

INTRODUCTION: THE NOMADS OF IRAN

Richard Tapper

Images

The nomads of Iran present a variety of striking images to the outside world: a pastoral idyll of tented camps surrounded by green meadows and carpets of flowers; trains of camels and donkeys winding through spectacular mountain gorges; and colourfully dressed women whose skills produce some of the finest carpets in the world. These images, contrasting with both the squalor of village life and the hurly-burly of modern metropolitan existence, appeal not just to outsiders, be they foreign observers or Iranian villagers and city-folk, they form part of the nomads' own presentation of themselves and their way of life as well.

Foreign travellers over the centuries have seen in these images echoes - however superficial - of the biblical patriarchs, leading the uninformed to assume that nomadic life has remained unchanged for millenia. But the images and their resonances go much deeper for settled Iranians, whose historical memory records the destruction wrought by the Mongol nomad hordes, the tribal turmoil of the eighteenth century, and, for many still alive in the 1980s, the depredations of nomad warriors in the early decades of the present century.

For Iranians, images of pastoral nomads contain several paradoxes, reflected today in debates about their future. Historically, mounted warriors from the nomadic tribes provided a valuable source of military manpower for the state, yet posed a potential threat to state security - even if today their famed horsemanship and marksmanship are no match for the military hardware deployed by the modern state. The nomadic tribes represent a reservoir of traditional virtues: independence of spirit, bravery, hardiness, hard work, honour, generosity and hospitality, based on a simple pastoral existence; yet that existence is harsh and dangerous and the nomads are by national standards poor, illiterate and ill-provided with health, welfare and other modern facilities. Nomad women are visibly tougher and freer than their settled sisters, yet their life consists of back-breaking work fetching huge loads of fuel and water and long hours at the loom. Further, while many in government recognize the value of the nomads' contribution to the national economy in exploiting otherwise unusable rangelands and supplying the country with meat, wool and dairy produce, others choose to focus on their primitive pastoral technology, the overgrazing of the pastures and the damage caused by nomad flocks to village crops. Debates tend to polarize between those who see nomads as backward primitives, an anachronism in the modern world, whose only future is settlement and integration into the modern industrial economy, and those who see them as 'noble savages',

repositories of lost values and skills, including the intelligence and the ability to adapt their nomadism to the modern world.

Many of these paradoxes are perhaps evident in the photographs presented in this book. The accompanying texts are intended to go some way towards resolving them, as well as contributing to the growing literature about nomad life, which now includes not only the specialized accounts of anthropologists and other academic researchers, both Iranians and foreigners, but also writings by people of tribal extraction themselves.

Origins and history of Iranian nomads¹

Present conformations of nomadic peoples in Iran date in the main from the time of the invasions of the Islamic Arabs from the west in the 7th century AD, and the Turks and Mongols from central Asia between the 10th and 15th centuries. Pastoralism as a way of life in Iran is, however, considerably older, though its origins remain unclear, and the debate among archaeologists and Iranologists continues.

Numerous observers have noted how the geography and ecology of Iran, like most Middle Eastern countries, favour pastoral nomadism. The terrain and climate make large areas uncultivable under pre-industrial conditions, and suitable only for seasonal grazing; and as only a small proportion of such pasture can be used by village-based livestock, vast ranges of steppe, semi-desert and mountain are left to be exploited by nomads - mobile, tent-dwelling pastoralists. However, this is not a complete explanation of the origins and distribution of nomadism, which has experienced repeated extreme expansions and contractions in response to economic and political developments. At times in the past, nomad flocks grazed vast areas of present-day irrigated lands, while remote valleys used only for grazing today were once richly cultivated.

Extensive semi-nomadic pastoralism may have been practised in the Zagros mountains since the seventh millennium BC, but definite evidence of nomads - mobile tent-dwellers - is slight until the first half of the second millennium BC. Early incursions of nomads from the north who made their presence felt in Iran included Scythians and others during the first millennium BC. For a thousand years before the coming of Islam, Iranian rulers occupied seasonal capitals, surrounded by the camps and flocks of pastoralists, and would appear to have had important contingents of nomad warriors in their armies.

One influential theory² proposes that nomadism developed in the Iran-Anatolia-Mesopotamia region out of a settled society which practised a mixture of rain-fed agriculture and pastoralism. It argues, in brief, that the introduction of intensive canal irrigation and the specialized cultivation of wheat brought an increase in population, and subsequently the pastoral and cultivating schedules fell out of step. Some of the pastoralists, especially those owning larger numbers of animals, became marginalized from the settlements, and sought more distant pastures in the steppes and mountains.

They began to migrate seasonally and became nomadic. But they continued to be linked with the settled society through the market. The world of canal and city demanded pastoral produce, and gave wheat in exchange.

Pastoral nomadism, in Iran as elsewhere, has always been associated with agriculture and settled society, and in complex ways. Nomads are mobile and militarily adaptable, and in many cases when a city-based central government has been weak they have provided the power base for a conqueror to sweep into the city to take control and found a new dynasty. At the same time, the pastoral economy is particularly vulnerable to climatic fluctuations, and nomads have been prone to raiding villages and the trade routes between the cities. In peaceful times, however, with a strong centre, nomads and settlers have pursued mutually beneficial economic exchanges, while the cities provided the basis for economic strength and cultural superiority.³

The development of nomadism out of settled society, and the cycle of alternation between strong and weak central state control, are processes that have been replicated many times in Iranian history, as the delicate balance between nomad and settled has shifted back and forth.

The Arab-Islamic invasions of the 7th century found a largely settled population, including the ancestors of groups later prominent as nomads: the Kurds and Lors of the Zagros (Fars, Isfahan, Khuzistan) and the Baluch of Kerman and the east. The Arabs too settled, in cities around the country, though a few of them took up a nomadic life, mainly in the south and east. Nomads are recorded as serving in the armies, and also at times as highway robbers endangering the trade routes, but they were not a major political component of the state until the Turco-Mongol invasions.

Oghuz Turkish nomad groups from Central Asia, led by the Saljuqs, began moving into Iran in the early 11th century. For the next nine hundred years the rulers of Iran were of nomad background or brought to power by the support of nomad tribes. The Saljuqs themselves were settled in orientation, and did little to disrupt the settled Iranian society whose administration they took over. The Turkish nomads pushed the Baluch south out of Khorasan but on the whole moved into otherwise unoccupied rangelands in Syria, Anatolia, Azarbayjan, Gorgan and Marv, intruding little on native pastoral areas such as the Zagros. When disorder was recorded among the nomads, it was less likely to concern competition over pasture land than tribal resistance to the rulers' desire to tax and control.

Very different was the effect of the Mongol onslaught in the 13th century. The invaders were militarily organized and despised agriculture and settlement; they destroyed irrigation and crops, and massacred villagers and townspeople. The Mongols, and the fresh wave of Turks they brought with them, swept through Iran westwards; many remained in Azarbayjan. In other areas such as Loristan and Khurasan, under the Ilkhanids (1256-1336) and Tamerlane (1370-1405) there was a massive expansion of nomadism and pastoralism at the expense of settled agriculture. Tamerlane himself

travelled surrounded by nomadic families and flocks. Nomadism was further reasserted in the 15th century under the Qaraqoyunlu and Aqqoyunlu nomad dynasties in Eastern Anatolia, Armenia and Azarbayjan, and later in the centre and south of Iran.

By this time, Turkic elements were about a quarter of the population of Iran, as they have remained more or less ever since. The major cleavages in Iranian society were established: between 'Turk' and 'Tajik', and between nomad and settled. Overall unity however proved elusive, and was not to come until the rise of the Safavids, the most successful of many Sufi orders which entered the political arena since the Mongol invasions. In the late 15th century, the Safavid sheykhs, espousing an extreme form of Shi'ism, recruited followers from various nomad tribes, mainly Turks from Anatolia, who came to be known as the Qizilbash or red-heads. With their support, Isma'il Safavi swept to power in Iran, becoming Shah in 1501.

For 250 years the Safavid Shahs ruled an empire that at its greatest extent included much of the southern Caucasus and present-day Iraq and Afghanistan. At first the realm was dominated by the Qizilbash chiefs, who were appointed as provincial governors or heads of government departments as well as military leaders and chiefs of their own tribes. Following the pattern which had prevailed among major tribal groups from the Mongol invasions onwards, conquest by nomadic military forces led to at least partial settlement of the leaders and many of their followers. The chiefs' domains comprised not only pasture lands and nomads but cultivation and peasants, trade and city-based households. Many chiefs, and their nomad followers, were shifted around the country to different appointments and associated territories. Under Ismail's successors increasing rivalry and disorder among the chiefs led to their suppression, particularly by Shah 'Abbas the Great (1587-1629) who, in order to counter the Qizilbash tribes, formed a standing army of slave and non-tribal origins. By the mid-17th century, irregular tribal troops were no longer a political threat, and the nomad groups from which they came were relegated to outlying pasture lands, though their economic contribution to settled society continued to be important.

The Safavid dynasty weakened in the late 17th century, and unrest grew, starting in distant areas of the empire, particularly among non-Persian and non-Turkish tribal elements. In 1722 the capital Isfahan fell to rebel Afghan tribes (not nomads), and Russian and Ottoman forces invaded in the northwest. For the rest of the 18th century, under a succession of competing rulers from the Ghaljai, Afshar, Zand, Bakhtiari and Qajar tribes, Iran saw a general resurgence of tribalism and nomadism. Settled people abandoned both towns and villages to go into exile or join the nomads. Again, there were considerable shifts of nomadic population: Nader Shah Afshar in particular moved thousands of families from the west to his home province of Khorasan. Under his successors, notably Karim Khan Zand, many of these returned westwards, not all to their original homelands.

In the 1790s Aqa Muhammad Qajar established the final dynasty of nomad tribal origins in Iran. Qajar rule was both ensured and constrained by Anglo-Russian imperial rivalry during the 19th century, and once again the pendulum swung away from nomadic dominance towards settled control of society. The nomadic tribes in the 19th century numbered 2-3 million, or one quarter to one half of the total population of 6-8 million, but they were increasingly marginalized. However, the rulers themselves retained nomadic habits for many decades: they continued to move seasonally to highland summer camps, whether to Ujan in Azarbayjan or to Damavand near their new capital Tehran. Irregular cavalry from the nomad tribes continued to provide the backbone of the national army, used both in limited campaigns on the now constricted frontiers and to help extract revenue from both settled and nomadic population. Only occasionally did the later Qajar authorities resort to either relocation (so common in the early reigns) or enforced settlement, in response to frontier problems. Central control, security and tax collection broke down in some areas after 1900, with the Constitutional Revolution and occupation of much of the country by Russian, Turkish and British troops. Security for settled society declined, and raids by nomads forced many villagers once more to join them or take refuge in the cities.⁴

The Pahlavi regime (1925-1979) took a radically different line. Reza Shah attempted to create a culturally integrated, Persian-speaking nation-state in a country where only half the population (some say less) had Persian as their mother tongue, and where most of the nomadic tribes belonged to the rich variety of cultural and linguistic minorities. He saw nomadic tribes as a threat to the national integration of the state and as a cultural anachronism in the modern world. In a successful military campaign of pacification in the 1920s he undermined the tribal structures, subduing most of the chiefs (many of whom were killed) and disarming their followers. In the 1930s he thought to remove the tribal problem for good by abolishing nomadism through comprehensive enforced settlement. Migration routes were blocked and tents destroyed, yet little or no provision was made to help nomads settle and start farming. The result was an economic and social disaster: no increase in agricultural production, huge losses of livestock and the impoverishment, misery and resentment of the former nomads.

After Reza Shah's abdication in 1941, there was a return to nomadic pastoralism; but the attack on the nomadic tribes and other minorities was resumed in the 1950s-70s. There were tribal revolts after the 1940s, but none, in the age of aircraft and tanks, could seriously threaten the government. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi pursued a modified version of his father's policies towards the nomad tribes: pastoralism was to continue, but on new terms, with a long-term development policy of planned settlement of nomads, mainly through neglect. Tribal leaders were removed, pastures were nationalized, commercial stock-breeders were allowed to invade - and

overgraze - tribal rangelands, while traditional pastoralism was neglected and massive agro-industrial schemes were launched in tribal territories. The government wilfully ignored the contribution pastoral nomads had made to the national economy, notably in exploiting otherwise inaccessible rangelands and supplying meat for the increasingly voracious domestic market.⁵

By the mid-1970s, following the oil boom, the livestock economy generally had been undermined by subsidized imports of meat and dairy products. Though this was partly offset by the fact that grain prices were also subsidized, large numbers of former nomads were impoverished and settled, many joining the mass migration to the cities.⁶ At the same time, the tribes were considered to have ceased to exist as a political element in society, while the pastoral nomads were marginalized to the extent that they could be regarded as colourful, folkloric relics from the past, a tourist attraction. As Beck reports, the government facilitated the access of foreign researchers to tribal areas, and urban Iranians were officially encouraged to drive out to the mountains and spend a day as uninvited guests of the nomads, whose banditry and unrest had so recently been a source of government anxiety.⁷

The Pahlavi regime's defeat of the nomads and other minorities was celebrated in the Festival of Popular Traditions held in October 1977 in Isfahan, in which nomadic cultures were taken out of their social and especially political contexts and displayed in public as museum pieces - a 'culture bazaar', as one Iranian anthropologist has described it.⁸ A major role in this was played out in the famous Meydan-e Shah in central Isfahan by groups of tribesmen, and some of tribeswomen, who performed for public entertainment dances normally confined to specific social and cultural contexts such as wedding celebrations. For this occasion, the dancers introduced inappropriate new movements, and the women wore make-up. In the electric revolutionary atmosphere of the time, all this was intensely inflammatory for the Isfahanis present, many of whom were of tribal origins; several men attempted to mount the platform where the women were dancing, and police had to intervene to quell the resulting disturbance.

There was apparently a growing focus on tribal values among urban revolutionary elements. Sometimes this was explicit, as when some Tehran youth identified with the Bakhtiari as portrayed in the classic (1924) film *Grass*: their struggle against the elements symbolized the contemporary struggle against the oppressive regime.⁹ However, nomads themselves played little part in the events surrounding the Islamic Revolution of 1978-9, which was largely an urban phenomenon, although settled tribespeople did participate in events in the cities, and in some parts of the countryside such as Kurdistan.¹⁰

The Islamic Republic has seen a revival in the fortunes of the nomadic tribes. Ayatollah Khomeyni declared them to be one of two sectors of the population (the other being the mullahs) particularly oppressed by the

previous regime. He termed them Treasures of the Revolution (zakhayer-e enqelab), and the fourth Armed Force; officially they are considered to have had a vital historical role in protecting the independence and territorial integrity of the country. Special efforts have been made to foster their social, economic and cultural life and to make sure that they have the same facilities as the rest of the population, as will be described below.

Who are the nomads?

In summer 1987 the first ever comprehensive and reliable census of pastoral nomads in Iran was carried out. The total number of nomads, in a population of about 55 million, was nearly 1.2 million, which is perhaps surprisingly close to the figure of 2-3 million nomads usually estimated for much of the 19th century, though the proportion of nomads in the population has drastically declined since then.

For the purpose of the census, nomads ('ashayer-e kuchandeh, 'migrating tribes') were defined by a combination of three criteria:

(a) tribal (qabileh'i) social organization, "in which individuals feel themselves and their families (khanavadeh) to belong to a larger social group, usually based on kinship, and usually called a tayfeh";

(b) reliance for livelihood mainly on animal husbandry (damdari);

(c) a pastoral (shabani) or nomadic (kuch) way of life, moving anything from a few to 500 kilometers between natural, seasonal pastures.¹¹

This official definition of nomads is clear; it was precise enough for the purposes of the 1987 Census, the organizers of which were well aware of past problems of counting the nomads: what constitutes the 'mobile population', what time of the year to count them, and the omission of pastoral nomads who happened to be in houses at the time of the census.¹² Nevertheless, strictly applied, it excludes non-tribal nomads and non-pastoral nomads, as well as settled tribespeople. In practice, application of the criteria, whether by government officials or by 'nomads' themselves, has been flexible: it depends on what is at stake, what is being demanded of nomads, or offered to them, in terms of taxation, government budgets, services and facilities.

Seen in a wider perspective, however, such a definition is idiosyncratic, particularly in the way it combines the three distinct elements of nomadism, pastoralism and tribalism, which in other parts of the world are not the same thing at all. Each of these elements constitutes a dimension of variation largely independent of the others.

Thus, pastoralism is usually considered to be a specialized, family-based, livestock-raising way of life. As an economy, it is distinct from cultivation, craft-work, trading and hunting. Pastoralism is neither a subsidiary adjunct to cultivating activities, nor is it industrial ranching or feedlot-farming of livestock - though it may evolve or be developed into one of these.

Definitions of 'nomadism', the second element, vary widely. Elsewhere, nomadism commonly signifies various kinds of patterned mobility of

families and communities, as distinct analytically from settlement and settled existence. It shades into village-based transhumance,¹³ vagrancy, and various forms of labour migration. Some scholars attempt to restrict the notion of 'pure nomads' to those with no fixed dwellings, or to those with no fixed movements, or to those who are in constant movement, between fixed dwellings perhaps, or on fixed routes. Such restrictions can lead to the claim that none of the nomads of Iran are 'pure', that at most they practise 'semi-nomadism', or transhumance, to the extent that they have fixed migratory routes, or fixed dwellings at some point in their migratory cycle. Other scholars find pastoralism (from the Greek nomas = herder) to be the dominant criterion of nomadism; yet others specify a mix of pastoralism with mobility; individual groups exhibit various combinations of the two elements.¹⁴ For present purposes, the seasonal movements of people and their flocks are enough for us to continue calling those involved 'nomads'.

There is less consensus on the definition of tribalism, the third element. Many accept the sense inherent in the Iranian formulation above: a tribe is a group of families (in a wide sense) feeling primary moral loyalties to each other because of shared kinship links. Others focus more on the political aspect, in which a tribe unites under a leader to defend a common territory; if there is a notion of kinship, typically in the form of descent from a common ancestor, this may be seen as an ideology, rather than the basis of unity, and it may well be created or manipulated by a leader. In the most general terms, a tribe can be said to be a social and political group whose members have primary loyalties to each other and to their leader (if any) rather than to the nation and state. This distinguishes tribes analytically from the peasantry in a pre-modern state and from the citizenry in a modern bureaucratic system.

Around the world, these three elements rarely coincide. In Iran, however, in the past, as in the recent census definition, there was in fact considerable coincidence between nomads, pastoralists and tribes. But even in Iran, pastoralists are not always nomadic: some communities practise transhumance, raising livestock from settled bases, with specialized herders accompanying the animals. Nomads are not always pastoralists: some make a living from hunting, specialised craftwork (gypsies), or trading.

Pastoral nomads are not always tribal in the above sense: some live in small, family-based communities (which anthropologists in other contexts would term 'bands'), with no systematic relations linking different communities and no formal leadership; the Komachi of Kerman would be an Iranian example.¹⁵

Tribespeople are often neither nomadic nor pastoral, but settled farmers. Government officials living in towns or cities may claim tribal identity. Pastoral nomadic tribespeople have long experienced settlement and urbanization without necessarily losing their tribal loyalties.

Nomads, pastoralists, and tribes typically live in ecologically and politically marginal areas or situations: mountains, deserts, steppes,

frontiers. But not necessarily; some like the Sangsari of the Alborz live or migrate close to major cities.

In the majority of cases in Iran, where there was a coincidence between nomad, pastoralists and tribes, outsiders have come to assume these elements to be synonymous, and to coincide further with 'national minorities'. In the past, as we have seen, some nomads were culturally, linguistically and politically related to the rulers of the country. Under the Safavid, Afshar, and Qajar dynasties in Iran, Turkish nomads could claim such an ethno-linguistic identity with the ruling elite.¹⁶ But under the Pahlavis the languages and cultures of minorities, notably Turks, Kurds, Lors, Baluches, Turkmens, Arabs, including almost all the tribal and pastoral nomadic peoples, were systematically suppressed. Many nomads (Kurds, Baluches, Turkmens, some Arabs) are Sunni Muslims, some Kurdish nomads belong to an extremist Shi'a sect, the Ahl-e Haqq, and many of the Sangsari are Baha'i; these minority religious identities further complicated relations with the Shi'a central authorities, particularly after the Islamic Revolution.

As a result, urban Iranian officials and intellectuals, at least in the 1950s to 1970s, tended to assume that nomad tribes belonged to cultural and linguistic, if not religious minorities, and regarded tribes, nomads and pastoralists as one and the same thing. 'Proper' tribes, it was thought, must be pastoral nomads.¹⁷ In Persian, until very recently the terms ilat (Perso-Arabic plural of the Turkish il, 'people', 'tribe') and 'ashayer (plural of the Arabic 'ashireh, 'tribe', 'clan') were used more or less interchangeably, often indeed as a pair, ilat va 'ashayer, meaning 'nomadic tribes'. Other terms have in the past been used synonymously with them: qabayel, tavayef, and the obsolete oymaqat, ulusat. All these too are plural forms, of the singulars qabileh (Arabic), tayfeh (Arabic), oymaq (Turko-Mongol), ulus (Turkish).¹⁸

As plurals, ilat and 'ashayer are shifting, ambiguous terms. What is implied by these terms - pastoralists, nomads, tribes - to the average Iranian today, compared with fifty or a hundred years ago? How indeed should the terms be translated into English? It is not just a question of definition, but also of thorny political and ideological issues - the notion of 'tribe' perhaps smacks more of anachronism, of powerful chiefs, of difficult times in Iranian history, than do either 'nomad' or 'pastoralist'; but terms which can mean all of these, carry all their connotations. It seems that the prime reference of the terms has been political, to 'tribes', so that there is sometimes, where necessary, the added precision of damdār (pastoralist), kuchandeh or kuch-neshin (nomadic, migrating), or chador-neshin (tent-dwelling). But increasingly the terms have become differentiated, ilat being reserved for 'tribes', and 'ashayer for 'nomads'.¹⁹

Thus, around 1990, the name of the government department (sazman-e omur-e 'ashayer-e Iran) that was concerned with providing services to nomads, and indeed had helped to organize the census, was translated into

English as ‘Iran’s Tribal Affairs Organization.’ In 1992 the translation was changed to ‘Organization for the Nomadic Peoples of Iran’, at least for the purposes of an international conference convened by the department, and the title of the conference (‘ashayer va touse‘eh) was translated as ‘Nomadism and Development’. Nomadism implied pastoralism, and clearly - and usefully - steered conference discussion in the direction of ‘the future of nomadic pastoralism’, a topical issue in development studies; one cannot conceive of a similarly useful conference being convened to discuss the development or future of ‘tribes’. Significantly, the conference brochures avoided any use of the term ‘tribe’ in the English text, or of ilat in the Persian, where only ‘ashayer was used.²⁰

This shift was a decision by a few individuals concerned perhaps with the international image of Iran. The English notion of ‘the tribes’, and the Persian-Turkish plural term ilat, have been eased out, and replaced by the Arabic ‘ashayer in its new sense of ‘pastoral nomads’ and qabileh (as in the census definition) as an analytical term for ‘tribe’, with social, and no longer political connotations.

But the singular il continues to be used for specific tribal groups, and rather more subtle redefinitions and refinements have been produced within official circles. In publications associated with and following the census, il is defined in more detail:

“An il is composed of several tayfeh united on the basis of kinship, or social, political or other ties; usually located in a defined geographic area, known as the tribal territory (qalamrou). Tayfeh of an il usually have distant kinship links with each other by blood (nasabi) or marriage (sababi); but some have no kinship links but form an il through social or political necessity (zarurat). The speech, customs and manners and way of life of the different tayfeh of an il are by and large the same.

“The most well-defined and important pastoral nomad (‘ashayeri) social level is the tayfeh, a community (jama‘at) usually united by near and distant kinship, linked through a number of generations, by blood or marriage, to a common origin (mabna); a pastoral nomad (‘ashayeri) individual is usually identified primarily by his tayfeh name.

“Independent tayfeh are those which have no il membership.”

Below this level (the definition continues) the various subdivisions in the tribal structure are peculiar to each tribal group. At the minimal level, however, there is invariably a small group of households linked by close blood relationship or affinity. Other forms of group, formed for example for migratory or herding purposes, are not counted in the census.²¹

Despite the qualifications, this definition is quite precise and comprehensive. However, although it includes the political notions of territory and unity, there is no mention anywhere of the element of leadership, once the sine qua non connotation of ‘tribe’. Apart from this omission, the definition has two major differences from its predecessors: on the one hand, it is both more explicit and more flexible than any previous

one; on the other, for the first time individuals whose own background is that of ordinary nomadic tribespeople have had a hand in the definition.

Pastoral Ecology and Economics

Pastoral nomads play a vital role in the Iranian economy, on regional, national and international levels, despite recent encroachments on tribal territories, from the nationalization of the rangelands in the 1960s and 1970s, the expansion of village-based cultivation, and incursions from the flocks and herds of commercial stock-breeders. According to the 1987 census, pastoral nomads raised 17 million sheep and goats and 500,000 other livestock, around a third of the country's total, and contributed a rather larger proportion of marketed produce.

James Morier wrote of Iranian pastoral nomads in the early 19th century: "An Iliyat of middling fortune possesses about a hundred sheep, three or four camels, three or four mares, ten asses, &c., which may yield him a revenue of forty to fifty tumans. A man who possesses a thousand sheep, thirty camels, twenty mares, &c., is reckoned a rich man. Each sheep may be valued at two piastres [rials?], a camel at ten, a mare at eight, an ass at three. Such a property would yield a revenue of four hundred tumans. This is to be derived from the wool and milk of the sheep, the wool and hire of the camels, the colts from the mares and asses ... The encampments of the Iliyats are generally of about twenty to thirty tents together, which they pitch mostly without any great attention to regularity ... The tents are close to each other, but the different encampments may be a mile or two asunder, according to the convenience of grass and water ... excepting their clothes, copper utensils, pack-saddles and ornamental luxuries, they supply all their own necessities ... Their mode of calculating property is by sheep ... A shepherd has the care of three hundred sheep, and is paid in kind, both in wool and lambs."²²

This account of pastoral economics is particularly important both in stressing the cash values attributed to the animals - the nomads' 'capital' - as well as to their 'revenue', and in hinting at the degree to which they depended economically on selling their produce, and hiring their animals, to members of settled society. What evidence exists in earlier sources strongly indicates that this emphasis on production and exchange had been a feature of pastoral nomadism in Iran for a very long time, and though the monetary values (and a few other items) need adjusting, Morier's description of nomadic life is more or less valid for late twentieth-century Iran. Within the general parameters he suggests, however, there are very wide variations in the ecological circumstances of the nomads and in the economic activities which they pursue.

The earliest modern detailed account of a group of Iranian nomads, Fredrik Barth's study of the Basseri of Fars, a tribe of some 3,000 households belonging to the Khamseh confederacy in Fars, has now

become a classic in social anthropology, and the Persian translation has been widely read in Iran.²³

Barth's book, based on fieldwork in 1958, offers, in summary, an account of the Basseri tribe at two levels. First, it is a study of the ecological and economic processes generating the forms of social life among Basseri pastoral nomads. Basseri households, based on nuclear families and averaging 5.7 members, own their own flocks. The average household flock is nearly 100 head of sheep, while the minimum viable flock - given the productivity of the flocks, sales of lambs, skins and produce to the market, and expected levels of household consumption - is 60 head. When a father finds a bride for his son, he soon provides him with a separate tent and his share of the flock as anticipatory inheritance, enabling the new couple to set up a separate household. Groups of roughly five households, not necessarily close paternal relatives, co-operate to herd joint flocks of 400 animals. The basic nomadic community is the 'camp', 10 to 40 households which move and camp together on migration between winter and summer quarters. The camp has a leader (riz safid - white beard) with limited personal authority over his followers.

Secondly, Barth shows how higher levels of organization than the camp are dependent on processes involving the Basseri chief and factors outside the tribe: the government, settled society, and other nomadic groups. The Basseri il, as administered by the chief, divides into tira (sections), which comprise one or more oulad. The oulad is a patrilineal descent group usually of between 50 and 100 households who have grazing rights in specific pasturages in winter and summer quarters; to have access to grazing, a nomad must be able to claim membership of an oulad. Most oulad comprise two or more camps, but these are not defined patrilineal descent segments of the oulad and their membership is irregular and liable to change. The tira are weakly developed as groups, and the chief deals directly and arbitrarily with oulad headmen (katkhoda) and often with camp leaders. To be effective as a leader and patron, the chief must have power and resources which set him, his family and his entourage apart from ordinary nomads, and on a level with regional and national elites. Barth's account of political structure and leadership is qualified to an extent by the fact that at the time of his study the chief had recently been abolished, and a new system integrating the Basseri into the state administrative structure via army officers had yet to take full effect.

Barth details the external economic relations and demographic processes affecting the nomads; and discusses the political relations between different tribal and ethno-linguistic groups in Fars province: the Persian-speaking Basseri are linked with the Il-e Arab and the Turkish-speaking tribes Inanlu, Nafar and Baharlu in the Khamseh ('Five') confederacy, who are collectively known as 'Arabs' and are traditional rivals of the Qashqa'i 'Turks'. All of them have market and other relations with the settled peasantry who are mostly Persian speakers.

Basseri economic, social, religious and political organization, as described by Barth, have been widely assumed to typify Iranian pastoral nomads, and many recent scholars have extrapolated from the Basseri in both space and time. Anthropologists have constructed the Basseri into a 'type' of pastoral nomadism,²⁴ while historians have used the Basseri as a guiding 'text' for their reconstructions of pre-modern, especially mediaeval, nomadic societies in Iran, Turkey and elsewhere, particularly as regards features of pastoral economics and nomadic social and political organization.²⁵

Unfortunately, the Basseri example is inappropriate for such extrapolation onto other 'nomadic tribes', whether mediaeval or contemporary, for various reasons, which should be obvious to readers of other chapters in this book:

First, comparison with other contemporary nomadic societies, whether in Iran or elsewhere, shows the Basseri, in virtually all the features outlined in the summary above, to constitute just one pattern among many. This is not surprising, given the very specific natural, economic, political and historical circumstances of the Basseri, most of which are ignored by those who extrapolate from the text, and which are quite different from those of other tribal and nomadic societies.²⁶

Secondly, the Basseri case is not merely specific but actually rather unusual, as is suggested both by Barth's own limited comparison with the neighbouring Qashqa'i Turks and Khamseh Arabs and by other sources on the social, economic and political organization of nomadic tribal groups elsewhere or at other times.²⁷

Thirdly, Barth's observations derive mainly from his residence in the camp of the Basseri chief's personal entourage, the Darbar, which must throw doubt on their representativeness even of 'ordinary' Basseri nomadic society. Moreover, he was able to reside there for only the 3 months of the spring migration.²⁸

None the less, substantial advances in the reconstruction of nomadic and tribal societies in the Islamic world could be achieved by more carefully contextualised readings of Barth's study, and by contrasting it with other modern ethnographies.

Classifications and comparisons of the different pastoral nomadic groups of Iran have been attempted along a number of dimensions. One is that of patterns of nomadic movement, where the following major categories may be distinguished:

First, long-range, vertical (between mountain and plain) migrations are practised by the major nomadic groups in the Zagros, such as the Basseri, the Bakhtiari (see chapters by Brooks and Digard), the Qashqa'i (see Amir-Mo'ez), the Lor (see Bradshaw), minor groups such as the Torkashvand (see Ehlers), and groups elsewhere like the Shahsevan of the northwest (see Tapper) and some of the nomads of Kerman (see Stöber).²⁹

Short-range vertical transhumance is conducted by many village-based pastoralists, for example the Talesh (see Bazin), many of the Kurds of Azarbayjan (see Yalçın-Heckmann) and Khorasan (see Papoli-Yazdi), and the Boir Ahmadi (see Friedl and Loeffler).

Long range, horizontal (that is, little change of altitude) nomadism is practised by the Sangsari of the Alborz, and some others, while short-range horizontal nomadism characterizes the Yamut Turkmen³⁰ and a variety of groups near Zanjan and Qazvin, as well as the Gawdaran of Sistan (see Stöber).

Finally, a few groups conduct a form of horizontal nomadism based on oasis settlements, such as the multi-resource economy of the Baluch.³¹

This type of classification is of limited value. Each major category includes extremes; for example, long-range vertical nomadism is found in both the densely-populated high rainfall areas of the northwest, and the arid, sparsely populated south and east. Moreover, there are significant variations in nomadic practices within each named nomadic group. It is clearly impossible to argue a simple ecological explanation, that the highly varied environments in which they live give rise to specific ecological and economic adaptations.

At a more subtle level, however, ecology and economics do affect the way nomads move within their environment, and to an extent also their forms of social organization. These factors influence the size, character and composition of social groups, and the nature of relations between them, as well as other forms of association and differentiation.

Nomads in Iran live and organize in fluid and flexible camps, though their movement schedules are usually quite regular. We find several kinds of variation. For example, because of the differing nature of their range-lands, the Shahsevan in summer scatter in small herding camps which congregate into larger settlements in the winter, while the opposite is true of the Qashqa'i and the Basseri. Similarly, because of the heat of their winter quarters in Fars, Qashqa'i leave on the spring migration for the mountains by Nouruz (21 March); the Kirman nomads of the plateau delay until after this date; while the Shahsevan of Moghan often do not leave until well into May. Further, on the crowded Zagros migration routes, where thousands of nomads, often from many different tribes, must cross narrow passes and defiles in a matter of weeks if not days, strict organization of the schedule is essential; while in other areas much greater flexibility is possible. In recent decades, with trucks, tractors and trailers increasingly being used for transporting flocks, or homes, or both, very different scheduling patterns for these 'migrations' have taken effect.

Another dimension of variation among nomads in Iran is that of economic production and trade. Many nomadic groups have long conducted their own cultivation, as well as other non-pastoral activities - hunting, collecting, raiding, trade, weaving. By and large, however, the nomads are specialized livestock producers, who trade with both cultivators (especially

of grain or dates, the pastoralists' staple foods) and a variety of craftsmen. They mostly keep sheep and goats as the main source of livelihood, though in widely differing proportions: according to the census, goats are less than 10% in Azarbaijan, but more than 80% in Kerman, Sistan and Baluchistan. A few (not just those described by Stöber) specialize in cattle. In all cases, animals are raised for market production: nomads sell milk and a range of milk products, wool and carpets, hides and hair, guts, and livestock on the hoof. Here too there are wide variations: among sheep-herders, for example, the Basseri sell their young male lambs, while the Shahsevan keep the lambs for a year or more as yearling or older wethers before selling them (see also the chapters by Ehlers, Stöber, and Amir-Mo'ez). Shahsevan have been selling milk and milk products commercially since the 1950s, while many Zagros nomads are said, even now, to regard such sales of 'white' products as shameful (Digard). Clearly, to understand pastoral economics it is vital to consider the 'terms of trade': the relative values of agricultural and pastoral produce, which are largely determined - and in many cases have been for centuries - by prices on international markets.

Nomads keep animals for other purposes than production. The camels, donkeys, horses, mules traditionally kept for commercial, household and personal transport are increasingly being replaced by jeeps, trucks and tractor-drawn trailers. Dogs are as important as ever for guarding home and herd: in most groups there is just the one breed, though among the Bakhtiari (see Brooks and Digard) herd and house dogs are kept separate. A few wealthy chiefs used to keep imported hunting dogs.³²

There is also variation in the size and organization of nomadic households. The 1987 census counted a total of 182,782 nomadic households, with a national average of 6.4 persons per household. In practice, average household sizes range from 5-6 persons for Baluch and other nomadic groups in the east and south (like the Basseri), to around 8 for Kurds, Shahsevan and Qaradaghis in the northwest. This discrepancy reflects different marriage and inheritance customs as much as any differences in fertility and mortality. Some groups, like the Basseri, or the Komachi in Kerman, practise anticipatory inheritance, where a man receives a share of his father's flock at or soon after marriage. Among others, such as the Shahsevan, division of the father's property is delayed until after his death, and even then married sons often stay within the same joint household and property for some years.

Among the Qashqa'i and some Lor groups, individual households attempt to be self-sufficient for all herding practices. Most pastoralists, however, form associations of households in order to pool herding labour and manage their grazing resources jointly. Hired shepherds (choban) usually play a vital economic role; but there is considerable variation in the amount and manner of their payment, and in their position in nomadic society.³³ The size and composition of herds relate to grazing practices, with seasonal variations depending on the timing of lambing and of market

sales, and on the constraints of the terrain: again there is variation between, for example, the Basseri, whose herds reach 400 head of ewes and lambs; the Shahsevan or the Komachi whose maximum herd size is 300 head, with older lambs kept separately from the ewes; and the Hasanwand Lors described by Black-Michaud, where the optimum flock of ewes is reckoned at 130 head. The Shahsevan and the Komachi are alike again in that they time the lambing in their flocks for late autumn (November-December), where in other groups the lambing season is spring.

The jobs of domestic husbandry - lambing, milking, shearing, marketing - are normally matters for individual households, though cooperation may be arranged. Gender roles and responsibilities vary widely: whether women or men do jobs like milking, pitching and striking tents, weaving and other household production; the degree to which women and girls are involved in herding; the extent of women's ownership of animals, tents and other property; the degree of segregation and veiling of women; how far women are involved in decision-making, and whether women form 'sub-societies'.³⁴

A final dimension of economic and ecological variation concerns the pastures, and the social groups which form to exploit them. Of central importance to pastoral nomads is the nature of their rights to land for grazing, farming or the accumulation of wealth; whether these rights are individualized or communal at some level; what size of groups own and/or exploit and defend them; how far these groups vary from season to season; how permanent and how exclusive the rights are. Many nomads in Iran have not only the classic range of summer pastures (yaylaq, sardsir, sarhad) and winter pastures (qeshlaq, garmsir), but also defined autumn and spring grazing areas, as well as 'schedules' comprising rights of passage and grazing on the migration routes (il-rah, elyolu). There was wide variation between systems like that of the Basseri, with extensive communal territories, and those like the Shahsevan, with near-individuated grazing rights which could be bought and sold or rented. Never formally recognized by the government, these traditional systems were abolished in the 1960s and 1970s by the nationalization of the nomadic grazing grounds, which have increasingly been taken over, legally or otherwise, by the flocks of city-based commercial stock-breeders.

Among most if not all nomads in Iran, as elsewhere, the basic nomadic group (the camp, in the Basseri case) is an egalitarian pastoral community of some twenty to fifty families. In many cases (though not usually that of the Basseri camp) shared or joint grazing rights form one of the common interests of this basic pastoral community. It is usually led by a 'grey-beard' and linked by common patrilineal descent or other ties of kinship and affinity, who camp and move together or nearby and make certain joint economic decisions, form a congregation for certain religious ceremonies, and maintain a strong degree of social integrity through shared customs and knowledge. Other local-level social groups among the nomads tend to form

according to one of the above economic or socio-cultural principles: to herd joint flocks or manage joint pastures, to move and camp together on migration, to form a religious congregation. In practice, actual social groups often combine several such functions. Standard ethnographic accounts of nomadic societies in Iran since Barth's study of the Basseri have analysed elements of nomadic social structure in such terms.

Differences between pastoral nomadic societies in patterns of camp and community structure and inter-community relations often reflect their varying economic and ecological situations as pastoralists and as nomads, which include patterns of interaction with their social and political environment: with settled villagers, the wider society and the agents of the state. As has been stressed above, nomads are not isolated from or independent of settled society, but regularly interact with it through 'trade or raid', the exchange of both information and personnel, and longer-term processes of settlement or nomadization.

Nomads and pastoralists are thus part of regional, national and wider economic systems, and whether there is harmony or antagonism in these relations depends on a further multiplicity of factors and processes: geographical situation, competition for resources, political struggle or accommodation, perceptions of ethnic difference or identity, and so on. In the common Iranian case of pastoral nomadic tribespeople, relations with village peasant cultivators, urban craftsmen and government agents are historically complex, dynamic and deeply rooted.

In sum, later studies of Iranian nomads - such as the chapters in this volume - and comparisons with Barth's classic study have shown that the organization of the Basseri pastoral camp community is highly specific: many configurations found among the Basseri are not repeated elsewhere. However, Barth's two-level analysis, in which the ecology and economy of pastoral nomad camps is distinct from the political organization of the tribe, is valid and useful generally: the processes operating at each level are quite different. Following Barth's insight, though relevant historical sources are only suggestive, it seems likely that basic nomadic communities have always been the product of the ecological conditions of nomadic pastoralism and internal demographic and cultural factors. His analysis of tribes and confederations documents what has long been recognized, that these larger political groupings are artefacts of external political and cultural relations, notably with neighbouring groups and with central authorities.

Tribes

As we have seen, the notion of 'tribes' (ilat va 'ashayer) as the political and social dimension of pastoral nomadism is strongly entrenched in academic and administrative thinking about Iranian society, such that the category of 'the tribes' has been conventionally synonymous with 'the nomads'. Further, 'tribes' were strongly associated with powerful leaders, who at points in the past rivalled - and on occasion overthrew and replaced - the

rulers of the state. However, as discussed earlier, since the Islamic Revolution official definitions of 'tribes' have played down this political dimension, omit all reference to chiefs, and focus instead on the social: tribes in Iran, or at least the major components, the tayfeh, are now defined as groups of kin - almost as extended families.

To be sure, the redefinition of the terminology recognizes changing political realities - the chiefs no longer exist; but it is also an attempt to fix current reality in a way that facilitates government control. This is also evident in the implication in the official definition that there is, and always has been, a more or less uniform pattern of political and social structure among the nomadic tribes, which is far from the case. Even the upper level of the structure - il divided into tayfeh - is idealized. It is not an exact representation of any one tribal group, but somehow the average of all of them, a model of uniformity, and it is a fiction for the purposes of administration, in a grand tradition of many centuries during which governments have defined, created and classified 'the tribes'.

The notion of tribe as the social dimension of pastoral nomadism is shared by numerous historians and other writers on the Middle East, who assume in addition that tribe comprise what anthropologists used to call 'segmentary lineages', where members claim descent from a common ancestor (the founder of the lineage, which often bears his - or her - name) and form a series of nesting sub-groups (segments) descended from more recent ancestors. Patricia Crone, for example, writes that it is likely that "tribe in the specific sense of the word is an overwhelmingly or exclusively pastoral phenomenon (or so at least if we add the criterion of segmentary organization)." The tribe, moreover, "is that descent group within which control of pasture land is vested", which shares the obligation to pay blood-money for an injured member, and which has a chief and forms a community. She finds nomads to be "pitiful creatures", doomed to "tribalism" by their environment, marginal, and hence inclined to avoid states; and she finds it "surprising" that certain nomadic people became conquerors on a gigantic scale.³⁵

Other historians, however, take a diametrically opposed view of the nature of tribes and tribe-state relations in earlier Islamic societies. For Rudi Lindner, clans and tribes are essentially political groups gathered around a leader, concerned about shared interests as much as blood ties. Though he underplays the role of kinship ideologies in recruiting and uniting tribal groups, Lindner is correct in observing (from the Basseri model) that in the Middle East all tribal political groups, whether large confederacies or even quite small tribes, are historically of mixed origins, sometimes recognized, sometimes forgotten.³⁶

But as we have seen, there is no necessary connection of tribe with nomadism or pastoralism; nor are tribes necessarily formed on the basis of shared descent or central leadership. In the Middle East, where nomads numbered tens of millions until very recently, it is true that historically most

nomads were organized politically as tribes under chiefs, and that many tribes (defined in political terms) had a pastoral economic base and led a nomadic way of life. However, Crone's insistence that tribes in the Middle East and Central Asia are necessarily pastoralists organized in descent groups excludes most major groups in Anatolia, Iran and Afghanistan. In Anatolia the Ottomans were not originally a descent group; while few of the Pashtuns of Afghanistan were pastoralists - and in other Middle Eastern countries too, important tribal groups were settled cultivators with little or no leaning to pastoralism or nomadism. Well-known groups in Iran, such as the Qashqa'i, Bakhtiari, Kurds, Baluch, Turkmen or Shahsevan, were at least partly settled agriculturalists, and complex and heterogeneous in composition.

By conventional definitions many of these were not 'tribes' at all, but 'chiefdoms', or even 'proto-states'; often such groups were the creation of the central state, but at times they were a threat to the state, or were feared as such. In most other contexts around the world, the English term 'tribe' is applied specifically to social groups quite unlike the best known so-called 'tribes' of Iran, groups that not only are not pastoral nomads, but have neither chiefs nor large-scale political organization.

Social groups that have been labelled 'tribes' do indeed vary considerably in their predominant mode of organization: and hence definitions of 'tribe' vary.³⁷ They may be organized and led centrally in a hierarchical political structure, sometimes up to the level of a major tribal confederacy and powerful paramount chiefs. Other tribes are organized diffusely in egalitarian groups, perhaps united by an ideology of unilineal descent. Commonly 'tribes' are organized by some combination of these two principles (the political one of allegiance to chiefs, or the cultural one of descent ideology), but neither of the two is necessary or universal in groups referred to as 'tribes'. Indeed, as we shall see, some pastoral nomadic tribes in Iran (as elsewhere) have neither chiefs nor descent groups, forming for the purpose of economic cooperation and on the grounds of neighbourhood. There are cases too of nomads in Iran who have neither formed tribes nor followed chiefs.

We should perhaps remember that, according to popular sociology, football supporters' clubs, street gangs, and the organized crime syndicates of the inner cities of the industrial world form 'tribes', and behave 'tribally', by which is usually meant that they organize with lines of loyalty and authority which ignore the community bounds and local frameworks sanctioned by the state.

There is nothing in either pastoralism as a production system or nomadism as a mobile way of living that necessarily leads to organization in 'tribes', whether these are defined politically in terms of chiefship and territory or culturally in terms of common descent, and any coincidence between pastoral nomads and tribes is not so much a causal relation as a function of relations of both with the central state. That is, both

tribespeople, by virtue of their personal allegiance to each other or to chiefs, and nomads, with their shifting residence, are classically unpopular with any settled state administration intent on registering and taxing the whole population whom it claims to control. In some cases, indeed, mobility can be a deliberate policy for escaping such control and exploitation.³⁸ Sedentary rulers have thus tended to classify the nomads and tribespeople together and indeed to administer them similarly.

From the rulers' perspective, even the most autonomous inhabitants of the territory over which they claim sovereignty are assumed to have similar or comparable patterns of organization, including leaders who may be treated as their representatives; if they do not have these leaders or patterns, they may be encouraged to produce them.³⁹ In some cases, in order to administer rural groups and minorities, whether nomadic or settled, governments create tribes where none existed previously, appointing chiefs from among either local notables or complete outsiders. One of the best known examples in Iran is the foundation of the Khamseh confederacy (including the Basseri) under the chiefship of the Shiraz merchant family of Qavam al-Molk in 1861-2; but there are many twentieth-century examples on a smaller scale. In Iran there is perhaps a longer history than elsewhere of such government practices, whose latest manifestation is the recent official redefinition of 'tribe' for census and administrative purposes, referred to earlier.

The names of such government-created 'tribes' may appear in the records but exist only on paper. Again, tribal names found in official sources imply a uniformity of socio-political structure which, in so far as it exists, may be entirely due to administrative action, and may disguise fundamental disparities of culture and society. Differing political history, geography, and cultural orientations mean that, a priori, there is a very wide and rich variation in nomad society and culture in Iran.

In the previous section, attention was drawn to certain major differences among the nomads of Iran, notably in their ecological and economic situations as mobile pastoralists. They have been classified in a variety of other ways, for different purposes. Official classifications, for example, have used three types of criteria, alone or in combination: ethnic, provincial, political.

In various official or historical documents, and some contemporary accounts taking the perspective of the state, nomad tribes have been listed by 'ethnic' affiliation, that is, by language and/or supposed origins. Examples are Lambton's and Towfiq's Encyclopædia articles, and earlier documents such as the tohfeh-shahi.⁴⁰ The major categories, typically, are: (a) Iranians such as Lor and Lak, Kord, Baluch and Brahui, held to be native to the country; (b) immigrant Turks; and (c) Arabs. Tribal groups are listed under one of these headings, together with numbers of families, names of chiefs and assessments of revenue and military levies. Some scholars would maintain that such an ethno-historical classification has sociological

correlates. In an interesting recent article, Barfield, for example, has revived the idea that 'indigenous Middle East tribes', such as Arabs, Kurds and Pashtuns (and presumably Lors and Baluch), have egalitarian lineage structures and are resistant to domination, features which differentiate them from the more ephemeral but powerful centralized confederations and dynastic states associated with the Turco-Mongol nomadic tradition originating in Central Asia.⁴¹

Other sources classify the nomad tribes by province, listing the dominant named groups present in each, and estimates of their numbers. Examples include Lambton's key article again, and several local histories, as well as those publications of the 1987 census concerned with the practical issue of the provision of services for the nomads.

The census's main classification, however, has been according to political and administrative units. Having defined il and tayfeh, the census identified 96 il, of which 17 constitute the following 'major' il (in order of size): Bakhtiari, Qashqa'i, Mamivand (Lors), Boir Ahmad Sofla (Lors), Ilsevan (Shahsevan), Khamseh, Qaradagh (Arasbaran), Mamasani (Lors), Bahme'i (Lors), Boir Ahmad Olya, Tayyebi, Jabal-e Barezi, Zelqeh, Jalali, Baluch, Afshar, Kord. In addition, 547 independent tayfeh belong to no il.⁴²

A further mode of classification of the nomad tribes focuses on socio-political structures and relations to the state.⁴³ Tribal political structures, as we have seen, have nothing much to do with either pastoralism or nomadism per se. As Barth showed for the Khamseh, the powerful chiefs and tribal groups in Iran were, in large part, moulded if not created by the state and by government policies. Tribes in Iran have formed and derived their character from their relation to particular states at particular times, and there has been much theorizing as to the complex processes involved.⁴⁴

The most well-known groups, for obvious reasons, are the large centralized confederacies, once led by powerful chiefly dynasties. Earlier examples included various Qizilbash groups and others which founded dynasties or challenged the rulers; examples from the present century are the Bakhtiari, Qashqa'i and Khamseh. None of these major groups were exclusively or even mainly pastoral nomads, and their chiefs were not merely leaders of nomads, but had two or more legitimate sources of personal wealth and power: not only flocks and herds, but agricultural land and commonly city-based trading houses. In addition, chiefs received income through tax collection, and often subsidies from the Iranian state and sometimes others, including (in the Bakhtiari case early this century) royalties from oil exploration. Such chiefs sometimes depended on recognition by the rulers, sometimes were strong enough to challenge them. They commanded well-armed irregular cavalry, drawn from their extensive entourage of kinsmen and personal followers as well as from the families of subordinate chiefs, none of whom participated directly in the hard work of the pastoral economy. These forces might be mobilized as levies by a strong government to fight its campaigns, but could, and sometimes did, bring the

chiefs to power in government. Even where government had created these major confederacies and appointed their leaders as part of a 'tribal policy', they continued to constitute a 'tribal problem' for the central state.

Less powerful and numerous, and usually of concern to the state only at a regional level, were a range of locally centralized chiefdoms including different Kurdish groups in Western Iran and Khorasan, Boir Ahmad and other Lors in the west, Shahsevan and Qaradaghi in Azarbayjan, Baluch in the southeast, and, on occasion, component elements of the major confederations.

Other tribal groups in Iran had no centralized political structure. They were diffusely organized and had no prominent leadership - like 'jellyfish', as Malcolm Yapp put it - and followed a strategy of 'divide that ye be not ruled', in Ernest Gellner's felicitous phrase.⁴⁵ The best example is the Yamut Turkmen of Gorgan, who were able to resist government control longer than many groups by virtue of their diffuse organization, as well having the advantage being located on a frontier across which they could escape. Numerous smaller groups, such as the Talesh (see Bazin) the Sangsari, and the Komachi and others in Kerman, usually managed to avoid the attention of government - and historians - altogether; as a result their existence and numbers were more or less unknown at least until recently.⁴⁶

The nomad census recorded the names of a number of 'tribes', including at least one 'major il' (the Zelqeh), whose existence before was obscure. Some of these probably fall into the previous category of diffusely organized groups, who successfully avoided attention until now. Others, such as Il-e Kerend, may be recent local agglomerations of tribal fragments, constituted as 'tribes' by administrative action or fiat.⁴⁷ Yet other cases may result from spontaneous political union of local nomads.

Clearly, no simple model of 'the tribes' or 'nomads of Iran' will be adequate, unless perhaps for very specific and drastic administrative or political purposes. Many recent academic and official studies of the tribes, however, have based their analyses on the apparent assumption of a uniformity of structure.⁴⁸ Typical formal schemes tend to include the following common elements:

(a) A regular segmentary structure of nesting territorial/political units, with groups at each level distinguished by terminology (for example, il, divided into tayfeh, each divided into tireh, and their equivalents); the structure is usually depicted graphically as a star or tree.

(b) A matching segmentary framework of nesting descent groups, with a genealogical charter of pedigrees of descent from a common ancestor; again, a tree is the common model.

(c) A matching hierarchical structure of political leadership roles (ilkhani, khan, kalantar, kadkhoda, rish-sefid and so forth), accompanied by pyramid-shaped diagrams.

(d) A matching pyramid model of class structure, for example: chiefly families, independent commoners, employees, dependants and servants.

Careful reading of Barth's account of the Basseri shows them to diverge at many points from this model of 'tribal structure', none the less his account has been frequently mis-read, by both Iranian and outside academics, as confirming the elements of the model.⁴⁹ Indeed, all the major Zagros confederacies (Bakhtiari, Qashqa'i, Khamseh), despite radical differences between them, are sometimes represented as the archetypes of 'tribal structure' and of pastoral economies and societies in Iran, while other tribal groups are held to be more or less imperfect approximations to them, with fewer levels of organization, less centralization, less powerful chiefs and so forth.

However, the idea that there is - or was - a uniform or archetypal 'tribal structure' of Iran, a fixed pattern of hierarchical political and social organization among nomads, is wishful thinking on the part of tidy-minded government officials and academics.

Even if certain nomadic societies have similar social and political structures on paper, this says nothing about the functions of groups at any level, the power and role of a particular leader, or the political behaviour of particular individuals. Indigenous terms for political and descent groups, according to which nomads and tribespeople identify themselves and act, are not as systematically related or consistent as standard hierarchical models of tribal structures suggest. The terms they use tend to denote facets or functions, rather than levels in a hierarchy of groups. Ethnographers often report that individual nomads could not specify whether a given named group of people was a tayfeh or a tireh or an il; this is not evidence of confusion or imprecision on the part of informants, but rather of the contextual nature of the terms. Many such terms are used interchangeably or apparently inconsistently, partly because - like the English terms 'section', 'department', 'division', 'family', 'group', 'lineage', 'tribe', 'clan', 'community' - they are ambiguous, partly because different terms are appropriate descriptions of the same 'group' in different contexts of action. The same Shahsevan social group may be called a tireh in the political context of tribal sections, a göbak as a descent group, or a jamahat as a ritual and moral community.⁵⁰ The same term may have different connotations in different tribal cultures, signifying, for example: community, grazing-group, tribal section, followers of a leader, descent group. Further, il, now officially used (as we saw above) for major tribal groups throughout Iran, in the Turkmen language and culture means 'peace', 'obedience'.

Much the same is true of the terminology of leadership positions. Terms such as khan, beg, katkhoda, rish-safid/aq-saqal, which may be neatly listed in a hierarchical - quasi-military - model of tribal political structure, in practical usage in different tribal contexts may rather differentiate between leaders who are self-promoted, government appointees, or popularly elected or approved.

As for the assumption that nomads conceive their tribal identity in terms of a nesting set of descent groups, this is true in only a very limited sense. The Bakhtiari, and one or two other groups, are reported to have a unifying tribal genealogy, but other major groups, with histories and traditions of heterogeneous origins, make no pretence at such unity, and invoke frameworks of common descent only at low levels of organization.⁵¹ Commonly, indeed, pedigrees and descent claims are only invoked where, as in the case of the Basseri oulad, they bring rights of access to an important resource such as pasture land. At the level of the local community, such as the Basseri camp, common descent is often no more important than other kinds of inter-personal ties as a basis for day-to-day relationships and loyalties. Local-level groupings tend to be of very mixed composition, like the major confederacies themselves; most commonly, it is ties between women that structure the composition of the smallest groups of households.

Formal segmentary and hierarchical models of nomadic tribal society, as they are reproduced in academic and official analyses, appear to create rather than depict or discover structures. They are convenient as administrative blueprints, models for use by central government or by tribal chiefs. But they seldom represent tribal structure as it is seen and lived by ordinary nomads, whose stories of the origins of different tribal sections and the connections between them often differ radically from the official, chiefly version.⁵² And they certainly do not explain the political behaviour of nomadic individuals: the networks of personal ties of loyalty and friendship, modes of negotiation and accommodation, the formation and maintenance of alliances and rivalries, and the emergence of leaders, including women (whether as wives or mothers of male leaders, or in their own right). These informal processes occur at all levels of nomadic society. At the level of tribe and confederacy they tend to be obscured if not suppressed by processes emanating from the state, following the official hierarchical political model. At the local level, on the other hand, these processes reflect real economic and social forces in nomadic society.

Tribal organization in the old sense no longer exists in Iran. The centralized chiefdoms and confederacies, condemned as socially unjust and politically unnecessary and incompatible with a modern state structure, have finally been abolished, and the state, through the ONPI, has taken over the political and economic functions of the former tribal leaders. Government has redefined 'ashayer, il and tayfeh to include no reference to tribal political organization or chiefship, but specifically to imply both pastoral nomadism and the moral ties of kinship, or shared economic interest. It has in effect recognized the basic social and economic reality of nomad 'tribes'.

Identity and culture

In foregoing sections, we have seen how pastoral nomads live in camps and local communities which reflect the economic and social exigencies of their

daily lives, and how they unite in wider and more inclusive patterns of organization, sometimes but not always on the basis of shared descent or allegiance to a leader, in order to mount offensive military efforts or in defence of a common resource such as pasture land. Political unity and leadership in response to outside pressures such as the state may take the form of tribes and chiefs, but the state itself creates tribes and chiefs as part of its formal structures of power and authority, for the purpose of maintaining order and extracting taxes and military levies.

Tribes, then, are political, not ethnic or cultural groups. None the less, nomads do feel wider cultural loyalties, a sense of identity with larger groupings than local communities, on various bases such as supposed common origins, shared cultural practices, and moral community.

The present nomadic population of Iran is very mixed in origins. The obvious ethnic and cultural complexity (as between Kurds, Lors, Turks, Baluch, Arabs, etc.) is only part of the story. Every named ethnic population and tribal group is itself heterogeneous, as a result of both forced migration of whole populations, especially under rulers such as Shah Abbas Safavi, Nader Afshar, Aqa Muhammad Qajar and others, and voluntary migration and exile of individuals and small groups. Heterogeneous origins may be evident in continuing ethno-linguistic diversity, for example in the relatively recently formed Khamseh tribal confederacy; or in memories of former diversity preserved by the now more or less culturally homogeneous components of a tribal group such as the Basseri, the Shahsevan, the Qashqai or the Bakhtiari; or it may be evident only in historical sources, present populations having, through generations of co-residence and intermarriage, assimilated to what seems now a single identity.

Trying to trace histories of tribal groups is a somewhat fruitless task, of little present-day relevance. Historical data on tribes often consist merely of records of the movements of names of groups and their chiefs, names which are little indication of either origins or present identity, despite appearances. As Basile Nikitine warned many years ago:

“The notions of ethnic unity and political organization are no longer the same when one enters the field of Asian ethnology. At any one moment one can discern some units which now unite in the form of a vague confederation, and now, just as easily, split apart. Even names offer no consistency nor certainty ... [a tribal name] may be the name of the chief during a period of prosperity, which will in time give place to another. If we add the constant fission and fusion of groups through time, we soon see the difficulties faced by the researcher.”⁵³

The name of a particular chief (and his tribe) may indicate his paternal origin, but not that of his followers, who may be distant relatives but are more likely a flotsam and jetsam of varied origins, linked to each other and the leader, perhaps, by marriage, so that, after a generation or two of stability, shared customs and understandings may emerge, and one can begin to talk of ethnic-cultural homogeneity. In many cases, the fact that

people have been in such close association will argue for what Lancaster terms 'must-have-been' kinship relations between them, but historically, most tribes began as organizations for the promotion of warfare and looting, and genealogies depicting supposed common descent appeared only later.⁵⁴

At the same time, more important than kinship ideology per se, the defence of shared grazing rights is clearly a basis on which political groups, with or without leaders, can form. Such groups, and rivalries and factions between them, all run counter to any shared ideology and inhibit wider unity in the face of an outside threat.

Nomadic communities form at two main levels, commonly coinciding with groups formed on other principles. The basic nomadic local communities of 20 to 50 families, such as the Basseri 'camps', have been mentioned earlier. In the major tribal systems of western Iran, these basic, communities commonly join to form larger communities of one to several hundred families, groups in this case of some continuity, independent of leadership, with a strong degree of cultural identity and notions of common origins, maintained by endogamy and other cultural practices.⁵⁵ These communities, more 'imagined' than experienced, for which the English term 'clan' might be appropriate, may also constitute politically-defined 'tribes', with jealously guarded territories and in many cases hereditary chiefs. Terms used by nomads themselves for the larger communities are hard to identify, particularly when they thus coincide with political and often state-sanctioned groups. Perhaps the most common are tayfeh and tireh, both terms implying a group that is itself part or section of a yet larger grouping, such as an il: a tribal cluster, confederacy or chiefdom.

How do nomads define their own identities? Do people classified by administrators, historians, anthropologists or other outsiders as 'nomads' or 'tribes', actually identify themselves as such, or by some other category? The answers, as in other questions of identity, depend on context: indeed, on who is asking the question, in what situation, and for what purpose. What are the elements of their identity?

First, for many nomads, the most conscious element of their identity has always been their religion; whether in the case of those adhering to the majority Shi'a faith of Iran, or the Sunni or Ahl-e Haqq minorities. Barth's account of the Basseri supports a conventional Middle Eastern stereotype of nomads as lax Muslims, uninterested in the religion of the mullahs; but there are other, contrary stereotypes, such as that derived from Ibn Khaldun, according to which nomads have a simple, desert religion which brings them close to God, and are liable to respond quickly to the call to reform; and more recent accounts of nomads such as the Shahsevan and the Komachi show them to be sincere, committed Muslims.⁵⁶

In the traditional context of political relations with the state, with non-tribal peasants or with members of other tribes, nomads would often identify themselves generically as 'tribespeople' (ilati, 'ashayer), or specifically by the name of a tribal group to which they belonged, depending

on the situation. In this context, markers of identity were commonly martial symbols such as firearms and stories of past exploits. In the larger tribal groups, as we have seen, members of the chiefly classes supplied the warriors and did little herding work; they would be more likely than ordinary nomads or hired shepherds to maintain this tribal identity.

In economic and social contexts, where ordinary nomads share the distinctive experiences and problems of tent-dwellers, camp-dwellers, migrants and stock-keepers, as opposed to settled cultivators, traders, city-dwellers, a number of relevant identities (in different languages) are available. The tents themselves, the hearths around which families gather, tend to carry important symbolic meanings associated with this kind of identity, as do the herding skills and practices and aspects of the migration (see Brooks, pp. xx-x; Tapper; Amir-Mo'ez, pp. xx, xx).

The richest area of symbolic potential for distinctive markers of identity is that of culture and ethnicity: language, history and tradition, religion, custom, and material culture. Cultural differences among the nomads of Iran have been much reported on, and the more visual and tangible aspects such as dwellings, textiles (Amir Mo'ez, pp. xxf), clothing, food and domestic paraphernalia have been displayed in museums and described in the more popular ethnographic literature. Material items such as tents and clothing are sometimes used as cultural markers by the nomads themselves, but linguistic differences appear to embody more important elements of cultural identity. Recently there has been a boom in publication of the poetry and other oral literature of nomads.

But there is one area of culture that holds for nomads (as for other people) deeply-rooted, and usually unarticulated, meanings: the realm of ceremonies and rituals, in particular those associated with marriage. In basic outline, weddings and other ceremonies (described in some detail in many chapters, and depicted in some of the photographs) are very similar among the different nomad groups; but their richness, and much of the implicit importance for the participants, lies in the details which distinguish the customs and symbolism of each group, often of each clan and sometimes each local community. Nomadic identity seems to be encapsulated in the forms of music and dance practised at weddings - hence, in part, the reaction to the dance displays in the 1977 Isfahan Festival referred to earlier.

These various identities are not exclusive, but are alternatives, and individuals can and do claim more than one, shifting between them according to circumstances. Much daily interaction between individuals can be interpreted as the continuing negotiation of identities.

What determines nomads' changing self-perceptions? Following Barth, much hinges on relations between neighbouring groups, which can be manipulated by local or outside leaders. Where groups of different backgrounds are allied (for presumably practical reasons) they can adopt a common identity as pastoral nomads, playing down their ethnic-cultural

differences, which may over time disappear. This ethnic convergence is more likely perhaps in the case of small groups or minorities adapting to majority or dominant groups, as has frequently occurred in Iranian tribal history, for example between Kurdish and Turkish groups at a local level. In other cases, there is a long history of ethnic rivalry, for example between Qashqa'i 'Turks', Bakhtiari 'Lors', and Khamseh 'Arabs'. This 'ethnic' rivalry often focuses on cultural differences such as wedding customs; it may also affect each group's perceptions of their religious identity, for example (between two Shi'a groups) of their comparative piety.⁵⁷

Much also depends on how far nomads share cultural, linguistic and religious traditions with the rulers of the state, and on the changing political and economic realities of privilege and discrimination, in terms of social status, and, these days, access to jobs and contracts and government funding. Before the Pahlavis, the rulers were of tribal origins, and tribal identities carried some status in society. The Pahlavis attempted to abolish the tribes, and encouraged an urban contempt for rural and tribal peoples as dirty and ignorant savages, beneath attention. Those who were once proud to be 'tribespeople', led by chiefs and a threat to the state, either attempted to merge into the rural landscape as ordinary citizens, or became 'pastoral nomads', which at least carried the connotation of harmless, specialized, even valued producers.

This identity and that of Shi'a Muslims have become more respectable in the Islamic Republic, but dominant religious and nationalist values mean that the state is ambivalent in its attitude towards distinctive tribal (even in the redefined sense) and minority identities and cultural practices, such as those involving music and dancing and women's dress. Significant perhaps are recent reports (see Friedl, for example) of the 'privatization' of weddings and much of the rest of daily life among the nomads; no longer are ceremonies and daily life based on community participation and values, rather they are focused on the individuals concerned, and have become private, exclusive and idiosyncratic affairs.⁵⁸

Nomads and the future

In 1860 Keith Abbott, British consul-general at Tabriz, commenting on government measures to curb the Shahsevan nomads of Moghan, of whom the Russians were complaining, made the following observations:

"I think it impolitic in the Persian Government to seek to render it's [sic] great nomad Tribes a stationary people. Persia is differently circumstanced to most other countries and the nature of it's climate, it's natural features and the general habits of the people require that it should possess a population which can adapt itself to variations of mountain and plain and draw from that condition of life resources which are in a great measure denied the fixed inhabitants. It is on these great pastoral communities that the population of the cities and plains nearly depend for their supplies of animal food - for the flocks - for the butter, cheese and

other preparations from Milk which are so largely consumed in Persia and for many coarse but useful articles of woolen and other manufacture for which the produce of the fields and cities is exchanged. The Tribes are a further advantage to the country in consequence of their wealth in camels which afford a cheap means of conveyance for merchandize to the most distant parts; but these advantages are in great measure lost to the country when the tribes are compelled to renounce their nomadic condition to become cultivators of the soil - and the State in authorizing these changes lessens it's resources in a military point of view - for whereas the Young men of the nomad Tribe are to a great extent available for military service, the duties and labour of the community being chiefly performed by the females, the labour of cultivating the soil must fall principally on the males - and no doubt also the hardiest races in Persia and the most valuable for military duties are the men of the wandering Tribes."⁵⁹

These observations on the nature of nomadic pastoralism in Iran are remarkably modern in tone, and would have held good until quite recently as an assessment of the value of the nomad tribes and of the arguments against a policy of enforced settlement. Many of the arguments are still valid, and sectors of the modern administration are well aware of them.

Since the 1970s, Iran has seen widespread economic and social development and massive population growth. There have been improvements in communications, education, and other services, but also expansion of cultivation at the expense of pasture lands. Pastoralism continues to be a valuable mode of exploiting the national rangelands, producing meat and other important commodities for the market, and nomadism is a rational mode of pastoralism under certain conditions, though it requires the support of a government willing to provide infrastructural and marketing facilities as well as controls, for example on overgrazing.

At the beginning of the Islamic Revolution of 1978-9, some educated young people of nomadic background mobilized forces within their own tribes against the chiefs, especially among the Bakhtiari and the Qashqa'i. Islamic-oriented nomadic youth associated themselves with the Islamic revolutionaries in the cities and argued for some kind of planning and organization for nomadic peoples, and for representation at the highest levels in the new regime. These enthusiastic young men initiated major development plans in some nomadic areas, under the auspices of the Campaign for Reconstruction (Jehad-e sazan-degi), though these plans were postponed after the onset of war with Iraq in 1980.

Before the Revolution there was an Organization for Mobile Pastoralists (sazman-e dam-daran-e motaharrek), but its brief is evident from the fact that it was part of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development. After the Revolution this organization was reformed and transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture, then in 1983 to the new Ministry for Rural Reconstruction (jehad-e sazan-degi). Renamed the Organization for the

Nomadic Peoples of Iran (ONPI - see above), it was from 1986 to 1992 directed by an economist of Bakhtiari origins, with the status of Deputy Minister, who also sat on the High Council of Nomads (shura-ye 'ali-ye 'ashayer), of which the Prime Minister, and later the President, was the head.

At the provincial level, where it is staffed partly by members of the tribes, ONPI provides infrastructural services and organizes local and regional representation of the nomads. Other services for nomads, such as health, education, security and the control of pasture-lands, are organized through other Ministries, though the basic groundwork is done by ONPI. ONPI also conducts research, which it publishes in books and reports, and in the interesting quarterly journal Zakhayer-e enqelab (Treasures of the Revolution), started in 1987.⁶⁰

Nomads initially had no great expectations of any improvement resulting from the Revolution. In practice, life has improved in several respects, largely thanks to the work of the Reconstruction Ministry and ONPI. In most nomad areas there are now roads, water and power supply, schools, bath-houses, veterinary services, health-care, shops, and cooperatives for selling pastoral produce and buying basic supplies. Nomads have greater control over their land, and are allowed both to farm and to build on it, which they were not before. The fact that the provision of services, and relations with government, are now in the hands of educated young men from their own tribes appears to have made a considerable difference to nomad attitudes to government.

Although in several quarters old ideas persist about the backwardness of the nomads and the need to settle them, the general improvement in their status means that many of the new generation in Iran, including people of nomad origins, value the nomads' way of life and their political and economic contribution to the country. ONPI, taking the perspective of the nomads and not that of the state, promotes an image of the nomads which is the opposite of that purveyed by the Pahlavi regime. Indeed, the murky histories of many nomad tribes as raiders, as threats to state security, and as agents of imperial powers, have been transformed into a glorious past as freedom-fighters against the oppressive Shahs and as frontier guards, not least in the recent war with Iraq.

Nomad settlement is no longer directly enforced, though government encourages it with some vigour. Meanwhile the growth in population means a continuing, indeed increasing, flow of spontaneous settlement. Wealthier nomads who have land, as well as the poorest who have nothing, are the most likely to settle, the former as farmers, the latter as migrant workers in the cities. The remaining nomad camps have as neighbours the herdsmen of wealthy village-based ex-nomads; but many large extended nomad families have diversified, with some members farming, others in trade or transport, and others continuing to migrate with the animals. The new roads have

eased the seasonal migrations, which are increasingly conducted by truck and trailer - few transport camels are left.

Many former chiefs, deposed officially in the 1950s and 1960s, retained their role as patrons until the 1970s, and several returned to power briefly after the Revolution. But they and their families are now gone, many of them abroad, a few remaining only as private citizens, with some wealth but little or no influence. Authority in the tribes is now in the hands of elected councils of young enthusiasts loyal to the regime. Privileges that used to go to chiefly families now go to families of martyrs, mullahs and government officials. In a final reversal of Pahlavi policy, armed tribal militias are now charged with security in the nomad areas, and once again young nomads proudly carry arms along with their tribal clothes.

A major problem for the nomads continues to be access to pasture. Under the Pahlavis, the pastures were nationalized and traditional systems of grazing rights were abolished. Access is now regulated by a system of permits, which has not yet proved satisfactory. Schemes are under consideration for assuring pastoralists access to particular pastures on a basis regular enough to motivate them to conservation. Other, older, problems continue to be reported: the invasion and seizure of tribal territories by both village cultivators and city-based, non-nomadic commercial stock-raisers, and the consequent overgrazing and need for supplemental fodder supplies; extortion by some government representatives; escalating prices, for example for transport; and continuing usury from money-lending merchants. Generally, however, the nomads, at least in the major tribes, with their ability to produce at least some of their own food, appear to enjoy a rather better standard of living than many middle-class city dwellers.⁶¹

In September 1992, ONPI convened an international conference on Nomadism and Development at Shahr-e Kord near Isfahan, with co-sponsorship from FAO and other international bodies. In the discussions, many government officials expressed views on the future of the nomads that were positive, enlightened and ambitious, compared with those of other modern states with nomadic populations. There was heated debate between modernists (from ONPI and the Reconstruction Ministry) who wish to encourage and facilitate either nomadic pastoralism (and economic diversification) or guided settlement, according to the nomads' wishes; and traditionalists (mainly from the Plan and Budget Organization and the Ministry of Agriculture) for whom settlement is the only 'solution' to what they see as the 'problem' of nomadism. But modernists and traditionalists were agreed on the undesirability of forced settlement, which would lead to further urban migration which the overcrowded cities cannot absorb. The modernists were building a high level of nomad participation (by men at least) into both the planning and the implementation of their development policies.

Also significant at the conference was evidence of shifts in the political culture of the Islamic regime: the earlier ban on music and dancing was relaxed, and nomadic women were conceded the right to dress in styles not conforming closely to urban 'Islamic' conventions. Once more, nomadic pastoral cultural practices and products are being promoted for their inherent interest and value as part of a rich national tradition, but this time there is greater respect for their living role in both past, present and future society. It remains to be seen how far these changes will affect the nomads and their perceptions of themselves. Preliminary indications are that, just as 'pastoral nomadism' has become more respectable a concept in government, and to the society at large, so also 'settlement' has become increasingly acceptable to nomads who once would have rejected it as threatening the very foundations of their identity.⁶²

This essay began by identifying paradoxes in the images of nomads in Iran. Nomads themselves today have ambivalent images of themselves and their past. On the one hand they are nostalgic for what they see as a golden age of abundance, when tribal values of independence and martial valour were respected (see Bradshaw, Friedl and Loeffler, all on the Lor),⁶³ and complain of the present degradation of the environment, the growth of population, the disappearance of the game, the expansion of cultivation, the intrusion of ineffective development projects, and so forth; but they also recall difficult times of climatic disaster and oppression by both chiefs and governments.

Nomads in Iran are not, and never have been, backward relics of primitive society. They have for centuries been very much part of wider economic and political systems, and have made informed and rational, if sometimes heavily constrained, choices about their involvement in the world. Today they are no different from other citizens in wanting to be part of the modern world, not least by acquiring some of its material trappings such as radios, televisions, refrigerators, cars and trucks - all of which could be found in nomad camps even in the 1960s.

But such material changes do not automatically bring radical changes in social forms and cultural practices at the camp level. Family structures, gender relations, and even herding patterns and practices, are to some extent adaptations to pastoral and nomadic conditions which continue to prevail, and they are likely to change slowly among those pursuing the nomadic way of life.

Despite the improved social status which nomads are now accorded, the overall process in the twentieth century - with the radical expansion of the world economic-political system, the revolution in communications and the military power available to the state - has been a decisive and irreversible turn to the ascendancy of settled society. The long-term future of pastoral nomadism in Iran, as elsewhere, must remain in doubt.⁶⁴

Notes

¹ See A. K. S. Lambton, "Ilāt", Encyclopedia of Islam (2nd edition) II, 1971, pp. 1095-1110; F. Towfiq, "'Ashayer," Encyclopedia Iranica II, 1987, pp. 707-724; Roger Cribb, Nomads in Archaeology, Cambridge University Press, 1991; Xavier de Planhol, Les Fondements Géographiques de l'Histoire de l'Islam, Paris, Flammarion, 1968; A. M. Khazanov, Nomads and the Outside World, Cambridge University Press, 1984.

² S. Lees and D. G. Bates, "The origins of specialized nomadic populations; a systemic model," American Antiquity 39, pp. 187-93; F. Hole, "Pastoral nomadism in western Iran," in R. A. Gould (ed.) Explorations in Ethno-archaeology, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1978. Khazanov (op. cit.) argues for considerably later origins.

³ See Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah: an Introduction to History (tr. F. Rosenthal), New York, Princeton University Press, 1967; and the huge literature devoted to his theories..

⁴ See, e.g., Richard Tapper, "Nomads and commissars in the Moghan steppe: the Shahsevan tribes in the Great Game", in Richard Tapper (ed), The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan, London, Croom Helm, 1983; and "Anthropologists, historians and tribespeople on tribe and state formation in the Middle East", in Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner (eds), Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991.

⁵ A point made in 1965 by Thomas Stauffer, "The economics of nomadism in Iran", Middle East Journal. See also Abbott, below.

⁶ In some remoter areas this was not true: Daniel Bradburd reports of the nomads of Kerman that they actually prospered in the new economic conditions (Ambiguous Relations: Kin, Class and Conflict among Komachi Pastoralists, Washington DC, Smithsonian Institution, 1990.)

⁷ Lois Beck "Tribes and the state in nineteenth and twentieth century Iran", in Khoury and Kostiner, Tribes and State Formation, pp. 186-7, and "Nomads and urbanites, involuntary hosts and uninvited guests", Middle Eastern Studies 18 (4), 1982, pp. 426-444.

⁸ Soheila Shahshahani, "History of anthropology in Iran", Iranian Studies 19, 1986, pp. 75-6.

⁹ Hamid Naficy, "Nonfictionfiction: documentaries on Iran," Iranian Studies 12, 1979, p. 223.

¹⁰ Lois Beck, "Revolutionary Iran and its tribal peoples," MERIP Reports 87, May 1980, pp. 14-20.

¹¹ Statistical Centre of Iran (Plan and Budget Organization) and Iran's Tribal Affairs Organization (Ministry of Jihad-e-Sazandegi), Socio-Economic Census of Nomadic Tribes, 1987, Country, Vol. 6: Tribal Atlas (in Persian), p. i.

¹² See Towfiq, "'Ashayer", for earlier censuses.

¹³ 'Transhumance' refers to seasonal movements of animals and people between summer and winter quarters, with settlements and fixed dwellings in one or both of these; for Digard (chapter XX below) and others, however, in transhumance the animals are accompanied only by shepherds, not the families of the owners.

¹⁴ Cribb, Nomads in Archaeology, p. 17.

¹⁵ Bradburd, Ambiguous Relations.

¹⁶ This was the case with nomads in a neighbouring country, Afghanistan, where these issues were (until the recent years of turmoil) even more distinct: tribalism, as a political issue for the country, especially among the Pashtuns, was quite separate from pastoralism and nomadism. Most Pashtun tribespeople have long been settled village or town-dwellers. Pastoralism shaded between long-range nomadism and village transhumance and was rather more explicitly an economic issue. Many Afghan nomads pursued long-distance trade, and most, whether traders or pastoralists, were Pashtuns, as were the rulers of the country. In most situations they would likely give their tribal and ethno-linguistic identity equal weight with their pastoralism, and far more than the contingent element of nomadism. On Afghan nomadism and settlement, see my "Nomadism in modern Afghanistan: asset or anachronism?" in L. Dupree and L. Albert (eds), Afghanistan in the 1970s, New York, Praeger, 1974, and "Golden tent-pegs: nomad settlement and change in Afghan Turkestan" in S. Akiner (ed.), Cultural Continuity and Change in Central Asia, London, KPI, 1991.

¹⁷ Fredrik Barth writes of "the pervasive conviction among urban Iranians to whom I spoke [in 1958] that all tribesmen in Iran - the land of Kurds and Lurs and Baluchis - should be nomads." "Method in our critique of anthropology", Man (N.S.) 27, 1992, p. 177.

¹⁸ Lambton, "Ilāt", pp. 1095-6; Towfiq, "'Ashayer", p. 707. The singulars have much more specific references in contemporary Iranian tribal societies.

¹⁹ But cf. Nader Afshar-Naderi's attempt to establish the reverse in the 1970s: "The settlement of nomads and its social and economic effects" (in Persian) reprinted in Ilāt va 'Ashayer, Tehran, Kitab-e Agah, 1983, p. 331.

²⁰ By 1993, in a further shift, some members of the Organization were using a slightly more accurate translation: Organization for Nomadic Affairs.

²¹ Statistical Centre of Iran, Socio-economic Census of Nomadic Tribes, Vol. 2-2: Ilsevan (Shahsevan), p. vi; also in Zakhayer-e Enqelab 11, summer 1990, pp. 77-81; Zakhayer-e Enqelab 19, summer 1992, pp. 17ff.

²² James Morier, "Some account of the Īliyāts, or wandering tribes of Persia," Journal of the Royal Geographical Society 7, 1837, pp. 239-41.

²³ Fredrik Barth, Nomads of South Persia: the Basseri Tribe of the Khamseh Confederacy, London, Allen and Unwin, 1961. Earlier studies in Persian by Bavar and Bahmanbegi are interesting but not very specific on socio-economic detail.

²⁴ E.g., among many others, Marshall Sahlins (Tribesmen, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1966), but also Barth himself (Nomads of South Persia, p. 49). The above paragraphs are an idiosyncratic 'reading' of Barth's study, for the purposes of this article. On the problems of reading Nomads of South Persia, see below; others have recently 'misread' Barth's text as a study of segmentary lineage organization, see correspondence by Brian Street and Susan Wright in Man 1992.

²⁵ E.g. John Masson Smith, Jr., "Turanian nomadism and Iranian politics," Iranian Studies 11, 1978, pp. 57-81; Rudi Paul Lindner, "What was a nomadic tribe?" Comparative Studies in Society and History 24, 1982, pp. 689-711, and Nomads and Ottomans in Medieval Anatolia, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1983; Gene R. Garthwaite, Khans and Shahs: a Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiari of Iran, Cambridge University Press, 1983; Beatrice Forbes Manz, The Rise and Rule of

Tamerlane, Cambridge University Press, 1989; John Foran, Fragile Resistance: Social Transformation in Iran from 1500 to the Revolution, Boulder, Westview Press, 1993.

²⁶ William Irons (various articles) many years ago made the same point about the specificity of the Basseri by comparing various aspects of Basseri and Yamut Turkmen economy, politics and society. For a detailed comparison between Basseri, Türkmen and Shahsevan nomadic social organization, see Richard Tapper, Pasture and Politics: Economics, Conflict and Ritual among Shahsevan Nomads of Northwestern Iran, London, Academic Press, 1979, pp. 240f.

²⁷ Barth, Nomads, pp. 123-33). A rather different 'typical' model is suggested by the remarkable similarities, for example, between constituent groups of the fifteenth-century Aq Qoyunlu and the sixteenth-century Qizilbash, and nineteenth-century tribal confederacies such as the Boir Ahmad and the Shahsevan; see John E. Woods, Aqqyunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire, Minneapolis, Bibliotheca Islamica, 1976; R.D. McChesney, "Comments on 'The Qajar uymaq in the Safavid period,'" Iranian Studies, 14, 1981, pp. 87-105; R. Loeffler, "Tribal order and the state," Iranian Studies 11, 1978, pp. 154f.; Richard Tapper, "Nomads and commissars".

²⁸ See Tapper, Pasture and Politics, p. 252.

²⁹ See also Bradburd, Ambiguous Relations, on the Komachi of Kerman.

³⁰ William G. Irons, The Yomut Turkmen: a Study of Social Organization among a Central Asian Turkic-speaking Population, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, Museum of Anthropology, 1975.

³¹ Philip Carl Salzman, "Multi-resource nomadism in Iranian Baluchistan," in William G. Irons and Neville Dyson-Hudson (eds) Perspectives on Nomadism, Leiden, Brill, 1972.

³² Only horses and dogs have names (see Amir-Mo'ez, Tapper).

³³ See particularly Lois Beck, "Herd-owners and hired shepherds: the Qashqa'i of Iran," Ethnology 19 (3), 1980, pp. 327-51; Daniel Bradburd, "Never give a shepherd an even break: class and labor among the Komachi of Kerman, Iran," American Anthropologist 76, 1980, 603-20, and Ambiguous Relations; Jacob Black-Michaud, Sheep and Land: the Economics of Power in a Tribal Society, Cambridge University Press and Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1986.

³⁴ See Nancy Tapper, "The women's sub-society among the Shahsevan nomads of Iran," in Lois Beck and Nikki Keddie (eds) Women in the Muslim World, Harvard University Press, 1978, and other essays in that volume.

³⁵ Patricia Crone, "The tribe and the state," in J. A. Hall (ed.) States in History, Oxford, Blackwell, 1986.

³⁶ Lindner, "What was a nomad tribe?", and Nomads and Ottomans. For fuller comments on Crone and Lindner, see my "Anthropologists, historians and tribespeople".

³⁷ See my "Anthropologists, historians and tribespeople", and also "The tribes in eighteenth and nineteenth century Iran", in Peter Avery, Gavin Hambly and Charles Melville (eds), From Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic, Volume 7 of The Cambridge History of Iran, Cambridge University Press, 1991.

³⁸ William G. Irons, "Nomadism as a political adaptation: the case of the Yomut Turkmen," American Ethnologist 1 (4), pp. 635-58; Bernt Glatzer, "Pashtun nomads and the state," in Tapper, Conflict of Tribe and State; Bradburd Ambiguous Relations.

³⁹ Beck, "Tribes and the state," p. 204

⁴⁰ Lambton, "Ilāt"; Towfiq, "Ashayer"; Marina Kunke, Nomadenstämme in Persien im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert, Berlin, Schwarz, 1991.

⁴¹ Thomas J. Barfield, "Tribe and state relations: the Inner Asian perspective," in Khoury and Kostiner, Tribe and State Formation.

⁴² See accompanying table, where the listing of the 31 largest il does not quite match the ordering of these 17 major il. In particular, while 'Kord' constitutes a major il, there are several separate Kurdish il listed. Apparently the smallest il had only 15 nomad households, while some independent tayfeh were represented by one nomad household each. This remains to be explained. It is also noteworthy that two thirds of the independent tayfeh were in the eastern parts of Iran: Kerman, Baluchistan, Sistan, Khorasan.

⁴³ Cf. Beck's classification of tribal groups by size and location in relation to frontiers, "Tribes and the state," p. 199.

⁴⁴ Different historical patterns of tribal relations to the state have been explored by Digard, Garthwaite, Beck, Kiavand and others. E.g. Jean-Pierre Digard, "Histoire et anthropologie des sociétés nomades: le cas d'une tribu d'Iran", Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations 28 (6), 1973, pp. 1423-35; and "Jeux de structures: segmentarité et pouvoir chez les nomades Baxtyari d'Iran", l'Homme 27 (2), 1987, pp. 12-53; Garthwaite, Khans and Shahs; Beck, "Tribes and the state"; Aziz Kiavand, Government, Politics and Tribes (in Persian), Tehran, 'Ashayer Publications, 1989; Richard Tapper, "Introduction" to Tapper, Conflict of Tribe and State, and "Anthropologists, historians ...".

⁴⁵ Malcolm Yapp, "Tribes and states in the Khyber 1838-1842," and Ernest Gellner, "Tribal society and its enemies," both in Tapper, The Conflict of Tribe and State.

⁴⁶ Bradburd, Ambiguous Relations; he has other arguments to explain Komachi lack of political centralization. Cf. Glatzer, "Pashtun nomads and the state".

⁴⁷ Cf. Barth's comments on such government aggregation in Fars, Nomads of South Persia, p. 132.

⁴⁸ See numerous recent monographs, and comments by Susan Wright in letter to Man, 1992. It should also be noted that historians and ethnographers have, through their writings, been among the 'creators' of tribal ethnic identities; the Shahsevan (see Tapper) are just one among many well-documented cases in the Middle East.

⁴⁹ See 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, 1990; and comments by Barth, "Method in our critique."

⁵⁰ Cf. qaum in Afghanistan: Nancy Tapper and Richard Tapper, "Marriage preferences and ethnic relations," Folk 24, 1982, pp. 157-77; and cf. discussion of Kurdish terms by Martin van Bruinessen, Agha, Shaikh and State (2nd edn), London, Zed, 1992, pp. 60f.

⁵¹ Cf. Martin van Bruinessen, "Kurdish tribes and the state of Iran: the case of Simko's revolt", in Tapper, The Conflict of Tribe and State; and Tapper, Pasture and Politics.

⁵² See Richard Tapper, "History and identity among the Shahsevan," Iranian Studies 21 (3-4) 1988, pp. 84-108, on different versions of Shahsevan origins, and Wright letter in Man 1992 on Doshmanziari and others.

⁵³ “Les notions d’unité ethnique et d’organisme politique ne sont plus les mêmes dès qu’on pénètre sur le terrain d’ethnologie asiatique. A un certain moment on y constate en effet des molécules qui tantôt se réunissent sous une forme de vague confédération, tantôt, avec la même facilité, se désagrègent. Les noms mêmes n’offrent aucune constance ni certitude ... Ce sera le nom du chef de la période de prospérité auquel pourra avec le temps se substituer un autre. Ajoutons à ceci des scissions et des regroupements constants à travers l’histoire et nous nous apercevrons de tout ce qu’il y a de délicat dans la tâche du chercheur.” Basile Nikitine, “Les Afshars d’Urumiye,” Journal Asiatique 214, 1929, pp. 122-3.

⁵⁴ William Lancaster, The Rwala Bedouin Today, Cambridge University Press, 1981. Cf. Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah, p. 100; quoted in Cribb, Nomads in Archaeology, p. 53. See also Lindner, Nomads and Ottomans.

⁵⁵ Richard Tapper, “The organization of nomadic communities in pastoral societies of the Middle East”, in Equipe anthropologie et écologie des sociétés pastorales (eds), Pastoral Production and Society, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press and Paris, Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, 1979. In the more sparsely populated areas of the south and east, such as Kirman, where large-scale organization is rare, the larger community, coinciding with a tayfeh such as the Komachi, appears to be unstable in composition (Bradburd, Ambiguous Relations). Cf. Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities, London, Verso, 1983.

⁵⁶ Tapper, Pasture and Politics; Bradburd, Ambiguous Relations.

⁵⁷ See my “Holier than thou: Islam in three tribal societies,” in A. S. Ahmed and D. M. Hart (eds) Islam in Tribal Societies, London, Routledge, 1984, and also chapters in the same volume by Emrys Peters and Bahram Tavakolian.

⁵⁸ Elsewhere I have shown the importance of shifts in identity in the case of the Shahsevan nomads, and variations as between different classes of Shahsevan society; and contrasted the case of the Durrani of northern Afghanistan. See my “History and identity”, and “Ethnic identities and social categories in Iran and Afghanistan,” in Maryon Macdonald et al. (eds), History and Ethnicity, London, Tavistock, 1989, and “Ethnicity and class: dimensions of group identity in northern Afghanistan,” in M. Nazif Shahrani and Robert L. Canfield (eds), Revolutions and Rebellions in Afghanistan, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984.

⁵⁹ Public Record Office, Foreign Office Files 248/192 (Abbott to Alison no. 38 of 29.11.1860).

⁶⁰ For a major recent compilation of materials in Persian, see Iraj Afshar-Sistani, Il-ha, chador-neshinan va tavayef-e ‘ashayeri-ye Iran (title untranslatable), Tehran, Homa, 2 Vols, 1987.

⁶¹ See Beck “Qashqa’i nomads and the Islamic Republic,” Middle East Report July-August 1992, pp. 37-41. Descriptions in English of nomadic life under the Islamic Republic are still few; the above account derives from Beck, and from personal information, mainly second-hand, on other major groups such as Bakhtiari, Shahsevan, and Lor.

⁶² For development of this and other points touched on in this Introduction, see Richard Tapper, ‘Change, cognition and control: the reconstruction of nomadism in Iran,’ in C M Hann (ed.), When History Accelerates, London, Athlone, 1994.

⁶³ See also Bradburd, Ambiguous Relations, for the Komachi.

⁶⁴ The last section is based largely on visits to Iran in September 1992 and August-September 1993 which were made possible by grants from the British Institute for Persian Studies (1992 and 1993) and the Nuffield Foundation (1993). I am indebted to Ziba Mir-Hosseini for sharing her knowledge of the nomads with me. I am also grateful to numerous officials and private individuals in Iran who have been willing to discuss the present and future of the nomads.