

Commission on Nomadic Peoples

“Introduction”

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Introduction

*Georg Klute*¹

It seems impossible that nomads and states will ever harmonize. State agents consider nomads in general as belligerent, difficult to control, and see their continuous movements much more as a sort of offence to the requirements of any modern state and its rational administration than as a quest for water and pasture. It is therefore not surprising that state interventions in nomadic groups are in most cases attempts at improving the state's control over its turbulent citizens, be it through development projects, sedentarization programs, or even by military means.

With regard to the nomad-state relationship, most recent nomadic studies argue, explicitly or implicitly, that nomads become increasingly marginalized. Nomads are perceived as victims of the states they are living in. The nomad-state relationship is characterized by mutual misunderstandings, lack of comprehension, and conflicting perceptions in every respect resulting, at best, in "a hindrance to any meaningful communication" between the two parties, as Salih put it (1990b: 3). It is further argued that nomadic groups in the incumbent states are put under immense political pressure that leads to their economic and/or political marginalization and, worst of all, to their physical extermination. Bourgeot and Guillaume characterize the actual situation affecting nomadic societies as a process of 'destruction', that has been induced by the states' policies towards the nomads. Marginalization, impoverishment, proletarianisation, assimilation, and sometimes even deliberate extinction (genocide) are seen as com-

mon features of any actual nomadic society in whatever geographical or economic context (Bourgeot / Guillaume 1986: 7).

Unfortunately, this negative picture of the actual situation is true for most nomadic groups. Many of them, living in the geographical periphery of their countries, are also excluded, wholly or in part, from the centres of political decision making. Nomads are described as unable to cope with decisions imposed upon them by administrators or development experts. The reaction of nomads is either described as refusal, retreat or resistance. Today, nomadic societies are more affected by the political system of the various countries they live in than ever before, Gast argues. That is why he suggests that future research should be focused not on the nomadic society itself, but on the political system in which the respective nomadic group is 'encircled' (Gast 1995).

The image of the nomads as victims of the state is a recent one, however. There is a long tradition in the social sciences that perceives nomads not as passive victims, but as an active part in the nomad-state relationship. This tradition, however, has not been concerned with the study of nomadic society itself, but rather with the question of the rise and formation of the state.

Towards the turn of the last and the beginning of this century, evolutionist and cultural historical scholars explained the origins of the state by basing their arguments on the conquest theory. This direction of thought goes back to Ibn Khaldun's reasoning five centuries be-

fore. Scholars like Gumpłowicz and Oppenheimer, and, with some modifications, also Thurnwald and Westermann, to cite but a few names, claimed that the formation of the state resulted from the phenomenon of 'Überlagerung' (superimposition) holding that foreign people, mainly of nomadic origin, had conquered sedentary (agricultural) groups and ruled over them. They further emphasized that the resulting inequality between conquerors and conquered had led to a process of centralisation, first to chieftancies, and later, at least in some cases, to the formation of the state.² Furthermore it has been argued that nomads were particularly qualified as state leaders, because for centuries they had been developing technologies of breeding and herding. In analogy to their abilities as breeders and herders, nomads were said to have been the first who had discovered that one could direct human beings in the same way as animals, be it slaves, or subjects in a state of nomadic conquerors (Mühlmann 1940: 110-111).

Though the conquest theory is no longer maintained, the relationship between sedentary and nomadic groups is a (potential) cause of conflict and very often problematic. Khazanov after examining systematically the relationships between nomads and the 'outside world', argues that conflicts between nomadic and sedentary groups ('the outside world') are mainly due to a constitutive feature of nomadic economy, i.e. its dependence on agricultural products. Considering the fact that nomadic production is highly specialized, nomads are obliged to deal directly with agriculturists in order to obtain the agricultural products they need for their subsistence. The relationship between nomads and agriculturists, however, can take various forms, namely: peaceful exchange and trade, deliberate or forced submission to a sedentary group, military domination

and exploitation through raids and tributes, or conquest (Khazanov 1983). Any of the above mentioned forms of relationship appear only as types of many relationships existing between nomads and sedentaries, when considered from a historical standpoint.

In 1990, 'Nomadic Peoples' published a special issue 'Pastoralism and the State' edited by Mohamed Salih (Salih 1990a), which treated a subject also dealt with in this volume. In the 1990 issue of 'Nomadic Peoples' too the analysis was focused on the relationship between (nomadic) pastoralists and the state. One may well ask the question, whether it is necessary to write about a similar topic in the same journal only some years later. In contrast to the present volume, however, 'Pastoralism and the State' was exclusively focused on East Africa, examining specific aspects of the actual relationship between pastoral groups and various modern states. Salih's book is based on the general idea that pastoral groups in East Africa are, more often than not, victims of states and their administrators. Each of the articles argues, explicitly or implicitly, that pastoralists are very much exposed to the risk of economic and/or political marginalization, because their genuine interests are supposed to contradict the interests of the state more seriously than those of any other section of society. 'Pastoralism and the State' therefore is yet another example of the 'marginalization theory' type like codes in line with many recent studies about nomads or pastoralists.

One of the main reasons why many studies about pastoralists and nomads are focused on marginalized groups is that some scholars, doing field-work in contemporary nomadic societies, pay only little attention to the historical dimension of the society they study. Such scholars are mainly concerned with the situation of today's nomads who in fact

are marginalized and who are often put under political pressure by the states they are living in.

With regard to settlement patterns of nomadic pastoralists, *Victor Azarya* differentiates between a state-forming or state-incorporated and a segmentary-marginal type of nomadic societies. He argues that some of the pastoral societies of the state-forming type, who were politically strong and wealthy, were already settled in precolonial times, sometimes abandoning all pastoral activities. Groups of the marginal type, on the other hand, continued to lead a nomadic way of life in the colonial and postcolonial period living on the margins of modern states, just as they had lived on the margins of precolonial states before. Today, these groups have in some cases become even more marginalized than ever before, *Azarya* argues (*Azarya*, this volume). It is very probable that many former nomads of the non-marginal type today appear as sedentaries, while groups of the marginal type are still pastoralists, and it is these groups that most current nomadic studies are concerned with.

In an attempt to give a more balanced view of the nomad-state relationship, the approach here is geared at viewing the nomads not only as passive victims of the state, but also as active agents in the nomad-state relationship. From an historical point of view, nomads actively defended the states in which they were incorporated against aggressions from the outside, regardless of the fact whether the state in question had been founded by nomads or not, or whether the aggressors were of nomadic or of non-nomadic origin.

All the articles in this volume relate to various historical contexts, which may well indicate the complexity of the nomad-state relationship. Though the majority of the cases referred to in this vol-

ume is African, there are comparative examples from Asia and Europe. In spite of huge differences in the spatial and historical contexts, all the studies have one point in common, i.e. their historical approach. They highlight thus both the dynamics and the various forms of the nomad-state relationship. It will become clear, therefore, that nomadic groups in different parts of the world and at different epochs were in some cases conquered by and in other cases conquerors of states; in some cases they were incorporated into and in other cases marginalized by states.

Victor Azarya's study has a comparative and a historical focus alike. In examining various nomadic groups in Africa, he postulates two opposite (ideal)-types of nomadic societies: a state-forming or state-incorporated type on the one hand opposed to a segmentary-marginal type on the other hand. Each type shows characteristic but very different features with regard to social stratification and settlement patterns. *Azarya* studies the nomad-state relationship throughout three different historical periods, i.e. the precolonial, the colonial and the postcolonial period. He demonstrates that the characteristic features of each of the two types of nomadic societies, i.e. the state-forming vs. the marginal type, basically remained unchanged from the precolonial time until today. Highly stratified nomadic societies, which were incorporated into precolonial states or actually founded states themselves, preserved their dominant political positions in the colonial and postcolonial period. Marginal nomads, on the other hand, who lived on the margins or beyond precolonial states, seldom succeeded in gaining high ranking positions when confronted with the political changes of the colonial and postcolonial political time.

In order to understand the nomad-state relationship, *Daniel Bradburd* suggests that attention should not be focused on the structures of the nomadic society, but on the state as a theoretical construct. His analysis is mainly related to the studies of Charles Tilly who has analyzed the processes of the formation of the state and the emergence of modern nations in Europe. *Bradburd* applies Tilly's theory of the formation of the state, firstly, to the nomad-state relationship in Iran and secondly, to examples in the Middle East, Southwest Asia and Africa. He suggests that pressures on contemporary nomads in Iran and elsewhere solely depend on the nature of the state in question, i.e. the modern nation state. Processes of the formation of the modern nation state are linked to growing forces of coercion and attempts by the state agents to monopolize violence. These processes include the elimination of other independent loci of power existing within the society, be they nomadic or non-nomadic. *Bradburd's* focus is as well theoretical, insofar as he probes the applicability of Tilly's model of the formation of the (European) nation state to the situation of contemporary nomads, as well as historical. Nomads suffer from the pressures brought to bear upon them by the state because they have to deal with a specific historical type of state: the modern nation state. To use *Bradburd's* own words: "pastoralists are part of history" (*Bradburd*, this volume).

Georg Klute examines the period immediately preceding the colonial conquest and the installation of the colonial state in West Africa. His study is based on the travel account of Heinrich Barth, complemented by the works of other European travellers from the second half of the 19th century. Though research about colonialism usually starts with military conquest, *Klute* proposes to include also the period prior to military

invasion in our studies about colonialism. Even at that time there were reactions of various kind, military and political, to the expansion of the colonial powers in West Africa. *Klute* focuses his attention on nomadic groups, the Tuareg in particular, and studies their reactions under three aspects: knowledge about Europe and the Europeans; direct reactions; and the influence of the incipient state to politics in West Africa. Nomadic groups or polities dominated by groups of nomadic origin in particular were astonishingly well informed about the world outside their continent, because it was they who were engaged in long distance trade, and as a result, had to look for information of all kinds. Even long before military conquest began, nomadic groups or polities dominated by groups of nomadic origin were well aware of the colonial threat and took diplomatic measures, in order to counter the advance of the colonial powers. It is suggested that 'the coming of the (colonial) state' aroused new feelings of national identity among the Tuareg who until then were not, at least not to any considerable extent, well organized beyond the regional level.

Kurt Beck also deals with the colonial state. He studies the installation of the Anglo-Egyptian colonial state in Northern Sudan and the impact of the military conquest on nomadic groups. In contrast to the image of the precolonial nomads as marginal groups living out of the reach of traditional states, *Beck* argues that the nomads of this region were acquainted with states long before the arrival of the British. He asserts that nomads were either incorporated into states, or they lived at their margins serving sometimes as auxiliaries against other nomads. The new colonial state, however, had an ability to establish control and to monopolize violence that none of the preceding states ever had before. The coming of this new

state was accompanied by an outburst of generalized violence affecting the nomads of Northern Sudan and nomadic groups of the adjacent regions as well. It was only after many years of vehement fights that the colonizers were able to confine the state of generalized violence which their coming had provoked. Within this process, the Anglo-Egyptian colonial state installed a legal and security system foreign to the region. This arrangement restrained violence thus effectively protecting the subjects of the colonial state and even nomads against nomads.

Thomas Bierschenk's analysis is focused on the nomadic Fulbe and their relationship with the colonial and postcolonial state in Borgou (part of contemporary Bénin). Following Lombard's line of argument, *Bierschenk* suggests that the socio-professional groups in Borgou became 'ethnicized' and 'tribalized' by the French colonial administration. Being dependent herders in the precolonial period, the Fulbe were transformed into an independent ethnic group with its own chiefs. *Bierschenk's* study is particularly focused on the history of a single family in this century. He shows how various members of that family managed to manipulate the colonial and postcolonial administrations alike, in order to acquire high ranking positions or well paid posts. Because the Fulbe were rich in animals and could pay taxes in form of money (or animals), they were exempted from the bondage of forced labour, unlike many other groups in Borgou. This is one of the reasons why the Fulbe in Bénin are considered lazy and being unable to withstand hard manual labour. Even though many Fulbe are agro-pastoralists, engaged in agricultural production and animal husbandry as well, the cliché of lazy and physically weak nomads still lingers in the minds of the common man in Bénin until today.

Starting with the dichotomy between the 'politics of sameness' opposed to the 'politics of difference' which marks one of the main dilemmas of modern Norwegian politics, *Robert Paine* analyses the relationship between Saami reindeer nomadic pastoralists and the Norwegian state. *Paine* characterizes the relationship between the Norwegian state and the Saami as a relationship between that of patron and client. Paradoxically, in this relationship the patron (the state) is less informed about the client (the Saami) than vice versa. In Norwegian society, Saami pastoralists are but a small minority possessing certain legal rights accorded to them by Norwegian law. At the same time, Saami nomadic pastoralists are a marginalized group exerting little or no influence at the centre of political decisions in Norway. The Norwegian state, on the other hand, finds itself in a double-bind situation. On the one hand, it has to respect minority rights accorded to the Saami, and on the other hand, it has to treat the Saami in the same way as it treats all other Norwegian citizens.

Dawn Chatty studies the historical evolution of the nomad-state relationship in the Sultanate of Oman over the last three decades. She holds that until the 1960s, the nomadic Harasiis tribe lived on the margins of the Sultanate with little or no contact to the state and its administration. The Harasiis did not want to get into contact with the 'outside world', and the state was simply not interested in the harsh environment inhabited by the nomads. Things started to change when petrol was discovered and exploited in the traditional Harasiis tribal area. The Harasiis discovered the importance of a reinforced tribal identity that could help them in increasing their influence in the Sultanate, both in political and economic terms; for in the tribal areas, oil industries and governmental projects respectively recruited people on

the basis of tribal affiliations. When the government representatives became more firmly established in the Harasiis area, however, the tribal identity lost its importance. The tribesmen learned to deal directly with government representatives. The Harasiis, formerly on the margins of the Sultanate, became incorporated into the state, not on a tribal, but on an individual level.

Peter Fuchs examines how different nomadic groups in the Republic of Chad coped with the civil war which already started in 1965. In fact, most of the nomads reacted to the fighting by mobility, they simply fled. Others took over leading positions in the liberation movements. When nomadic groups started to join the liberation movements in large numbers, they also influenced the character of the fights. The civil war in Chad became nomadic in character with regard to warfare tactics. It became also nomadic, *Fuchs* argues, because the nomadic leaders continued their traditional rivalries within the liberation movements they dominated. *Fuchs* shows, that the nomad-state relationship radically changed during the Chadian civil war. During the pre-war period, most of the nomadic groups in Chad were marginalized, isolated and left alone. The nomads themselves avoided any contacts with the state whenever feasible. During the war, nomadic leaders tried to become incorporated into the state by conquering high ranking positions and capturing the state itself. *Fuchs* concludes that in the end the nomadic groups in Chad, though very successful as military conquerors, were not able to build up a state, unless they associated with sedentary groups they had conquered before. In this, *Fuchs* rejoins *Azarya's* argument who claims that the tendencies with regard to incorporation vs. marginality of nomadic groups found in the precolonial

period continued and were ever strengthened in colonial and postcolonial times.

The historical approach adopted in the contributions to this volume will make clear that the relationships between the nomads and the states are far more complex than the general idea supposes which depicts nomads as victims of the states. Since there is, from a historical point of view, a large number of similar cases, future research should systematically differentiate between various types of the nomad-state relationship: that of conflict, that of co-operation between the two parties, that of incorporation of the respective nomadic group into the state, or, finally, that of mutual distance. Whether the approach in the study of the nomad-state relationship be more focused on various types of nomadic societies, like in *Azarya's* paper, or, whether it should start with the focus on the state, like in *Bradburd's* paper, depends very likely on the actual historical cases which are studied. The nomad-state relationship must be understood, in any case, as a dynamic process in which each side, i.e. the nomads and the states, mutually affect the other.

Notes

- (1) I would like to thank Victor Azarya for comments on earlier drafts of this paper; I would also like to thank Joseph N'Kwenti for his help with the English script.
- (2) For an overview see: Khazanov 1984.

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