A Study of the Strength of Tribal Ties Among Rural and Urban Zanzibaris in Oman

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Introduction

Tribe (*qabeelah*) has been a major aspect of Arab life for centuries; the advent of the modern state and rapid urbanization is bound to have an effect on this institution. I became interested in whether the tribe has undergone any significant changes in Oman that can be attributed to urbanization, due to the fact that large-scale urbanization was so rapid, only beginning in the 1970s with the rise to power of Sultan Qaboos. While many parts of Oman remain somewhat underdeveloped, the country is rapidly changing; it is not unrealistic to assume that traditional structures may be bending under the pressure of changing lifestyles.

Zanzibar was part of the Omani empire in Africa until the uprising on January 12th, 1962, after which the majority of the Omani families that had migrated there returned. Those who had moved to Zanzibar belonged to Omani tribes and thus when they returned were easily accepted back into Omani society.[1] This held true as long as the "different blood" (not from an Omani tribe) was from the mother, a relevant issue as many Omani men married Swahili women.[2]

In this paper I first examined the literature available about tribe and urbanization, looking at the migration to cities and settling of nomadic tribes. While there was substantial information about the Arab world in general, not much research had been done in Oman. I conducted interviews and gathered data to fill this gap in the literature. Believing that those exposed to a more urban lifestyle would have significantly weaker tribal ties than those who remained in rural settings, I focused my research on the urban and rural Zanzibari population of Oman, in order to control for all possible variables. I then analyzed the data obtained and presented it along with my conclusions and the many new directions that I believe this research may well take in the future.

Literature Review

The majority of the Arab world is traditionally organized into tribes which, before the modern state, were the main source of identity, support, and protection for the individual. The question I address here is whether the advent of the state and of urbanization has had an effect on tribal organization and cohesiveness. The majority of the literature on tribes in the Middle East remains undecided on this. In the many studies that have been conducted, urbanization has rarely been mentioned and the emphasis is instead put on the state and its actions. When urbanization does appear in the literature it is fleeting and ambiguous, some writers claiming that it has had a profound effect on tribes, others that it has had little or none. There is also the minority view that tribalism has an adverse effect on the state and urbanization. It is important to also note that in the literature many times the term "urbanization" is coupled with, and at times interchangeable with, the term "modernization." While I will not be using this term in my research, it is unavoidable that it will appear in the literature review, as previous researchers have coupled the two. Since the literature I encountered covered a variety of issues as they related to tribe and urbanization, I will address each piece separately, acknowledging the amount of effect that

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[1] This information was taken from various discussions in classes taken during my study abroad experience in Oman. Academic Director Elizabeth Langston oversaw these discussions, prompted by lectures given by guest speakers throughout the course of the semester.

[2] The source used for this information is a presentation given to SIT students by Ahmed Mukhaini on 2/20/07 entitled "Tribes, Patronage and Politics in Oman"

each states that urbanization has had. I will separate the literature based on whether it addressed the other countries in the Middle East, or the Middle East in general, or Oman specifically.

Middle East

The issue of tribes and the state, or more specifically urbanization, has been of interest to researchers since the 1970s. Many focused on tribes and state formation; however they did address urbanization from time to time, whether explicitly or implicitly. As each piece of literature dealt with different aspects, each will be examined individually to assess the effect that state formation and urbanization have had on the tribes of the Middle East.

Khoury and Kostiner (1990) compiled articles dealing with tribes and states in their book *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*. In the introduction they detailed how the process of state formation has led to the voluntary or forced breakup of traditional forms of tribal authority and the erosion of old tribal loyalties, leading to the emergence of new groupings and movements that retain certain tribal characteristics but are also conditioned and heavily affected by other factors.[3] They acknowledge that there are deeper undercurrents to this transformation within the city and the tribe. While the tribe is conventionally viewed as the historical opponent to the state and many states therefore pit tribe against town, employ tribal leaders in the government, and spread a nationalist ideology and national identity, it is acknowledged that tribes also helped smooth the transition to state and urban city, as they formed a buffer which helped maintain tradition in the face of change.[4]

In the same collection, Tibi's article advances the idea that tribes continue to exist relatively unchanged in modern urban societies. He describes how while at times there is a correlation between socioeconomic status within the city and the cohesiveness of the tribe, namely that the higher the status the more cohesive the tribe, this is not always the case. This is due to tribal affiliations being "sub-ethnic societal divisions in the nation-states of the Middle East [;] [t]ribal affiliations continue to exist despite the fact that Middle Eastern societies have undergone essential transformations."[5] While it may seem that the upper class in urban society is the only area where tribal affiliations and institutions are maintained, this is not always the case. In the Middle East "modernization" was externally induced, leading it to proceed unevenly, causing social tensions as not all groups were assimilated in the same manner.[6] Tibi therefore presents the assimilation and instrumentalization of tribal affiliations by the upper class as a means to maintain control, whereas the lower classes and those unable or unwilling to assimilate cling to tribal ties as a source of identity and survival in a rapidly changing environment.

Kostiner's contribution to the book focuses on Saudi Arabia, specifically the creation of the Saudi state. With consumerism and urbanization the "ecological integrity

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[3] Khoury, Philip S. and Joseph Kostiner "Introduction: Tribes and the Complexities of State Formation in the Middle East" *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* California, University of California Press 1990 pp 1-22; p 3

[4] Ibid. p 13-15

[5] Tibi, Bassam "The Simultaneity of the Unsimultaneous: Old Tribes and Imposed Nation-States in the Modern Middle East" *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* California, University of California Press 1990 pp 127-152; p 140

[6] Ibid. p 142

and political autonomy of tribes were eroded; in fact tribes tended to disintegrate owing to sedentarization"[7]. This also led to new problems such as class conflict, mainly in the mixing of tribal groups with social classes; whereas tribal chiefs joined the upper class, "rank-and-file" members formed the bulk of the Saudi lower class. Nomadic and lately sedentarized groups also had problems mainly with adjusting; "the dissonance between their traditional ways and modernization led many to dissatisfaction with the new lavishness and Westernization, and they became alienated"[8]. Kostiner notes, however, that despite the aforementioned erosion and disintegration of tribes, tribal values and elements still played two important although opposing roles. First, they eased the disparities created by state administration or that the administration failed to overcome by serving as a buffer to change. Providing a sense of familiarity and continuity, tribalism compensated for the creation of formal and unfamiliar bureaucracy, and the absence of political parties was ameliorated by the patron-client network, with leaders drawing on tribal cooperation and familiarity to gain political support. Tribe also helped form identities by fashioning a mythical genealogy around the patron-client networks and new inhabitants of towns. However, the norms of groups were alienated from the modernizing government, and thus feelings of deprivation, poverty and maltreatment were articulated in images of tribal failures; namely lack of water, failing agriculture, and the sedentarization of the younger generation.

In this vein, Al-Mansoori, in his book on the UAE, *The Distinctive Arab Heritage: A Study of Society, Culture and Sport in UAE* (2004), focuses on the changes to Bedouin lifestyle that have been brought on by the oil industry. He however comes to a different conclusion as to the prevalence of tribal ties, emphasizing that the tribe is being transformed from a social system to a social value; while remnants of the tribe as a social system survive, they are limited and better understood as markers of allegiance and social status[9].

Dodd, in his 1973 article for the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, also contributes to the idea that urbanization has not changed the essential aspects of Arab society. He focuses on the concept of *'ird* or family honor and shows how these values and norms seem to resist the process of change because "while *'ird* is most evident in the tribal and peasant sectors of society, it also appears in the contemporary urban sector, in all but the most 'modernized' families."[10] Dodd stresses that the size and density of the population are key factors. If the Western idea of "urban anonymity"[11] held true, wherein there are too many people to be able to identify them as individuals and people are too preoccupied to form close ties, *'ird* would be difficult to maintain. While there is evidence that this has occurred in Cairo and Tripoli, most other Arab cities have divided themselves into quarters where the traditional small communities have been maintained, thus maintaining the value of *'ird* despite urbanization.

The book's final two articles give an interesting perspective as they look at not only the state's effect on tribe, but also the tribe's effect on state and how this is incorporated

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[7] Ibid. p 244
[8] Ibid. p 245
[9] Ibid. p 140-1
[10] Dodd, Peter C. "Family Honor and the Forces of Change in Arab Society" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol. 4 No. 1 (Jan 1973) pp 40-54; p 40
[11] Ibid. p 47

into the structure and working system of the tribe. In the first, Piggott (2005) sees the decline of the tribe in urban states as a necessity. The "long established socio-cultural factors within Arab society, in particular traditional tribal identity and loyalty, have been greatly underestimated as an impediment to structural reform and the development of a credible rule of law system."[12] She claims that if tribal loyalties persist "Arabs will at best have only a weak sense of allegiance to the states of which they are citizens; public officials will continue to be corrupted by particularist loyalties; the development of a rule of law culture will continue to be undermined; and the concept of a state that embodies and promotes the common will and the common good will be a distant dream."[13]

In Antoun's (2000) article he argues that the tribe has been modified in order to fit into a specific area left open to it by the state: civil society, where it functions to help maintain the state and assist in the transition to urban society. Antoun argues that the common definition of civil society is ethnocentric (i.e. Western) and does not take into account many of the structures of civil society that are common in the Middle East. He points out that tribal institutions can be considered a form of civil society, specifically the "indigenous process of conflict resolution used to settle disputes at the local level before, after, or instead of resorting to formal civil and Islamic courts. This local arena of conflict resolution, rather than newly formed political parties, recent elections, or new voluntary associations, lies at the heart of civil society in Jordan."[14] Kufr al-Ma, the village where Antoun conducted his research, had undergone many changes since 1960: accelerated social, economic and demographic trends due to the oil price revolution; an increase in the number of villagers that had worked or studied abroad; and the fact that the village became a municipality in 1986. All contributed to the weakening of kinship ties, a decline in multiplexity, and the development of differences in social status. However, although there is a new expression of individual interest and a switch in focus from the consanguine to the conjugal family,[15] assumptions and mechanisms integral to the tribal process remain part of pan-Jordanian social and political life.[16] The resilience of these tribal institutions despite urbanization and conformity to the state "may stem in part from the fact that these are the only cross-community, pan-societal cultural and social mechanisms that emphasize personal dignity in a world that increasingly is being released from clanship and close kinship norms and is increasingly being differentiated and hierarchicalized by wealth and education."[17] Thus while tribe is not as strong or cohesive as it was before urbanization, it has preserved itself in a non-threatening position within the state, allowing both to maintain validity in the daily life of citizens and tribal members.

This literature gives a scattered glimpse into the many opinions that have been formed as to how the tribe and urbanization, or the state, have interacted over the past few decades. There seems to be no consensus as to whether urbanization plays a major role in

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[12] Piggott, Leanne "Tribalism in the Arab MENA Region" *Policy* Vol. 21 No 1 (Autumn 2005) pp 15-20; p 15
[13] Ibid. p 19-20
[14] Anoutn, Richard "Civil Society, Tribal Process and Change in Jordan: An Anthropological View" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol. 32 No 4 (Nov 2000) pp. 441-463; p 441
[15] Ibid. p 457-8
[16] Ibid. p 460
[17] Ibid. p 456

the cohesiveness and importance of tribe to the population, and results seem to vary over time and by country. I will now turn to the literature that deals specifically with Oman.

Map source: CIA Factbook

<u>Oman</u>

The tribe in Oman is a social organizational structure, and while the prevalent type is the genealogical patrilineal organization, there are non-blood related tribes in Oman too, mainly alliances of smaller tribes or ethnic groups. While the tribes in Oman provide legitimacy to the state, the question remains whether the tribes still have influence or have become a product of the state. One of the main issues of tribe currently in Oman is the government's desire to establish a national identity; the importance of tribal identity to Omanis creates a problem in this regard as it leads them to switch back and forth between the dual identities of tribal member and Omani citizen.[18]

Wikan's (1982) book on women in the port city Sohar begins to address the effects that urbanization is having on the tribal institution in Oman. Her research was done in the mid-70s, when Oman was beginning to open its doors to foreign researchers, and Wikan's subjects were the "Arabs," defined by her as those who spoke Arabic. She quickly discovered that there had been a definite decline in knowledge of the tribe and its

[18] The source used for this information is a presentation given to SIT students by Ahmed Mukhaini on 2/20/07 entitled "Tribes, Patronage and Politics in Oman"

importance in daily life, for "[t]hough we[19] found little evidence among the men that these tribes mean much today, we were surprised that many, if not most, women did not even know the name of their tribe."[20] Marriage is a major issue in this book. Wikan touches on the issues regarding choosing one's spouse, negotiating the marriage and bride price, marriages used to forge alliances, and the issue of "stranger" marriage vs. cousin marriage. She holds that not much has changed in this area except for a shift towards a preference for stranger marriage over cousin marriage on behalf of the men, as it lessens the influence of the in-laws and heightens the authority of the husband. It is interesting that while by law women have had the right to choose their own spouses since 1971, Wikan found that many women still do not exercise it due to the social restraints in interactions between the sexes and the idea that elders will "know better."[21] This supports her conclusion that urbanization has not played much of a role in changing tribal values and institutions in Sohar.

Chatty's (1996) book on the mobile pastoralists of Oman addresses the development programs initiated by Sultan Qaboos, specifically those directed towards the Bedouin and the Harasii tribe in particular. While traditionally these tribes were presided over by an elected sheikh, the ascension of Qaboos to the throne has resulted in widespread efforts at developing the areas which the Bedu inhabit, thereby bringing them under the direct control of the sultanate. Much of this desire to "develop" the Bedouin stems from a popular consensus over the past few decades that in spite of lingering sentimentality, these Bedu tribes are a major obstacle to social and economic development,[22] mainly due to the belief that they form a state within the state. There is a concern that nationhood cannot be achieved permanently unless the tribal segment becomes fully integrated with the rest of the nation. The use of development planning stemmed from the idea that "the population's conception of their identity was basically tribal, and the broader concept of national identity was only to develop in step with their understanding of the services that a nation-state provided its citizens"[23]. While this has resulted in a few changes, none seems to directly affect tribal cohesion.

While there has been some research into tribe and tribal organization in Oman there is little being done as to the effects of the rapid urbanization that has been going on since Sultan Qaboos took power in 1970. My research in Muscat and Nizwa will attempt to fill the gap that exists within the research on tribes in Oman, specifically focusing on the effect that urbanization has had over the past three decades.

Research Question and Hypothesis

I examined the current conception of tribe in Oman among the urban and rural Zanzibari community and the role it has in an Omani's life, through which I attempted to gauge the strength of tribal ties. I hypothesized that tribal ties would be weaker among the

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[19] Wikan and her husband, Fredrik Barth, who was also conducting research in Sohar at the time.
[20] Wikan, Unni *Behind the Veil in Arabia: Women in Oman* Chicago, University of Chicago Press 1982; p 42-3
[21] Ibid. p 190
[22] Chatty, Dawn *Mobile Pastoralists: Development Planning and Social Change in Oman* New York, Columbia University Press 1996; p 15
[23] Ibid. p 76

Zanzibari community in urban Muscat than in rural Nizwa, and that if this were true, then tribal issues will be more prevalent in Nizwa than in Muscat.

Reported consultation of the tribe was the dependent variable; I controlled for whether the informant moved away from the tribe's rural base, and if so when, as well as the age and gender of the informant. The independent variables were the informant's proximity to the tribal base, his/her identification with the tribe, and what he/she considered to be the occasions in life where it is important to consult the tribe. Proximity to the tribe was determined by where the informant currently lived; where the tribal base was located; and how frequently the individual was in contact with tribal members outside of their immediate family (*usrat(h)*). Identification with the tribe can be determined somewhat by the informant's description of him/herself, paying close attention to where tribal affiliation is mentioned, if at all; and by whether or not the informant has formed friendships outside of tribal ties. The final independent variable was determined by asking who they consult for issues such as marriage, birth, death, divorce, and/or other issues previously taken to tribal members outside immediate family, which were obtained from the literature review and the interviews as they were conducted. I also asked about their perception of tribe and what role it should play in Oman today in order to test the information gathered in previous questions, and also simply to see how they interpreted the role of tribe in Oman.

I believed that the information gathered would sow a correlation between the amount of urbanization in an area and the strength of tribal ties of the inhabitants. The more developed the city, the less important the concept of tribe will be, due to the greater diversity of the population and the distance from the tribal base.

Methodology

I relied on ethnographic interviewing, using a semi-structured set of open-ended questions (see Appendix 1), and participant observation. In order to obtain informants I relied on word of mouth and snowballing, beginning with a few well-known contacts and branching out from them. Personal introductions and contacts are a necessity in Oman to conduct this sort of research.

Participation

The snowballing method led to a varied group of informants, and while I was able to get five informants from Nizwa and five from Muscat, the commonalities end there. In order to narrow the search for informants, and guarantee that they spoke enough English to complete the interview, I focused only on the Zanzibari or Swahili-Arab population of Oman. I also chose the Zanzibari population as they have had the most exposure to urbanization and life outside of Oman; thereby eliminating the conflicts in data if I had combined these informants with a group which had never had such exposure.

The group that I interviewed was varied in age, occupation, and lifestyle. This gave me multiple perspectives on the ways people conceive of tribe. The ages of my informants ranged from twenty to seventy years. Six were married, four unmarried.[24] One was a teacher, one worked for the army, four were students, two were housewives, and two were employed by private companies. One of the informants from Nizwa, Informant 7, did not

[24] Informants 1, 4, 5, and 10

speak any English and was in fact illiterate. A few of the informants were related but not from the same tribe, as they were related through the women of their family. There were two sets of informants from the same tribes: Informants 1 and 11, Al Harthys from Muscat and closely related; Informants 4 and 5, Al Mahrooqis from Nizwa. They were distantly related and also had very different views, mainly (I believe) because Informant 4 had lived part of her life in Muscat and Informant 5's family had not left the tribal base of Adam since returning from Zanzibar.

Problems Encountered

When conducting the interviews I came across a few problems that may have affected the data obtained. In Nizwa I interviewed four women and one man, whereas in Muscat I interviewed three men and two women. While I had initially decided not to control much for the sex of the informants, based on the assumption that due to cultural boundaries I would mainly be interviewing women, the fact that there is unbalanced representation of the sexes may alter results. Minor issues encountered were time conflicts, especially in Muscat, and a few minor misunderstandings due to language, mainly in Nizwa; these were, however, rectified during the interview the majority of the time. There was also one instance where I was forced to use a translator as Informant 7 did not speak any English.

Data and Analysis

After completing the interviews I concluded that whether an informant resided in an urban or rural area had little effect on the person's identification with the tribe or the strength of tribal ties. Instead, the person's age and the level of education played a much stronger role. The majority of the informants from Nizwa did fit the original hypothesis, having fairly close ties to their tribe and a relatively positive view of the institution. One Nizwa informant, however, I4, believes that tribe is an antiquity, that it is nothing more than one's surname now. The majority of informants from Muscat did not fit the original hypothesis either. Tribalism seems to remain as strong there as in Nizwa, with one exception, I11 who, although respecting the tribe and adhering to certain tribal values, at least formally, believes that there is no place for tribalism in the 21st century.

This lack of support for my initial hypothesis made it pointless to analyze the information gathered based on the urban versus rural distinction. Throughout the interviews I used a basic nineteen-question guide (see Appendix 1), which addressed issues such as marriage, loans, voting, job-hunting, contact with the tribe, and what the person thought of tribe and its role in Oman. Since the responses were so varied and did not support the urban/rural hypothesis, I analyzed the data based on the commonalities that did appear, namely those based on the informants' ages and levels of education. One thing that bears mentioning before delving into the analysis is that very few informants identified themselves as coming from a certain tribal base when initially describing themselves to me, in fact only two did;[25] the rest either described themselves based on their professions, studies or marital status and many mentioned Zanzibar as the majority were born there.

[25] Informants 8 and 10

Marriage

In addressing the issue of marriage, I changed my method of asking the question based on a few factors. I asked married people how they chose their spouse and whom they consulted about it, how and by who their marriage was arranged, whether their spouse was from the same tribe, and if they had a daughter, whom they would prefer her to marry. The unmarried were asked whom they talked to about marriage, whom they would choose as a spouse, and whether or not they would want to marry within the tribe.

Out of the three married women that I interviewed only two, I3 and I7, gave detailed information about their marriages and what they hoped for their daughters. Interestingly they both had very different experiences and expectations, due mainly I believe to the difference in their ages; I3 was 33, I7 was in her 70s and a widow. When the issue of marriage arose for I7, she was unable to discuss it with anyone as her mother was still in Zanzibar at the time of her marriage, and she was the eldest of her sisters. She was married at thirteen to a man from her tribe, the marriage arranged by her paternal great uncle, who was acting as her father, and "there was no freedom, they did not ask her, he asked for her and she was given to him."[26] Her perception of marriage was that "maybe those with authority just wanted to get rid of the girls."[27] When she was asked who she preferred her daughter to marry the immediate response was "someone from the relatives"[28] because if she married a "stranger" he may move her further away from her and therefore she wouldn't be able to visit her daughter as often as she would like.

I3 had a very different opinion as to how marriage should be carried out. She said that while in the past women could be married in their early teens, "things have changed, developed."[29] Although I3 also had an arranged marriage, she was married after she completed college. Her spouse was not from the same tribe, but the marriage was arranged between their mothers who had known each other while in Zanzibar. When I asked her about the details of arranging a marriage she said that "there are rules we should follow, especially in marriage"[30]. The issue of the dowry was settled between her uncles, acting in the place of her father, and her husband-to-be. When all had been arranged between them an "old man", who was not a relative of either party, asked her if she would accept the man as her husband, and he must listen to her decision. She encourages her daughter to also marry into a different tribe, since she is aware of the risk of genetic disease; however she acknowledges the difficulty of this as there still exists as hierarchy of tribes wherein higher status tribes do not wish to marry into lower status tribes.

The married men, whose accounts differed from those of the women, gave almost identical accounts of their marriages. Both I8 and I9 married cousins; I8 married within the tribe, while I9 did not as he married his maternal cousin. While I8 did not consult anyone on the subject of his marriage, according to him he "just decided and [he] spoke to [his] uncle and [they] were engaged."[31] I9 on the other hand did discuss his marriage with his immediate family. It is interesting to note that his mother did most of the negotiations, probably because the bride was her niece. Both informants hoped that their daughters

[26] Informant 7 (25-04-07)
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Informant 3 (24-04-07)
[30] Ibid.
[31] Informant 8 (02-05-07)

would marry someone that they loved and would be the best match for them but neither preferred that the potential spouse be a tribal member.

The unmarried informants, regardless of sex, seemed to have the same opinion of marriage and the spouse they would choose. All were college students, between the ages of 20 and 29, only one was male. None of them desired to marry within the tribe, mostly because of a belief that it was an antiquated practice. (None mentioned the possibility of genetic disease as a deciding factor as previously mentioned by I3.) The women all agreed that they would consult their sisters and mothers about marriage. I4 said that talking to her parents would not be very important because they "started to believe the culture in Nizwa about marriage."[32] I5 believes on the other hand that while it is important to take her family's opinion into consideration, she would prefer to make her own decision in the end. I5 and I1, however are not thinking of marriage any time in the near future and prefer to finish college before considering it.

Although the tendency to marry within the tribe seems to be declining in the younger generations, and even in the desires of their parents, tribe still plays an important role in marriages. The role however is changing; it is becoming more of a consultative role and less of a deciding factor. While people are still willing and often do consult their tribe in regards to their marriage, more and more prefer to make their own decisions independent of tribe and family. This trend does not seem to have any relation to whether the informant was from a rural or urban background but instead results from a generational gap. While the majority of those already married had arranged marriages, they did not express a desire to arrange marriages for their children, nor did many of them want their children to marry within the tribe. The unmarried all preferred not to marry within the tribe or have an arranged marriage. Contrary to urban/rural assumptions, the changes in tribal practices regarding marriage are based on age and education.

The following are issues which arose from questions used during the research to verify how strong tribal ties were. These questions were mainly hypothetical, used in order to see how the informants would deal with issues such as inheritance, loans, buying a house, getting a job, voting for *majlis al shura*, and what they would do if they were charged with a crime. These issues were chosen because traditionally they would be addressed in a tribal setting, avoiding involving members outside of the tribe, and even at times outside of the immediate family circle.

Inheritance

Issues of inheritance are usually handled within the family, and the majority of my informants regardless of age, education, and location preferred to handle it in this manner. A few, I4, I7, and I10, all women, would avoid the conflict all together or "only complain to God."[33] Only I8 and I9 mentioned the courts in any context, and both listed it as a method of last resort. I8 said that he would only go to the courts if discussing it within the family and going to the sheikh did not work. I9 was much more specific in his answer, stating that normally they use the Islamic system, which has very clear guidelines regarding inheritance. In settling any disputes they may talk to someone they trust and then if any further issues need to be settled they will resort to the courts.

[32] Informant 4 (24-04-07)
[33] Informant 7 (25-04-07)

The courts remain a last option among the men, and the women preferred to resolve it within the family and tribe or avoid the conflict altogether. This preference for keeping disputes within the family and trying not to involve outsiders unless there is no other option shows that tribal ties remain strong in this area as well, regardless of residence, age or education. This can be tied to the tribal concept of shame, discussed in the literature, wherein in order to preserve the public's good opinion of the tribe all internal conflicts will remain that way and be dealt with in a private manner.

Loans

The matter of loans is resolved in different ways depending upon the amount in question. If it is a small or modest amount, all of my informants said they would ask a family member, however if it was a large amount of money they would go to the bank for a loan. There were only two exceptions to this general consensus, I3 who believed that all money matters should be in the hands of male relatives and therefore did not concern her, and I1 who felt that he personally was unable to ask for a loan but knew that if his family was aware that he needed money they would help him without the need of him asking. Thus much like the previous issue of inheritance many prefer to rely on their tribe, and at times more specifically their immediate family, in order to solve issues such as this instead of resorting to outside aid.

Buying a house

When considering buying a house, the majority wanted someplace close to their relatives, only one informant said he wished he had chosen to live outside of the capital where most of his family lives because he wanted somewhere quieter and more peaceful, whereas when he chose his current house it was based on its proximity to his workplace[34]. Another informant, I3, did not actually choose where to buy her house as she and her husband went to the government and had land appointed to them. While she acknowledged that some people prefer to live close to the family, they decided to stay on the land appointed to them by the government, however given that this is in Nizwa there's a very good chance that despite taking the land appointed to them she was still fairly close to her family.

The choice to live close to the family was the same regardless of age, education or whether the informant was from an urban or rural background. The only discrepancy in this is I8's initial decision to choose live close to his work and desire to now move out of the city.

Getting a Job

Asking my informants how they got or were planning on getting a job yielded some very interesting results. It was initially assumed that at least some of the informants would use tribal influence or *wasta*, but not a single informant reported using it; the majority preferred to use the internet or newspaper ads. Only one mentioned *wasta* in any sense, which I had asked him to explain in detail since he was going through a job search it at the time of the interview

[34] Informant 8 (02-05-07)

> Well I'm trying to search through the internet, if I can get something, but the problem is even though people are applying through the internet, sometimes you don't get a reply and it bothers me. That you send emails and your CV and they just don't reply and so you're stuck, sometimes what happens is almost like 4000 people apply for the same vacancy and so they cant reply to everybody but the least thing they can do is tell you or just email you back something, but you know... And sometimes they just can't go through 4000 CVs. And then there's something called *wasta*, have you heard of this... and some people use it. Well sometimes you have to but, I have never used it, it came through my mind but I couldn't ask.[35]

Although *wasta* is acknowledged to exist and some people do apparently use it, none of my informants reported using it at any point in their careers. This suggests that in this area tribal influence may be lessening.

Voting for *Majlis al-Shura*

Who a person votes for in the *majlis al shura* can greatly depend on tribal affiliations. While three informants said they would vote either for a relative or for someone that their relatives voted for, only one did it because it was her preference. The others said it because there was no other way for them to know whom they were voting for since there is no campaigning that would allow them to learn about the candidates; tribal affiliation might be the only known factor. I8 mentioned how now "family, tribe and politics"[36] all play a role in his decision of who to vote for, but how he hopes that in the near future people will vote based on qualifications and not family. The youngest two informants from Nizwa, I4 and I5, both said that they preferred to vote for someone who would help the *wilayaat* (state) they were representing, and that while some people from the previous generation will follow the sheikh in his decision, the younger generation has started to stray from this practice. Interestingly, two informants said that they had not bothered to vote at all, the first because he doesn't have the resources to know the candidates well enough to vote for them and the second because she has "no specific reasons to vote, and ... because no one's approached me yet, you know when they do personal campaigns"[37]. While this does suggest that she may vote for tribal members, though she would verify their promises, her disregard for both tribe and the *majlis* itself make her answer odd.

While tribal influence still plays a major role in voting for *majlis al-shura* it seems that with time, education, and freedom to campaign (should that day come), this will probably lessen as well.

Legal Assistance

The final hypothetical question was whom the informants would go to for help if charged with a crime. The majority, four of the seven who answered this question, would first look into it themselves before seeking help. All would ask their families for help or support, and only three would seek legal advice. The reluctance to seek legal advice is

[35] Informant 1 Interview #1 (17-03-07)
[36] Informant 8 (02-05-07)
[37] Informant 10 (05-05-07)

present for much the same reason as people prefer to solve disputes and financial matters amongst themselves; however whether or not the family members they consult may advise them to seek legal advice is another question that may arise from this.

Whom to Consult When

In order to gauge the amount of consultation of the family and the tribe I asked informants to list examples of when they consulted the tribe and when they consulted only their immediate family. There seemed to be little continuity between the different informants, however to better illustrate the point and perhaps attempt to find commonalities I have summarized the data into the table below.

	Age, Occupation, and Residence	Consult Tribe	Consult Family
Informant 1	21, Student, Muscat	Ceremonies and marriage	Help, marriage, death and gatherings (Eid)
Informant 3	33, Teacher, Nizwa	Did not seem to think she would, instead said that if she could not contact family she would talk to a friend.	Travel, marriage, and divorce
Informant 4	20, Student, Nizwa	Said that women do not consult the tribe, only men do this.	Studies and marriage
Informant 5	22, Student, Nizwa	Greater conflicts outside of family, for example the lack of girl's hostels at the university though this was not done by the informant but by her father	Something that affects the whole family, such as moving
Informant 8	30s, Private Company, Muscat	Choosing the sheikh	Weddings and funerals
Informant 9	40s, Army, Muscat	Major family crises or disputes, something that involves another branch of the tribe, building the sabla	Marriage, divorce, family disputes, health, crises, job loss, loosing a house, financial problems
Informant 10	29, Consultant, Muscat	Only marriage, when there is the mixing of two families	Changing jobs, moving

Table 1: Reported Consultation of Tribe and Immediate Family

Consultation of the immediate family is high; there are many issues where the informants believed that it was important to consult their immediate family -- mainly actions and events that would affect the entire immediate family directly. However consultation with the tribe does not seem to be very important, especially for the women. Those who said they would consult the tribe mainly would do so in regards to marriage. The men indicated that there would be more reason for them to consult the tribe than the women did, including disputes, choosing the sheikh, and the building of the *sabla*[38]. These differences seem to be completely unrelated to age, education, or location and instead seemed to be based solely on the sex of the informant. While both the women and men, regardless of age, education, or residence, consulted the immediate family on multiple issues, only the men seemed to consult the tribe on any matter.

Friends

Almost all of the informants except for the eldest, I7, said they had close friends outside of their tribes; the majority of these friendships were formed through work, college, or other associations (e.g. the Cancer Association which I11 belongs to). Only three actually seemed to have very close relationships with these friends, the rest more superficial relationships. I10, I1, and I5 had formed their closest bonds outside of the tribe, all three are relatively young, I10 being the eldest at 29, and all were or had recently been students. I4 was the only university student to portray doubt as to the closeness of her friends outside the tribe, pointing out that she has one close friend but she does not "trust her 100%, [she] can't tell her everything, [she] prefer[s] to tell [her] sister everything."[39] Friendships formed over the internet through instant messaging services also seem to be becoming more prevalent among the younger generation, though these tend to be superficial. One exception to this is I10 and her close friend, and now business partner, whom she met on a discussion board in a chat room[40].

While it seems that in the end the majority of trust still lies within the family and tribal circle, people are beginning to branch out and form friendships and connections outside of the tribe. This is mainly a phenomenon among the younger and/or more educated group, namely those that have had the technology or the opportunity to physically separate themselves from the tribe.

Tribe and its Role in Oman

The final two questions focused on the informants' opinion of tribe and the role that they believed tribe should play in Oman. An overwhelming majority of the informants, eight out of ten, had an extremely positive opinion of tribe and thought it was as relevant today as in the past. Only two had a negative or indifferent opinion and believed that the tribe had no role in contemporary Omani society.

Those that had a positive view of tribe and its role in Oman cited three reasons for this belief. Cooperation and problem solving was the most common, and was also believed to remain the tribe's role in Oman as it has for centuries. I5 in particular stated that "tribe is a part of culture, and culture is like skin, difficult to change."[41] This also led to the belief

[38] Meeting house.
[39] Informant 4 (24-04-07)
[40] Informant 10 (05-05-07)
[41] Informant 5 (24-04-07)

that tribe is an influential part of society, a few saying that "it's like a small society in a big society, and if there are strong families there will be a strong society."[42] This then made tribe a necessity in the past, present and future of Oman because it bound people together and made the Omani society stronger.[43] The final reason cited as why tribe is important and relevant is that of identity. All that cited this as their main reason said "it's good to know where you come from in the end."[44] I9 warned, however, that this sense of identity can be taken too far and that it's important to retain a sense of individualism, and also keep in mind that this identity should not interfere with equal opportunities at work and in the *majlis*. I9 also mentioned another interesting phenomenon taking place in Oman, especially in Muscat -- the creation of new communities that are not tribal and play a role in the society as well. These communities depend on the particular backgrounds of individuals and families, namely the fact that "some people have been exposed to more and live their lives in a different way."[45] This does not mean that tribalism is losing its importance in Oman, but that new factors are coming into play as well.

Almost all of those who retained a positive view of tribe did cite one negative aspect of the tribal society, the hierarchy of tribes, and most wished to see this aspect disappear, while preserving the tribal society as a whole. This seems to be loosening in the eyes of some of the informants, who believed that "before all tribes were different, you couldn't marry someone from a different tribe, now it's like a big family in Oman."[46] This opinion may be attributed to the small size of that particular informant's tribe, for many others said that there were still difficulties in regards to marriages between different tribes of different status.

The two who had a more negative or indifferent view of tribe and its role in Oman agreed that the only purpose it served was to "label," whether that be by name or geographically, and to separate people. An example of this is I10's evaluation of tribe, that "it doesn't serve any purpose other than to label yourself, I mean there are categories even within tribes that don't depend on money but are from 200 years ago when people were valued based on where they belong, I mean it's the 21st century."[47] I4 believed that although it was part of the culture it has no role in Oman at all anymore and that, as she stated many times throughout the interview, it is something that belongs to her grandfather's generation. Both informants pointed out that the tribal system has been, and in some places continues to be, used to degrade people based on their station within the tribe. Oddly, despite their obviously negative views of tribe, both answered previous questions in ways that show that their own tribal bonds are still strong. While both are adamant that they do not wish to marry within the tribe, both plan to get advice and organize their weddings in the traditional tribal way. While they adamant that tribe should have no role in Oman and may in fact be detrimental to the society, they still behave in ways that support the tribal system.

It does seem odd that while in practice much of the younger generation seems to be veering away from tribal practices the majority of them still hold a positive view of the tribe

[42] Ibid.
[43] Informant 8 (02-05-07)
[44] Informant 1 Interview #2 (18-04-07)
[45] Informant 9 (04-05-07)
[46] Informant 6 (24-04-07)
[47] Informant 10 (05-05-07)

and its role in Oman. However this does lead to one of my main conclusions, that the tribe in Oman has become a social value, which is further discussed below.

Summary and Conclusions

Tribalism remains strong in Oman, though not unchanged. While in practice there seems to be less consultation of the tribe, the majority of my informants continue to hold the tribe and its role in Oman in high esteem even if it has been relegated to the role of identity and support system, becoming a social value instead of a social system. Whether an individual is raised in an urban or rural setting appeared to have little or no effect on the strength of their tribal bonds or their perception of tribe. Instead the age and education of the informants had the most effect on their responses; the younger and more educated the informant, the weaker the tribal bonds.

My informants in their forties and older, whether educated or illiterate, demonstrate the strongest ties to their tribe. They continue to consult their tribe on important issues and have tended to conform to traditional practices of marriage, even if they do not plan the same for their children. There remains a desire to solve disputes and financial or criminal issues within the tribe to avoid involving outsiders and jeopardizing the honor of the tribe. The younger, more educated generation does seem to be veering away from tribal institutions to a more individualized lifestyle. While they still respect and value the institution of the tribe, there is much evidence that it does not play as much of a role in their lives as it did in the lives of the generation before them.

It is also important to note the new affiliations that are becoming part of the daily lives of Omanis. The mixed communities, especially in the city have provided people with the opportunity to interact with people outside their tribe on a daily basis, and form new ties that are strengthened over time due to proximity.

New Directions

In completing this research many questions arose, which if time had permitted would have led to other areas of research, especially since my initial hypothesis had no bearing on the results that I obtained. One of my main suggestions for further research is to examine the role that age and education play in the erosion of tribalism in Oman. I was unable to do more than examine the data I had obtained, and I do believe that a more in depth study of this will corroborate my results.

There is also a need to examine the rest of the Omani population, especially those that consider themselves "Omani-Omani", who have not had the same experiences as the Zanzibari community. This is important simply because this is the greater part of the Omani population, and may in fact give the researcher very different results.

The final area which gained my attention during the course of my research was the role of Islam in the strength of tribal bonds. Many informants brought up issues related to Islam, which I was unable to develop further. Some of these referred to the necessity to eradicate the hierarchy between tribes and tribal members, obligations in regards to attending events if invited and caring for the elders of the family.

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Informant 2, Muscat April 19th, 2007, Interview not used in paper due to lack of response.
Informant 3, Nizwa, April 24th, 2007
Informant 4, Nizwa, April 24th, 2007
Informant 5, Nizwa, April 24th, 2007
Informant 6, Nizwa, April 24th, 2007
Informant 7, Nizwa, April 25th, 2007
Informant 8, Muscat, May 2nd, 2007
Informant 9, Muscat, May 4th, 2007
Informant 10, Muscat, May 5th, 2007
Informant 11, Muscat, May 8th, 2007

Appendix #1: Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself. (or Tell me about where you're from.)
2. Where do you currently live?
3. Who do you consult on matters such as marriage?
    a. If a woman, and previously married, does this change?
    b. Who carries out the negotiations with regards to marriages, are these people considered immediate family?
    c. Was your marriage based on love or was it arranged? Did you marry within the tribe? If so, why?
    d. Who would you consult on issues of divorce?
    e. Who would you prefer to marry or who would you marry your daughter to?
4. Whose weddings/funerals do you think it's necessary you attend?
5. How would you deal with issues of inheritance, would you take it to the courts or address it in another manner?
6. If you needed a loan to make a major purchase or for your wedding, where or who would you get it from?
7. If you wanted to build or buy a house where would you buy the land? Why?
8. If you were looking for a job how would you go about it?
    a. Government job
    b. PDO
9. How would you decide who to vote for in the majlis al shura, who would you talk to about it?
10. Do any members of your family participate in a regular sabla? If so, what kind, familial organization, neighborhood organization, or work organization?
11. If someone tried to charge you with a crime who would you call or go to for assistance?
12. Where is your tribe's rural base?
13. Who do you consider to be members of your immediate family?
14. How often are you in contact with tribal members outside of your immediate family?

15. Do you have close friends who do not form part of your tribe? If so, where/when did you form these friendships?
16. What do you consider to be the circumstances in life where it is important to consult only your immediate family?
17. What do you consider to be the circumstances in life where it is important to consult the tribe?
18. What do you think about tribe?
19. What role do you think tribe should play in Oman?