

Richard Tapper

What is this thing called “Ethnography”?

A MULTI-VOLUME, MULTI-AUTHOR ENCYCLOPAEDIA SUCH AS THIS IS A DESK-top library; but, more than any library, it represents a set of conscious editorial decisions. The basis of these decisions (if, as is common, the editors do not make it explicit to the reader) may be inferred not just from the choice of topics, but from the balance between them, and from the length and nature of entries. In every case, choice and balance must be largely determined by the availability of previous research: if someone is known to be the world expert on X, then it makes sense to invite them to give a reasonable summary of their findings, even if in the grander political and cultural scheme it might be hard to justify. Bizarre—but delightful—anomalies are bound to result: among many in this encyclopedia, I would single out Willem Floor’s two-page entry on DUNG; it is shorter, more approachable, and more inviting to the casual reader than, for example, the anomalous chapter on lizards that occupies a full 70 pages of the first volume of *The Cambridge History of Iran*.¹

In the case of the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, several questions may be asked concerning the editors’ general priorities and their understanding of categories and fields of knowledge—insofar as they can be discerned. Every reader will have their own notion of priorities, but it is hard not to be critical when the general guiding categories are apparently ill-informed. I was recently asked to contribute a general entry on “Ethnography”; I responded that, in my understanding of the term, I did not feel that anything I could or would want to write on Iran would be more than a footnote and an update to Brian Spooner’s excellent review under the heading ANTHROPOLOGY. Now, having been asked by this journal to write a review of entries in the *EIr* on “ethnography and tribes”, I accepted, but queried the logic of linking these two subjects. It became clearer to me that my notion of “ethnography” differed substantially from that of the editors of the *EIr* (and for that matter, from that of the then editors of *Iranian Studies*). My initial misgivings about the task increased as I began to read through the entries on “tribes” and encountered very different views among the authors as to what was worth saying about their subjects, as well as misconceptions (in my view) about notions such as ethnicity and identity.

“Ethnography”, though formally defined as “the scientific description of the races and cultures of mankind” (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary*), has come to mean a series of research practices formulated by social and cultural anthro-

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1. S. C. Anderson, “Zoogeographic analysis of the lizard fauna of Iran,” in W. B. Fisher, ed., *The Land of Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 305–71.

pologists, involving methods such as long-term participant observation, unstructured interviews, collection of case histories, genealogies, etc. "An ethnography" is also a written work, usually a book-length monograph, based on research conducted by such methods, describing matters such as technologies and practices of production and consumption, economic, political, social, and religious organization and institutions, values, beliefs, customs and ceremonies, and local articulations with regional and state structures. Until recently, the authors of most such ethnographies were scholars from Euro-American academic traditions, and their subjects were usually small-scale, often "tribal" populations from the "Third World": the West studying the Rest. In recent decades, however, several radical movements have transformed ethnography. First, other disciplines such as sociology, social and cultural geography, cultural studies, and folklore studies have appropriated the term "ethnography" and transformed ethnographic research practices. Second, the objects of ethnographic attention are now less likely to be exotic "tribes" than urban public culture or the lifestyles of a national elite. Third, the political, ethical, and epistemological implications of "writing about other cultures" have been questioned more radically than before; and ethnography is now increasingly practiced "at home".

Brian Spooner has admirably summarized and documented the history of anthropological and ethnographic studies of Iran and Afghanistan in his entry ANTHROPOLOGY. In these two countries, as in many others, ethnographic field studies started, and for many years largely persisted, with the "tribes": large named groups of people, often nomadic pastoralists, usually headed by powerful chiefs, and mostly non-Persian speaking—though one of the first major ethnographies on either country in a western language was Barth's study of the Persian-speaking Baseri of Fars.² The particular reasons for an early focus on tribes in these countries³ have to do with the political importance of tribes in their histories, but often too with the ethnographers' romantic notions about pastoralism, nomadism, and warrior tribes, as well as their concern to conform with the traditional conventions of the discipline: respectable anthropologists did do field studies of "tribes", even if the traditional student-fodder comprised accounts of non-literate, ethnically homogeneous peoples such as American Indians, the Nuer pastoralists of Sudan or the Trobriand Islanders of Melanesia, who had apparently been little affected by urban and state (usually colonial) authorities and bore little

2. Fredrik Barth, *Nomads of South Persia* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1961). As Spooner notes, there were several earlier studies, all on tribal peoples, including Barth's books on Iraqi Kurds and on Swat Pathans.

3. In an inaccurate and distorted review of a limited section of the ethnographic literature, Brian Street ("Orientalist discourse in the anthropology of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan," in Richard Fardon, ed., *Localizing Strategies: Regional Traditions of Ethnographic Writing*, [Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, and Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990]) focuses on a concern with "the segmentary lineage principle" as the dominant issue; see Barth's response, "Method in our critique of anthropology," *Man* 27, 175–77, and comment by Philip Carl Salzman, "Understanding tribes in Iran and beyond," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 1, 399–403.

resemblance politically, culturally, structurally, historically, or otherwise to the "tribes" of Iran and Afghanistan.⁴

Major ethnographic monographs on the tribes have continued to be published since 1980, including Barfield's *Central Asian Arabs of Afghanistan*, Beck's *The Qashqai of Iran* and *Nomad*, Black-Michaud's *Sheep and Land*, Bradburd's *Ambiguous Relations*, Nancy Tapper's *Bartered Brides*,⁵ and several lavishly illustrated books recently published by the Carlsberg Foundation's Nomad Research Project⁶—not to mention major studies in Persian, French, German, and other languages. However, as elsewhere, much innovative ethnography-based work on Iran and Afghanistan published in the same period has little or nothing to do with tribes, or even rural society: for example, Azoy's *Buzkashi*, Beeman's *Language, Status and Power*, Fischer's *Iran: from Religious Dispute to Revolution*, Fischer and Abedi's *Debating Muslims*, Haeri's *Law of Desire*, Mir-Hosseini's *Marriage on Trial*⁷—again to mention only book-length monographs in English. Spooner, again, surveys a range of ethnographic articles published up to 1984 (the time of writing) on urban and national society and culture, non-tribal minorities, women, popular entertainment, media, not to mention material culture and ethno-archaeology.

4. As for stereotypes of the social and political structures of "tribes" in these countries, that is another story: and not one that has yet been successfully tackled in the *EIr*. See articles on 'AŠĀYER (F. Towfiq) and AFGHANISTAN iv. Ethnography (L. Dupree), both discussed briefly below. For further comment on "tribes" in Iran, see the discussion in my *Frontier nomads of Iran: A political and social history of the Shahsevan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, chapter 1).

5. Thomas J. Barfield, *The Central Asian Arabs of Afghanistan* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981); Lois Beck, *The Qashqai of Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) and *Nomad: a Year in the Life of a Qashqa'i Tribesman in Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Jacob Black-Michaud, *Sheep and Land: the Economics of Power in a Tribal Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, and Paris: Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1986); Daniel Bradburd, *Ambiguous Relations: Kin, Class and Conflict among Komachi Pastoralists* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1990); Nancy Tapper, *Bartered Brides: Politics, Gender, and Marriage in an Afghan Tribal Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

6. Inge Demant Mortensen, *Nomads of Luristan: History, Material Culture, and Pastoralism in Western Iran* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993); Gorm Pedersen, *Afghan Nomads in Transition: A Century of Change among the Zala Khan Khel* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994); Asta Olesen, *Afghan Craftsmen: Cultures of Three Itinerant Communities* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994); Birthe Frederiksen, *Caravans and Trade in Afghanistan: the Changing Life of the Nomadic Hazarabuz* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996).

7. G. Whitney Azoy, *Buzkashi: Game and Power in Afghanistan* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982); William O. Beeman, *Language, Status and Power in Iran* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Michael M. J. Fischer, *Iran: from Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980); Michael M. J. Fischer and Mehdi Abedi, *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogues in Postmodernity and Tradition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); Shahla Haeri, *Law of Desire: Temporary Marriage in Iran* (Syracuse University Press, 1989); Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Marriage on Trial: A Study of Islamic Family Law* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1993).

The editors of the *Elr* (and those of this journal) would not seem to be fully aware of these meanings, movements, and developments. They appear to consider ethnography not as the practice of anthropologists, but as a form of history: as the study of ethno-genesis, perhaps ethnology in the old sense of tracing the historical origins of peoples and cultures—and tribes—in order to establish and explain their current “ethnic group composition” and “ethnic identity”. Hence the rather anomalous (to my mind) linking here of “ethnography” with “tribes”; and the similarly anomalous association of “anthropology” with “folklore”. If an anthropologist or ethnographer had been asked, they would probably have grouped “ethnography” with “folklore” and “material culture”; and “tribes” go just as happily with “anthropology”—as they have indeed done in research institutions in Iran itself. One explanation for these anomalies must lie in the fact that, of the thirty to forty listed Editors and Consulting Editors, not one is an ethnographer or an anthropologist, and not one has a brief for anthropology (social, physical, or cultural). Most significant is that it is a historian, Pierre Oberling, who has “ethnography” as his area of responsibility; his own contributions are excellent short summaries of the known political histories of named tribal groups, but he displays no interest—and to the best of my knowledge claims no expertise—in ethnography as I understand it. Similarly, “folklore” is the responsibility of a scholar (Mahmoud Omidshalar) who, to judge from his own many contributions on Persian folklore—richly detailed, scholarly, and fascinating though they are—has no interest in anthropology, though insights from this discipline would undoubtedly have added an important dimension and depth of understanding to these entries.

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I have found five entries that include the word “ethnography” in their title. One is AFGHANISTAN iv. Ethnography, by the late Louis Dupree, an anthropologist in the broadest North American sense (he was an expert in archaeology and physical anthropology as much as, if not more than, socio-cultural anthropology or ethnography), who wrote a major book—comprehensive and interesting, if flawed—on the country. Here he discusses the ethnolinguistic divisions and physical anthropology of Afghanistan; he gives a brief summary of physical variety in the population, followed by a listing of the main “ethnic groups”, defined by language and physical features, with bibliographies. Two other entries—BAKTIARĪ TRIBE i. Ethnography, by Jean-Pierre Digard, and BALUCHISTAN i. Geography, History and Ethnography by Spooner—offer more conventional “ethnographic” descriptions; so does BRAHUI (part 1 of which is entitled Ethnography and History of the Brahuis) by Josef Elfenbein (who is a linguist, not an anthropologist like the others, yet his account is every bit as expert, competent, and ethnographically informative as theirs); and so does my own awkwardly-titled AZERBAIJAN vi. Population and its Occupations and Culture. The fifth entry on “ethnography,” Digard’s brief but fascinating and authoritative DOG iii. follows two much longer sections on the dog in literature and folklore, and in Zoroastrianism; it complements his nearby entry (with Daniel Balland) DOMESTIC ANIMALS; both, with their details of history and variations in cultural practices, contrast strongly with the entry DONKEY

(Mahmoud Omidasalar and Teresa P. Omidasalar), which is entirely devoted to Persian traditions and generalized folk beliefs.

Entries on named tribal groups fall clearly into two categories. A bare handful, written by anthropologists who have carried out extended field studies of the groups concerned, are "ethnographic" in the conventional sense: descriptions of the way of life of people bearing the tribal name. They include brief pieces by Bernard Hourcade (ALĪ KĀY; °ARAB iv. Arab Tribes of Iran 2. The Arabs of Tehran Province) and the late Alfred Janata (AYMĀQ); and more extensive discussions by Digard (BAKTĪĀRĪ TRIBE i. Ethnography), Barth (BĀŞERĪ) and Reinhold Loeffler (BOIR AĤMADI i. The Tribe). One looks in vain, however, for ethnographic entries on, for example (from the sections of the alphabet covered so far), the Afshar of Kerman, the Arabs of Afghanistan, or the Doshmanziari, although anthropologists or cultural geographers (who also do "ethnography") have researched and published extensively on all these peoples.

The vast majority of entries on named tribal groups take the form of a summary of the political history and/or geographical distribution of the name (as people or place) and have little or none of the ethnographic content one might hope for. The huge bulk of those on Iran are by the historians Pierre Oberling (37 entries) (°ABD-al-KĀN; °ABD-al-MALEKĪ; ĀDĪNEVAND; AFŞĀR; AĠĀC ERĪ; AĤMADĀVAND; ĀL-E BŪ KORD; °AMALA; AMRĀNLŪ; °AMMĀRLŪ; ĀQ EVLĪ; °ARAB iv. Arab Tribes of Iran 1. General; °ARAB MĪŞMAST; AYNALLŪ; ĀYRĪMLŪ; BAHĀRLŪ; BAHĀRVAND; BAHMA°I; BĀJALĀN; BANĪ ARDALĀN; BĀVĪ; BĀYBŪRTLŪ; BAYRĀNAVAND; BELBĀS; BOĠAQĠĪ; ĠAHĀR DOWLĪ; ĠALABIĀNLŪ; ĠEGINĪ; ĠERĀM; DARRAŞŪRĪ; DEH-BOKRĪ; DELĪKĀNLŪ; DĪRAKVAND; DONBOLĪ [with °Ali Al-e Dawud]; DOŞMANZĪĀRĪ; DU°L-QADR) and John Perry (6 entries) (BANĪ ĤARDĀN, BANĪ LĀM, BANĪ SĀLA, BANĪ TAMĪM, BANĪ ŤOROF; BĀWĪYA). Those on Afghanistan are contributed by the linguist Charles Kieffer (4 entries) (ABDĀLĪ; AĠAKZĪ; AFRĪDĪ; AĤMADZĪ) and the geographer Balland (10 entries) (BĀBORĪ; BAKTĪĀRĪS of AFGHANISTAN; BANGAŞ; BĀRAKZĪ; BARĒCĪ; BĒTANĪ; DAWLATKEL; DAWLATZĪ; DAWTĀNĪ; DORRĀNĪ). Other entries in this category are contributed by Ĵ. Qā°em-Maqāmī (ĀL-E KAŤĪR; ĀSTARKĪ); A. Hasanpour (BARĀDŪST); W. Behn (BĀRZĀNĪ); G. Doerfer (BAYĀT; BĪGDELĪ); Fridrik Thordarsen (DIGOR).

The historical entries relating to tribal groups in Iran are based on original documents and chronicles, as well as secondary sources such as the *Gazetteers* of the turn of century and Henry Field's 1939 anthropological compendium.⁸ They take their character from these sources, and their style from entries in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*: typically they constitute brief narratives of the deeds of chiefs bearing the tribal name and their engagements with government, often concentrating on Safavid and Qajar periods. These histories, at least in the first few volumes (up to the late 1980s), need updating in the light of the recent outpouring of published documents and local histories, as well as the 1987 Nomad Census, and the various compilations by Iraj Afshar-Sistani (though later entries by

8. Henry Field, *Contributions to the Anthropology of Iran* (Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 1939).

Oberling mention Afshar-Sistani's main compendium.⁹) Omissions and errors are probably inevitable, but I spotted only one: Doerfer, writing on BĠGDELĠ, "a former Turkish tribe," says the name "appears to have survived only in personal names," whereas numerous sources (including some he uses in the entry) attest to the continued existence, whether nomadic or settled, of tribal groups of this name among the Shahsevan of Moghan and the Qashqa'i, and in the district of Malayer and elsewhere in Iran.

A different sort of question is that of the criteria for selection of tribal names for treatment in the *Elr*. Despite the caveat mentioned earlier—that it must depend on the availability of research and sources—it is hard to see the justification for including 6 lines on ĀDĠNEVAND, a "tribe" of 300 families in the 1940s! or 7 lines on the equally obscure AĤMADĀVAND. If the intention was to include entries on every known tribal name, every component of more than a few hundred families in every tribal confederacy, then a large number of such opportunities have already been lost. In other cases, available ethnographic knowledge has not been tapped. Thus, the entry DORRĀNĠ is a competent summary of the history and geography of this major branch of the Pashtuns, but there is little ethnographic information other than some remarks on material culture, even though several scholars have published extensively on the ethnography of the Durrani.

More serious objections might be voiced about some contributors' concern—sometimes verging on an obsession—with establishing names of prominent leaders, dates and places of historical events, and precise estimates of numbers, as though such "objective" and "scientific" facts constituted reality and were the only, or the most important, things that could be said about a "tribe." There is little evidence of awareness in these entries that the sources on which they depend might have their own particular axes to grind, or that the people so authoritatively "described" might have (had) rather different perceptions of what was real and important.

One sees an editorial presumption that historical, geographic, and linguistic information are somehow more important (more "scientific"? more "objective"?) than ethnographic description or anthropological analysis; further, that a historian, a geographer, or a linguist is more likely to be able to provide an interesting (understandable?) general discussion of a "tribe" (or other named category of people) than an anthropologist or an ethnographer. This may be true (though it is at the very least debatable), but the scholars then given the responsibility for "coverage," unless they take the trouble to consult an anthropologist as an expert on social and cultural phenomena, lay themselves open to making naive assumptions, theoretical errors, and category mistakes when straying beyond the boundaries of their own disciplinary competence. In the case of the two main scholars concerned—Oberling and Balland—the former does not even bother to attempt more than narrative history; Balland, however, on more than one occasion, comes unstuck.

Thus, writing on tribes in Afghanistan, Balland—who has contributed numerous other valuable entries on named places and their populations—makes

9. Iraj Afshar-Sistani, *Ġl-hā, Chādir-neshīnān va tavāyef-e 'ashāyerī-ye-Ġrān*, (Private, 1366/1987).

extensive use of the unpublished Afghan Nomad Survey of 1978 to provide comprehensive information on how many families of nomads there were of each tribal name and where they lived. This scholarly endeavour is undoubtedly of great value; but it rests on a number of assumptions about social reality and ethnic identity which should, at least, be questioned. For example, writing of nomads and semi-nomads named Bakhtiari in northern Afghanistan, Balland says: "The real ethnic status and origin of these people can only be conjectured," and gives some examples of the different affinities some of them give themselves. Similarly, he writes of "Barakzi of indeterminate ethnic identity."

But what exactly is "real ethnic status" or "identity," and how might it be determined? The very notion that such a thing might exist (the truth is out there?) seems to presume, first, a knowledge of genetic links which is not usually available; and second, that a reading of documentary sources is more "real" than subjective convictions. It runs counter to several decades of anthropological writing about the elusive notion of "ethnicity." Unfortunately, the expectation (desire?) of academics and administrators that every human being has a single, fixed, unchanging, objectively determinable—and mappable—"ethnic identity" will always be frustrated by those cursed creatures, human beings themselves.

Another doomed assumption is that genealogies and pedigrees can be treated as historical documents, whether as evidence for the passage of calendrical time, or for the existence of "real" links between people: W. Robertson Smith, writing in the 1880s of Arab society, recognized "that the genealogies used by the bedouin to describe their sociopolitical order were not descriptions of concrete, actual relations among themselves but ideological charters for the construction of social groups."¹⁰ This has been demonstrated again and again of pedigrees and tribal genealogies in the Middle East (as elsewhere), yet Balland still uses them to make calculations about the actual dates of mythological events (s.v. art. BANGĀŞ).

Beneath such expectations and assumptions seems to be the conviction that we, the scholars, know better than our subjects who they "really" are, and that we can establish a superior "truth" by our documentary ("scientific") research. I do not mean to deny the value of such research—I have spent much of my academic life involved in it! But I would argue that no identity is "real" or objective; if there is a "reality" to identity (ethnic or otherwise), then the first say in what it is must be that of the subjects themselves. We outsiders can trace "their" origins from documents, but we cannot force them to accept this evidence in preference to their own self-knowledge, nor can we tell them who they "really" are. If a people's identity is "indeterminate," it is probably the case that there is a lively argument among them on the issue, based on current social and political practices, while their future may well be affected by the arguments of scholarly outsiders.

"Ethnicity," as understood by anthropologists today, is not a genetic, but a cultural and political matter; it is one of a number of discourses on identity. Ethnic labels and conceptions of ethnicity are essentially ambiguous and shifting

10. Dale F. Eickelman, *The Middle East: an Anthropological Approach*, 2nd edition (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1989), 39, referring to William Robertson Smith, *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967, orig. 1885).

materials for the construction and manipulation of identity, by the subjects, by their neighbors (friends or enemies), by administrators, and by academics. Ethnic and other identities (religion, language, kinship, tribe, gender, occupation, region, class, nationality. . .) are essentially negotiable, changing, multiple and flexible. Ethnographies and other literature are full of examples of individuals who manipulate two or more such identities for different purposes in different contexts. It is impossible to lay down a general definition of what constitutes, for example, a Kurd; it depends who is asking the question, in what circumstances (time and place), and for what purposes. Bilingualism, and multiple and disputed identities, mean that boundaries between ethnic groups are never precise or territorial, but contextual and shifting. The ascription of an "ethnic" identity to a group or individual varies with the speaker, the audience, and the context. Any ascription of ethnic identity is in effect a political statement which defines the speaker and their relation to their audience as much as it defines the group or individuals so defined. The description, classification, enumeration, and mapping of "ethnic groups" are political acts that create order and facilitate control, whether for academic or administrative purposes. Governments manipulate such identities, whether in the interests of national political integration, or for scape-goating purposes, or sometimes even to attract tourists. As for numbers and territories, there are no "true" figures or boundaries. A search for "accuracy" reflects an academic (and administrative) search for order, with the danger that order thus imposed will be taken as real and authoritative, that a group so identified and located will become fixed, and that members will be expected to conform, and subjected to categorical policies. Such a danger should not need to be spelled out in the world of the 1990s.

A different category of "ethnography" is represented by a number of thematic essays, mainly by ethnographers; these divide into three categories: (1) essays on a major region, a country, or a people; the respective sections of the entries on AFGHANISTAN, AZERBAIJAN, BALUCHISTAN, and BRAHUI have already been mentioned; there are also Garnik S. Asatrian's account of DIM(I)LĪ and Beatrice Manz's brief discussion of ČARKAS i. The People; (2) essays on special topics: apart from Digard's already mentioned DOG iii. Ethnography, there are further entries by Digard on ČĀDOR and ČŪPĀN, his and Balland's DOMESTIC ANIMALS, my own CONFEDERATIONS, TRIBAL, Spooner's DESERTS, and Towfiq's "AŠĀYER"; (3) reviews of work in an academic discipline relating to Iran and Afghanistan: apart from Spooner's entry ANTHROPOLOGY there is Hourcade and Balland's DEMOGRAPHY.

Several of these essays are—properly—idiosyncratic; often they are largely Perso-centric (for example Digard on ČĀDOR and ČŪPĀN; Tapper on CONFEDERATIONS), but Spooner in particular is hard to fault: his surveys of ANTHROPOLOGY, BALUCHISTAN, and DESERTS are admirable, comprehensive, useful, clearly written summaries and syntheses of work done by the time of publication. Towfiq's essay on "AŠĀYER" is a useful update and complement to Lambton's now-classic 1971 entry on ĪLĀT for the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, but it is not without flaws. It often fails to distinguish "nomads" from "tribes"; it usefully attempts an "ethnic categorization of the tribes . . . generally based on present conditions rather than historical origins," but still classifies the tribes according to externally determined linguistic categories (Lor, Kurd, Turk, Arab, Baluch and Brahui); and there are some pretty weird translations of non-

Persian terms. Highly debatable is Towfiq's assertion of a "more or less uniform type" of tribal structure, a model typified by the Bakhtiari and Qashqa'i, with other cases classed as "variations," "rudiments," "simplified forms" of this model. One could argue—and indeed several scholars in recent decades have argued—that any similarity between tribal structures in Iran need be no more than the result of (a) the logic of any hierarchical structure, and (b) the imposition of such structures by chiefs and/or the state: this is demonstrated simply by the fact that those tribal groups whose organization is furthest from the "model" are precisely those, such as the Türkmen and the Baluch, which have been historically furthest from state or chiefly control.

The *EIr* is full of entries on topics of great interest to ethnographers and anthropologists: aspects of social organization; the beliefs and practices of urban and cosmopolitan, not just tribal and rural, people. But few of them are written by anthropologists and many as a result contain (to an anthropologist) glaring omissions and solecisms. Entries on several major topics are missing an ethnographic input: an example is DIVORCE, where the discussions are historical, religious, legal, and statistical only. More often than not, such entries are folkloric, or generalized for Iran (and/or Afghanistan), without any attempt to document or explain either regional or other variations, or how practices and differences are embedded in local social and cultural contexts.

A final category problem, particularly with reference to "ethnographic" coverage, is that of geographical and cultural ambiguity and the treatment of minorities. Persian/Iranian elements are often the privileged or sole consideration; Persian language is given primacy, followed by other Iranian languages (esp. Pashto, Kurdish, Baluchi). Perhaps this bias is inherent in the *EIr*, given its apparent brief to "cover" Afghanistan as well as Iran on the vague basis of Persian language, shared history, "Iranian" culture, or the "Iranian" plateau. But the ethnographic coverage of non-"Iranian" elements in both countries is vague and very partial. So far there has been systematic coverage of Azerbaijan, and of Turkic- and Arabic-speaking tribal groups under named entries; but in general, ethnographic/anthropological entries, such as those mentioned above, where they mention linguistic usages and cultural elements, rarely include those of speakers of Turkic languages or Arabic, or mention their vernacular terms. Even transliterations of Turkish terms, for example, are most commonly transliterations of Persian versions of them (throughout °AŞÂYER, for example; or in Doerfer's BİGDELİ, Begdeli and Bagdilu for a name best and most simply transliterated as Beydili). For Afghanistan, entries on DORRĀNĪ and many other Pashtun groups, as well as the BRAHUI and the Persian-speaking AYMAQ, are detailed; but again, general entries rarely mention the customs and terminology of most Afghan groups, of whatever language.

The editors must realize that, through their choice of categories, topics and treatments, they are, in effect, responsible for defining and redefining the field of Iranian studies. I believe that they should tell their readers—perhaps in a Preface to each Volume—how these important choices have been made. I hope that, if they read my criticisms and suggestions, they will take them in the constructive spirit in which they are intended. We are only at E: there is plenty of opportunity to update and correct, even to rethink, categories.

I must stress that, despite my carping, the *EIr* has established itself as a monumental resource for scholarship, which I have found enormously useful. If I

had had this resource available to me in the 1970s when putting together a historical survey of "tribes in Iran," my task would have been more than halved, and the result, I am sure, would have been more than twice as comprehensive and authoritative as I managed to achieve. Now, the *EIr* has already become the first reference point for any ethnographic search—and for the tribes. Even if earlier entries are incomplete, cross-referencing, particularly to later volumes, can help. Above all, it is an endless pleasure to browse through, like being a child let loose in a sweet-shop: what a range of topics, what concentration of expertise, what fascinating detail!