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21st century: the return of tribalism?*21st century: the return of tribalism?**Abstract:*

This complex 21st century has been shaken by a series of milestones such as, among others, the economic-financial crisis of 2007-2008, the Arab Springs and the "indignados" movement from 2011 onwards, the Brexit referendum in 2016 and the COVID pandemic in 2020, events that have undermined several of the foundations on which most societies were largely based, such as legitimacy, cohesion and expectations of a better future.

At the same time, there has been a spectacular technological advance, with the emergence and exponential growth of social networks and the capacity to process and manage data and information in a growing manner.

In a globalised world, and where human beings can feel that their identity is blurred, the combination of weak social foundations and the capabilities of communications and information technologies generate a cocktail that contributes, either spontaneously or induced, to the growing tribalism of the population.

A brief analysis of this process and a reflection on the consequences of this reality are the focus of this paper.

Keywords:

Crisis, tribalism, legitimacy, cohesion, identity, social networks, technopolitics, war

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Siglo XXI: ¿El retorno del tribalismo?

Resumen:

Este complejo siglo XXI se ha visto sacudido por una serie de hitos tales como, y entre otros, la crisis económico-financiera del año 2007-2008, las primaveras árabes y los movimiento de «indignados» a partir del 2011, el referéndum sobre el Brexit en el año 2016 y la pandemia de COVID en el año 2020, hechos que han socavado varios de los cimientos sobre los que se asentaban, en gran medida, la mayor parte de las sociedades, como es la legitimidad, la cohesión y las expectativas de un futuro mejor.

Así mismo, se ha producido de manera simultánea un espectacular avance tecnológico, destacando la aparición y crecimiento exponencial de las redes sociales y la capacidad de procesar y gestionar datos e información de manera creciente.

En un mundo globalizado, y donde el ser humano puede sentir que su identidad queda difuminada, la combinación de la debilidad de los cimientos sociales y las capacidades de las tecnologías de comunicaciones e información generan un cóctel que contribuye, bien de manera espontánea, bien de manera inducida, a un creciente tribalismo de la población.

Un breve análisis sobre dicho proceso y una reflexión sobre las consecuencias de dicha realidad articulan el presente documento.

Palabras clave:

Crisis, tribalismo, legitimidad, cohesión, identidad, redes sociales, tecnopolítica, guerra

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Introduction

In this 21st century, which is already almost a quarter of the way through, new advances in technology are being made every day, and issues such as Artificial Intelligence, robotics, drones and the growing use of outer space are gradually populating humanity's heritage.

However, at the same time as this process of modernity is advancing, voices are being raised to warn of the progressive tribalisation of societies, in a real or apparent paradox which, although it could be a simple fad without consequences—a curious mixture of modernity and antiquity—, could also constitute something completely disruptive.

Perhaps this question merits reflection.

What exactly is tribalism?

The human being is a social being by nature, said Aristotle; one is born with this condition and exercises and develops it during life, in such a way that the Greek thinker goes so far as to affirm that one even “is” as long as one “co-is”, as long as one is part of something, which is why the need to belong is so tremendously important.

Having made this initial consideration, regarding the term “tribalism”, the *Real Academia de la Lengua*¹ provides two meanings, both of which are very broad: firstly, it states that tribalism is the social organisation based on the tribe, while the second meaning expresses, and pointing out that it is a derogatory use of the term, “the tendency to feel closely linked to the group of people to which one belongs, and to ignore the rest of society”.

Without attempting to usurp or replace the depth of anthropological and sociological concepts and analyses on this issue, it should be noted that tribalism² can be framed as an essentially cultural phenomenon, whereby people create social organisations with which they identify and, through their participation in them, assert themselves and feel part of something larger and broader than themselves. And this phenomenon not only tends to occupy all aspects of an individual's life—from external symbols to codes of

¹ Real Academia Española, *Diccionario de la Lengua, Edición del Tricentenario*, 2022, Tribalismo. Available at: <https://dle.rae.es/tribalismo?m=form> NOTE: All web links in this paper are active as of 03 January 2023.

² ROVIRA SALVADOR, Isabel, ¿Qué es el tribalismo? Analizando este fenómeno social, *Psicología y mente*, 1 March 2018. Available at: <https://psicologiymente.com/social/tribalismo>

conduct to religious or political issues—but also has a mutual influence between the group—the tribe—and the individual, for while the tribe has a powerful influence on the individual, each person tries to leave their own mark on the tribe, feeling that they are an integral part of it.

Classically, tribalism as a system of social organisation is based on the tribe; and with regard to “tribe” different meanings and interpretations³ can also be found, ranging from “primitive social group of the same origin, real or supposed, whose members usually have in common customs and habits” to “groups of individuals with some common characteristic” with a specific focus, in this case, on violent youth gangs, the so-called urban tribes. In this sense, the key and common aspect of “tribes” is the fact that they share a series of common elements—from traditions to habits—and this can include an additional element such as belonging to a specific ethnic group, the fact of sharing a common ethnic origin.

Again, without wishing to develop this broad and cross-cutting concept, “ethnicity”, a term which comes from the Greek “*éthnos*” (people), refers to a human group defined by essentially cultural affinities, although the racial element may also play a role in the formation of certain tribes. In any case, while it may be feasible, under certain conditions and with all the considerations one may wish to make, to join one ethnic group, it is not feasible to join another race: it is, or may be possible, to assimilate and internalise cultural elements, but it is not feasible to change genes. And if this element—race—is used as a differentiating and differential element, the result is watertight human groups, which may be shocking in the face of the more comprehensive concept of “citizen” and the possibility—with exceptions, obviously—of being able to obtain citizenship of another country through different channels and for different reasons.

The tribe is also and can be understood as the human organisation that generates a powerful sense of identity, such that this identity differentiates and establishes distance from other tribes, and that its members, in turn, fully identified with the tribe and “co-believing”, as Aristotle would say, are proud to belong to it and willing to fight for it and defend it. To a certain extent, perhaps it is another way of understanding the “social contract”, that link between the citizen and the state: in fact, the First World War seen

³ Real Academia Española, *Diccionario de la Lengua, Edición del Tricentenario*, 2022, Tribu. Available at: <https://dle.rae.es/tribu?m=form>

from Africa, where despite the imperial and colonial structures, the tribe continued to constitute the sign of identity and the fundamental social structure, was called “the war of the white tribes”⁴, given the difficulty of assuming and internalising the concept of citizenship with respect to a nation-state.

For this reason, and despite the similarities—they are human social organisations—there are profound differences; thus, while the concept of citizen is an inclusive one (with certain nuances), that of tribe presents a greater degree of exclusion and differentiation.

But this issue has already been overcome, or has it?

The 21st century: New era!...

A few decades ago, at the beginning of the millennium, the world seemed to be heading towards an idealistic model: there was an increase in democracy and respect for human rights on the planet, an overall improvement in the economic situation and international cooperation... but a series of events shook the pillars of that world to paint a bleak picture: the economic crisis of 2007-2008, the Arab Springs and the movements of the “*indignados*” all over the world—especially in the West—in 2011, the Brexit referendum in 2016—and the severe blow it dealt to the European construction project—and the COVID-19 pandemic that started in China at the end of 2019—and has not yet been declared extinct—among other milestones, have had such a powerful impact on people, societies and structures that it has had powerful consequences: trust in institutions of governance, especially at national and supranational levels, has been largely lost; there is a powerful lack of leadership; social cohesion has deteriorated; global wealth has failed to grow but inequalities have grown; and for the first time since the Second World War (1945) there is a widespread perception that children are going to live worse than their parents.

All of this leads to a powerful loss of trust between people and rulers and induces a great lack of legitimacy, leading to the conclusion that a new security paradigm⁵ is needed in order to adequately address this basic and primordial need of human beings and groups. And there are still more considerations to be made.

⁴ FERRO, Marc. *La Gran Guerra, 1914-1918*, Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 2014.

⁵ SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ, Pedro. “Era COVID: ¿Un nuevo paradigma de seguridad?”, Analysis Paper 36/2000, Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, 18 November 2000. Available at: https://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2020/DIEEEA36_2020PEDSAN_eraCovid.pdf

In the context of the growing implementation of technologies such as digitalisation and robotisation, with the emergence of a new economic—and therefore social—paradigm, it may be that, as on other occasions, a new “industrial revolution”, the fourth in this case, after a period of reorganisation and some chaos, will give way to a new era of prosperity. But, regardless of whether this is true, what is unquestionable is that its collateral effects on many people and jobs, on many ways of life, on many uses and habits, in short, on many human realities⁶, induces the feeling in a large sector of the population of not only “being left behind”, but even of being a simple “factor of production”—or consumption—that is absolutely disposable, valid only to keep the value chains running but completely depriving human beings of their own identity, reducing it to a mere cold piece of data or set of data.

Globalism and technification can therefore generate a sense of loss of identity, which, together with the crisis of legitimacy generated by this situation in this complex 21st century, generates a complex panorama; And if we take into account that the relationship between people and institutions continues to be the basis for the existence of organised societies, there is no doubt that the greater the distance between citizens and their governments, the less the latter's capacities and options will be to carry out actions on any scale—local, national or global—as these require resources, an increasing amount of resources in the face of the growing challenges, resources that are obtained, in democracies, basically due to the legitimacy of the structures of government (otherwise, we would speak of plundering or pillaging).

And, faced with this situation...

... neo-tribalism?

We must remember how, back in the apparently distant 1960s, the Canadian sociologist Marshall McLuhan coined the term “global village”, which, in a visual and plastic way, seeks to materialise the impact and effects generated by the development of global communication systems (we are still in the 1960s), which made it possible to receive information and images in a manner almost similar to what we could perceive if we were

⁶ SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ, Pedro. Industrial revolution 4.0!: “¿Un nuevo siglo de revueltas en el Mediterráneo?”, Analysis Paper 01/2022, Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, 12 January 2022. Available at: https://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2022/DIEEEA01_2022_PEDSAN_Revolucion.pdf

physically in the place where they were generated, in the manner of what would happen in a village: having the sensation of knowing and seeing almost everything that happens in our “immediate surroundings”.

And furthermore, while it was not a novelty to be able to receive press and news in text mode -even, for diasporas, to do so in the mother tongue-, images have a much greater power, both because of the immediacy they suggest -a written news item always has a time delay, and has passed through a certain filter which is that of the editor—and also because of their capacity—as the saying goes, “a picture is worth a thousand words”—to induce a sensation very similar to what we would be able to perceive for ourselves, in such a way that they become an important part of our heritage and of our self, and of us as a group.

Thus, when in the past life was essentially structured around the family and people close to us—our village—and where what we could capture through different media spoke of people and/or places that were distant, thanks to this technological development—we are still in the 1960s—we can almost suddenly have access to those people and places that are no longer distant and remote, and even, on many occasions, become predominant over those with whom we really live. This is why McLuhan pointed out that despite the immensity of the planet, it has become a global village, and that due to the potential of the media, tribal behaviour is re-emerging in society. He goes so far as to cite⁷ that the great masses of people watching the content broadcast by television channels⁸ absorb the modern equivalent of shamanic knowledge—an authoritative source—in a further equivalence to ancient tribal relations, and that this global village leads people to try to recover their traditional way of being, in the search for an apparently lost identity, subsumed in this global tide.

In this sense, at the end of the last century, the work “The Time of the Tribes”⁹ was published, in which the logic of reason is replaced by that of passion in the post-modern world in which a large part of humanity finds itself, the logic of reason is replaced by that

⁷ MCLUHAN, Eric and ZINGRONE, Frank. McLuhan. “Escritos esenciales”, Planeta, Barcelona, 1998. page 15.

⁸ One need only recall the impact on politics on a global scale of images broadcast in real time 24/7, so much so that the term “CNN effect” was coined. For a succinct analysis, see BENABID, Kaouthar. What is the CNN Effect and why is it relevant today?, *Aljazeera Media Institute*, 22 February 2021. Available at: <https://institute.aljazeera.net/en/ajr/article/1365>

⁹ Although the original work dates from 1988, the result of a doctoral thesis, it is still being reprinted. MAFFESOLI, MICHEL. *The Time of the Tribes*, New Publisher, London, 2021.

of passion, and that in the face of the prevailing individualism, an exercise of construction through difference is taking place, which generates the resurgence of tribalism, in such a way, and especially in the cities—in an increasingly urbanised world—that the term “urban tribe” is becoming more and more popular and commonplace.

While it was thought that globalisation could generate a new cosmopolitan consciousness, the truth is that, with certain obvious exceptions, it is sometimes said¹⁰ that the real cosmopolitans, those who really benefit from this globalised world, are the oligarchs, those who are able to obtain passports in tax havens or in other nations according to their own very personal interests, and who move across borders that do not exist for them—as they do for money—borders that in many cases the laws are not able to cross. On the other hand, there is a resurgence of tribes, perhaps as an intuitive response to the need for human socialisation in the face of a growing “egocentric society”¹¹, and in which there is a reinterpretation of the relationships and social ties that give rise to the existence of a community life.

Moreover, people’s loss of identity and legitimacy on the part of social referents contributes to the radicalisation and extremism of some of these tribes, which end up becoming “gangs”. And the phenomenon is that recruitment to these mostly urban tribes is occurring at a younger age¹², and that there is a gradual shift from a process of loyalty and entry into the group of people who previously had a lower degree of parental control to a growing degree of attraction through the constant monitoring of actions, videos, news and images of these tribes (gangs) via the internet and social networks. Thus, radicalisation occurs both because of the difficulty of controlling the use of these media by minors—and adults—and because of the attraction that these groups can have due to their aesthetics, the symbols used or the “epic” nature of their actions.

In this way, the development of communication technologies has made possible not only the birth of the “global village”, but also the maintenance and appearance of a growing number of “global tribes”, whose members are united by symbology, aesthetics and ideologies, by passion to a much greater extent than by reason, giving rise to identities

¹⁰ BULLOUGH, Oliver. *Butler to the World*, Profile Books, London, 2022; *Moneyland*, Editorial Principal de los Libros, Barcelona, 2019.

¹¹ CASTELLS, Manuel. *Comunicación y poder*, Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 2009, page 302.

¹² *El Mundo*, Police warn about Latino gangs: much younger, violent “by imitation” and captured through TikTok. 26/12/2022. Available at:

<https://www.elmundo.es/madrid/2022/12/26/639271ffdddf3d408b45e3.html>

that defy the “classic” ones and which in many cases are opposed to or at least not aligned with the citizen identities of the nation-states.

So these tribes and tribalism is a matter of circumstance, it is not a phenomenon that can be induced... or is it?

Tribalism: spontaneous or technopolitics?

The provision of services and attention to the basic needs of society, of the citizenry, constitute one of the bases of the legitimacy of a government, of a state, of a socio-economic structure in which there is a social contract of one kind or another. And while attention to basic needs—like the needs themselves—is an element that can be quantified, there is certainly room for perception.

Thus, the so-called “relative deprivation”¹³ can be understood as the real or perceived lack of resources that prevent one from maintaining the standard of living that one is used to, or that one feels one should enjoy on average in the group under consideration; in simple terms, one could say that the feeling that is generated is that “things are worse for one” than for the group or people with whom one is compared.

On the other hand, this comparison is not only made horizontally, with respect to contemporary people or social groups, but also along a temporal thread, establishing an assessment between the past, the present and the future, which is directly related to perspectives and illusions, with the vision of a potential better tomorrow or, on the contrary, with a future full of dark clouds... the latter perception which, as has been pointed out in previous paragraphs, constitutes one of the current convictions in a large part of the planet.

And although it may—this lack of resources¹⁴—not threaten survival itself, the feeling created has a direct impact on the materialisation of potential social changes, as people with such a perception—or reality—will tend to organise themselves to obtain or recover the things they feel deprived of—or to which they believe they are entitled, rightly or

¹³ LONGLEY, Robert, All about relative deprivation and deprivation theory, Thought.co, 3 August 2021. Available at: <https://www.thoughtco.com/relative-deprivation-theory-4177591>

¹⁴ Obviously, no reference is made here to what is called “absolute deprivation”, to the lack of basic means of survival and the impossibility of obtaining them, where, in the case of large masses of people, the choice is death by starvation—or an agonising and miserable life—or confrontation, as has happened on several occasions throughout history.

wrongly—and if this comparison yields a negative balance—whether real or perceived—between “us” and “them”, or between “yesterday” and “today”, or even between “today” and “tomorrow”, it may cause revolts, disputes and disorder between human groups, between tribes trying to change this situation—real or perceived—and force the creation of a different one, favourable to their interests. In fact, this is one¹⁵ of the driving forces, a factor of the revolutions.

But it is not the only one. It is also necessary to take into account another potential factor, rational choice, whereby people make the decision to rebel on the basis of a logical reasoning based on a benefit-cost calculation: there is no reason not to rebel if the benefit of doing so outweighs the costs... especially if these are very low or non-existent, or if the risks and costs associated with the breakdown of the social order have been eliminated by whatever means. And it is this rational choice approach that often explains the rebellions of elites¹⁶, who choose to try to force policy change on the basis of a rational interest in the potential benefits to be gained and the costs to be borne... for and by themselves.

To do this, (certain) elites need “shock forces”, tribes—it is easier to mobilise a tribe than a plural society—who, as “delegated forces”, fight for their class interests, making them think and believe that they are doing it for the common good or for the good of the tribe. This is about “having a tribe” and that “the tribe thinks the way the leader wants it to”.

Human decision-making, and even the reinterpretation of social relations, is produced and influenced on the basis of what comes to us from the outside and the interpretation we make of that information; that is why it is key to control information, which in many cases arrives in the form of “news” at the end of the political process, so that governing with news also means controlling what reaches the public¹⁷. And despite the feeling of complete freedom that having access to the internet can provide, it is forgotten that the images and information that reach the recipients have been selected and chosen from a wide variety of sources, so they may well be biased. Even facts and issues as far removed from a highly mediatised debate as history are elements that add to the fray when trying

¹⁵ VERME, Paolo, Relative deprivation, discontent and revolutions, *World Bank Blogs*, 23 December 2013. Available at: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/relative-deprivation-discontent-and-revolutions>

¹⁶ WEEDE, Erich and MULLER, Edward N., Rebellion, violence and revolution: a rational choice perspective, *Journal of Peace Research*, volume 35, number 1, January 1998, pp. 23-59. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/425230>

¹⁷ CASTELLS, Manuel. *Comunicación y poder*, Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 2009, page 302.

to create or destroy new and old identities. In the growing struggle between and for tribes, anything goes, even the rewriting of history¹⁸.

This is why media influence on the future of a society can be so complex and dangerous, especially if the so-called “politics of scandal” is used, which although it may apparently bring immediate benefits, in the end only deepens the crisis of legitimacy¹⁹... in a global context that increasingly requires a seamless alignment between governments and the governed.

In this context it is necessary to remember what is feasible to achieve with the so-called “Infocracy”²⁰, a term analysed by Byung-Chul Han and which points to the power of data, of the growing capacities of digitalisation that affect all orders of life, in such a way that its influence on the political process is such that, by means of fake accounts and robots, messages are constantly sent, saturating the networks and media to influence voters, the population, as well as by means of the use of various techniques—psychometrics, digital psychopolitics—to influence perceptions, preventing rational decision-making. It is even pointed out that power, nowadays, is measured in the immediacy of a “like”²¹, in a display of a politics more of affection than of facts, more of passions than of reasons... the perfect environment for tribalisation.

And all this without forgetting the crucial role of the so-called “biases” in decision-making, aspects already defined in 1972 by Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky in the framework of behavioural economics; these elements, the so-called “cognitive biases”, are constituted by internal and internalised issues, which in the case of decision-making lead one to believe that one is proceeding in a completely rational manner when, in reality, one is proceeding on the basis of emotions and opinions²². And in the case of being part of a tribe, the strong sense of identity and belonging leads to certain biases—such as that of entrainment (doing what people close to us do) or confirmation (giving priority to information that coincides with and confirms our beliefs and ideals)—being decisive when it comes to making decisions and, when the time comes, taking action.

¹⁸ In this sense STEPMAN, Jarret. *The war on history: the conspiracy to rewrite America’s past*, Regnery Gateway, Washington, 2019.

¹⁹ CASTELLS, Manuel. *Comunicación y poder*, Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 2009, page 390.

²⁰ HAN, Byung-Chul Han. *Infocracia: la digitalización y la crisis de la democracia*, Taurus, 2022.

²¹ MAVRAKIS, Nicolas. *El poder de la psicopolítica digital*, *Perfil.com*, 1 June 2021. Available at: <https://noticias.perfil.com/noticias/cultura/el-poder-de-la-psicopolitica-digital.phtml>

²² KHANEMAL, Daniel. *Pensar rápido, pensar despacio*, Debate, Barcelona, 2012.

In order to be able to agglutinate feelings against the established power, it is necessary to be able to communicate them to others; therefore, the ability to control communication and the manipulation of information²³ is a key element in the hands of the powerful in order to achieve their ends.

As a simple example, the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia²⁴ is a paradigm of this reality: after Tito's death, the lack of leadership and a complex economic situation generated a state of relative deprivation that was instrumentalised by new elites who, using the embers of radical nationalism, exploited all existing means of communication to tribalise a once united society and achieve the outbreak of armed conflicts to create small fiefdoms for themselves and "their own", and after a trail of death and destruction, transform a state that was a reference on the planet into a group of micro-nations in which internal struggles, in many cases, have not yet ended and which are territories, as in the 19th century, where the powers plan to settle their disputes.

It can be argued, obviously, that this happened in the past, that in the present the reality is different, and the ways and uses of life are different, that societies are moving towards different models.

Tribalisation, then!

As has been pointed out, tribalisation is not a phenomenon linked to economic crises—although they accelerate this trend—but is above all a psychological phenomenon driven by a collective identity crisis due to a major trauma... and the planet has had a few of those in the last two decades. And so it is expressly pointed out that humanity is in a new period of tribalisation²⁵, and the rise to the presidency of Donald Trump, the growth of terrorism and the policies pursued by some leaders, such as Putin, are cited as examples of this growing tribalism, among others. And it is also recalled that, after tribalisation processes, the result is often a great war.

On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that tribalism ends up leading to feudalisation, to the attempt of territorial control of spaces by tribes, which generates a

²³ CASTELLS, Manuel. *Comunicación y poder*, Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 2009, page 453.

²⁴ For further information, see SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ, Pedro. *Yugoslavia y yugonostalgia: ¿Europa y euronostalgia?*, in *Panorama Geopolítico de los Conflictos 2019*, Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, Madrid, 2019, pp. 107-142.

²⁵ DEBEUF, Koert. *Tribalization: why war is coming*, Academic and Scientific Publishers, Brussels, 2018, page 11.

completely inverse process to that of the construction of nation states and international organisations, leading to a process of fragmentation instead of one of union, added to the always worrying loss of the legitimate monopoly of violence—since this fragmentation and feudalisation brings with it the existence of groups and defence elements in each of the tribes—... replicating, with a greater degree of approximation, the Hobbesian chaos, the state of nature of all against all... and also generating a structural weakness that can be exploited by “a much larger tribe” or by a state that manages to maintain cohesion and its tools of power.

The Sahel, Europe’s southern border, is the embodiment of this reality of tribal fragmentation²⁶, where the strongest tribe, for the moment, is the one formed by the jihadist terrorists and, in the tribal struggle for this space, a spiral of violence and chaos is generated in which the search for a “strong man”²⁷ to put an end to this situation becomes a constant, with simple survival taking precedence over freedom and rights. If it is complex to maintain global “order” in a world of states, it is impossible in a world of tribes.

And this reality is addressed from certain orbits without ambiguity²⁸, indicating that the situation in large parts of the planet is a return to tribalism, although politically correct language sometimes uses euphemisms such as “communitarianism” or “identity withdrawal”, as if this would lessen the impact of a crude reality, a reality that is also insisted on the need to proceed to its eradication, as it implies a return to past times and situations that were apparently already overcome... but nobody acknowledges being afflicted by this “evil”, the need is always to eradicate it “in others”.

In plural, diverse societies, with an increasing number of people from different backgrounds living together, widespread tribalism—beyond some exotic or seemingly innocuous issues²⁹—is not only a fault line for such a society, but goes against the very

²⁶ SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ, Pedro. Siglo XXI... y el Sahel yendo hacia la Edad Media?, Analysis Paper 29/2022, Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, 4 May 2022. Available at: https://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2022/DIEEEA29_2022_PEDSAN_Sahel.pdf

²⁷ SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ, Pedro. ¡El Sahel en llamas!: ¿Vuelta al caudillismo?, Analysis Paper 61/2022, Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, 05 October 2022. Available at: https://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2022/DIEEEA61_2022_PEDSAN_Sahel.pdf

²⁸ SOUDAN, François. Tribalisme: l'enfer, c'est les autres, Jeune Afrique, 6 March 2017. Available at: <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/409393/politique/tribalisme-lenfer-cest-les-autres/>

²⁹ In this respect, some of the issues that can be seen in the World Cup in Qatar in 2022 are of interest. BODETTI, Austin. World Cup 2022: for morocco’s football fans, nationality is a fluid concept, *Middle East*

rules and laws of coexistence; it can even go so far that, as reported in an American media³⁰, people seek to use the Constitution not as a statement of shared principles, but as a means with which to attack their enemies—enemies who are no more than “former” fellow citizens, and who have now become “members of a rival tribe”.

Conclusion?

This common heritage includes how the Iberian Peninsula was conquered, despite the courage, resistance and fighting capacity of the Hispanic tribes by the Romans, who were able to take advantage of the fragmentation and rivalries between them to achieve their aims; how the immensity of Africa and its plethora of tribes succumbed in a short period of time to the European nation-states during the initial phase of colonisation of the continent; and also how the North American subcontinent saw not only the defeat, but the virtual annihilation of the tribes that had been the masters of these lands for millennia.

It is also from this heritage that memories can be gleaned of how, at times, confederations of tribes were able to win victories over their adversaries. But these confederations, in the form of “tactical groupings” were short-lived, and not even the step towards a federation and then towards an effective union was taken, meaning that the sentence “together we are stronger” was really validated . The small differences, nuances and “buts” of each tribe prevented the creation of a superior entity that, with a desire—and capacity—for permanence, would allow the possibility of maintaining their way of life... or even life itself, simply by focusing only on the defence at all costs of “small differential facts”.

In the current geopolitical context, not only are the threats global and extremely powerful, but the reconfiguration that the planet is undergoing, like an earthquake and colliding tectonic plates, threatens the very continuity of the tribes in the face of the great powers at play... powers that in many cases are precisely those that induce tribalisation under the guise of modernity, freedom and progress, seeking precisely “divide and rule” or, in other cases, to create a new fiefdom where they can run wild. A fiefdom that will certainly not be, by any stretch of the imagination, a model of modernity, freedom or progress.

Eye, 1 December 2022, Available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/qatar-world-cup-morocco-football-team-nationalities-fluid>

³⁰ CHUA, Amy and RUBENFELD, Jed. The threat of tribalism, *The Atlantic*, October 2018. Available in: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/10/the-threat-of-tribalism/568342/>

The trend towards tribalisation, i.e. fragmentation, disunity and radicalisation, has been going on for a long time. Now that the causes are known, and the consequences are known, the only thing left to do is to act to avoid it...

... if it is to be avoided, since it is preferable to become extinct than not to make “casus belli” for a—in the end—minuscule “differential fact”.

And is that, would that be, a rational decision or the result of an externally fed bias?

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