Int. J. Middle East Stud. **33** (2001), 667–672. *Printed in the United States of America*

NOTES AND COMMENTS

A REPLY TO JAMES GOODE'S REVIEW OF OFIRA SELIKTAR, *FAILING THE CRYSTAL BALL TEST: THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION AND THE FUNDAMENTALIST REVOLUTION IN IRAN* (PRAEGER, 2000)

HENRY PRECHT

As neither the reviewer nor the author contacted me before reporting critically on my work during the Iranian Revolution and hostage crisis, I appreciate *IJMES*'s offer to state my position. Subsequently, I have been in touch with both James Goode and Ofira Seliktar. The latter told me

1. She made a decision not to conduct any interviews because interviewees are apt to offer self-serving or faulty memories and because she might face "threats."
2. Although she felt sorry for the way I was treated in the book, she seemed to place greater blame on the academics advising the State Department who put forward the "reigning academic consensus" (New Left and *moralpolitik*) that captured Foreign Service minds (especially mine) and led to destructive policies. I'll bet that few Middle East Studies Association members realized they could have such power over policy-making.

Here are five self-serving facts that Dr. Seliktar missed by not telephoning me:

1. I was political-military officer in the Tehran embassy from 1972 to 1976, a period of massive arms sales to the Shah. I was commended and promoted for my work.
2. I was the drafting officer for President Carter's policy (PD-13) on conventional arms sales. My version of a flexible policy was changed in the White House to a more rigid one (with exceptions permitted).
3. As chief of the State Department's Iran Desk, I concluded earlier than most of my associates that the Shah's power was fading. Washington, I believed, ought to prepare for a soft landing and transition to an unknown future by putting some daylight between the United States and his regime and by getting to know—and be better understood by—his opposition, who had been off-limits for a decade. My position brought me into bureaucratic conflict with National Security Adviser Brzezinski, who believed until the last days that we should stand firmly behind the Shah.
4. After the revolution succeeded, the administration decided to seek a new relationship with the Khomeini-led regime. I thought this would be exceedingly difficult, given America's history in Iran, but went to work with diligent determination and, I fear, deficient realism. My conflict with Brzezinski during this period was again over the Shah. I argued that we could not admit him to the United States and hope to continue operations in Tehran. One or the other. To his later regret, President Carter selected both options.
5. During the hostage crisis, I opposed the threat or use of force as unlikely to succeed and

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743801234084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> likely to cause many deaths, including those of the people we were trying to save. As a consequence, I was excluded from the planning for a rescue mission.

Am I unduly sensitive to Seliktar's criticism? For my efforts, I was nominated by the president as ambassador to Mauritania. The nomination was rejected in Senate committee and later by the succeeding Reagan administration. In his memoir, *Power and Principle*, Brzezinski wrote that I was "motivated by a doctrinal dislike of the Shah and simply wanted him out of power altogether." (Wrong in both clauses.) Senator Helms reportedly said in opposing my nomination, "This man brought down a king who was our good friend." (Ego-inflating until I learned from Seliktar that the job was done by MESA members, who used me as their instrument.)

A COMMENT ON RICHARD T. ANTOUN, "CIVIL SOCIETY, TRIBAL PROCESS, AND CHANGE IN JORDAN: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL VIEW"

JONATHAN BENTHALL

The nub of Richard J. Antoun's interesting article (*IJMES* 32:441–63) is that the scholarly attention given to formal associations and institutions in the Middle East has overshadowed those implicit or vernacular processes of cooperation and reconciliation that actually constitute the core of "civil society," and that are adapting to such changes as transnational migration and telecommunications. This warning against ethnocentrism from such a distinguished ethnographer of Jordan is timely and valuable. However, some dimensions are missing from Antoun's analysis, and maybe his case is overstated.

First, he gives no attention to gender. When I undertook research in 1996 into the voluntary sector in Jordan, it seemed from the daily press that almost every day Queen Noor, Princess Basma, or Princess Sarvath was chairing a meeting of women's leaders somewhere in the country. Here was a regime actively committed to releasing the suppressed resourcefulness of women as an untapped asset for national development, and to backing up this commitment with some of the nation's most prestigious voices, against the resistance of both tribal conservatives and nearly all Islamists. However, official sponsorship of this kind could alternatively be seen as a form of co-opotation, tending to neutralize the politically radical consequences that flow from grass-roots challenges to traditional gender roles. To justify Antoun's analysis, he would need to show that similar issues are being brought to the fore in the vernacular modes of interaction that he considers to be so much more important than formal organizations. This might be the case, but in fact virtually all his informants appear to be male, and gender issues are not foregrounded in his article.

Second, his analysis probably underestimates the importance of mass media in the Middle East and the likelihood that—as argued by Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson—major social changes are afoot in response to these. It was the media blindness of Middle East studies in the 1970s that allowed Khomeini's revolution in Iran in 1978 to come as such a surprise to nearly all social scientists. Or, to put the argument in another way, since publication of Arabic-language newspapers independent of gov-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743801234084 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ernment in the region dates to the late 1850s (in Egypt and Syria), how much time needs to elapse before this can be regarded as an indigenous tradition, albeit a somewhat submerged one? Why should those who attach importance to liberalization of the press in the Arab world be considered ethnocentric?

And third, Antoun does not mention that Jordan is an aid economy. Chris Hann's important critique of civil-society rhetoric, which Antoun follows, was the result of Hann's disillusionment with the opportunism and sharp practice that has compromised much of the NGO movement in its attempts to promote social reconstruction in the former Eastern bloc by building up a new voluntary sector from scratch. The growth of NGOs in Jordan has certainly, among other things, contributed to building up a new sodality of NGO professionals dependent on foreign aid. Civil-society rhetoric is bound up with efforts to find ways to channel external development and relief aid to countries that need it, when so much aid channeled through governments is notoriously misapplied. The academic argument is influenced by practical concerns about institution-building. Though Antoun does not address such matters, the rational consequence of his article—that in a country such as Jordan, small vernacular institutions such as mosque and local *zakat* committees deserve recognition as potential conduits for diffused external funding—seems to me rightly subversive of the continuing efforts of many Western governments and NGOs to impose their own formulaic solutions. However, when we come to "tribal" systems of exchange and reciprocity, it would be hard to know at what point it would be possible for external NGOs to undertake justifiable interventions.

Furthermore, it is arguable that the continuing embeddedness of kinship in the Jordanian political economy constitutes a serious brake on the country's competitive progress through an increase in meritocracy. One of the reasons that middle-class professionals such as engineers, doctors, and lawyers are so prominent in Islamist organizations is no doubt that they are looking for this form of solidarity because they find their careers blocked by forces of nepotism or *wāsṭa*—the "well-positioned intermediary," in Antoun's gloss.

The field of "informal processes and implicit understandings" in Jordan and similar countries is indeed a highly important focus for anthropological study, and one for which the discipline can draw on its specific strengths and sensitivities. (Researching mechanisms of trust requires that a particularly good relationship of trust be built up between researchers and researched, and it is typical of the challenging climate now facing fieldworkers that on Antoun's visit to Kufr al-Ma in 1998 he was publicly called on—as he candidly discloses—to justify his academic career as the regional documentarist.) My question concerns why the study of these deeply embedded forms of "social capital" need to replace or exclude study of the roles of the press, protest movements, or particularly NGOs. International agencies are already much interested in national and local NGOs, and it is surely important that whenever external intervention is undertaken, it should be well thought out and targeted on the basis of reliable data. NGOs are strategically located on the hinge between the haves and the have-nots, as indeed is anthropology.

There is also some danger that Antoun's emphasis on "tribal process" might unintentionally reinforce reactionary trends. He rightly says that "many [Jordanian] urbanites as well as the great majority of villagers take pride in their patrilineal descent and

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can recite long genealogies." However, a claim to bedouin forebears now carries a certain glamor among members of the upper class in Amman, some of whom host lavish receptions in traditional tents. When invited to one of these in a suburb of the city, I was reminded of claims to descent from a Highland clan among the Scots. In the 1990s, a political tendency emerged in Jordan that accused its Palestinian diaspora of divided loyalties, and there is surely an ever-present danger that Transjordanian ethno-nationalism might overcome the Hashemite leadership's policy of "inclusiveness."

A REPLY TO JONATHAN BENTHALL

RICHARD T. ANTOUN

Jonathan Benthall's stimulating comment on my essay on civil society and tribal process in Jordan has five specific criticisms: I pay no attention to gender; I underestimate the importance of mass media; I neglect the fact that Jordan is an aid economy with the implied necessity of finding formal organizations through which to funnel spending; I emphasize the importance of kinship ties, although kinship puts a brake on the country's progress and on meritocracy; and I emphasize the importance of tribal process when it is precisely that process that reinforces reactionary trends. I shall briefly address these matters, then focus on the issues underlying our differences. In that way, I hope to advance the discourse.

I plead guilty to the first charge. I began my research in the rural areas of Jordan in 1959, and from that time until the late 1970s the constraints on interacting with women in a village milieu for a foreign, Western, adult man were substantial. The code of modesty governed cross-gender village social relations (see Antoun, *American Anthropologist* 70, no. 4, 1968), and women invariably left the room when I entered a house. This situation did change somewhat in the 1980s as a result of transnational migration and changes in education and transportation and communication. A number of village women became teachers in the district, and a few even went to Saudi Arabia to teach, but even then their occupational mobility was accommodated to the modesty code by the presence of a male protector in the diaspora. Fortunately, beginning in the 1970s many talented, professional female social scientists have done excellent research in the Middle East and have begun to right the imbalance of gender perspectives.

I do not diminish the role of the mass media in Jordan, but when I began my research in 1959, only one man in the village read a newspaper. Many villagers listened to the radio, but only to the news and to readings of the Qur'an. In the 1990s, after the communications revolution, newspapers were available in a few shops, but my distinct impression is that few people read them. On the one hand, villagers associated newspapers with factionalism and various "political" perspectives, and on the other they regarded them as vacuous, peddling the government line, and avoiding important issues. Television, on the other hand, was prevalent but like radio was viewed selectively. The most popular television program in the 1980s, viewed as I

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recall on Saturday nights, was American professional wrestling. In any case, the mass media are accommodated to tribal institutions. In Jordan, there is nothing incongruous about reading a newspaper and participating in tribal conflict resolution—that is, *ʾatwa* (truce), *dakhl* (entrance into protection of a third party), and *sulha* (ritual peacemaking).

Benthall's comments on tribal process and Jordan's status as an aid economy requiring formal organizations through which to funnel aid get to the nub of our different perspectives. Benthall never addresses my main argument—namely, that trust and cooperation is the basis of civil society and that indigenous institutions of trust, specifically tribal institutions of conflict resolution, are still much more powerful and effective than the newer formal organizations with which he is concerned: press, Parliament, and NGOs. I have argued that the core of civil society in Jordan resides in the techniques of social control, the principles of conflict resolution, and the assumptions behind and constraints on such techniques. These techniques include imposed silence and imposed absence; principles such as the one that social harmony must prevail over individual interest; and assumptions such as the one that a person's case (whether to get a job, arrange a marriage, or settle a dispute) is best presented by influential others and not by oneself.

I have not argued that new institutions of trust and cooperation—for example, voluntary associations—should not be formed or that social scientists and historians should not study them. Indeed, I pointed to their formation in the community studied. Further, there is no danger that NGOs will not be studied or that public attention will not be given to them, particularly when they are targets of interest and funding by governments and international organizations. Rather, I have argued that academic investigation of civil society in the Middle East has neglected, almost ignored, informal institutions. Moreover, governments and political elites, both indigenous and foreign, often regard such institutions as reactionary.

The difference in the point of view taken toward such relationships as kinship and such processes as tribal conflict resolution is a matter of perspective. Many social scientists look at the world from a top-down perspective. They are absorbed in studying, dealing with, and socializing with elites, particularly political elites. Other social scientists are absorbed in studying, dealing with, and socializing with peasants, tribal people, and lower- and middle-class urban-dwellers. When it comes to dealing with matters of trust and cooperation at the grass-roots level, certainly the bottom-up perspective is insightful.

But my argument does not exclude elites, and here is where theoretical and perhaps ideological factors become pertinent. I argue that the tribal process of trust and cooperation cross-cuts various categories of society and includes elites. Many political and economic elites in Jordan have their origins in rural–tribal society, and when it comes to the nitty-gritty of conflict resolution, arranging a marriage, or getting a job, they revert to the norms and processes they grew up with. Alternatively, there is evidence in such elite circles of "invention of tradition"—that is, as Benthall states himself, members of the upper class in Amman who seldom took pride in their genealogical origins or hosted "lavish receptions in traditional tents" now do so. Gamal Abdel Nasser rose to the top of the political hierarchy in Egypt as a military officer as a result of a revolution that proceeded to espouse socialist norms. But in some sense,

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his reference group remained the Egyptian village. When he addressed Egyptian audiences in many public gatherings, he spoke to them in the rural Egyptian dialect with which he was comfortable. There is a theoretical point here. Whether Nasser reverted to his traditional culture or invented it for political purposes, in terms of culture there was no division between his role as military officer and his position as president of the Republic of Egypt and his comfort with the village idiom. In the Jordanian context, the process of conflict resolution initiated at the grass-roots or the governmental level travels up, down, and around, cutting across formal groups and status hierarchies such as courts, parliaments, and NGOs in what, following Hann, I have termed a "seamless field of . . . interaction." It is this field of interaction that has been neglected in our studies and on which I urge attention.

Benthall's worldview seems to be top-down and dichotomous. He is concerned with Western governments' being able to find formal organizations into which to funnel aid funds. Benthall views the world from the pinnacle of modernity and fears that emphasis on honorable ancestors, lavish hospitality, patron–client ties, and the process of intermediation (*wasta*) will result in "reactionary trends." From his perspective, "tribal" is negative because it undermines achieved status. From mine, it is positive because it is person-to-person with give and take in an open forum managed by people who are familiar (kinsmen, neighbors, friends) and promoting the trust and cooperation necessary for successful problem-solving.

I would certainly argue that there is room for both our worldviews and for an academic division of labor, but at present the scales are tipped so far toward the formal, top-down side that a call for righting the balance seems appropriate.

At the existential level, there is a problem with affirmation of all worldviews. Behaviorally, in real-life situations, Jordanians continue to choose between formal and informal modes of trust and cooperation. The preference for a type of conflict resolution that is person to person; open; give and take; and managed by own's own kin, neighbors, friends, or community fellows is diametrically opposed to a type of conflict resolution that is formal; bound by alien, legal rules; bureaucratically framed; and peopled by strangers. Although Jordanians do resort to courts, run for Parliament, join professional associations, and organize NGOs, their most stable, effective, and morally resonant forms of trust and cooperation are in the tribal mode. At the end of the tribal mode of conflict resolution, they are assured by their fellows that they have done the right thing. At the end of the court session, they receive no such assurance, only a verdict, and that often only after long and tedious deliberations that were not understood. To address this malaise, Jordanians often resort to/join formal institutions and use them in a way that is more comfortable with their own values. *Wasta*, *mulaqa* (private dyadic diplomacy), and kinship ties become relevant even in such institutions as Parliament. This fact reinforces my view that the category "tribal" in Jordan and other parts of the Middle East does not refer only to nomadic and rural people but to urbanites and elites, as well. And tribal conflict resolution, the focus of my essay, is a genuine cross-cutting societal phenomenon.

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