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Tribal narrative in the Syrian political universe

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Abstract: The following article deals with the problem of formation and functioning of tribal narratives in the political universe of Syria. The author shows how tribe narrative is structured in the form of epic narration within the framework of which different political events acquire a special logic and vested with new connotations. The tribe which comprehends political relations through the prism of this narrative, structures its communication with forces external relative to it, the state included, in a special way. The accomplished research is based both on open sources and on materials of the author's interviews with the representatives of Hsana tribe, which he took in summer and autumn 2021. The results of the research, as it seems, could be useful for studying the general problems of tribalism and relations of tribes and state in the Middle East.

Keywords: tribe, 'ashira, Hsana, Syria, Syrian conflict, political narrative.

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Introduction

The article is devoted to the problem of tribe narrative circulating within the political space in Syria.

The first part of the article offers a general view of the tribes role in public and political life of the Syrian Arab Republic (SAR) and specifics of the state policy relative to tribes.

The second part contains a reconstruction of five tribes narratives, two of which were recorded by the author during his communication with Hsana tribe representatives in summer and autumn of 2021. Three narratives are dealing with the general history of Hsana, one more, published way back in 2011 by T. Schoel, shows a concrete episode of 1979, linked with the conflict between Hsana and Fawa'ira. And finally the fifth one describes the events in Dara'a in 2011. The last section of the article provides us with conclusions, showing, the peculiarities of the tribe narrative: the role of honor, nobility, dominance, its anti-historicity, typical for it personalized perception of political relations.

The target of the research may be described in the following way: an attempt is to be made to understand which principles are used for composing a story about the political

reality of the Syrian tribes, and consequently, about the communication of tribes with other political actors, with the state power of SAR above all.

Materials and methods

Methodologically article is based on the approaches which had been developed by the author in a number of his publications, dedicated to the problems of neo modernism and the possibility of the political processes study by means reconstructions of political actors narratives. (Kuznetsov 2020).

In more general way these approaches comprise the following. The political process is viewed in them as communicative interaction (dialogue) between actors and each of them structures his behavior in accordance with his own viewing on the political reality, expressed in the narrative form. This in turn means the author's view about the reality is shaped, on the one hand, logically (and chronologically), on the other – in the literary way, by means of tropes. Correspondingly, in order to restore logic of his behavior what is required is to reconstruct that very narrative within which he works.

The source base for the research was the interview taken by the author from the representatives of the Hsana tribe in summer and autumn in 2021, some of these were taken during the author's business trip to Syria and his encounters with Nawwaf sheikh, the rest were taken remotely. In addition materials published by other researchers relative to tribes legends were also used.

Results

Some landmarks of the tribe policy in Syria

The history of the tribe policy of the Syrian state was studied fairly in detail by a number of authors (Chatty 2010; Aganin 2018). They showed in their works a complicated a pendulum like trajectory of these relations, which maintained the characteristics of a dialogue between tribes and the government, though not always equal, during the whole duration of the XX century. Some scholars designated the period through to the advent to power of the Ba'ath party as the time of the sheikhs (zaman al-shuyukh) (Schoel 2011, p.102). That was the epoch when the tribe leaders played a determining role in the domestic political process.

A tough idealized policy of Ba'athists and Nasserites (within the period of UAR), in 1950-1960 was accompanied by pressure on the tribes, undermining of their social and economic basis and political influence. Act №166 adopted in 1958 dated 28 September deprived them of the legal status, and Baathists constitution showed the determination of the authorities in their search to uproot the tribalism. As a result, among other things, was that the mass migration of the Syrian tribes to other countries, started, - to Saudi Arabia

first of all (Chatty 2010, p.38). Nevertheless the short term functioning of this course and its certain inconsistency within the context of the general historic development of the country have not allowed Syria to delegitimize the tribe narrative to the same degree as it happened in some other countries of the Arab world (Egypt, Tunisia). There as the time passed it became perceived as totally marginal (Bisson 2012, p.17; Kark, Frantzman 2012, p.495). Even in the most complicated conditions in the region of Badia, which covers more than half of the whole territory of the country, there are still alternative conceptions about power, connected with the chiefs of the tribes (Chatty 2010, p.30).

With the advent to power of Hafez al-Assad the Syrian government set the course for the defined policy and the legal autonomy of the tribes. The new head of state not only contributed to the return to the country of those sheikhs who had been forced to emigrate in 1958-1970. Alongside he admitted illegally the usage of traditional mechanisms of arbitration in solving conflicts between tribes. (Chatty 2010, p.44). Judging by all this course continued under Bashart al-Assad and it seems at least that he did not attach a significant role to a tribe's factor in domestic policy through to the start of the conflict.

During the whole history of the Syrian parliamentarianism the tribes got the representation in the upper body of the legislative power (even in 1960-ies). If in 1943 they numbered 7 percent of the deputies (Chatty 2010, p.47), then after 1982 they got 10 % of the seats (Dukhan 2014, p.6), and also they started to play a significant role in the security apparatus, ministry of internal affairs and in the ministry of agriculture, were they were mostly involved (Dukhan 2014, p.6). By the year 2007 their parliamentary representation had reached 12 % (Chatty 2010, p.47). By the year 2022, according to our informants, 21 deputies out of 250 deputies were Bedouins (8.5%), that means "the number is fairly less in percentage than before", moreover there are tribes , which had not got seats in the representation, though some of their members pass to the parliament from the regions (Interviews with Syrian informants, 2022)¹.

It is fairly difficult to define how closely the parliamentary representation corresponds to the social structures of the Syrian society. Neither today nor a decade before the total tribal population in Syria was registered officially anywhere. However Dawn Chatti, referring to the then Health Minister's statement, evaluates the number of Bedouins as being 900 000 people in 2007 (5.5% of the population) (Chatti 2010, p.47). Other researchers also use the figures of 5-7% which means about 15% of the tribe population (Dukhan 2014, p.14). At the same time Nawwaf sheikh who was at the head of Ashirahsana in 2021 asserted that the members of the tribes constitute up to 40% of the country's population² (Interview with Nawwaf, 2021. Some other sources speak about almost 70% of the population, referring themselves to various tribes (Hussain 2018). The last figure seems to be extremely exacerbated. Nevertheless, taking into consideration the level of urbanization as being 51-55% on the eve of the conflict and a consequent sharp rise in the

¹ Quite significant in this recognition is not only the fact itself of a tribe representation but also the thing that informants, close to the political leadership of the country can make use of this statistics easily. Kuznetsov V.A Interview with Syrian Informants. January 2022

² Kuznetsov V.A. Interview with Nawwaf sheikh. July 2021 [Kuznetsov V.A. Interview with Nawwaf sheikh. July 2021.

urban population (according to UN-Habitat data in 2014 its population size reached 76% (UNHabitat 2014), and also the fact of sedenterization and urbanization does not mean the immediate the denial of the tribe identity, the data used by Navaf sheikh do not seem fantastic enough. Probably we may speak about 5-10% of the population leading a tribe-like way of life, and about 10-20% more preserving a tribe identity.

Thus we cannot help agreeing with H.Dukhan, who asserts (Dukhan 2014, p.1), that despite

the generally accepted perception of the Syrian society as largely urban (as linked with the specifics of the state construction policy (Khoury 1991), in reality, the tribe factor maintains a considerable influence in it. In particular it relates to confederations (qaba'il) 'Anasa and Shammar, widely represented in other states of the regions. (Iraq, Saudi Arabia and others).

Trans bordering links of the tribes were upheld by the Syrian government both by Hafez al-Assad and Bashart al-Assad, they had not been cut off. Saudi government rendered both political and financial aid to the tribes of Anaza (see further). H. Dukhan mentions about generous gifts, given by the king Abdallah bin 'Abd al- 'Azis to the sheikh of Anaza during his visit to Syria in 2010 (Dukhan 2014, p.17). Our informants in Syria reported about the financial support for the sheikhs in the pre conflict period as well, noting at the same time that over the past decade this support was ceased for those tribes which preserved their loyalty to Damascus. (Interview with Syrian informants, 2022). Despite the fact that it inevitably led to the rise of dependence from the government, they still kept other sources of income, linked, above all, with illegal trans bordering trade, arms smuggle, also with (possibly) money transfer from fellow tribesmen working in the Gulf countries (taking into account the fact that Syrian banks were cut off from SWIFT, the issue here is about the cash money import into the country).

This way or another, the military confrontation, unfolded in Syria after 2011, rarely allowed the tribes to preserve neutrality. The choice of the side was determined by various factors – by the territory of their settlement, history of relations with Damascus, the degree of dependence on the Syrian or foreign governments and etc. Despite the fact that it is generally accepted that allegedly the majority of the Syrian tribes sided with opposition (H. Dukhan even considers it possible to speak about the formation of the “tribes’ belt” by the Gulf monarchies in counterbalance to the Shiite. (Dukhan 2014, p.16). In reality quite a considerable part of them kept commitment to the government or turned out to be split.

Not a small role was played by the domestic tribes conflicts rather than external circumstances. In this connection H. Dukhan cites one of the representatives of Hadidin, the appositionally minded tribe. Explaining why some tribes were split, he noted that for decades H. Assad contributed to pressing aside the traditional chiefs and supported the sheikhs loyal to him. These were closely connected with the apparatus of the state security, however they did not enjoy trust among the run and file members of the tribe: “The sheikhs who were created inside of each tribe by the regime, now they are playing the regime game, but they disgraced themselves and their tribe and the time will come when they will appear in court to answer for for their crimes (Dukhan 2014, p.17).

What is more such targeted policy of the authorities is confirmed by other sources, and one cannot but admit that in many cases conflicts inside of the tribes were connected with the processes of sedenterization rather than with special activities of the authorities. The result of the above was that the sheikhs were becoming large landowners, and that naturally resulted in tension rise between their relations with rank and file fellow tribesmen (Lange 2006).

Hsana tribe legends

Within the framework of the further analysis it makes sense to concentrate on a specific example.

What is meant is the Hsana tribe which belongs to Anaza confederation. One episode in the history of this tribe is described in the article written by Tornstone Schoel (Schoel 2011), other examples of a tribe narrative were taken from the association with Nawwaf Abd al-Aziz sheikh in summer of 2021 and some other Hsana in the autumn of the same year.

Both T.Schoel and other informants begin their narrative about a tribe with a short exposition of its history and political structure.

Here is how T.Schoel presents it.

He notes that the tribe migrated into the area of Homs from the Northern Arabia in XVII century, however then its main part returned to the Saudi Arabia, having settled into the El Riyadh and Jeddah. During the time of the Arab uprising the tribe actively supported Emir Faisal and entered Damascus together with him in 1918. However during the time of the mandate Hsana demonstrated their full loyalty to the French authorities and already on the eve of the Syrian conflict they kept showing to T.Schoel, with a certain pride, the agreement, which Trad sheikh had concluded with the French and which was stored in madaf³ (Schoel 2011, p.104).

Despite the fact that the “time of sheikhs” had sunk into oblivion, the Hsana inhabitants living in the strategically important area, preserved the significant influence for the whole of the duration of XX- through to the early of XXI century.

At the moment when the article was being written by T. Schoel the Hsana was headed by triumvirate of sheikhs, belonging to the Mulhim genus: Abd al-Aziz bin Trad, member of the parliament and two of his nephews Mansour and Abd al-Ilah, sons of Thamir sheikh, brothers of Abd Al-Aziz, who headed the tribe from 1946 through to 1998. Being the elder son, the leader of the Saudi branch of the tribe, he had the title of shaykh al-shuyukh, and Mansour was his deputy in Syria (Schoel 2011, p.96).

One person from Hsana, telling me about his tribe, described it in a quite different way without going beyond the framework of the usual narrative.

He started from the description of genealogy of ashira (tribe or kin (clan) of Hsana, belonging to danamuslimbutnvahb from Fakhzh al-Munabiha, where damna, butn and

3 The place of the tribe meetings and receptions.

fahz mean unification of different levels. What is more in the Russian language there are no obvious terminological analogues, Aganin A.R. suggests that the words ashira should be translated as kin, dana as section (Aganin 2018, p.47), and butn and fahd as line and branch (Aganin 2013, p.19).

As we can see Hsana are the cousins of the Ar-raula or Ar-rvala tribe and in the same way as Kakar- raula in Ash-Sham dominate over all kins from Batn al-jilas, Hsana towers above all kins from Batnvahb.

Hsana was the first tribe from the confederation Anaza, resettled to Syria. As a result of multiple clashes with different tribes, they were able to occupy the territory in the area Hama and Homs, and for the duration of the whole centuries we were upholding their rights to possess it. The storyteller gives quite a detailed story about the battles of Hsana with Shammar, Al-rwala, Al-fad'an and particularly with Al-mavali, who had previously possessed these lands, keynoting that almost on all occasions Hsana conquered their enemies. Alongside he cites quotations from the works of the European travelers, mentioning Hsana in the positive way.

The story is ended by the appeal to the memory of Trad al-Mulhim sheikh, who headed the tribe at the time of the mandate. The storyteller recalls his kasyds, many of whom had appealed to the French supreme commissioner Jouvenel, whose intention was to separate Syria into several small states and to install Trad sheikh at the head of one of it, - Al-Badiya, with the capital in Palmira. "However Trad sheikh categorically refused this proposal. He rejected the possibility of Syria being disintegrated, without being a single state with all its regions and constituent parts, comprising it, and he delivered his famous speech: We shall not accept the division of our country, single and indivisible Arab republic, - into separate states, until a baby accepts his mother's breast having been cut into several parts. Our great dream is to build Great Syria, and our Greatest Dream is that you should flee our country"⁴

When we compare two stories about the tribe, several episodes strike our eyes.

It is principally important for a European researcher to introduce the Hsana past into the context of whole history of Syria. That is why he starts his narration from the information when and where from the tribe had migrated into the country, how it settled in the contemporary states of the borders. However for a representative of the tribe itself it is much more important to show, which place is occupied by Hsana in the genealogical system of the Arab tribes. Resettlement into Syria is significant because it meant the conquering of new territories, also because it allows to emphasize the precedence of Hsana over all tribes of Anaza. The story about the following two centuries is being narrated in such a way as if the tribe existed in a stateless environment. All is reduced to defending the lands from the claims of other tribes and to trying to prove their own glory and their might. In the same context citations from storytellers are quoted. So the whole matter goes through to the XX century, when the tribe starts demonstrating its Arab and then Syrian patriotism,

4 Kuznetsov V.A. Interview with Syrian informants. January 2022.

first taking the side of Emir Faysal (against the Ottomans) and then in the period of mandate, having turned out to be champions of the statehood. Here two narratives enter into a direct contradiction. If Schoel keynotes the Hsana loyalty to the French referring to the well known Western sources, then ten years later on the contrary the informant emphasizes the denial on the part of Tradom sheikh to separate Syria.

And at last, the third story about the tribe is offered by Nawwaf sheikh.

He starts from the description of the tribe history as the previous storytellers had also done it, however he presents it in his own quite different way. He is neither interested in the resettlement from the Northern Arabia nor in a war between Hsana and other tribes, about which he does not mention at all. He starts his assertion with the words, that Hsana rose during the war with Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab, when he was trying to spread his power over the territory of Syria and Iraq. After that he turned to the battle between Hsana and Ottomans, to their participation in the Arab uprising, and finally to their participation in the national-liberation movement against the French.

The battle of the tribe against jihadists in the years of 2010-s, which is described at the end, is becoming in this situation a natural continuation of that policy, to which the tribe adhered to for the duration of the last two centuries, and radicals themselves are becoming the analogue of Wahhabis and other foreign invaders. It is worth noting that the three main enemies of Hsana

have turned out to be the French (most probably they symbolize the West as such), Ottomans (rather than Al Saud, as we could expect), in reality Damascus resisted the same forces for the duration of 2010 years. It is natural enough, that adversaries of Hsana in 2010-s are described as criminals, terrorists and hires from external powers, rather than the opposition.

After a short historic survey the sheikh explains which place Hsana occupies in the contemporary Syria and in the Middle East in general. Despite a high level of modernization and the fact that many Hasana representatives have long moved to cities, got higher education and very often integrated into the political elite of the country, the tribal identity is not only preserved but even it has been strengthened over the past years, as Nawwaf sheikh emphasizes. Of no small importance here is trans bordering nature of Hsana resettlement, whose members live not only in Syria but in Turkey, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and etc. Being loyal to the government they at the same time up uphold the inner tribe contacts at the personal level. That in turn creates possibility for the development of the tribe diplomacy and the basis for informal tribe economy, as sheikh admits in the course of further discussion. Trans bordering nature of resettlement is so important that the sheikh returns to that issue in his narrative several times.

At last he shares his impressions about which role the tribes played in the history of the region. As he asserts, it is namely themselves who linked Hejaz and Levant were initial carriers and defenders of uruba, or belonging to Arabs, with Syria naturally at the heart. Here the tribe version of the history, not without an elegance, gets in touch with the official bassist ideology, for which the idea of uruba was and remains the central one, even if it is being interpreted in a different way (Naumkin 2021, p.54)

Developing the idea about the central role of the tribes in the history of the country, the sheikh asserts that they were not only the sources, but defenders and keepers of identity but they were the basis for the statehood, determining the political image of the region since prehistoric times.

Thus, “patriotic element”, which is produced in the second story, is acquiring a key importance in the Nawwaf sheikh narrative. As K. Lange notes the underlining the tribe patriotism (vataniyi) is generally typical for contemporary Syrian tribe narratives (before there was no such tradition). In all the stories researched by her the narrative is about confrontation of sheikhs to foreign invaders (Lange 2006, p.945)

Keynoting the numerous population size, its major role in the Syrian society, it seems that Nawwaf sheikh follows the same logic of confrontation of city and tribe, what can be seen in other Arab countries. Thus if in the coastal districts of Tunisia, the Banu Hilal tribe, having migrated to Maghreb in the XI century are still considered as barbarians-destroyers, but in the southern districts, where some traces of the tribe culture are still preserved are taken for carriers of the true Arab culture. In both cases what happens is a certain turning upside down the stable historical milieu: it is not a “contemporary” city bends all “backward” tribes to its will, but rather the tribes spread their influence over the cities, remaining at the same time custodians of the Arab uniqueness and cultural identity of the society.

At the same time Nawwaf sheikh narrative differs in the principle way from the others. Emphasizing the role of the tribes, the sheikh underlines their positive contribution to the development of the Syrian statehood. The tribes are not hostile to the state (as in Tunisia), are not subordinate to it, (as in Schoel) and they do not exit in parallel reality (as in the second storyteller), but serve them as a stronghold, and it is not by chance they defend Syrian independence from numerous external enemies through to the whole duration of their history.

Shaping of this kind of narrative, evidently, corresponds to changes in the leadership of the tribe, which took place against the background of the conflict, when the Saudi Arabia branch headed by Abd al-Ilah supported the opposition, Mansour sheikh was forced to flee for Saudi Arabia. Abd al-Aziz died, and the only leader of the Syrian branch Hsana became his son Nawwaf, showing his complete fidelity to Damascus. He concentrated all levels of power in his hands. In addition to his status of sheikh he got the seat in the parliament and in 2012 headed Hizb al-ash sha'b party loyal to the government, though he did not break relations with his fellow tribesmen abroad.

Let us consider two more episodes to have the true picture. They show the specifics of the tribe narrative in Syria, as differed from the previous ones, they are related to the very particular events in their history rather than to self presentation of the tribes.

The first one is given in the above mentioned article written by T.Schoel and was narrated to the researcher by Mansur sheikh.

It all happened in 1979. Once the sons of the then sheikh Thamir bin Trad, twelve years old Trad and seventeen years Muwaffak started to the city and met on their road the youth from Fawa' ira tribe, close to Hsana tribe. They started the argument disputing who had to give way to the other party. The sons of the sheikh appealed to be of the higher status

in their tribe and to their own status. Fawa' ira did not yield. The argument resulted in a quarrel, which ended in Trad murder.

Having arrived to the hospital Thamir sheikh saw that the building was surrounded by cordons of the police and understood that his son was dead. Then he returned to Madhafa, however there he also came across police detachments. Having agreed with the police about the withdrawal of the forces, he assembled his subjects for a meeting, which was interrupted by the arrival of the governor of Latakia. This close to Asadualavit personality was in friendly relations with the sheikh, and being in a fear of revenge actions on the part of Thamir, he had come to make him a proposal on behalf of the president: "Name him whom you want to see dead from the Fawa' ira tribe, and in the evening time he will be brought to the Homs city clock". Thamir was outraged, first because his interlobular thought that the sheikh allegedly would subject to danger the inhabitants of Homes, and secondly that he was offered to just kill someone. His fear of God did not allow him to do it.

During Trad's funerals, Thamir addressed all citizens from the mosque, wishing avoid the clashes. He said: "I am the son of this city and I am one of you. I love Homes and you, citizens of Homes..." His idea was to avoid bloodshed and he offered Fawa' ira people to come to his place and to confirm their loyalty. He guaranteed them immunity. Those who would refuse to come, they would experience death.

The sheikh fellow tribesmen did not like his position, they accused him of the fear before the government or Fawa'ira, however he answered, that he had only the fear of Allah. Almost all Fawa' ira responded to the appeal, and the funerals were without incidents. All sheikhs from Anaza confederation were present.

The situation tuned worse in the spring. The relatives of Trad killers, being in the fear of revenge, refused to chase away the livestock to the lands of Hsana, as the had usually done it before, and they preferred to stay in their own small pasture, located between the police station and military barracks near the city. Thamir thought this behavior insulting, it meant mistrust to his nobility (karama). Having agreed with Lebanese Druses, the sheikh received two American vehicles full of small arms and sent his friend, a Christian, to Fawa' ira to warn that in a week's time Hsana would come to take the revenge on Trad's murder. Those did not believe and when early in May 1979 fifty vehicles of Hsana arrived at the parking of Fawa' ira, they did not encounter any resistance. As a result the death toll was fifty people and the multiply wounded on the part of Fawa' ira while the losses of Hsana were insignificant. As the attackers wore masks, the government could identify only those who were wounded. In order to avoid a dangerous precedent, a decision was made to punish them in exemplary fashion. Then Thamir sheikh addressed his friend Khalid bin Abd al-Aziz, king of Saudi Arabia, and the latter urgently sent a delegation to Hafez al-Assad. Having assured the latter that the arms used by Hsana had been obtained by them as a gift from Saudi brothers, Saudi assured the President to forgive the tribe and to forget about this matter. H. Assad, overwhelmingly being absorbed in the battle of Brothers Muslims that had burst out at that time (Pir-Budagova 2015, p.233-249), thought it would be better to agree with Saudi's arguments and not to enter into another conflict with them (Schoel 2011, p.97-102).

The last story is a very short one, it is directly connected with events of 2011, when teenagers were arrested, as they had dawn antigovernment graffiti in the city of Dera'a. The episode itself and reprisal over them is widely known and is introduced almost in any story at the beginning of the Syrian conflict. However the following apocryphal work is spread among the tribes relative to the further events. H. Dukhan presents it in his article and, judging from the interviews, offered by us, on the whole it is fairly known. There is no documented confirmation for it, of course, and people personally familiar with the antagonist of this story, are greatly doubtful. Could he really behave like that? However the popularity of the story among the tribe population is important in this case.

After the arrest of the young people a tribe delegation came to the city political security department. It was received by the head of the department, Atef Najib, a relative of President Assad. Visitors asked him to release their children. They raised their heads in a traditional way, took off their bands and put them on the table, saying that, they would take them again when the issue would have been solved. As a band on the head is the symbol of fortitude and honor in tribes' traditions, Bedouins took it off when addressing anyone with a serious request, by doing so demonstrating their belittling and being in expectation that their interlocutor would answer positively. However instead Najib took the bands of the senior tribe sheikhs from the table and threw them into the garbage can. The response for this the first demonstration in Dera'a, organized by Al zubi and Al-masalmih tribes took place. It gave the impetus for "Tribe Fridays" as matter of recognition of the Syrian tribes participation in protests against the Syrian regime. (Dukhan 2014, p.7-8).

In these last episodes we can see those peculiarities of the tribe narrative, which are not noticeable enough in the description of the general history of the tribe and which relates the historical role of individuals.

Conclusions

If we compare all the given narrations, we can emphasize some of their common traits.

First, in all of them, the main protagonists are the tribes' sheikhs. They are ascribed such permanent qualities as courage, nobility, and patriotism (wataniyah). It is lack of faith in his nobility forces Tamir bin Trada to punish *fava' ira*, disregarding at the same time with possible consequences, and a sense of patriotism towards the native town makes him abandon the revenge towards offenders. At the same time in the narrative about Dera'a, the loutishness of an officer is contrasted with the nobility of sheikhs.

Secondly, All of the mentioned conflicts have developed because of the nobility. Some young people do not give way to the other party and shooting begins, *fawa' ira* do not believe in nobleness of of Thamir sheikh, and this results in five dozens of victims, , and at last the uprising in Dara'a stars because of the young peoples' deaths , but because of the insult inflicted by the state security officer to the tribes leaders. In all cases honor and demonstration of the respect turn to be more important than lives of separate people.

It is worth noting that the story about the events in Dara'a ilooks very much the same as the South Tunisia narrative about the uprising in Sit Bu Zide, which started after self-immolation of Muhammed Bouazizi, a local trader of fruit, on the 17 December 2010. If in Tunisia case, an insult, allegedly inflicted by a woman-officer to a trade resulted in Bouazizi suicide and mass protests, then in Syria, according to the story, insults inflicted on sheikhs from the part of the state security officer resulted in uprising. The Tunisian narrative is certainly of imaginary type, the Syrian one is at least an apocryphal one. However in both cases it the appearance of these stories is important, and thanks to this factor the event is inscribed into the logic of the tribe narrative. The impulse, which triggered mass protests, revolution, armed conflict, is getting quite an acceptable explanation from the point of tribe's view. Thus all of the subsequent events obtain such an explanation.

Thirdly, the relations of the tribes with the surrounding world are always the relations of dominating/submission, and fear is of no small importance in them. K. Lange notes that the "domination" is the main theme of all these narratives, is being implemented invariably beyond the boundaries of the tribe group. There the tribe subordinates its neighbors or resists to colonizers. Inequality, processes of domineering and conflicts inside of a tribe are excluded from the "official narrative of the tribe history" (Lange 2006, p.960).

What is more, the relations of dominating are developing differently. If the point is about interaction between tribes' groups, the matter invariably boils down to the fact who is the ruler. When the narrative is about the interaction of tribes and "their" state, the tribes recognize the power of the latter, if it respects their traditional rights. And what is more the tribes are prepared to show their loyalty to the state in case of its lashes with external enemies.

Fourthly, the relation of the tribes towards the state is ambivalent. On the one hand, the latter is perceived as external and a dominating force on the whole. On the other it is considered as a possible partner for a dialogue, as well as a space for upholding the tribes' interests (Thamir bin Trad address to the king of Saudi Arabia) and as a source of resources, in this case, political ones. It is not by accident that the links between tribes leaders both with Latakia governor, and Hafez al-Assad and Saudi king are keynoted in the narrative about the events of 1979.

And the fifth one at last, in all of these stories we can witness the phenomenon of personification of power. Any conflict between the representatives of the tribes – is always a conflict between tribes as such, personal merits of a sheikh is the merit of the entire tribe and etc. The same personification is transferred to the state, which is invariably represented by the concrete people, who are in such or other personal relations with the tribes.

Evident enough is the epic type of the Syrian tribe narrative, all the story tellers, addressing the tribe history, string one episode on the other in their narratives, in each episode a tribe conquers its enemies in the same way as it is described in classical Arab heroic epic literature (for example, in Tagribat Bani Hilal or in Siri Antara bin Shaddad).

The stories suggested by the story tellers about the past of the tribes, in general are deprived of any historical ground, as well as epic literature is deprived of historical ground, - modifiers of place and time are of conditional nature in it. If in the years 2000 a positive

attitude of Hsana to the West personified by the French and their close relations with Saudi leaders are emphasized, then in 2021-2022 the whole story boils down to a fight with enemies for the unity of the Syrian statehood. Structurally and functionally the episodes are identical to each other and are string on a thread of the time, denying any development, however strengthening each other and being subordinated to the political state of affairs.

The linking trope of the narrative is the simple metonymy, allowing to correlate separate sheikhs with their tribes, separate officers with the state, episodes of a hundred, two hundred or three hundred years old align with each other and with the modernity, a tribe with a state and etc.

The result of all of this is the formation of specific tribe narrative, where well known political events (as Syrian conflict) are “translated” into a language of the tribes, acquire a new logic, which dominates the behavior of tribes leaders. The apparent inconsistent, irrational or opportunistic from outside, it can turn out to be the only possible one within the framework of the set up narrative.

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