

Salzman, Philip Carl

1978 Does Complementary Opposition Exist? *American Anthropologist* 80:53-70.

*Submitted 9 November 1977*

*Revised version submitted 6 March 1978*

*Accepted 8 June 1978*

## Back to the Problem of Tribe

EMANUEL MARX

*Tel-Aviv University*

While not a few scholars believe that there is no point in continuing the discussion on the problem of tribe, I feel that it is only just beginning. At a time when the functionalist paradigm of society is gradually yielding to that of the social field, discussion may be especially fruitful. For tribes possess characteristics of both the functionalist normative bounded system, and the open situational social field. Their multiple overlapping social fields are largely confined to a territorial human group. The discussion of tribe is therefore concerned with some of the central problems of anthropology, such as the nature of society, kinship, descent groups, political and economic organization, genealogies, and other ideologies. Salzman seems to agree with me on this count, for, in spite of an initial disclaimer, he does join the debate about "the concept of tribe," and his thoughtful remarks touch on most of these issues.

His first point is that some passages in my article (Marx 1977) suggest that "adaptational exigencies, territory, and social organization are neatly tied together." That was certainly not what I wished to imply. But, since the paper developed slowly and was redrafted several times, occasional traces of earlier versions may have remained undetected. So, perhaps, I ought to state my present "final" position: The area of subsistence of a pastoral tribe is determined by the pasture and water required by the herds over numerous seasons. That part of the sea of subsistence controlled by the tribesmen, I call territory. It is rare for a tribe to control all the land it needs, either because some of it is of such quality as to attract a sedentary population or because other pastoralists use it as well. The pastoralists must possess a territory, be it even a small one, to become a tribe in the sense suggested by me. The extent of territory is determined not by subsistence needs but by the

pressure on the land exerted by other tribes and other land uses. Tribal organization is largely determined by the types of territorial resources available to, and controlled by, the tribesmen. Those provide the basis for a community of interest and for patterns of cooperation and competition. In that connection it should be pointed out that tribesmen do not necessarily reserve pastures for their own use. In South Sinai, for instance, each tribe grants the others the use of pastures in its territory, but reserves for its members the right to build houses, plant orchards, and use smuggling trails. Permission to use pastures is given on a mutual basis, and is thus no less an act of sovereignty than the reservation of other rights to tribesmen. Each tribe thus uses all the pastures in South Sinai. The area of subsistence of a tribe, its territory, and its organization are then each affected by different factors.

Salzman's second point concerns my ambiguous description of the tribe as "a kind of political organization," often without instituted leadership or corporation organization, that yet functions and persists in time. I accept his implied stricture that I should have gone into the issue of the tribe's corporateness, and I take this opportunity to elaborate the argument. I claim that although a tribe is made up of numerous small descent groups, it is not necessarily organized corporately. It often possesses some of the characteristics of corporateness as defined in the literature: it limits the admission of outsiders by rules (Weber 1947:133); members have a clear conception of their rights and obligations and thus possess, in Salzman's terms, "symbolic corporateness"; members are jurally equal (Fortes 1959:26); and the tribe also possesses "perpetuity," the attribute that Maine (1960:110) considered to be most important in corporations. But it often lacks the critical attribute of being capable of coordinated collective action (Weber 1946:134). I do not consider formal leadership to be an important ingredient of small corporations, but a tribe whose members may count many hundreds cannot easily coordinate activities without formal leadership. Although a tribe is a bounded political organization, whose members are aware of their rights and duties and act individually or in groups (though in some cases never collectively) to implement them, it is not necessarily a full-fledged corporation.

This leads to Salzman's third point, that my model of the tribe gives too much weight to networks, and too little to "symbolic corporate-

ness." He emphasizes that the tribe as such is a political entity that sets boundaries, defines membership, and allocates rights. But that is precisely what my model of the tribe is supposed to do. In the final analysis, "the tribe is the cumulative result of the efforts made by individuals and corporate groups to enlist the cooperation of others, in order to cope with problems of pasture, water, and self-defense" (p. 358). In order to drive home a modified view of the tribe, I had to emphasize the role of overlapping networks of relationships, but I did not ignore the role of groups and of informal leadership. The tribe is the result of all those interactions. The emerging relationships and activities also include cognitive elaborations on such matters as territory, membership, allocation of resources, rights, and duties toward others. All those matters are summarized by the tribesmen in a simplified conception, usually built around a genealogical scheme. Any discussion of social order implies the existence of the cognitive aspect, but that is not identical with the social order.

Let me now get to the crux of Salzman's criticism. It is that I try to eliminate the traditional model of the tribe as a segmentary organization, as a series of "replicate groups tied together by a unifying conceptual framework and/or by cross-cutting relationships." That is the rationale behind his second and third points, and is stated even more bluntly in his final remarks. Perhaps he feels there is still some use for it. For the elements embodied in the segmentary scheme can be discerned on the ground. Every tribes-

man belongs to a corporate descent group; a segmented genealogy links individuals to the tribe; the tribe possesses a territory; and there is fission and fusion of corporate groups. The segmentary scheme has combined all those features. Its elegance and simplicity captivated the minds of tribesmen and anthropologists alike. But that is its main shortcoming. For, in reality, each element in this scheme tends to move in its own orbit, and the elements combine in different ways. If the segmentary model is discarded, we are free to rearrange these elements. The new model may lead to new insights and benefit our art, provided it is eventually replaced by another.

#### *References Cited*

- Fortes, Meyer  
1959 Descent, Filiation and Affinity: A Rejoinder to Dr. Leach. *Man* 59:193-197, 206-212.
- Maine, Henry  
1960 *Ancient Law*. London: Dent. (1st ed. 1861)
- Marx, Emanuel  
1977 The Tribe as a Unit of Subsistence. *American Anthropologist* 79:343-363.
- Weber, Max  
1947 *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. London: Hodge.

*Submitted 12 October 1978*

*Accepted 12 October 1978*