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3. The organization of nomadic communities in pastoral societies of the Middle East

RICHARD L. TAPPER

Cet article exploratoire remet tout d'abord en question certaines généralisations qui ont été faites à propos des sociétés pastorales nomades, particulièrement celles du monde islamique. Il passe ensuite en revue les modèles connus d'organisation sociale communs à ces sociétés. Ceux-ci paraissent se distribuer entre deux types de communautés définies selon la taille et par la structure, comme l'illustre la comparaison des turcophones Shahsevan de l'Azerbaïdjan iranien et des Basseri de langue persane de l'Iran du sud-ouest. Ces deux sociétés forment des communautés comparables par la taille, mais dissemblables en composition, la différence paraissant résulter des systèmes des droits pastoraux et des contextes politiques. En outre, l'examen de la littérature rend évidente l'existence de communautés du même type, non seulement parmi d'autres nomades d'Iran, mais aussi ailleurs. Aucune idéologie d'opposition complémentaire ou segmentaire ne permet d'expliquer la nature de ces communautés, et leurs ressemblances ne sauraient être attribuées simplement à des facteurs écologiques ou politiques, non plus, semble-t-il, qu'à un mode de production particulier. Elles invitent plutôt à formuler l'hypothèse de mécanismes démographiques sous-jacents, voire socio-psychologiques.

Among Bedouin, "all groups, at whatever level, are of the same order . . . all have much the same functions, in more or less attenuated form". (Bacon 1958: 129–130.)

. . . all Bedouin society follows fundamentally the same principles at all levels of organization . . . there are no lineages in the sense of bounded groups having a continuing and cohesive base in corporate rights and duties . . . there are no corporate segments in Bedouin society, except for the pasture-owning tribe, which is only weakly so . . . In this system, it is almost impossible to isolate a solidary in-group . . . in one of the more important corporate obligations of Bedouin society [blood responsibility], there is no bounded and stable group with which the individual is totally identified and the membership of which is interchangeable one for another. (Murphy & Kasdan 1959.)

. . . the structural possibilities of tribal organizations based on pastoral nomadism would seem to be fairly limited on the lower levels of integration. In most cases, ecological pressures mitigate against the emergence of formal corporate groups on the residential level. The adaptive advantage in permitting an easy flow of people in shifting camp groups tends to inhibit the development of a hierarchical chain of authority which penetrates the community level. (N. Swidler 1972: 119.)

. . . in the Middle East . . . the lineage is the group within which there exists the knowl-

edge, the consciousness, and the sentiment of being a distinct unit, and whose members actually cooperate in numerous institutions and undertakings . . . in respect of a corporate obligation which is of paramount importance in Bedouin society [blood responsibility] . . . the lineage is the bounded and stable group with which the individual is totally identified. (Patai 1965, 1969.)

Introduction

This paper is speculative and exploratory. I first question some generalizations which have been made in the literature concerning pastoral nomadic societies, particularly those of the Islamic world; then I identify certain patterns of social organization which are common in these societies; and I conclude with suggestions as to the kinds of principles underlying these common patterns.

The patterns concerned are two types of interactional community which emerge with a regular size and character at certain levels of organization. I first became aware of these communities when comparing my own field data on the Shahsevan Turks of Iranian Azerbaijan with F. Barth's account of the Persian-speaking Basseri in southwest Iran. These two nomadic peoples are organized in communities which are remarkably similar in size and character but differ in composition, the differences clearly related to different systems of grazing rights (see pp. 95–114) and imposed political structures. When I proceeded to review the literature, the existence of similar communities, not only among other nomads in Iran (cf. Tapper 1974: 323, n.d.) but elsewhere, became clear.

These communities are not explicable by any ideologies of complementary or segmentary opposition, nor can their cross-cultural similarities in size and character be attributed simply to ecological factors or external political pressures, which differ in each case; nor, so far as I can see, are they a function of any particular mode of production. Rather, in my view, they invite hypotheses of underlying demographic and possibly social psychological mechanisms.

The third section of this paper is a compilation of the evidence concerning the communities from most of those ethnographies that provide it. But before we consider the evidence, a brief evaluation of the nature, orientation, and outcome of previous comparative studies of nomadic societies is in order.

Comparative studies of nomadism in the Middle East

Comparative studies of pastoral nomad society in the Middle East have until recently been hampered by the lack of reliable or sociologically informative data. The available material on customs and cultural traits was adequate for the establishment of "types" of nomadism in Southwestern and Central Asia in the discussion between Bacon (1954) and Patai (1951, 1962), but the lack of statistical information on Arab nomads confined Murphy and Kasdan (1959) to a "mechanical model" when they attempted to analyse Bedouin social struc-

ture. As Dyson-Hudson (1972: 6) has pointed out, it was only in the 1950s that there began to appear "a corpus of material capable of transforming the study of nomadic societies".

The new nomad ethnographies understandably gave a dominant role to ecology as a factor shaping society. Comparative studies have come to regard nomadism as an ecological adaptation, and have sought in the environment explanations of variation in nomadic social forms. Thus, there have been comparisons of the different ways in which climate and terrain, availability of pasture and water, and types of animals herded influence patterns of movement and forms of herding and camping associations (e.g. Krader 1959; Sweet 1965; Johnson 1969; Rubel 1969; Spooner 1973). Others have related political structures and major tribal group formations to ecology (Barth 1961: 123ff, 1962; Sweet 1965; Salzman 1967; Black-Michaud 1975: ch. 4), while support has come from Bates (1971) and Irons (1974) for Lattimore's suggestion (1940) that nomadism is often an adaptation to the political rather than the natural environment.

It has long been established that there is no social form common to all pastoral nomadic societies, and none that is peculiar to them. There has seemed a danger that the category "nomadism" would prove analytically sterile. Two ways out of the problem have been pursued. Some writers have fastened onto ideological or cultural features held to be common to all nomadic societies; others insist that the two component elements of the concept "nomadism" — namely pastoralism as a productive system, and residence in mobile and fluid groups — should be studied separately in their different implications.

Thus, Spooner (1973: 3–4) suggests that nomadism be treated as a "trait of cultural ecology", characterized by "lack of interest in fixed property and fixed resources"; nomads' dependence on "unimproved natural environment . . . generates a characteristic nomadic ideology in all nomadic populations". The antithesis of nomad is peasant, and there is a "general ideological polarization" between the two (Spooner 1972). Now it is undoubtedly true that for many nomadic people their pastoralism, represented symbolically in their tents, their migrations, their animals, and other values, is a crucial principle of social organization, such that settlement implies a radical transformation of society; this is the case, for example, with the Shahsevan. But unfortunately such symbolic values are by no means universal among nomads, nor so simply derived from the ecological nature of the nomadic adaptation as Spooner suggests. Among some nomadic populations of the Middle East movement, tent-dwelling, and stock-rearing are not imbued with central meanings at all, and the supposed nomadic ideology of independence, etc. (Goldschmidt 1971) turns out to be a characteristic of tribally organized people, settled or nomadic. In these cases nomadism is an economic rather than an ecological, cultural or political adaptation. There is no clear ideological polarization that might inhibit nomad settlement. Most examples of such uncommitted nomads seem to be members of large ethnic or tribal groups which dominate large defined regions either

numerically or as a result of factors external to the region: for example the Durrani of western and northern Afghanistan (Ferdinand 1969b: 128, 147, and personal information); probably the same applies to Baluch, Kurds, Lurs and many Arabs.

In their introductions to two recently published symposia on nomadism, both Salzman (1971) and Dyson-Hudson (1972) have urged the separation of nomadism as movement from pastoralism as one kind of "resource extraction" (Salzman) practised by nomads. As regards pastoralism, several writers have shown how differential demographic features of human and animal populations, and the seasonally and annually fluctuating requirements of herding efficiency, are met by flexibility in size and composition of social groups at the herding level. Indeed, one author (Rubel 1969) has attempted a comparison of four different pastoral nomadic societies, by constructing a "generative model" in which a single variable, herd composition, is held to determine "herd management, camp composition and the socio-structural features of affinal relations and marriage patterns". The attempt fails, partly through the inappropriateness of the empirical data used, but mainly through a fundamental misreading of Barth's instructions (1966) for the construction of such generative models.

The social implications of nomadic mobility have also received some attention in the comparative literature (e.g. Johnson 1969). Just as pastoralism is not exclusive to nomads, so a mobile life is not exclusive to pastoralists. Spooner suggests that for anthropologists the significant feature of nomadism lies in "lack of interest in fixed property and fixed resources", but this particular criterion would exclude some pastoral nomads which do have such interests (see my other paper pp. 95-114) and include hunter-gatherers and gypsies. The type of movement which distinguishes pastoral nomads as such might be characterized as involving the residential mobility and economic autonomy of household productive units, mobile but intensively exploited resources, and mobility with a degree of political autonomy among co-operative local groupings.

The social significance of nomadic mobility is that it gives the opportunity for continual choice and change in residential association, within a wide but limited and relatively homogeneous social field, an opportunity inherently denied to settled peoples. Not only does this enable nomads to cope with the demands of a herding way of life, but as Spooner has pointed out, "The fluidity of nomadic society renders it ideal subject matter for the study of politics — which is otherwise tied in some way to fixed economic interests" (Spooner 1973: 33); more crucially for this paper, it will be among nomads rather than settled peoples that we can expect the emergence and evidence of any inherent social dynamic processes generating interactional communities of a certain size and character.

It is in the analysis of actual face-to-face communities that the comparative study of pastoral nomadic social organization seems to me to be still deficient.

In this respect, two theoretical approaches have had considerable influence, the one deriving from social structural analyses of segmentary lineage models developed outside the Middle Eastern context, the other arguing from the logic of ecological relations. These approaches concur in their insistence that neither the structure of certain nomadic societies, nor the ecology of pastoral nomadism, will permit the formation of corporate groups.

The inadequate material on the Bedouin led Bacon in 1958 to state that they, like the Central Asian peoples from whom her model was drawn, were characterized by "tribal genealogical" or "obok" structure, the components of which are "sliding lineages" concerned with vengeance (and exogamy in Central Asia), and fixed lineages of which she argues that "all groups, at whatever level, are of the same order". A year later, Murphy and Kasdan published a rather more elaborate examination of Bedouin social structure, in which the main elements were a segmentary lineage system after the African model, the *khamisa* kindred vengeance group, and a rule (or "system") of patrilineal parallel cousin marriage. The implications of this model, they conclude, are that "there are no corporate segments in Bedouin society, except for the pasture-owning tribe". More recently, N. Swidler (1972: 119) has maintained that "the emergence of formal corporate groups on the residential level" is inhibited by nomadic ecology; while other writers such as Spooner continue to stress the essential instability and fluidity of nomadic local groupings.

Patai (1965) found fault with Murphy and Kasdan on a number of counts, for example the organizational relevance of the notion of a "system" of patrilineal parallel cousin marriage. He was also able to show that corporate "endogamous unilineal descent groups" are widespread in Middle Eastern society, though his evidence and argument mainly concern settled villages. He further criticizes Murphy and Kasdan for misrepresenting the nature of the *khamisa* by an analogy with the bilateral kindreds found elsewhere. He fails himself, however, to stress that as a patrilineal kindred, or "sliding lineage" in Bacon's more graphic phrase, the *khamisa* is not focussed on the sibling group, as they state, but on the cousins of a generation, and is thus relatively capable of forming or at least coinciding with a "bounded and stable group" (cf. Black-Michaud 1975: 44ff). In their riposte, Murphy and Kasdan (1967) are not slow to point out Patai's own errors and misapprehensions, but they do not comment on his important establishment of the general phenomenon of localized corporate descent groups in Middle Eastern society.

Meanwhile, another critic of Murphy and Kasdan's findings, using much the same limited range of data as was available to them and to Patai and Bacon, was able to identify "a relatively stable social unit smaller than a tribe" among the Rwala, Shammar and Mutair Bedouin (Sweet 1965). This unit, the tribal section (*fahhd*), "governs a number of aspects of the techniques and economics of camel pastoralism in north Arabia, and it shows features of corporate structure and process in relation to the control of productive resources". It is an econ-

omic group, concerned with the distribution of grazing within the tribal territory; a residential group, also frequently migrating as a body; the group which organizes raiding parties and often forms a "petty chiefdom". Tribal sections vary in size: in the south and east, Mutair sections range from 20 to 200 tents, but mostly from 50 to 100; west and north of them, the Shammar tribes of the Nefud have sections of between 200 and 300 tents; the Rwala tribe is divided into sections ranging from 150 to 800 tents, but mostly 300 to 500. As for other social characteristics, and the internal composition of the sections, there is scanty information. They are divided into ranked lineages, which form compact tent clusters, sometimes move independently, and may or may not coincide with the *khamisa* vengeance unit. But Sweet is forced to note that "at this point there is a regrettable gap in the data needed to relate this lineage structure to the actual camping units and economic activities". Unfortunately, she seems to have missed the main source on the Shammar (Montagne 1947) which includes additional data on the sections and suggestions as to their basis (see below). She concludes that apart from the joint family, "three other units of organization within the tribal boundary are functionally significant: the section, composed of a core of ranked lineages; the separate or 'fixed' lineages themselves; and the 'sliding lineages' or egocentric (sic) vengeance unit (*khamisa*)". She relates the section, the "minimal camping unit" on which her article focusses, to ecology; variation in size "probably reflects to a considerable extent ecological differences among the tribal territories which are significant for breeding camels".

All the above structural and ecological arguments, as attempts to provide adequate models of nomadic society, must be modified or abandoned in the light of more recent ethnographic work. Peters, Barth, Cunnison, Cole and others, writing on a variety of nomadic peoples, have described in detail basic communities of a more or less corporate nature, whose organization can in no way be accounted for by the kinds of mechanical models of "tribal genealogical structure" or complementary opposition put forward in the 1950s (cf. Black-Michaud 1975: 54ff; but see also Gellner 1969, and two recent papers suggesting that there are nomadic societies where the "native model" of complementary opposition may approach reality: Gellner 1973 and Salzman 1978). At least two of these ethnographers relate the size of the communities they observed to the carrying capacities of pastures and wells (Peters 1960: 40; Cole 1975: 80, 90). A comparative perspective, however, suggests that processes other than ecological may be operating here.

Few writers have followed Sweet in comparing local, residential, interactional groups among nomads. Herding units have been analysed/as responses to ecological, economic and demographic demands, but the different degrees to which such units are also basic communities or political groups have not been discussed. Spooner (1972: 126) states that among "most nomads in the Iranian area . . . the primary sociological unit . . . — the herding group — is also the basic

political unit", but the social and political significance of such groups has not been well established in this area or elsewhere. Certainly, the material on camp organization among Baluch and Brahui nomads indicates that the camps are not only herding associations but may also be termed "communities" (see Pehrson 1966: ch. 6; Pastner 1971; W. Swidler 1972; Salzman n.d.); however, given the instability of these groups, and the comparative stability and other features reported of the wider "camp clusters" (Pehrson 1966: 100ff) or "micro-pastoral orbits" (Pastner 1971), the latter seem better candidates for the role of "primary sociological unit", "basic political unit", or indeed "basic nomadic community".

Among nomads elsewhere in the Iranian area and beyond, herding units are more often distinctly economic associations, socially and politically of minor importance compared with larger groupings. Moreover, the organization of larger groupings that frequently camp and move together, particularly those forming below the tribal and sectional level discussed by Sweet, has received little comparative study. Dyson-Hudson appears to have such groups in mind when he points out that:

a prominent organizational feature of nomadic societies is the local exploitation group — a set of domestic and herding units periodically drawn together by a temporary mutual interest in the peaceful exploitation of local resources. Its composition and operation must be grasped to comprehend the functioning of any particular nomadic society: it offers a useful means of comparing nomadic societies (1972: 11, my emphasis),

but he is in fact referring to the Brahui *halk*, as analysed by W. Swidler, which is basically a small herding camp; and he clearly stresses the economic basis of such groups without considering their possible community nature. Meanwhile Spooner has compared the different structural principles according to which nomadic societies do form groups at higher levels: genealogy, kindred, contract, class, age grading, exogamy/endogamy. He concludes that "instability at the level of local grouping is balanced by conceptual stability at the level of larger social grouping (the native model of social organization)" (Spooner 1973: 41), but he does not attempt a systematic comparison of the actual groupings so formed, and hence does not notice the considerable degree of stability in size and composition frequently exhibited by localized collections of "local subsistence groupings".

A comparison of nomadic social groups

The cases compiled below are confined to certain of the more centrally located nomadic societies of the Middle East. Clearly the net could have been spread wider to include other peoples in Africa, Central Asia and elsewhere, but neither my time nor the space here available allowed this. I should note, however, that in the cases I did examine, certain ethnographic lacunae regularly impeded the exercise: first, a lack of statistically presented data on the range of size and average sizes of social groups, from camps upwards; secondly, a general concentration

on the two themes of camp organization and descent structure, frequently taking precedence over consideration of actual, as opposed to ideological and marital, patterns of interaction and association at higher levels.

Bedouin

Al Murrah – camel herders (Cole 1975: esp. 23ff., 85ff.)

- a. The “basic unit of society” is the lineage (*fakhd*), a summer camp group which gathers around its own wells. Camps which form at other times of the year are highly flexible associations of lineage members, with no herding basis, as each household herds separately. Lineages are relatively equal in size and status, this equality being related by Cole to ecological limits, the capacity of the wells and surrounding grazing for supporting animals and tents in certain numbers (Cole 1975: 90). They average 50 households of seven members each, though some households may reside apart from the rest, sharing only in collective responsibility with other members of the lineage. It used to be a military unit, with a war leader; now it has no leader, nor council of elders; but each lineage has its own camel-brand, war-cry, and other symbols.
 - b.c. Four to six lineages form a clan (*gabila*), averaging nearly 300 households. Sometimes a clan has its own wells, but usually no shared resources. Most clans have chiefly lineages; they are politically important units, but no other particular functions are reported of them.
 - d. Seven clans form the Al Murrah tribe, which totals over 2000 households (15 000 people). The tribe has its own territory, though it is freely shared with others. Traditionally it was politically autonomous, headed by military leaders, who now act as intermediaries. Apart from the chiefly families, the tribe is virtually endogamous. Consonant with this, its boundary is socially and culturally important, and marked by a variety of customs and symbols.
- On other Bedouin groups in Arabia, I have not had access to information other than that collated in the article by Sweet (1965) discussed above. The most relevant information comes from Montagne (1947) on the Shammar tribes, whose organization appears similar to that of the Al Murrah.

The Shammar of northern Arabia – camel herders (Montagne 1947: 48ff.)

- a. The summer camp (*getin*), usually a subsection, sometimes a section of a tribe, gathers around wells. It subdivides into *megtir*, spring camps (about five tents) based on *hamula*, the fundamental kinship units. The subsection in theory is a *khamisa* vengeance group, and is led informally by an old man as Shaykh (Montagne 1947: 51–55).
- b.c. The section is the basic social and political unit in nomadic society, a miniature state led by a chief; it has territorial unity, sometimes gathers as a sum-

mer camp around a well; it has a single *wasm* brand and was the unit mobilized for war. It comprises 100 or 200 to 300 tents, mainly agnates, with some strangers present (Montagne 1947: 55–58).

- d. The tribe is a relatively flexible cluster of five to ten sections (around 2000 tents), with a powerful and numerous dynastic section providing the Shaykh, who is however *primus inter pares* compared with other Shaykhs in the tribe (Montagne 1947: 58–59).
- e. The Shammar confederation comprises from 100 000 to 150 000 people (20 000 tents?), including the settled sections. Sections of a tribe and tribes of the confederation exhibit the same tendency to “moiety” division that Montagne found among the Berbers (1947: 60ff.; and cf. 1973: 37).

Awad notes that among the nomads in the Arab Lands of the Middle East:

The size of a tribe varies considerably, according to environment and occupation, and tends to increase under sedentary or semi-sedentary conditions. Absolute nomadism has a restrictive influence on size, because of the need for maintaining a certain amount of contact among members while pursuing a nomadic existence. A nomadic tribe is usually counted by tents; and while some very powerful tribes, such as the Ruwala, may consist of some 3500 tents, a much more modest figure of about one thousand or even a few hundred is more generally the rule . . . The nomads . . . usually travel in rather small bands of about twenty to thirty tents, in order to avoid overcrowding at wells and pastures . . . (Awad 1962: 333).

Saadi Bedouin of Cyrenaica – camel and sheep herders (Peters 1960, 1965, 1967, 1975, 1976)

- a. Peters describes the organization of the “tertiary section”, “corporate group”, or community, the dry-season camp (*bayt*) which has its own homeland, resources in land and water. Eighty per cent or more of members belong to an agnatic minimal lineage, members are *amara dam*, sharing collective blood responsibility, and form a ritual congregation. Subgroups such as spring camps are cognatic in composition. The data on the size of tertiary sections are inconsistent: 150–200 souls (30–40 tents?) in Peters 1960; an example of 524 souls (85 tents?) in Peters 1965 (the relevant passage on p. 140 is quite confused); 200 to 700 souls (40 to 100 tents?) in Peters 1967 and 1976.
- b.c. Several tertiary sections make a secondary section, the group which is supposed to unite in feuding relations against collaterals. No figures given, but 400 tents seems a likely average size. In practice it is the tertiary sections which are involved in feud; patterns of marriage between different secondary sections, and the competition between collateral and neighbouring tertiary sections, produce a “chequer-board” pattern of blocs or “confederacies” of several thousand souls, which inhibit the coalescence of collateral groups according to principles of segmentary opposition.
- d. Two or more secondary sections form a primary section (*qabila*) with no specific functions reported other than possible raiding organization; size – 1000 tents or more?

- e. There are nine Saadi tribes (*qabila*), typically numbering 10 000–30 000 individuals (2000–5000 tents?). Potential war relations.

Sudan Arab groups

Humr Baggara – cattle herders (Cunnison 1966)

- a. Ideally, agnatic minimal lineage (*surra*) coincides with camp (*feriq*), but often in fact occupies more than one. Camps are also cooperative herding groups, though herds may divide for grazing purposes. Strong ideal of lineage and camp solidarity, but actual groups often unstable in size and composition. Camps number up to 20 tents, but one of more than 15 is admired as large – further numerical data lacking. Camp of lineage led by unofficial *reis*, who may have more official status as leader of larger segment. Preference for endogamy, but only 36% of marriages are within *surra*. *Surra* united by common sentiments of honour, blood responsibility, some have distinct drum-beat, brand, ear-clip.
- b. Larger descent groups (*khashm bayt*, at all levels) localized in that agnates tend to camp near each other, but no division of land rights within Humr. Most significant *khashm bayt* appear to be primary segments of *omodiya* (see below); there are 42 such segments in the Humr, averaging 1300 people (250 tents?).
- c.d. There are 11 *gabily*, nowadays distinguished administratively as tribal sections (*omodiya*) under leaders (*omda*). They range from 2000–9000 people, averaging 5000 (1000 households). They appear to be of diverse origins, and often to be regarded as culturally distinct from each other. Also each is associated with a different migratory tract.
- e. The Humr tribe (*gabily*) numbers some 55 000 people, divided into two roughly equal sections, each under a *nazir*.

Kababish – camel and sheep herders (Asad 1970)

- a. Camp clusters of up to 15 tents (?) not necessarily close kin but usually same clan, form an interactional community (Asad 1970: 128ff, numerical data lacking). Households (5 members each) form different kinds of herding associations, but partners may not even camp together (Asad 1970: 122ff). Close agnates form taxation groups (Asad 1970: 133).
- b. Administratively created sections (under Shaykhs) coincide with subclans (*khashm bayt*); they have no territory, are not corporate. There are 60-odd subclans/sections (Asad 1970: 142), averaging 1000 members (200 households). Marriage patterns are not clear.
- c.d. The 20 clans (*qabila*) average 3400 people (700 households); have no terri-

tory, are not corporate; but appear to exhibit continuity and not to be prone to fission (Asad 1970: 172ff).

- e. Kababish nomads number 68 000, under a *Nazir*. Were a loose confederation of tribes; some became independent after administrative reorganization, others became clans of present Kababish.

Rufa'a al Hoi – mixed sheep, cattle, camel herders (Ahmad 1974)

- a. Camps (*fariq*) of 30 to 50 tents (200 to 300 people) are administratively recognized and led by Shaykhs. They are migratory units, based on descent have considerable ideological importance as groups (Ahmad 1974: 60ff). The camp is highly endogamous, and comprises 3–4 tent clusters (*nazla*, *fariq*), herding groups of 10 to 15 tents (70 to 100 people) (Ahmad 1974: 35ff).
- b.–e. There are about 70 camps among the Rufa'a al-Hoi, who number 26 890 nomads (3600 tents), under one *Nazir*. The *Nazirate* divides into two main sections, but further intermediate groups or communities are not recorded.

Mountain and plateau areas of Southwest Asia

Jaf Kurds – sheep herders (Barth 1953)

- a. Nomad camps (*khel*) vary in size and composition; usually 20 to 30 tents, which “may roughly be regarded as a lineage segment”, led informally by an elder; camps subdivide into herding units based on extended families.
- b.–e. Beyond the camp level the position is unclear, mainly because at the time of study only 2000–3000 of the 60 000 Jaf tribesmen were still nomads. The Jaf confederacy (*ashiret*) is led by a Beg or Pasha, head of a chiefly dynasty, the Begzada, which constitutes one of the 12 (18?) component tribes (*tira*). If we take this to be the total of all Jaf tribes, rather than just the 2000–3000 nomads, then tribes average 4000 people (800 families?), but no doubt effective nomadic sections were much smaller. The tribe is based on a maximal lineage (*hoz*); it is the primary political group, led by a hereditary *Raiz*; it has “traditional rights to specific pastures and camping sites”, and its migration is regulated by the *Raiz*. It is also highly endogamous.

Bakhtiari Lurs – sheep herders (Ehmann 1975: 59–64, 88)

- a. Camps (*mal*?) of 2–5 tents in winter, 10–15 tents in spring, 4–10 tents at other times; may be based on *oulad*, minimal lineages which average 11 families; *oulad* are headed by elders (*rish-sefid*), have their own pastures, access to which is acquired by birth. Migratory groups (*tash*) comprise from one to 6 *oulad*, and average 35 families. Other data on *tash* not available.

- b.c. The *tireh* is mainly a political group, headed by a subchief (*kakkhuda*), but with a common territory and based on descent ties; it averages up to 200 families.
- d. The main political and social group in Bakhtiari society is the *tayfeh*. One set of related *tayfeh* (in the Duraki *il*) varies from 50 to over 4000 families (Ehmann 1975: 88). The data so far have come from the clearest example discussed, the small Bamadi *tayfeh* (500–600 families, Ehmann 1975: 61). The large Mouri *tayfeh* (4180 families) of the same *il* appears to subdivide differently, having 11 *tireh* averaging 380 families, and 60 *oulad* averaging 70 families (Ehmann 1975: 62). A *tayfeh* shares a common territory and migratory route, thinks of itself as a descent group, and is led by a *kalantar* from a dynastic family.
- c. There are 105 *tayfeh* (Ehmann 1975: 60), which group into ten *il*, heterogeneous political groups led by a *khan*, and then into the two major branches of the Bakhtiari. The estimated total of 27 400 nomad and 10 600 settled families indicates that most *tayfeh* must be smaller even than the Bamadi. The general picture of Bakhtiari political segmentation and the nature of their nomadic communities remains unclear to me.

Basseri of Fars – sheep herders (Barth 1961)

- a. The “primary communities of nomadic Basseri society” are the camps (Barth 1961: 25, 46) of between 10 and 40 tents (though cf. Barth 1960: 10, “30–60 tents, or 200–400 individuals”). Tents group into herding units of 2–5, which separate in winter, congregate in summer, the whole camp migrating as a unit in spring and autumn. Camps and herding units are associations of bilateral kin and affines; camps are headed by unofficial elders and not formally recognized as political groups. Two-thirds of marriages are within the camp.
- b. There are usually two or three camps in an *oulad*, a patrilineal descent group with a joint pasture estate; as the sole political subdivisions of the tribe, *oulads* are led by appointed subchiefs (*kakkhuda*). In the 1950s the 3000 Basseri tents grouped into 32 *oulad*, which thus averaged nearly 100 tents, ranging however from 13 to 200 or more.
- c. Tribal sections (*tireh*) appear to average 200 or so tents. Members are reputedly of common origins; the section is the primary reference group. Section names exhibit considerable continuity, “insulated from most processes of petty politics, factionalism and fission . . . section names and traditions can serve the tribal population as stable and unchanging anchors of identification under changing circumstances” (Barth 1961: 68). Marriage outside the section is regarded as shameful; section has compact territory of adjacent pastures and migratory schedules, but no leader as such, and no political

- functions, though many sections coincide with *oulads* and have recognized headmen.
- d. The Basseri tribe (*il*) of around 300 tents is a historically varying collection of heterogeneous sections, united under one chief (*kalantar*, *khan*).
- e. The Khamseh confederacy (*il*) was an administratively created union of 5 tribal groups under a paramount chief (*ilkhani*); it totalled between 10 and 20 000 tents.

The Qashqai of Fars – sheep herders (Marsden 1976, Beck n.d.)

- a. Usual migratory unit is *bonkuh*, descent group of 30–40 tent-families led by elder; divides into herding groups (*beyleh*) of flexible and varying composition.
- b.c. Tribal section or subtribe (*tireh*) “has a territorial basis; most of its members share common pasture areas. The *tireh* is the main unit of identification for the individual Qashqai. Most of those identifying with the *tireh* claim common patrilineal descent. The *tireh* is the main endogamous unit” (Beck n.d.: 4). It is also an administrative unit headed by a *kakkhuda*. Nomadic *tireh* appear to average 80 tents (500 people) (Marsden 1976: 13).
- d. The main tribes (*tayfeh*) are collections of 12 to 71 sections; the nomadic branches of the tribes average 3000 families. Each tribe is attached to a dynastic chiefly section, which intermarries only with other chiefly dynasties.
- e. The Qashqai confederacy (*il*) comprises 5 or 6 tribes, divided into 250 sections, and a total of 25 000-odd families, of which at least one third are settled (Marsden 1976: 13).

Shahsevan of Azerbaijan – sheep herders (Tapper 1971, and see below pp. 95–114)

- a. The main nomadic community is the tribal section (*tirä*), usually based on single descent group (*göbäk*); numbers commonly 20–30 households. Each section migrates as unit, and until recently exploited joint pasture estate. Nowadays the main administrative and political grouping, led by elder (*aqsaqal*) who has political, economic, religious and social responsibilities. As a community, it is a ritual congregation on major religious occasions (Muharram, Ramazan). About 40% of marriages are within section, but males control marriages of daughters of the group.
- b. Sometimes an effective elder of a sizeable section also has influence over smaller and weaker sections – not necessarily close neighbours or agnates; thus forming a “section cluster” of up to 100 tents.
- c. The main political group used to be the tribe (*tayfa*), a territorially compact collection of sections with common allegiance to a chief (*beğ*) and family. Tribes are highly variable in size, but average 200 tents. Even with formal

removal of chiefs from authority, the tribe remains the primary reference group among the nomads. Up to 90% of marriages within the tribe. Each tribe feels itself in many ways culturally distinct and indeed most have shown considerable historical continuity as unified groups, above the level at which fission and fusion processes operate.

- d. The largest of the tribes, from 500 to 1000 tents, were often known as *el*. In past times when government control was weak, the chief of such an *el*, known as *khan*, had a following of smaller tribes forming part of his *el*. Such "tribal clusters", usually compact territorially but unstable in composition, might total up to 2000 tents.
- e. Shahsevan nomads in Ardabil/Meshkin area numbered 10 000–12 000 tents in the 19th century, divided administratively into two confederations (*el*) of 5000 and 7000 tents, each headed by a paramount chief (*elbeği*) and dynasty. Confederacies broke up by 1900 as effective units, since then 5000–10 000 remaining nomad families have been informally united in single confederation, at one stage administered by an army officer appointed as *elbeği*.

Yomut Turkmen of Gurgan – sheep herders (Irons 1972, 1974, 1975)

- a. Basic community appears to be the *oba*, "a group of twenty-five to one hundred households, which share joint rights to pasture and water in reference to a defined territory" (Irons 1972: 92). The *oba* is dominated by a single patrilineage (*tireh*), but includes a number of attached "neighbours" (*gongshi*) from other groups. The *oba* has a spokesman. Members of patrilineage are united in common blood responsibility, though relevant concept of seven-generation patrilineal kindred (*qan dushar*) may extend beyond the single *oba*. Within *oba*, fluid herding units of 2–10 tents (usually 4–5) camp separately.
- b.c. Neighbouring *oba* on peaceful terms constitute tribes (*il*), and share residual rights in each others' territories. They may act together on basis of consensus; respected elders coordinate opinion. There appear to be ten effective tribes, highly variable in size, about 1000 households, most including both nomads and settled.
- d. The only larger groupings among the Yomut are two blocs, confederacies (also called *il*) of allied tribes, the Sherep and Choni; each comprises 5 tribes and over 100 *obas* (5000 households), and is distributed "chequer-board" fashion across Yomut territory.

Pashtuns of Afghanistan – sheep herders (my field notes on Durrani in Turkistan; Ferdinand 1969a on eastern Afghanistan)

- a. Migratory camps (*khel*, *keli*), roughly 20–50 tents, based on lineages (*aulad*) with assorted "neighbours" (*hamsaya*), kinsmen and clients sometimes from

other tribal and ethnic groups. Led by headman (*sarkhel*); commonly coincides with vaguely (at present) stated notion of seven-generation blood kindred; lineage as such is over 50% endogamous. Herding units of close agnates, plus some *hamsaya*, camp separately.

- b.c. The major reference group is the subtribe (*tayfa*, *tol*, *khel*); based on ideology of common descent and origins, but the few hundred families probably includes large number of *hamsaya* attached. Usually associated with area of pastures, though these are commonly subdivided among component camps. May be politically unified under a petty *khan* or *malik*, but communal decisions are properly made in the subtribe (as at every level) by a *jirga*, assembly of family heads, influenced by elders (*mashar*).
- d. Localized nomadic branch of a recognized Pashtun tribe may number 1000 or more families, with allegiance to a dynasty of khans.
- e. Major confederacies such as Durrani and Ghiljai include both nomad and settled elements; only occasionally united for common action. All Pashtun tribes (and some subtribes) are connected by written genealogies.

Baluch of Pakistan – sheep and goat herders (Pehrson 1966; cf. Pastner 1971, Salzman n.d.)

- a. Camp clusters based on agnates, but with strong tendency to endogamy producing matrilineal web; comprise several camps (*halk*) herding groups of 3–4 tents, ideally based on minimal lineage (*waris*) but of flexible composition; in fact, most mobility between camps occurs within cluster, giving it continuity over generations. Clusters also have ceremonial expression in various contexts. They contain the "few strands of regular interaction" between the "small residential communities", the camps (Pehrson 1966: 71ff, 100ff). There is no indication of the size of clusters among the Marri (20 tents?), but data from other Baluch groups, though presented differently, suggest a similar picture. See, among Shahnawazi of northern Iranian Baluchistan, coincidence of minimal lineage (*brasrend*) with preference among different camps for camping together as "neighbours" in face-to-face communities (Salzman n.d.: 16f., 25ff.). See also, Baluch in Pangur where several camps, totalling 200 individuals (40 tents?), identify primarily with a territory known as "homeland", called by Pastner (1971: 176) a "micro-pastoral orbit".
- b.–e. The Marri form a tribe (*tuman*) under a Sardar, and number about 60 000 people. The tribal system regarded as based on descent, but without unifying genealogy; military structural idiom also used. Tribe divides into 3 sections (*saiyak*, *takar*), administered by *wadera*; recruitment to section by patrilineal descent and allegiance to the leader. Subsections (*shakh*, *takar*, *firqa*), known to be of diverse origins, number 20 to 25 and average 500 tents (2500 people). Many divide even further into units referred to as *khel* or *khanadan*,

80 to 90 in all, averaging 150 tents (Pehrson 1966: 110ff). From Pehrson (1966: 178) it may be inferred that subsections and their divisions are the major reference groups within the tribe. Other functions of these different levels of grouping are not discussed in detail.

A brief analysis

I shall draw out only a few of the possible points of comparison in the material summarized above. *I have tried to separate the different social groupings in each case into five levels, (a)–(e).* Of course the data often do not fit precisely, and in no sense does the compilation demonstrate anything like a rigidly uniform pattern of groups and levels. However, among the kinds of groupings identified I suggest the general existence of two particular types of community, which I shall call types A and B.

A-type communities are all found at level (a). Although such communities sometimes display wide variation in size within particular societies, the average sizes recorded are remarkably uniform, i.e. somewhere between 20 and 50 tent-households, or 100 to 300 souls (average households vary from about 5 to nearly 8 persons). The largest communities were among the Yomut Turkmen and the Cyrenaican Bedouin, where they can reach 100 households; the smallest among the Kababish and the Baggara, where a community of 15 to 20 households appears to be on the large side – though there is a lack of precision in the published data on such communities in all four societies. It should be noted, however, that communities in the first two have joint estates, while those in the two latter enjoy unrestricted grazing throughout the tribe.

The usual pattern is for an A-type community to be based on a dominant lineage, with a greater or lesser proportion of temporarily resident affines, matrilineal kin, unrelated clients or herdsmen. The connexion between community composition and rights in grazing and water resources is obvious. When a community does not have its own estate (the manner of allocating grazing rights tends to be controlled at higher levels), then its composition is unstable, though usually confined mainly to kinship ties, with an agnatic emphasis: see the Kababish, Basserri, Rufa'a al-Hoi, Baluch, Baggara, Jaf, Qashqai cases. It is difficult to tell from the sources, in view of the lack of hard data, but it would appear that the least agnatically based communities are found among the Basserri, and the most unstable among the Kababish; communities in other societies are more heavily agnatic in character and have greater stability. The most corporate and agnatic of all are among the Bedouin, where they have joint rights in water resources, and the Shahsevan, Yomut and Pashtun, where they have joint or fixed grazing rights. It is among the last category – Shahsevan, Turkmen and Pashtun, but particularly the various Bedouin groups – that there is a strong tendency to stratification within the community based on differentiation of core members (agnates) who share joint rights to community resources,

and outsiders (clients, "neighbours") whose rights are contingent on acceptance or payment of fees. In these cases, the outsiders, like the Cyrenaican Bedouin clients, "constitute a socially mobile group; they are the pawns in the annual readjustment of men to their resources" (Peters 1960: 43) and give these more corporate communities the minimum degree of flexibility necessitated by their pastoral nomadic adaptation.

In all cases, as Evans-Pritchard's studies of the Nuer taught us to expect (cf. 1940: 204), there is a terminological and ideological distinction between the physical community and the descent group on which it is based, but the more corporate the community the more the two terms are likely to be confused in the vernacular, on the assumption that they are coincident. Unfortunately many writers on nomad societies ignore the Nuer example and tend to subjective statements of how far local group composition is agnatically based, rarely specifying the ratio of agnatic as opposed to other links among residents; a notable exception is Peters on Cyrenaica (1965: 132). Other writers accept the stated norm of agnation and indicate a general conformity to it as a dominant and significant pattern; or, surprised that actual composition deviates from 100% agnation, they deny the ideal any validity and stress other factors as determinants; while, for all the reader can tell, the percentage of agnatically related members may be the same in each case.

There seems to be some notion of an ideal size of community in each society, related not simply to resource availability, as Cole and Peters have suggested, but possibly also to ideas of an optimal size for a vengeance group (cf. Black-Michaud 1975: 44ff). In almost all groups the limit of blood responsibility coincides with at least the agnatic core of the community, whether or not the former is associated ideologically with a patrilineal kindred of a certain depth. Frequently also it is recorded that the community forms an exclusive congregation on certain ritual occasions, including e.g. the migrations (cf. Barth 1961: 147ff.). In most groups too, members have a measure of control over the marriages of daughters of the group.

Even the more stable and corporate communities are subject to fission and fusion processes, in response to demographic change. Occasions for fission are crises involving honour or blood responsibility; what previously (since an earlier crisis) was regarded as a single vengeance group may have grown to the extent that now one branch can argue that it is not involved in the affairs of the other; or such crises may precipitate fusion of declining groups. The elements of population size, residence, descent, and blood responsibility are clarified in relation to each other only when such a crisis occurs, or is engineered. At other times, apparent disparities do not disrupt the daily life of the community.

I am suggesting that descent principles and ecological constraints in varying degrees affect the composition and sometimes the variations in size of these communities, but they do not account for the statistical fact that it is at this precise level of organization that more or less corporate primary communities

regularly emerge, often forming ritual congregations and with associated ideologies concerning the limits of blood responsibility, honour and the control of women.

Issues of just this nature have preoccupied students of non-pastoral societies, from Radcliffe-Brown through Steward and Service to the contributors to the symposia *Man the Hunter* (Lee & Devore 1968) and *Man, Settlement and Urbanism* (Ucko, Tringham & Dimbleby 1972).

Among hunter-gatherer specialists there seems to have been agreement on the following. If such societies are considered particularly "close to nature" and culturally and socially isolated from other peoples, then it becomes interesting to ask what kinds of social groupings emerge among them. Two main kinds have been identified: first, the "primary subsistence band" (Steward) of 25 to 50 individuals, fluid in composition though sometimes with a patrilineal-patrilocal emphasis and with exogamy as a prime feature, the maximum size seemingly being constrained by the food supply of a convenient area. Secondly, there is the "regional band" (Steward) or "dialectical tribe" (Birdsell) of 300 to 500 individuals, which is the largest group within which individuals can be well enough acquainted with each other to keep some linguistic uniformity, and also, it seems, the smallest possible genetic or marriage isolate. The factors limiting these groups seem to be the relation between population, food supply and territory, and the relation between convenience of communication, a "marry-out" rule, and certain genetic principles.

Similar factors operate in the pastoral groups we have discussed, but with different results. Thus, patterns of resource control and population density are usually very different from hunter-gatherer societies, and in almost all the pastoral cases considered minimal group endogamy is permitted if not encouraged. These differences might be put into a model which we would expect to produce clear differences in group size; but does it? The "primary subsistence band" is the same size as the pastoral "herding unit", which often forms a separate camp, and which I have hardly mentioned in my survey; while the "regional band" is not far from A-type communities in size. But the model derived from hunter-gatherer societies is clearly inadequate to deal with other general features of A-type pastoral nomadic communities.

More light is thrown on the matter, however, by a paper in the second symposium mentioned. Forge discusses the possible reasons for the widespread existence in New Guinea and Melanesia of a basic, face-to-face, residential and ritual community of 250 (± 100) persons, very similar, in other words, to A-type pastoral nomad communities. He dismisses ecological determinants in favour of a normative factor which he holds to be "basic to the very nature of New Guinea society, or perhaps even to all Neolithic cultivators without hierarchical institutions" (1972: 373), that is, the premise of equality within the community. This can only be maintained at the cost of eternal vigilance, which implies highly aggressive competition within and between units.

It seems not unlikely that for such systems to work the numbers of competing adult males must fall within a certain range. If there are too few, less than thirty over a range of age of say twenty to sixty, personality factors would, I suggest, tend to dominate, there would be an insufficiency of challengers to men of strong personality. Over seventy-five to eighty adult men the numbers of players in the game become too many and each player having deficient information the game becomes disorganized and unbalanced and the players split into two games of manageable size. This hypothesis is basically sociological and states that when the players in the game (of prestige) are all defined as potentially equal the game becomes static, i.e. unplayable, if the numbers are too low, and impossible if the numbers are too high. (Forge 1972: 374)

In bio-genetic terms the hypothesis becomes:

Homo sapiens can only handle a certain maximum number of intense face to face relationships, successfully distinguishing between each. When the number of relationships he is involved in rises above this figure he can only continue by classification of relationships to cut down the total number of different relationships he has to act in and carry information about around in his head. (Forge 1972: 375)

The hypothesis implies that if the community is to persist at a size larger than the norm, some element of hierarchy is likely to emerge.

I would suggest that very similar bio-genetic if not sociological factors must be in operation in the pastoral nomadic communities discussed here. The same factors may operate also in settled societies (cf. Coon 1964: 175–176), but it is sooner in mobile and flexible than in stationary and fixed societies that we can expect them to express themselves in social groupings.

B-type communities are often harder to identify, being hidden within a more obvious structure of political and ethnic allegiances. Moreover, unlike those of type A, they may include settled elements which obscure any specifically nomadic principles in their organization. Given these difficulties, it is clear that these communities too vary widely in size within particular societies, while average sizes are remarkably uniform, with two extreme exceptions: the Qashqai *tireh* averaging 80 families, and the *omodiya* in the Sudan which averages near 1000 families. A more usual size is between 150 and 500 families, or 1000 to 3000 individuals (see discussion of Sweet 1965, above).

Thirty years ago Montagne observed that communities of this kind ("fractions"), which he considered basically political, were nearly universal among populations of the arid zone from the Persian Gulf to the Atlantic. He found the reason for this mysterious: "Qu'il s'agisse de nomades ou de sédentaires berbères ou arabes, ils se grouperont en minuscules petits Etats, formés de quelques campements ou de quelques villages, dont l'ensemble n'excédera pas quelques centaines de feux. Bien souvent, ce groupement politique élémentaire sera à leurs yeux la seule forme réelle que puisse prendre l'Etat." Why such a minimal cellular political organization in these cultures? The cause must be sought in the fact that the elementary State constituted by the "fraction" represents the maximum extension on the political plane of the strict maintenance of kinship solidarity (Montagne 1947: 57). It should be noted that Fortes later (1953) asked similar questions of African unilineal descent groups.

These B-type communities are not necessarily politically centralized, how-

ever. Their community characteristics appear independent of political processes. They are the "primary reference groups", tend to a high degree of endogamy, almost constituting "marriage isolates", and exhibit considerable historical continuity, being formed above the level of shuffling, fission, fusion and structural amnesia in genealogies. Although sub-groups of these communities may be demonstrably and often admittedly not of common origins, there is usually a pretence that they are, and certainly a great degree of cultural (and biological?) homogeneity and distinctiveness among the members as a result of intermarriage and interaction patterns. It is in these cultural features of endogamy and identity, and not in political characteristics, that I incline to look for the key to these communities. My hypothesis in this case is that groups of this size constitute an organizational optimum as marriage isolates and primary reference groups; but I am unable to suggest what genetic, social psychological or other principles might underlie this.

The nomadic societies I have examined are tribally organized, encapsulated into the national states concerned either only nominally or by a policy of "indirect rule" (Bailey 1969). If the state intrudes to the level of B-type communities, or even to those of type A, it is usually just to ratify already existing groups and leaders. But in some other nomadic societies, such as the Yörük of southeastern Turkey (Bates 1973), integration into the state has gone further. Tribal groups and leaders as such are not recognized, pastures are not allocated to groups but are acquired by individuals or extended families, often by renting from settled villages. The formation and maintenance of groups larger than extended families then becomes difficult, and we might expect the break-down of tribal and descent group organization (cf. Barth 1973: 18). The Yörük case appears to cast doubt on this argument. Although, indeed, both the tribe (150 families) and the lineages (averaging under 20 families) are smaller units than among other nomadic groups, the tribe might be regarded as a B-type community, and the lineage-based camp (Bates 1973: 114, 124, 140), limited as it is by ecological pressures, may be a community of A-type; but the relevant information is lacking.

My attention was recently caught by a case which, though from outside the Middle East, seems to provide better evidence than many of the others for the operation of the hypothesized principles. In Mongolia (Humphrey, personal communication), pastoralists are now organized into collectives (*nigdel*); these average up to 500(?) families, and have fixed centres; they are economic units; they coincide with an administrative region (*sum*). A *nigdel* subdivides into brigades (100 families?), one of which stays at the centre for special duties, while the other three or four do the main herding. Brigades divide into *khisig* (20 to 40 families?), which, like brigades, have fixed territories, each with several separate seasonal pastures; they are usually self-sufficient productive units, though some specialize, e.g. in cows. *Khisig* subdivide into stable herding units (*suur*) of 2 to 15 households, with specialized herding tasks contributing to the

khisig economy. This hierarchy of groups is an administrative creation; however, interactional communities have emerged spontaneously on different principles. Thus, *nigdel* centres are not used as regular meeting places as planned; rather communities appear to form as follows: (a) the *khisig* is a basic face-to-face community (type A?); (b) the winter fodder storage base, used by several neighbouring *nigdel*, tends to become a social centre, where various services are provided and where permanent settlements are founded and grow (type B community?).

Finally, this last point reminds us that the existence of such communities needs careful consideration in the study and implementation of nomadic sedentarization processes.

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