

A Taste for Freedom The Case of the Gomal Nomads

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This paper is speculative and exploratory.¹ Data were gathered during the period I was Political Agent in South Waziristan Agency (1978-1980) in Pakistan where some groups of the nomadic Suleman Khel and Dottani tribes live. These tribes have traditionally used the Gomal route to enter Pakistan, along the Gomal River which flows from Afghanistan into the Agency to join the Indus near Dera Ismail Khan. Over the last two generations some members of these tribes have decided to settle along the Gomal. Indeed, their association with the Gomal, reinforced by the presence of those who settled here created a name for them. They are known and refer to themselves - as "De Gomal Khalq" د گومل خلق (the people of Gomal). In this paper, I will, therefore, refer to the two tribes under discussion as the Gomal nomads.

Nomad ethnographies have traditionally, and perhaps correctly, placed an emphasis on the dominant role of ecology as a factor shaping society; indeed, comparative studies have almost come to regard nomadism as an ecological adaptation. Climate and terrain, availability of pasture and water, and

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¹I hope to publish a lengthier paper on this subject later.

types of animals herded, are seen to influence patterns of movement and forms of herding and camping associations. (Johnson, 1969; Krader, 1959; Rubel, 1969; Spooner, 1973; Sweet, 1965) Thus nomadism is treated as a *trait of cultural ecology*, characterized by *lack of interest in fixed property and fixed resources* (Spooner, 1973, p. 3-4). Political structures, too, are seen as related to ecology (Barth, 1961; Barth, 1962; Michaud, 1975; Salzman, 1967; Sweet, 1965). Reflecting another view, Bates (1971) and Irons (1974) supported Lattimore's argument (1940) that nomadism may be also seen as an adaptation to the political rather than the natural environment. Although sufficient literature exists on the above themes, there is a conspicuous lacuna on the ideological/cultural content of nomadic life as it relates to concrete administrative/political zones. The Gomal nomads exhibit a defined ideological position which instructs daily life. This ideological position offers additional significant explanations for understanding Gomal nomads and phases of their sedentarization.

While agreeing with the main body of literature on nomadism, I suggest that perhaps we may usefully examine ideology as an additional factor to ecology in explaining nomadism. My data from Waziristan indicates that we should examine ideology with specific reference to and within administrative zones more closely as an explanation of and for nomadism. I argue here that the Gomal nomads live in the administrative and social interstices of the larger states not by accident but by choice, not as victims of ecological conditions but as part of a political strategy which expresses explicitly a desire to live freely. This feature is perhaps most characteristic of those nomadic tribes crossing administrative/political borders in South Asia. The State in South Asia is traditionally highly centralized, monolithic and bureaucratic (the Mughal matrix being still visible). For the often illiterate, traditional, generally poor nomad, the State characterizes vast powers, corruption and impersonal administration. He wishes to remain free of its tentacles. He can do so only by movement.

In addition, it is suggested in this paper that nomadic life be seen as an ideal cultural expression or statement of the larger tribal group - usually sedentary - to which the nomads belong. Through a nomadic existence, certain key features of the larger society are translated, expressed and perpetuated. Nomadism may thus be seen as an ideological expression and social extension of Pukhtun society reflecting the two major systems within which the Pukhtun organizes his life, Pukhtunwali, the Code of the Pukhtuns, and Islam. Gomal nomads themselves emphasize these sets of ideologies, which presume and presuppose each other, in explaining their style of life. Indeed, there appears to be a conflation of these two systems as reflected in the key features of Gomal life.

There are two key features of the Gomal ideology: "azadi"² (political freedom) - owing allegiance to no political system or man - and thereby underscoring the unique and direct relationship with the one God; and "tor" (lit. black) or safeguarding honour of women. Together these two features permit the Gomal nomads the fullest possible expression of ideal Pukhtun values.

Azadi may be understood - as it is understood by the Gomal nomads in terms of administrative borders and structures.³ In this regard, a serious methodological criticism may be levelled at much of the

²Not all anthropologists heed Mauss that the anthropologist has "to be also a novelist able to evoke the life of a whole society" M Mauss, *Manuel d'ethnographie*, edited by D Pauline Payot Paris, 1947, p. 8. Novelists, on the other hand, with sometimes a sharper eye for cultural forms and comparisons than anthropologists who are necessarily confined to focusing on social features such as structure and organization, have perhaps best portrayed the feeling of freedom, azadi, of the nomads (among others Rudyard Kipling, John Masters and James Michener).

³Both nomads and administrators recognize the azadi of nomadic life. The azadi of another nomadic group, the Gujars, had struck me when I was a young administrator (aged 26) and in charge of Mansehra Sub-Division, as Assistant Commissioner in 1969. In an impressionistic essay I wrote of them: *There is an indescribable and unfettered freedom about*

literature on nomadism which ignores the existence of the administrative structures within which nomads operate. The nomads appear to make move and counter-move as a response to seasonal/ecological factors solely. They seem to operate in an administrative vacuum. However, transition from one administrative zone to another is a key factor in migration implying vastly differing personnel, rules and procedures. One major factor in migration is the attempt to escape or, where possible, exploit the administrative structures. Mobility allows nomads freedom inconceivable to peasant or settled groups. For instance, the Tribal Areas in Pakistan, where Government presence is minimal, allow the nomads almost complete freedom to transport and sell prohibited commodities. In contrast, this is more difficult in the Punjab due to different administrative arrangements. The escape from and exploitation of these administrative webs within which other groups live allows nomads cultural and political freedom. Their names appear on no revenue forms for taxation or police records for identification. Settled Pukhtuns who may be somewhat dismissive about the ignorance and poverty of nomads, such as the Gomal group, nonetheless recognize them as an expression of azadi which contrasts with their trapped situation within administrative and political webs. Their migrations and activities are thus viewed as "escaping" between and from different zones rather than as response to herding needs.

Migration may thus be seen as a political or cultural escape, both in a real and symbolic sense, from political zones. Indeed, this is how they perceive themselves. Their very names "powindah" پوؤنده (in Pakistan) "one who travels on foot" and "kochi" کوجي (in Afghanistan) "one who travels" (both derived from Persian) support this. I will also argue, as others have done, that to place nomads in a discreet social category with rigid boundaries may create methodological problems. Nomadism remains and reflects an aspect of its own desire to remain desedentarized. The sedentarization process, perhaps inevitable in the last half of the twentieth century, may be a logical state in social and economic progress but it also creates serious dilemmas for the Gomal nomad. For a start, his understanding of azadi the fundamental nomadic concept - is compromised.

Let us examine the ethnographic data.⁴ The Suleman Khel and Dottani, the Gomal nomads of this paper, are two of the smaller tribes of South Waziristan Agency. The Suleman Khel number some 1,513 and the Dottani 2,383 souls.^{5 6} The tribes are organized along segmentary principles familiar in the

them ... they laugh and march. Some nights camping by a grove of olive trees that protects a grave-yard, some nights under the shelter of jutting rocks by the road side; sometimes on the road in the month of sawan and its playful mists and rains; sometimes returning in September with trees along the road and in clumps turning autumn gold and yellow ... But always drifting, always free." in Akbar S Ahmed, *Mansehra: A Journey* Ferozsons, Lahore, Pakistan, 1973, p. 53

⁴Notes on Nomad Tribes of Eastern Afghanistan (Robinson, 1934, (1978 reprint)) written by a British political officer who served in the Agency about two generations ago - for the purpose of discouraging such groups from disrupting civil life in British India by petty theft, smuggling or even kidnapping - remains nonetheless a reliable document for the examination of the Gomal nomads. I was able to locate the descendants of some of the names mentioned by Robinson - and utilize his excellent genealogical charters.

⁵Census of Pakistan, Technical report Government of Pakistan, 1972

⁶These figures are somewhat suspect. Tribal enumerations are based on what are officially called "estimates". The

literature. That is, they exhibit "nesting" attributes, are acephalous, egalitarian and trace genealogical links to an apical ancestor characterized by me as nang or honour-based groups (Ahmed, 1980). The basic socio-economic - indeed political - unit appears to be the nuclear family, around the household head which includes his wife/wives and offspring organized as a "tent-camp". The number of this unit is usually between 12-15 souls. During and for the purposes of migration other such units related in the patrilineage join together. The tribes are found in south-east Afghanistan, where their major population lives, and also further south-east towards the Indus near Dera Ismail Khan.

Pastures in Pakistan are either those reserved by Government for the nomads, called chiraghan or melagah, or during migration those allowed by local tribes. Migration down the Gomal river and into Pakistan takes place annually in autumn and they return to their pastures in Afghanistan in early spring. Travel is calculated on the basis of a parowa or daily span of about 8-9 miles. Their animals are camels, sheep and goats. Horses are rarely used. Although the Gomal nomads are reluctant to mention the fact, there is an increasing tendency, over the last two generations, to "settle" one male sibling as owner of joint property - usually 1-4 acres along the Gomal river. This sedentarization, paradoxically, assists in the azadi of the nomads. The sedentarization of one member of the family allows them the best of both worlds. To enquiring officials, males are perpetually "out" on migration while the Gomal house is a useful "hideout" in times of trouble across the border.

Both tribes are marginal to the political life of the South Waziristan Agency which is dominated by two powerful cousin tribes, the Wazirs and Mahsuds, and their intense agnatic rivalry. Indeed the intensity of the Wazir-Mahsud agnatic rivalry draws in the political administration of the Agency; their azadi is thus compromised. In contrast, the Gomal nomads live outside the sphere of the administration.

Indeed, I was probably one of the first Political Agents to visit the Gomal nomads in their traditional stronghold, the Zarmelan plain. The plain is an arid, dusty bowl of rock and sand surrounded by desolate and barren mountains. It is perhaps for this reason that the Wazirs and Mahsuds have allowed the Gomal nomads ownership of Zarmelan. They also live along the banks of the Gomal river which allows them to cultivate one crop of wheat and barley.

An important event tying the Gomal nomads to the fixed administrative structure of the Agency during my tenure was my nomination in 1980 of the Suleman Khel elder, Zarif Khan Kamrani (whose genealogy is given in Figure-1) to the prestigious Agency council. He was the first Gomal nomad to be appointed and in time a vocal representative of their needs in Council meetings. My hope was that, through more active involvement in Agency affairs, the Gomal nomads could legitimately demand and obtain more facilities from Government. The connection would also serve the nomads well in the times of trouble that lay ahead in the region. I was not to be disappointed. Schools, tube-wells and roads were high on their list of demands - as they were on mine for these tribes. Another important development which took place during my tenure was directly related to the emerging political situation in the region. A Scouts ⁷ post has been established on the point where the borders of Afghanistan, Baluchistan and the North-West Frontier Province meet, on the banks of the Gomal river. Zarmelan today is thus "penetrated". The Zarmelan post situated on the vital route used by the Gomal nomads will surely affect their traditional movement; it detracts from their azadi. It also illustrates what is one of my major arguments in this

migratory nature of these two tribes makes the actual figure permanently living in the Agency even more difficult to assess. The continued deliberate vagueness of the tribesmen regarding such information further supports my argument: they do not wish to engage modern administrative apparatus as they feel it would compromise their freedom.

⁷The Scouts are a para-military force that guard the borders in the Tribal Areas.

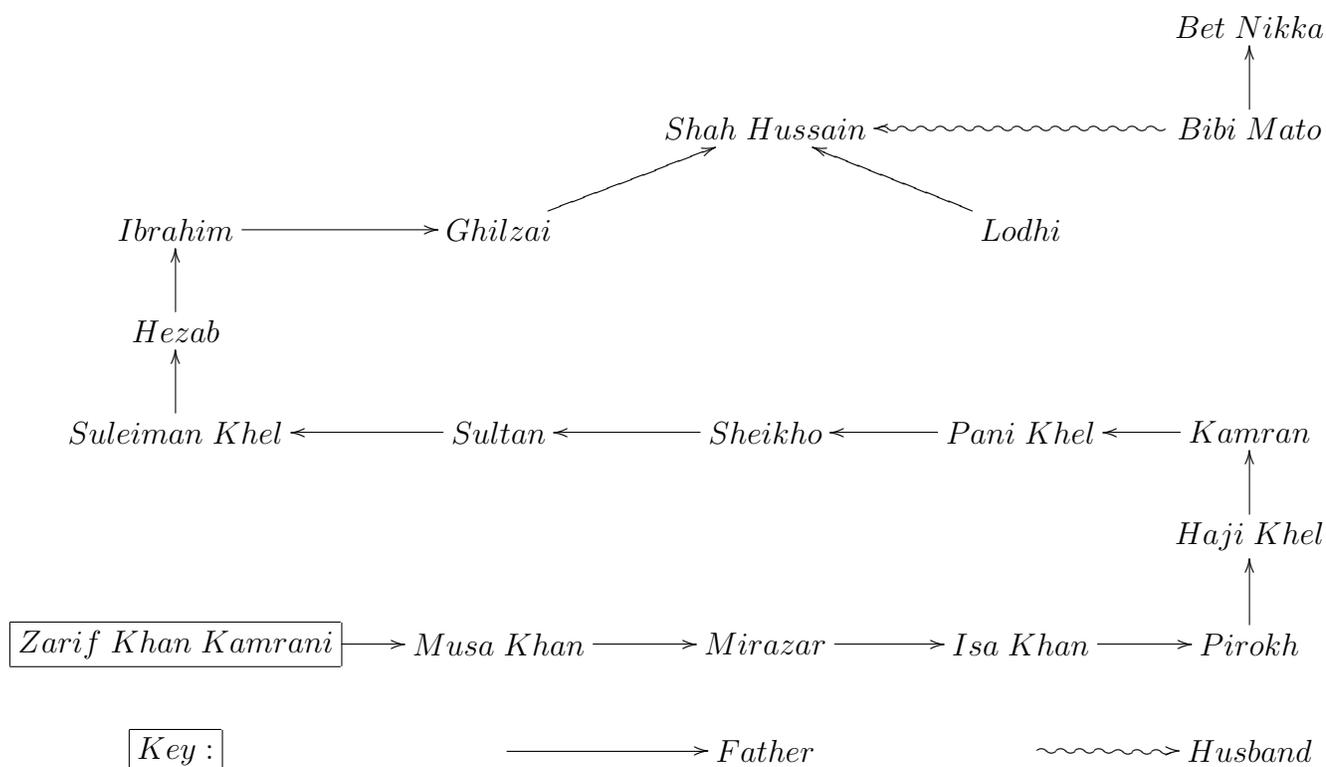


Figure 1: Genealogy of Zarif Khan Kamrani

paper, which is to underline the consequences of larger political developments on nomadic ideology and life.

Let us briefly consider the genealogies of the Gomal nomads. The Suleman Khel are one of the larger and better known tribes of the Ghilzai confederation - the total population of which was estimated to be about a million by Robinson (Robinson, 1934, (1978 reprint), p. 55) and which is now estimated to be more than doubled, between two to three million. The Ghilzais, who have provided ruling dynasties in India (1290-1320) and Persia (1722-1729), retain a somewhat exaggerated sense of social importance. The Dottani, on the other hand, are not Ghilzai.

The origin of the Ghilzai remains obscure, some commentators claiming holy Islamic descent (Syed) for them while others point to a Turk origin. Robinson, following Dorn and the Mughal historians, relates the story which gives them the holy descent and also their name: Shah Hussain, a noble born but impecunious Persian, married Matu, daughter of Sheikh Batni, a tribal chief in Afghanistan, after making her pregnant. The boy being the fruit of a clandestine amour, was called Ghilzye. Ghil in the Afghan language signifying a "thief" and zye "son" (Robinson, 1934, (1978 reprint), p. 53). The Gomal nomads reject this story and explain the name as deriving from "khas" - or land they owned in Afghanistan - hence "khas zoi" (sons of the land of khas). This, in time, became Ghilzai. Ghilzai, in turn, had a son Ibrahim from whom descended Suleman Khan. Lodi is appended to Ibrahim -from "Loe dey" (Literally He is the eldest) - after Ghilzai pronounced Ibrahim as the "eldest" of his sons.

The story of Ghilzai origin establishes two interrelated social facts: first, their "holy" descent and second, their non-Pukhtun ancestry. As a consequence of these facts, the Ghilzai are included to underscore their "Islamic" character.

The Ghilzai have traditionally been rivals to the ruling Durrani dynasty for political power. Consequently, the Durrani have constantly sought to weaken and divide the Ghilzais, especially the Suleman Khel. Amir Abdur Rahman, the Iron Amir, is said to have deported about a thousand families from each of the leading divisions of the Ghilzai to Afghan Turkistan (Robinson, 1934, (1978 reprint), p. 57). It is perhaps no accident that the first non-Durrani to rule Afghanistan after the over-throw of the Durrani rule in 1978 was Noor Mohammad Tarraki, a Ghilzai. Some observers note that Tarraki's purge of Durrans reflected a zeal which was more ethnic than ideological.

Genealogy assumes an exaggerated importance for Gomal nomads because of their mobility and the span of their migrations. Unlike settled Pukhtuns, they cannot identify with known and fixed geographical features such as a valley or mountain. Even the Gomal river - which recently has given them a geographical association - symbolizes a form of freedom, winding its way, as it does, through two countries and numerous administrative/political zones. Genealogical memory, oral and imprinted in the minds of the elders, is thus a key to identity. Almost all the males I talked to, who held positions of authority in their camps (elders, sons of elders), could trace their ancestry to Suleman Khel. The Gomal nomads express their Islamic associations tracing the conversion of Quais, their putative apical ancestor, by the Prophet himself. After converting, they explain, he changed his name to a more "Islamic" name, Abdur Rashid.

In Figure-1 is given the genealogy of Zarif Khan Kamrani, the Suleman Khel elder. The genealogical links to Isa Khan (Isa is spelt as Azi) from Suleman Khel, are also provided by Robinson (1934, (1978 reprint)), p. 200-201. The genealogical table makes two points: the importance of generation recall to Gomal nomads - up to 14 generations linking Zarif Khan with his ancestor Shah Hussain - and the suggestion of non-Pukhtun origin of the tribe. The latter point, after Ghilzai's many centuries of assimilation and association with Pukhtunwali, is not sociologically important. The first point is important: genealogy remains a diacritical feature distinguishing Pukhtun from Pukhtun, and Pukhtun from non-Pukhtun.

Daily Life

Let us briefly examine the daily activities of the basic unit. The basic unit, as I suggested earlier, is socially, economically - indeed to a large extent politically - self-sufficient. The rhythm of daily life appears to be unchanged since the last two generations at least.⁸ Adult males on the move or in seasonal camps are involved in trade deals, temporary manual labour and conducting various forms of politics. The household head is the decision-maker and does not hold any official or administrative position. Women, as in other Pukhtun tribes, lead an exceedingly busy physical life. They cook, clean, sew, wash for the household and also tend the animals. Children, from an early age, assist their parents - in the early years the mother, and later, the boys are attached to the father. Although on the surface life is physically hard and unsettled, in the daily routine it assumes steady and known patterns. Authority is clearly demarcated, as are job roles. Each member knows his position in society.

For other needs, such as making cots, shoes, etc. the qasabgars, or service groups, have been affiliated to the tribe. Qasabgars are various supporting professionals such as cobblers, goldsmiths, barbers

⁸See J A Robinson, *Notes on Nomad Tribes of Eastern Afghanistan* MIS Nisa Traders, Quetta, Pakistan, 1934, (1978 reprint) for details

and carpenters. Ideally, there is no inter-marriage between qasabgars and the major host tribes. The qasabgar does not "carry the gun" and does not own land, diacritics which distinguish him from Pukhtun. In time, some qasabgar groups, especially among the settled Dottanis, have merged with the host tribe assuming their name and creating fictitious genealogical links. Genealogy thus remains an important diacritical feature for tribes like the Suleman Khel who wish to distinguish non-Suleman Khel. We saw above the capacity of elders, like Zarif Khan, to recall male ascendants up to the apical ancestor of the tribe.

Life is hard and luggage is kept - almost by nomadic definition - to a minimum. The daily budget is spent largely on food items of which the main are tea, sugar, meat, pulses, flour and kerosene oil. The average family - or basic unit - is estimated to spend between 50-60 rupees (5 to 6 dollars) daily. Milk and firewood are free for the nomads.

The major expenditure revolves around the rites de passage. Marriage is the major and most expensive of these, in part due to the actual bride-price payment, followed by rites of death, birth and circumcision. The pattern for the "rites de passage" are familiar from other comparative data on Pukhtun tribes (Ahmed, 1980). The low daily budgets and expenditure on rites de passage are a consequence of the nomadic life; one that lends itself to easy movement at short notice across changing borders and zones in South Asia. A factor that supports their movements and assists them in mapping strategy is the recent arrival of the radio among the Gomal nomads. Almost every family unit possesses the radio and the family head is an avid listener to national and international news.

The influence and presence of Islam permeates life among the Gomal nomads. Indeed, as they see it, Islam is visibly interlinked with their ancestry - traced to their holy ancestor Shah Hussain - and their tribal mythology. For instance, the Gomal nomads explain the downfall of the Ghilzais by a story involving a Pir - saint - and his "curse". Apparently an ancestor of the tribe had displeased the Pir who cursed the tribe through khayray, or "badoa" (literally "bad prayer"). For seven generations, he had predicted, the Ghilzais would be dominated by their rivals, the Durrani. A Ghilzai proverb claims "Badshahi da Durrani, tura da Ghilzai" باچاهي د دراني، توره د غلزي - kingship belongs to the Durrani, but the sword (power, honour, etc.) belongs to the Ghilzai. The story reflects interestingly on history as Durrani rule began in Afghanistan about seven generations ago (allowing about 30 years for a generation). Religious mythology was again sustained for the Ghilzai when Noor Mohammad Tarraki in 1978 came to power in Kabul displacing Durrani rule. Their tribe, the Ghilzais, the Gomal nomads point out, have provided a Muslim dynasty in India. They have carried the banners of Islam to far points of South Asia. Islam and tribal identity appear inter-linked to them.

In contrast to the observations of other anthropologists (such as Barth regarding the Basseri) I found the Gomal nomads firm in their allegiance and - where locally understood - practice of Islam. Robinson also notes, "They are generally strict in the performance of religious duties" (Robinson, 1934, (1978 reprint), p.9). For instance, almost every nomad I checked wore a religious talisman - "taweez" - usually verses

from the Holy Quran - around his neck as a visible symbol of his faith and protection against unspecified dangers.

It appears that a certain myth about Muslim nomads possessing "a reputation for being poor Moslems" (Tapper, 1979, p.2) prevails in nomadic studies in spite of general, though scattered evidence to the contrary (Ahmed and Hart, 1981; Cole, 1975; Ibrahim and Cole, 1978; Pastner, 1971; Salzman, 1967). My observations corroborate those of Evans-Pritchard (1973 (Originally, 1949)) who noted that laxity in practice of the Cyrenaica Bedouins was not to be understood as irreligiosity. Nomads translate various aspects of life into Islamic idiom. For example, Lancaster notes the Rwala Bedouin's adverse reaction to sedentarization is seen in primarily "religious" terms (Lancaster, 1980, p.20-27).

Some observers point to laxity in practice as a proof that nomads are "poor Moslems". It is noted that fasting during the month of Ramadan one of the five compulsory features of Muslim life - is suspended. It is my observation that the question of fasting has been misunderstood by many observers of Islamic groups. According to Islamic tradition and customs, the fast may be legitimately postponed if the person is "traveling" (on safar - journey). The Gomal nomads who do not fast if the month of Ramadan coincides with their migration appear to compensate - under Islamic practice - the days missed once they have camped for the season. When travelling the nomads drop the "nafal" in their daily prayers. They explain this as a special dispensation deriving from the time of the Prophet.

I suggest a more useful discussion than the "poor Moslems" versus "good Moslems" one (and where does that lead us to? - few Moslems however "poor" in practice - will admit inferiority) would be to examine the pre-Islamic organization, values etc. that may have been "Islamized" and retained. We may thereby learn more about the ideological adjustments between Islamic universalism and nomadic particularism. An extension of this enquiry relates to the question of tribe and state in the Middle East. As we know the relationship is sometimes uneasy and largely undefined, which creates certain tensions in the contemporary world. Nationalist Governments sometimes behave as if they possess a monopoly on culture and religion. The issue is farther obfuscated by the "romantic" view of nomadic life against the "realist" view.⁹ The "romantic" image, deriving from the "noble savage" prototype, perhaps does more harm than good to the object of affection. We may avoid this trap altogether if we view nomadism as an ideological expression of certain ideals of the larger settled group. The nomad, then, may be seen, as I argue, reflecting the higher ideals of society and not as a cultural aberration left high and dry by the ebb and flow of historical progression.

I am arguing that the nomadic interpretation of Islam may be seen literally and simply, as the Gomal nomad sees it, as the submission to the one God. Any other relationship makes him uneasy. To assert the freedom this relationship implies he must keep moving; he must also possess, what Robinson so aptly terms "restlessness in his blood" ¹⁰ (Robinson, 1934, (1978 reprint), p.2). Matters pertaining to geographical locality and social relationships are the exclusive domain of the camp elder. Through them he ensures his freedom.

Let us briefly examine how the Gomal nomads may interpret the laws of "tor" distinctly from other Pukhtun groups. As we know tor, which suggests the violation of the honour of a woman, may be

⁹See W O Lancaster, Review of Ibrahim and Cole (1978), in: Nomadic Peoples, 5 Commission on Nomadic Peoples, IUAES, 1980 for a good example of the one confronting the other with reference to the Bedouins in Saudi Arabia

¹⁰To illustrate the cause of this restlessness is to reflect on nomad character: As an Afghan once told Mr. Elphinstone, "We are content with discord; we are content with alarms; we are content with blood: but we never will be content with a master" (Robinson, 1934, (1978 reprint), p.8)

converted to spin or white - only by death (of the couple involved). Tor, it is locally argued, is both Pukhtun and Islamic in concept. The courts and law of Afghanistan and Pakistan often take a lenient view of tor cases; the accused is considered by the Criminal Procedure Code in Pakistan as having acted under "grave provocation". Nonetheless, tribesmen are sometimes involved in lengthy and expensive court-cases. In the Tribal Areas, the matter is simpler. Society allows killing - usually by the father or brother of the person in tor cases. However, there are various escape routes which men often utilize (Ahmed, 1980). New ideas and new money have further influenced people on tor cases (Ahmed, 1981a). In contrast the nomads, living within a whole, viable, defined and recognized universe conceptualized as the basic socio-economic unit and during migration the tent-camp - can order the speedy implementation of the punishment. Society will explicitly approve. Moving from zone to zone, it is easy to elude entanglement with local people and administration. Few questions are asked and fewer answers provided. The nomad carries his secrets with him. Tor punishments, I was convinced through numerous cases recounted by elders, are rigidly implemented. Otherwise, it was argued, not only morality but social morale, the ideological component of society, and ultimately discipline in the unit would suffer. The last, it was argued, was not possible for the efficient organization of a nomadic camp.

What remains of interest in the situation of the Gomal nomads is the pattern of their migrations. They traditionally crossed international borders and widely differing ecological zones. From the central zone of Afghanistan in autumn, south-east across the mountain ranges, along the Gomal river, into the plains of the Punjab, sometimes further south towards Delhi and Calcutta ¹¹. Winter was spent under tent-camps or in neighbouring villages working as part-time labour. The transition from Central Asia into South Asia was signified by the compulsory surrendering of arms at the check-posts on the borders between Afghanistan and British India. In this paper I am emphasizing the presence of these administrative structures and zones as I believe they are not sufficiently dealt with as a factor in nomadic life. They are a real and integral part of nomadic life; migration routes and camping sites are often selected with administrative borders and their personnel in mind. Some of the latter are to be avoided altogether, some negotiated, and some circumvented. The nomadic encounter with the personnel of the State, especially on the outskirts or border zones, is fraught with possibility for both sets of actors.

Awareness of their passages through traditionally difficult administrative areas, and of the potential to mobilize migratory tribal networks for the Great Game, played between Imperial Russia and Britain, was fully exploited in the last and present century. Rudyard Kipling's horse-trader from Kabul, in Kim, personified the tribesman who represented a link with central Asia and the nomadic life.

Conclusion

Perhaps the greatest threat to the life-style of the Gomal nomads has little to do with the traditional factors of change analysts discuss (Stanford, 1976) and traditional processes of sedentarization (Salzman, 1980). In the case of the Gomal nomads, geo-political decisions made by heads of Government have affected their life. In the early 1960s President Ayub Khan of Pakistan, reflecting the deterioration in the relationship with Afghanistan, ordered the closing of the border to the powindahs. This resulted in severe dislocation and hardship for them. The Gomal nomads, nonetheless, managed to migrate to Pakistan through unfrequented paths such as the Gomal route. Their span of migration, however, was

¹¹and some, it appears, as far south as Australia - Robinson (as in n. 8), p. 26

shortened. While they could pasture freely in the Tribal Areas of the Frontier where there are no police, fewer reached the Punjab with its complex and developed administration networks. When the Russians entered Afghanistan in 1979, the Gomal traditional life-style was once again severely affected. Until that year, their life was largely traditional and unchanging in spite of the inconveniences of Ayub Khan's ban on their entry. Even labour opportunities in the Arab States, which through remittances sent home are affecting other tribes (Ahmed, 1981a; Ahmed, 1981b), were largely ignored. To my mind, 1979 is the most critical year - and a turning point - in the recent history of the Gomal nomads. It is unlikely that their traditional life will be restored fully. Their capacity to express their needs for political freedom by shifting across borders will be impaired. This event may enforce sedentarization of the Gomal nomads. Nomadism, in any case, is not a total social category. A sloughing-off process, as we saw earlier, was clearly at work among the Gomal nomads.

However remote from political life they may have kept themselves in the contemporary situation, the Gomal nomads find their traditional life disrupted. Apart from a general unrest and tension in the country which disallows normal migration, many have expressed a desire to take part in the holy war - jihad. Azadi is now translated in a directly religious idiom which encompasses total social life. Many adults leave their families with their kin along the Gomal route and - in rotation with agnatic kin - take turns with their dated .303 rifles to wage jihad in Afghanistan against the supreme military power of the age. This gesture in itself, it could be argued, reflects the idealistic content to nomad life and translates as the desire to maintain azadi.

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