

Evolution of Middle Eastern Social Structures: a new model

Abstract

The desert is small relative to the growth of population, leading to endemic warfare over territory and to the expulsion of weaker groups. However, camels have relatively low fertility rates in the face of recurrent drought, so that maintenance of balanced ratios of camels requires the raiding of camels by those who are militarily strong and the expulsion of the weak from the desert.

Given the inadequacy of natural increase to preserve the sufficiency of herds, the sizes of herds are determined by the actions of men as raiders and as defenders of herds. Men, however, are the products of the fertility of women, and hence the fertility of women acts as the critical wealth-asset underlying possession of herds and the survival of agnatic groups.

Like marriage practices almost everywhere, marriages among the Somali carry the ethos of the successful and the powerful, the powerful being those whose sons are so successful in raiding that a sufficiency in camels is assured. In the context of such sufficiency additional camels are reduced to the level of consumption goods, into which they are transformed, rather than becoming part of the herd as wealth.

This being the case, the camels of the strong, and of the many who would mimic them, fail as exchange equivalence against the fertility of women. Hence, groups will tend to avoid offering women to other groups, if endogamy is permissible. The responsibility of kin to facilitate endogamy falls to the brother's son in the form of a right. Given the son's role in warfare and raiding, he is a man of honor whose responsibility must be culturally configured as an act of honor.

For non-Bedouin camel herders, such as the Somali, and the Afar, an exchange of a daughter's fertility for camels is also largely avoided. However, endogamy is not permissible and these groups must find a different solution to the same problem.

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Introduction

Within the cultures of the Middle East a man has a *right* to demand in marriage the daughter of his father's brother. Marriage with one's father's brother's daughter (f.b.d.), has been an element of a more general practice of patrilineal endogamy, to include marriage of second patrilineal cousins (f.f.b.s.d.), as well. While the actual frequency of such patrilineal endogamy varies widely among groups, there are many groups in which the frequency is very high. Among the southern Kurds, Barth (1953) found an incidence of f.b.d. marriage of 50%, a level that he perceived to be at the limit of the feasible range of availability. For a number of theoretical paradigms, this form of marriage is anomalous because it fails to create linkages among families, such that a "society" may emerge as the product of those linkages. Patrilineal endogamy tends to produce a collection of atomized agnatic segments which social scientists have found difficult to explain.

In their efforts toward explanation some investigators have focused on factors affecting the decisions of the marital pair or the decisions of relevant kin. According to Holy (1989) most anthropological work has been oriented toward explaining preference, "Why are cousins *preferred* as spouses?" However, preferences are necessarily expressions of choice on the part of those who are in a position to influence a choice. The existence of a *rightful claim* on an uncle's daughter is fundamentally different from preference. We see this easily with regards to the right to vote. This right is undiminished by the failure of a large majority to exercise the right. It exists independently of preferences. The right to vote exists to the extent that those who actually seek to vote will receive protection and support from others (including agencies of the state). It implies that a broader community of persons is willing to place negative sanctions of some kind upon those who would prevent the exercise of that claim. *Social support*, then, is an essential foundation of a rightful claim; and those whose support of a claim is the basis of its rightfulness are not necessarily in a position to choose, but they support those who have a right to choose. Hence, while the *exercise* of a right may require a decision that expresses *preference* among culturally feasible alternatives, the *existence* of a right (and the presentation of feasible alternatives) depends on the opinions and actions of persons other than the specific decision makers.

Definition: A right to an action or resource exists to the extent that individuals are protected and supported in the event that they desire to perform the action or acquire the resource.

The fact that rights are fundamentally different from preferences should be obvious; but it is a fact that is very difficult to accept within the standard paradigms of social science. No matter how strongly I emphasize fundamental characteristics of rights, my critics constantly revert to the issue of preference as though preferences are foundational to rights. They appear to confuse rights with norms.

Barth (1954) suggests that f.b.d. marriage is preferred by a girl's father, who must sacrifice the larger bridewealth associated with exogamy, in order to secure the political allegiance of a son-in-law in a politically turbulent environment. "If a man alienates his nephews by refusing them their traditional rights, he loses their political support" (p. 168). On the other hand, a nephew avoids high bridewealth when he takes his f.b.d. and, according to Barth, is now indebted to his father-in-law. However, a violation of socially recognized rights by any man endangers his social reputation among his agnates and within a very wide public. A right is culturally valued, such that its violation constitutes a morally unconscionable action that threatens an institution of importance to society. Moreover, the exercise of a right by a b.s. cannot create indebtedness. The f.b.d. is rightfully the possession of the b.s. Her hand in marriage cannot be offered to b.s. in exchange for a social debt, because rights to her do not belong to her father. Her hand belongs already and axiomatically to the b.s. It is for this reason that the b.s. must be compensated for relinquishing that right to an alternative claimant. In order to understand the right to the f.b.d., we must look beyond the decision makers, whom ever we believe them to be, and interrogate the broader social processes that induce people to defend and support a specific expression of preference, if and when it is expressed.

Interestingly, Peters (1980) bemoans the scholarly fascination with f.b.d. on the grounds that this daughter is commonly related to the b.s. in a number of other ways, including links through her mother, for example. And, of course, it is true that when marriages take place within a limited collectivity, a large number of kinship links can be delineated by a kinship specialist. And these other links may often have significance within a culture. Yet, as we shall see, below, the issue of f.b.d. is *in the first instance* a question of marriage within a tertiary *agnatic* group of camel herders, so that links through women are relatively incidental.

Although Bedouin have long been sources of irritation to sedentary rulers, their fierceness, independence and honor have assured a high degree of admiration on the part of the

common people. It is entirely understandable, then, that processes that have their foundation within Bedouin culture have drifted into the urban cultures of the Middle East. Important culture elements have flowed from the desert into the villages, not the other way. Furthermore, the people of the desert have for many centuries been forced from the desert into the villages, carrying their admired culture with them.

The general suffusing of Middle Eastern culture by patrilineal cousin marriage has led some observers (personal communications) to believe that its source must be found in Islam. However, this is emphatically not the case. Indeed, nothing could be more alien to the spirit of Islam than agnatic solidarity. A central objective of the Prophet's teachings was to create an Islamic community in which tribal and other agnatic differentiation were absent. It is, perhaps, for this reason that Islam requires bilateral inheritance – a rule that, if followed, would spell the death of patrilineal organization.

On the other hand, it has been shown by Korotayev (2000) that the geographic region in which f.b.d. marriage is common is precisely the area covered by the Islamic Caliphate in the first centuries of the Islamic era. The adoption of Islam does not imply the adoption of f.b.d. marriage among all followers of Islam. However, if the people lived in an area that was part of the early Caliphate, then there was very strong incentive to adopt Arab customs, including f.b.d.marriage. At the very least, the peoples of the Caliphate were granted *permission* to marry patrilineal parallel cousins. I emphasize the word, permission, because such marriages would certainly have been forbidden as incestuous in most of the societies that became subject to the Arab conquest.

In this paper I shall provide the reasons for the existence of a man's right to the daughter of his paternal uncle among Bedouin, given that such marriages are permissible.¹ I shall show that this right of cousins is the solution to two problems, problems whose solution is demanded by forces affecting the survival and relative viability of close agnatic kin. Moreover, these problems must be solved in the context of a warrior culture within which a man's claim to f.b.d. is a manifestation of honor.

The social context

The desert is large in absolute size, but small in relation to the resource-demands that are made upon it. This is so, especially, because life on the desert is often better than the sedentary alternatives, inducing the desert's population to grow beyond measure. Yet, the population of the desert cannot, in fact, grow beyond measure. Over time, it cannot grow at all. Peters (1990) noted this peculiarity with respect to the Bedouin of Cyrenaica. However, he presumed that equilibria in population levels were produced by the differential effectiveness of fertility within various subgroups. This perception is actively supported by Bedouin, whose orally transmitted

genealogies systematically “forget” moribund lines of descent. Lewis (1961) points out that the nomadic Somali insist on the historical accuracy of their genealogies (which they trace to an uncle of the Prophet), in spite of factual contradictions produced by the disappearance of weaker agnatic segments. Instead, the Somali also attribute differential growth of agnatic segments to differences in fecundity.

According to Evans-Pritchard (1949: 43), the poorer Bedouin of Cyrenaica "living near towns sometimes drift into them; but when they do so their descendants soon lose their links with the tents and their tribal status." And "those who were defeated in the great tribal wars of the past and in the inter-tribal and inter-sectional fighting of more recent times migrated to Egypt and settled there as *fallahin* ... " (p. 45), where they would be subjected to domination and exploitation by state authority. In this way Evans-Pritchard provides a glimpse into the processes that maintain ecological balance on the desert.

Only in Barth (1964: 108) have I found a detailed discussion of the demographic processes that must apply in a different fashion to Bedouin. Barth, however, was observing shepherds of south Persia; and he could see the whole process more readily than those who study Bedouin because the villages into which these shepherds were forced to flee were immediately adjacent to pastoral pathways.

Whereas the flocks tend to prosper and grow due to the nomad's work in herding and tending them, accidents, pests and mismanagement may also have the obverse effect of reducing the herds through time; or the needs of the pastoralist may be too great, and lead him to over-tax his herd, and result in a decline in the herder's wealth, rather than an accumulation. As we have seen, all such economic risks are carried in their entirety by the separate, individual households. ... Serious loss of wealth in a household thus has the result that the household is sloughed off from the tribe; or, to put it the other way around, the persistence of the present form of Basseri organization depends on a continual process of sloughing off of members who fail to retain the productive capital in herds which is required for an independent pastoral existence.

We shall show that the process of “sloughing off” must be different among Bedouin. But the often indicated desire of Bedouin to have many children, especially males, and the commonly “healthy” lifestyle of the desert, relative to circumstances in villages, assure high rates of fertility. And while it may be to the advantage of individual lineage segments to grow more numerous, the result in aggregate must be an increase in the number of segments that must be removed from “independent pastoral existence” and “sloughed off.” In reference to the Basseri shepherds, Barth (1964: (115-116) presents the few facts available to him with exceptional clarity:

One is thus forced to assume that a consistently high rate of growth has been a characteristic of the tribal population in previous times as well as today. The evidence from the living generations in the Basseri camps today -- 4.25 children per tent, and 7.2

persons per adult sibling group — suggests a net growth factor of at least 3 per generation, i. e. a trebling of the nomad population every 30-40 years. This general picture is, furthermore, not unique for the Basseri; *superficial acquaintance with neighboring Arab and Qashqai suggest comparable natural growth rates.* (my emphasis)

Since nomadic tribes of a basic economy and organization similar to the Basseri are of great antiquity in the area, one may be justified in assuming that the total tribal population is and has been in approximate demographic balance, i. e. that there are processes which drain off at least a major fraction of this natural increase in every generation. These processes are emigration, and sedentarization.

Barth dismisses the suggestion that the more rapid growth of certain sibling groups is due to higher fertility. On an individual level “child-less couples, couples with only daughters, and persons belonging to small sibling groups show a higher frequency of sedentarization than do highly fertile members of larger sibling groups” (p. 117). However, “the difference between growth and decline in a section depends on differences in their rates of sedentarization and possibly emigration, and not on differences in their fertility rates” (p. 118).

A similar proximity and familiarity with village life is common to Turkana cattle nomads. In Dyson-Hudson and Meekers (1999: 308-335) there is an extensive discussion of the largely one-way flow of population from nomadic life into the villages, as a result of periodic droughts that decimate herds and force people into “hunger” and despair and as a result of livestock disease, “poor luck/management” and raiding. Among the Basseri and Turkana, the flow of nomads into villages was a rather smooth one. Nomads often possessed land in a village on which they would plant crops during the period of their passing through the area. And when nomads faced economic difficulty, they might be able to assume temporary economic roles within a village, roles that had the potential of becoming permanent. For most camel herders, however, who move upon the desert far from villages and urban areas, a descent into village life can be far more difficult. Distance from and lack of familiarity with village life would no doubt lead to a greater relative frequency of death by malnutrition and disease. On the other hand, it is clear from contemporary studies of village life in the Middle East that many villagers are “tribal,” implying more recent arrival from nomadic life.

Somali nomads often maintained regular relationships with their sedentary kinsmen (Lewis 1961). Hence, they possessed a less problematic route from the desert than may have been the case among the nomads of Cyrenaica, who commonly were forced to find settlement in Egypt (Evans-Pritchard 1949), given the paucity of suitable places in Cyrenaica. Clearly, then, the difficulties encountered by processes of sedentarization and emigration, as well as the sizes of

the departing units, differ greatly among camel nomads in different locations and among camel, sheep and cattle nomads, whose relationships with sedentary populations are likely to differ.

However, there must in every case be a process of “sloughing off.” This process of differential expulsion is often silent and unseen. And often it is denied by an ideology of equality within the tribe that would frustrate an ethical justification of such expulsions. So, while there may be none whose expulsion from the desert is ethical legitimate, the central purpose of much social action is oriented toward producing precisely that consequence. This is the fundamental *contradiction* of nomadic society. It is hidden in the namelessness of the Bedouin’s three-generational agnatic group, whose disappearance carries no historical trace. It is hidden in the putative equality of all men of the desert, none of whom possess fewer rights to life on the desert than others. It can be hidden from ethnography.

Raiding

The limited space provided by the desert defines an “ecological problem.” Even in the absence of drought, there must be a flow of people from the desert as the general population increases. We must now inquire into the processes that selectively expel some groups and allow greater growth for others. Since the desert cannot accommodate this growth, there must be a mechanism for allocating access to the resources required for survival. The Basseri, whose tertiary units must make joint decisions about the movement of stock, provide a special case. In this case, the survival of individual units depends, at least in part, on the wisdom and good fortune that attends those decisions. However, the literature on camel herders reports in every case on the prevalence of warfare, raiding, and conflicts over grazing territory and water holes. And in the absence of super-ordinate authority, these conflicts appear to be a necessary consequence of the growth of human and animal populations on the desert. Physical force functions as the fundamental mechanism for selective expulsion of people from the desert.

Among Bedouin, territory is allocated into cascading patrilineal segments. Territory is allocated to the major, “primary,” segments, and within those segments further divided among “secondary” segments” and finally to tertiary units in Cyrenaica (Evans-Pritchard 1949; Peters 1990) or to three-generational agnatic groups or *ibn amm* among the Rwala (Lancaster 1981). The splitting of lineage segments into tertiary units is associated with the allocation of grazing territory to the new units. Typically, territories of a tertiary unit are adjacent to the territories of the units of the most proximate agnatic kin, leading to frequent conflicts over boundary violations among kin. “The capture of natural resources for use by a tertiary group can only be achieved by expanding into a neighbor’s territory” (Peters 1990: 75).

Every tribal segment is in potentially fierce competition with other segments at the same level of segmentation. That is, one tribe against another tribe; one major tribal segment against another (within the tribe); one minor tribal segment against another minor segment, and so forth. Hence, more inclusive segments come into conflict with other segments of the same level of segmentation, and segments must struggle for territory within the territory of the larger unit of which they are a part.

The Rwala are ever at war with one tribe or another. Without war a Rweijli could not live. War gives him an opportunity of display his cunning, endurance, and courage. ... The booty itself he will give away without thinking much about it – even to the wife of the very man he has just robbed. (Musil 1928: 504)

The ability of a group (at any level of segmentation) to maintain a privileged domain on the desert depends on the presence of strong, clever and brave young men who can challenge effectively the claims of others, while defending their own. It is clear that this is a central concern to the nomads, themselves. It is this challenge that could be called the *people-on-the desert* problem. The desert is capable of containing relatively few and those who remain to roam freely upon it are those who have successfully forced others to leave. This process of differential growth and expulsion generates equilibrium in the camel/people/desert relation.

Since lower levels of segmentation are able to coalesce into larger segments in the face of outside threat, it is possible for larger units to suffer severe loss and suffer displacement. These larger struggles are very common. But even more common, and almost quotidian, are the struggles among tertiary units. The prevalence of conflict at this level means that those who suffer losses and are “sloughed off” are these small units. And segmentation has the result that stronger groups, even those with relatively close common ancestry, will not be held responsible for the disappearance of weaker groups. Since some people must lose their places on the desert, segmentation makes it possible for them to do so without dragging their more distant agnates with them.

Among the Somali nomads, there is much hostility expressed at the level of camel camps, as well as conflicts between lineages and major tribal segments. However, when there are conflicts between segmental levels of two different tribes, there is an immediate threat of inter-tribal warfare (Lewis 1969). The segment involved in dispute can propose to the leaders of the tribe the need for an attack on the tribe of its enemy. If the proposal is accepted, a member of the proposing group may be selected as commander to the military force. For purposes of illustration I shall quote from Lewis (1969: 46) in his discussion of tribal movements in the area now known as Somalia:

The Sultanate of Mogadishu developed through the immigration of Emozeidi Arabs whose presence is recorded from as early as the 10th (and perhaps the 9th) century. During the 15th century, the Ajuran extended their territory at the expense of the Jiddu and Galla. The Jiddu were driven south-west as the Ajuran advanced to Kalafo on the Shebelle, where they founded the capital of their state. From Kalafo the Ajuran moved out in strength and forced the inter-riverine Galla to retire to Bur Hakaba. The region between the Shebelle and Isha Baidoa was left in the hands of the Madinie, a tribe of whom little more is known than that they were allied to the Ajuran. The Ajuran influence was considerable and the pressure which they exerted to the south-east contributed to the collapse of the Muzaffar dynasty of Mogadishu.

And so forth. We can see that the minimal lineage is not the only segment that is subject to “reduction” or elimination. Lewis indicates that entire clans (which are identical to “tribes” in the Somali context) will launch raids against their enemies whose positions on the desert are thereby jeopardized. Hence, at every level of segmentation, agonistic interactions determine which groups will continue to occupy the always finite (and sometimes decreasing) territory for nomadic life.¹

Kressel (1996) points out that the westward movements of Bedouin from the Arabian deserts toward the Maghreb reached its limit in the 18th century and that waves of population descended from the deserts in an eastward direction thereafter, with settlement in Egypt and Palestine. It would appear, then, that there are times when the “sloughing off” process is elevated to a flood of migrants. *This flow, whether slow and steady, or sudden and massive, produces a core of Bedouin culture in the settled areas of the Middle East.*

The consequences of such flows for the well-being of the *fellahin* are clear. We see those consequences rather graphically in Barth’s discussion of the villages which received the “sloughed off” Basseri shepherds of south Persia – we see a radical increase in the degree of exploitation of the *fellahin* by landlords, because of an excess supply of tenants. It becomes possible for the peasant’s share of output to fall below the requirements of survival – where the dead are easily replaced by the hungry. And, given the arrival of violence-inclined agnatic groups into a circumstance where only the strong can survive, it is clear that only Bedouin or those who adopt their form of solidarity will survive.

However, Kressel (1996: 24) suggests that the maintenance of agnatic structures by settled Bedouin arises because those values “were embedded too deeply to be easily uprooted.” However, it is possible that those structures persisted because they found a value in the villages that rivaled their value on the desert. Indeed, Kressel (1992) gives substance to my argument in his discussion of feuding in the village of Jaw~r♣sh, Palestine (Israel). First, those who were classified as former *fellahin* were less likely to maintain patrilineal endogamy than those who were classified as Bedouin. Furthermore, an individual’s power was a function of the size of his

agnatic group in the village (and adjacent areas). Having a large group required the possession of resources that would encourage residential stability of agnates; and relative group size was promoted by the internal exploitation of the fertility of their daughters and by marriage to unrelated women. In this context an agnatic group would be strongly encouraged to adopt patrilineal cousin marriage, even if it were not an ancestral pattern.

Barth (1953) describes a comparable function of agnatic solitariness among settled villagers of southern Kurdistan. These villagers had been camel raiding nomads in the relatively recent past. And as villagers, the strong would raid the weak, but return their animals on a promise of subservience and tribute. In this way the fighting strength of agnatic groups became a basis for the subordination of other groups. And given a lack of sophisticated technology, fighting strength depended on the number of men – the product of daughters. The persistence of Bedouin patterns among villagers can be explained, not as an embedded legacy from the past, but as a continued source of power in a society where the power of a group is largely a function of the number of men.

It must be pointed out that Bedouin often marry outside of the agnatic group in an effort to create an alliance that will offer reciprocal grazing rights for camels in the territories of their affines. Since each level of segmentation has a limited and fairly well-defined territorial allocation, and since the vagaries of climate may lead to a lack of sufficient forage within a given allocation, these reciprocal grazing rights are often essential to the survival of herds. The Bedouin understand that the advantages of grazing rights are vital and that they justify the alienation of fertility. In the best of circumstances a group is able to retain the fertility of its own daughters while gaining additional women from outside for their sons. In this way, they gain additional fertility, as well as additional grazing rights. Symmetrically, in the worse case an agnatic group may have lost essential elements of its herd and also may lack the men required for their recovery. This group may then seek camels in exchange for daughters, obtaining critically needed camels and gaining an alliance with a stronger group. This exchange allows the stronger group to grow stronger and may allow the weaker group to survive.

Reproduction of Camels

Thus far, we have considered the *people-on-the-desert* problem in terms of the need to slough off excess human population. We have focused on the violence by which groups are eliminated and we have identified the tertiary and larger units that benefit or lose in the process. But what about camels? It is widely observed that camels have a low fertility rate (Novoa 1970). This observation applies especially to camels maintained among transhumant pastoralists, where the quality of nutrition and husbandry is not likely to reach the standards realized in experimental

settings (Dahl and Hjort (1976). It appears that early embryonic death is high (Musa and Merks 1990); the mortality of calves tends also to be rather high (Dahl and Hjort 1976); and as many as fifty percent of female camels may be infertile (Novoa, 1970; Yuzlikaev and Akhmedier, 1965). Yet, there can be no general statement about the growth rates of pastoral herds. It is clear that growth rates may be negligible in areas that are not highly suitable to maintaining camels and higher elsewhere (Gast et al., 1969). The fertility of camels is highly sensitive to ecological conditions and to methods of animal husbandry, so that actual rates of fertility are highly variable.

Number of female camels.

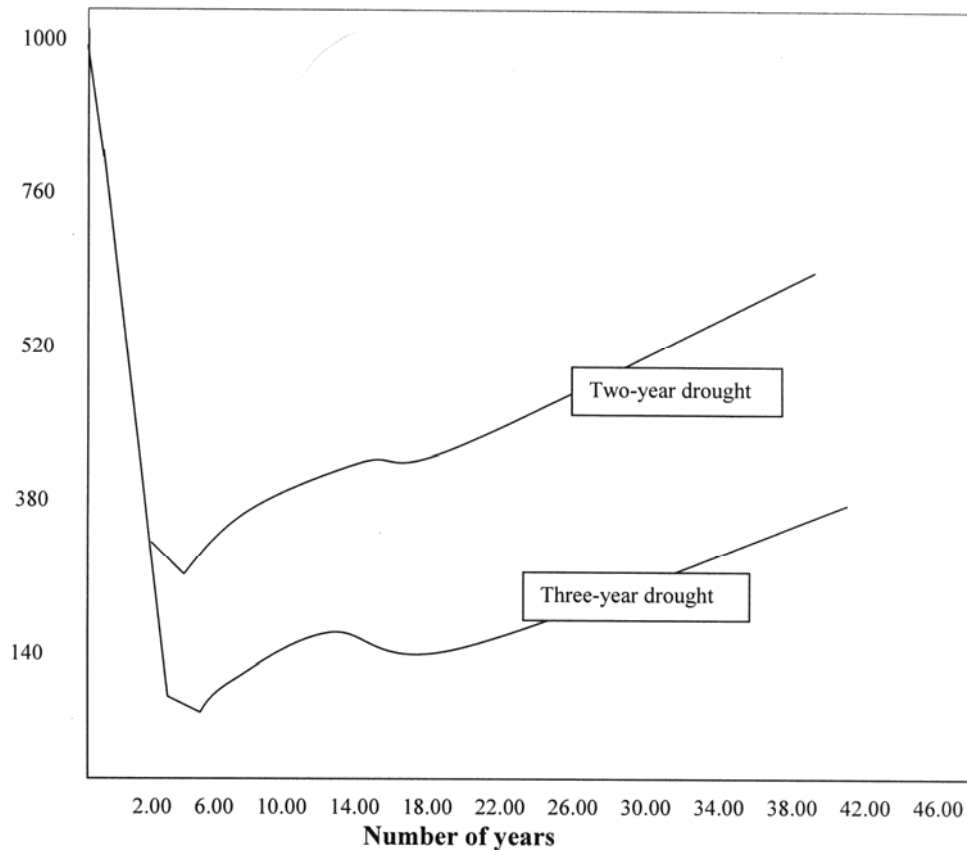


Figure 1: Source: Dahl and Hjort (1976, Figure 5.11, p.): Total number of females remaining in a herd of camels after a two-year and a three-year drought.

Adding significantly to the problem of herd maintenance is the incidence of drought. According to Hazell et al. (2001: i) “drought is a recurrent and often devastating threat to the welfare of countries in the Middle East and North Africa.” The region has relatively low rainfall combined with considerable variability and is “therefore highly vulnerable to drought” (DePauw 2001: 66). According to Dahl and Hjort (1976) droughts can be expected every ten to twelve years; and a drought that lasts as long as two years will reduce herds by 70 percent.

Furthermore, given the problems of camel reproduction, a 75 percent recovery of stocks after a two year drought may require as many as thirty years (Dahl and Hjort 1976: 125). See Figure 1

Droughts do not appear to lead to massive mortality in the human population, but they threaten to deny the essential subsistence resource of herders. It is clear, then, that possession of an adequate number of camels cannot depend on the internal growth generated through fertility. From these data it is that camel herding is an infeasible lifeway -- infeasible, that is, in the absence of a forceful method of camel reallocation following droughts.

Raiding for camels is the solution. Those who are strong, brave and fierce and *sufficiently strong in number* may supplement the natural growth of herds with the product of raids, such that a redistribution of camels among the population will allow some people to have a sufficiency, and perhaps a surplus, of camels while others suffer an increased deficit. *Hence, the possession of camels by a tertiary agnatic group is not a function of the fertility of camels.* Given the likelihood of drought, the low fertility rates on the desert and the common occurrence of raiding, the number of camels held by a group is a function of the activities of men; and the growth of a herd depends on the number and aggressiveness of men, not on the number and fertility of she-camels. These facts are fundamental to understanding the role of camels in the social relations of Bedouin. Camels are the product of sons, who are the product of women. Hence, it is the fertility of women that arises as the foundational dynamic of survival.

Lancaster (1981) speaks of the culture and ethics of raiding – indeed, the nobility of it. Raiding was the principal avenue for the manifestation of leadership, intelligence and ethics – of honor. And the sons of shaykhs most often committed themselves to this process, seeking to realize the prestige of their fathers.

It is difficult to get across the full flavour of raiding. It is often said to have been almost a sport and there is certainly some element of truth in this for it was governed by fairly strict rules that made it more difficult. For instance, it was dishonourable to attack a sleeping enemy, any defender who submitted must be spared, women were inviolate even if they counter-attacked, herdsman (as opposed to guards) were never involved in fighting, sufficient camels must be left for the family to reach relatives etc. ... A man not only had to be successful but had to be successful within the rules. (Lancaster 1981: 141)

In relation to herding capacity, camels can become redundant, or “surplus.”

Fifteen to twenty camels will provide basic subsistence for a family of six very adequately, so anything over twenty camels is surplus. What on earth can you gain from them? (Lancaster 1981: 139-140)

Some level of surplus relative to the *herd* is valuable to the herder because on a periodic basis he can take that “surplus” to market and exchange it against many essential consumer goods. Any Bedouin understands this situation. Lancaster points out that a family can use only so

much milk, that the meat from a camel is in excess of family use, that they can be sold only in those intermittent cases when markets are near, that a man can herd only about fifty of them and must employ herders beyond that, and that a large herd only invites the raider for which guards must be hired, and so forth and for what?

Useful wealth in the desert must be highly mobile, easily preservable and non-stealable -- in other words non-material, like reputation. So the acquisition of camels is only a stage in obtaining wealth -- you're not measured by how many camels you own, but by how many pass through your hands and what happens to them. ... so you give them away. Your reputation is increased ... So the basis of wealth is measured in generosity and success in raiding. (Lancaster 1981: 140)

So, why is there a prestige in continued raiding, even after requirements of the group have been satisfied? Lancaster's discussion does not tell us. We can be satisfied with the argument that men will risk their lives in raids for the sake of reputation if, indeed, reputation can be built through raiding. But we must look elsewhere to discover why those possessing an abundance of camels are willing to confer reputation on successful raiders.

We may assume, then, that the Bedouin groups whose behavior is commonly a focus of imitation by sedentary populations, and who are consequently the fountainheads of social norms among Bedouin, will usually have camels in surplus. Indeed, they will have a surplus in excess of that necessary for the periodic acquisition of customary provisions. They are in a position to give camels away in grand gestures of "generosity." This being the case, we understand their reluctance in delivering a sister or daughter to a potentially hostile group in exchange for camels. A woman is a source of power and domination for an *ibn amm* through her fertility, while additional camels have value measurable only in household staples.

Fertility and demographic growth

When a patrilineage, or segment thereof, secures a wife for one of its members, the group claims the fertility of that woman. While the groom may display eagerness, borne of his expectation of conjugal services, his agnates are principally concerned with the principal product of the new household, male children. By producing new members for the patrilineage, a household provides a basis for the survival and growth of the group. This is true of patrilineal formations everywhere, but for the desert nomad the fertility of wives provides the force to confront the endemic conflict and violence that pervades the desert.

Lancaster (1981:62) argues that the foundation of the agnatic group, the *ibn amm*, is fertility, an asset whose *accumulation* as a wealth-asset provides the increasing flow of warriors.

The placing of women in the private, non-violent sphere of life is not sentimental nor is it motivated by any idea that women are the weaker sex. ... The reasoning behind their position is that they are the means of survival of the group, the '*ibn amm*'.

In most patrilineal societies, there is a movable form of patrilineal wealth that can be advanced in an exchange for fertility. But camels cannot serve this purpose. There are two related problems. First, a truly powerful agnatic group is by definition a group with young warriors who raid successfully for camels, so that there is no shortage thereof. Indeed, we may presume that camels are in surplus, relative to the needs of the group. And such surplus will be exchanged for various consumption goods in town. Hence, an offer of a daughter to others in exchange for surplus camels implies a loss of a foundational wealth-asset without commensurate return. An exchange of women for camels becomes entirely irrational – providing strength to others with no countervailing strength for bride givers. By giving a bride to others, one loses not only a woman, but also the men required for obtaining and maintaining camels as well. This is so, even when camels are offered in exchange. Camels can be possessed only to the extent that there are men to protect them and raid for them; and by losing a daughter to others, one suffers a loss of those men.

Patrilineal parallel cousin marriage is a solution to this problem. Or, more correctly, marriage within the tertiary unit is a solution. A woman's fertility is the possession of this tertiary unit (in a lineage society, rights to a woman's fertility *never* belong to an individual husband,³ although husbands are among those who share those rights). And to the degree that broader sets of agnates are advantaged by the growth of an agnatic group, they too enjoy the benefits of her fertility.⁴ Hence, the absence of an agnate who is willing or able to take her as wife is potentially damaging.

The most powerful solution to the problem of securing a daughter's fertility for the group would be to provide rights to her father in the selection of a groom. But among Bedouin, a woman's father does not have rights to his brother's son; rather he must politely and discretely inquire and suggest. A man's father might insist that he marry a brother's daughter, but he possesses no right to require it. Given the great deference that Bedouin yield to older brothers and to their fathers, one might suggest the feasibility of parental control as the appropriate solution. But such a solution would contravene an equally powerful and fundamental cultural value;⁵ it would be inconsistent with the culture of honor that is almost invariably a feature of societies propelled by warfare. Having risked his life in the interests of the group, he should not now be told by his father or uncle that he must marry a specific individual. According to Musil (1928) a Rwala refuses to apply physical punishments to his infant son in anticipation of a time when the son, with the fierceness of a warrior, will be able to return the favor with interest. A

culture of warfare generates a code of honor within which control over a girl's disposition in marriage depends not on her father, but on her cousin.

It is only the first cousin who possesses a rightful claim. This right becomes significant only when other members of the three- or five-generation agnatic group are unwilling or unavailable to seek her in marriage. In this context, a cousin's rightful claim takes on the force of an obligation; and his "preference" for his f.b.d. is honorable to the degree that it expresses a primacy of group interest over ego-centric and somewhat shameful sexual satisfactions. He may permit her to marry someone else, expecting a small payment for his indulgence, and appear to be in a position of power. However, I have no reluctance in characterizing cousin marriage as a *responsibility* of members of the tertiary unit, a responsibility for which the right of the first cousin is a cultural expression. By establishing a right (responsibility) of a f.b.s., a similar responsibility (somewhat modified) is imposed on other men who may occupy a similar but more removed social locations (especially second parallel cousins), providing for them the potential honor of an endogamous marriage. For this reason, the importance of a cousin's right (as emblematic of honor) extends beyond marriages between first cousins.

Let me again emphasize the difference between "preference" and rights. The existence of a right does not depend on the extent or source of preference. Rights are not the same as norms. Norms, as we know, refer to what people actually do and, hence, are likely to be a reflection of preferences. Rights, however, are always produced by the actions of third parties (members of the community, the agnatic group, etc.) who are willing to support and defend individuals if and when they attempt to express the relevant preference. The existence of a right, therefore, is not challenged by a perceived absence of preference; it is challenged only when the (perhaps rare) expression of preference can be frustrated with impunity. Unfortunately, contemporary inclinations toward "rational choice" theory and "interactionism" have led investigators to confuse rights with norms.

Kressel (1992) argues that the right of cousins arises from the desire of a girl's father (his "preference") to secure an early disposition of her sexuality. However, this is a "problem" faced by people in a great many cultures; and the typical solution is the arrangement of an early exogamous marriage. However, given that patrilineal first cousin marriage is *permissible*, an anxious father can be expected to seek immediate attachment of his daughter to a cousin. However, the *availability* of the cousin as a permissible choice does not imply the *right* of cousins. The *right* of cousins among the Bedouin, as a preference that others are willing to protect, solves a problem for the group whose social support is essential in producing the right. The problem for this supporting group is its own survival on the desert, in the face of a seemingly

overwhelming and ineluctable “sloughing off” process. In this context each group would like to conserve for itself the fertility of its daughters, while taking brides from others. Indeed, if one group adopts this posture, others are induced to follow if only in self defense. The groups that most effectively can hoard fertility for themselves will become dominant, not only in population but in camels as well. Among strong groups, then, brides will be released to others only to the extent that strategic relations with others are essential to the achievement of other goals.

The Afar

Since Bedouin culture is not the only culture that rests on camels, and since these other camel-cultures do not permit patrilineal endogamy, we must consider alternative cultural accommodations to the problematic supply of camels. We shall see that each solution provides an internally coherent and logically consistent set of cultural elements; and by showing that each solution solves the same problem, we are assured of having identified the unique problem that has been solved by each. Within each solution one will find an avoidance of camels as bridewealth (even when camels are transferred); and we shall find that marriage involves recognition of honor for the young men within a culture of force and violence.

According to Thesiger no man may wear a coloured loincloth, a comb or a feather in his hair or decorate his knife or rifle with silver until he has killed at least twice; he is then entitled to slit his ears. Ten killings are celebrated by the wearing of an iron bracelet. ... On their return from a raid, men who have not killed are subjected to the scorn of their womenfolk; their clothes are soiled and cow-dung is rubbed in their hair. (Lewis 1969: 168)

The victims of the Afar are castrated in order to provide trophies of valor: "Killing Issa men and bringing livestock after a successful raid is the dream of every young Afar man. It offers an Afar respect and social standing as a hero in his community. ... In the past both groups [the Afar and the Oromo] carried out raids against each other to acquire camels and cattle to restock their herds after prolonged droughts and to take revenge against each other" (Getachew 2001: 47). Clearly, then, the Afar do not rely on the fertility of camels in order to preserve a desired camel/man ratio. They live in a culture that presupposes the violent expropriation of animals and territory from others as the primary basis of group preservation.

The Afar occupy a severe and adverse environment and practice limited transhumance in a well defined area of eastern Ethiopia; and they are highly segmented into exogamous clans; and marriage is not with parallel cousins, but with paternal cross-cousins (f.z.d.). How, then, is exogamous, patrilateral cross-cousin marriage a solution to the same problem that the Bedouin solve with patrilineal parallel cousin marriage?

The Afar also seek affines with whom reciprocal grazing rights can be established, however, clan exogamy does not constitute an exception in this case, it is the rule. In fact, patrilineal cross-cousin marriage is *prescribed*. If a man does not marry into his mother's clan, he is unlikely to find a bride among the Afar. Men who fail to have a suitable option may be forced to remain bachelors (Getachew 2001). So, to assure him the possibility of marriage, he has a *right* to his f.z.d. Given the fact of prescription, which is symmetric to men of both clans, it can be presumed that daughters received by one clan will be returned in the next generation, if not sooner. This being the case, these prescribed marriages do not require bridewealth – a fact that is particularly important if the growth of camel herds is a function of the fertility of women.

The difference between inter-lineage marriage of the Afar and lineage endogamy among the Bedouin is largely a function of anthropological categories. To see this, observe Figure 2, which displays the two forms of marriage.

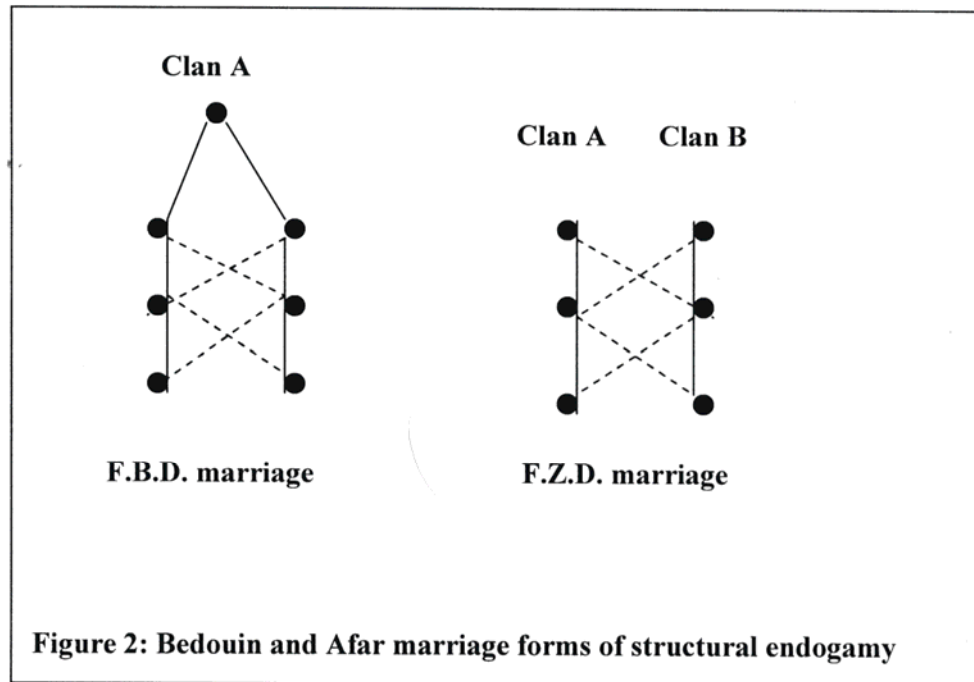


Figure 2 makes use of the p-graph approach (White and Jorion 1992, 1996) in representing a set of marital linkages. The solid lines represent men and the dotted lines represent women. The downward intersection of solid and dotted lines indicate marriages and the lines that flow downward *from* those “marriages” represent their children. In order to simplify matters, it is assumed in Figure 2 that everyone marries and has two children, a boy and a girl. The point to be emphasized here is that the patrilineal cross-cousin marriage is identical to a patrilineal parallel marriage if we assume that the first men (a and b) are brothers. White (1997: 5) would refer to

each of the graphs in Figure 1 as endograms or endogamic blocks, because even when those blocks reach outside of lineage structures, they satisfy a fundamental criterion of linkages:

Within a given kinship network, an endogamic block or endogam is a maximal set of individual-level linkages between couplings such that every pair of couplings is connected by multiple independent paths (none using the same edges) within the endogam.

For this reason, both marital forms in Figure 2 feature *structural endogamy*, even though only the f.b.d. endogram corresponds to lineage endogamy.

Marriage among the Afar is structurally parallel to f.b.d. marriage and has the built-in advantage of providing both sides with additional grazing areas. It is also the case among the Afar that men have rights to their f.z.d. (although they may actually marry another woman in this clan). Even in the context of his limited choices, he is allowed an element of power. This power is, I believe, a reflection of the honor that he has merited by a display of his enemies' emasculation around the neck of his horse. It is by means of a body count (Thesiger 1935) that a man builds the foundations of honor -- the essential elements of manhood. It is this man who is granted *rights* in women.

The Nomadic Somali

Located in territories just north of the Afar and in much greater number are the Somali nomads. They have minimal lineage segments for the herding of camels and they, too, practice clan exogamy. In fact, they generally have strong objection to cousin marriage of any form. While the Bedouin are said to have marriage within the tertiary unit as a means of strengthening group solidarity, the Somali reject it on the grounds that it would *threaten* group solidarity! The Somali have intermittent warfare with neighboring clans, and yet they intermarry with their neighbors. Lewis (1957) even suggests that intermarriage may be most frequent among enemies.

Before transferring rights in the fertility of their daughters, the Somali negotiate a counter-transfer of camels, called *yarad*. On the surface, *yarad* has the appearance of bridewealth; but their low fertility rates, the impact of droughts and raiding prevent camels from acting as wealth that can be exchanged against the fertility of women. The Somali solution to this problem is that the father of a bride does not keep the camels that he receives as *yarad*. Implicitly, he rejects the notion that his daughter's fertility can be valued in camels. He will give one-third to one-half of the *yarad* to his son-in-law, a young man who possesses no herd with which to begin a family and distribute much of the remained to the "uterine family" of the bride and to other agnates (Lewis 1969). My presumption is that all of these recipients are persons who, unlike the bride's father, ⁶ suffer an insufficiency of camels. A payment of "generous"

yarad creates conditions for an honorable endowment of a son-in-law as he arrives to assume temporary residence in the camp of his father-in-law. A common practice among all of these tribes, Bedouin, Afar and Somali, is the provision of grazing rights to affines. Among the Somali these rights remains *even after divorce*, inducing some men to seek divorce and remarriage in order to accumulate an abundance of such grazing rights.

In spite of the many differences between Somali and Bedouin marriage practices, marriage is still maintained within the unit of survival. The Somali differ in that this unit is not the tertiary group. Lewis (1969: 67) claims that the capture of camels and land is more likely to be organized at the tribal level. Indeed, even the payment of bloodwealth is not the obligation of a tertiary group, alone. Rather, the source of compensation appears to depend on the relationship between the murderer and his victim. If it is a murder within a secondary section, then the tertiary group is obliged to pay only one-third, with the remainder paid by the "outer-ring of cousins" (Lewis 1969: 108). However, if the principals are members of different sections, then the section becomes the unit of payment with a per capita assessment against each man, supplemented by contributions from tertiary units. So, when compared with Bedouin, the tertiary unit among the Somali is much less important as a source of one's right to life, to land and to animals. We would not expect, then, that it would have a major role in assigning rights to women.

Honor as a defining force

In our effort to understand a man's right to his f.b.d. among camel herders, we considered first the ecological problem presented by a growing population in relation to a fixed and limiting environment. This ecological problem demands a systematic method by which individuals or groups are sloughed off and forced to suffer the indignities of sedentarization. We then considered violence (warfare and raiding) *as a necessary aspect of the mode of production*, given the relatively low fecundity of camels and the periodic occurrence of drought. Camels are reallocated from the weak to the strong.

In each of the nomadic groups discussed herein, we have encountered a cultural attribute that is intrinsic to cultures of violence – a code of honor. This code may appear to be ancillary to the system of production – a quaint aspect of a system of social relations. However, it is my contention that it is a fundamental and essential element in the system of social reproduction. *Honor joins with the fertility of women and the milk of camels as an essential input to the production of the Bedouin warrior.* From a Marxian perspective, honor may appear to be an ideological construct, functioning at the level of "superstructure." However, we present it as an aspect of the "infrastructure"; it is a "mental" factor that interpenetrates the "material" in the

structuring of Bedouin institutions (Godelier 1986).⁷ Since honor arises from the forces to which an agnatic group owes its very existence, it should not be surprising that its influence is ubiquitous. Among the many aspects of culture that are importantly influenced by this code, rules regarding marriage may be included. Inspired by Godelier (1986) I suggest that a code of honor intervenes as a mentally derived infrastructural element of social process that requires the agnatic group to provide rights in women to the benefit of young warriors.

Holy (1989) recognizes honor to be a foundational factor in Bedouin social organization. He points out that the deportment of women after marriage remains the responsibility of her family of origin, including the responsibility to pay bloodwealth in the event that she commits murder. Morally improper acts on her part are a source of shame for her father and brothers. It is they who are likely to kill her in the event that she commits adultery. However, Holy's (1989: 73) main argument is that

The strongest responsibility for a woman's chastity befalls her father and brother, followed by the father's brother, the father's brother's son, mother's brother, mother's brother's son, etc. They exercise this responsibility by seeing to it that she gets married or by actually marrying her. What amounts, under certain circumstances, to an obligation to marry a kinswoman is thus directly related to the responsibility for her chastity.

Hence, the right to marry the f.b.d. has the function of protecting her from irresponsible conduct, conduct that would stain the honor of her father and his agnates. And by achieving this protection of virtue and by being more easily negotiated and arranged, this form of marriage contributes greatly to strength of an agnatic group and emerges as an expression of agnatic solidarity. In general, Holy (1989:75) believes that the "notion of honour" centers on "the normative rules of kinship relations" and has its primary significance in expressive acts in the avoidance of shame. However, a concern with honor suffuses all social relations by assuming a primary role in the composition of male personhood (with implications for female personhood), given its foundation in the acts of valor on which the group depends for its continued presence on the desert. This is the same kind of code that we find in greatly distant cultures, such as the Samurai culture of traditional Japan, the Sarakatsani shepherd culture of Greece, the knightly culture of medieval Europe and perhaps even among Chicano street gangs in Chicago (Horowitz and Schwartz 1974).

Honor is a tool by which statutory equals can be differentiated in rank by means of codified forms of valor and violence (Pitt-Rivers 1966). As such, it centers on the person of the warrior, as I have indicated repeatedly, and hence on all males who at some stage of life, distinguished themselves as warriors. A major difficulty in understanding honor, today, is the attempt of the bourgeois classes to appropriate for themselves a term that belonged appropriately only to a section of the European aristocracy. Or, perhaps equivalently, the problem may be that

the bourgeoisie was inclined to compound honor with "honorable" in such a way that the honor of the past was hardly any grander than the dubious reputations of the commercial rich. The problem is clear in Steward (1994) who seems not to understand that a law against insults cannot be a protection of honor. The requirement of the duel for the avenging of impertinence was not simply a quaint custom that suffered the absence of law forbidding insult. Indeed, a law against insult is a fatal assault on the code of honor and to a large extent this was its purpose. A man of honor can greet insult only by reacting in a culturally approved, but always, violent manner. While honor resides in social recognition, its defense is necessarily reserved for the honored individual.⁸ It is only the "honor" of the bourgeoisie that law can protect. In this case, however, honor is transmogrified into "honorable."⁹

Abu-Lughod (1986) locates the function of parallel patrilineal cousin marriage among village residents in a desire to avoid challenge to the integrity of the agnatic core. In general sexual attraction is a threat to a man's self control and hence the marital pair may become divergent relative to the interests of the agnatic core. However, if the bride is the f.b.d., she can be trusted to have internalized the interests of this agnatic group and the solidarity of the group is secure. This argument is certainly valid given the continuing strong attachment of women to their natal groups, but how is it that people who live in villages and who have no relationship with the camel continue to maintain the "integrity of the agnatic core." There seem to be two factors at work. First, given that it is permissible, cousin marriage is useful in a struggle for demographic dominance in both the desert and the town. Secondly, we know that a significant percentage of urban and village people in the Middle East were only one or more generations from nomadic life. It could not be otherwise, given the ineluctable sloughing-off process that consigns a continued flow of proud but failed Bedouin into urban and village life.

Concluding remark

The desert ecology of camel herding leads ineluctably to tragedy, expressed over many centuries. Those who remain on the desert have reason for pride, while those who must be sloughed off commonly face a final tragedy in the village. In contrast to the structural equality among men of the desert, those who are expelled from nomadism must encounter the harsh hierarchy of the village. Having lost their way on the desert, they now become easily exploitable work-power as *fellahin* in Iraq, Egypt, and other places. This flow certainly assures transference of desert culture into villages;¹⁰ but additionally, it transfers to villages a new problem of survival. In the villages, it is life that must be preserved, rather than life-style; and the sloughing off process in the context of village life assumes new dimensions. My point is that a continued

importance of agnatic solidarity in village life may be much more than cultural drift and may assume its own *raison d'être* as each family struggles to isolate itself from the fate of others.

Our story began with the fact that a process of Arabization accompanied the expansion of Islam during the first centuries of the Islamic era. This process led to the permissibility and, perhaps, a common preference for patrilineal cousin marriage within the territories of the Khalifate. These conditions were essential preconditions for the persistence or evolution of *rightful* claims on f.b.d. among Bedouin. However, one cannot expect to explain the initial development of its permissibility on the Arabian peninsula. Culture remains, in the end, inscrutable – a fact that we as anthropologists must recognize with appreciation rather than embarrassment.

Notes:

1. It has been suggested that this paper is incomplete without an interrogation of pre-Islamic marital practices that may have prompted the rules of the Caliphate. There is some evidence that patrilineal cousin marriage was first practiced by Jews (perhaps, Jewish shepherds) in pre-historic times and that it was adopted by the Arabs. Surely, this is a question to be pursued by a suitably specialized historian.
2. It would appear that the ecology in the Horn of Africa is richer in food for camels than that in Arabia or Cyrenaica, allowing nomads to remain within limited geographical locations throughout the year. The fact may also explain the lack of territorial allocations at the tertiary level.
3. The modern business corporation accommodates this criterion without having to construct a multi-generational wealth-holding corporate group. This is accomplished by the development

of "shares" for capital assets. The value of a share reflects at any point in time the collective (market) expectations regarding the *future growth* in the value of the underlying assets, whose value is discounted to the present.

4. It should be clear from the "indefinite duration" property of wealth-assets that they can actually belong only to an entity of indefinite duration. A husband is a transient member of that entity.
5. The broader benefits from her fertility arise when larger units coalesce to confront enemies of the similar level of segmentation.
6. Hildred Geertz (1979: 372 ff) points out that in Moroccan villages it is the father who might exercise the right of his son to his brother's daughter. These sons, of course, are not warriors.
7. Even if the father possesses only a modest herd, he should assume the proud posture of one who possesses a sufficiency. Sufficiency in camels becomes a mark of honor.
8. I am also indebted to Ingrid Jordt for a productive private discussion of Godelier's ideas.
9. Among Bedouin, the insult or murder of an agnate is an assault on the *ibn amm* as a whole, so that a response by that *ibn amm* or any member thereof would be required.
10. According to Steward (1994:39), "The finding that interests us here is that "the use of the word honour in the sense of 'honourableness of character' becomes more and more frequent in plays during the first half of the seventeenth century, and in the restoration drama it is the commonest meaning of the word."
11. In a poor section of Cairo "44 percent of married women were married to a relative. Of those related, 70 percent were to first cousins, and in two out of three cases they were patrilineal cousins" (TekHe et.al 1994: 74).

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