Until recently, Middle Eastern tribalism was thought of as a dying phenomenon retreating before the sweeping forces of modernity. Conventional wisdom had it that the post-colonial nation-state erodes tribal forms of identity. Historians and social scientists viewed citizenship, nationalism, religious beliefs and class identities as the main forms for social and political organization and subjected them to scholarly inquiry, downplaying the role of the tribes. Contrary to these predictions, however, tribal values and forms of organization have not only survived modernism and statehood but in some ways also enjoyed a revival. Tribes in Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, Yemen and Libya became the sought after allies of the regimes. Following the regional turmoil commonly known as the Arab Spring, tribes play the role of critical powerbrokers and are in a position to shape the future direction of their countries.

The seminar offers a close analysis of the historical as well as current role of tribes and tribal values in the Middle East. It demonstrates the significance of this phenomenon as one of the main features of Middle Eastern politics, society and culture. After a short introduction that draws on the theoretical literature on tribes and state in the Middle East, the rest of the course is dedicated to examining particular case studies. The syllabus draws on cutting-edge scholarship in the disciplines of history, anthropology, sociology and political science. This literature will be supplied with a variety of primary sources.

**Course requirements:** Students are expected to read the assigned material and come to class well prepared. At the end of the course they should submit a research paper (around 20-25 pages doubled spaced for seminar, 10-12 pages for students who take the course as an elective). During the course I will give clear guidelines on how to research and write the paper.

**Grading:** The paper constitutes 70% of the final grade. Informed participation in class discussions and one or two short written assignments make up 30%.

* Students are more than welcome to contact me. Please write to valon@post.tau.ac.il
An official office hour will be held on Sundays, between 1400-1500 (room 451, Gilman Building). To make an appointment for this time or others please email me.

**Part One: By way of Introduction: General discussion, Definitions, Concepts, Theory**

**Week 1: Introduction and Preliminary Discussion**

**Week 2: Where It All Begins: Ibn Khaldun**
**Week 3: Anthropological Concepts of Tribes**


Eickelman, “What is a Tribe,” in idem, *The Middle East*.

**Part Two: Historical Case Studies**

**Week 4: The Ottoman Period**


**Week 5: Western Perceptions of Arab Tribal Societies/The Arab Revolt**
Film: *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962)

*Short written assignment based on the film and:

**Week 6: The Colonial State: French Syria, British Jordan**


**Week 7: Saudi Arabia**
Part Three: Tribalism Today

Week 8: The Bedouin in the Modern World - Are They Really Bedouin? Case studies from Egypt, Jordan and the Negev


Week 9: Iraq’s Past, Present and Future


Week 10: Tribalism and Nationalism in Jordan


Week 11: (By Way of) Conclusion
Film – People of the Wind (1976) [Nomads in Iran]