation of the tribe and caused a cultural rejectionism, coupled with an unwillingness to change, since preserving the traditional form of the tribe guarantees the reproduction of the same benefits for the tribe and its leaders; elites are always careful to preserve the "re-production line" as it is.[27]

It happens that loyalty to the tribe is the product of mere fear, or the need for protection; fear, especially during times of war, always had an important role in assimilating groups as in the historic case of the Kingdom of Babylon that was used by Bertrand Russell as an ideal type of the hegemony that has subjugated wide realms with fear and terror.[28]

In sum, "loyalty" as an internal mechanism in the tribe has strongly affected the economic, political, and social life in the region as a whole and in Iraq specifically. The degree of allegiance to the tribe may vary, and tribesmen may protest their mistreatment by the tribal leaders, which took place in Iraq. Nevertheless, the concept of loyalty remained ever-present and had a paramount role in the state's exploitation of the tribe, and the tribe's exploitation of its subjects.

### The collective mind and the question of national identity

When a tribe decides on an action, it enters as a whole or abstains as a whole, and along these lines, we see the concept of fanatic allegiance being reproduced in more modern forms. This is

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[27] **Pierre Bourdieu**, Jean **Claude Passeron,** *Reproduction* in *Education, Society, and Culture*, (SAGE, 1990).
[28] Al-Ghuthami, Ibid., p. 29.

what certain modern communities request from their adherents, when they allow no space for opposition with them; while any new direction should require a "stand" by the members to assess it and choose whether to follow the logic of the majority, debate the majority, or abandon the group altogether. Thus, the intellectual and human position that is required in modern societies is radically different from that of the traditional *asabiya,* where solidarity is expected in right and wrong, and where positions are taken according to the old Arab poet: "I am but from the Ghaziya clan, if Ghaziya lapses I lapse, and if Ghaziya takes the rightful path I follow." An intellectual posture is not like that of the sports' fan who cheers his team whether it wins or loses, taking intellectual positions involves consequences that the individual has to bear, and to take into account.

However, in the face of the entrenchment of such a culture and its mastery of society, we find that the individual is forced to go along the tribe's wishes and offer his solidarity with it to avoid finding himself removed from the tribe and disowned. The collective expects him to respect its wishes and to labor in order to contribute to the collectivity. For it is a culture that "only depicts individualism and individual opinion as being against the masses and outside of them. Individualism and the collectivity here are in a state of antagonism that prevents the individual from becoming an effective one in the public space."[29]

Therefore, the logic of the tribe is a "collective logic"; the individual "does not possess his personal being in tribal society except through a bloc, whichever bloc, while – outside of it – he loses his existence completely. Here, the identity of the person is not determined by "who are you?", but by "the son of whom are you? And to what branch do you belong?" In tribal society, a person is not known by his name, but by his affiliation to a certain branch or clan."[30]

It is noteworthy that this "opinion" emanating from the collective mind of the tribe is an effective one, which can be turned into "political capital" in specific fields, such as elections, or by striking in other fields, by "stirring" tribal unrest in certain regions. Al-Wardi opines that the collectivity of the tribe has replaced the individual. The Bedouin sometimes says "we" or "us" instead of "I".[31] The collective mind had a role in preventing the maturity of the process of political modernization in contemporary Iraq; which is a country made up of multiple sects and ethnicities, with these communities varying in their ideological background and historical roots. Each of these communities has its proper "collective memory" that differs from that of others, and it is not unlikely for them to have an independent "future vision".

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[29] Bishara, Ibid., p. 122.
[30] Al-Jabiri (1994), *The Arab political mind*, Ibid., p.170.
[31] Al Wardi, (2008), *Ibid.*, p.22.

This is how the process of building of "civic identity" has suffered in modern Iraq, and did not receive popular support with a momentum that would allow it to influence and surpass those traditional identities. Therefore, Iraq and its citizens were divided between different powers that are each bound by their "political tribe". This bond between individuals, a result of their cultural make-up, engendered a resistance by traditional communities to the concept of patriotism; this "modern" concept was alien to them, in addition to the doubts and suspicions of these communities vis-à-vis the agendas of the political leadership. As an example, the historian Hanna Batatu mentions in his book *The Old Social Classes and Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, of a time when 400 individuals petitioned the Ottoman Sultan in 1923, asking him to save Iraq from the foreigners, Faysal, and his father, who have come to fragment the Muslims under an Arab nationalist banner.[32] It appears that the new situation did not please the tribal sheikhs and their aides, who were the powerful class in the Ottoman state, with Faysal Bin al-Husain appearing as a competitor who seeks to limit their powers.

The policy of the ruling elite in monarchist Iraq was, in itself, one of the obstacles to the creation and dissemination of "national identity". This identity, which stresses the geographic unity of the country and acknowledges the various cultures within its body, was instrumental for the edification of the legitimacy of the government and the stabilization of Iraq. Modern Iraq, especially in its early years, was in a position to go a long way on the path of political modernization, as historian Majid Khadduri affirms in his book *The Independent Iraq*, in which he mentions that the evolution of Iraq was determined and guaranteed by the standards of that era. It has acquired a modern form for a state that guarantees broad popular participation in the political process, and optimism and solidarity filled the nascent state since its beginnings, in addition to the fact that most of the wings in the state had a consensus over the person of King Faysal and his administration; the first King of Iraq was realistic and practical in his dealings with political actors inside and outside of Iraq. As an example, when he used to meet with tribal men, he would behave as one of them.[33] However, the rooting of patriotic practice was corrupted because certain sectors of society, such as the Shia and the Kurds, saw the notion of "national" identity propagated by the "ruling elite" in Iraq as a mere reflection and affirmation of their "Sunni Arab" identity. In her book *Iraq: The Search for National Identity*, Liora Lukitz examines the perpetual Iraqi problem with national identity, and finds that Iraq had a considerable chance, in the beginnings of state formation, to achieve the notion of "national unity". This opportunity was expressed through the Sunni-Shia alliance during the 1920 Revolution against the British occupier. Furthermore, Kurds and Turkomans could, in the era of King Faysal, have reached the

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[32] Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, (Princeton University Press, 1978).
[33] Majid Khadduri, *The Independent Iraq*, (Oxford University Press, 1960).

highest ranks in the state because the king had a conviction in the necessity of the Shias partaking in the molding of national identity.

However, the dominance of the ruling Sherifian elite, which grew stronger with time, in addition to the sudden death of King Faysal, led to the weakening of links with the Shia part of the country and increased the subconscious alienation that a large sector of Shias felt towards the state despite the presence of Shia patriotism and influential Shia figures in Iraq during that period and what followed, including Sayyid Muhammad al-Sadr, Abd al-Rasul al-Khalisi, and Fadhil al-Jamali.

The lack of a unifying national identity in Iraq led to the emergence of cleavages as a reaction to the "hegemonic identity". Thus, Liora Lukitz argues that the Kurds refused to be politically subjugated by the Arabs, and that their drift towards Sufism was a mere reaction against Islam in its institutional form, which has political dimensions. Furthermore, the isolation of the Iraqi south and its harsh economic conditions – under the pressure of the administrative centers – engendered a reaction that exhibited itself in some Iraqi tribes converting to Shia Islam, in order to distinguish themselves from the state and its identity at the time, whether "Ottoman" or "Baghdadi Arab".[34] In reality, opposition to the state and the revolutionary spirit against it had a role in "increasing" the numbers of those who converted to Shiism in the Iraqi south, and not in the launching of the conversion process. The tribes of the Iraqi south had adopted Shiism in periods preceding the founding of monarchist rule in Iraq, and specifically since the mid-18th century, with the phenomena beginning with the tribes of Tameem and Khazaa (The Khazail). Kurds also had an ancient link to Sufism, which was not a mere reaction to the ruling elite, as Phoebe Moore depicts the matter, but this Sufi current may have been strengthened due to this popular desire to be distanced from the current of the ruling elite.

The "biased" policies of the ruling elite created "thorny" identities, or "murderous identities," to use the terms of novelist Amin Maalouf. Under the modern state, it is not expected that the Iraqi individual would reduce his identity to a single belonging; the citizen is to move away from this perspective and include multiple dimensions in his repertoire of allegiances, so that he can experience his national identity alongside the primordial ones. In contrast, communities with a mono-identity corrupt political and social life are originally "wounded" communities, and the corruption of the political practice is a major catalyst of its existence and persistence.

We could argue that ethnic and sectarian differences are natural and do not go far in sharpness and "othering" that has changed because of the social meaning that was endowed to these differences due to the nature of competition that marked the monarchist era in Iraq between

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[34] Leora Lokitz, *Iraq and the search for a national identity*, (Arbeel, Dar Aras, 2004), pp 61-89.

various political communities and currents. This struggle has weakened the concept of patriotism, undermined the legitimacy of the government, and affected the democratic process and its interaction with the local powers. Max Weber (1864-1920) argued that without legitimacy, it would be difficult for a government to provide a competent and continuous management of the struggle within it; legitimacy is an essential condition for the good government that is capable of preserving the stability of the country.[35]

### The tribe and the beginnings of modern Iraq

The intense presence of the tribe has mandates its participation in the apparatus of the modern Arab state, as well as a cultural presence that dovetailed with the nascent national culture. The tribe has always been thus: a state within a state. The modern state was born in Iraq in an early phase of the 20th century only to encounter a large tribal weight and presence that could not be ignored by anyone.

Ali al-Wardi states that Iraq was, for centuries, a "Mecca" for many Bedouin tribes that were increasing in numbers and influence, most of these were Bedouin tribes that migrated to Iraq from the Arabian Peninsula. The largest and mightiest of these tribes were Anza, Shammar, and Tameem. Kurdish tribes in Iraq's north practiced a different lifestyle than Arab clans, by settling in towns and villages and depending on agriculture and rainwater. The weakness of the Ottoman state and its Persian neighbor, however, forced the Kurds to coalesce and unify into armed tribal confederations in order to protect themselves from the raids of neighboring tribes. From here came the martial tradition of Kurdish tribes, which is no less than what we find in the Arab tribes of Iraq. It seems that the alliance of Kurdish tribes in the face of an outside invasion, or in seeking spoils, was not a permanent, natural, unity. The animosity and division that prevailed among some Arab tribes found their equivalent among Kurdish tribes. In fact, the reason behind the failure of the creation of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq is primarily attributed to the continuous quarrel and struggle between Kurdish clans, such as the *Talbaniya*, the *Barzangiya*, and the *Babaniya*. As we see Arab tribes of the same ethnicity and sect infighting, the same process occurred between Kurdish tribes. One of the noteworthy features is the absence of serious confrontations between Arab and Kurdish tribes, with fighting taking place specifically among tribes of the same ethnicity. This shows that ethnic and sectarian difference cannot, alone, explain strife;[36] in fact, tribal differences could explain a significant portion of the conflict in the region, and in Iraq in particular.

In his book *Social Glimpses from the History of Modern Iraq*, al-Wardi refers the growth in the expansion and strength of Iraqi tribes, explaining that the Ottoman state had begun its period of

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[35] Michael Hudson, *Arab Politics*, (Yale University, 1977).
[36] *The tribe in Iraq: Its dynamics and its political role*, (Iraqi Center for Strategic Studies, 2009), p. 12.

decline upon its entry to Iraq in 1534, and it ruled the country for a long period while experiencing strenuous circumstances.[37] The Ottoman governmental administration was felt and visible in the three provinces of Iraq: Basra, Mosul, and Baghdad. Outside of these provinces, the weakness of Ottoman administrative centers was apparent. Khadduri (1960) affirms that the Ottoman state could not provide security and the basic needs of the people in the region; in addition, its presence was limited to a few cities and towns that were isolated from the rest of Iraq.[38] This permitted Iraqi tribes to control vast areas of Iraq, as well as its vital and strategic routes. In political sociology, it is a known rule that the tribe strengthens when the state weakens and vice versa.

The Ottoman state used tribes in wars and raids against its neighbors in order to channel the strength and energy of the tribes towards external enemies. Enmity between the Ottoman state and the tribes ran deep; the state has often attempted to "break" the tribe, which contrasted with the British, who labored to revive the tribes and to win them on their side by wooing their leaders and showering them with privileges. When Great Britain occupied Iraq in 1914, it found "strong" and "armed" tribes that controlled wide swaths of the country. We must here make a comment on the deep-rooted value of "strength" in the tribe in order to understand how the Iraqi tribe dealt with the various powers that accompanied the rise of the state. With the birth of the state in Iraq, the traditional intellectual dimension represented in tribal culture clashed with the beginnings of civic thought, represented in the modern state. The tribe viewed the emerging powers on the scene – such as the state apparatus – as a threat to the sovereignty of the tribe and as a competitor. Al-Wardi says:

The Bedouin is unmatched in his vaunting of leadership and power, and his aversion to obedience and compliance. Leadership, in the Bedouin's mind, is the sign of triumph, while obedience is the sign of submission … this is what gave the Bedouin tribe the tendency to divide once the number of its members surpasses a certain limit, with competition and rivalry appearing amongst the leaders of its branches, even fighting could erupt between them.[39]

The tribe has opposed all forms of authority, according to Ghassan al-Atiya, who claims that "war, instead of peace, was their natural condition".[40] Therefore, clashing with the government and refusing to hand the affairs of the country to its hands was an expected reaction on the part of the tribes.

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[37] Ali Al-Wardi, *Social features from Irq modern history*, (London: Dar Al-Waraq, 1969).
[38] Khadduri, Ibid.
[39] Al-Wardi, (1998), Ibid. p. 69.
[40] As cited in: Samira Haj, (1991) "The Problems of Tribalism; the Case of Nineteenth-century Iraqi History", *Journal of Social History*, p.48.

After the 1920 Revolution, which was a popular Iraqi revolt against the British occupation, the tribes realized that they would encounter a guaranteed defeat against an organized army that is equipped with artillery, armor, and aircraft, such as the British Army – which, upon receiving reinforcements from India, dealt deadly blows to the rebellion.[41] Tribes knew that with the advent of the modern state, they had to exist in a new field of power relations, especially with the Iraqi government subjugating the strongest of Iraqi tribes, the mighty *Shammar*, through the process of "settlement" in the *Jazira* region. The same tactic was used with the *Zawba* tribe west of Baghdad. What transpired was that the tribe or the clan persisted as a social structure, with its adaptation to the new situation allowing it to use modern tools to guarantee its survival; this included the use of politics, and struggle over political power, and even the use of military service and the frenetic tribal attempts to occupy a position of power within the Army. All of these tactics were used in its new condition of adaptation with permanent settlement in order to establish itself as a social solidarity unit, or as a political unit that can be easily mobilized during elections, for instance, or whose loyalty could be counted upon in the ranks of the army and the security agencies.[42]

This new situation in the region has contributed to weakening the tribe and limiting its influence, but it has also offered it gains and privileges when Britain enticed leaders of minority tribes and tribe branches with the promise of freeing them from the hegemony of the large tribes. By 1918, there were "118 independent branches" of Iraqi tribes. British support varied from offering financial support and tax breaks, to offering military support for tribal leaders against rivals.[43]

In his book *Iraq from Occupation to Independence*, Abdulrahman al-Bazzaz states that British authorities established an independent legal system exclusively for the tribes, which continued operating until the 1958 Revolution.[44] By gaining tribal sheikhs to its side, Britain's objective was to secure the main routes that were vital for its interests in Iraq, and to reduce the possibility of tribal uprisings against its military presence, in addition to gaining the tribes so that the "power" of King Faysal did not exceed its own in the country, which would be the case if the tribes sided with him.

As for King Faysal, the first King over modern Iraq, his tribal policy focused on containing the tribes and subjugating them to the state, which was revealed by one of his private letters, in which he told a member of his close entourage: "The men of the tribe should not feel that the government intends to destroy them. Instead, the government must make them feel that it labors

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[41] Al-Wardi, (1969), Ibid., p. 379.
[42] Bishara, Ibid., p. 116.
[43] Batatu, Ibid.
[44] Abdulrahman Bazzaz, *Iraq, from Occupation to Independence*, (Arabic), (Baghdad, 1967).

to provide them with a decent living."[45] King Faysal truly aimed at winning over all the local powers and uniting them under one national banner. However, until his death in 1933, the state had not yet acquired enough strength to subjugate the competing powers and suppress their sense of rebellion. In that year, the number of rifles owned by tribesmen was estimated to be 100,000 guns, while the state had less than 15,000 rifles.[46] The ruling elite continued to woo tribal leaders and to shower them with privileges, as well as a respected stature in the government and the parliament.

The gains offered to the tribes in the era of the modern state caused "structural" changes in them; the vast properties and different forms of support created a gulf between the tribal sheikhs and their tribesmen. The sheikhs of the tribe used to be a sort of "spiritual fathers" who behaved and lived in the same manner along with their tribesmen, but the new privileges made a class of those sheikhs into "feudal lords," with their "organic and mutual relationship" with the tribe's members becoming one of servitude and exploitation. In the past, Arab societies did not experience feudalism in the manner that existed in Europe during the Middle Ages, property in tribal society was "on the whole, a familial and limited property, or a large property communally shared by several families. The absence of large private property in tribal society made it so relationships within it were not one of a group exploiting another, but family relations based on cooperation and mutual service."[47]

Some sheikhs continued to amass wealth at the expense of the tribe's members, especially among the tribes of the south. The tribes people were employed to work in the vast lands of the sheikhs, such as with the sheikh of the Albu Muhammad tribe, who accumulated lands and privileges in the Amara region, and the Prince of Rubaia Muhammad al-Habeeb who was the effective master of al-Kut, which caused great dissatisfaction and the migration of hundreds of thousands towards Baghdad and other big cities.[48] This rural migration gave some space of freedom to ordinary tribesmen, and a temporary isolation from the domination of the tribal sheikhs.

Charles Tripp notes that some tribal sheikhs were extremely displeased by the tribal uprising that occurred in some villages of the Middle Euphrates in 1930 under the incitement of "opposition" forces. The sheikhs considered this protest to be "a dangerous omen" for them, with the possibility of the tribesmen siding with others becoming real.[49]

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[45] Batutu, Ibid.
[46] Abdel Razeq Al-Husseini, *Chronicle of Iraqi cabinets*, (Arabic), Beirut: Al-Erfan Press, 1966.
[47] Al-Jabri, (1994), Ibid., p. 174.
[48] Al-Wardi, (1969), Ibid., p. 375.
[49] Charles Tripp, *A history of Iraq*, (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

However, tribal traditions and standards remained alive, even in the cities, because individuals did not find modern institutions to embrace them and respond to their needs as their traditional structures did. In the absence of veritable citizenship, the tribe quickly turned into "a tool that is used as a source of personal power within the other belongings, such as the state or the party."[50]

Many of the profiteering sheikhs shifted from relying on the tribe for protection to the use of a contingent of personal guards, called the *Hushiya*, who helped them enforce their orders over the members of the tribe, the government sometimes provided this private force. At the same time, many of the sheikhs migrated to Baghdad to be close to the center of power, which endowed them with powers not different from those of politicians. The British often intervened to support tribal leaders against rivals. For example, in 1926 British forces executed air strikes to help quell a rebellion by some branches of the *Shammar* tribe against its paramount Sheikh Ajeel al-Yawir.[51]

As we saw in early Islamic history, when Islamic conquests halted, along with them "the spoils, and tax revenues shrank; the outside conquest (Jihad) became an internal conquest, leading to the communal-economic conflict."[52] We saw these forms of internal tremors occurring with the appearance of the modern state in Iraq when the tribe found itself forced to abandon its lifestyle of raids and warfare, and began looking for a new stature or source of power befitting the new circumstances. The tribe saw that this new power was in parliamentary participation, in mutual economic links with the ruling elite, or in siding with one political wing against another in exchange for the support of that faction.

### The democracy of monarchist Iraq

The democratic system is a type of constitutional rule where the people are the source of authority, transmitting the people's voices and trends through deputies and representatives. According to the 1925 constitution, Iraq became a "constitutional monarchy" and acquired a government that resembles, to a certain extent, the British government and its institutions. However, since the very beginning, constitutional deviations ensued, allowing King Faysal to dominate the three powers (legislative, executive, and judicial), to choose and dismiss ministers without regard to the opinion of the parliamentary majority, which led to the concentration of power in the hands of the *Sherifian* elite that surrounded the king and governed the country through a hegemonic executive.

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[50] Bishara, Ibid., p. 123.
[51] Batatu, Ibid.
[52] Al-jabri, (1994), Ibid., p. 278

Rasheed points that the Iraqi regime during that era limited the circle of power to a handful of individuals hailing from the strong families and tribes, and who did not shy away from using tribes or the army to impose their authority.[53] In other words, the regime did not expand the circle of popular participation in effective rule or in a manner conforming to the civic mechanisms adopted by the regime at the time.

The dominant elite and its despotism has hampered the democratic march in monarchist Iraq and did more damage to it than the foreign power, the tribes, the army, the classes of the merchants and notables, or the general masses. To illustrate the reigning monopoly of power at the time, Nizat al-Hisso says in his *Struggle over Power in Royalist Iraq* that 58 cabinets were formed in royalist Iraq (four decades), with 780 ministerial posts, which were filled by only 166 individuals. This points to the redundancy and the exclusive circulation of posts within this elite; for instance, a prime minister, such as Nuri al-Saeed, occupied 47 ministerial posts during this period, and Tawfeeq al-Suwaidi was appointed minister 19 times.[54]

Furthermore, the endemic failure in the Arab region in terms of building the political, economic, and social perquisites for Arab practice has been a serious obstacle to democracy in Iraq. Democracy theorists speak of its need for cultural incubators in its region until it can take root and build itself on solid ground. Lipset affirms that the cultural embracing of democratic themes, such as the freedom of expression, the freedom to gather, the freedom of belief, and political participation all contribute to making democracy into dynamic, effective, and deeply-rooted concepts. Lipset argues that "the cultural factors" are even more vital to democracy than the "economic" factors.[55]

The situation was difficult in Iraq because of the entrenched conditions of the country. It was difficult for society to suddenly switch from "pastoral and clannish" to "modern and democratic". Kedourie (1944) affirms that, in a country like Iraq, where traditional local forces maintain a strong presence, it is not expected of the democratic institutions to be as effective as the old Western institutions that grew accustomed to democratic practice.[56] In a similar vein, Rasheed (2006) asks: "how can we speak of democracy in the shadow of subordination, the lack of economic independence, and the absence of an independent national decision?"[57]

On the other hand, it would be unfair to judge the democratic experiment in Iraq, especially if we place it in its historic and geographic contexts. The democratic experience did not take a single,

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[53] Rasheed, Ibid., p. 145.
[54] Nizar El-Hessou, *Conflict over power in monarchal Iraq*, (Arabic), (Beirut: Dar Al-Arabiyya Lil-Mawsou'at, 1984).
[55] Seymour M. Lipset, (1994), "The Social Requisites of Democracy Revisited: 1993", *American Sociology Review,* 59, 1-22.
[56] Majeed Khadduri, *Iraqi Government*, (Iraq: The New Press, 1994), p. 30.
[57]  Rasheed, Ibid., p. 143.

specific form, but featured different practices and forms, with few similarities other than their belonging to the democratic tradition in its broad definition, which is based on the abolishing of autocratic rule, the forming of parliaments, and the provision of the freedoms of gathering, elections, and the media. This notion of democracy was illustrated in other experiments around the world. In the early 1900s, a "new wave" of democracies swept the world, starting with the Russian Revolution in 1905, followed by the Ottoman state, Iran, China, Mexico, and Portugal. With the exception of the Portuguese experiment, which lasted until 1926, these experiments quickly faltered within short years, and were overthrown for varying reasons.

If we were to examine the Iraqi democratic experience within its context, especially in terms of the region surrounding Iraq at the time, we would notice that it was a pioneering and maverick experiment in the region. This was the assessment of Adeed Dawisha in his study on democratic practices in royalist Iraq. The study aimed at debunking the common conception of Iraq as a country subjected to "totalitarian rule" throughout its modern history. Dawisha asserts that democratic practice was present in monarchist Iraq, exhibiting itself in the lively and dynamic parliamentary debates between diverse political currents, in the presence of opposition parties and press freedom. That being said, it is to be noted, according to Dawisha, that the presence of democracy was relative, and that parties and the press were banned in numerous instances.[58]

Even within the Iraqi monarchist era, the democratic conception did not take a single shape; the meaning of democracy in 1920s Iraq was quite different from of the 1930s and the 1940s. In the 1920s, Iraq was under British occupation, which engendered a unification and solidarity between political forces and all the stripes of the Iraqi people to be rid of the occupier. This led to the successful progression of come democratic "forms" under the rule of King Faysal, in addition to "national unity".

In the 1930s, however, with the gaining of "independence" in 1933 and Faysal's sudden death, an intense struggle erupted between the two wings of the ruling *Sherifian* elite, which ended with the triumph of the Nuri al-Saeed faction that was supported by Britain over the wing represented by Yasin al-Hashimi and Rasheed Ali al-Kilani, and which rejected British intervention. This period saw the early signs of autocracy and the undermining of democracy in Iraq, with the banning of opposition parties, the disbanding of the parliament on multiple occasions, and the shutting down of the opposition media.

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[58] Adeed Dawisha, (2005), Ibid.

In the 1940s, this elite continued to monopolize the Iraqi political scene, especially after being aided by the conditions of the Second World War, remaining on that path until it was uprooted by the 1958 Revolution.[59]

### The political employment of the tribe in monarchist Iraq

Throughout its history (1921-1958), royalist Iraq was influenced by two major forces: the ruling *Sherifian* elite and the tribal sheikhs. At the same time, the class of opposition intellectuals emerged. The *Sherifian* elite and the sheikhs were linked through an interest-based solidarity, relying on their mutual interests to benefit from the country's wealth. Political leaders in Iraq did not have loyal "followers," who were available in abundance to the tribal leaders, some of whom had armed followers. Tribal sheikhs would offer political and popular support to the politicians in exchange for high positions in the state, such as parliamentary seats, in addition to the land grants.

David Paul notes that the *Sherifian* elite dominated the ministries in Iraq, while the tribal sheikhs and landowners controlled the parliament. This led to the "big wager" at the top of the pyramid, which remained in place throughout the monarchist era – perpetual control in the countryside by the sheikhs in exchange for permanent control of the power centers by the *Sherifian* elite.[60]

Modern Iraq was born following the 1920 Revolution, which offered significant glimpses of patriotism by uniting the different Iraqi stripes under the banner of defending the homeland against the occupier. However, there was a counter-movement against this revolution and its literature during the 1920s, which was the period of direct British mandate. During that first decade, the state did not have enough strength, and the sheikhs were bought and supported by the British through different means, such as financial and military support and the offering of a special judiciary for them. The British tribal policy was effective since its arrival in Iraq; some sheikhs, such as those in al-Kut and al-Amara, did not participate in the revolt against Britain and did not want to risk the gains that they had obtained. The quick spread of the rebellion, however, forced them to bend to the flow and partake in the revolution.[61]

In reality, most of the tribes that waged the rebellion were not among those of the Tigris, but mostly from the Middle Euphrates, Diyala, and western Iraq. In his history of the Revolution, al-Wardi notes that "many of the sheikhs who participated in the revolution had their enmity directed at the pro-British sheikhs much more than towards the British themselves; they had seen

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[59] Abdel Ghani Al-Mallah, *The history of the national democratic movement in Iraq*, (Beirut: Al-Muassassa Al-Arabiyya lil-Dirassat wal-Nashr, 1980).
[60] David Paul, (1980), "From Elite to Class: The Transformation of Iraqi, 1920-1939", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 12, p. 344.
[61] Batatu, Ibid., and Abde Jaleel Taher, *Iraq Clans*, (Baghdad: University of Baghdad, 1972).

in the revolt a hope for ridding themselves of the nightmare of these sheikhs and of the government that supports them."[62]

The dialectic of the tribal position vis-à-vis the national question remained effective for a long period, and was not decided with the birth of the state, or in the stand against colonialism. British support for the tribal sheikhs continued during the mandate period (1920-1932), which greatly displeased King Faysal, who attempted to support competing sheikhs. As an example of British support, the Iraqi Parliament voted in 1926 on a decision halting the financial grants that were offered by the government to the heads of the *Shammar* and *Anza* tribes, but the British High Commissioner annulled this decision. Furthermore, during the 1920s, the king and the ruling elite in Iraq wanted to institute a military draft, which would strengthen the army of the state in face of the tribes, but the British government stood firmly against the enactment of this plan.[63]

What prompted tribal sheikhs to support the continued presence of Great Britain and to side against the "nationalist movements" was this instrumentalist attachment to Britain that paid them in cash and did not ask them to go to war as the Ottomans did.[64] The leaders of some large tribes, however, took patriotic positions during that phase, but their actions were largely in tow of their people, who were enthusiastic for the country's independence. Khadduri quotes a British official describing one of those leaders: "this time, they followed their men, and did not lead them."[65] The position of the tribal sheikhs was perplexed vis-à-vis the government that appeared to be limiting their powers. The political ambition of tribal sheikhs was apparent from the beginning; they have continually insisted on participating in Iraqi political life in order to remain within the circle of influence. Khadduri says that the Sheikhs instigated repeated tribal uprisings in order to protect their feudal rights in the country.[66]

In 1922, the Karbala Conference was held, joining the different Iraqi elites. During the conference, the religious leadership advanced an enthusiastic position that opposes and rejects the British presence, which created a clear split between the clergy and the tribal Sheikhs. Following the conference, tribal leaders such as Adday al-Jaryan of the Bu Sultan tribe and Umran of the Bani Ujail signed a petition supporting Great Britain and condemning what they termed as "the interference" of the clergy in Iraq's political affairs. In the same year, sheikhs and Kurdish *Aghas* protested King Faysal's appointment of the *Sherifian* officers in sensitive posts,

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[62] Al-Wardi, (1969), Ibid., p. 25.
[63] Batatu, Ibid.
[64] Samia Zubaida, (2002), "The Fragments Imagine the Nation: The Case of Iraq", *International Journal of Middle East and Central Asia*, (34, 205).
[65] Khadduri, Ibid.
[66] Khadduri, Ibid.

arguing that these fortunes were their right and that of their followers.[67]Al-Wardi also mentions that 40 sheikhs and tribal leaders met in King Faysal's court and informed him that they only supported his leadership because of Britain's approval of his person, and that they expected him to pursue his support for British policies in the region.[68]

Following Iraq's independence in 1933, the government became the front of the country, dealing directly with the tribal Sheikhs after Britain's role shrank. Following independence, the role of the tribe was expected to wane, but the reverse took place.

Hanna Batatu refers the resilience of the "tribe's power" following independence to three main reasons:

> **First:** Neither the army nor the state was sufficiently strong; the strength of the army did not begin to appear until the mid-1930s.

> **Second:** *Sherifian* officers and other members of the ruling elite became large land and property owners, which fused them in instrumentalist relationship with the sheikhs and the *Aghas*. The ruling elite also passed policies that benefited the economic interests of those two groups.

> **Third:** The instability of the Iraqi government following the death of King Faysal, especially with the assumption of King Ghazi who was young and inexperienced in matters of politics. His short tenure (1933-1939) was a period of crisis and political infighting between the two wings within the ruling elite.[69]

The political elite surrounding King Faysal, largely composed of *Sherifian* officers, was careful to control the ministries. Such a vantage point allowed this group to easily govern the country and achieve all of its interests. This elite stood by King Faysal during the period of the British mandate, but following Faysal's death in the early 1930s the split of this elite into two opposing wings became overly clear. The power struggle paralyzed the government administration and allowed some powerful figures to abuse their powers for personal gain, which prompted the parliament, in 1936, to supplicate King Ghazi to put an end to the "illegal enrichment" among the elites. In his book *The Struggle Over Power in Royalist Iraq*, Nizar al-Hisso says that Iraq lived a period of political chaos and swift changes from the mid-1930s and until 1941; the

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[67] Batatu, Ibid.
[68] Al-Wardi, (1969), Ibid.
[69] Batatu, Ibid. and El-Hessou, Ibid.

parliament, along with the parties, underwent a phase of extreme weakness and was incapable of performing its "oversight" role with the hegemony of the executive.[70]

The battling wings of the political elite made sure to benefit from the tribe in this struggle to support their positions. Rasheed reports that the politicians of that elite did not hesitate "to use the clans first, and then the army in the twenties and thirties for reasons of personal gain. Members of the elite also resorted to exploiting their posts to strengthen alliances with the Sheikhs and to provide those on their side with economic and political benefits. Caracatacus says that one of the scandals that became widely known related to the use of the water of the al-Kut dam; this project that cost millions of dinars, it turned out, benefited only three individuals, one of whom used to boast that his landed property equaled the size of Switzerland."[71]

The conflict between the political elites fed the rivalries among tribal elites, and vice versa. The nationalist axis that was headed by Hikmat Sulaiman and Jafat Abu al-Timn was supported by al-Shalan, Abd al-Wahid, and Samawi al-Jallub, who were – respectively – the sheikhs of al-Shabana, al-Fatla, and al-Azza. Meanwhile, the opposing axis, supported by Britain and led by Jameel al-Madfai, Nuri al-Said, and Ali Jawdat al-Ayyubi was, in turn, supported by Marzuq, Alwan, and Rayih, the sheikhs of the Awwad, Bani Hasan, and Hmeidat tribes.[72] In his book *The History of Arab Ministries*, Abd al-Razzaq al-Hasani informs us that the rebellious tribal authority was capable of bringing down the government. When tribal sheikhs found no place for them in the 1934 cabinet of Ali Jawdat al-Ayubi, they sided with the "opposition," represented in Hikmat Sulaiman and Jafar Abu al-Timn.

Figures such as Sulaiman, Abu al-Timn, and Rasheed Ali al-Kilani were capable of maintaining political influence in that period even if they were outside the cabinet because of the tribal support that they enjoyed. The tribes kept pushing and protesting until the cabinet of Ayubi finally resigned in the following year. After the government's resignation, King Ghazi chose Yasin al-Hashimi to head the new cabinet, while imposing a few names on him. Al-Hashimi refused, prompting the king to appoint Jameel al-Madfai as the new prime minister, but the tribes side with al-Hashimi and exerted pressure upon the king and the government, using violence in the regions of the Middle Euphrates such as al-Shamiya and Abu Skheir and al-Faysaliya, employing methods such as the sabotaging of bridges, aqueducts, and dams. The army moved

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[70] El-Hessou, Ibid.
[71] Rasheed, Ibid., p. 146.
[72] El-Hessou, Ibid.

slowly in the face of this tribal uprising, forcing the king to reinstate Yasin al-Hashimi in the prime ministership, with al-Hashimi forming the cabinet free of royal interferences.[73]

Abdulrahman al-Bazzaz says that it was normal for politicians and tribal leaders to turn the tables against each other once interests were no longer there and when circumstances changed. The army did not face the tribes that sided with Yaseen al-Hashimi because the brother of the army commander was Taha al-Hashimi. However, after al-Hashimi became prime minister, he directed a military campaign against the tribes that quelled their mutiny in 1935.[74]

The extensive use of the tribe in the political process shows the depth of the "instrumentalist bond" between these elite groups whose "branches" intersected "up high" away from those "down under" who belonged to the people. This bond between the ruling elite and the tribes, represented by their leaders, continued throughout the era of monarchist Iraq, and featured one of the most important aspects of the socio-political dialectic in Iraq during that period.

This usage of the tribe could not have taken place with such momentum had it not been for two important conditions: the tribal sheikhs placing a primacy upon their personal interests, and their propensity to be drawn into political exploitation.

Real examples exist to affirm the existence of these two factors as a common "pattern" in royalist Iraq. The sheikhs and the *Aghas* whose estates spanned the country did not concede any of their material or moral privileges with the new situation; the "modernist" status of the country merely meant, for many of them, a modern tool for gain and benefit. In *Sociological Glimpses from the Modern History of Iraq*, Ali al-Wardi recounts a tale of deep significance. In the 1920s, Abdulrahman al-Naqeeb – the first prime minister of Iraq – asked a *Shammar* sheikh who had come to visit him: are you a democrat? The sheikh answered negatively. Al-Naqeeb retorted: then I am the sheikh of democracy! So the sheikh responded: if you were a democrat, then I am a democrat as well, but what does it mean to be a democrat? Al-Naqeeb then explained to him how democracy signified equality, which prodded the sheikh to exclaim: if this is democracy, then god knows that I am no democrat! Al-Wardi comments on this anecdote, noting that the concept of democracy terrified the sheikh because it threatened his stature and privileges vis-à-vis his people.

Owning "land" and acquiring government "posts" were the two bounties most desired by tribal sheikhs. Prime Minister Yaseen al-Hashimi realized that the unrests that were stirred by tribal sheikhs were taking place because they felt that they were excluded from official positions;

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[73] El-Hessou, Ibid. and Al-Hussni, Ibid.
[74] Al-Bazzaz, Ibid.

therefore, in 1935, al-Hashimi increased the number of parliamentary seats, which proved to be an effective policy. The Regent Abd al-Ilah similarly expanded the size of the parliament during the 1940s to secure the support of tribal leaders, which prompted al-Hissu to argue that the entry of the sheikhs into the parliament weakened political life in the country because many of them were illiterate and had joined the parliamentary forum with the sole purpose of protecting their interests.[75]

Landed property was an important illustration of how tribal sheikhs had the capacity to forego their commitment towards their tribesmen in exchange for their personal interest. Batatu mentions that the government offered Ajeel al-Yawir vast lands to distribute among his people, but the sheikh kept the land to himself and to his family. In her seminal book on Iraq, Batatu described other events in the same vein, explaining how vast tracts of land in monarchist Iraq would fall in the hands of the Sheikhs leading important tribes.[76]

The following table shows the estates owned by tribal sheikhs in the Amara province:

**Table 1**

The number of landowners in the Amara Province between 1906 and 1951

| Merchants and Clergymen | Sayids | Tribal Sheikhs | Total Number of Landowners | Year |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | | 17 | 19 | 1906 |
| 1 | 3 | 29 | 33 | 1918 |
| 1 | 5 | 37 | 43 | 1921 |
| 19 | 7 | 55 | 81 | 1929 |
| | | [77]148 | 181 | 1944 |
| | | 144 | 177 | 1951 |

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[75] El-Hessou, Ibid.

[76] Batatu, Ibid.

[77] The figures (148) and (144) include the number of tribal sheikhs in addition to Sayyids.

Until the mid-1930s, tribes maintained a sense of their ability to confront the government. Tripp mentions that the tribes of the Middle Euphrates were despondent because they were not exempted from paying taxes, which was one of the major reasons behind the unrests of the 1930s and the tribal uprisings against the government.[78] Tribes waged large confrontations against the government in 1935 and 1936 when they initiated a revolt that they wanted as an emulation of the 1920 Revolution; they garnered the support of politicians and clergymen. At that point, the government dispatched a sizeable force led by military commander Bakr Sidqi, who crushed the tribes one at a time. Al-Wardi comments on these events: "the tribes finally realized that conditions had changed, and that the government was capable of subjugating and exacting revenge on any tribe that rebeled against its authority. Since that period, Iraqi tribes became more pacific and submissive, and tribal sheikhs began seeking the favor of the government and garnering its good graces, rather than declaring war against it."[79]

We could say that, from that moment on, the army – and not the tribe – became the principal player in Iraq, from 1935 until 1941. Following the strong showing by the army, tribal sheikhs developed a new strategy consisting of working with political authority as part and parcel of it, rather than confronting it. This meant that they would side with government at times, and with the opposition in other instances, which was a rational perspective and a lone solution as long as "power" was their principal objective. This was intensified by their observation of the instrumentalist behavior of the political elite, not to mention the tribal leaders' lack of belief in the government as a whole.

After 1941, the country languished under governmental despotism after the British government intervened militarily to support the Liberal movement (which was loyal to Britain, and composed of Nuri al-Saeed and Regent Abd al-Ilah) against the nationalist revolutionary movement represented by the revolution of Rasheed Ali al-Kilani. Thus, Nuri al-Saeed and Abd al-Ilah were capable of completely dominating Iraq, whose crisis intensified until the end of the monarchist era with the 1958 Revolution. Due to the sheikhs' benefiting from ruling elite, many of the southern tribes and Kurdish tribes in the north were apathetic towards the war with Great Britain in 1941, and did not respond to the "Jihad" call that was sounded by the clergymen against British intervention in the country.

Nuri al-Saeed, who was during that phase Iraq's strongman, maintained the interests of the *Aghas* and the tribal sheikhs and showered them with benefits, so they kept supporting him and propping up his authority. Batatu comments that "the tribes between 1941-1958 were largely in

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[78] Tripp, 2006.
[79] Al-Wardi, (1998), Ibid., p. 175.

harmony with the government; and following the mid-1930s and the events of 1941, the authority stopped trusting the Army and relied on the tribal leaders."[80]

In addition, the Prime Minister Nuri al-Saeed included the leaders of the large tribes in his party (the Constitutional Union) in 1947, and they were given 17 Parliamentary seats out of a total of 46 party seats. Meanwhile, to garner their support, the Regent Abd al-Ilah increased the representation of tribal sheikhs in the cabinet between 1947 and 1958 to 6%, while their ministerial share between 1921 and 1932 did not exceed 1.8%.[81] In this late period, two tribal leaders occupied important posts within the Iraqi Army: Mazhhar al-Shawi who led one of the army brigades, and Kadhim al-Abadi who led the air force.[82]

To illustrate the official status achieved by the tribal sheikhs in the last phase of the monarchical regime in Iraq, we could observe (see Table 2) the swift increase in their numbers in the parliament, which was a gift from Abd al-Ilah, compared to their numbers in previous years. Their expanding role in the parliament, despite their lack of education and illiteracy, shows the strength of their "instrumentalist bond" with the ruling elite at the time.

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[80] Batatu, Ibid.
[81] *Ibid*.
[82] *.Ibid.*

**Table 2**

The numbers of tribal sheikhs and *Aghas* in the Parliament[83]

| % | Total Number of MPs | Number of Tribal Sheikhs and Aghas | Parliament |
|---|---|---|---|
| 19.3 | 88 | 17 | 1925 |
| 14.8 | 88 | 13 | 1928 |
| 15.9 | 88 | 14 | 1930 |
| 20.5 | 111 | 18 | 1933 |
| 18.9 | 116 | 21 | 1937 |
| 31.9 | 135 | 37 | 1943 |
| 33.3 | 135 | 45 | 1947 |
| 34.1 | 135 | 46 | 1948 |
| 36.3 | 135 | 49 | 1953 |
| 36.3 | 135 | 49 | 1954 |
| 37.8 | 135 | 51 | 1954 |
| 35.9 | 145 | 52 | 1958 |

**From embracing the individual to exploiting him**

Hanna Batatu sees the history of Iraq as a history of the tribes and their sheikhs, which is confirmed by the modern history of Iraq and the political roles played by the tribes that deeply affected the political process and its maturity. From a general overview, we can say that the

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[83] Batutu, Ibid.

political status of the tribe in monarchical Iraq did not take a single shape, changing forms according to each phase. In the 1920s, the mighty tribes opposed the government and the tribal leaders were considered to be competing with King Faysal over the leadership of the country. The 1930s witnessed a sharp conflict between the tribes and the government, as well as a struggle within the government in which the tribes were used to pressure opponents. However, the 1940s were a time of accord and harmony between the tribes and the ruling elite, a situation that lasted until the end of royalist Iraq.

This accord in the last two decades of monarchist Iraq was a result of the confluence of interests of the sheikhs with those of the ruling elite that had taken hold of the country, pressuring the tribesmen of the countryside into submission, while the opposition became limited to the city-dwellers, especially with the 1941 and 1958 Revolutions.[84]

Today, we are experiencing the technological revolution and the age of post-modernity, in a world that reinstates secondary and traditional identities and belongings. The emergence of traditional identities and society's embracing of them is but a natural reaction to the unavailability of an alternative that can assimilate individuals in their modern societies and homelands.

Democratic practice in Arab society turns, automatically, into an "enshrining" of sectarianism and tribalism once political elites attempt to exploit these two dimensions and conspire with the tribe and the sect. It is important to keep this tribal dimension in mind when pondering political change in Arab societies. If there were positive effects for the tribe in Arab society, these benefits should be limited to the social dimension. The political process, on the other hand, should be stripped from the tribal dimension and a process must be instituted to politically fragment the tribal entity.

As Azmi Bishara says: "this pattern of political behavior does not allow the delimiting of the Nation and Citizenship, instead, it creates a different arena that is completely separate from that in which a democratic system could develop."[85]

The entry of the tribe into the political process is a negative factor because healthy political practice does not allow a space for the tribe as "tribe" (i.e., as a single entity shaped according to its known traditional form that does not fit with modern political practice). Furthermore, the very structure of the tribe prevents healthy political interaction. If we were to perceive the individual from the tribe's perspective, he could only be an agent to be exploited, and could never become

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[84] *Ibid.*
[85] Bishara, Ibid. p. 116.

the basic, effective unit on which civil society is based. Thus, we observe that the tribe, which was a natural "incubator" for individuals throughout its history, turned into an exploitative system once the political situation allowed for it. The ancient logic of the tribe remains in effect: the logic of strength and seeking stature.