Cutting the Face: Kinship, State, and Social Media Conflict in Networked Jordan

The local uptake of new media in the Middle East is shaped by deep histories of imperialism, state-building, resistance, and accommodation. In contemporary Jordan, social media is simultaneously encouraging identification with tribes and undermining their gerontocratic power structures. Senior men stress their own importance as guarantors ("faces"), who restore order following conflicts, promising to pay their rivals a large surety if their kinsmen break the truce. Yet "cutting the face" (breaking truces) remains an alternative, one often facilitated by new technologies that allow people to challenge preexisting structures of communication and authority. However, the experiences of journalists and other social media mavens suggest that the liberatory promise of the new technology may not be enough to prevent its reintegration into older patterns of social control.

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When conducting research on tribal law in Jordan, it was quite common for me to hear older men (and even tribal judges themselves) counseling me that the time to conduct such research had now passed[i]. I became accustomed to elegiac monologues from such men explaining wistfully how, "these days, the youth don't sit and learn in the *dīwān* (the guest room) the way they used to. They're always on their phones! They're on Facebook, Whatsapp, and I don't know what else!" Indeed, the adoption of the Internet and ubiquitous mobile telephony in Jordan has been rapid and striking—and many Jordanians (young and old) cannot seem to put their phones down. These older men were perceptive to note the importance of the *dīwān*

historically in creating a particular kind of [male] public (Habermas 1962) or even what Warner

(2002) terms an oppositional "counterpublic" where the know-how of tribal custom could be

passed down from father to son. However, this article will question whether the break with older

publics, antagonisms, emotions, and modes of sociality is as stark as such testimonies suggest.

These criticisms of young people's social media usage have come at a time when my and my

interlocutors' social media feeds teem with reports of "tribal clashes" (*ashtibākāt 'asha'iriyya*)

across Jordan. In fact, this was precisely why self-appointed guardians of the social order like

these older men were counseling me not to confuse such violent goings-on with Jordan's

venerable "customs and traditions". While many youths are now spending a lot of time on their

phones, the introduction of a new medium of communication has also intensified their

engagement with certain preexisting kinship logics[ii]—even if their elders view those

engagements as illegitimate.

In this article, I draw on six months of dedicated fieldwork focused on Jordan's tribal law

as well as over four years spent living and working amongst Jordanian tribesmen to track a

reported upsurge in feuding in Jordan since 2011[iii]. The data analyzed here involves over fifty

formal interviews with leading journalists, tribal leaders and members of the security apparatus

as well as a substantial archive of local media reports and extensive participant observation[iv]. My

interest in this topic dates back to 2012, when I was researching the effects of changing marriage

practices on kinship structures. In that year alone, despite my best efforts to avoid them, I

witnessed five of these tribal clashes firsthand, all of which followed the same pattern: Following

a perceived slight, youths would send out calls to action via Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, and

text messaging. At the appointed time, they would try to burn the shops and vehicles of the rival

family and then fight their rivals when they tried to defend their property. Eventually, the

gendarmerie would arrive and separate the sides using tear gas, truncheons, and armored personnel carriers.

Just what made these clashes (and those involved) "tribal" was shaped by deeper histories of resistance and accommodation involving kin groups and colonial and postcolonial state policies. Like the Ottoman and British empires before it, the Jordanian state has long sought to stamp out raiding and feuding as some of the many threats to its monopoly on the use of violence. Like its predecessors, though, Jordan's government has also found that tribes can facilitate its attempts to monopolize violence. The result has been a marked tendency to allow tribal law to continue in rural, Bedouin areas dominated by a non-Palestinian population that predominates in the security apparatus. This century-long policy tendency has been alternatively interpreted as a site of (and sign of) resistance to the state (Watkins 2014), a key tool for the subjugation of Jordan's Palestinian population (Massad 2001), and a canny strategy for patiently encompassing those tribes (Abbadi 2006). While these interpretations are often opposed both within popular discourse in Jordan and in the scholarly literature on Jordan, they are not actually mutually exclusive. In any event, it is important to emphasize the continuity of these forms of divide and rule at a number of scales over time, from Ottoman attempts to manage its hinterlands through a mix or tribal patronage and punitive raids (Abbadi 2006:39-44; Boehm: 1984:39-50; Shryock 1997:38-94) on forward.

This history of the differential application of tribal and state law has had a profound impact on how people in Jordan now negotiate notions of law, lawlessness, and criminality. At the time of research, the media tended to label clashes as "tribal" when they happened in rural areas, while labeling similar conflicts between kin groups in refugee camps and other urban areas "group clashes" (*ashtibākāt jamā'iyya*). Journalists who considered themselves tribesmen tended

to think the term "tribal clashes" was denigrating to tribes, while those who did not (often urban and Palestinian-Jordanian journalists) tended to see the distinction as trivializing tribal violence and its lawlessness. Such differences of opinion index both a shared frame of reference and two markedly different experiences of it: tribal and nontribal.

The history of the differential application of state law remains, but increasingly any victim with kinsmen willing to go along with the process can in theory avail themselves of tribal law. They can even expect a degree of government imprimatur when dealing with the crimes of *dam* ("blood" or homicide), *'arḍ* ("honor" or sexual crimes), and *taqṭiyya al-wajh* ("cutting the face" or breaking truces). Some urban and immigrant groups claim their own tribal traditions while others simply claim "the Jordanians taught us about tribes." For its most vocal proponents, tribal law promises to prevent this sort of chaos—not foment it. There are supposed to be customary limits on legitimate retribution when one's kin were under attack: rules about who can be targeted, when they can be targeted, and how each side's guarantor ("the face") is to keep the peace in subsequent truces on the pain of giving up a large surety. Through a series of truces, attempts at restitution, and reconciliations, the conservative proponents of tribal law argue that it can help bring communities together even after appalling atrocities have been committed. Yet plenty of people, far from seeking tribal prerogatives that they have historically been denied, instead reject tribalism as backwards, chaotic, and mafia-like.

This article begins by examining the methodological advantages and pitfalls of approaching a social field amidst the introduction of a new medium of communication, focusing on how such moments can highlight the workings of local "media ideologies." I then survey the ways in which tribal dispute resolution has been shaped by a very specific ideology of "face-to-face" communication that has long struggled to reconcile itself with the realities of tribal

conflict. In the following section, I use a meeting with one of a new breed of Facebook sheikhs in his *dīwān* to illustrate the challenges of projecting the *dīwān*'s masculinist and gerontocratic dynamics onto social media. In the next section, I examine what has happened as feuding and tribal conflict more generally move online, creating openings for new actors to emerge and foment their own conflicts and publics using new technologies. In the final section, I argue that the riotous efflorescence of online journalism and new media spaces that coincided with the so-called "Arab Spring" is quickly being absorbed back into what Jordanians call "the security apparatus." Subject to fierce competition, libel lawsuits, and accusations of incitement, the capture, registration, and regulation of Jordan's new online journalistic establishment comes to resemble that of the tribal notables who came before them—especially as foreign security concerns increasingly come to shape Jordanian debates on everything from faith to foreign policy.

Understanding New Media

The emergence of new media has long provoked anxieties, at least since Plato warned of the potential of writing to corrupt the transmission of oral traditions in *Phaedrus*. So it is little wonder that similar anxieties persist today when novel forms of mediation arise. Against the technological optimism sometimes associated with visions of "global villages" (MacLuhan 1964:37) and "technological singularities" (Kurzweil 2005:21-34), techno-pessimists join the fray with jeremiads warning of the social, economic and spiritual ruination that awaits those who embrace these technologies (Postman 1985; Turkle 2011). The older generation of Jordanians can thus certainly be forgiven for assuming that new media represents some challenge or other to "tradition" (whatever that is). Yet many anthropologists have long attempted to tell a much more

nuanced story, enquiring after the hopes and fears that such scholarly debates index as well as the complexities of using such technologies in practice.

In enquiring into what Ilana Gershon (2010) has called the "media ideologies" of my Jordanian interlocutors, this article builds on an earlier anthropology of media from the 1980s and 1990s, much of it inspired by the introduction of television and audio/visual recording equipment into previously marginalized communities (Abu Lughod 2004; Ginsburg 1991; Turner 1991). This work has laid the groundwork for more recent work on the internet and social media, helping anthropologists to cut through some of the hype and approach online sociality as just another site of *human* sociality (Boelstorff 2008). Daniel Miller, for instance, has argued persuasively that Facebook and related media are, in a sense, "conservative" (Miller 2011:190). He means this in at least two senses. First, more trivially, social media helps bolster relationships in the face of migration, busy schedules, and progression through the life course. It helps counteract the social entropy that leads social relationships to atrophy through disuse. However, in a more fundamental sense, online social networking sites underline how humans are always already "social networking sites" to a degree (Miller 2011:161). These new online tools work against both the ideology of modernist individuality and its practical day-to-day dynamics, re-integrating people into community accountability structures.

Yet if Miller seeks inspiration for his theory of Facebook in Nancy Munn's (1986) *Fame of Gawa*, where the goal of sociality becomes the extension of self in time and space through the creation of "fame," this article will draw inspiration from another Melanesianist trope. This is what Marilyn Strathern has called, "cutting the network" (1996). As Strathern notes, people would become immobilized and sociality would be impossible if they were caught up in "potentially endless networks of relations that seemingly did not cut themselves" (1996:529).

This is why Strathern argues that, "social relations depend on multitudinous factors that truncate the potential of forever-ramifying blood relations" (ibid:530).

The point is not to imply that Miller's focus on extension and forging new social bonds is wrong or that there is something unique about his (or my) interlocutors. People across the Arabic-speaking world today also seek to use media to forge new social bonds and animate the kin networks in which they find themselves entangled. Indeed, in a particularly compelling account of one rural Moroccan youth's search for love, Matthew Carey (2012) chronicles his key informant Hicham's pursuit of the low-risk/low-reward strategy of using mobile phone technology to call random phone numbers in the hopes of finding a suitable wife. Hicham's experience here might well resonate with the millions of young men across the Arabic-speaking world today in countries like Jordan consigned to bachelorhood and dependence on their fathers long into adulthood unless they can find ways to animate the kin networks in which they find themselves entangled (Hasso 2011). Yet it is important to understand how cutting off social relations can also be generative as the other side of the same coin—and how new media can be brought to bear on such projects of self-making through othering.

In this regard, this article builds on Gershon's (2010) work on the role of social media in social detachment: social media promises avenues for self-making by connecting with others, but it also facilitates self-formation through disconnection. Like the US college students whose Facebook practices Gershon studied in *The Breakup 2.0*, I found that Jordanians experiencing the same technological innovations at the same time also had complex "media ideologies" about what new forms of communication were—and were *not*. If for very different reasons, social media like Facebook were also seen as a source of discord among almost all of the Jordanians I interviewed. Whereas Gershon found that the neoliberal milieu of contemporary campus life

turned students into hyper-individualized neoliberal subjects who struggled with romantic

attachment, it was Jordan's often contentious and fissiparous agnatic kinship structures that

dominated local concerns in my data. Social media was widely believed to intensify individual

and collective forms of male self-making through conflict and violence. All of my interviewees

believed that the new forms of communication provided new vectors for insult and affront, as

well as new avenues for organizing retaliatory action that might bypass preexisting structures of

authority and decision-making and put more power in the hands of the crowd and its inflamed

passions. What's more, new forms of communication threatened to bring strange men into the

household where they might seduce or harass daughters and sisters in ways that would force

male relatives to avenge real or perceived slights against women, the house, the patriline or some

combination thereof.

Careful attention to local media ideologies is crucial if one wishes to avoid overly

homogenizing accounts of the uptake of new technologies or, worse, crude technological

determinism that ignores its own cultural assumptions. For one thing, against a popular Anglo-

American paradigm in which the solution to problems of communication—even violence—is

always *more* communication (Peters 1991:30-31), my interlocutors (like Gershon's US college

students) presented compelling accounts of how more communication was precisely the problem.

More importantly, while these feuds were unfolding at the time of the Arab Spring and

"#Occupy Everywhere" (Juris 2012), they were also distinct in very important ways. Certainly,

there was no shortage of Zeynep Tufekci's *Twitter and Teargas*, but there is a danger in rushing

to find in such developments what she terms, "a global cultural convergence of protester

aspirations and practices" (2017:xv). It is important to account for the local specificities of the

aims of social actors and their moral claims, as longtime ethnographers of Egypt like Farha

Ghannam (2012) and Lila Abu Lughod (2012) warned from the beginning of the Arab Spring. While Jordan has seen its own *hirak* (movements) self-consciously embracing just such a globalized paradigm of bottom-up activism, even those facets of these *hirak* most imitative of foreign precedents have ironically been forced to emphasize their own tribal character as a means of bolstering their authenticity (Yom 2014). It is to such local specificities that we now turn.

Understanding Face-to-Face Communication

As the ethnographer Andrew Shryock (1997) notes in his study of Jordanian historians, adapting discourses of (and *about*) a world of agonistic face-to-face encounters to new forms of mediation is no mean feat. The Jordanian men whose attempts to write history Shryock chronicles struggled with the challenge of relating scurrilous and defamatory narratives designed for the *dīwān*—"lies" (*kidhib*) in the local idiom—into texts that could circulate far beyond their originally intended publics (1997). As Shryock seeks to collect oral historical accounts and commit them to tape, he quickly discovers the deep fears of his interlocutors that words transposed from one medium to another might betray their authors. The tape recorder becomes a diagnostic not so much of veracity as dominance: only the most powerful and well-insulated have the confidence to disseminate their narratives far beyond the *dīwān* (Shryock 1997:179-182). If such anxieties could be provoked so readily by older men's history-writing and a foreigner's tape recorder, then it is little wonder that the profusion of social networking and phones with recording capabilities greatly accentuates these fears. Amidst rapid technological change at the level of practice, tribal sociality remains ideologically committed to face-to-face encounters in the *dīwān*. Yet the materiality of new media challenges such commitments among the older generation, becoming part of a deeper history of technological transformation dating back to colonial sedentarization projects and the introduction of the automobile. This history

underlines how there has long been a problematic disconnect between the ideology of face-to-face communication and the technical realities of actual tribal sociality.

Compared to sedentarization and the introduction of the automobile, the introduction of new forms of communication has had a much more diffuse effect on older paradigms of dispute resolution, grounded as they are in "face-to-face" communication. It is not simply the guarantors who vouch for their kin's compliance in truces who are "faces" here. The groups themselves (as well as their individual members) also have their own idiomatic "face," or discrete social reputation. It can be metaphorically "blackened" via various affronts, just as the coloring of one's face may literally darken in moments of interpersonal conflict as blood rushes to one's cheeks. In such a situation, unless one's metaphorical "face" is "cold" (incapable of experiencing shame), it becomes incumbent upon any self-respecting individual or kin grouping to "whiten" their face through retaliatory action. Such beliefs are longstanding and, in many ways, "Face-book" is immediately recognizable as a tool for the extension of one's "face." While such continuities with older logics were widely accepted by interviewees, however, it was the disjunctures that fascinated them.

One of the most interesting and dynamic of these disjunctive "traditions" to my interlocutors was a kinship category known as *khamsat-ad-dam* (the five of blood). The category is given its fullest expressive form in didactic commentaries that are imparted to children and visiting anthropologists alike in the *dīwān*. Holding an imaginary dagger with a clenched fist, the more senior man explains to his juniors that all of the relatives of the killer to "the fifth grandfather" are subject to a degree of collective responsibility for homicide. With each generation, a finger is dramatically released until, after five generations, the imaginary dagger is relinquished. These are the people who, following a murder, are potentially subject to *jalwa*

(banishment) or *tha'ir* (revenge). It is a vivid and evocative image. It is also a very partial representation of the reality—as my patient teachers were always quick to note. It is assumed that some of the *khamsa* will try to wheedle their way out of responsibility, while more distant kin may seek to join the fray for various reasons: in the hopes of building new family coalitions, making off with some booty in subsequent raiding, or maybe just becoming a protagonist in a good story and earning some local renown. There are also good reasons why, at various times, the principle of five generations of collective responsibility itself has been attacked as both overly broad and not broad enough.

Perhaps the biggest threat to the concept of *khamsat-ad-dam* related to me by my interlocutors was the introduction of the automobile to Jordan. All of a sudden, the potential for unintentional homicide skyrocketed, especially when compared to the sort of face-off implied by a knife fight or even a gunfight. While the nature of car-related deaths might mitigate claims of malicious intent, the victim was no less dead and there remained a sense that families should be entitled to satisfaction following the loss of beloved kin. As a result, there was a concerted effort to limit collective responsibility to three generations rather than five, thereby decreasing the number of people who would have to undergo the hardships of banishment. One respected local historian even told me that, since a man can hold a dagger with three fingers (and the ring and pinky fingers move together), only three generations should *ever* be banished and that all of my interlocutors arguing to the contrary were ignorant. The government's tendency to encourage previously nomadic groups to sedentarize (and accept the state's authority in place of such stateless structures of dispute resolution) has further pressured families to settle disputes quickly and with minimal violence while cutting off collective responsibility at three generations.

Despite the fact that almost everyone I spoke to saw social media as creating conflict, my Jordanian interlocutors did not naively accept a dichotomy between dynamic modern technologies and a static, objectified tradition. Indeed, most of the Jordanians I encountered were intensely concerned with history and the historicity of their customs and traditions. Even the threats posed by technology to face-to-face sociality and to sober attempts to prevent such conflicts from "widening" beyond a delimited group of responsibilized (Dean 1999) kinsmen were understood to predate the Jordanian state and the Internet. From car crashes to ever-evolving systems of guarantorship and the institutionalized banishment of five (or three) generations of a killer's family, the technical mediation of such "face-to-face" relations among kin groups has long been a significant problem and part of the work that the *dīwān* is supposed to do. As we will see in the next section, the *dīwān* presents itself as an interactive space that can defuse conflicts involving sprawling networks of actors by focalizing them in the bodies of senior men and their assembled kin and then orchestrating their separation while tempers cool. Here, elders cut the network to avoid creating opportunities for kinsmen to 'cut the face.'

A Facebook Sheikh

If the emergence of social media has often left those in their sixties or seventies confused and increasingly marginalized, a new generation of leaders in their forties and fifties has begun to blend many of the trappings of sheikhly authority with a bit of internet-savvy to make their own claims to tribal authority. One of the most interesting examples of this new kind of leader is a man I will call Sheikh Abdullah. While I may seem to dwell on this encounter at length and highlight certain atypical aspects, much of it was completely typical of my interviews with other judges, from the rituals of hospitality to the depictions of tribal law and tribe-state relations. In our discussion, he made clear how he saw tribal law much as tribesmen in many other parts of

the former Ottoman Empire do: as, "a self-conscious kind of social engineering, in which the older and more mature members of the community tried to manipulate a homicidal conflict in such a way that it first could be contained and then… be resolved" (Boehm 1984:142). As the ensuing discussion will make clear, tribal conflict mediation in Jordan is likewise a moral project that places a high normative value on a kind of social harmony that seeks to accentuate and reify hierarchies of age, gender, and wealth. Yet despite his popular page with thousands of followers, including hundreds who would "like" everything he posted, the shiekh made clear through both his explicit answers to my questions and his tacit self-presentation how dependent he remained upon the interactive space of the *dīwān*.

I first met Sheikh Abdullah, appropriately enough, through Facebook. A tribal judge, he would frequently post pictures on his Facebook page of satisfied disputants reconciling in his *dīwān*, which was a goat hair tent next to his well-appointed house in the capital of Amman. Through a series of Facebook messages and some mutual friends, I arranged to meet the sheikh at his home one evening. When we arrived he led us to his studied replica of a Bedouin tent with a ceiling fan, a flat screen television, and large, imposing pictures of his father and grandfather, Jordan's king, and its crown prince. He sat us down and had a young boy pour us each a cup of coffee in a small, thimble-like cup before promptly disappearing. In his wake, three more boys emerged, each carrying a platter: dates, chocolates, and cookies. We demurred a bit. They insisted. After we had all taken some sweets, they filed out and left us to our own devices. My friends took pictures of themselves and remarked on the décor. When the sheikh presented himself again, we were interrupted by the arrival of another guest. Indeed, a couple of men would file through over the course of the meeting, although they barely registered in the

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conversation. An Asian woman came out with tea and the sheikh remarked, "My Sudanese is off for the day."

The nature of this setup was highly typical. Framed around women and junior men providing tea, coffee, and food, the sheikh's hospitality in the *dīwān* required a host of invisible yet indispensible labor as its condition of possibility. The first question I asked him was, "what is the basis of the tribal system?" He replied, "The *dīwān*." He pointed to the tent we were in and said, "this is the *dīwān*. It is open to anyone. Anyone can come here. Now we have stone houses, but we still keep the *dīwān* for guests[v]. This is where the sheikh is found. He's the big [man]. He fixes problems amongst the people. He judges. This is the basis of the tribal system." The *dīwān*'s modes of hospitality ideologically center certain senior men as its primary givers, subsuming and erasing women and junior men as mere extensions of these senior men in ways that in turn govern who can speak and when, with those who "give" hospitality encouraged to monopolize discourse in the *dīwān* while those who *enact* the hospitality are largely excluded. More than its physical space, it was this human component of the *dīwān* that most set it apart from the modes of online tribal sociality that people like Sheikh Abdullah are now turning to, where at least in theory anyone can have their own account and start their own pages.

I next asked the sheikh to explain the process of resolving disputes and he said he would do so using the procedure for homicide as an example. He told me that first step after the governor and police deemed a homicide to be tribal (a determination heavily dependent on whether those involved responded as individuals or tribes) was for them to impose a "security truce" for three and a third days. At this point, the guilty party and those related to him through his family notebook (a government document listing one's patrilineal relatives) would be banished from the area, ostensibly for their own safety and reasons of public order. The two

families would then be expected to agree upon a sheikh who would act as a tribal judge and organize the "truce of recognition." This second truce would involve a meeting of the guilty party and his banished kin and the victim's family under the protection of the tribal judge overseeing the truce in his own *dīwān*. There the two sides would agree to a blood money payment and choose guarantors from each side ("faces"), who would be held responsible if the truce was broken. The third truce or "tribal truce" would happen after some time had passed and some blood money had been collected, which would be paid following a delegation. When the last of the blood money had been paid (or before with the sufferance of the victim's family), those banished from their homes could return. The reconciliation would be the fourth meeting of the disputants, marking the payment of the final sum and a return to normal social relations.

Proponents of tribal law like Sheikh Abdullah believed that the use of government courts and their jails brought nothing but "loss" because they did not lead to material compensation, reconciliation, or socially generative relations. The sheikh explained how the blood money is "lightened" by the people under tribal procedures. The delegation that is sent to the reconciliation asks for a particular sum, but it also asks for prayers for the prophet and his excellency the king (all of which is mirrored in the documents that participants sign at truces). Over time, the sum may be adjusted or the terms of the truce may be altered such that people can enter the other side's domain without violating the truce. In this way, demands for punitive damages are supposed to give way to mercy and then forgiveness on the part of the victim's family, the "owners of the blood."

The sheikh told me there were three types of cases: honor, face, and homicide. He estimated that he judged fifty cases a year, which would mean he had overseen about 500 in his career. Of these cases, he estimated about sixty percent were homicide and 40 percent were

honor. Of the homicides, many of these were car accidents in which the blood money payment had to be negotiated between the families, the police, and the insurance company. He said cases of "face" were exceedingly rare yet also especially important because without truces anarchy would reign, making such cases the key to stopping cycles of retaliatory violence. This was precisely why the notable failures in recent years of previously respected tribal "faces" to negotiate truces that would hold (discussed in more detail in the following section) has led to such consternation. The "face" (or guarantor) is the "loser" if the truce is broken, having promised to pay a surety if someone on his side is found to have broken the truce, ranging from thousands to hundreds of thousands of dollars. Such "cutting the face" could range from an unauthorized revenge attack by a member of the *khamsat ad-dam* to a family member simply wandering into the other side's territory during a truce.

Sheikh Abdullah was by far the most enthusiastic proponent of social media I encountered and surely represents an emerging pattern in which the gender and age hierarchies of the *dīwān* are increasingly projected into online spaces. After years of hearing almost nothing but complaints about Facebook, I was shocked when I asked him to compare Facebook and the *dīwān* and he said, "The *dīwān* is face-to-face. You see the effects of words on the face of the other… But now is better [because] everyone can see the reconciliation on the Internet." Yet even he had to admit some ambivalence about the relationship between his online and offline personae and social media's violent potential. He complained that cases of "old revenge" would start on Facebook with youths re-litigating old cases that had been settled by their elders decades ago until they spilled over into violent confrontations in the streets. He also related an example of a reconciliation he had overseen that had been "spoiled" when a young journalist published the blood money payment online in the midst of the proceedings in his *dīwān*. The two sides,

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angry over the publication of the monetary sum, had broken off the reconciliation, causing the gendarmerie to move in and prevent the return of 40 families that had been previously banished. In the next section, we will see more examples of how the social media use of such younger men further complicates the struggles of men like Sheikh Abdullah to take the advantages conferred upon them by their wealth, lineages, age, and gender and project those advantages into online spaces. If tribal law seeks to contain violence and empower senior men by cutting the network, youths have found that 'cutting the face' offers an alternative means of cutting the network, one that can quickly turn the tables on their elders.

Feuding Goes Digital

Plenty of social media activity (and activity in general) in Jordan has nothing to do with feuding and tribalism—especially in urban areas. Jordanian social media users enjoy sharing jokes, poetry, inspirational images, and a lot of Islamic and nationalist content. They also take vast quantities of pictures of themselves, their friends, and their mundane activities. Yet the nature of preexisting rural Jordanian social networks tends to make kinship integral to the adoption of new media, which can mean exclusivity as well as inclusivity. For instance, because mobile phone companies used to offer discounts to calls within their networks, kin often pressured each other to switch carriers to save them money, leading to different carriers being associated with different tribes. Nowadays, Facebook groups specializing in tribal news like "The Sakhr News Network" and "The Huwaytat Tribe" boast followers in the tens and hundreds of thousands.[vi] Likewise, when it comes time to 'friend' or 'follow' people on social media and share content, it is often to one's tribe that one turns: for connections as well as affirmative, non-controversial material that can be unproblematically 'liked' and 'shared.' The semiotics of such circulating images proclaiming tribal solidarity tend to revolve around connecting the name of

one's tribe with other prestige symbols, including international brands, nationalistic symbols like flags, and traditional Bedouin regalia and paraphernalia. As a medium, Facebook seems to present vastly greater prospects for such strategies of extension. At the same time, though, cutting the network by precipitating the dissolution of preexisting social relationships offers another way to animate an inert kin network.

The clashes that broke out between the Huwaytat and the Ma'ani tribes in 2013 represent a particularly extreme instance of the schismogenic (Bateson 1935) potential of this combination of kinship and social media. Following clashes at Hussein Bin Talal University that left four dead, there were reports of people being pulled off of buses, having their IDs checked and being attacked on the basis of their last name. These sinister rumors, which turned out to be true, became far more concrete when a group of Sharia Court employees that I was working with (none of whom were from either family) began repeatedly watching a viral video on Facebook that claimed to show the corpses of two Ma'anis who had supposedly been killed by the Huwaytat. Debate raged as the video was played and replayed: Was it real or fake (*kidhib*)? Were the corpses who they were purported to be? Most importantly: just what sort of agenda was pushing this video—and the conflict more broadly? Was this being disseminated by Huwaytat as a means to gloat or by Ma'anis to rile up their kinsmen for another round of revenge? Might there be darker forces at work (Israel, the US, the Ministry of the Interior) driving all of this to sow chaos in Jordan amidst the tumult of the 'Arab Spring'?

Whatever grand machinations did or did not lie behind the clashes, as events progressed they became less about the rival families and more about challenging all existing authority structures. A particularly striking post from a week after the four deaths at the university depicted four men with *kefiyyeh*s covering their faces holding a stolen "Ministry of the Interior"

banner and assault rifles. The most popular comments were: "There's no correct solution but the correct one from long ago, which is for the Southern Desert to be independent from the rest of the governorate" and "the Huwaytat are an army that doesn't need training." Meanwhile, elder members of the community were complaining that this was all ignoring the proper channels through which such conflicts were supposed to proceed and that people were being attacked with little in the way of genealogical precision. Most of the victims of these attacks were not from the *khamsat ad-dam* of the killer and, in any event, the government had announced a truce and important men from both families had backed it.

In their own ways, however, the upstarts and their elders were both deeply concerned with the need to cut the network. While young social media users tried to build tribal solidarity by fomenting conflicts with the government and rival kin groups numbering in the tens of thousands, their elders tried to maintain order by cutting the network at the level of five generations. This sort of fundamental need to cut the network (even as one extends it) was also central to much more mundane aspects of online sociality as well. When one admin for one of the largest tribal Facebook pages in Jordan explained to me the constant need to ban people from the page, he said, "A lot of people just dislike the page in general… Our tribe has maybe 22 or 23 families and one or two families are in the upper class. A lot of the members of parliament are from them… and they are not the biggest family either… When we want something from the government and the people in the upper class don't give us this service, we put the problem on the page. It helps the average citizen, but they hate us for it." Again, the making and breaking of kin bonds emerge as two sides of the same coin, in this case in the attempt to extend the network by nurturing a broad-based tribal political bloc to wrest more services from the government requires cutting the network by actively banning and excluding existing power brokers. The next

section will explore how Jordan's government is increasingly taking an active role in shaping these conflicts online, before they reach the streets.

Bringing the State Back In

It is not just kin groups working to cut the network. Cutting the network has long been central to the work of the Jordanian state as well—and it is increasingly translating existing logics to social media. In the short term, Jordan's government has attempted to stop the clashes (following the basic logics of tribal law) by blockading the traditional domains of the respective families to keep them apart. Yet this itself has led to more protests (media in tow, naturally). With the 2011 Arab Spring and its Internet-mediated dimensions as backdrop, 2012 was the year that the Jordan government began applying its "Press and Publications Law" to the Internet, requiring websites to be registered with the government and to have a full-time editor with at least four years of membership in the Jordanian Press Association. In 2015, a new electronic crimes law came into effect, which now extends sanctions for libel and slander to online "speech." Through both of these laws, various sovereign prerogatives compete in an increasingly global system comprised of responsibilized guardians of social order. In fact, journalists themselves are increasingly under pressure to mediate conflict in ways redolent of tribal notables before them.

The dominant political debates in my conversations with journalists in 2016-2017 were about what people could legitimately articulate online. Chief among the controversies were a string of high-profile cases in which Islamists were arrested and accused of interfering with Jordan's foreign policy through social media by publicly criticizing Jordan's American and Gulf backers (Azzeh 2016; Sweis 2015). Then the Christian journalist Nahed Hattar was arrested for an allegedly blasphemous anti-*da'esh* Facebook post that would soon lead to his assassination on

the courthouse steps (Bulos 2016). The journalists I interviewed were highly ambivalent about the increase in government regulation. I met journalists who had served time in prison and been intimidated by politicians for video content that they had promoted to viral status. I met an editor who had resisted complying with the press law until he was left choosing between acquiescence and a government blockade on his website that left him unable to make payroll. He noted, though, that the authorities never tried to shut down his site's Facebook page—they just blocked his website and thus his source of advertising revenue. Even the frequent visits of the authorities to his office to encourage him to comply with the law so as to end the blockade had been (at least on the surface) cordial enough. Virtually every journalist also at some point defensively told me, "We have freedom of expression like you do in the West." I certainly would not dismiss such claims—although I might question the degree to which "the West" actually lives up to the ideals they seemed to be envisioning—especially to the degree that it is in fact *Western* security concerns and specifically US security concerns that increasingly impinge on the exchange of ideas within Jordan's public culture.

I was particularly keen to understand how these journalists approached the tribal clashes at the center of this article given their increasing centrality to the dissemination of information online as average citizens and opposition figures alike became more reticent in the face of such government crackdowns. I had noted that news of "tribal clashes" made up a significant portion of the content online news sites produced, on a par with drug busts and car pileups. Yet most journalists were, on the whole, uninterested in these sorts of stories when I spoke to them, especially compared to issues of foreign policy and press freedom. I was repeatedly told that only someone who had spent a lot of time living in rural areas would care about such things. A

number of journalists showed me how they took police press releases and posted them, unedited, without alerting the reader that they were reading re-posted content.

In these press releases, the actions and claims of the 'security apparatus' were discussed in the third person, pre-packaged for placement underneath the banner of a news site, at which point they came to read like ready-made short news items on a local disturbance. The appeal here was obvious: competition was fierce, budgets were tight, and free content was not to be refused—even if such "*copy-paste*" was bemoaned as "unprofessional." When journalists did produce original content, they were mindful of the risks of getting the story wrong—and of providing the wrong kind of information and antagonizing the wrong people. Asked why journalists did not name the tribes involved in "tribal clashes." I was told, "We don't want the fight to widen so, for instance, if there is a clash in Maʿan, we don't want for people to read about it in Zarqa and then start a fight there."

None of this has stopped these clashes or (as far as I can tell) necessarily lessened the amount of bloodshed and disruption caused by them. At the same time, whatever bad faith motives might lie behind the attempt to use such examples of online incitement as a rationale for government regulation of the Internet, there is little appetite in Jordan for romanticizing the violent clashes the authorities ostensibly want to put a stop to. More insidiously, though, the whole way in which people think about social conflict is influenced by the communicative restrictions that are slowly emerging. Ieva Jusionyte, drawing on fieldwork conducted among Argentinean journalists caught between shadowy informal networks and official corruption, has noted a trend in coverage towards what she terms "crimecraft" (2016). Like Jordanian journalists, these journalists find that the need to maintain good relations with the authorities encourages them to report the official narrative while allowing other truths and opinions to subtly

emerge through the comments thread online, which can be moderated and subsequently disowned if need be.

Yet the discourse of crime that is now challenging that of tribal conflict can be even more hostile to different sorts of claims-making by more or less marginalized voices than the highly regulated age and gender hierarchies of the *dīwān*. The concept of crime is very much consonant with the Weberian notion of the state as that entity which has a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. It is almost tautological under modern states that citizen violence is "criminal" while state violence is not, although the persistence in Jordan of state-approved "tribal law" and its "tribal clashes" greatly complicates this. It would be deeply ironic if the Internet, long believed to nurture and foster diverse viewpoints, was increasingly coming to homogenize a heterogeneous world of scurrilous talk in cloistered *dīwān*s into a more neutral, state-endorsed hegemonic account of social conflict as "crime." Yet even this seems unlikely, as coverage of "tribal clashes" shows no sign of disappearing despite a long history of attempts by both state and civil society actors to subsume it within a discourse of criminality.

Conclusion

The focus on how changing media technologies have affected Jordanian society turns up a decidedly ambivalent picture that supports neither a dire 1984-style alarmism nor the sorts of celebratory accounts of social media's liberatory potential associated with early accounts of the "Arab Spring." It also challenges the idea, though, that social media is inherently about extension and points to ways in which "cutting the network" (and/or cutting the face) is also a canny use of such technologies. Youths connect with each other (and undermine their elders) by attacking rival kin groups, upending truces and reconciliations and severing incipient alliances in the process. Their elders, in turn, insist on setting limits to culpability and responsibility at five (or

perhaps three) generations while government officials try to blockade contentious content and, *in extremis*, entire towns. Would-be disruptors in Jordan like youth, Facebook sheikhs, and journalists rush to take advantage of such gaps where the control of states and existing kin networks is lacking. Social media gives them access to a far wider audience than they could ever reach through speech and paper, yet they are also hemmed in by the contradictory demands of the government and their followers to both extend and cut the network. Those who balance such informational and representational challenges can build large followings, wield real power, and profit. They can bring people together and make themselves the center of attention—but only if they can balance the sensibilities of their audience, those embroiled in the conflicts they comment upon, and the state. In this way, increasingly registered, responsibilized, and expected to defend the social order, social media mavens of all ages find themselves challenging—but also growing into the roles of—those grizzled old tribal notables who fear their days are numbered.

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[i] While the use of the term "tribal" in anthropological theorizing has been rightly criticized as vague and potentially orientalizing and primitivizing (Southall 1970; Sneath 2009), it is arguably precisely these qualities that encourage Jordanians to use the term and I follow the local convention in translating the terms *'ashīra* and *'asha'irī* as tribe and tribal respectively. Whether they love them or hate them, Jordanians arguably talk about "tribes" as such precisely because the term invokes evolutionary and civilizational hierarchies. If the term "tribal" is often associated with a certain unilineal evolutionary teleology and a "denial of coevalness" (Fabian 1983) by anthropologists vis-à-vis their interlocutors, then anthropologists must confront head-on instances (as in Jordan) where their interlocutors *refuse* coevalness, perceiving the anthropologist's own time as shallow, effete, and unsustainable. This rhetorical framing of 'tribal law' within the ethnographic encounter is highly reminiscent of the "symbolic condensations and displacements" that Andrew Shryock has identified in Jordanian discourses around hospitality, where authenticity is likewise projected onto a nobler past at odds with contemporary decadence (2004:42). In doing so, Jordanians creatively appropriate and invert civilizational hierarchies, either inventing (and reinventing) a positively valued "tribal" past in the process (Al Abbadi 2006) or, alternatively, seeking to hold Western anthropology responsible for having perpetuated such notions in the first place (Massad 2001). While I have registered my doubts elsewhere about the degree to which the British Empire was the first empire to administer Jordan through the dynamics now termed "tribal" (Hughes 2015; 2016) and I do draw on Christopher Boehm's (1984) work on highly similar dynamics Montenegro (a part of the Ottoman empire that was never ruled by the British), a full discussion of these long-running and vibrant debates would be beyond the scope of this article.

[ii] As I will show, aspects of these 'kinship logics' are quite idiosyncratic and historically dynamic and should not be confused with an earlier anthropological discourse of "kinship societies" that has rightfully been criticized as offering an unreflexively eurocentric notion of kinship rooted in certain ideas about the biological "facts" of "reproduction" (Schneider 1984). Indeed, much of what is discussed here is actually quite removed from such concerns, grounded instead in beliefs about culpability and responsibility among male agnates in the wake of violence.

[iii] Aside from the local Arabic-language coverage described herein, see also al-Khalidi (2011) and Sweis (2013) for English-language coverage of "tribal" clashes in the Western press.

[iv] As I am keen to point out when Jordanians ask why an American like myself would be interested in such things, at a time when mass incarceration in the US is coming under increased scrutiny (Alexander 2012) and activists are rediscovering paradigms of alternative dispute resolution (Nader 1993) and restorative justice (McLaughlin et al. 2003), there is much to learn from communities that have experience with such approaches.
[v] This was a rhetorical flourish. The sheikh *also* has a *diwān* in his stone house.
[vi] https://www.facebook.com/sa5arnews/ and https://www.facebook.com/alhowaitat1/

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