HOME AND HOMELAND

THE DIALOGICS OF TRIBAL AND NATIONAL IDENTITIES IN JORDAN

Linda L. Layne

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

Published by Princeton University Press, 41 William Street,
Princeton, New Jersey 08540
In the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press,
Chichester, West Sussex

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Layne, Linda L.
Home and homeland : the dialogics of tribal and national identities in Jordan / Linda L. Layne.
p. cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-691-09478-0
1. Bedouins—Jordan—Ethnic identity.
2. Jordan—Social life and customs. I. Title.
DS153.55.B43L39 1993
956.95'004927—dc20 93-23878

This book has been composed in Adobe Galliard

The maps on pages 24 and 39 are used by permission of the cartographer, © Lars Wåhlin, Näsbydalsvägen 4, IX, S–183 31 Täby, Sweden

Princeton University Press books are printed on acid-free paper and meet the guidelines for permanence and durability of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the Council on Library Resources

Printed in the United States of America

3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Preface

THIS BOOK has been a long time in the making, and over the many years that Jordan has been a part of my life (as the subject of scholarly research and as a second home) there have been important changes in Jordan and in anthropology; changes that intersect in and inform this work.

When I first went to Jordan in 1977 for a year of Arabic at the University of Jordan in Amman, Jordan was enjoying a period of prosperity. The country was celebrating the King's Silver Jubilee with a year of special events commemorating his twenty-five years on the throne and there was, at least to my young and sheltered eyes, a widespread feeling of well-being. These were, after all, the boom years. Oil prices had risen dramatically in 1973; and although Jordan did not possess substantial oil reserves, the new affluence of the region was also felt in Jordan. So many Jordanians were working in the Gulf that Jordan was experiencing a labor shortage, and there was an effort on the part of the government to get Jordanian women to fill part of the gap, especially the white-collar jobs. The impact of remittances from the Gulf was perhaps most visible in Jordan's thriving construction industry. New luxury hotels and beautiful houses were being built at such a rate that people wondered whether there would soon be a glut. In the meantime, fortunes were being made in land speculation. Jordan, well aware of its limited natural resources, hoped to become a new service-industry center in the region, replacing the still war-torn Beirut as a banking center.

At that point I still had not had any formal training in anthropology. My field research in Algeria as an undergraduate had been of the seat-of-the-pants variety, although with the help of Sally Falk Moore I managed to write up a passable network analysis upon my return to the States. My formal training began in 1978 when I joined what would be the first M.Phil. class in social anthropology at Cambridge. Much like Michael Gilsenan's (1990) experience at Oxford in the early 1960s, I was struck by the absence of the Middle East from the canon. Ethnographic material came mostly from sub-Saharan Africa and New Guinea; theoretically, structural Marxism was the rage. I took an Althusserian framework (and what I considered to be an overly detailed scholarly acquaintance with pigs and taro) with me to Princeton, and this framework influenced both my choice of field site (the Jordan Valley) and field topic (public education) (Layne 1986).

In the 1970s the Jordan Valley had been the site of an extensive "integrated rural development" project (another manifestation of the na-

tion's new prosperity), and so it provided an especially rich opportunity for studying the conjuncture of state- and local-level forces and structures. As a by-product of these projects there existed a wealth of statistical data on the area. During the summer of 1980 while in Amman for another course in Arabic I collected an impressive stack of government and agency reports full of figures on the number, ages, educational levels, landholdings, crops, livestock, and dwellings, et cetera, of the "beneficiaries." The following summer, with the support of a Fulbright-Hays grant and the Wenner-Gren Foundation, I returned to Jordan to begin my research. I reestablished contact with Najwa Shasha, one of the factory owners I had interviewed in 1979 while doing research for the M.Phil. Najwa's family also owned extensive agricultural holdings in the Jordan Valley and a lovely villa (complete with rose garden and swimming pool) overlooking the village of Muʿaddi, and she invited me to stay in the family villa while finding a place to live.

Through Najwa I met Hussein Rashrāsh, an enterprising young man who owned a local shop and did odd jobs for the Shasha family. During the academic year 1981–82 I rented a part of his house in the government housing project in Muʿaddi. (He had recently completed a large addition to the original unit which he and his newly married wife occupied.) I became close friends with wife, Nada Abu Ghunmi, who was a schoolteacher in the local high school for girls. Most mornings I spent at Nada's school observing classes, interviewing teachers, socializing in the teachers' lounge, and sitting in the headmistress's office gossiping, looking at school records, and listening to the parents who visited. From time to time this routine was broken by school trips and visits to the other schools in the area.

In the afternoons Nada and I normally visited her natal family in their home in Muthalath al-ʿArda, just three kilometers to the south. Her father was not well, and he spent a large portion of each day installed on a mattress on the veranda smoking and chatting with old cronies from the neighborhood. Nada's mother and her oldest sister, Nura, busied themselves with household chores. Nada's oldest brother, Muhammad, was married and lived in the town of Salt, but he worked at the central marketing center in the Valley and so stopped by frequently. He often left his three-year-old son in the care of his mother and sisters for several days at a time. Aḥmad, the youngest of Nada's siblings, was an aspiring young artist. He did not spend much time at home but would sometimes join us for a brief chat and show us his latest work. Nada's two other sisters were schoolteachers like her. (A fourth sister, the eldest, who died prematurely of cancer, had been the first woman from the Valley to become a teacher.) We "working women" usually spent a few

hours every afternoon relaxing—napping, chatting, drinking tea, playing with their nephew, enjoying their lovely flower garden.

Nada's sisters, especially Nura and Munīra, also undertook the task of educating me. Nura and her mother spent hours recording old songs and proverbs on my tape recorder, and Nura, a skilled embroiderer, explained her craft to me (chapter 7). (Nura embroidered the two lovely dresses that served as my uniform while in the Valley). They also planned a series of outings for me—several trips to local healers, a visit to a local exhibition of tribal artifacts (chapter 7), and a trip to the National Broadcast Service in Amman to meet the people in charge of the tribal music programs and to admire their archives of "traditional music." Each of these trips and their tape recordings were their suggestion. As evidenced from our first encounter when Munira took my notebook and drew a goat-hair tent filled with "typical" people and artifacts, they had definite ideas about what I, as an anthropologist, ought to know about them. The corpus of knowledge that they selected as appropriate consisted of the "traditional" or "folkloric" aspects of their culture. Although I agreed with them on the suitability of these topics, my attention that first year was focused on how unlike the image I had of Bedouin they were (an image based both on scholarly texts and Hollywood movies) and how bracketed off from the rest of their lives much of what they taught me seemed to be.

In addition to this relatively passive mode of research, I also engaged in a number of the standard, more structured forms of anthropological investigation. I made a series of kinship charts for the Abu Ghonmi family and each of the sections of the Ghānānim tribe. I also conducted a household survey, beginning with the government housing project, which I had learned from a number of people in Amman had been one of the most controversial aspects of the development projects (Layne 1984b). I found these more formal, structured activities helped me to feel "professional" and reduced my anxiety about whether I was actually getting the makings of a dissertation (cf. Joseph 1988). They also helped me get to know the entire community, for in the end I visited nearly every household in Mu ʿaddi.

During the summer of 1982 I was a guest of the al-Ṭālib family, a Mu ʿaddi-based ʿAbbādi family, in their goat-hair tent in the foothill region of al-ʿArda (chapters 3–4). It was not until that summer that I became aware of some of the many other dimensions of "tribal" life—practices like the organization and use of space in their homes which were still vital aspects of their daily lives. As a result, the household survey I conducted that summer in al-ʿArda (of both tents and houses) included more detail on the organization of domestic space. At the end of

the summer I returned to the Valley and now saw the concrete and cinder-block houses that had seemed ugly, plain, and certainly not very "Bedouin" in a different light.

That second year I moved from Muʿaddi to live with members of the Mashalkhah tribe in the village of Diyyat. I had become intrigued by the way in which many ʿAbbādis spoke of the Ghawarneh, tribespeople considered to be the original inhabitants of the Valley, and I hoped that by living among them I would come to understand the relationship between tribespeople like the ʿAbbād considered to be noble (aṣīl) and those not so, like the Ghawarneh. I ultimately regretted this decision. The move created what I now view as needless distress for my previous hosts because they "could not protect my honor" there and because they feared my move might be interpreted as a sign of dissatisfaction with the hospitality they had so kindly offered me. In addition, the scholarly goals that had prompted the move proved elusive. Nevertheless, the experience did broaden my understanding of life in the Valley. I was a frequent guest in the meeting room in the house of Sheikh Sālah al-Naʿīm of the Mashalkhah tribe and was able to observe the comings and goings of the wide variety of individuals who visited him there. Abu Naif, one of the sheikh's sidekicks and the owner of my lodgings—a mud-brick one-room, two-storied structure—often invited me to accompany him on errands (many of which were on behalf of the sheikh on behalf of others) to the various state and local government offices. I also sometimes accompanied the local young women who worked as paid laborers in the fields. The summer I had spent with the al-Ṭālibs had been idyllic, and the following year was colored by my new romanticism about tribal life. Nevertheless, the year spent in Diyyat was crucial in shaping my understanding of the way that the change in their mode of production and their changing relationship with the state had altered their way of life.

In 1984 I returned to Jordan for eight weeks to organize an international symposium, Anthropology in Jordan. Following the symposium, I spent several weeks in the Valley studying the participation of the residents of the Deir ʿAlla Subdistrict in the national parliamentary by-elections. It was during this visit that I became aware that there was a national debate on tribalism under way. The question I was by that point focusing on—"What does it mean to be a member of a tribe in contemporary Jordan?"—was, at least at that time, one of national importance.

I returned to Jordan again in 1988 for two weeks as an escort for a group of Mallone Fellows from the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations. The program included a number of official briefings by state officials including Jordan's Crown Prince Hassan. Two not-unrelated is-

sues dominated the briefings: the continuing Iraq/Iran war and the worsening state of the Jordanian economy. Lower oil prices and a regional recession meant an influx of returning migrants and rising unemployment. The Gulf War, then in its seventh year, entailed the continuing commitment and expenditure of valuable resources, not only by the two combatants but by the other Gulf states as well (Khalaf 1987), countries that had been important sources of financial support for Jordan in the seventies and early eighties. Within months of our visit, King Hussein announced Jordan's disengagement from the West Bank, a decision that entailed additional financial burdens (Layne 1990a) and that contributed, along with the Gulf War, to a shift in Jordanian collective identity making from issues of tribalism to discussion of the place that Jordan holds or should hold in a divided Arab nation. I have not been back to Jordan since, but a number of reports from the area suggest that Islam now plays a more prominent role in discussions of what kind of a country Jordan is and ought to be. (The Muslim Brotherhood won a third of the eighty seats in parliament in the 1989 elections.)

A good portion of the ethnographic material presented here was first grappled with in the doctoral dissertation I completed in 1986 at Princeton under the supervision of Hildred Geertz, Lawrence Rosen, Gananath Obeyeskere, and Rena Lederman. (The many people both in Jordan and at home who assisted me with the dissertation are acknowledged there.) I had by that time abandoned the structural Marxist framework but had found no adequate alternative. That same year George Marcus and Michael Fischer's call for anthropological research to "take account of larger systems" was published, and in the years since anthropology has on the whole moved in that direction (see Foster 1991).

The Department of Science and Technology Studies at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute has proved to be an intellectual haven that has provided both the security and stimulation I needed to complete this project. I am particularly grateful to my chair, Shirley Gorenstein, for her unwavering confidence and unerring advice and to John Schumacher for sharing his insights with me about the ramifications of human posture.

Dale Eickelman has been an important source of counsel, criticism, and encouragement over the years. His comments on various portions and versions of the manuscript have always been prompt, thorough, and constructive. Michael Herzfeld's work on the complex interrelationships between national- and local-level discourses of collective identity in Greece provided a valuable model for me, and his interest, support, and detailed comments on this book's many iterations have been much appreciated.

Two anonymous reviewers provided astute feedback on the manuscript for this book. The book is a better one as a result of their prodding. Dick Antoun, Riccardo Bocco, Seteny Shami, Lars Wahlin, and Mary Wilson have regularly shared their special knowledge of Jordan with me. In addition, Lars Whalin prepared the maps, Linda Shumaker George kindly attempted to systematize my Arabic transliteration, and Lars Wahlin assisted with the transliteration of place and proper names. I am also grateful to my editors at Princeton University Press. Working with them was one of the more pleasurable aspects of writing this book.

My loyal readers and dear friends Mary Huber, Linda Jacobs, Betsy Shally, and Bernard Wilson read and listened to more versions of this book than they probably care to remember. Their suggestions and support over the long haul were invaluable to me.

During the many years I have worked in Jordan, Ahmad Sharkas and his family helped me in countless ways. I cannot think of Jordan without thinking of them with gratitude and fondness.

I would probably never have gone to Jordan had it not been for the generous scholarship provided by His Majesty King Hussein. In subsequent years, the support I received from both their Majesties greatly facilitated my work and added an important dimension to my understanding and appreciation of Jordan.

Finally, I want to thank the people of Jordan. It is to them that this book is dedicated.

A Note on Transliteration

I HAVE on the whole followed the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* system of transliteration. I have chosen, however, to keep some well-known place and proper names in their more common English forms; so, for example, I refer to King Hussein, rather than King Hussayn, and to Jerash rather than Jarash. I have also tried to represent the *ʿarab* colloquial pronunciation of terms as accurately as possible. Hence, the *q* of classical Arabic appears as a *g* in the context of local usage.

Contents

Figures and Table

FIGURES

TABLE

HOME AND HOMELAND

CHAPTER 1

Rethinking Collective Identity

IN 1988 ON A TRIP TO JORDAN as "scholar escort" for a study tour of American college professors, most of whom had little prior knowledge of the Middle East, I was struck by the frequency and uniformity of a particular genre of question, one that I consistently found difficult to answer adequately. These questions involved requests for me to identify and categorize people they were seeing into meaningful social groups, often on the basis of physical appearance alone. "Linda, tell me, that woman over there in the embroidered dress, is she Palestinian or Jordanian?" or "Tell me, who wears the red *kufiyya* and who wears the black ones?" or "Those dark-skinned people over there, who would they be?" Or the question might be about the speaker they had heard in the morning, often people I knew quite well, and although in these cases I was able to offer a more substantive answer, the answer was never a simple one. "Well, he is a Palestinian but his family moved to Jordan and established themselves here before Israel was created in 1948." Or, "He is a Circassian whose family lived in Palestine for three generations before fleeing to Jordan in 1948." Time and time and time again, I, their local expert, was unable to order the new world they were confronting into the framework that they had brought to the encounter. I could sympathize with their efforts, for I recalled my sense of progress when during the first or second month of research in the Jordan Valley I made an entry in my field notes titled "Important Social Groups"; and then, how for the better part of that first year, I struggled with limited success to come to some understanding of who fit into each of those groups and what that meant. This book is an exploration of the problem I encountered first as an ethnographer, later as a culture broker for Americans visiting the Middle East, and most recently as an author attempting to discuss "identity" in nonessentializing ways.

The topic of collective identity has been a central one in the anthropology of the Middle East. The assumption that Arabs belong to easily recognizable corporate social groups is one that has dogged Middle Eastern ethnography throughout its history. Two images—the mosaic and the segmentary triangle—have represented the two most pervasive approaches to collective identity in the region. These approaches, although normally utilized to describe different aspects of Middle Eastern

society (the cosmopolitan Ottoman Empire on the one hand and Bedouin tribes on the other), share a number of important characteristics.

The image of the Middle East as a mosaic portrays the region as made up of distinct peoples (each represented by a single, clearly demarcated, colored stone). According to this model, these discrete, static, clearly bounded groups keep their unique identities and cultures while contributing to a larger structure. There is no room for overlap, for gradations, for change. Because this metaphor provides a model of social organization that posits equilibrium, it has been associated with the structural functional approach in anthropology. As Dale F. Eickelman pointed out, although the metaphor of the mosaic was "useful for conveying some of the bare geographical and ethnographic facts concerning the Middle East . . . [like structural functionalism] it is less adequate in explaining the interrelations among these elements or their known historical transformations" (Eickelman 1989:49). In other words, the mosaic metaphor has typically been used by anthropologists and others to portray a timeless Middle East made up of distinct, clearly bounded social groups.

The metaphor of a mosaic became popular following the publication of Carleton Coon's *Caravan* in 1951 and although in recent years it has been largely abandoned by anthropologists of the Middle East, this representation still retains remarkable currency in other scholarly and popular arenas. For example, a respected American political scientist recently asserted that "Jordan is much more of a communal mosaic than most analyses portray it to be" (Brand 1988:180).[1] The mosaic metaphor also appears both explicitly and in the organization of the handbooks and guides to Jordan written from the 1940s through the 1980s (Layne 1990a). Kaplan (1980), author of the chapter "The Society and Its Environment" for the "country study" on Jordan produced by the Foreign Area Studies of the American University as part of their Area Handbook Program begins his piece by stating that "although many Middle Eastern societies have been described as mosaics of distinct and often conflicting groups, the East Bank situation is probably more fragmented than most because of the uprooting that so many of its citizens have endured" (1980:53).[2] This pervasive image of Middle Eastern society probably, at least implicitly, informed the questions posed to me by the educated American tourists whom I escorted.

The other core image of collective identity in Middle Eastern ethnography has been the triangle (sometimes also tellingly referred to as a pyramid) used to represent segmentary lineage systems. The theory of segmentary lineage systems was developed by Evans-Pritchard to explain the social organization of an African tribe, the Nuer. E. E. Evans-Pritchard was influenced by Robertson Smith's work on Arab kinship

FIG. 1 A mosaic map of Jerusalem located in Jordan (reprinted with permission from the Ministry of Tourism, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan)

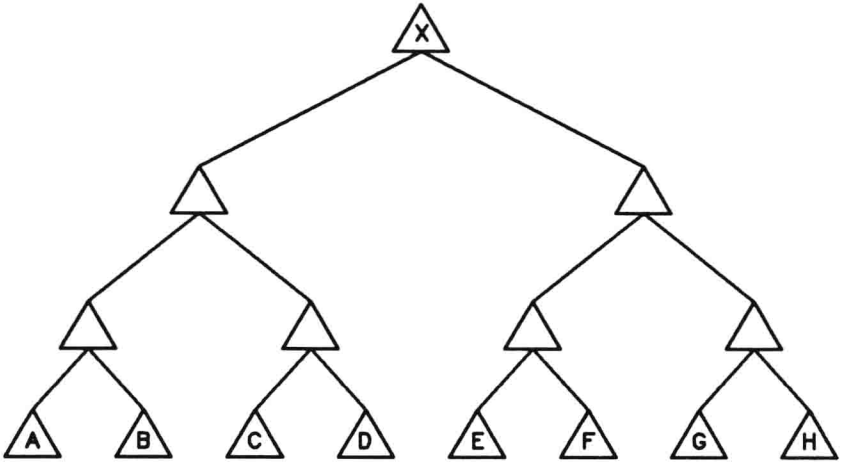

FIG. 2 The classical form of a politically segmenting genealogy (reprinted from Meener [1979] with permission from Cambridge University Press)