

# Commission on Nomadic Peoples

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# Dynamics of camp formation among Pashtun nomads in west Afghanistan

*Bernt Glatzer*

## Introduction

This paper deals with the formation and organization of pastoral nomadic camps of Pashtuns in western Afghanistan. The size of pastoral camps as such is explainable from a given ecology and economy, but within the given scale of camp size a wide variety of camp compositions and social combinations are possible. This variety and its dynamics cannot be explained sufficiently by referring to ecology and economy alone. As a case study this article is descriptive, but I believe this to be the best way towards an understanding of the complexity of nomadic local groups.

Why camps at all? In west Afghanistan one may come across a lone tent in a wide steppe, but this happens very rarely. The prime reasons for households to seek each other's company and neighbourhood are the same as in other human groups:

- (a) The general human desire for social company and the fear of loneliness,
- (b) The desire for security.
- (c) Requirements of organization of productive work.

Point (c) has found much attention in the literature on nomadism, here it may be summarized as follows: Groups consisting of more than one household are economical because by pooling of ani-

mals, i.e. through joint herding, work force can be set free for other tasks, such as processing and marketing of animal products. Since the nomads do not live from meat and milk alone, it is the market value of pastoral products which defines the minimum size of a household's own livestock. The maximum size a household can handle is limited by the amount of labour the household can provide. In our sample minimum and maximum lie between 10 sheep (or 20 goats) and 50 sheep/goats per adult member of a household. The herds which several households build range from 400 to 600 sheep/goats and ideally consist of about 500 small stock. This can be explained by animal behaviour in herds, by ecological constraints and by the working capacity of shepherds. Groups of households who pool their livestock are referred to as "herding units", their average membership is 5 to 6 households, extremes ranging from 2 to 10. A camp is composed of one or several herding units, depending on the maximum possible animals which can be herded in one locality.

When the ecological and economic rationales behind the sizes of nomad groups is known the question remains: How do nomads actually form these groups? How do they select partners for their herding units and camps? Is there

a range to choose from? How and by whom are camps created? How do camps split or merge? And equally important, how are they sustained during their short lifetime?

This case study takes as its starting point the description and history of one household which is seen as the crystallization point of a series of camps. We follow these camps and the ones who branched off during a period of 18 months. The camps underwent no less than 12 fusions and fissions during this period, making it rather difficult for the researchers to follow. From extensive observations during a total of 30 months between 1970 and 1977 in northwest and west Afghanistan I collected evidence that such camp instability among purely pastoral nomads (those without agricultural activities) is by no means exceptional. Only where agriculture is added to the economy freedom in camp formation becomes restricted.

### Geographical and ethnographical overview

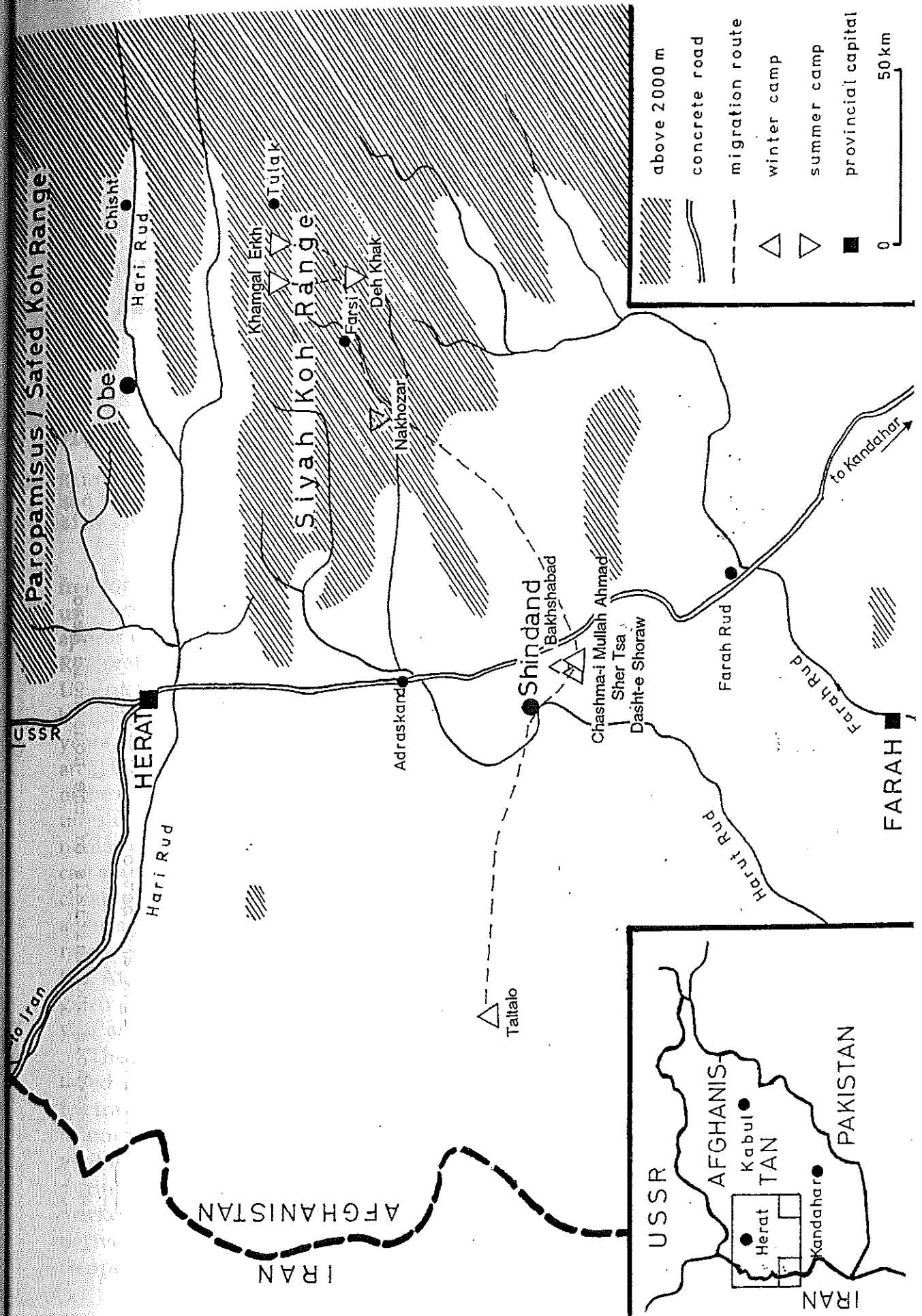
We joined this nomad group in December 1975 in the Dasht-e Shoraw (*Salty Plain*) (33° 06' N; 62° 25' E) ca. 15 km south of Shindand, or ca. 120 km south of Herat as the crow flies. The plain is 1260 m above sea level and surrounded by hills up to 1900 m. Summer temperatures reach 48°C, the average rainfall in Farah (capital of the province) is 98 mm, in Herat 228.8 mm.<sup>2</sup> The steppes of west Afghanistan have a treeless dwarf bush vegetation with sagebrush (*Artemisia siberi*) as one of the most frequent plants and with grass only in early spring. Even in places where nomads camp only for a few months deterioration of pasture becomes noticeable, the reason for which is not only overgrazing but also fuel ex-

traction for camps, villages and towns. The metropolitan centre of the area is Herat; other focal points of trade, crafts and state administration are Shindand and Farah. Surrounded by large oases, the towns are also agricultural centres.<sup>3</sup>

Since the last 200 years Durrani Pashtuns have been dominant in west Afghanistan, but they underwent marked cultural assimilation with the Persian speaking local population. Today the Durrani are still numerically dominant in the area, but in their basic cultural norms and values they hardly differ from their neighbours. The relative cultural homogeneity allows pastoral competitors with different ethnic backgrounds, such as Durrani Pashtuns, Timuri, Zuri, Taheri, Mahmudi, and many others, to interact in a mutually comprehensible and predictable way. Even ethnically mixed camps are common. The Pashtuns see themselves subdivided into a number of clans or tribes with an intricate pattern of subtribal ramifications, but this system does not correspond to any territorial or political order in the steppes of west Afghanistan. Reviewing the results of the 1978 nomad census of Afghanistan Balland speaks of "*l'absence absolument générale chez les nomades d'Afghanistan de toute correspondance entre organisation tribale et organisation territoriale*" (1982:63). The Durrani Pashtun tribes include both sedentary and nomadic members and there is no purely nomadic clan or tribe. Although nomads and villagers lead an economically distinct and spatially separate life, social relations between the two domains are close; there is a constant mutual flow of humans, goods and services between the two.<sup>4</sup>

Pasture rights can be summarized as follows: (a) In the lowlands (winter area) there is neither individual nor corporate ownership of pasture, except in the immediate vicinity of villages. Pastures are

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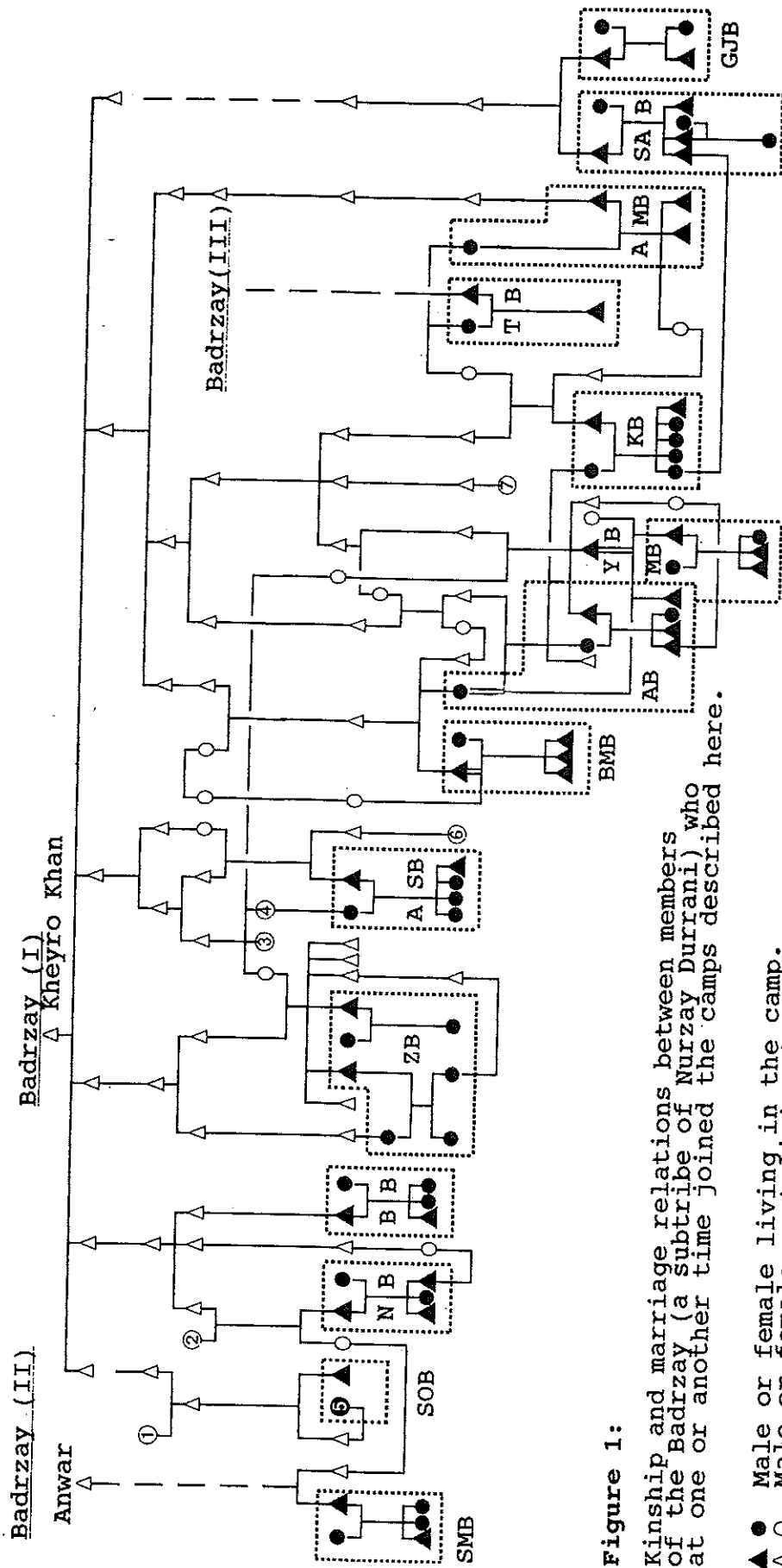


Figure 1:

Kinship and marriage relations between members of the Badrzay (a subtribe of Nurzay Durrani) who at one or another time joined the camps described here.

- ▲ ● Male or female living in the camp.
- △ ○ Male or female not living in the camp or dead.
- ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ Badrzay women who have married Milarzay, or Milarzay women who have married Badrzay men, see Figure 2.
- Same figure in both diagrams indicate the same person.
- - - Broken vertical line: Number of genealogical steps unknown.
- Marriage link and betrothal relation.
- ▭ Household and initials of the household head.
- ⋯ AB

Samizay (Nurzay)  
Nek Mohammad

Milarzay (Nurzay)

△ Pordil

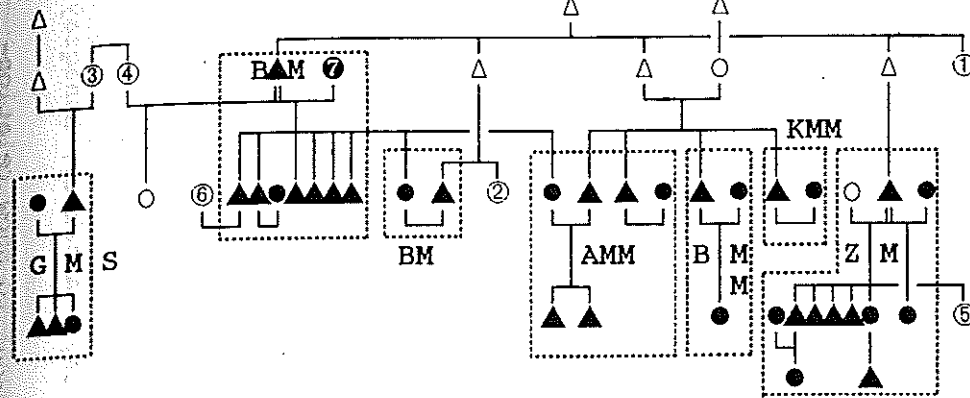


Figure 2:

Kinship and marriage relations among the members of the Milarzay and Samizay (subtribes of Nurzay Durrani) who at one or another time joined the camps described here. It supplements Figure 1.

free for all as long as those who claim usufruct rights to a defined area do not appear on the scene with their animals. Reservation *in absentia* is not permitted. Usufruct rights can be obtained simply by using an area for several consecutive years. (b) In the highlands (summer area) the best pastures are under control of the nearest villagers who own the pastures corporately and rent them out to nomads on a seasonal basis. Nomads can acquire firm grazing rights by purchasing farm land, canals or wells in or adjacent to the pasture. This option is rarely used because in the western Central Afghan highland the quality of a given pasture may change from year to year and cannot be depended upon.<sup>5</sup>

The nomads of this study breed fat-tailed sheep and goats, and use camels for transportation. The main source of income is selling live animals (61 % of total income), the second source is producing wool and dairy products for the market (28.5 %); 5.9 % of the total income derives from extraction and selling of steppe plants to villagers as fuel. From

these sales they buy cereals from the villagers and clothes and household utensils from the bazaar. About two thirds of the total amount of pastoral production are sold and one third is consumed directly (measured in market value). This indicates a high dependence on economic exchange with the non-pastoral sector.<sup>6</sup>

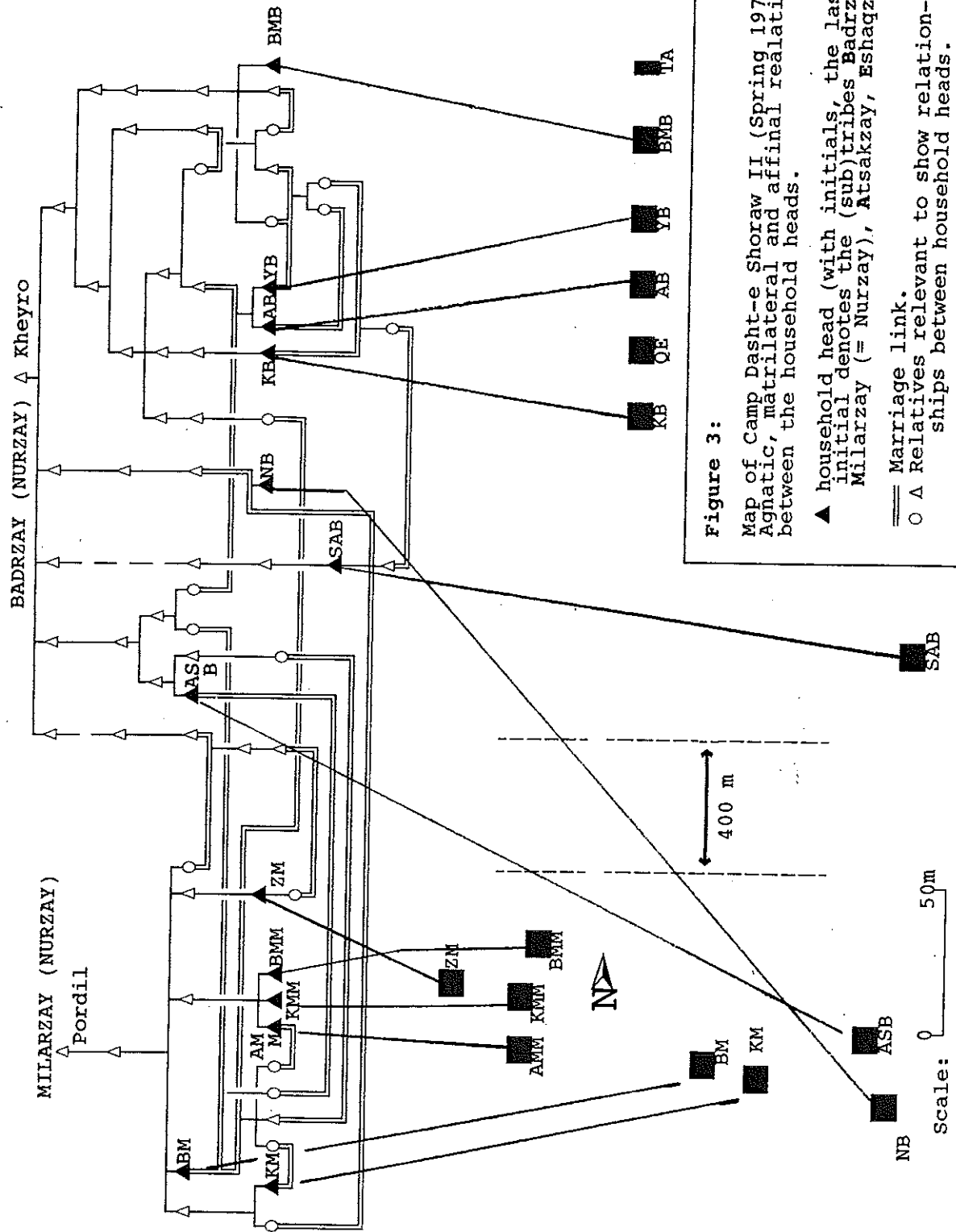
### History of a household

For a better understanding of the composition of the first camp (Dasht-e Shoraw-I, see Fig. 4) I begin with a description and history of one of its points of crystallization: the household of the brothers Ahmad Badrzay and Yusuf Badrzay (AB and YB). The last character of all initials used here indicate the subtribe of a person, in this case: B for Badrzay.

This tent was a branch of a large and versatile agricultural and pastoral and trading family enterprise. At the beginning of this research the tent was inhab-

Household and initials of the household head.

AB



**Figure 3:**  
 Map of Camp Dasht-e Shoraw II (Spring 1976).  
 Matrilineal and affinal relations between the household heads.

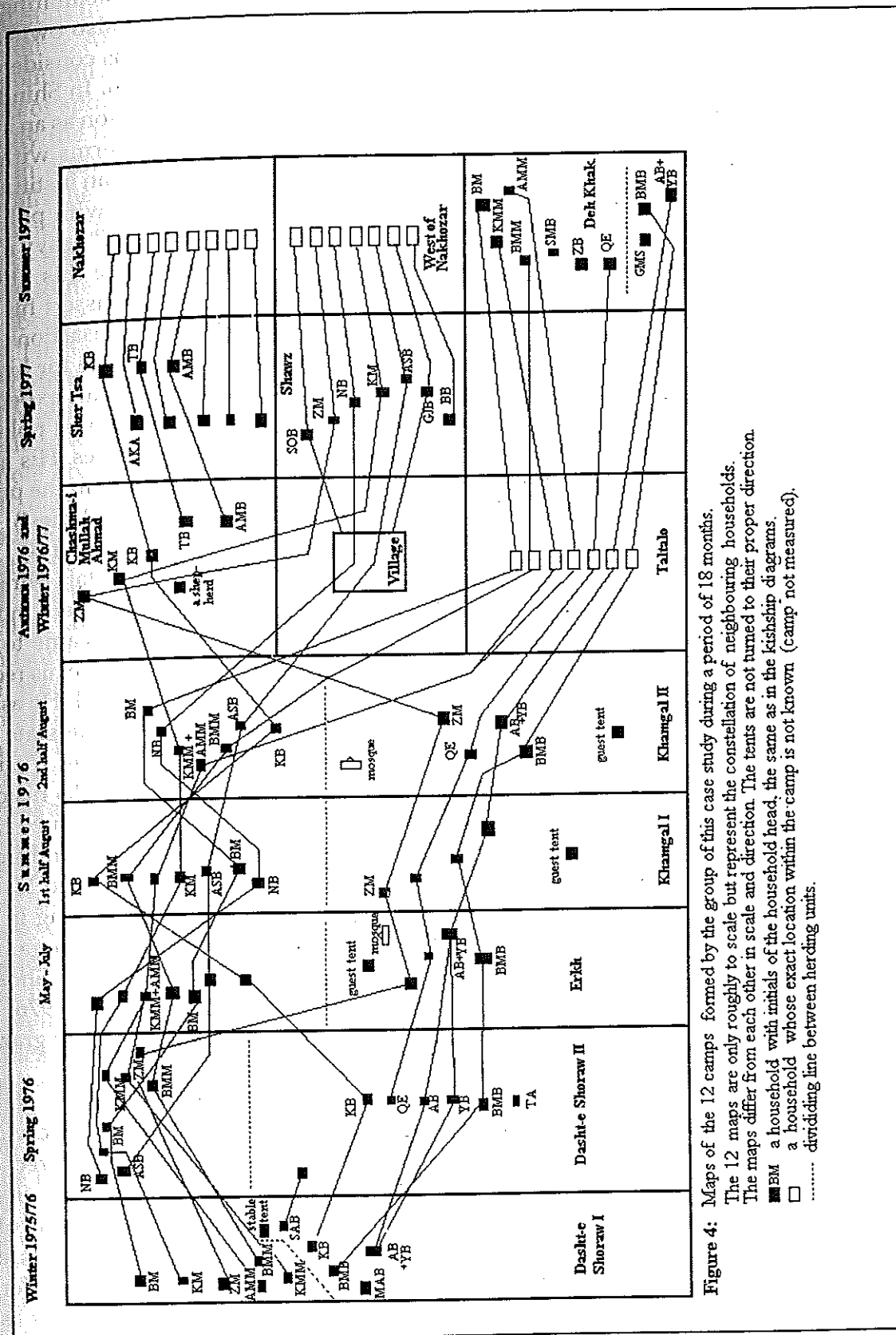
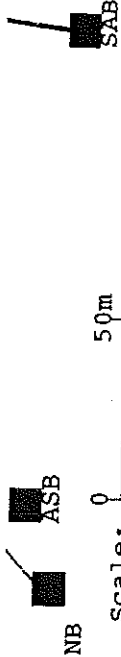
- ▲ household head (with initials, the last initial denotes the (sub)tribes Badrzay, Milarzay (= Nurzay), Atsakzay, Eshagzay.
- Marriage link.
- Relatives relevant to show relationships between household heads.



Milarzay (= Nurzay), 'Atsakzay, Eshaqzay.

— Marriage link.

○ A Relatives relevant to show relationships between household heads.



**Figure 4:** Maps of the 12 camps formed by the group of this case study during a period of 18 months. The 12 maps are only roughly to scale but represent the constellation of neighbouring households. The maps differ from each other in scale and direction. The tents are not turned to their proper direction. ■ BM a household with initials of the household head, the same as in the kinship diagrams. □ a household whose exact location within the camp is not known (camp not measured). ..... dividing line between herding units.



ited by Ahmad (age 35), his wife (30), his two sons (4 and 6), Khan-Bibi (50) his sister-in-law as well as his mother-in-law, and Ghafur (11) a son of Khan-Bibi.<sup>7</sup> About twice a week Yusuf (60) Ahmad's eldest brother and second husband of Khan-Bibi came from the village Bakhshabad to visit the nomadic part of his family.<sup>8</sup> In times of increased labour requirements, i.e. in spring during and after the lambing season, two adult sons of Yusuf – Mahmud and Karim – came from the village to give a helping hand. Khan-Bibi had one adult son from her first marriage who was absent on military service. In addition two labourers belonging to the Durrani tribe Eshaqzay lived in the tent; one helped the women of the household, the other relieved Ahmad from his duty as *gomârî* ("shepherd in turn").<sup>9</sup> Employing labourers is rather rare among western Afghan nomads; this household was in an unusual dilemma: Ahmad was not experienced enough and the other male family members were too young to qualify for *gomârî*. The female work force was also too small to perform the usual women's chores, such as milking, buttering, spinning, weaving, cooking, etc. Yet the household was rich enough to overcome the problem by paying for labour.

The main family seat was not the tent but a comfortable mud fortress (*qal'ah*) in the village of Bakhshabad near Shindand. There, Yusuf resided as head of the family together with his next younger brother Hamidullah (50) and their women, children and servants. Besides Khan-Bibi, Yusuf had two more wives who lived in the *qal'ah*. This nomadic branch of an affluent rural enterprise owned 351 sheep/goats with 120 breeding sheep and 110 breeding goats.<sup>10</sup> Economically more important was the agriculture and the cross-border trade with animals (formerly also with opium). In 1977 a truck was purchased

in order to enter the transport business but was never used for facilitating nomadic migration. Yusuf also owned 30 ha irrigated land which is considered a large estate in this region. In Shindand Yusuf enjoyed his reputation as an influential *khân* on friendly terms with the sub-governor. *Khân* is not an institutionalized position; any man with political influence, any *drund saray* ("heavy man" or "big man") can assume this title. A *khân* has constantly to re-assert his status through continuous transactions, one of which is securing pasture for his clients. In return the *khân* can expect at least a limited and conditional political loyalty from his beneficiaries. His main reward is increased respect in the political arena (among the sedentaries!). The following case may illustrate this:

In spring 1975 a certain Hajji Miragha of Khamgal (in the north-eastern mountains of Shindand district) came to the district centre in order to settle his recent land acquisitions in Khamgal. He asked Yusuf for brokerage with the state administration, and he lived in Yusuf's guest house during the weeks his case was pending. In fact Yusuf pursued Hajji Miragha's case successfully and in return the Hajji offered Yusuf and his clients unlimited summer grazing in the area of his farm land in Khamgal. Indeed, the nomads of Dasht-e Shoraw camp went there in summer 1976, but were disappointed with the low grazing quality (see below).

The three brothers Yusuf, Hamidullah and Ahmad had skilfully divided their tasks: Hamidullah acquired the position of a rural *malek* (Persian: *arbâb*). An officially registered spokesman of an unspecified number of peasants and nomads who may come from different villages and camps, the *malek* acts as an intermediary between his clients and the Government. The position of *malek* is more formal and more dependent on the

Government but less powerful and less prestigious than that of *khân*. The youngest brother, Ahmad, got the honourable but politically unrewarding position of *sarkhêl* or spokesman of a nomad camp. Usually the head of the richest household in a camp becomes *sarkhêl* automatically: he has to feed all the guests of the camp. The *sarkhêl* acts as a spokesman of the camp particularly when it comes to negotiations about pastures and about right of way during migrations. He has to find shepherds and to negotiate the contracts with them. He has no deciding power within the camp. Decisions which matter for the camp as a whole are decided in councils of all adult males and often also females. Throughout our stay I heard complaints about the inability of the *sarkhêl* Ahmad to find better pastures.

Yusuf and his brothers are great-grandsons of a certain Taj Mir, who in turn was great-grandson of Kheyro Khan, the founder of a lineage of predominantly sedentary Badrzay Nurzay, localized south of Shindand town. Taj Mir was a weighty *khân* in the region but his sons and grandsons went into oblivion until Yusuf and his brothers ventured into cross-border trade with opium. When the opium business became too dangerous they shifted to livestock. The surplus of the business went, in a well-planned manner, into the diversification of the family's economy, in more irrigated land and particularly into breeding livestock. The family's flock of sheep and goats increased fast and could not be kept in the village anymore because of lack of fodder and pasture. That stage was reached in 1964. They remembered their distant uncle Babar Mohammad (FFFFBSSS and FZDHB), a poor nomad who could pasture the animals ("BMB" in the drawings of this article). Later, when their livestock increased further Babar Mohammad be-

came overburdened, the flock had to be divided and the other part was given to another nomadic household: to Bakhtyar Milarzay ("BM"), Yusuf's mother's sister's husband, who is tied by multiple affinal links with the Badrzay. To understand relations with the Milarzay an excursion into the marriage relations of the group is helpful:

The Milarzay are a small, almost exclusively nomadic, subtribe of the Nurzay. Bakhtyar, grandson of Pordil Milarzay, was the elder of a small group of his sons' and his brother's sons' nomadic households. This group was purely nomadic, none of them owned land, they knew of no patrilineal relatives in any village. Such a situation is considered economically hazardous: there is no relative to rely on in times of crises if a family loses its livestock. In such times, e.g. during droughts, nomads have only a limited potential to assist each other, because normally they are all affected in the same way. Good relations to farmers may be crucial for survival. If agnatic relations are not extant, matrilineal and affinal relations are good alternatives. Tribal law obliges agnates to assist each other, but often excuses are found to evade this. Matrilineal and affinal relations are considered by the Pashtuns as more affectionate and warm, so in times of need and desperation one may rather rely on them, or even better: on agnatic relations which are supplemented by matrilineal and/or affinal ones. Pashtuns consider purely agnatic relationships as ambivalent: legal obligations are regularly counterbalanced by feelings of rivalry and enmity. One should keep in mind that patrilineal descent in Middle Eastern societies may be a means to bind large populations together, but the same structure serves also for fission and division of social groups. Pashtun *tarbûrwâlî* ("[hostile] cousinship") has been the fo-

cus of much anthropological attention (see e.g. Ahmad 1980, Lindholm 1981).

For these reasons the purely nomadic lineage of Pordil Milarzay sought strategic marriage links with sedentary villagers. They found families of the lineage Kheyro Badrzay in Bakhshabad who were interested in links with nomads. Their original motivations were impossible for me to find out because the first actors of this relationship were not alive anymore. As can be seen from Figure 3 a distant patrilineal uncle of Yusuf and Ahmad married a sister of Bakhtyar Milarzay. Since my informants consider affinal links to fade-out emotionally after a decade or so, it is important to re-affirm them by repeated marriages. Ideally, these relations should be symmetrical. Thus Bakhtyar Milarzay acquired for himself a Badrzay who happened to be a sister of Yusuf's and Ahmad's mother. After this woman's death Bakhtyar renewed the link by marrying another Badrzay, this time a patrilineal secondary cousin (FFBSD) of Yusuf. Again, for re-enforcement, Bakhtyar gave one of his own daughters to his in-laws: to Agha Sher Badrzay (ASB), a man who had strong nomadic interests and who joined the camp later on. Agha Sher, in turn, persuaded his brother to marry off his daughter to a son of Bakhtyar. Long ago Also Bakhtyar's brother's sister had also married another sedentary member of Kheyro Badrzay's clan. Her husband, owner of 2.5 ha of very poor land, planned to start pastoralism, hence his interest in a nomad wife. However, due to the great drought of 1970-72 and because of other bad luck he failed to become a nomad, while during the time of my research their son Nurullah (NB) just started a promising nomadic career, encouraged by his mother and assisted by his mother's brother Kohendil Milarzay (KM). Again, in the next generation, the affinal link

between the two lineages was continued by the marriage of Bakhtyar's brother's son's daughter with the grandson of that very Badrzay who was the first to marry a Milarzay woman (for an illustration of this web of marriages see Figs. 1,2,3).

Back to the brothers Yusuf and Ahmad: Yusuf entrusted a part of his livestock in Bakhtyar Milarzay's care, but as every farmer and nomad in west Afghanistan knows, animal husbandry pays only if the owner himself cares for the animals and if his household also engages in secondary pastoral production: milk products, wool, and textiles. It is also common knowledge that an adult farmer may start nomadism, but not without a woman who has grown up in a tent. Therefore the brothers finally decided to establish their own nomadic household and to marry nomad women. Yusuf was at that time about 48 years old and in west Afghanistan it is not considered auspicious if a couple is too far apart in age. Thus an unmarried girl was out of question, she had to be a widow. Babar Mohammad Badrzay's sister Khan-Bibi (see above) had lost her husband three years earlier and now lived with her two daughters and a minor boy in Babar Mohammad's tent. She was the ideal choice for Yusuf. The elder daughter of Khan-Bibi was of marriageable age, so it was not far-fetched for Yusuf's brother Ahmad, at that time aged 23, to marry her soon after. Young Ahmad had a wider choice of brides, but Yusuf and Ahmad intended to form only one nomad household and there is a belief that mother and daughter in the same household promise harmonious family relations. Not only Yusuf's and Ahmad's views were important, however; among Durrani a widow cannot be remarried without her consent. She actually made it a condition to stay together with at least one of her grown-up daughters and with her son. Had Ahmad married an-

other woman, Khan-Bibi had to expect an inferior role in the household, because unlike her own husband who did not intend to stay permanently in the camp, Ahmad would be the *de facto* household head supporting his own wife in whatever conflict that arose. This double marriage tied together the new household of the brothers very closely to that of Babar Mohammad, their brother-in-law and uncle-in-law respectively. It was Babar Mohammad who became their faithful tutor, advisor, guardian and helping hand in all pastoral matters in which the brothers were inexperienced. Even 13 years later, when these field notes were taken, this relation had not changed. Babar Mohammad was much more successful as a teacher for new nomads than in his own economic affairs. In spring 1977 he did not own more than 85 sheep/ goats. Also Kamal, another new nomad, became his apprentice and later married the other daughter of Khan-Bibi (see below). For Babar Mohammad through this relationship he gained security. He had no other sedentary relatives to rely on in bad years. During the big drought of 1970-72 this arrangement actually paid off; he could save his animals with additional fodder from Yusuf's farm. The Milarzay survived due to the assistance of their in-laws among the sedentary Badrzay.

When the brothers started their nomadic household they joined the herding unit of Bakhtyar Milarzay together with Babar Mohammad. On Yusuf's request the Milarzay agreed to camp near Bakhshabad, except in summer. This arrangement allowed Yusuf to regularly visit his nomad tent, while he continued to live for most of his time in the village. For the Milarzay the advantage of firm grazing rights was important, something Yusuf could secure through his political influence in the area. The brothers' ani-

mal wealth increased fast, not so much because of their pastoral skills but because they continued to invest the surplus from their cross border trade into their flocks. In 1967 Khan-Bibi's second daughter was married to Kamal, a young farmer's son who started nomadism. After a year Kamal joined Ahmad's and Babar Mohammad's herding unit but after one season he had to leave to join another herding unit. The reason for this casts light on problems of co-herding:

Full nomads such as the Milarzay keep predominantly sheep because the latter are by far more profitable than goats: a live sheep fetches double the market price of a goat. Full nomads keep goats only for making herds more dirigible and for making tents from goat hair. Semi-sedentary pastoralists prefer goats because the latter need less care and herding and don't need distant summer migrations; goats can be kept the year round in the lowlands. Goat herders can save the very high expenses of camels needed for long migrations. Goats have higher yields of milk than sheep; this is an important point for poorer nomads: the poorer the household the higher the relative income from milk products in comparison to income from sales of livestock. To enhance their pastoral enterprise the brothers purchased camels and increased the number of sheep in their flock. Kamal being poorer and not yet having decided to make the final step to full nomadism avoided the investment of camels and kept his goats (for his shorter migrations he could borrow camels).

In 1970 an armed conflict on agricultural land ownership in Bakhshabad broke out between some Badrzay and some Korizay families (both subtribes of Nurzay). The final decision was taken in a group duel: 20 warriors of either side lined up opposite each other at a dis-

tance of several hundred metres and shot at each other until the first man fell. It was a Korizay, the day was won by the Badrzay. Unfortunately the victim died later on, reason enough for the state court at Shindand to get involved. The verdict declared the Badrzay collectively guilty of man slaughter and ordered them to name one man as a culprit to receive punishment. There were several who boasted as being the hero but Yusuf being the leader took the responsibility and produced one of his own family. It was Ahmad who could best be spared from other tasks: Yusuf and Hamidullah considered themselves indispensable to continue family politics and Mahmud, Yusuf's eldest son, was drafted in the military. In addition, Ahmad had got involved in a quarrel with the Milarzay, thus for the sake of peace in the camp Yusuf found it convenient to remove his brother from the scene and agreed to have him sentenced in 1972 to 10 years in jail. Meanwhile, Mahmud came home from military service, and was thus able to head the pastoral household in Ahmad's absence.

Ahmad was released only 3 years later and resumed his position as household head and *sarkhêl* in the nomad camp. Mahmud again resumed his trading business. By now the household owned 350 sheep/goats and two tents; in winter one was used as living room and the other as animal stable, in spring the pastoral family spread into two tents. In summer the family again used only one living tent and pitched the second for guests. During the 13 years of the household's history three children were born; Khan-Bibi gave birth to one son and her daughter, Ahmad's wife, got two sons. At the time we joined the camp, Khan-Bibi's first son served in the military and her second was already an effective hand and a good *sarwân* (camelherd). In winter 1974/75, before

Ahmad's release, Mahmud and his family's nomadic household went to the camp Taltalo in Anardarra District, half way between Shindand and the Iranian border. Babar Mohammad accompanied him and they joined other Nurzay nomads whose identity I could not establish. Mahmud wanted to be closer to his business in Iran.

## The camps

### *The camp Dash-e Shoraw I*

In winter 1974/75 when the households of Yusuf, Mahmud and Babar Mohammad camped in Taltalo, Kamal Badrzay and the Milarzay stayed in Dasht-e Shoraw (15 km south of Shindand) and formed one herding unit. The pasture quality was better than in Taltalo where Kamal and the Milarzay had no business. Having camped there in former years and being relatives and clients of Yusuf, they enjoyed unquestioned pasture right south of Shindand. Their herding unit was at its upper limit and since Kamal's flock grew further in spring 1975 the herding unit could no longer be maintained. Kamal left the Milarzay. In summer 1975 in the highlands, when Ahmad had returned from jail and taken over his household Kamal, Ahmad and Babar Mohammad formed a new herding unit. Since their livestock were still not enough to form a viable herd they invited Sher Ahmad Badrzay who had kept his animals in the village last winter to join them. In autumn there came a lone nomadic household from Gulran (northwest of Herat) to Shindand fleeing a family feud: Muhammad Anwar Badrzay (MAB). Without knowing anyone in Shindand M. Anwar heard of a *khân* with influence among local nomads who by chance belonged to the same subtribe as he himself: Yusuf. It was an honour for Yusuf and his brothers to



grant M. Anwar asylum, and it came in handy because Ahmad was looking for another nomad household to complete his herding unit. Together with the Milarzay who now formed a herding unit of their own they went to Dasht-e Shoraw in order to spend the winter there. As mentioned above, these two herding units were bound to each other not only by common interest in the good pastures of the Dasht but also by many matrilineal and affinal ties. This was the constellation when we met the group in January 1976.

In winter 1975/76 the six tents of the Milarzay, of the Badrzay brothers, of Babar Mohammad, Kamal, Sher Ahmad and of Muhammad Anwar Badrzay all together 11 households moved close to one another to form a very compact camp. This was despite their forming two herding units which normally demand more space between each other; but this winter was unusually cold: in the worst nights (when we measured  $-8^{\circ}\text{C}$  inside our tent) wolves sneaked into the camp and stole sheep even out of the tents. The composition of the camp equalled very much the one in pre-drought times when the brothers and Kamal joined Babar Mohammad and the Milarzay (see Figure 4).

Regarded out of context, this camp gives the impression that camps are defined neatly along unilineal descent groups: with only one exception (Mohammad Anwar Badrzay) the two herding units of the camp were each recruited out of only one lineage. Indeed, patrilineages are important for camp formation, but they do not define camps nor do they guarantee stability. This neat camp constellation was unstable too and broke apart a few months later.

The *raison d'être* of herding units has been explained already from the economic and technical point of view, but why do two or more herding units come

together to form joint camps? Security and mutual protection are mentioned above, there is yet another reason: sheep and goats are usually herded in groups of 500 to 600 animals for reasons already mentioned. Herding units are formed around that number of their pooled livestock property. But if two herding units go together they can form a big herd pool, *rama* in Pashtu, out of which varying herds can be formed according to different criteria, e.g. sheep in one herd, goats in another, "dry" animals in one, lactating in another, breeding stock vs. stock for sale etc., and still each of these specific herds may be big enough for economic herding.

#### *Dasht-e Shoraw II (spring 1976)*

In spring 1976 the camp moved a few 100 metres away and spread out in the open plain. It is the lambing and milking season, the mother animals have to come to the households every day, lambing needs human assistance and milking takes place in front of the tents. New born lambs are kept in the tents and once a day are brought to their mothers for drinking. This requires ample space around the tents, particularly herding units have to be kept clearly separate from each other. The maps of Dasht-e Shoraw II in Figures 3 and 4 reflect just this, not a substantial change in social relations. Figure 3 also shows the agnatic and affinal relations between all the household heads, except for the newcomers Quddus Eshaqzay (QE) and Tawkal Atsakzay<sup>11</sup> (TA), who were unrelated and joined the camp as Mullah and shepherd respectively. I tried to draw the kinship diagram in Fig. 3 arbitrarily in such a way that it comes closest to the topographical lay-out of the camp. A superficial glance at this diagram may lead to the wrong impression that the camp was defined along the lines of kinship and marriage. This is not

the case: a complete kinship diagram of all nomadic households of this Badrzay lineage would show many more households of the same lineage, most of whom were camping elsewhere. There were also descendants of Pordil Milarzay who never joined this group.

*Nurullah and Agha Sher:*

There is one interesting change: Two new households, Nurullah Badrzay and Agha Sher Badrzay (NB and ASB in the figures) came into the camp, but not into the section of the other Badrzays; they joined the Milarzay quarter instead. The first explanation given to me was that the herding unit of the Milarzay had less animals than that of the Badrzay. However, this was not fully convincing, because in spring herding units are not that important and Kamal had separated his animals anyway, so the rest of Ahmad's herding unit could have integrated the two new Badrzay flocks. In later camps, when the herding units were reshuffled many times Nurullah and Agha Sher remained with the Milarzay and never joined Ahmad's herding unit. Later a more convincing explanation was given to me by Nurullah and Agha Sher themselves: they simply wanted to be with their mother's kin and in-laws. Kohendil Milarzay was Nurullah's mother's brother and his nomadic tutor (Nurullah was a newcomer to nomadism) and Agha Sher had a double affinal link with the Milarzay: Bakhtyar Milarzay was his father-in-law, and a son of Bakhtyar had married Agha Sher's niece. On the other hand Agha Sher had also affinal relations with Ahmad Badrzay: his mother-in-law was sister of Ahmad's mother. Nurullah's preference for his maternal uncle Kohendil Milarzay is clear: in Pashtun society the relation to one's paternal uncle is formal and defined by obligations, honour and respect, the maternal uncle on the other hand is considered as

a dear and loving relative, the one you can also joke with. Given the choice to reside near one's paternal or near one's maternal uncle most Pashtuns would not think twice. The closeness of Agha Sher's household to the Milarzay vs. the Badrzay can best be understood when seen from the angle of Agha Sher's wife: she simply wanted to have her household near her father's. Women pitch the tents – and often decide where.<sup>12</sup>

One household left the camp: Mohammad Anwar received news from Gulran that his family dispute was settled, so he went back without leaving a trace in the Dasht-e Shoraw. As mentioned already, the two other households were those of Mullah Quddus Eshaqzay and Tawkal Atsakzay. Both were directly called in by Ahmad.

*Mullah Quddus:*

Since long it was Ahmad's wish to engage a mullah: if Muslim rituals were observed regularly by the group and supervised professionally, in short, if the *azân* were to be heard over the steppes, the reputation of the camp and of himself as the responsible *sarkhêl* would increase considerably. It was difficult to find a nomad mullah, several candidates were examined but their material demands on the flock (the human and the animal ones) were too high. Finally Quddus applied, he owned enough animals to sustain himself and his family on it and thus asked only for a modest annual fee for his services: 8 sheep as fixed *zakât* and an unspecified amount of butter fat, wool and *qwret* (dried butter milk) depending upon the services he would actually perform.

*The shepherd's household:*

This household was very poor, it consisted of an old man, Tawkal Atsakzay, his son Sakhidad, the latter's wife and two minor children. They had no animals of their own. As a shepherd



Sakhidad could expect to earn his daily bread and one tenth of the new-born lambs and kids in the following spring. Unlike shepherds among the Komachi in Iran (Bradburd 1980), Pashtun shepherd do not form a social class of their own. Usually a shepherd has a good chance within five years of earning enough sheep and goats to support his own independent household. Shepherding is a transitory stage in the career of a normal nomad.

*Sher Ahmad Badrzay:*

As can be seen from Figure 3, Sher Ahmad Badrzay camped a bit separately from all the others. This had two reasons: (1) Sher Ahmad owned 200 sheep/goats, thus he needed ample space around his tent (2) his elder son, aged 36, had a difficult and unstable temper, to put it mildly. His aggressiveness and uncontrolled temper antagonized most other camp members. The Milarzay declared categorically that this was the last camp in which they would live together with this household. Kamal tried to defuse the situation by making friends demonstratively with Sher Ahmad and by even promising one of his daughters to a minor son of Sher Ahmad; however Ahmad feeling more obliged to the Milarzay than to his distant paternal cousin, Sher Ahmad, sided with the former and succeeded in persuading the latter to join another camp group.

*Erkh (summer 1976)*

On April 15, the camp began its spring migration to the summer area (*siyâband*).<sup>13</sup> After three weeks they reached Khamgal (63° 23' East, 33° 55' North), 12 km north of Farsi, the seat of the easternmost subdistrict of Shindand. Hajji Miragha, a client of Yusuf (see above), had offered them unrestricted grazing in that area, but the pasture proved to be of poor quality and after one week the group moved to the foot of

the mountain Safed Koh (63° 18' East, 33° 55' North) where the provinces Farah, Herat and Ghor meet. After one month the pastures were exhausted and they moved on to Erkh near Sang-e Mashina (63°35' East, 33° 52' North), a few kilometres east of the spot where the road Shindand-Chaghcharan crosses the border between Ghor and Farah. This camp was situated in a dry bed of a stream, at an altitude of about 2000 m. They stayed there till 26 July 1976. After paying a fee to the Taymani of Sang-e Mashina they could use the pastures on the surrounding hills. We had not accompanied the group since they left their spring camp, we only met them again here in Erkh.

*Change in composition:*

Sher Agha and Tawkal had left the camp (Tawkal, because his son did not perform well as a shepherd), and the two herding units were reshuffled. As in Dasht-e Shoraw II the two camp sections were also separated by some 100 m (see Figure 4). One herding unit consisted of the inseparable households of Babar Mohammad and Ahmad, and also of Mullah Quddus. One Milarzay was added: Zarin (ZM). Kamal with his considerable animal wealth of 162 sheep/goats had shifted over to the Milarzay section. When asked Kamal, and Zarin told me that the reason why they shifted was the imbalance of the two herding units: the Badrzay unit was too big. Zarin owned only 64 sheep/goats, through the shift of Kamal and Zarif both the herding units would be balanced. A later calculation of the different household flocks revealed that other combinations would have led to the same effect; e.g. Nurullah and Agha Sher could have gone to the Badrzay unit allowing Zarin to stay with his Milarzay, but we had already noticed a rivalry developing between Zarin and his paternal uncle Bakhtyar. Zarin, 60 years old,

became less and less willing to accept the authority of his uncle. In the new herding unit at least he had freed himself from the embarrassing role of a grand father being treated by his uncle of the same age like a little boy; so he volunteered to join another herding unit. For Kamal there was no alternative, Ahmad's and Kamal's animals together simply did not fit. Later also, Kamal and Ahmad could not come together again, despite their wives' (who were sisters) efforts. Ahmad began to feel the fate of the rich nomad: the larger one's animal wealth the smaller the choice of partners for co-herding.

Another minor change occurred in the Milarzay herding unit: The two households of the brothers Khwaja Mohammad Milarzay and Agha Mohammad Milarzay (KMM and AMM in the figures) merged into one because Agha Mohammad went to Iran to earn cash to buy more sheep for his own flock which had fallen below the existence minimum. In his absence his family moved into the tent of his brother Khwaja Mohammad. Labour in Iran is the fastest way to earn cash; the opportunity of easy labour there was also why it became very difficult to find shepherds.

#### *Khamgal I and II (summer 1976)*

By the end of July the pastures of Erkh were exhausted and competition with the local Taymani for the same pastures increased. Under pressure from the Taymani the group left and went back to Khamgal to give Hajji Miragha's pastures another try. The camp composition did not change during that time. The pastures still proved very bad, but better ones could not be found. By the end of August the milking season was over, there was no reason for the households to stay any longer near the herds, which could now seek pastures at remote

places where the households did not follow. The herds were tended by one professional shepherd each and by members of the herding units who were replaced from time to time. We had to leave the group for a renewal of our research permission and we could not monitor the following camps. Later I learnt that the group broke up in early September, some households stayed a few weeks longer in the highlands simply to enjoy the better climate, the others came near the villages of their next sedentary kinsmen to participate in the *rîngay* ritual:

#### *rîngay*

*rîngay* (or Persian *sofrah*) is a custom to bind nomads and sedentaries together. In autumn many nomads camp around villages where they have close patrilineal and/or matrilineal/affinal kinsmen. Everyday they expect one village relative to appear in the tent bringing along a dining cloth (*rîngay*) packed with good food. Later the nomads return the cloth filled with *qwret* (dried butter milk). All relatives residing in that village serve their nomad kinsmen in this manner one by one. After the round is completed the nomads flock in the village and are hosted by their relatives - everyday in another house. Nomads are entitled to bring along friends and colleagues who may not have relatives in that village. This time Ahmad brought along Mullah Quddus, Bakhtyar and three other Milarzay households: Khwaja Mohammad with Agha Mohammad and Kohendil. Agha Mohammad had returned from Iran and pitched his own tent again. Babar Mohammad went to another village where his closest relatives resided.

#### *Winter 1976/77*

##### *Taltalo*

In October the herds come back from the highlands and the nomad households

move away from the vicinity of the villages to establish their winter camps. During *rīngay* Yusuf and Mahmud persuaded Ahmad and the other participants to spend the winter in Taltalo again. Mahmud said he had been there and found the pastures very good. So, Ahmad, the 4 Milarzay households, the Mullah and Babar Mohammad went there. The two other households of Bakhtyar's former herding unit (Nurullah Badrzay and Agha Sher Badrzay) preferred to spend the winter in the village. As we had no opportunity to travel to Taltalo the map of Taltalo, Fig. 4, is only schematic and does not indicate the relative position of the tents.

#### *Chashma-i Mullah Ahmad*

Zarin Milarzay refused to accompany his lineage brothers to Taltalo because he did not see a point in travelling so far. He found the pastures near Shindand were also not bad. With his lame leg he had to ride on a camel during migration which he intensely disliked. Kamal Badrzay and Kohendil Milarzay shared his view and formed a new herding unit at Chashma-i Mullah Ahmad, between Shindand and the Dasht-e Shoraw. Three more households joined: an unrelated shepherd with his family and two more Badrzay households: that of Tawkal (TB) and of Amir (AMB). Tawkal was born a nomad but had become sedentary due to bad luck. In the village he worked hard to raise money and sent his sons to Iran. With the money they earned he could purchase 50 sheep and a black tent. This enabled him to return to the nomads in autumn 1976, just the time when his wife's sister's son, Kamal Badrzay, was looking for partners for his newly established herding unit; better company was hard to imagine. The case of Amir was similar to Tawkal's: Amir was an old nomad, but when his only son was drafted in to the military he sold his ani-

mals and settled with some farming relatives. After his son was returned, he bought a small flock of sheep and goats and resumed nomadism. As a Badrzay he had a choice of several camps to join, but he followed his brother-in-law Tawkal and joined Kamal's herding unit. The wives of Amir and Tawkal and the mother of Kamal were sisters: a very solid basis for good camp neighbourhood. In addition, Amir's daughter was married to Kamal's brother. This strong constellation survived the following re-shuffling of herding units.

#### *Spring and summer 1977*

##### *Sher Tsa and Nakhozar*

In spring when the herd of the unit grew considerably, a division was unavoidable. Kamal Badrzay, Tawkal Badrzay, and Amir Badrzay formed a herding unit of their own and went together to Sher Tsa, some 6 km south of the winter camp. There they shared the camp with another herding unit of three Atsakzay brothers who were friends of Kamal. Some years earlier Kamal had specialized in goats (see above) and spent the summers with these Atsakzay in the lowland. Meanwhile the Atsakzay had diversified their flocks like

Kamal. Later the two herding units migrated together unchanged to the mountains. First they went near Farsi, then to a place named Nakhozar, 20 km Southwest of Farsi. Although we paid a short visit to Nakhozar we were not able to measure the camp, hence the schematic plan in Figure 4.

##### *Shawz*

Zarin Milarzay and Kohendil Milarzay were not left alone, they just moved a few kilometres south of Chashma-i Mullah Ahmad near Dasht-e Shoraw in sight of the concrete road Herat-Kandahar. There they attracted those

former camp-mates who had spent the winter in the village: Nurullah Badrzay and Agha Sher renewing their neighbourhood of last year's spring camp (see above). Since they all had relatively small flocks they needed additional camp mates to form a viable herding unit. Three more Badrzay households could be recruited: Sado (SOB), Gul Jan (GJB), and Basir (BB). The two former had also been in winter in the village, Basir came from another winter camp. Sado placed his tent right beside that of Zarin, the father-in-law of his brother; or one should rather say, Sado's sister-in-law, whose husband worked in Iran, pitched tent besides her father's. Gul Jan was a distant cousin of the other Badrzay, but nobody knew precisely how he was related to them. He was a village neighbour of Nurullah. Basir was a first cousin of Nurullah and despite the customary ambiguity of Pashtun paternal cousin relations Basir and Nurullah maintained cordial ties with each other. For summer camp they went a few km west of Nakhozar without changing their camp composition.

#### *Deh Khak*

In spring the group who had spent the winter in Taltalo came through Shindand and contacted the groups in Sher Tsa and Shawz but stayed only a few days in the region. Before they moved on to the summer area they attracted three more households: Gul Mohammad Samizay<sup>14</sup>, Zarif Badrzay and Shah Mard Badrzay. Gul Mohammad and Zarif were well linked matrilaterally with Bakhtyar Milarzay and Ahmad: Gul Mohammad's, Zarif's and Ahmad's mothers, and Bakhtyar's former wife were sisters. Why didn't they join earlier? The reason: during the drought of 1970-72 Gul Mohammad succeeded in saving his animals, but following a general pessimism among nomads in west

and central Afghanistan who lost most of their animals in those years (see Mir Aqa et al, 1973), he sold all his livestock for a piece of agricultural land. Lacking success in agriculture he later regretted, sold his land and purchased a flock of 100 sheep. This was the first camp Gul Mohammad joined after many years. Zarif so far camped with other relatives. He spent the winter of 1975/76 in Shawz where he was very close to his mother's kin; the summer before he had gone to Deh Khak, some 22 km east of Farsi. When he met the group of Ahmad and Bakhtyar in spring 1977 they were still undecided where to go in summer, Zarif suggested trying out Deh Khak. Shah Mard was of another lineage of the Badrzay whose patrilineal link to the rest of the subtribe was unknown. When looking for a camp to stay in he made use of his brother's marriage with a sister of Nurullah. Therefore he first contacted Nurullah, but the latter's herding unit was complete, as was the other herding unit of Nurullah's camp. At that time, by chance, Ahmad and Bakhtyar just came along with their camp, so he was invited to join Bakhtyar's herding unit. After all, his brother's wife was a niece of Bakhtyar, thus Shah Mard was not unknown in that camp.

In Deh Khak we finished field research.

#### Conclusion

With this case study of camp transformations among a single nomadic group in west Afghanistan I tried to demonstrate the multitude of causes generating actual camps. The acting camp members consciously take this plurality of factors into consideration when they plan and struggle for new and viable local groups. It is not possible to list the priorities of the factors, since these are dictated by

each unique situation. Of course, culturally given norms and values as well as the ecology restrict the choice and range of thinkable options, but the cultural and ecological givens in rural west Afghanistan allow a wide range of choices in which the actors can virtually form innumerable camps compositions. From this case study the following main factors can be extracted (though not in order of importance):

- a) Formal social relations:
  - Tribal and patrilineal relations between household heads
  - Matrilateral and affinal ties between them
  - Kinship relations between the women of the different households
  - Ethnic relations
- b) Informal relations:
  - Friendship, acquaintance, enmity, sympathy and aversion
- c) Size of households and their composition by sex and age
- d) Political relations
  - Political strategies of household heads
  - Decision making and adhering to decisions
  - Feuds and asylum
  - Relations with the state and with the sedentary world
- e) Ecological opportunities and constraints, carrying capacities and climatic variations
- f) Economic factors:
  - Variations of nomadic experience and skills
  - Economic strategies and market relations
  - Organisation and division of labour
  - Size and growth of household flocks
  - Composition of different livestock categories within household flocks
  - Poverty and wealth
- g) Territoriality, particularly pasture rights

h) Security

i) Nomadisation and sedentarisation

This case study intends to illustrate how these factors are interwoven. Ecology prescribes the maximum number of animals to be pastured in an area. The market value of their production prescribes how many humans can make a living from these animals. Ecology, herding behaviour of animals and the inherited experience of nomadic labour organization restrict organisational alternatives, but within this framework there is still a very wide range of possible alternatives in group formation. One camp may be built on agnatic ties only, the next purely on kinship relations between the wives or mothers of the household heads. Camps range from units of only one extended family or one fraternal joint family to a multi-ethnic, multi-tribal conglomerate of households which I found frequently in Badghis, northwest Afghanistan (Glatzer, 1977).

Although I had to condense and select from more diverse field data, I have tried to retain an image of complexity which is not reducible to a simple model or formula, and which each nomad actor has to deal with. The optimum composition of a herding unit or a camp can decide over its component households' survival in an extremely risky economic sector, viz. nomadism. This explains why nomads spend much time and energy in setting up communication networks for gathering vital information. Observers unfamiliar with nomadism often mistook this for a leisurely pastoral life: nomads (not only Pashtun) can sit and talk together for days and weeks, practice lavish hospitality and undertake hazardous trips for visiting other nomad groups.

Fluid and ephemeral camps are not new in the literature on nomadism in general and on Pashtun nomads in par-



ticular.<sup>15</sup> Spooner believes that the fluidity of camps has to be counterbalanced by a more stable wider social structure, viz. a rigid unilineal descent system (Spooner 1973). Tapper (1979) speaks of more stable nomadic communities behind the ephemeral camps. Indeed, the nomads of this case study recruit their camp mates from a wide range of kinsmen, affines, friends, former camp mates etc. Nomads who have an agricultural background use the village of their closest sedentary relatives as a fixed point in this fluid social environment. There is no defined wider social group out of which camps are formed. We have rather to speak of ego-centred social fields, each of which may encompass a hundred or so sedentary and nomadic households. Such a kindred, enlarged and enforced by other, personally achieved social relations provide a nomad household with a relatively reliable social backbone beyond the ephemeral camp.

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Pashtu words have been spelled as follows:

^ indicates a long vowel: *â* equals *a* in English *fall*, or *part*, depending on the dialect; *ê* as in English *air*, *î* as in English *these*, *û* as in English *goose*;   (underlining) indicates a retroflex consonant: *r* equals *rl* in American English *darling*; ' is a glottal stop, but more often just prolongs the following vowel; *e* is the *e* in English *the*; *kh* is pronounced as German

*ch* in *Bach*; *gh* is a fricative *g*, similar to French *r*.

Spelling of personal and geographical names follows common English usage and no diacritical marks are used.

### Notes

- (1) Planhol (1979) has directed our attention to the relevance of security for an understanding of nomadic organization.
- (2) No meteorological data are available from this area, only from Herat and Farah. Precipitation in the Dasht-e Shoraw may lie half way in-between.
- (3) On two smaller bazaar towns in northwest Afghanistan (Qala-yi Naw and Bala Murghab) see Planhol (1976).
- (4) For more on the ethnography, geography and history of Durrani Pashtun nomads and their neighbours see Ferdinand (1959, 1969b), Planhol (1973, 1976), Planhol & Balland (1975) Janata (1975, 1983, 1986), N. Tapper (1973), R. Tapper (1984), Tapper & Tapper (1982), Balland (1982, 1987, 1988b), Tavakolian (1984, 1987), Glatzer (1977).
- (5) For more on territoriality and pasture rights of this nomad group see Glatzer (1992).
- (6) For a detailed description and analysis of the household economy of this group see Glatzer & Casimir (1983).
- (7) All ages are rough estimates.
- (8) Bakhshabad is a pseudonym as are also the names of the persons in this article.
- (9) At night each of the households of a herding unit has to send one shepherd in turn (*gomârî*) to the joint herd to assist the professional shepherds (*chopân*). The rule is: one man each night per 20 sheep/goats; e.g. A household who owns 60 sheep/goats will send one man for 3 consecutive nights.
- (10) This household was unusually rich

by local standards. In our article on household economy (Glatzer & Casimir 1983) we have not included this household in our sample.

(11) As Nurzay and Eshaqzay, Atsakzay are another major tribe of the Durrani Pashtuns.

(12) Also see Tavakolian (1984, 1987) who stresses the important role of women in economy and social organization of western Pashtun nomads, particularly the brother-sister relations.

(13) The nomads of west and northwest Afghanistan use the general term *si-yâband* ("black mountain range") to denote all the highlands to which they migrate in summer. There is also a mountain range of that name in southwest Afghanistan.

(14) The Samizay are another subtribe of the Nurzay.

(15) "L'organisation territoriale des communautés nomades d'Afghanistan présente une remarquable instabilité. Le nomadisme réglé n'est pas un nomadisme figé" (Balland 1982: 61).

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Resumé

Une étude sur la terrain de dixhuit mois chez les nomades pashtunes de l'Afghanistan de l'ouest en 1975 et 1976 a permis d'analyser les prises de décision qui déterminent la composition des campements nomades. Même si les conditions écologiques et économiques délimitent le champs d'action, les décisions prises individuellement de joindre ou quitter un certain campement, de prendre de nouveaux membres ou d'en congédier d'autres dépendent d'une multitude de facteurs. Ceci est également valable s'il s'agit de fusionner ou de diviser des campements. Tous ces mécanismes dépendent également des rapports entre les femmes de même qu'entre les hommes, des relations matrilineales et affinales ainsi que patrilineales, sans oublier les affinités et les amitiés.

Resumen

En la presente contribución se analizan los factores y la toma de decisiones que determinan la composición de los campamentos de los nómades pashtunes occidentales. El trabajo se basa en una estadía de campo de 18 meses, realizada entre 1975 y 1976. A pesar de que las condiciones ecológicas y económicas delimitan el marco de acción, las decisiones individuales sobre la adhesión a un campamento o su abandono, sobre la incorporación de nuevos miembros o su expulsión dependen de una amplia gama de factores. Esto también es el caso para la fusión o la separación de campamentos. En todos los procesos mencionados influyen además las relaciones entre mujeres y hombres, las relaciones matrilineales, afines y patrilineales, así como también los vínculos emocionales y de amistad.

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