

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SELECTED PASTORAL  
ISLAMIC SOCIETIES

by

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ABSTRACT.

The purpose of this thesis is two-fold: first, to discuss the activities of the women of the Shahsavan tribe of North-eastern Azerbaijan, Iran, and to consider the women's sub-society in which all Shahsavan women participate, and secondly, to determine the extent to which the three requirements abstracted from the Shahsavan material and essential to the development of such a sub-society can be used as predictive tools when applied to other communities.

In Part 1, a brief introduction to the concept 'women's sub-society' is presented, and the selection of societies to be used for comparison is considered. Part 2 includes a presentation of the Shahsavan material: Shahsavan attitudes to women, women's daily activities, and those activities - particularly feast-going - which provide a basis for the women's sub-society. In Parts 3 and 4 comparative material, on the Pastoral Fulani, and the Tuareg of the Sahara respectively, is examined in terms of the requirements essential to the development of a women's sub-society; it is suggested that the existence of a women's sub-society is not unlikely among the Pastoral Fulani, whereas among the Tuareg, where the three requirements are not met, this does not seem to be the case. A broader perspective is presented in Part 5;

the implications of a women's sub-society, particularly as it acts as an information service, a means of social control, and a possible psychological outlet for women, are examined in terms of societies other than those which are nomadic, Muslim, and male-dominated.



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PREFACE

I wish to begin by recording my gratitude to my supervisor, Professor A.C. Mayer whose interest and advice has been invaluable. I thank also Professor Johannes Nicolaisen who kindly read and commented on Chapter 4.

My interest in Islamic tribal women began when I briefly visited the Shahsavan tribesmen with my husband Richard Tapper in the summer of 1965. We soon realized that as a woman I had access to considerable information about the tribal women which would be difficult, if not impossible, for my husband alone to elicit in this highly segregated society, and we planned that on my return to the area the following summer I would conduct anthropological fieldwork among the women. The material for Part 2 of the thesis was taken from the field notes of my husband who worked among the Shahsavan in August and September, 1963; August and September, 1964; and between July, 1965 and October, 1966 and from my own notes collected between July and October, 1966. Much of the theoretical analysis of this material was worked out in discussions with my husband, and I am deeply indebted to him for his help.

I thank also Capt. Ferit Polat whose patience in teaching me Turkish was inexhaustible.

Finally, my debt to the Shahsavan women I came to know is very great; their friendship and assistance

provided the impetus for this inquiry, and I wish to express my pleasure and many thanks for the summer I spent among them.

## A NOTE ON TRANSCRIPTION

X There is no standard English system of transcription for Azeri Turkish which as a literary language has Arabic and Cyrillic alphabets. Neither these nor the Romanized Standard Turkish alphabets <sup>are</sup> ~~are~~ adequate. Primarily for use in Chapter 2 on the Shahsavan people, I have adopted the following system of transcription which is consistent with that used by my husband. I use such a precise system because many of the words have not been transcribed previously and should be recorded here as accurately as possible; inevitably, many words of Persian and Arabic origin are deformed in transcription in order to represent their pronunciation in Azeri Turkish. Transcription and rough pronunciation is as follows :

- a varies between the English 'putt' and 'par'.
- ä as in 'pat'.
- e varies between the English 'pet' and the French 'fête'; in a final position it is not mute.
- i varies between the English 'pit' and 'peaf'.
- ı corresponds to the English informal final vowel 'e' as in 'the' before consonants, and 'fathe'.
- o varies between the English 'pot' and 'por'.
- ö as in the German 'ö' or the French 'eu' as in 'peu'.
- u varies between the English 'put' and 'hoo'.
- ü as in the German 'ü' or in the French 'u' as in 'du'.

Various diphthongs.

Consonants b, d, f, h, l, m, n, p, s, t, v and y are roughly as in English.

r is slightly trilled.

z as in 'zeal'.

š = sh as in 'shop'.

č = ch as in 'church'	} often palatal- ized to become	{ č → ts as in 'cats'. g → j as in 'jam'. k → č as in 'church'. j → dz as in 'adze'.
g as in 'gate'.		
k as in 'kit'.		
j as in 'jam'.		

x = kh, as in the German or Scottish 'ch'

q = uvular plosive, as in the Arabic/Persian 'ق'.

ğ = uvular fricative; not used in an initial position.

The words represented in this system are underlined;

I have chosen to use the English 's' plural rather than the Turkish plurals: hence - čobans rather than čobanlar, and so forth.

For a number of words, particularly proper names of people or places, I have used only a rough system of transcription, either because they are words or proper names with which the reader might be assumed familiar, (e.g. Baraka, Jinn, and Tabriz) or they are names of individuals or tribal groups within the Shahsavan, all of which are in any case fictitious. These words are capitalized, but in no other way distinguished from English words.

However, one striking inconsistency remains: I spell the shrine city in eastern Iran and the title affixed to proper names of pilgrims who have visited this city as 'Mashhad', but when I am refering to the leadership position among Shahsavan women, I use the more accurate system of transcription, hence - 'Māshādi'.

Where words in foreign languages other than Azeri Turkish are not found in direct quotations, footnotes indicate the authority followed.



## CHAPTER 1.

### INTRODUCTION.

This thesis is largely based on the analysis of fieldnotes collected among the women of the Shahsavan tribe of north-west Iran, among whom a certain type of social organization is shown to exist. Two other societies are also examined to see if general points of comparative relevance can be established. In this introductory chapter I shall outline the material from the Shahsavan and explain the criteria used for the selection of the other two societies.

In Chapter 2 I shall discuss a kind of social activity which involves all the women of the Shahsavan tribesmen of Iran, in which the women establish among themselves a range of relationships based on achieved and ascribed statuses, rules of social behaviour, and leaders.

The women take part in two definite spheres of social activity. One is based on camps, discrete localized groups of households; the other is a system of ego-centered circles of dyadic relations, mobilized at feasts, and cutting across the localized camps. Separate camp communities of women do not build up into a larger structure, nor do the ego-centered circles form a structure larger than a society-wide network of such circles. However, in both camp activities and feasts women are enabled to maintain and manipulate

Ascribed and achieved statuses so that similar ranking systems based on a common system of values are found among all Shahsavan women; these systems form a structure and the women of the Shahsavan form a society or culture of their own. "A society is not an agglomeration of persons but a system of social relations." (Pitt-Rivers 1954:xiii) - activities, beliefs and institutions are consistent with one another. Because these values and ranked positions are exclusive to the women and yet dependent on and to some extent complementary to certain features of organization among the men, and because this is a 'male-dominated' society, I regard the above structure as a sub-structure, and I shall refer to the women's society as a sub-society. The use of these terms is discussed more fully below, cf. p.132 ff.

After a presentation of the general material relevant to women's relations with each other, a detailed examination of the women's activities will be made. The abstract structure which emerges is open to analysis, and I shall first consider both the features of the women's activities per se and the features of the larger society, all of which appear to affect the nature of the sub-society, and I shall then propose certain requirements as being essential to the existence of such a sub-society. To my knowledge such an organization among women has not been described before, though intimations that they do occur elsewhere can be found in the literature. This then would seem to be a

fruitful area for comparative study which can perhaps explain or fill lacunae in anthropological theory.

In the light of the Shahsavan material, in Chapters 3 and 4 of the thesis I shall consider the relationships between women in two other societies. In particular, I shall determine whether those basic requirements which underlie a women's sub-society, which I have established in Chapter 2, are fulfilled; if it appears that these are met, I shall examine the content of the relationships themselves.

The selection of the two societies to be used for comparison - the Pastoral Fulani and the Tuareg - was in many ways arbitrary for I was severely limited by the material available for analysis. To aid me in my choice I established three constants: occupation, religion, and 'male-domination'.

With regard to occupation, I have selected societies which have an economy based on pastoral nomadism.<sup>1</sup> I have done this mainly because the Shahsavan from whom I draw the material used in Chapter 2 are pastoral nomads themselves.

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1. The criteria used to distinguish nomadism, semi-nomadism, and transhumance, vary widely among different writers. I prefer to follow Salzman (1967) in using pastoral nomadism to refer to any combination of pastoralism and movement. The distinction of types of nomadism will not be relevant in this thesis.

Though it may become evident that this control does not add positively to an understanding of the material on women, I feel that the local organization of nomads, which in its fluidity and mobility differs so greatly from that of settled peoples, may indeed be a significant factor in determining the contacts that women can establish and maintain among themselves; it would certainly be folly to consider this factor irrelevant at the onset.

The two societies discussed in Part II are similar to the Shahsavan in that they too adhere to some degree to the tenets of Islam.<sup>2</sup> I am fully aware that Islam as a religious/jural system was developed in a specific context and yet has been superimposed on totally different social systems half-way round the world, and that Islam has circumscribed if not changed these disparate systems, but its imposition even after 1300 years has by no means created a monolithic culture.

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2. As a means of determining whether a people are Muslim or not, I follow Lewis: "Theoretically, the minimum definition of the practising Muslim is in terms of the observance of the five 'Pillars of the Faith'. But in all Muslim communities it is recognized that these represent ideals of conduct which are often perfunctorily and imperfectly realized. They are therefore best regarded as ideals to which all professing Muslims subscribe and seek to honour with varying degrees of determination and success. ... Thus, ultimately, it becomes necessary to adopt the operational (and tautological) definition that those are Muslims who call and regard themselves as such." (Lewis 1966:58)

For this reason I will 'be naive' with regard to the historical tradition of Islam and try to concentrate on functional sociology.<sup>3</sup> My justification, if one is necessary, is that though the legal status of women in Islam has been dealt with extensively,<sup>4</sup> reliable sociological data on Muslim women, tribal or otherwise, is virtually non-existent. Nonetheless, because all three are Muslim societies they do have a number of Islamic themes in common - for instance, Koranic inheritance laws. But, rather than underlining the formal aims of such an institution, I hope to show that it is its local interpretation which has important implications for other institutions in a society.

A relationship between the two constants of occupation and religion should be noted; that is, "Religion is reckoned generally to be less conspicuous among nomads." (Spooner 1963:88) "Since the most conspicuous feature of nomadic life is the migratory routine, the religious routine must be an

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3. This approach to a world religion is adopted by Bailey (1964) with regard to the traditions of Hinduism and Indology in general. "If one ventures...into the literature, it is because one is interested, not because familiarity with the more academic side of Hinduism is required for the understanding of peasant social relations." (61)

4. cf. Levy 1965: 91 ff; Syed 1912.

integral and subsidiary part of this - if it is possible to distinguish between the two." (Spooner 1963:88n.)

Finally, I have used the fact of 'male-domination' as a criterion for selection. According to Lewis, a 'male-dominated' society is one in which "...men hold a secure monopoly of the major power positions and deny their partners effective jural rights..." He adds that male domination and the resultant 'peripherality of women' is "...not some special feature limited to patrilineal societies..." (Lewis 1966b:321)

Both Islam and pastoralism per se have been considered<sup>5</sup> synonymous with male-dominated societies. Though a relationship may sometimes exist between male-domination and either Islam or pastoralism or both, I do not believe that this is necessarily the case. It is important to see male-domination as a separate consideration. Let me elaborate.

In the past, the economic system of pastoralism has been seen as a determinant of the low formal status of women. The argument runs that by ancient custom the men's work was to provide the food, after which the women's work of preparing the food begins. (cf. Myres 1940:38) That is to say that since herding and other activities to do with the animals are principally the concern of men, the women who add

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5. e.g. Iuzbetak 1951:194.

little or nothing to the food supply are relegated to an inferior position in the society. In fact Hobhouse in examining the relationship between pastoralism and the inferior position of women even came up with the fact that 87.5% of the time there is a positive correspondence between the two. (cf. Lowie 1921:184)<sup>6</sup>

However, the division of labour in pastoral communities should not be seen as existing to put women in their place or to define their lower status. As Cunnison says, it is better seen as an expedient way of sharing the practical process of living. This is especially true where specialized knowledge in several areas is necessary to the existence of the society, and where there is a delicate balance between these different specialist areas. (1963:34)

In other words, if the division of labour between the sexes is such that economic duties of either sex are both indispensable and not transferable, it is clear that the viability of the society is at stake; in such a case, "...an attempt at anthropological or moral arithmetic...to decide whether the position of women in general is high or low ... is ...likely to prove profitless." (Kaberry 1952:vii)

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6. Driberg makes a similar point when he says that, "That the legal status of women is more independent among Nilo-Hamitics than among the Nilotics corresponds with their relatively greater economic independence." (Driberg 1932:419)

For example, Cunnison goes so far as to suggest that any changes in the position of women among the Baggara Arabs would probably limit their ability to learn those things necessary to be<sup>ing</sup> a Baggara wife and would presuppose changes in the entire economic situation of the tribe. He goes further to demonstrate the interdependence of men's and women's specializations by noting that boys who are sent to school even for a year miss much of the training necessary to keep cattle in their bleak country, and likewise, women who have an education are not sought as wives because of their inability to perform equally crucial tasks.

(Cunnison 1963:34)

As will be shown in the material on the pastoral Fulani, it is in fact the nature of the division of labour itself which allows the Fulani women the greatest liberty in one important area of social life.

In the Muslim world, male domination is a basic assumption on which **are** built moral precepts and jural prescriptions.

The most striking example is to be found in ... legislation on divorce and family life. ... the Koran explicitly maintains the superior right both of the father and the husband, and legalizes polygamy up to four wives and repudiation under certain restrictions. Further than this Mohammed evidently could not go by the method of legislation, ...even so it was not long before most of the rights accorded to women and the restrictions imposed upon their guardians were substantially curtailed by the ingenuity of Muslim casuists.  
(Gibb 1962:33)



A Muslim commentator writing in the 13th century details the ways in which men are superior to women:

...in the matter of mental ability and good council, and in their power for the performance of duties and for the carrying out of (divine) commands. Hence to men have been confined prophecy, religious leadership, saintship, pilgrimage rites, the giving of evidence in law-courts, the duties of the holy war, worship in the mosque on the day of assembly (Friday), etc. They also have the privilege of electing chiefs, have a larger share of inheritance and discretion in the matter of divorce. (Levy 1965: 98-99)

All this is to say, "Men shall have the pre-eminence above women, because of those advantages wherein God hath caused the one of them to excel the other..." (Koran, Sura 4: verse 34) But in practice the excellence of men takes many forms. Not only is the distance between ideals and practice generally great, but there is also a definite place for local custom ('urf, 'āda)<sup>7</sup> as a source of the law. Thus traditional laws or patterns of behaviour governing the position of women in a society may take precedence over Islamic interpretations, whether the latter are complemented or contradicted.

The importance of the traditional Tuareg definition of a woman's position will be described below; it will become evident that a male-dominated society can be organised according to matrilineal principles which take little notice

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7. Levy 1965:248

of Islamic emphases.

I shall be discussing the relations among women in three selected Islamic, pastoral, male-dominated societies; but in each case, to understand the women's activities among themselves, the social system as a whole must be considered. As Kaberry says,

...there is no short cut to the study of women. Generalizations on their status and roles are the end-product of an intensive process of investigation into the social organization or into a particular set of institutions of a tribe.  
(1952:viii)

The variables must be considered as independent, but together they form the parameters of my main problem - that of analysing the degree to which women's sub-societies exist and what forms they may take.

## CHAPTER 2: THE SHAHSAVAN OF AZERBAIJAN.

### 1. INTRODUCTION.

The women of the Shahsavan, pastoral tribesmen in Northeastern Azerbaijan, Iran, are wholly dependent on men for economic maintenance and political leadership, legal and religious guidance; yet, within the irrefutable limits of male authority, there exists an autonomous if dependent women's sub-society.

The Shahsavan are tent-dwelling shepherds who migrate between winter pastures (qışlax) on the Moghan plain and summer pastures (yaylax) on the Savalan massif 100 miles to the south. They live off the meat and milk of their flocks, though they are heavily dependent on the market for commodities such as flour, oil, sugar, tea, salt, some clothes and equipment. Their interdependence with both the villages of the region and the distant city populations must be emphasized, for the Shahsavan economy is based on the sale of animals for slaughter and of wool and dairy products; wool is also processed by the tribesmen themselves for their own tent felts, blankets, bags and rugs, etc.

There are small market towns near both winter and summer pastures, and villages are scattered throughout the area except in the mountains of yaylax. Though some of the Shahsavan have settled and taken up farming, most villagers of the area (tats) are of non-tribal origin. Both tats and

Figure 1:  
Sketch-map of  
Shahsavari Area  
Mountainous Areas

Roads

Rivers

25 KM.



U. S. S. R.

p. 22a  
Baku  
PLAINS

PARSABAD

ARAS R.

MOGHAN

ARASBARAN  
(QARADAGH)

U.S.S.R.

AHAR

KHIAV

MT. SAVAN  
(15,800 ft.)

ARDABIL

Savan Range

← Tabriz

SARAB

Shahsavan speak the Azerbaijani dialect of Turkish and are Shi'a Muslims. Some preachers (mullas) live in the villages and towns of the region, and are called to the tents for Islamic festivals, funerals, and sometimes marriages.

The Shahsavan tribal population numbers about 50,000 people in 7,500 tents (accurate figures are unobtainable). Traditionally there are 32 'tribes' (tayfe) each with a chief (bāiğ) whose main sanction for authority in the past was the strength of his family, patrilineage, and retainers, (the bāiğzade). Tayfes vary greatly in size from 50 to more than 1000 families and subdivide into between 2 and 25 localized sections (tire). The tire core is a group of 20 to 30 agnatically related families (i.e. tents) tracing descent from an ancestor three to seven generations back, after whom the tire is commonly named. The leader or aq saqal (grey-beard) usually succeeds his father; he mediates relations between his tire and others and with the bāiğ, and deals with disputes inside the tire. In the past, the bāiğs could wield absolute power in the tayfe through the bāiğzade and the aq saqals, but recently the political emphasis has changed and police and courts and other government institutions have replaced the duties and powers of the bāiğ and deal more directly with the aq saqals who have considerable economic and political independence.

The tire is the migration unit and its members own and occupy defined stretches of winter and summer pastures. It

subdivides however for camping and herding purposes; in summer, into herding units of about five tents (i.e. 300-500 sheep) while two or three of these units combine to form winter camps of ten to fifteen tents. Each herding unit and winter camp is led by a senior member also called aq sagal.

Apart from the agnatic tire members who hold the pasture rights, other tents may join a camp for other reasons. Affines short of land may come for a season or more and may or may not pay for pasturage. Sometimes they may have the status of unofficial 'retainers', which means that they make themselves available for menial services in return for pasturage for their animals. Others will be officially hired herdsmen (čoban) who tend an employer's herd on a renewable six months contract for a fee plus free pasturage. These 'camp followers' may not be affinally or matrilineally related to their hosts, especially if the latter are important men such as a tire aq sagal. Local grouping thus depends on (a). patrilineal descent, (b). affinity and matrilineal kinship, and (c). economic contracts.

A summary of one important institution should be included in this introduction: xeir-u-šärr - literally "good-evil". Xeir-u-šärr is a concept which means a dyadic relationship of mutual attendance at feasts. It also refers to the ego-centered groups so formed. 'My xeir-u-šärr'

means all those people to whose feasts I go, and who come to my feasts.

Feasts include: toys (weddings and circumcision); mourning gatherings and farewell parties for pilgrims to Mecca. At all such feasts the guests bring contributions of some kind. At toys, the guests (men and women, separately) are served with sweets before lunch, on receipt of which each person throws down a sum of money, as a contribution to the expenses of the feast. At funerals, each guest brings some material contribution (sugar, tea, a sheep, etc.) to the expenses, and more important, his prayers for the deceased. At engagement ceremonies, more intimate kin and friends of the groom's father contribute to the prestations he must take to his affines-to-be.

All these donations are supposedly reciprocal; you throw down or bring to a man's feast, as much as he last threw down at a feast of yours of the same category; or more, if you want to shame him, or have a feast of your own in the offing. If you are invited to a feast which you cannot attend, you should at least send a member of your household with the appropriate donation.

Invitations are sent round for toys, but other feasts are informally announced and xeir-u-šärr are expected to attend uninvited. To initiate a relationship with B, A must just send him an invitation; if B turns up, the relationship commences, otherwise not. Similarly, the sanctions on



maintenance of the relationship are automatic - if one partner drops out, the bond ceases.

The more powerful and influential a man, the wider his circle of xeir-u-šärr, on which indeed his power and influence depends. Xeir-u-šärr between ordinary tribesmen and bäiğ families carries great snob-appeal for the former.

The rules for xeir-u-šärr participation are the same for both men and women and the groups so formed are similar in so far as the focus of any xeir-u-šärr group is the individual (man or woman) who called it into being. Implicit in this statement is the idea that no two individuals, even a man and his wife, have the same xeir-u-šärr contacts.

The material on the women of the Shahsavan will be discussed under five headings: The ideal status of women; Ascribed statuses of women; Achieved statuses of women; The women leaders; and Xeir-u-šärr feasts, and the women's sub-society.

## II. IDEAL STATUS OF WOMEN.

When asked what the position of women in their society is and ought to be, Shahsavan of both sexes refer to two main principles; the segregation of the sexes and male domination.

### A.) The segregation of the sexes.

The segregation of the sexes is evident both in the division of labour and in all social relations. While men



concern themselves with the political and economic aspects of social life, women's activities are centered within the home which is regarded as their domain. (The nature of the division of labour will be more fully discussed below, see page 34 ). Genealogy, custom and magico-medical lore are also recognized to be women's specialities.

A woman's social contacts with men fall into three categories: a.) men who are with the forbidden degrees (mähräm - not marriageable). For the most part the men of this category are those who live in the women's tents of origin and marriage, and relations with all such men, except at the transition period between the two tents, are familiar and unrestrained. Other men who belong in this category (e.g. DH) may live elsewhere but relations with them are of the same nature. b.) qohum - all recognized male kin and affines outside the forbidden degrees - that is, men of a woman's tire of origin and tire of marriage - and any other men who may be neighbours in her camp. Conversation with such men is possible and may be inevitable in the course of running the household, but relations are much more restrained than those with men of the first category. As these men are potential marriage partners, a woman is expected to cover her face in their presence. In the absence of her menfolk, a woman is forbidden to receive and entertain such men as visitors. c.) yad adam - all men not included in the above two categories. No contact with such men is permissible. If a stranger approaches a camp the women will cover their

faces and hasten to their own tent; if no men of the camp are present, old women will shout to the stranger that he cannot be received. However, with some strangers - for example, itinerant tradesmen and family guests - contact is inevitable and for such purposes a relationship of pseudo-kinship is formed enabling the women to converse with some freedom with the visitors. (This point will be taken up in greater detail below, see page 58.) For all formal gatherings such as feasts and religious ceremonies, where, from the point of view of a woman guest, men of all three categories will be present, men and women will be completely separated in different tents. The women's non-involvement in the affairs of men and avoidance of strangers is referred to their supposed natural feelings of embarrassment and shame.

B.) Male domination.

A woman should obey her husband at all times and have his permission for any activity outside the home. A Shabsavan husband has said, 'They (the women) belong to us and we are free and can do anything.' and the women would concur. If a man is known to consult his wife on economic and political affairs (i.e. those not concerned with the running of the household) he will be the subject of some ridicule; but, men admit that, when marriage choices are made, the woman's opinion carries some weight. This is

not surprising since marriage more than any other subject is of vital interest to both sexes. (Moreover, typically only the women have a chance to assess the character and beauty of a potential bride). This is the one area of overlap in the sexual division and in no other matter are women necessarily consulted, so the male's authority as household head remains unchallenged. (cf. Evans-Pritchard 1965:51)

Men inevitably encroach on the women's sphere as fathers, husbands, and brothers but in positions of authority, while women do not intrude into the male sphere of activity. Yet women control the daily affairs of the household and men willingly accept their judgement in this sphere, acknowledge their dependence on the women, and accord them great respect and honour for their performances of a role so vital to the well-being of the community. One man said: 'A house is bad without a woman; the men are helpless, they can live only when there are women to help'. and there are proverbs to the effect that the household revolves around the wife.

Leadership in all relations outside and inside the family is held to be a male prerogative; for women leadership is only possible after menopause, when their status approximates that of a man. This happens not so much because of the old woman's loss of sexuality as from her freedom

from many of her former domestic responsibilities - e.g. child-rearing.

As in most societies, ascribed statuses among the Shabsavan derive from age, birth, and usually marriage; in other words, those areas which are of principle interest to the Shabsavan women, whereas competition and achievement take place in political and economic activities -- the male area of interest. Thus, competitive values - those which determine relationships of inferiority/superiority of status - are male values. Because of the segregation of the sexes the women are disqualified from the competition, and hence stems the conception, held by all, that women are not so much inferior as completely different from men. The question of the equality or inequality of the sexes is not relevant to the Shabsavan - the sexes are not to be compared with each other any more than industrial shares are to be compared with the share-holders. In fact, in their own sphere of interest, i.e. economic and political affairs, men tend to regard their women (both daughters and wives) as productive capital, in other words, as property. But it should of course be emphasized that in the spheres of social life that directly concern the women, i.e. domestic and marriage affairs, this notion of women as property is not relevant.

### C.) CONCEPTS OF HONOUR AND SHAME.

As mentioned above (page 28 ), male values predominate. This may be analysed as follows: in males, the same qualities (bravery, intelligence, competence, etc.) are valued by both men and women; while men and women have different ideas about what a woman should be. Men value women for their ascribed qualities such as strength, beauty (i.e. plumpness), and birth status, whereas women respect achievement among themselves (i.e. efficiency, good-humour, and other personal characteristics).<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, there is one attribute on which all are agreed - women should be affected by feelings of shame and embarrassment.

This concept of shame is not elaborated among the Shahsavani to the extent that one finds in some Mediterranean countries (cf. Peristiany, 1965) where it is closely bound to ideas of group honour. There is no notion among the Shahsavani of continual confrontation to prove the honour of the group, and 'shameless' behaviour does not defile the group. Certain differences between Shahsavani and the

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8. Aswad considers the importance of personal characteristics in ranking women in a Turkish village:

...due to [the] normally more peripheral role, a woman's personality, and the degree to which she measures up to the ideal woman, can account for her standing in the community to a greater extent than can a man's personality. In listing traits for ranking a good wife, [a woman] gave them in this order: 1.) that she bear a male child; 2.) her personality; 3.) her lineage background and property. (1967:150)

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Mediterranean societies might account for this situation. Since social segregation of the sexes is a fundamental characteristic of Shahsavan society which is highly relevant to any discussion of Shahsavan women, it is worth considering these differences in some detail.

1.) Marriage and group honour. The Christian Mediterranean 'group' of extended family or kindred is exogamous and marriage always unites two potentially hostile groups; the marriage negotiations and ceremonies are a focus for the confrontation of the honour of each group. Egyptian Bedouin and other Muslim groups avoid this kind of confrontation through preferred marriage with a FBS, who is the closest relative permitted to marry a girl and he is considered the best man to look after her and protect the bird (honour) of the lineage. The FBS is regarded as responsible for retaliation for the stain on their collective bird. (Abou-Zeid 1965:257)

The Shahsavan, however, regard honour as a personal attribute and not as the characteristic of a group as a whole. Thus, both in marriages within a tire and between two different tires, only the 'face' (abiru) of individual protagonists in the tire (fathers of bride and groom) with whom others may sympathize though not identify is involved. Nonetheless, the virginity of the betrothed girl at the time of her marriage is a matter of honour to

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her family. Of all members of her family, the girl betrothed to an outsider has fewest vested or defined interests in the family's welfare, and is most likely to compromise its honour - for example, by betraying family secrets, failing to live up to her affines' expectations, or worst of all by proving to be 'used goods' on the wedding night. In the same way the new bride is a threat to her in-law's honour. Honour in these contexts is not an idealized abstract concept, indeed, there is no indigenous Turki term for it. Rather, it is a further extension of the face lost or won by parties to an economic bargain.

Thus the honour of the individual is of primary importance among the Shahsavan. This may be related to the fact that there is considerable economic differentiation within the tire, the unit which <sup>is</sup> the focus of basic group loyalty. As Friedl notes (1963:133) families in the Cypriot community did not differ in wealth but did differ in the degree of honour achieved by the behaviour of their women. A similar situation seems to obtain among the Egyptian Bedouin, (cf. Abou-Zeid 1965:257) Among the Shahsavan however, there are considerable variations in the economic standing of families in a tire and this index is used for ranking purposes. Thus, because there is already one set of criteria to distinguish the relative statuses of families, it perhaps accounts for the

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lack of elaboration of another set based on relative honour and shame.

2.) Sanctions against illicit sexual affairs.

Among the Shahsavan, sanctions against extra-marital sexual affairs are very powerful; although no direct evidence of any such affairs was obtained, the punishment, even for an innocent association, was always affirmed to be death for the female, if not for both parties, at the hand of the woman's guardian (father or brother, if she is unmarried, or husband if she is married) and exposure without burial. The sanctions were not referred to concepts of group honour, rather to the idea of a just punishment of acts abhorrent to God. In the Mediterranean societies such as the Sarakatsani and the Bedouin, cases of illicit sex relations did seem to have occurred from time to time; the penalties were as severe as in the Shahsavan but seemed to fulfil the need to restore the group's honour rather than to destroy the individual offender. Temptation and opportunity also seem to be greater than found among the Shahsavan where the social segregation of the sexes is strictly observed; when a woman is out of her camp, her face is always covered, and even then she is very rarely out of shouting distance of her menfolk. The only real danger of sexual irregularities comes from within the group; if this should occur, no outsider need in fact ever know, but the



sanctions, the attitudes, and the very nature of daily life virtually rule out such an occurrence.

### 3.) Ideas on the nature of women.

In the Mediterranean societies, women are regarded as naturally evil and potentially in league with the devil. To live in conformity with the demands of 'shame', a woman and her kinsmen must struggle continually to suppress her inclinations particularly her sex-instincts. Preservation of the honour of the women is vital to the maintenance of group honour, which is constantly threatened from within by the naturally 'shameless' women. By contrast, Shahsavan women are held to be by nature pure and noble and their natural place is at home and in the women's sphere. It is the shameless woman who is unnatural, inconceivable in fact.

### III. ASCRIBED STATUSES OF WOMEN.

This section will deal with the ascribed statuses of women: A.) Age status at various points in the life cycle, B.) A woman's 'birth' status as defined by her family of origin, C.) Marital status, and D.) Domestic duties. A case illustrating the above four principles in camp life will follow.

#### A.) Age status at various points in the life cycle.

There are five stages in a woman's life cycle; each one is clearly defined with regard to expected behaviour and relative status. The style of headdress a woman

wears is a signal indicating which stage she has reached. a.) uřax - or child, the term does not differentiate sex. Until the age of eight or nine, a girl plays freely with boys and girls of her own age and has only minimal obligations to help her mother. At this time a female child is careless about keeping her head covered; she will be coquettish in claiming the affections of her father and elder brothers. b.) qřz - as yet unmarried, but marriageable girl. At eight or nine a girl becomes much more subdued and decorous in all aspects of her behaviour, and her duties in the household become extensive. She carefully wears a single scarf as a head-covering. Though she is likely to be betrothed, a girl at this age has few contacts outside her immediate family. c.) gřlin - bride; daughter-in-law. Marriage is the ideal state and is reached by virtually all women; therefore and because the choice of a marriage partner is in the hands of the girl's father, marital status is ascribed rather than achieved. The final marriage ceremonies are usually held when a girl is between the ages of twelve and fifteen; at this time the bride puts on the two-scarf headdress of a married woman. She enters her husband's family as the servant of her mother-in-law and extreme modesty and obedience are expected of her. The description Campbell gives of a bride's position among the Sarakatsani of Greece seems

to be virtually identical to that of the newly married Shahsavan woman.

The essential fact is that the new bride is subordinate to all other adults in the extended family. Even the five-year-olds try with varying success to boss the new 'bride'.

... The bride takes most of her orders from her mother-in-law under whose critical and watchful direction she works. ... Yet despite her subordinate status she is accepted as a full member of the group. ... Her behaviour is extremely modest. (Campbell 1964:64)

d.) arvad - wife. After two years or the birth of a child, the bride ceases to wear the bürük headdress, rather she assumes the fashion worn by all established married women from this time until they are old, though young women do effect slight changes in accordance with their age. At this time a woman gains considerable independence of her mother-in-law; typically she now has children of her own to care for and her importance in a household increases with the number, age, and sex of the children she has borne. Gradually she becomes more outspoken among men and women and she is less conscientious about the modesty of her head covering. e.) qoja arvad or qoja nānā - old woman. Around menopause, the women again slightly change the style of their headdress. This form of headdress, though essentially a variant on the basic 'married woman's' fashion signals certain respect due to age and prolificity. There are no particular modes of dress for widows; rather, they dress and act according

to which of the above mentioned categories they belong to.

To some extent the unmarried, and those women who have at some time been married, provided the two principle categories into which the universe of women is divided. But such a strict compartmentalization must be modified by considerations of the age, number, and sex of the children a woman has, among other things.

Periods of greatest freedom are extreme youth and extreme age. Greatest restrictions on behaviour occur during stages (b) and (c) immediately before and after marriage. This is hardly surprising in view of the fact mentioned in the section on ideals that at these stages a woman is liable to be disinterested in the welfare of either family and thus a threat to their honour. A female before puberty or one with children of her own obviously has vested interests in the family with which she is living and as a consequence there are fewer restrictions on her behaviour.

B.) A woman's birth status as defined by her family of origin.

Members of a tire other than the aq saqal and the hangers-on (čoban and retainers) are in theory equal in status - their own masters. In fact, these two categories, the leader and the hangers-on, are at opposite ends of a continuum of economic wealth on which status is based. Those at the top end attempt to reinforce their status by

a pilgrimage and the acquisition of the religious title of Hajji or Mashhadi; while those at the lower end renounce any claims to independent status by attaching themselves to an employer. As will be elaborated below, families of equal status tend to intermarry; a woman's marital status is thus determined largely by her birth status as daughter since her husband's father and her own father will be men of equal substance.

In Shi'a Muslim theory (and also in the Iranian Civil Code) a sister has half a brother's share in the patrimony. In the Shahsavan, sisters commonly transfer their rights in flocks and pasture to one or all of their brothers;<sup>9</sup>

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9. Among the Shahsavan the transfer of a woman's share to her brothers does not imply as Rosenfeld suggests in the case of Arab village women that "...only by foregoing her rights in property does a woman enjoy kin rights." (1960:67) In the latter case, when women do not claim their inheritance, they are thereby entitled to the guardianship, the protection, and the freedom to avail themselves of the hospitality of their family of birth; in this way the women never lose their ties with their natal family on whom they rely to insure fair treatment from their husband and his family.

In the Shahsavan the interest a woman's kin take in her after her marriage does not have the character of a debt owed to the woman, but is based only on the affective nature of the ties. Furthermore, moral sanctions appear to be strong enough to insure the fair treatment of a woman by her family of marriage; informants stated that where a husband mistreated his wife, his tire aq saqal and probably the women leaders would bring pressure to bear, not the woman's father or brothers directly. Though I have no direct evidence of this, cases were mentioned where young wives managed to run away to their father's house, but it seems that a delegation from the husband's tire always secured the return of the wife.

besides, the trousseau they take with them at marriage is held to be their share of the patrimony. However, Shahsavan women may own property in their own right which cannot be alienated without their consent. The Shi'a system of inheritance favours members of the inner family (M,F,H,W,S,D) to the exclusion of agnates and collaterals. In this way a woman can, if she is the only heir of the inner family, inherit an entire estate - an impossibility under Sunni law. Thus, there are occasional Shahsavan women who have considerable private wealth, but in so far as this involves herds or village property they do not manage it themselves.

One woman inherited half a village from her father and was said to have received an income from the property of between £50 to £100 per annum. To keep the management and custody of the land in her control, she arranged for her daughter to marry a cousin who lived in the village.

In another case,

A tribesman's village-born, non-Shahsavan wife was the only heir of her father, a village landlord; on his death, she left her husband and returned to live in one of the villages she now owned to live off the income and play an active part as 'headman' of the village. No Shahsavan woman has ever been known to take on a man's role to this extent.

For daily expenses of the household, clothing, supplies, etc., the wife will ask her husband for money if he does not do the shopping himself which is more likely. However, most women have some private resources which may be augmented by sales of odd scraps of wool or other household

produce. In the summer, for example, the women and children collect a flower which they dry and sell to itinerant traders for 30 shillings a kilo. Each woman keeps a special saddlebag (dürdürünlük - xorjunu) in which she stores treasures, money, or jewelry. It is like a savings chest, and is kept locked until her death, when the contents are distributed among her sons. Before she dies, the woman may say, 'I have so many Toman<sup>10</sup> in my saddlebag; give so much of it to so-and-so, but keep so much for Koran reading (i.e. funeral expenses) for me.' (Private wealth and the sub-society will be discussed below, see page 125 ).

A woman's status depends largely on the status (economic) of her father, and by extension her husband. Since the economic standing of a family rarely changes radically in one generation, this relationship of equality between a woman's father and her husband is usually constant throughout her lifetime.

C.) Marital status.

The two previous sections have briefly outlined the way a woman's status is ascribed on the basis of age and birth; in the Shahsavan, as elsewhere, these are the main sources of ascribed status for both men and women. This section deals with the status a woman receives through

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10. The Toman is worth 10 Rials; i.e. about a shilling. Rial is the unit of Iranian currency.

marriage. It is included here as an ascribed status since a woman usually has had little or no control over it. But because a bride is the focus of competition and negotiation for the male principals, it is necessary to describe the relationships and processes involved in marriage. These will be discussed under four headings: 1.) the choice of partners, 2.) the marriage ceremonies, 3.) the dissolution of marriage and polygamy, and 4.) conclusions about the marital status of women.

Marriage is the norm; the only exceptions being those unfortunates who are physically or mentally incapable of performing the duties demanded in a marriage relationship. Only one woman was found unmarried or even un-engaged after the age of puberty; she was deaf and dumb and her parents acknowledged that they would be lucky if they could ever arrange a marriage for her.

1.) Choice of partners.

An unmarried girl's guardian (sahib or iyā) is her father or, if he is dead, her brother or mother. (A married woman is the legal and economic responsibility of her husband.) The sahib is responsible for getting his ward married. In fact, this obligation is shared by all a girl's paternal cousins (i.e. men of the tire core). A generalized preference for marriage within the tire (which occurs about 35% of the time) amounts to a double-edged responsibility: a girl's paternal



cousins have first refusal on her and they have priority over men from outside the tire, yet these same cousins are also obliged to provide the girl with a husband from among themselves if she is not sought in marriage by anyone else. All men and women of the tire core outside the immediate family are known to each other as FBS or FBD (āmm'oglu or āmmiqızı).

Marriages with neighbouring tire of the same tayfe occur as much as 50% of the time. There are two main factors involved here: 1.) such marriages almost always strengthen an already existing affinal tie between the tires. The fact that contacts between families of different tires usually occur on festive occasions gives these meetings an aura of excitement and romance. When a man is found to have chosen his bride himself (that is, for romantic rather than political reasons) she is usually from another tire. 2.) Further, as was mentioned above, families of equal wealth and political standing tend to intermarry. This in fact accords with the Shi'a prescription that a bride must be maintained at the level to which she was accustomed before marriage. The result is that many political unions (i.e. between aq saqal families) occur between tires. At the same time, many poorer men marry outside their tire since no suitable mate within their own tire is available. From this last point it is evident that the 'equality' of a union is more important than the costs - a poor

man will look for his equal outside the tire even though such a marriage is always more expensive in terms of the numbers of presents required for the bride's family than an intra-tire marriage would be.

At the beginning of a marriage, the bride's position is always weak and one would expect that her situation would be even more difficult if she came from a distance and had few if any nearby kin to support or at least comfort her. But in fact, there is little difference in the positions of brides from near or far in their father-in-law's household, for few wives have close agnates in their camp of marriage, let alone the same herding unit, and cases of actual FBD marriage occur very rarely and mainly in response to particular conditions, e.g. the young man's or the girl's father has died.

Moreover, though a bride is under the domination of her mother-in-law, it is in the interest of the latter to keep the extended family (including married sons and their wives) content together in one tent throughout her lifetime. Not only is the mother-in-law concerned that there should be children of the marriage, but also she benefits considerably from the domestic help provided by her daughters-in-law, and she is likely to be dependent on the goodwill of her son's family in her old age.

That household fission usually occurs only after the death of the mother, underlies the fact that this woman cannot and does not tyrannize her son's wives. But, the

girl who comes as a bride from a distant group has one potential advantage over the girl who has made a close kin marriage. The former will commonly have a larger and certainly more heterogenous xeir-u-šärr and this very institution will allow her to maintain these wider contacts throughout her life.

## 2.) Marriage ceremonies.

As outlined above, there are two fairly distinct types of marriage choice - (a) within the tire, and (b) outside the tire, i.e. between tires of the same tayfe, or between tires of different tayfe. These two categories affect the nature and extent of the marriage ceremonies. When asked to describe marriage procedures, the Shahsavan will outline the longer and more involved form which accompanies marriages between different tires. In fact, the ceremonies which accompany marriages within the tire or between very close affines seem to be an abridgement of the full version.

There are a number of stages in the full marriage procedure; ilčilik (= <sup>between-go</sup> embassy) - the boy's father, elder brothers, and senior 'cousins' (e.g. the tire aq saqal) propose marriage to the girl's father who will then consult his own 'cousins' and tire aq saqal. If the proposal is accepted they arrange to hold the nišan (= pledge) or engagement ceremony soon after. The groom's family bring presents, including a ring and a large amount of sweets

which are distributed at the feast given by the bride's father. Formerly, the nišan feast was much smaller than now, and was confined to putting the ring on the bride's finger and breaking and distributing some sugar. The groom's family must continue, throughout the engagement period, to send presents of household items, clothes for the bride and her female relatives, sweets, and money; especially at the širni (= sweets), a second feast in the bride's father's camp, at which further sweets are distributed and the question of bridewealth is discussed. Six months to two years after the nišan, the groom's family come again to ask permission (ijaze) for the wedding proper; they are entertained to dinner and a night's lodging by the girl's father. They are liable to be refused twice; the third time, after threatening abduction, they may be accepted. The biggest feast of all is the toy or wedding proper which is held at the groom's camp and may last many days with games, music, and dancing. On the penultimate day the groom's family, accompanied by their most influential kin and friends, ride to the bride's camp and are entertained that evening; they bring with them the last installment of the bridewealth and presents including the henna which is put on the bride's hands - this is the crux of the evening's activities. On the following morning, having agreed on the amount of the kābin (see below), they mount the bride on a horse, collect the trousseau (jehiz) and

take her to the groom's camp. The couple, who may not have met hitherto, are allowed one night of privacy together after which they sleep behind a curtain in the groom's father's tent. The bride stays behind the curtain for three days after her arrival doing nothing; on the third day (duax-gapi = veil-snatching) her own family comes to visit her and her bridal veil is removed and she begins domestic duties. Finally, about a month after the wedding the bride is fetched home by her father for a short visit and before she returns he makes her a present (ayağ-açti = untied the feet) of an animal, commonly one which he has received as part of the bridewealth.

There are many variations of this formula; the Şirni feast is usually omitted when the two families are at all close. Most variation occurs in the exchanges; for example, in some tayfes the bridewealth (başlix = for the head) is waived altogether although it is always acknowledged that the bride's father has the right to ask whatever he wants. They say, 'the bride's house is the Shah's house.'

Apart from the considerable, but informal, presents brought throughout the engagement period from the groom's father, there are only two main prestations: the trousseau provided by the bride's father is never omitted, nor is the <sup>11</sup>kābin. The kābin is an agreement that the husband will pay

11. Luzbetak mentions that a payment called kabin is found throughout Caucasia; he considers it to be the same as the Islamic mahr. (1951:90)

so much (often considerable amounts) if he divorces his wife, though this is never paid, as divorce is almost unknown among the Shahsavan. The importance of the käbin is that no sexual relations can take place until it has been agreed and witnessed in front of a religious authority, a mulla or seyyid. The käbin or 'deferred dower' is in fact the equivalent of the Islamic mehr ; it is the signing of the contract which "makes" the marriage. The käbin is the only requirement when a widow remarries. As Lewis points out for the Somali:

All satisfactory matches require the exchange of wealth between families and lineages, and although the settlement of the woman's personal dower (mahar) gives a man full uxorial and genetricial rights over his wife....it is bridewealth....and dowry...which create and maintain an effective affinal relationship...  
(1962:23)

This distinction between the Islamic dower arrangement which creates a legal union and the bridewealth and dowry is relevant to the Shahsavan material; the former (the käbin ) is the contract between individuals, whereas the latter (bašlix and jehiz) represent the 'contract' between social groups.

There are many minor payments which may be demanded before the bride is handed over - for example, the süt-pulu (milk money) asked by the bride's mother and the jehiz-üstü as a token payment for the trousseau.

The bridewealth is like the Islamic 'dower' (mehr) which should go to the bride exclusively. The Shahsavan

follow this in that where a bridewealth (animals or money) is demanded it is usually, if not always, transferred to the bride by her father at the ayaḡ-ačti, and so is the süt-pulu given to the bride by her mother.

### 3.) Dissolution of marriage and polygyny.

Divorce is virtually non-existent among the Shahsavan. One old man commented, 'among the Shahsavan it is not a good thing to divorce a wife and always we Shahsavan marry a girl for the whole of our lives.' This sentiment is held by all Shahsavan; thus, public opinion forms an extremely effective moral sanction against divorce. The only stated ground for divorce is the supposed infertility of the wife, but even this in practice is not considered to be an adequate reason. No cases of divorce were discovered among the tribesmen.

For a young man whose children are unmarried, the death of his wife brings economic difficulties and, moreover, if he does not quickly find a replacement he becomes the subject of amused gossip and ridicule. Therefore, remarriage is essential for widowers.

Widow inheritance is an ideal in the society but it is seen as a duty rather than a right. 'If there are two brothers and one dies, it is the duty of the other brother to marry the widow' - whether he is married or not. This obligation is also extended to all the dead man's paternal cousins. But the widow is free to refuse any of these

men, in which case they will try to prevent her from marrying elsewhere. However, the widow may receive suitors at night and if she accepts one or is discovered she will go to live with him as his wife, completely severing her connections with her former husband's family, though if she has small girls she may take them with her. There are no ceremonies for the marriage of a widow, though a kābin will always be arranged. When a widow marries outside her head husband's tire she may take only her own personal possessions (clothes and knick-knacks) - the tent, household equipment, bedding, etc. remain for her children. On the other hand, if a widow has a son old enough to help her manage the household (i.e. nine or ten years old) he will refuse his mother permission to remarry and will become her de facto guardian and provider. If a young boy does become his mother's guardian, he ceases to be regarded as a child.

Young widows of a child-bearing age are a scarce commodity and are much sought after by wealthy men desirous of increasing their household. Such widows frequently are in a strong position to determine their own future, except that if a woman is widowed before having borne children, she will almost always go to a close agnate of her husband. It is said that one recent widow in a village of the area had fifteen suitors, both tribesmen and villagers.



Polygyny is rare and is limited to those men who can maintain an extra wife or wives, each of which should have a separate household. The husband usually tries to treat co-wives equally - this is done without reference to the Islamic precept, rather it is seen as a purely Shahsavan value. Since ideally virgins marry virgins, and a man should not take a second virgin wife unless the first has died, wives after the first in a polygynous household are almost always widows. Of the 54 marriages contracted by men of a tire studied, 4 were polygynous and all of these involved widows.

#### 4.) Conclusions about the marital status of women.

Three things point to the great security of women in marriage: most girls can reasonably expect to marry, divorce is not practiced even with regard to childless women, and widows are assured maintenance if not remarriage. In fact, those points in the Islamic legal system where a woman's jural position is weakest - divorce, maintenance after the death or divorce of her husband - are avoided a priori among the Shahsavan.

A number of factors may be related to the stability of marriage<sup>12</sup> among the Shahsavan: (a) descent grouping

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12. "Stable marriage may be defined as stable jural relations irrespective of conjugal relations, as stable conjugal and jural relations, or simply as stable conjugal relations." (Schneider 1953:56) Here stability of marriage refers to stable conjugal and jural relations. Shahsavan behaviour is in complete conformity with the expectations the people have about marriage and marital roles. \*

is relevant only with regard to males; in male theory women as daughters or wives belong to the groups of their father or husband respectively not as members, but as productive capital. A husband has absolute rights with regard to his wife's sexual services, the children she bears, her labour, and he may ultimately divorce her at will. The wife has rights to maintenance and protection which are transferred from her father's group to her husband's group at marriage.<sup>13</sup> The kābin is her insurance in case her husband exercises his ultimate right of divorce. (b) Marriage ceremonies are so protracted and involved and begun when a girl is so young that the idea that they can be annulled has little opportunity to arise, and (c) a high sum is fixed as the kābin. Extra-tire marriages are no less stable than those within the tire; when a girl marries outside her own tire, she receives more attention, more presents and has considerably more ritual assistance in adjusting to the idea, all of which compensate her for the strains to which she is subjected when she goes to live with strangers or remote kin or affines. (d) Finally, as was pointed out above, a bride rarely moves into a camp where her own close agnates are

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13. The Shahsavan material supports Lewis' argument that "...where the wife relinquishes her pre-marital legal status and is incorporated in her husband's group, men and women here being subject to dissimilar agnatic loyalties, marriage is stable." (1962:43)

present; in this way the pull of both her family of origin and family of marriage is diminished.

The fact of stability in marriage leads to perhaps the most important conclusion of this section on the ascribed statuses of women. In all cases, a woman at marriage assumes a position in the women's sphere which closely correlates with that of her husband in the male sphere. Because there is virtually no divorce, the status of a man and his wife, their complementary duties in the household, and their economic fortunes are congruent throughout their lives. Since each woman's position is consonant with that of her husband, there is a stable index which can be used to order women in their own sub-society. I shall return to this point in greater detail later.

The correspondence of the statuses of husband and wife is augmented further by the fact that number of children and age are criteria used for classifying both men and women. The more living children, especially sons, in a family, the more both the husband and wife are regarded with importance in their separate male and female spheres.

Prolificity is not only a virtue in itself, for the economic advantages are great. The more sons in a family the more viable is the economic unity of the family. If the family is able to deploy this free labour force successfully, their affluence can be translated into increased influence for the whole group. Similarly, daughters and later daughters-in-

law provide domestic help for an older woman which, though it does not increase the income of the family, does allow her considerably more free time to be spent in purely social pursuits. It should be noted here that there is a stigma attached to a childless old age.

D.) Domestic duties.

This subject will be dealt with under three headings.

1.) Tasks centered in the tent. A Shahsavan woman cannot withhold from her husband rights to sexual access except during the menstrual period and for a time after childbirth. Men do not expect sexual responsiveness from their wives and the latter refer to their sexual duties with distaste and disgust.<sup>14</sup> This attitude carries over to procreation and frequently women comment that babies are variously bad, unpleasant, and dirty. This sentiment was in fact echoed by a midwife, herself mother of four living children.

The responsibilities of childcare and education fall to the women. Little formal instruction is imparted to children of either sex; they learn almost entirely by observation and by listening to the discussions of their elders and by imitating them. Only at Ramadan when a

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14. The women's disgust and the fact that men apparently do not consider women to be sexually voracious or to require frequent satisfaction of their sexual needs, may well be linked to ideas of the pure and noble nature of women. (c.f. p. 35)

mulla is brought to the camp do they hear formal lectures on religion and morals. Boys up to the age of six or seven will be constantly in or around their mother's tent. They will play at making bread with the women, cook themselves the bits of food which happen to come to them, and play games with the neighbour children, boys and girls. A favourite game is 'house' (ävcik) in which the children build themselves a house of stones on a nearby hill-side where they build a fire and eat and chat together. At six or seven boys will be given jobs herding the sheep or lambs which will take them out of the home for most of the day, though they return to their mother's tent to sleep. Girls remain in their mother's tent until they are married. By the time of her marriage, a girl is able to perform all domestic duties required of a married woman and she has had experience in running a household adequate for all normal situations. As was pointed out above, the bride starts to take part in the domestic routines three days after the wedding.

The mother-child bond is a strong one which serves a woman well in her old age. She requires some degree of obedience and help from her children, but discipline by the mother is by no means severe and her instructions are often flouted by boys of five or six who must be bribed or cajoled into bringing water from the spring, etc.

A co-wife is often said to be more permissive than the mother,<sup>15</sup> but permissiveness should not be confused with coddling, for very young children learn to look out for themselves with very little positive encouragement or aid from their elders.

The division of labour between the sexes is one which is primarily dictated by the economic situation of the family. The composition of domestic units (i.e. the population of a tent) varies widely. One basic principle is common to all - each tent almost always has one (and no more than one) group of unmarried siblings three or more years old. It is where this is exceeded that the household is most likely to split.

Aside from eating and sleeping, a man's activities take place outside the tent (sheep herding, marketing, etc.) and if he is at leisure he will either go visiting or have visitors, for women and children are not considered fit company for a man.<sup>16</sup> The woman's domestic duties are centered

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15. A somewhat similar situation has been noted in Muslim villages in Palestine. If a man takes a second wife because the first is childless (which sometimes occurs among the Shahsavan) the latter is very sensitive regarding this defect. The barren wife must have unusual wisdom to maintain an equal position in the household and she often tries to lure the children of the other wife to her support. (Granqvist, 1950:76)

16. Stirling writing of Anatolian villagers who are in many ways culturally similar to the inhabitants of north-eastern Azerbaijan describes a similar attitude - men avoid the house except for sleeping and eating (1965:101) and it is considered undignified for a man to remain with his wife and children (1965:239). "Women do not look to their husbands for com-

on the tent from which she can manage the household alone for days or weeks if her husband is on a sheep-selling expedition. In fact, the tent is the domain of the woman and everything inside it is in her care.

Milking is carried out by the men or boys, who claim that the women do not know how to do it well, but a woman will milk if necessary. On the other hand, the treatment of milk products is entirely the responsibility of the women, who make butter, yoghurt, dried whey, cheese, etc. The baking of bread and cooking are women's tasks; the former is perhaps the most time-consuming as well as the most sociable chore of the day and women will commonly spend two to three hours making bread and gossiping. Fetching water, by contrast, is physically the most difficult chore and the women carry five- or seven-gallon tins on their backs from springs which may be more than half a mile away over very hilly, rock-covered terrain. This trek is commonly made two times a day in the company of neighbour women. Children are sometimes sent with donkeys if extra water is needed during the day. Other household duties include making the beds, cleaning the tent, washing cooking utensils and clothes, feeding the dogs, and packing and unpacking the household items on the migration. As the daughters of a woman grow up and her sons bring

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(continued from previous page)

panionship; still less do men look to their wives. It is taken for granted that there is no common ground for conversation." (1965:113).

brides into the family, a woman will rid herself of many of the menial chores in the household, but she will remain in charge of cooking and the treatment of milk products.

Since a certain amount of domestic knowledge is universal, the performance of such chores in a superior way would not seem to be a significant means of augmenting a woman's status. The one main exception is weaving. Aside from the woollen cloth required for the family's immediate use, a woman is responsible for much of the trousseau of her daughter, and work on the rugs, blankets, sacks, and bedding bags may begin when the girl is five or six. Those women who have a number of exceptional pieces in their own tent, or in the collection of items for their daughter's trousseau, are known and their skill is praised. Weaving patterns are passed on from mother to daughter and it is the knowledge of a number of patterns and styles rather than mechanical skills which seems to set some women off from others.

## 2.) Tasks which necessitate contacts with outsiders.

Typically, a woman has very few contacts with individuals who are not Shahsavan. She never visits town or villages for shopping; her trading activities are confined to buying and bartering on a small scale with the itinerant peddlars (čārči) who visit the tribal camps throughout the year. These men peddle everything from fruit to cooking utensils, tea glasses and lengths of cloth.



The women have pin money to buy small items and may barter scraps of wool or butter. The čärči addresses the women as 'my sister' (bajm) and they address him as 'brother' or 'guest' (qardaš or qonax). Both terms signify a relationship where sex relations are unthinkable, i.e. they are allowed to talk on familiar terms, which facilitates the exchange of goods. Because the woman's contacts with non-Shahsavan are limited almost entirely to these necessary exchanges with the itinerant merchants, it is not surprising to find that these take the form of a joking relationship in which light banter is sanctioned. Through the joking relationship the woman is permitted to do something which is normally quite prohibited - talking to a stranger.

It should be noted here that male guests will often talk casually with women of the tent. As with the čärči, when a strange male guest will inevitably have some contact with the women, his relationship with the host family for the duration of his stay is translated into kinship terms. This makes the unavoidable circumstances of contact acceptable to both men and women. Here too, a limited joking relationship is established between the stranger and the women; this acts as a safe-guard in a potentially dangerous situation.

If the čärči stays the night in a camp, he will eat and chat with the men and will not have other than economic

contacts with the women. In summer some tradesmen (küpčü or boyaxči) come to the camp with dyes for the women to dye their skeins of wool; they are paid according to the weight of wool dyed. Their relations with the women are like those of the čärči.

During lambing in the winter and spring, agents of city cheese merchants visit the tribesmen and erect large canvas tents as 'cheese factories' for three or four neighbouring camps. Each day the women and girls carry the milk to the factory and argue with the milkman (sütčü) to ensure that the weighing of their milk is done fairly. Women keep note-books in which the sütčü records the amount of milk brought daily, and soon after New Year (March 21st) accounts are made up. Loans from the sütčü are repaid and new loans are advanced to the women's husbands. A woman's contact with the sütčü is usually more strained than with the čärči, but this is easily explained by her more serious economic transactions with the former. Outside these exchanges, the sütčüs, like other merchants who come to the camp, spend the rest of their time with the men.

### 3.) Economic co-operation among women.

In some tents there live two married brothers and their wives; the women by accepting common residence accept total co-operation in all domestic affairs. When both have children, the conflicting demands will lead to

the split of the household.

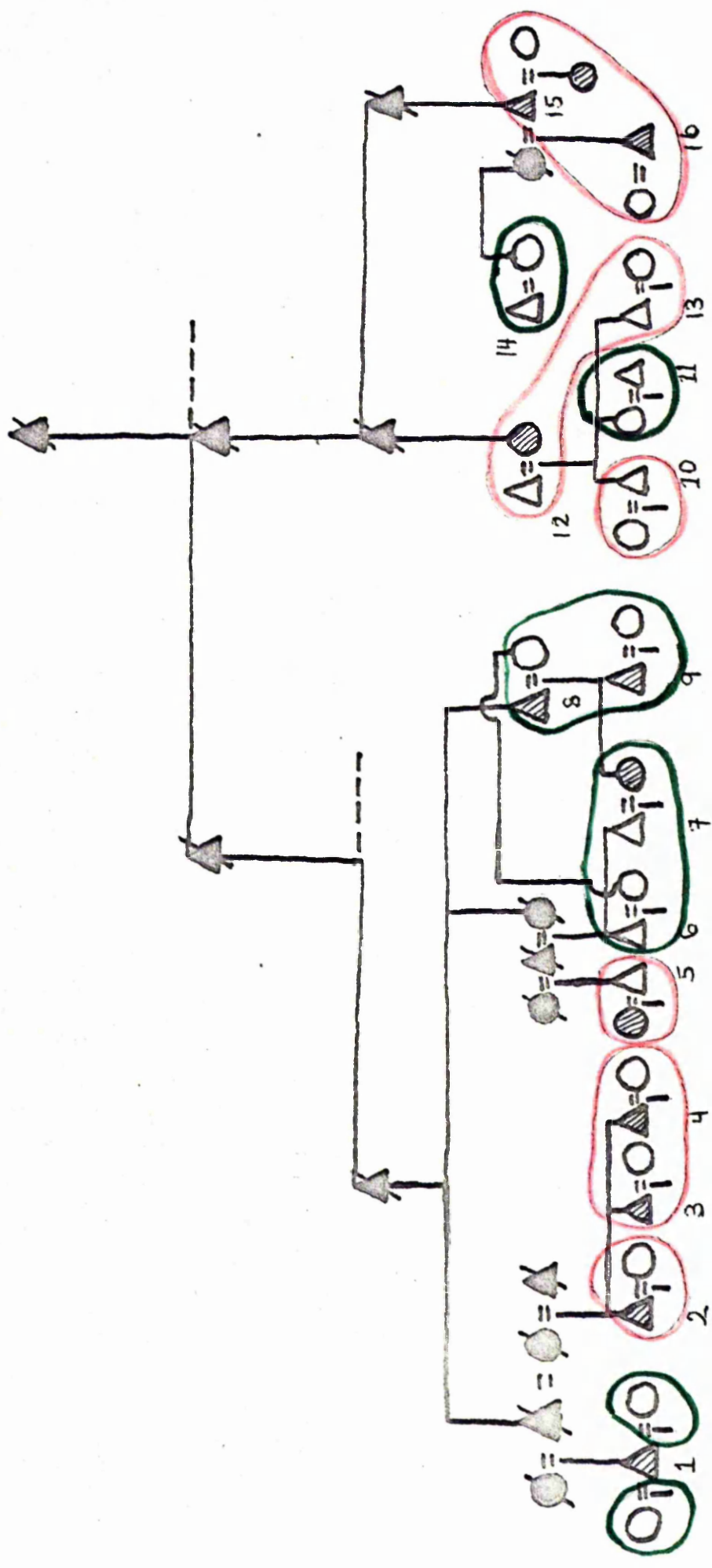
In the one polygynous household observed closely, the co-wives combined to do most chores - an arrangement which was both more efficient and allowed the two women more free time. They worked together to make bread, weave, prepare milk products, and to cook for guests. They also helped each other with other incidental tasks and kept an eye on each other's children. But they each carried the water necessary for their separate tents and they washed clothes for only their own children, though they did take turns in washing the husband's clothes.

Women of a herding unit are usually affinally related if they are not kin as well, yet there is little co-operation in domestic chores between the wives of the agnatic core of the group; they seem to regard themselves as equals and they manage their households independently. Further, most of the tasks outlined above can be carried out efficiently by one woman.

In fact, the co-operation among women in the herding unit seems to be to a great extent determined by the position of a woman's husband in the group. That is, when there are čobans and retainers associated with certain of the agnates, it is the wives of these poorer families who provide certain domestic aid in the households of their husband's employer. A čoban's wife may help with bread-making in the employer's tent though she is not paid nor

in any direct way compensated for her time and effort. She does not take a share of the bread and will probably have to do this chore again that day to provide for her own family. Wives of both čobans and retainers may also help incidentally in processing the milk, setting up a loom, or cooking for guests in the employer's tent, whereas it seems to be only the retainer's wife who cards or spins her own wool, washes clothes or fetches water in the company of the employer's wife. A retainer's wife is likely to become a confidante of the family and may well accompany the wife to feasts.

The above analysis is oversimplified and it is necessary to examine in detail camp co-operation between women. In the two herding units to be considered the number of čoban and retainer families associated with each is unusually high, yet because there are a number of women in all three positions - wives of agnates, čobans, and retainers - the relations between the women, as they are more or less regulated by their husband's positions, are clearly demonstrated. Observation of other similar groups does not lead one to suppose that relations within this group are atypical. This study was done when the two herding units were camped next to each other for seven weeks in the summer pasture. The position of the camps and the composition of the herding unit changes throughout the year; thus, this case shows the relations within a



- Tents in herding-unit headed by 1
- Tents in herding-unit headed by 3
- $\Delta \odot$  Lineage members
- $\Delta \otimes$  Deceased

Figure 2: genealogy of two herding-units

specific group of women only at one time during the year, yet the principles which underlie the relationships to be described are probably applicable at all times.

The main point with regard to relations between the two camps is that the two leaders, 1 and 3, who are paternal half-brothers, very recently had a series of extremely violent quarrels over their patrimony which were only solved by the splitting of the group into the present two camps.

In the first herding unit, 1 is both the herding unit and the tire aq saqal. 1, 8, and 9 are close agnates who form the core of the camp group, whereas 6, 7, 11, and 14 are poorer individuals of the camp who are in some way dependent on 1 for support. 6 and 7 are 1's čobans. 11 and 14 are more or less permanent camp followers whose few animals graze 1's pasture without charge; in return, they take on some duties as shepherds and servants for 1.

The co-wives of 1 rarely associated with the wives of 8 and 9. They did not frequent each other's tents and there was no kind of economic co-operation between them. 8's wife on behalf of her children, felt that her husband should have put up more resistance when 1 and 1's father took the lion's share of the patrimony. She resented the good fortune of 1's wives and children.

The wives of 6 and 7, čobans of 1, were responsible for the huge daily supply of bread required by 1's family. The bread was made in one of 1's tents and his wives helped and chatted with the čoban's wives. Though all these women were on very cordial terms while they worked together, the čoban's wives spent time whenever possible with the wife of 8, their sister and mother respectively.

The wives of 11 and 14, retainers of 1, also took on occasional domestic duties in 1's household. These women performed many personal services for 1's wives such as acting as their hair-dressers and bath attendants. Further, between these four women there was much borrowing of items such as spinning wheels, samavars, and foodstuffs. Most significantly, the retainer's wives were the boon companions of 1's co-wives.

In the second herding unit, 3 is the aq saqal and 2 and 4 are his brothers. 5 is the čoban of 3, while 15 and 16 are the čobans of the two brothers who live together in a single tent. 12 and 10 are men who lacked summer pasture and for this reason they became temporarily the retainers of 3 and used the latter's pasture without charge.

The wives of the agnates of the camp, 2, 3, and 4, get along reasonably well but there was minimal economic co-operation between them. At this time the amicable relations were largely due to the stage in the developmental

cycle which each family had reached. 2, the eldest brother of the three, is regarded as rather eccentric, and too irresponsible to hold the position of camp aq saqal; he has a large family and has recently set up his own tent independent of his two younger brothers. 3, the aq saqal, has three sons whereas the youngest brother has only a small daughter. The antagonism between the wife of 2 and the wife of 3 which was based on the potentially competitive positions of their husbands for the leadership of the camp and the fact that they both had growing families with sons who would compete over inheritance, was lessened when 2 moved into his own tent. The wife of 4, the youngest brother, comes from a wealthy village family but is unlikely to quarrel with the wives of 2 and 3 until she has a larger family.

The wife of 5 was frequently in 2's tent where she helped out as the wife of the čoban of that family. Similarly, the wives of 15 and 16 helped the two women in the aq saqal's tent. In this case, a betrothed girl of thirteen (the daughter of 15) took on many of the chores in the employer's tent, including fetching water.

The old wife of the retainer 12 often cooked for guests of 3 though she rarely helped in other ways. The wife of the retainer 10 maintained some distance and independence from the aq saqal's tent. Her husband as the retainer of 3 gives his services as a herdsman and in return gets free pasturage. But as he has only five or six sheep his payment in pasture is hardly equivalent to his work for 3. If his wife were also to help the women of the aq saqal's tent without compensation, the equivalence of the exchange between the two families would be further unbalanced without much justification. These facts certainly account for much of 10's wife's aloofness from the wives of 3 and 4.

Relations between the women of the two camps were brought into clear relief when a wool dyer visited the camp for three successive days. The dyeing arrangements were very flexible since each woman brought her own dye pot and supplied her own fuel at any time when the wool dyer was present in the camp. This very flexibility allowed for such a clear demonstration of the alignments of the women in the camps. The day on which each woman



chose to work with the dyer was in no way prearranged and each was able to choose the group within the camps with which she wanted to associate - except for the Čoban wives whose choices were predetermined by their obligations to help the wives of their husband's employers. Not all the women had wool of their own to dye at this time.

On the first day, the wives of the agnates of the second herding unit, 2, 3, and 4, were helped by the wives of 5, 15, and 16 - their Čobans.

On the second day, the wives of 12 and 13 (the temporary retainers of 3) worked with the co-wives of 1. The latter were actually helped by the wives of their Čobans, 6 and 7.

On the third and last day, the wives of 8 and 9 (8 is the eldest agnate in the two camps but not a leader) were joined by the wives of six poorer men from the two camps - 6, 7, 11, 15, 16, and 10. On the two previous days, the wives of 6 and 7 and 15 and 16 had helped as Čoban's wives; on this last day they were dyeing wool on their own.

In other words, on each of the first two days the women associated with the camp leaders worked at the dye pots with their Čoban's wives. It is not surprising, in view of what was said above about the relations of the two aq saqals, that the women associated with them would dye wool on separate days; in fact they have no routine co-operation between them and they make no casual social visits to each other's tents.

On the third day, the other woman whose husband (8) had genealogical seniority in the two camps worked with 1's Čoban's wives, who were her close kin, and the wives of retainers (especially 10's wife) who dyed their own wool on that day apparently as a sign of independence rather than because they positively favoured the wives of 8 and 9. The old wife of 12 and her son's wife, (13) also displayed this same independence from the wives of her husband's employers by working her wool on the second rather than the first day. In any case, the help of retainers wives could not be demanded by the employer's wives.



Curiously, on the third day one of 1's wives found that she had forgotten on the second day some scraps of wool which needed dyeing. Her coming to use the dye pots caused considerable commotion and annoyance; the women working on the third day resented her assumption that she was welcome and a violent quarrel developed between the wife of 8 and 1's wife over this point. The women came down to the real issues when 8's wife screamed that her husband was the oldest man in the camp and as the brother of the former aq sagal he deserved respect. By implication, she as the wife of such a man also deserved respect. 1's wife retorted in rage that she as the wife of the camp leader had the right to dye her wool at any time she desired. The quarrel then deteriorated into obscene name-calling and stone throwing.

The points which emerge from this case are several:

- a). A man's position in a camp determines to a large extent the relationships his wife will have with other camp women and the kinds of economic co-operation she will give or receive. Coban's wives whose husbands receive a fee as well as free pasturage from the employer are obligated to work with the women of the employer. Retainer's wives - retainers receive no fee only free pasturage - are not required to work in the employer's tent; rather, their help and friendship is determined by the degree to which their family is dependent on that of the employer, the equivalence of the exchange of pasturage for services rendered, and the permanence of the retainer's position.
- b.) Though agnates are ideally good friends and in fact there is rarely overt conflict between them, the difficulties which underlie the relationship - particularly questions of inheritance and leadership - are brought into relief by the relations between their wives. It is always

said by the Shahsavan that women are responsible for a household's separation and, in fact, their quarrels would seem to be the efficient, but only the efficient, cause of fission. Basically this is because a woman identifies with her own children and her main aim is to guarantee the recognition of their rights over those of their cousins. Once a woman has children, her position relative to that of other female affines is more or less determined by her overriding interest in the welfare of her own family. In this case, it was clear that the wives of close agnates did not associate much with each other even when overt conflict was kept in the background.

### III. ACHIEVED STATUSES OF WOMEN.

Achieved status can derive from two sources, the full exploitation of those ascribed statuses mentioned in the previous section, and the acquisition of special attributes in three areas of social action. In this section I shall describe these three specialities; these lie in the magico-medical, domestic, and religious fields and are really extensions of qualities required of all women.

#### A.) Magico-medical.

The first speciality concerns the realm of magic, medicine, and midwifery. In fact, each woman has a modicum of knowledge and skill in each of these areas; for example, as part of their domestic repertoire, they have some knowledge of herbs and their medicinal uses.

Every woman knows the various supernatural creatures which threaten the well-being of herself and her children, and is familiar with elementary precautions against them. Further, when necessary, for example on the migration, tribal woman can cope with childbirth without the assistance of a midwife.

However, emergencies arise in which ordinary skills are felt to be inadequate. In every few tires there appears to be a mama or professional midwife who is also an expert on herbal and magical cures for those diseases or spirits which attack women and children.

The midwife is called in at a birth whenever possible, and if necessary a horse is sent to bring her to the camp of the pregnant woman. For cutting the umbilical cord, she is paid in kind or up to £1 in cash, and if the parents have not chosen a name for the infant the mama will name it. If possible, the midwife remains for three days after the birth and her presence and knowledge are felt to ward off a roving witch-like spirit<sup>17</sup> (al) which would otherwise attempt to injure the mother. All excessive bleeding and deaths in childbirth are thought to be caused by the al, who roams the pastures at night dressed in white and riding a white mare. Illnesses of infants are ascribed to another kind of spirit, the šeše, which is believed to try and capture

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17. Beliefs and practices regarding the al appear to be somewhat similar to those discussed in more detail by Donaldson (1938:28-31).

children even after the dangerous three day period after birth has elapsed. The mama knows the best defences against these various spirits, whether talismans or medicinal remedies. She is paid in kind (e.g. a chicken or a scarf) for these services. Koranic charms are written only by men, a few tribesmen but mainly wandering prayer writers, and the women can and do buy numbers of these as additional protection for themselves and their children, and for other purposes, e.g. love charms.

The mama is also a general specialist in herbal medicines and she is consulted for internal illnesses. Commonly, she is called in before a decision to go to a town doctor is made and again afterwards if the latter's treatment was not felt to be efficacious. Both fertility and contraceptive potents are in her repertoire.

The skills involved are not unique to the mama; most mature women will have acquired experience of the way she works. Her uniqueness lies in the fact that she specializes in these activities and hence has gained a certain aura of expertise and efficacy.

There are other old women apart from the recognised mama, who have particular skills with herbal medicine (torki-dava) and some called čöpcü who know how to get rid of objects that have stuck in children's throats. While the mama is concerned mainly with the supernatural dangers surrounding women and children, the other herbalists,

called doctors (<sup>18</sup>hākīm) may be consulted for more ordinary ailments, internal and external, of both men and women. Thus the hākīm is more orthodox than the mama, and her clientele is different and much smaller, each tire having at least one hākīm. The two specialists therefore do not seem to clash professionally. However, a hākīm with suitable character, stamina, and inclination, might well succeed a mama when the latter dies, though the specialized knowledge of the mama is said to be passed on from aunt (MZ) to niece.

The job of the mama is regarded as primarily a necessary and not an honorary one; since the mama appears at times of crisis as the only available expert, the family which is so dependent on her tends to regard her with some distrust and scepticism for, needless to say, her cures are not always successful.

It will become evident from the case history outlined below (see p. 75 ) that among formal positions for women, that of mama is by far the most anomalous, but it is important to realize that this is not associated with any ideas of supernatural power for working either good or evil. The mama is not felt to be blessed with any kind of mystic benevolent power (e.g. Baraka among some other Muslim peoples) nor can she threaten to use bad magic against others. The strictly pragmatic approach of the Shahsavan to the skills

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18. There are also a few male hākīm or döktür, specialists in torki-dava, whom men consult if they are available; and every tire includes one or two old bone-setters, sinişçi.

and success of the mama is reflected in their ideas about witches and supernatural power in general. Though witches and the evil eye are believed to be real forces in the world, these concepts are not elaborated in stories or explained in myth and they play little part in every day considerations. Even in crisis situations, e.g. a difficult birth, accusations of witchcraft, bad magic, or the evil eye are never levelled at individuals and there is in fact no indication that the Shahsavan would consider such an accusation credible. Nonetheless, in so far as many of the diseases which the mama is called to treat clearly concern beliefs and spirits which are only partly assimilated into the Shahsavan/Islamic cosmology as Jinn, the lack of orthodoxy makes the mama's position an ambiguous one and she is the object of both derision and awed respect.

#### B.) Domestic.

At life cycle feasts and other ceremonies the host's wife is commonly aided by a specialist cook who directs the preparation and serving of the food. A woman holds this position for reasons other than her ability to cook; the recipes for the dishes served at these feasts are identical to those normally served to guests. Moreover, few women would be daunted by the task of organizing a large meal.

A cook (ašpaz) must be intelligent, strong-willed, efficient, and more independent than most Shahsavan women. She is also likely to have a good sense of humour. The

position of cook is achieved and a woman who aspires to the job must make herself known and available.

A cook is specifically invited by the family giving the feast and they may even send a horse for her; she may then travel alone some distance to the camp where the celebration is being held. The cook demands a fee (qazan-ačti - opening the pot) of about \$2 for each function at which she presides. Such a woman is much in demand for larger feasts and her presence adds to the prestige of the host family. Even poorer families who are related to a specialist cook will invite her to preside at their feasts. If a family of considerable political standing holds a large feast (400 or more invitations may be sent and celebrations may last up to ten days) a village cook, a man, may be hired for a considerable sum. A male cook is more prestigious than the female ašpaz yet very few families are able to bring in such an individual; when one is brought, the ašpaz helps him.

### C.) Religious.

In a tire there are a few women held to be knowledgeable on religious matters. Always, they are women who with a male relative have made the pilgrimage to the shrine of Imam Reza at Mashhad, and are thereafter referred to by the title of Māšhādi. In fact, the position of a Māšhādi

among women is comparable to that of a Hajji among  
 19 men. The Māshādis are among the few women who pray  
 regularly; their position is a highly conservative one and  
 they firmly support traditional Shahsavan customs and moral  
 attitudes, sometimes by references to imaginary Koranic  
 injunctions. The opinions of such a woman in matters of  
 family law and custom are sought by both men and women and  
 her advice is given equal weight with that of men. In one  
 case, a question of fosterage as a permanent bar to marriage  
 was raised; a betrothed man was said to have been suckled  
 by his fiancée's mother, but no one could remember or would  
 admit the extent to which this took place. It was therefore  
 uncertain whether the engaged couple were foster-siblings  
 according to Islamic law and hence forbidden to marry. A  
Māshādi gave her opinion on the question and there was  
 general agreement that her decision must be right.

#### IV. THE WOMEN LEADERS.

The above kinds of specialization differ in the  
 opportunities they offer for aspiring women leaders. The  
 magico-medical specialist differs from the other two in  
 that her relations with her clients are dyadic and private  
 rather than social in nature. Her reputation is diffuse  
 and it would be difficult for her to exploit it for political

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19. To my knowledge no Shahsavan women have yet made the  
 Hajj - the pilgrimage to Mecca - though village women  
 of the area are reported to have done so.



ends. Ceremonial cooks and Māshādīs on the other hand, are essentially public figures and it is through such specializations that a woman achieves a position of leadership. I shall discuss the life histories of three women to illustrate these points.

A.) Simi.

Simi is mama for at least four or five tires of Maral-lu-tayfe; the outward limits of her practice are not known. She is an old woman, herself the mother of four married children; her husband is still alive. She has been practising her skills for fifteen or twenty years and only the name of her predecessor is remembered in the tayfe. She is by origin an outsider to the group of her clients. Simi is always accompanied on her rounds by her granddaughter (SD) aged 10-11, who seems destined eventually to follow Simi's profession, though not for many years, probably not until after her menopause.

Simi has a number of personal characteristics which suit her for the job. Like a ceremonial cook she travels alone extensively throughout the pastures; this in itself indicates that she is more 'shameless' than the ideal or average Shahsavan woman. Though in outward appearance Simi seems to be a typical Shahsavan woman and in fact she has had a normal marital career, in general she behaves quite unlike any other woman of the group of her clients. She takes great liberties in conversation with both men and women; she will roughhouse with young men and she feels quite free to visit in any tent. Curiously, she punctuates her sentences with prayers and pious phrases. Though she is an old woman she does not appear to be senile or in any way deranged. Whether Simi always behaved in an unusual fashion or whether this strange behaviour, which is accepted by both men and women, evolved after she became a mama, unfortunately cannot be discovered.

Pitt-Rivers in The People of the Sierra writes at length about the sabia or wise woman who is concerned with the supernatural and who is thought to have powers in protecting people from acts of God, in curing and midwifery, etc. She works through "...medical, pseudo-medical, and supernatural methods." (Pitt-Rivers 1954:191) The sabia is typically an

old woman who has had a normal marital career and may or may not be a widow. Pitt-Rivers further notes that considerable ambivalence exists in the pueblo's attitude to the wise woman: "...she is condemned on the grounds that she effectively uses magic but uses it for evil ends; ... [and] because she is a silly old woman who fools people." (*Ibid.* :194) The first criticism is related to the fact that her practices are against the church. Curiously, both the sabia and the people who require her services emphasize her orthodoxy and her goodness.

In another article about the same people, Pitt-Rivers mentions the association made between the male roles assumed by some women in the pueblo - especially widows - and an aggressive role in sexual activity. "...widows are commonly believed ... to be sexually predatory upon the young men. ... a woman whose shame is not in the keeping of a man is sexually aggressive and dangerous." (Pitt-Rivers 1965:69) P. Bourdieu in an article on "The Sentiment of Honour in Kabyle Society" also notes that "...a shameless brazen person who breaks the bounds of normal behaviour, assumes an arbitrary power, and generally acts in a thoroughly unsocial way." (Bourdieu 1965:193)

In the case of Simi all of these elements seem to be working in combination. She shamelessly oversteps the limits of conduct appropriate to her sex, which places her in an ambiguous and hence potentially powerful position. At the same time she engages in unorthodox magic and charms. Thus, though she has considerable power within the area of her

speciality, she does not seem to be able to translate her influence to other spheres. She is an important individual in the limited area of midwifery and magic but she is in no sense a women's leader. In this way the mama's position differs greatly from that of the other two kinds of specialists who concern themselves with matters which are both morally correct and appropriate to the female sex. Nonetheless like the real leaders, Simi has a large and heterogeneous xeir-u-šärr. She is automatically invited to all feasts given by past or future clients who will make certain that she attends by sending a horse for her; on one occasion when a double nišan feast was being held, both bridegroom's fathers sent horses for Simi. One would expect Simi to use her extensive contacts for political ends, but as shall be described below she only takes a very small part in the every-day gossip at a feast, and she is even less involved in the more important issues facing the sub-society.

I have stated above that leadership is regarded as a male prerogative among the Shahsavan; to a certain extent positions of leadership in the women's sub-society echo those in the male sphere. Formerly, a tire aq saqal (grey-beard) was commonly one of the old men of the group. Nowadays, the old men of the tire are still respected as such, but they are called aq birček (grey hair) and the exacting position of tire leader is ideally filled by a

younger man at the height of his influence and powers. The less demanding job of herding unit aq saqal is still performed by an older man, e.g. the senior of a group of three or more brothers. On the other hand, aq birček when used as a woman's title implies not so much that she is old and past menopause but that she is a leader in the women's sub-society. (Men and women who are old but who do not merit exceptional respect are addressed simply as qoja or old one, or as baba or nānā, grandfather and grandmother respectively.)

An aq birček is a powerful women; her influence is based on her position in the women's sub-society but is also significant in the male sphere. Men often comment about a woman who holds this title; 'She is our aq birček' and they may add by way of explanation 'she is the women's aq saqal'. Typically, an aq birček arrives at her leadership position after going to Mashhad as a pilgrim or having established herself as a ceremonial cook. Either of these specialist positions - Māshhādī or aš-paz - legitimizes a woman's claims to leadership from an ascribed base. An aq birček is always an old woman; this title is never applied to women who are capable of bearing children. The next two short histories will serve to illustrate the pattern of leadership represented by the aq birček.

#### B.) Mashhad Fatima.

Fatima was born into the bāiğ family of Develu tayfe - a small group attached to the large Marallu tayfe. She

was married to a reasonably well-to-do man of a Marallu tire by whom she had two children, a son and a daughter. Her husband died when her children were very young and she was taken as second wife by her late husband's leader, aq saqal of another Marallu tire who rivalled the Marallu baig for leadership of the tayfe. She had three sons by him. As the wife of such a prominent man and the mother of four sons, her position as it related to that of her husband and her family was very secure. As was shown above, (p. 67) this relation between a man's position and his wife's corresponding status is very important in terms of the co-operation and friendship between women in a camp and tire.

Twenty years ago she was taken to Mashhad by her husband, who died a few years later. Her step-son lived in a separate tent, had a wife (Mashhad Fatima's daughter by her first marriage) and several children and now became the tire aq saqal. From this time on, Mashhad Fatima's influence in the tire and domination of her own family cannot be over-emphasized.

She was an intelligent woman of strong character; and very fat, a characteristic much admired by the Shahsavan. Until her death (aged sixty or sixty-five) in a Tabriz hospital in the summer of 1966 she was a respected aq birček of the tire. Naturally presiding at all the feasts of the tire, Mashhad Fatima had xeir-u-šarr relations with women of both the Marallu and the Develu baig families as well as with some women in villages of the area. She was honoured by all who knew her and her wishes were respected even in areas which typically concern only men. For example, a superb bull camel (när) owned by her sons was dying and the men wanted to kill it in the prescribed manner to cleanse the meat and render it eatable (hālal). (To the Shahsavan, camel meat is a rare delicacy.) Mashhad Fatima intervened declaring that this när was too noble a beast to be eaten. The camel died naturally and was buried near the camp.

### C.) Mashhad Durna.

Durna is from a family of average wealth belonging to the same tire of Marallu tayfe. She is married to a patrilineal cousin; though she has been married for some twenty-five years, she has borne no children and is thought to be infertile. She accepts this fact as God's will; her husband has never made any motion to divorce her nor has he taken a second wife.

Durna is a quick-witted, intelligent woman who because of her directness, commanding bearing, and excellent sense of honour is a popular and respected personality in the tire.

These traits are in no way compatible with the stigma that childlessness carries and she seems to have acted consistently and consciously to improve her personal standing. She has made herself known and available as a ceremonial cook of the tire. As such, she takes the most prominent role in the women's tents at tire feasts.

Some years ago she and her husband went to Mashhad specifically to ask help from the Imam for their childless condition. But the effect, probably calculated, was to augment her already important position and to counteract further the stigma of her barrenness. A further area in which Mashhad Durna went out of her way to gain specialist knowledge, is that of the preparation of female corpses for burial. Having learned from a mulla, she is the only woman of the tire who can direct this job according to the proper Islamic routine.

For all these reasons Mashhad Durna has a wide range of contacts as well as a very large xeir-u-sārr. Though she is no more than forty years old, because she is barren she is classified as an old woman; curiously, the very fact of her childlessness helped her to acquire the title of aq birček when she was still comparatively young.

Mashhad Durna and her husband are a family of average circumstances - not wealthy enough to employ a čoban which means that the husband has to share menial herding duties with other of their herding group. On the other hand, they have adopted Durna's BD to help her in the house. In return, they are responsible for the girl's trousseau. This is the only recorded case of adoption of a child with both parents living, and can be explained by its context: the sole object being to provide Mashhad Durna with help in her tent and hence more free time to fulfil her duties as a women's leader.

#### D.) Nature of leadership among women.

This topic will be considered under four headings.

1.) Requirements for leadership. Though an aq birček is usually associated with a tire and her relations with the tire women correspond with those of the aq saqal with the men of the tire, both Mashhad Fatima and Mashhad Durna lived in the same tire and both were recognised as aq birček

for many years. There seems to have been no competition between them, a fact which points to one of the most striking features of the position of aq birček. Mashhad Fatima's position was to a very great extent based on ascribed status; she was the daughter of a bāiğ family, and in her second marriage, she could command great respect because of her husband's position. Further, she had four surviving sons and a daughter all of whom made very 'good' marriages - her children remained very much under her authority even after they were married. Mashhad Durna, on the other hand, had little ascribed status to use as a basis of power; there was nothing extraordinary about the position of her own family or that of her marriage, and most significantly, she was without children.

While both women had in common certain personality traits and the intelligence to qualify them for leadership as aq birček, Mashhad Fatima seems simply to have consolidated her secure and powerful position without needing to emphasize her unique personal qualities per se. Her pilgrimage to Mashhad at a strategic time in life seems to have served this purpose very well. By contrast, Mashhad Durna acquired specialist knowledge and skills and actively promoted herself by performing special tasks; in other words, the main basis of her power is achieved status. Her trip to Mashhad confirmed and legitimized the position she otherwise achieved through purely secular means.

Thus, aq birček can be either an ascribed title or an achieved position and the role and its duties can be played more or less passively or actively. The common denominator seems to be simply a strong, assertive character; the position can be tailored by the woman herself.

2.) Duties of leadership. In the women's sphere the position of aq birček per se does not bring many formal duties, but where an aq birček achieved her position by the performance of certain specialities, she does not abandon these functions. For example, Mashhad Durna is always in demand as a ceremonial cook and body washer. Such duties as do exist are:- a.) Consultative - the aq birček's opinion, as outlined above, is respected in all matters which touch on the female sphere, especially marriage. With regard to the consultative duties, it should be noted that an aq birček has no sanctions other than her ability to direct public opinion to ensure that her advice is accepted. In fact, even the threat of public disfavour does not seem to be used by a leader to any great extent; this seems reasonable in view of the fact that an aq birček's advice is regarded as sensible and pragmatic (she is always among the most well-informed women) and in accordance with traditional values. In other words, her advice is a valuable guide to acceptable behaviour. b.) Ceremonial - aq birčeks are included in the small party which goes to fetch a bride in marriage both inside and outside the tire



and they preside at all weddings of the tire, among other things. For example, Mashhad Durna was asked to accompany the mother of a betrothed man when she rode to the camp of his fiancée to seek the girl's mother's permission (ijaze - see p. 46) to hold the wedding feast.

3.) Perquisites of leadership. An aq birček has a wide range of contacts and xeir-u-šarr involving continual invitations to feasts - a major reward of leadership. All Shabsavan women are full of anticipation for weeks before a feast and they spend much time considering the dress they will wear, the amount of food they will eat, and the women they will meet. An aq birček who is invited to many such feasts is in an enviable position. Just how enviable becomes clear when it is realized that the average Shabsavan woman possibly goes to ten feasts a year, while an aq birček, a cook, and a midwife may well attend thirty or more such functions.

The other advantages which derive from being aq birček are varied and sometimes hard to define:

Though her husband has no čobans or retainers, Mashhad Durna can expect neighbour women to help her with household tasks, particularly weaving, without reciprocity on her part. This unusual situation is partly the result of Mashhad Durna's personality, for quite simply she is good company. But more than this, she has recruited for herself a number of female retainers (much as an aq saqal or rich man recruits male

retainers) perhaps to replace the daughters-in-law she does not have.

The Shahsavan have an extraordinary propensity for ordering people and animals around which is consistent with the absence of formal sanctions of command even for the aq saqal of a tire. No comment which can be in any way turned into a command will ever be made as a statement, and no action is too petty to escape this kind of notice. Subtle competitions are continually in progress to determine who will obey whom, and though an individual may obey one command, on the next occasion the battle-game must be replayed. Some less important individuals may get a sense of power from ordering others to perform acts in which they are already engaged, but generally the degree to which a person is obeyed is a good indication of his or her status. The aq birček as a recognized leader takes a big part in these competitions in the women's sphere. She is rarely disobeyed and though the issues are usually petty, the sum total of her wins seems to be a great satisfaction to her.

As was noted above, an old woman has much freedom in conversation with men - considerably more than a woman of child-bearing age. She can establish informal joking relations with men not of her own family and she may criticize their behaviour openly. Only in old age, when their sexuality is diminished or neutered, do Shahsavan women enter these kinds of purely social relations with men.

But more than this, an old woman only gains quasi-equality with men in proportion to her own strong character. The aq birček as an old woman who has the approval of all the women behind her has even more right to transgress from the female to the male spheres. She is likely to do so judiciously for she cannot afford to jeopardize her orthodox position in the women's sphere, but this self-imposed restraint makes her pronouncements in the men's sphere even more forceful. Nonetheless, the relative ease with which an aq birček converses with men and will express her (unsolicited) opinions on numerous topics, means that though what she says is typically of a conservative nature, her behaviour indicates that she conforms least of all the women to the ideals of shame and embarrassment. The women leaders join men in conversations on all subjects on more or less equal terms; for example, during the migration when the tire men repair to a hillside and consider plans for the following moves, an aq birček may well be among them discussing freely the problems of the migration which are largely of an economic or political nature.

A leader's freedom from these constraints which are the basis of the social segregation of the sexes, her willingness to take advantage of this freedom, and the men's acceptance that she does so provide an important articulation point between the women's sub-society with the larger society. (cf. Aberle 1950:501) Nevertheless, it should be made clear

that though the aq birček can easily talk with men both on her own initiative and at their request, there are no formal channels for this kind of communication between the women (through their leaders) and the men. Finally, though the linking role between the male and female spheres is an important one, Shahsavan women leaders do not overcome what Barth calls the 'impediment of female sex' (1953:120) which prohibits them from playing an active part in political life in the widest sense, though there is an accepted tradition that women can interfere in men's affairs in extremis.

For example, where a tribesman or his camp leader has tried persistently, but unsuccessfully, to have some grievance attended to by the chief or some other authority, he may send one of his womenfolk - or she may go of her own accord - to confront the authority. The method of doing so is for the woman to take off her scarves and throw them before him so that he is forced to pay attention. In one case, thirty-six sheep were stolen from men of a certain tayfe who managed to trace them to the camp of the bāiğ of a neighbouring tayfe. For several months they tried to get the bāiğ to admit the theft and return the sheep, offering him money to do so. Finally, the wife of one of them, who was also the granddaughter of a Hajji, went and threw her scarves before the bāiğ. However, the sheep were still not returned.

There are also stories told of the part played by women in the inter-tayfe feuds of the past. In 1922,

Najaf Qulu Khan of Arallu tayfe, who had captured a number of field and machine guns from the Russians, attacked his deadly rivals from Qojabeglu tayfe and as a result defeated them. The baigzade (see above, p. 23) warriors arrived home after their defeat but their women threw down their scarves at their feet crying, 'If you are lacking in zeal, we'll go ourselves and fight.' This roused them and the nineteen baigzade went back to face Najaf Qulu's battery, and, in fact, drove their rivals in their hundreds out of their lands. (Recorded from an old man who knew the principals.)

4.) Competition for leadership. All too often two ideas without any necessary connection are linked in a casual manner; I would suggest that the existence of a leadership position is not necessarily related to inevitable competition for that place. Among the Shahsavan it has been demonstrated that though leadership positions for women certainly do exist there is little competition for these places. A brief examination of the positions themselves will help to explain the absence of competition. Three points are relevant: a). no women before menopause are considered suitable for leadership positions, and in any case b.) distinctive personality and intelligence are essential. With regard to competition, the combination of age and personality factors inevitably eliminates a number of candidates, for only a few women with suitable strong characters will survive their child-bearing years. c.) Most importantly, the roles and rewards associated with women's leadership

positions are not exclusive. Let me elaborate.

The duties of leadership, in that they are mainly consultative, need not be performed by one person alone, for the advice given by a leader is not invested with supernatural truth, but is simply regarded as a reasoned pragmatic comment from a well-informed individual. Similarly, the ceremonial jobs of a leader are not designed to be performed by one individual only. For instance, there are no special rituals, etc., performed exclusively by the women's leader who has been included in the wedding party; in fact, it is prestigious for the mother of the groom in such a case to be able to include a couple of prominent women in the party.

In other words, the leadership positions for women are of such a kind that competition is simply irrelevant. If there are a number of women suited to leadership, there is no reason for them all not to be declared leaders, each with consultative and other duties and the resultant rewards. Power among women in the sub-society is not based on a zero-sum game in which victory for one is defeat for the other.<sup>20</sup> This point is demonstrated by the behaviour of the women leaders in the cooking tent (see below, p.123) towards

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20. This differs from the situation among the men - there cannot be more than one effective leader in a camp or tire, because of the nature of such leadership. (cf. the forthcoming thesis of Richard Tapper) Nevertheless, even among men, leadership at the camp level is not the object of much competition; economic and political activities are directed to the goal of individual economic independence and prosperity.

the younger women who may presume to join them. For example, a woman of thirty-five or so, the mother of several young children may appear; clearly at this stage of the life cycle she is not eligible for leadership but she may well have a strong personality and a certain ascribed status which singles her out as a likely leader of the future. She may well have recognized these characteristics in herself which would account for her interest in joining the women in the cooking tent. Her presumption of a leadership position before she is qualified does not cause resentment among the other women in the tent, and she is allowed to join the group in what is a classic example of anticipatory socialization.

#### V. XEIR-U-SÄRR CONTACTS, FEASTS, AND THE WOMEN'S SUB-SOCIETY.

Contacts between unrelated women are few and infrequent. During the year each household will move about thirty-five times; around twenty-five of these moves will be involved with the migration proper, during which all the tire will camp together. As was noted in the introduction, there is considerable change in the size and composition of the camps from winter to summer. Moreover the actual arrangement of the tents in this unit tends to change with each move. The core of agnates and their families in the herding unit may remain constant but may also be joined by kinsmen, čobans, and retainers at various times during the year. Each move means new neighbours and on the migration the group may even

camp next to complete strangers. A woman normally only leaves her own camp to make casual visits to other camps of her tire of marriage, though even these are infrequent; there is no interaction between the women in camps of strangers who will even water at separate springs if at all possible.

The only occasions in the year when tire members gather to the exclusion of others are the last days of the fast month of Ramazan, terminating in the feast at Eid-e fetr (1st of Shavval), and the mourning ceremonies for Imam Hussain (1st to 10th of Moharram). During the last day or two of these ceremonies the women also gather. On the last day of the latter (asura) wives and daughters sit by the mosque tent to watch the proceedings. They take part discreetly in the chants and wailing and the mourning services from outside the tent. They also pay the mulla for prayers for the dead. The tent of the tire aq saqal is used for cooking and his wife or wives and a ceremonial cook direct the preparation of meals. The tire wives and daughters are fed together in the cooking tent; this and a similar gathering on Eid-e fetr are the one occasion when they will all eat together exclusively.

A wife of village birth may visit in the village of her kinsmen. However, in the 54 marriages contracted by the men of one tire, only four men were married to village women. Women with daughters married to villagers (a slightly more frequent occurrence; 10 out of 71 marriages contracted



by women of the same tire) do not visit them; the daughter will occasionally be fetched by a brother for a visit in the camp of her parents.

Most of these visits between village and tribal women are concerned with life-cycle feasts. As a camp passes through villages on the migration route, information about births and deaths is exchanged; special mourning ceremonies may be held months after a death when a camp passes by a village where kin or affines reside. Then tribal women may go to the village to mourn a death, but, more frequently, village women come to visit the camp of relatives. Occasionally, if a tribesman owns land in a village, his wife may have contacts with the wives of his tenants, who may come and help if she is holding a feast nearby.

#### A.) Xeir-u-šärr Contacts.

It is the institution of xeir-u-šärr which allows for the development and expression of women's relations with other women thus forming a sub-society. In this, leaders arise and their influence can be extended through xeir-u-šärr to distant women who are otherwise unconnected. (Men do a favour by attending feasts of xeir-u-šärr partners; women are favoured by being invited!)

When several women of a camp want to attend a feast, they go together in a party typically led by an aq birček or at least an old widow. However, a younger married woman who alone of her camp wishes to attend a feast, must be escorted by her husband; if she is a close agnate of the

feast-giver, the latter or a kinsman may have to fetch her himself. If a woman meets someone at a feast with whom she wants to become xeir-u-šärr herself, she simply extends an invitation to attend the next feast at which she will act as the hostess. If the invitation is accepted, the relationship commences.

At feasts, one can see the action and interaction of the factors discussed above - a.) the corresponding statuses of husband and wife, b.) a woman's age and the number and sex of her children, c.) special skills learned by some women, and d.) personality. Relations between women are defined and redefined at feasts; these occasions which are accorded so much importance by the Shahsavan women are the basis of their sub-society.

I shall examine the gatherings of women at five feasts held during the summer, 1966. The first, which seems to embody the most typical and representative elements of such gatherings, will be described in some detail. The next two varied from the former only in the range of attendance, and this feature alone will be outlined. The last two were smaller gatherings than the others, and the procedure varied somewhat, so they too will be considered in some detail. Women are listed according to the tire into which they have married; the numbering of the women is consistent throughout the description of the five feasts. Young girls who attended the feasts with their mother or another female relative are not enumerated, and it should be noted that

male children after the age of five or six do not remain in the women's guest tent, but play or sit near the doorway of the men's tent. Women whom I will call 'notables', that is, aq birčeks, Māshādis, mamas, ašpazs, and the wives of Hajjis and tire aq saqals, will be starred throughout the account. Elderly women are not included as 'notables' unless they also belong to one of the above-mentioned categories.

A nišan or betrothal feast - the idea of having more than a simple family gathering to signify the betrothal of a girl is a recent innovation. The xeir-u-šārr invited to nišan feasts is still smaller than that involved at the proper wedding feast, but perhaps because of this it is somewhat easier to unravel the patterns of interaction.

1.) The nišan was given for Khanoym Gul (A), a spirited, good-looking girl from Hajji Salim-lu tire, Marallu tayfe, by her guardian, her FB, a man of modest circumstances. On this day, she was betrothed to a man (B) of average wealth and position from Qoyun-lu tire, Marallu tayfe. 34 women were present at this feast; one can see the women as belonging to two parties, the first as part of the xeir-u-šārr of the betrothed girl's mother (22), and the second as part of the xeir-u-šārr of the mother of the groom (39). (See fig. 3, 94)

Not counting the girl's mother, 16 women were from the betrothed girl's tire, Hajji Salim-lu. Every herding unit of the tire was represented. These women were 1\*, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 13, 15, 20, 23, 24\*, 29, 31\*, 34, 35, and 36. 1\* is the senior wife of the tire aq saqal; 24\*, who is Mashhad Durna (see above, pp. 79-80), an aq birček and Māshādi, was responsible for the cooking at the feast; and 31\* is Simi (see above, p. 75) the midwife. 9, a retainer's wife, is the BW of the young man to be engaged - she belongs to the xeir-u-šārr of his mother.

Not counting the young man's mother, 9 women were present from his tire, Qoyun-lu. They were 40, 41, 42, 43\*, 44, 45, 46, 47, and 48. 43\* is the wife of the tire

Hajji Salim-lu tire

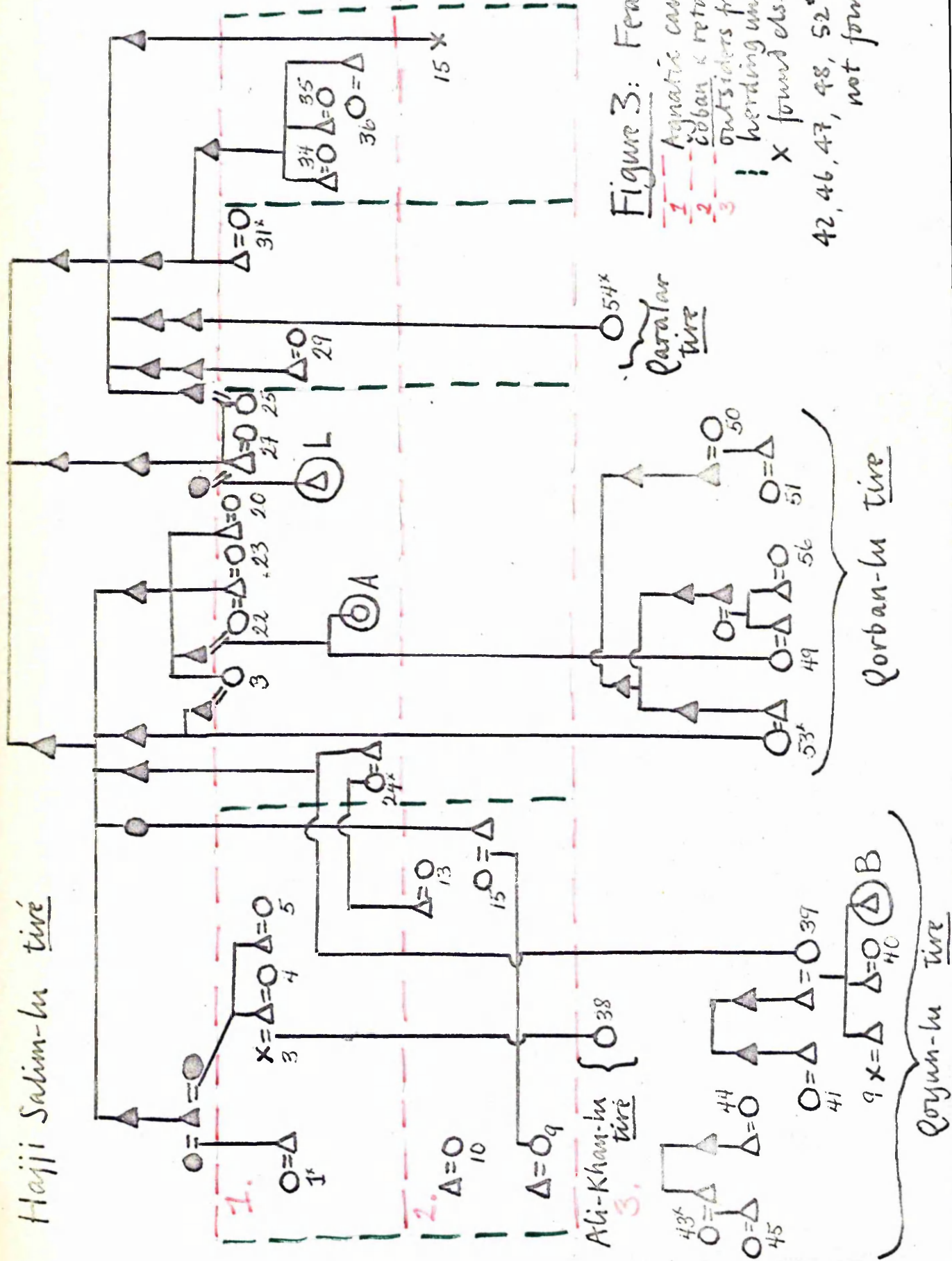


Figure 3: Feast 1.

aq saqal, a Hajji, - in her own right she is an aq birček and a Māshādi.

The remaining 9 women (38, 49, 50, 51, 52\*, 53\*, 54\*, 55, and 56) were married into four other tires of Marallu tayfe: Qorban-lu, Ali-Man-lu, Qaralar, and Ahmad-Ali.

From Qorban-lu tire (the tire of the betrothed girl's MF) five women were present: 49, 50, 51, 53\*, and 56. 49, the Z of the betrothed girl, came in the company of 56, her HBW who represented a lineage branch of the tire. 53\* is the wife of the tire aq saqal, a Hajji, - in her own right she is an aq birček. 50, an old woman, is originally from Qoyun-lu, the tire of the young man. Qoyun-lu tire is also the tire of origin of 51, the daughter-in-law of 50. These last two women belong to the xeir-u-sārr of the young man's mother.

From Ali-Man-lu tire came 38 who is the FZD and childhood friend of the betrothed girl.

Qaralar tire was represented by the tire aq saqal's wife, 54\*, and 55 the oldest woman of the other branch of the same tire.

From Ahmad-Ali-lu tire 52 the senior wife of the tire aq saqal, a Hajji, was present.

Significantly, two women (25 and 27) of the camp of the girl refrained from coming to the feast as a protest; they had hoped that a young man of their own family would win permission to marry Khanoym Gul, his cousin. For a number of reasons the decision had gone against them in favour of a stranger from another tire. The absence of these women was noticed by everyone present.

As the women arrived they were ushered to the guest tent. The more important women were greeted in chorus by the others and they took places of honour in the back of the tent. 4 of the senior women from the young man's mother's contingent (41, 42, 47 and 50) arranged themselves in the back of the tent (the back of the tent, known as yoxara = up, is a place of honour) with their counterparts from the girl's side (1\*, 3, 15, and 29). The conversation of these women was followed by all the other guests in the tent. As other women joined the group, there was much scrambling to find them places in the tent appropriate to their status. News and gossip was brought up and discussed, and the most lively conversations concerned marriage arrangements and the several important weddings which were due to occur before the autumn migration. Preparations for these



weddings were discussed in great detail - the women arranged loans of their household utensils, carpets, etc. to help a family giving a feast<sup>21</sup> and there was much speculation about the women who would be present. At this point Simi (31\*) the midwife appeared and she greeted the other women in turn, kissing each of the children at whose birth she had assisted. Her contribution to the discussion was small; rather she concerned herself with individual problems and with cadging cigarettes, which she smoked continually.

At mid-morning Mashhad Durna (24\*) arrived and after stopping briefly at the guest tent she went to the kitchen tent and began preparations for the repast. There were 90 to 100 men and women to feed that day. Soon 11 of the most important, though not necessarily the oldest women joined Mashhad Durna in the tiny kitchen. These included 5 tire aq saqal's wives (1\*, 43\*, 52\*, 53\*, and 54\*) two of whom are themselves aq birceks (43\* and 53\*); 31\*, Simi; and 4 other women who were closely associated with the principals - 3 the girl's FZ, 20 the girl's FBW, 23 the co-wife of the girl's mother, and 40 the BW of the young man. His mother (39) was also present, though the girl's mother (22) remained with her daughter in a separate tent. Older women with few other claims to importance remained to preside in the guest-tent after the exodus of the notables; 24 women stayed in the guest-tent eating melon, drinking tea, and chatting casually.

The conversation in the cooking tent which was directed by Mashhad Durna was considerably more pointed. For example, the absence of the two women mentioned above was discussed only after Mashhad Durna introduced the topic. Everyone was agitated, for the problem of Khanom Gul's engagement had been hotly debated for over a year. Every woman had her say and then Durna commented that the two women were foolish to keep up the grudge and miss the feast, for the decision had been made and would not be reversed; everyone should now forget their grievances, the issue was closed. The women in the cooking tent concurred and in fact what had

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21. These loans are made by wealthy neighbours and relations. Considerable enterprise on the part of both the hostess and the women who are helping her, is necessary to carry out such arrangements smoothly. The latter are responsible for finding a retainer or youth to take a donkey or camel load of goods to the camp of the feast which may be many miles away. Men recognize and value this kind of work which is done by the women; there is a tacit assumption on their part that the women can cope with all such technical concerns - regardless of the number of invitations to a proposed feast - without their interference.

been a burning issue seemed to have burnt itself out. After giving her final opinion, Mashhad Durna quickly turned the conversation to arrangements for a large wedding to be held in several weeks time. Other controversial topics were similarly dealt with.

Mashhad Durna was helped in the preparation and serving of the food by three other women, the girl's FZ (3) and FBW (20) and the co-wife of her mother (23). The food was served first to the men; then to the women in two lots, first to the guest-tent and then to those in the cooking tent itself. Two young married women acted as liaisons between the cooking and the guest tents and the tent where the nišanli girl herself spent the day in isolation. One of them was the girl's sister (49), the other was her FZD (38); the three of them had grown up together in the same camp. These two young women in fact conducted to the engaged girl the ring and other presents brought by her fiancé's family.

2.) A nišan feast was given for two daughters (C and D) of a moderately wealthy man of Hajji Salim-lu tire, Marallu tayfe. One of the girls was betrothed to the first son (E) of the neighbouring camp aq saqal of Hajji Salim-lu tire, a man of moderate wealth. The second girl was betrothed to the first son (F) of the aq saqal of Ahmad-Ali-lu tire, a wealthy Hajji. This was quite an important nišan and the celebration was elaborate and expensive. 44 women attended the feast as the xêir-u-šâr of three women: the mother of the two girls (4), the mother of the young man, E (20), and the mother of F (58\*). (See fig. 4, 92).

Not counting the mothers of the principals, 22 women from Hajji Salim-lu, the tire of the betrothed girls and the young man E, were present. Every herding unit of the tire was represented. These women were 1\*, 2\*, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 19, ■, 22, 23, 24\*, 25, 30, 31\*, and 33. 1\* and 2\* were the co-wives of the tire aq saqal; 24\* (Mashhad Durna) an aq birçek was again responsible for the cooking; and 31\* (Simi) is the midwife.

Not counting the young man F's mother, there were 10 women from Ahmad-Ali-lu tire. Both herding units of the tire were represented. These women were 52\*, 60, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69 and 70. 52\* is the junior co-wife of F's mother: she is of course the wife of the tire aq saqal as well.

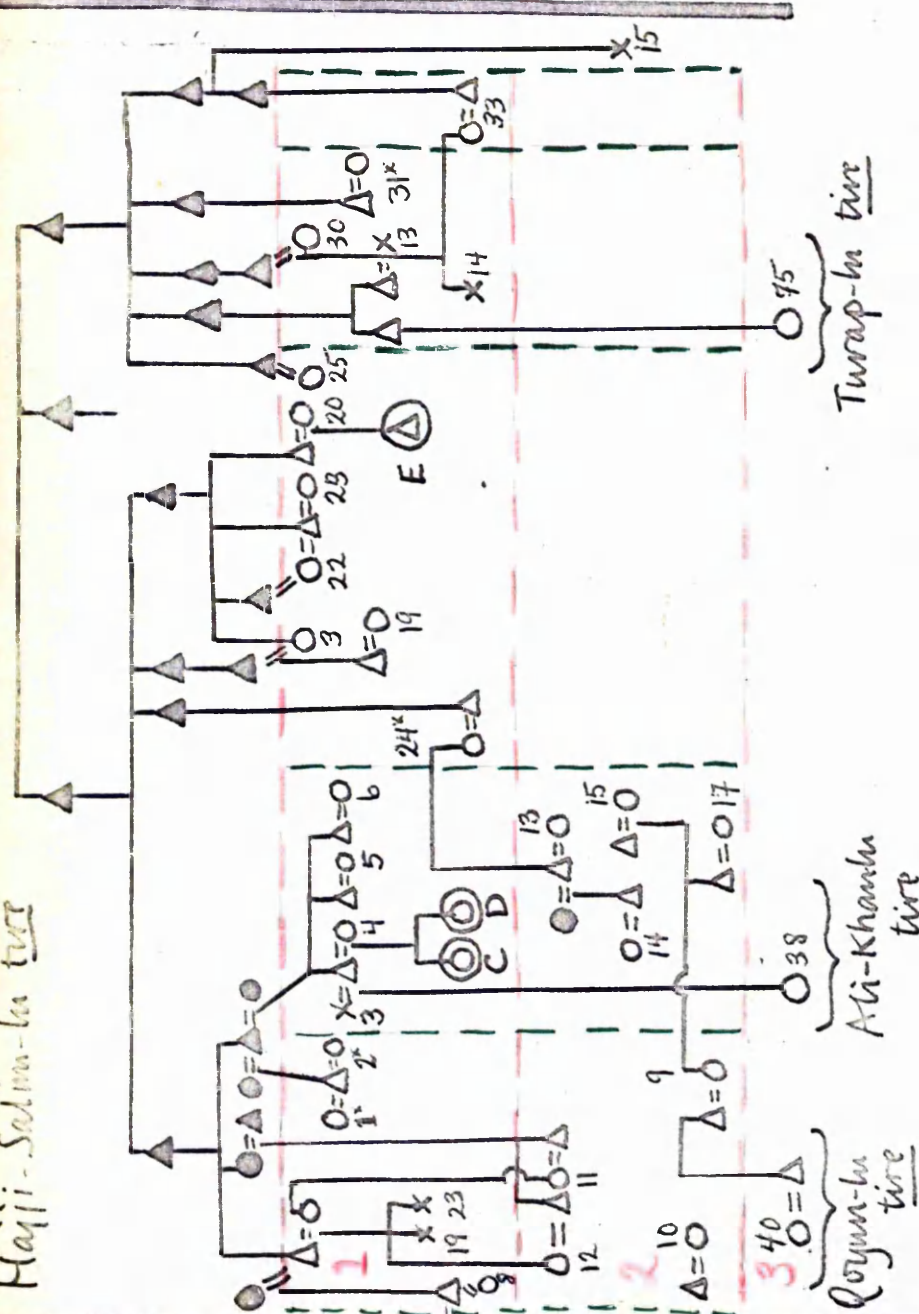


Figure 4: Feast 2

1. Aquatic camp core & wint  
2. Urban & retainer families  
3. outsiders from other times.  
! ! !  
X found elsewhere on chart



The remaining 12 women (38, 40, 49, 59, 61, 62, 71\*, 72, 73\*, 74, 75, and 76\*) were married into 5 other tires of Marallu tayfe: Qorban-lu, Ali-man-lu, Qaraqush-lu, Turap-lu, and Qoyun-lu.

From Qorban-lu tire which is genealogically connected with Ahmad-Ali-lu tire 7 women (49, 59, 71\*, 72, 73\*, 74, and 76\*) were present. 59 was the Z of F; 71\* is an aq bircek; while 73\* and 76\* were the wives of Hajjis.

From Ali-man-lu tire came one woman (38) who was the half-sister of the two betrothed girls.

From Qaraqush-lu tire came 61 the Z of F's father and her daughter, 62.

From Turap-lu tire, there was one woman, 75, a paternal relative of the betrothed girl.

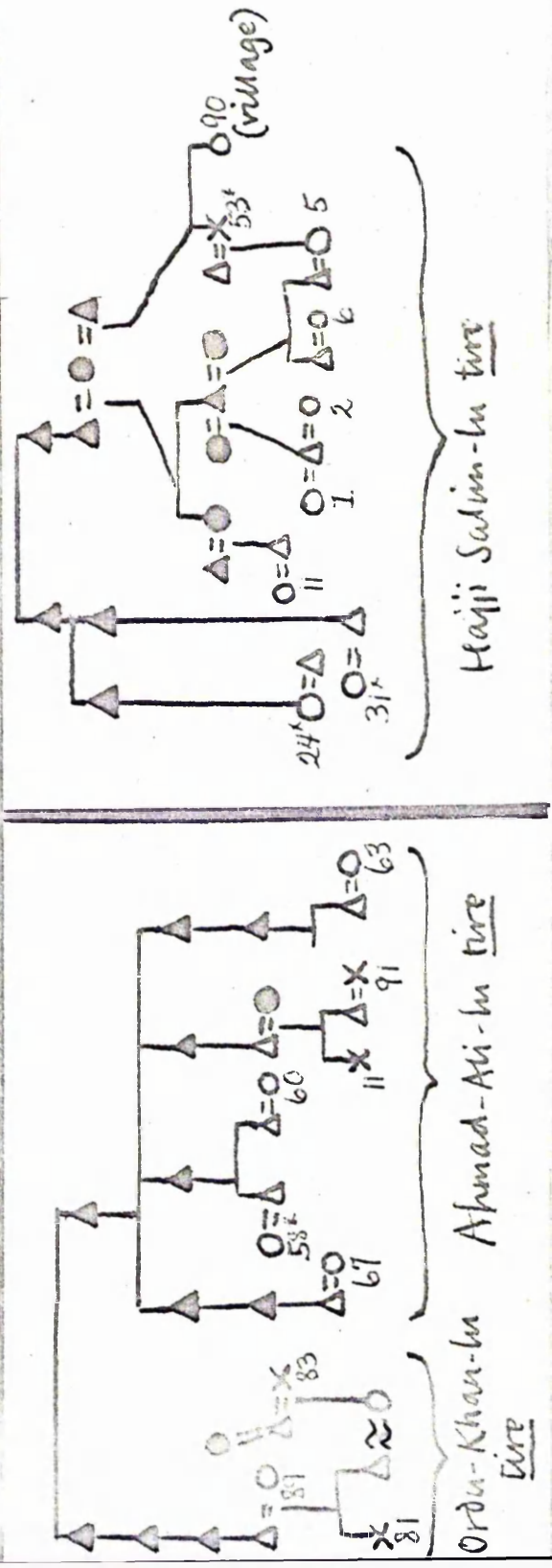
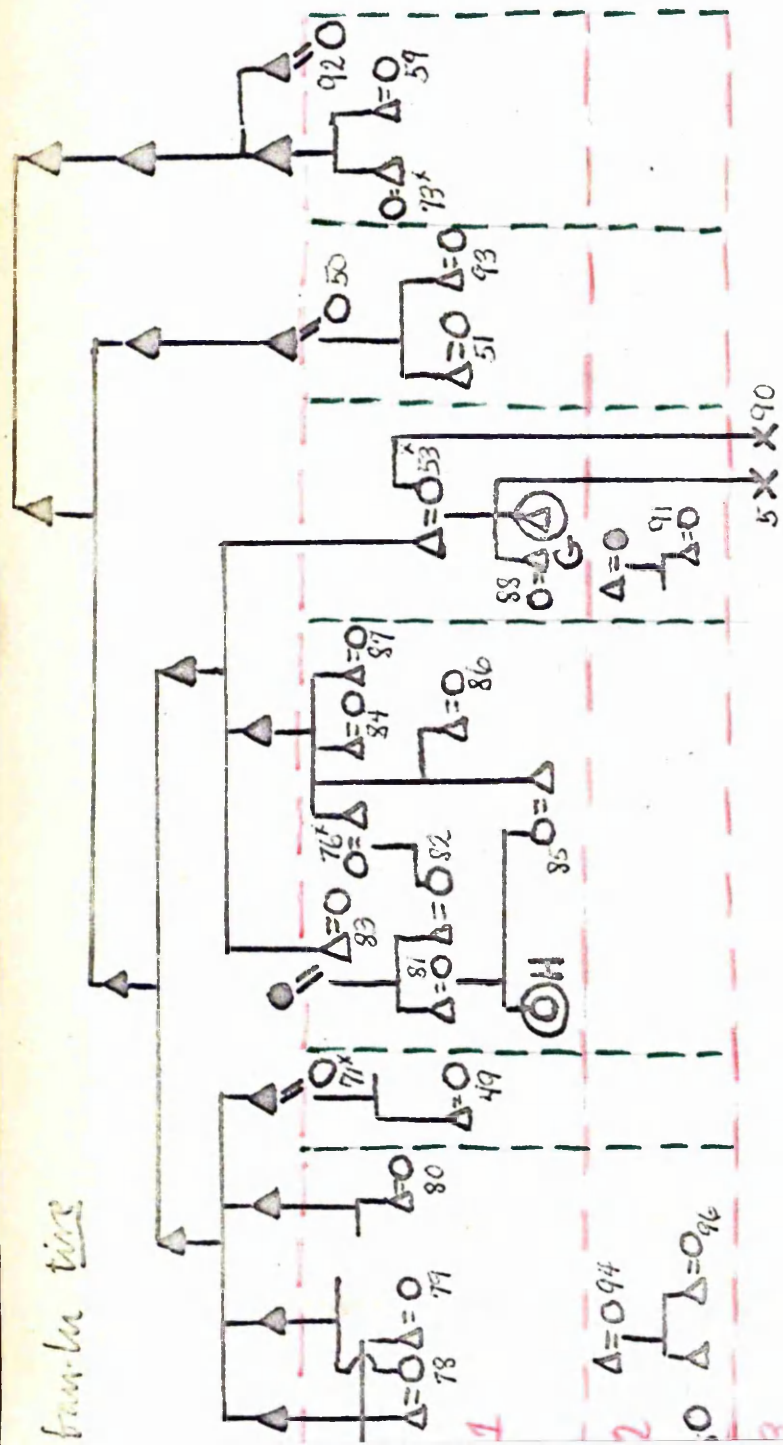
From Qoyun-lu tire, there was one woman, 40.

A toy or wedding feast is the occasion for a gathering of all of one's xeir-u-šärr; further, unlike at the nišan feasts, all the women (and men) guests make contributions to cover the expenses of the host family. The wedding celebrations are spread over a minimum of two days; on the first, the xeir-u-šärr of the bride's family and only a small contingent of the men and women representatives of the groom gather at the camp of the bride. On the second day, the bride is brought to the camp of her in-laws, whose xeir-u-šärr are gathered and feasted there. Clearly, in close kin marriages, not only the location but also the guests present will be very much the same on each of the last days.

3.) I shall describe here only the attendance on the first day of the toy, in the bride's camp. The second son (G) of a Hajji and aq saqal of Qorban-lu tire, Marallu tayfe was to be married to his FBSD, H. The celebrations were lavish. There were 33 women present at this feast, in

Figure 5: Forest 3

- 1 agnate camp core & whips
- 2 Eban and retainor families
- 3 outsiders from other tires
- working units
- x found elsewhere on chart.



ban-lu tire

Ordu-Khan-lu tire

Hayji Salim-lu tire

Ahmad-Ali-lu tire

the main they were the xeir-u-šarr of the bride's mother, 81. Naturally, many women were also xeir-u-šarr of the groom's mother, 53\*; but they did not attend the first day feast in this capacity. (See fig. 5<sub>p.100</sub>).

Not counting the mother of the bride, there were 22 women present from Qorban-lu tire. Every herding unit of the tire was represented. These women were 49, 53\*, 71\*, 73\*, 76\*, 77, 78, 79, 80, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, and 96. 53\* the groom's mother was an aq birček in her own right; so also 71\* was an aq birček; 73\* and 76\* were the wives of Hajjis.

The remaining 11 women (5, 6, 11, 24\*, 31\*, 58\*, 60, 63, 67, 89, and 90) were married into three other tires of Marallu tayfe: Ahmad-Ali-lu, Hajji Salim-lu, and Ordu-Man-lu. One of these women (11) was from a village 6 or 7 miles from the camp of the wedding.

From Ahmad-Ali-lu tire which is genealogically related to Qorban-lu tire 4 women were present: 58\*, 60, 63, and 67. 58\* was the senior co-wife of the tire aq saqal, a Hajji - she came as the representative of the tire as a whole.

From Hajji Salim-lu tire there were 5 women: 5, 6, 11, 24\*, and 31\*. 5 is the Z of the groom; 6 the HBW of 5 is the daughter of a wealthy village Hajji; 11 is the wife of the retainer of 1\*'s husband who was sent as a substitute for 1\*, the wife of the aq saqal of Hajji Salim-lu tire. Illness was given as the excuse for the latter's absence; though she was not popular she was entitled to respect because of her husband's strong position and because her mother was an extremely important woman - (Mashhad Fatima, the honoured aq birček mentioned above, see p. 78 .) 1\*'s absence on this occasion caused considerable comment and dismay. 24\* was Mashhad Durna, the aq birček. 31\* was Simi the midwife.

From Ordu-Man-lu tire was 89 the MM of the bride.

90, the Z of the groom's mother, (53\*), was married to a villager.

4.) I shall describe here the events on the second day of a toy held in the camp of the groom. The second son (I) of a camp aq saqal of Ali-Man-lu tire, Marallu tayfe was to be married to his FFBSD (J) a girl living in the same camp. Because it was a marriage between individuals in the same camp, many of the women who attended were xeir-u-šarr of the mother's of both bride and groom. For this reason, and more importantly, because both the families of bride and groom were comparatively poor, only 17 women

# Ali-khan-tu tire

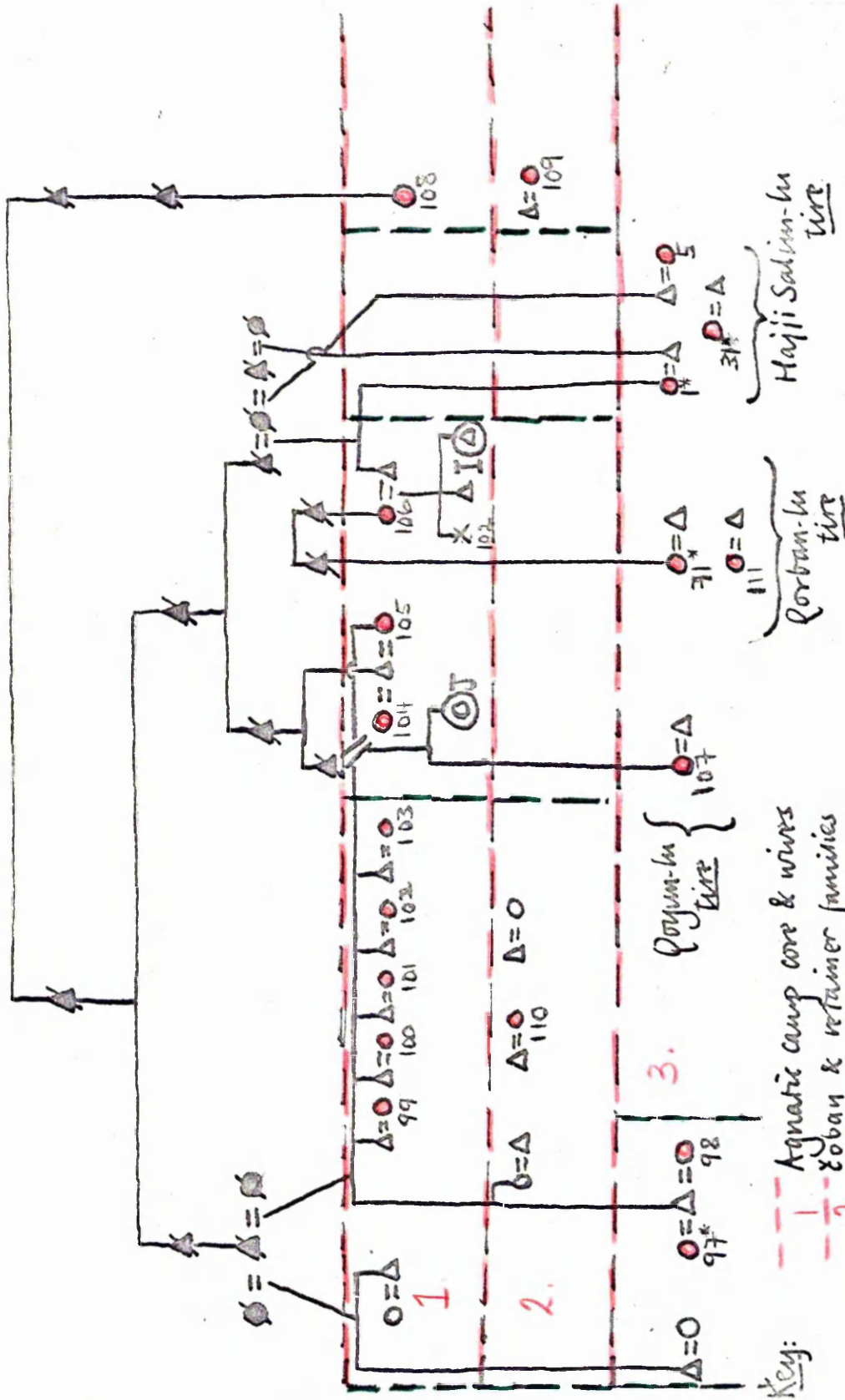


Figure 4: Feast 4

Agmatic camp core & wires  
xobay & retainer families  
others  
herding units  
women present at feast  
found elsewhere on chart

were present, not counting the mother of the bride (104) and the mother of the groom (106). (See fig. 6, 102.)

Not counting the above mentioned two women, there were 11 women from Ali-khan-lu tire present. These women were 97\*, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 105, 108, 109, and 110. 97\* and 98, though married into the tire were in fact now living with their husband in a village not far from the camp of the wedding. 108 was the senior woman of one herding unit, she alone represented the other branch of the tire though she was accompanied by 109, her husband's čoban's wife, who in fact appeared to be an important woman in her own right. 110 was the wife of 99's husband's čoban.

The remaining 6 women (1\*, 5, 31\*, 71\*, 107, and 111) were from three other tires of Marallu tayfe: Qorban-lu, Hajji Salim-lu and Qoyun-lu.

From Qorban-lu tire 2 women were present: 71\* and 111. 71\* was an aq birček and FBD of the groom's mother; she was accompanied by 111, the wife of her son's čoban. They rode alone some ten miles to the camp of the wedding.

Hajji Salim-lu tire was represented by 3 women: 1\*, 5, and 31\*. 1\* is the senior co-wife of the tire aq saqal and FZ of the groom; 5 is a young woman who has already made herself known in the women's sphere, she is the wife of the half-brother of the groom's father. 31\* is Simi the midwife.

From Qoyun-lu tire 107 was present; she was the bride's sister.

Much of the cooking was done out-of-doors, while the tent of the groom's mother was used as the women's guest tent. A hard wind was blowing which made the cooking area unpleasant and smoky; for this reason 97\* the senior wife of a wealthy man now living in a village of the area, who acted as ceremonial cook, and her helpers, 102 and 105 went outside as little as possible. The other women remained in the guest tent chatting in a desultory fashion. There was clearly no private gathering of the women leaders as there was for each of the first three feasts described. The seating arrangements however were typically those of the women's guest-tent which are determined as the women arrive and maintained throughout the feast. These arrangements indicated that 1\*, 71\*, 97\*, 108, and 109 were the persons of highest rank present.

A toy or circumcision feast - The xeir-u-šärr invited to a circumcision feast depends largely on the number of



surviving sons a family has. When a first son is circumcised, the feast may be quite large and may last over a period of several days, while the circumcision of junior sons does not merit this attention. In the latter case, if there is a feast at all, it will last only one day and only a part of the xeir-u-šärr of the boy's father and mother will attend. Xeir-u-šärr contributions are given to the host family.

5.) The circumcision feast for Bala Khan (K) the fourth son of a reasonably well to do family of Hajji Salim-lu tire, Marallu tayfe was attended by 14 women not counting the hostess herself. These women can be regarded as only part of the xeir-u-šärr of the latter. (See fig. 7, p. 105.)

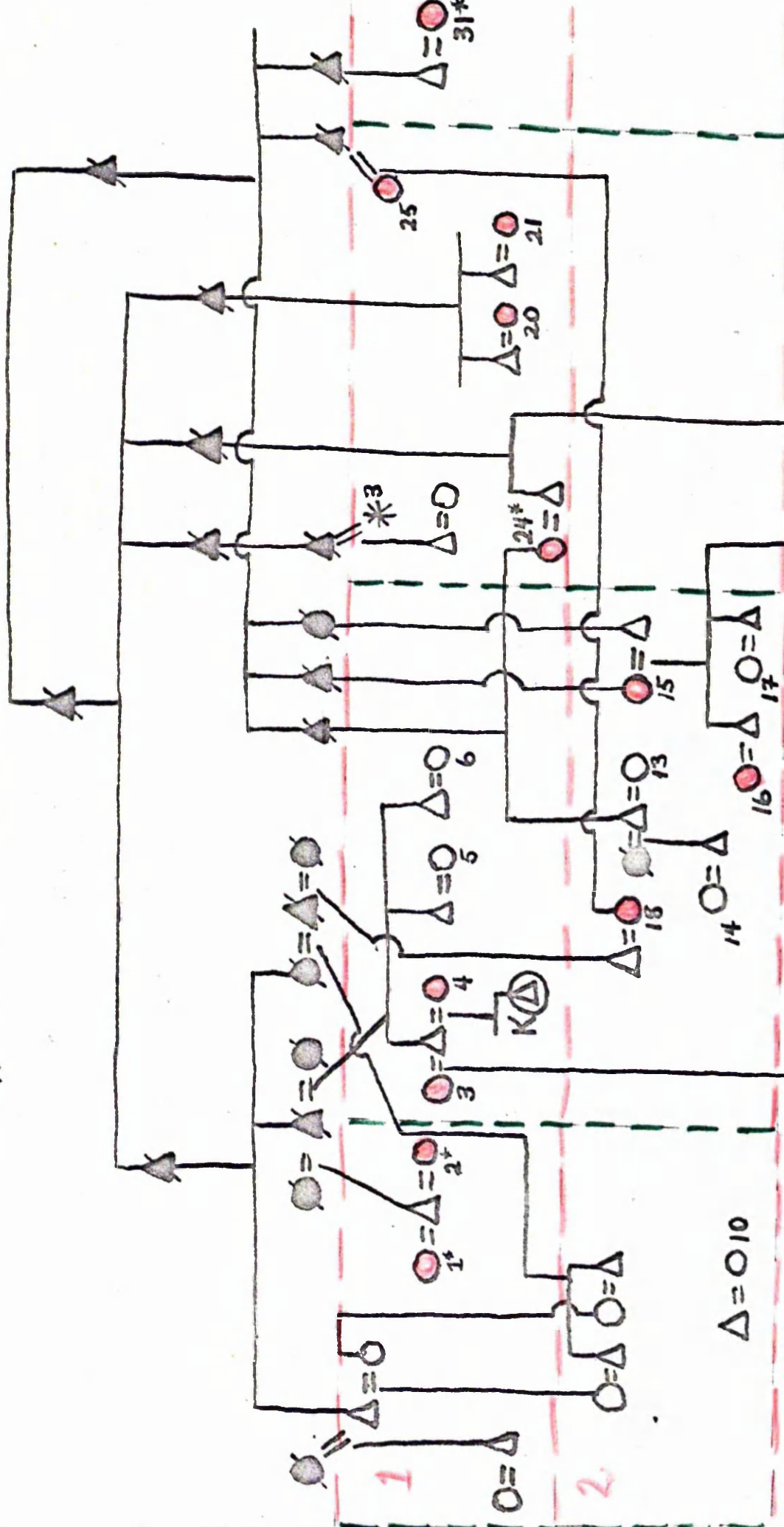
From Hajji Salim-lu tire 11 women were present. They were 1\*, 2\*, 3, 15, 16, 18, 20, 21, 24\*, 25, 31\*. From the camp where the feast was held, only the hostess (4) and her co-wife (3) and the wife of their husband's šoban (18) and the wives of his retainers (15 and 16) were present. The other two wives of the camp's agnatic core (5 and 6) were at that time quarrelling with the hostess and did not attend the feast. Because these two women were not present, the wives of their husbands' šobans (13 and 14) and the wife of the retainer of their tent (17) also did not attend. From the neighbouring camp only a few hundred yards away, 4 women were present: 20, 21, 24\*, and 25. Each of these women represented a tent of the agnatic core of the camp. 24\* is Mashhad Durna the aq birček. The camp of the tire aq saqal was represented by the aq saqal's wives, 1\* and 2\*. Another camp of the tire was represented by 31\*, Simi the midwife.

The remaining 3 women (38, 39, and 40) were from two other tires of Marallu tayfe: Ali-~~han~~-lu tire, and Qoyun-lu tire.

38 who was married into Ali-~~han~~-lu tire was present as the step-daughter of the hostess and the half-sister of the boy to be circumcised.

From Qoyun-lu tire two women (39 and 40) were present at the feast, but as will be shown, they took advantage of their xeir-u-šärr ties with the hostess to attend principally because they wanted to discuss with the other women present a betrothal feast which was to occur a few days later.

# Haji: Sahim-lu tire



3 Key:

- agnatic camp core & wives
- cuban and retainer families
- outsiders from other tires
- herding units
- women present at feast

Qoyun-lu tire

Figure 7: Feast 5

Because this was a small feast, the tent of the hostess was used as both the women's guest-tent and the cooking tent. In the morning, all the women present helped in the preparation of the meal by cleaning rice and getting other foodstuffs and the dishes ready. Mashhad Durna as ceremonial cook began the meal and she broached the subject of the betrothal feast with the two women from Qoyun-lu tire. A man of their camp (B) (he is S of 39 and HB of 40) was to become engaged to Khanoum Gul. (This feast was described above, p. 93 ). The engagement had caused much controversy for over a year and by coming to the circumcision feast at which 4 women representing all the agnates of Khanoum Gul's camp were present, the two women had a chance to assess the last minute feelings about the engagement and to work out any problems which, if left to the day of the feast, might have prevented the occasion from running smoothly. It is interesting to note that seating arrangements on this occasion were very informal, unlike those in a typical guest-tent gathering; rather they and the general behaviour of the women present made it clear that this was a cooking tent situation. Important issues were at hand and all the women participated as equals in the discussion.

Eventually sweets were passed round by the hostess and each woman made her xeir-u-särr contribution and the meal began. 25, the oldest woman of the neighbouring camp and an important woman in her own right, 20, the wife of the neighbouring camp aq saqal, and 2\*, the second wife of the tire aq saqal who is considerably more of a personality than her co-wife, 1\*, helped Mashhad Durna to serve the meal.

What conclusions can be drawn from the material presented above?

(a) The extent of the range of contacts of one woman is indicated. In the course of six weeks, I attended the five feasts described above as the guest of 1\*, the senior wife of the aq saqal of Hajji Salim-lu tire.<sup>22</sup> Because of her

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22. Though she did not attend feast No. 3 because of illness, there is little doubt that she would have done so otherwise; by sending 11, the wife of her husband's retainer as her substitute, she clearly demonstrated that she did not wish to break off her xeir-u-särr relationship with 81, the hostess of the feast. Thus, for the purpose of the following summary, I shall act as if 1\* had been in attendance at all 5 feasts.



husband's position as tire aq saqal, I\* is considered an important woman, though she is in no sense a women's leader and, in fact, she is actively disliked by many women; her range of contacts is extensive but not so much so as is that of, for example, an aq birček. The five feasts detailed above were attended by 102 women drawn from 9 tires of Marallu tayfe; they represent perhaps only 3/4 of the total number of women that I\* met in the six-week period, for she in fact went to four other feasts during the six-week period. The latter four feasts included two funeral and two wedding feasts - all large gatherings of 25 to 45 women. Thus, during only a short period of time, I\*'s range of contacts was considerable; in the course of a year, the number of women she would meet could be doubled and probably trebled. Unfortunately, I do not have any complete record of I\*'s own xeir-u-šärr, and it cannot be estimated from <sup>the</sup> above, for at none of the 5 feasts did I\* herself act as hostess.

(b) I shall discuss in some detail below (cf. p. 128 ) the content of the information exchanged by the women at feasts; but first, it is necessary to consider the potential spread of such information. To return to the 5 feasts, it has been shown that 102 women from 9 different tires of Marallu tayfe were present. At any given feast, the greater number of women were residents of the same tire as the feast-giver and hostess. But aside from these women and

Representation at each Feast:

	1	2	3	4	5
Tire of hostess.	47.0	51.5	} 68.0	69.0	78.0
Tire of principal	27.5	23.0			
Tire of guest-principal	25.5	25.5	32.0	31.0	22.0
other tires	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
%	36	47	34	19	14
Actual Totals					

Tire of hostess.

Tire of guest-principal

other tires

%

Actual Totals

Figure 8

Women Feast-goers: Percentage Representation of tires of Residence.

others who were directly involved in the feast insofar as they were resident in the same tire as one of the principals of the feast, at each of the gatherings there were also a considerable number of women whose tire of residence was different from that of any of the principals.

The pattern that emerges is shown on Fig. 8, p. 108. In other words, a fairly consistent percentage (from 22% to 32%) of the women at each feast were resident in tires other than those of the principals. This figure in itself does not indicate the range of women among whom information could be exchanged, but, by breaking these figures down in terms of the herding units and villages represented by at least one woman at each feast, a view of the potential spread of information is shown. The assumption here is that the information a woman receives at a feast could at least be relayed to the women of her own herding unit; needless to say, the extent to which this relay of information actually occurs of course depends on the internal relations between women of each herding unit. See Fig. 9, p. 110.

(c) It is perhaps worth mentioning that aside from 1\* herself, only 31\*, the midwife was invited to the same 5 feasts. But more than this, what can be said about the women whom 1\* met more than once at the five feasts?

Without counting the women whom 1\* met several times who were resident in the same tire as 1\*, she met 10 women from other tires at least two times in the course of these 5 feasts. Of these 10 women, 6 in fact have been designated

Tires	Number of herding units	Distribution of herding units represented at each feast.				
		1	2	3	4	5
Hajji Salim-lu	5	5*	5	4	3	4
Ahmad- Ali-lu	2	1	2	2	-	-
Qorban- lu	6	4	4	6	1	-
Ordu-khan- lu	1	-	-	1	-	-
Goyun- lu	7	4	1	-	1	1
Ali-khan- lu	4	1	1	-	3	1
Qaralar	?4	2	-	-	-	-
Turap- lu	?7	-	1	-	-	-
Qara-qush- lu	?4	-	1	-	-	-
villages	-	-	-	1	1	-
Totals	40	17	15	14	9	6

\* The number of herding units from the tires  
of the principals of each feast are circled.

Figure 9: Women Feast-goers -  
Representation of herding-units  
of Residence.

'notables': 52\*, 53\*, 58\*, 71\*, 73\*, and 76\*. This high proportion of distinguished women among those whom I saw on a number of occasions during a relatively short period of time, indicates the existence of an effective network among the important women. The implications of this discovery will be considered below, cf. p.135 ff.

(d) In each of the first three feasts described there were about six women who were without any direct kin or affinal ties with the principals; that is, this group of women were linked to the principals through neither their tire of origin nor their tire of residence. Typically these women were representatives of neighbouring tire who were distinguished by their age, or their own or their husband's position. At these three feasts half of these 'outsiders' were in fact 'notables'.

At feast No. 4 on the other hand, the only women present who were without direct kin or affinal links to the principals and who did not reside in the tire of the principals, were 31\*, the midwife, and 111, a čoban's wife who accompanied 71\*, the FBD of the groom's mother. Thus at this wedding feast celebrating a marriage between two comparatively poor families, the xeir-u-šärr involved was confined almost entirely ~~for~~<sup>to</sup> kind or affines most of whom were also resident in the tire of the principals. Aside from 31\*, the midwife, the only three 'notables' who were present - 1\*, 71\*, and 97\* - were in fact kinswomen of the principals. The relationships between women at the 4th

Ali-khan-lu tire

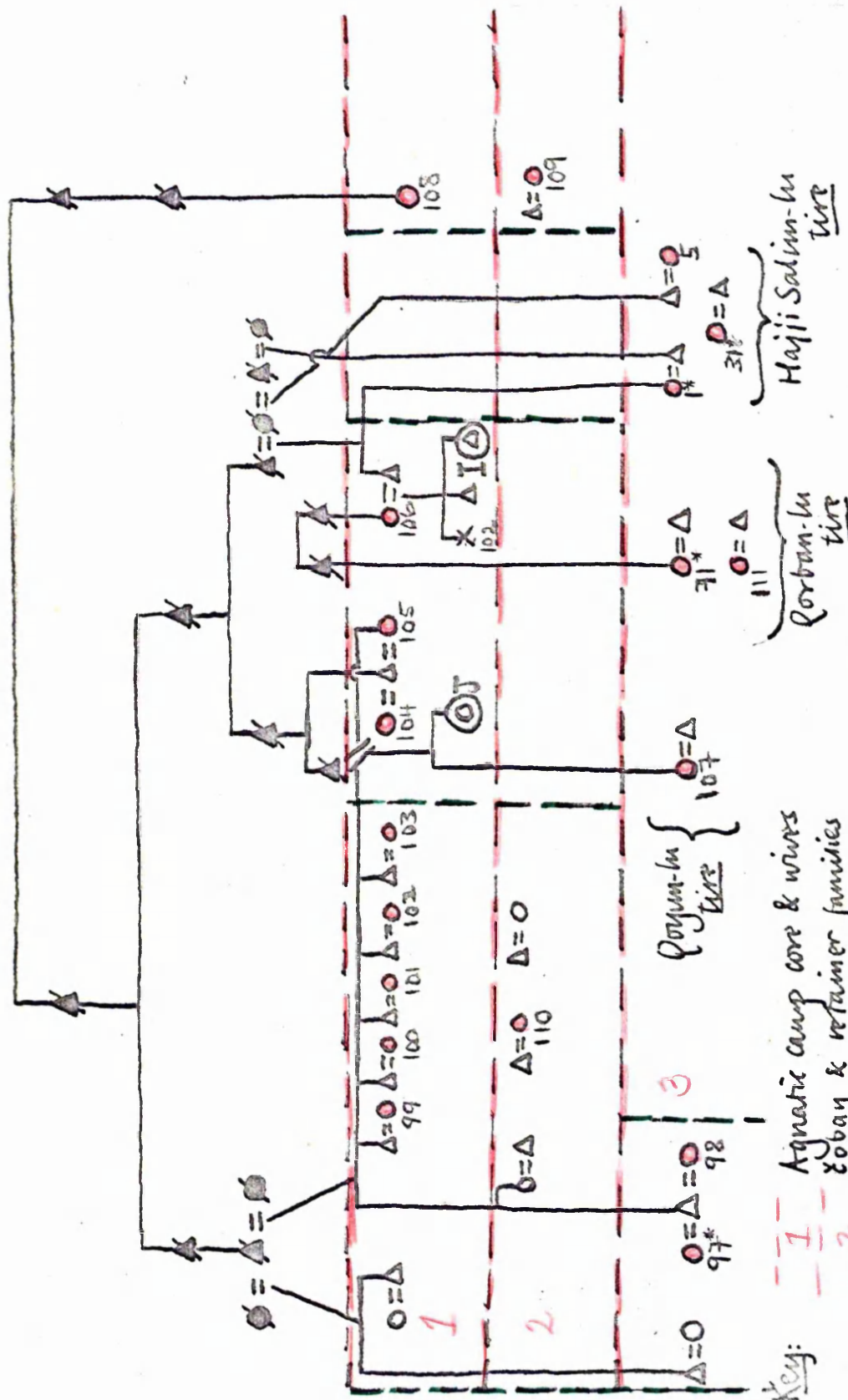


Figure : Feast 4

feast can be easily shown on the accompanying diagram.

See fig. 10, p 112.

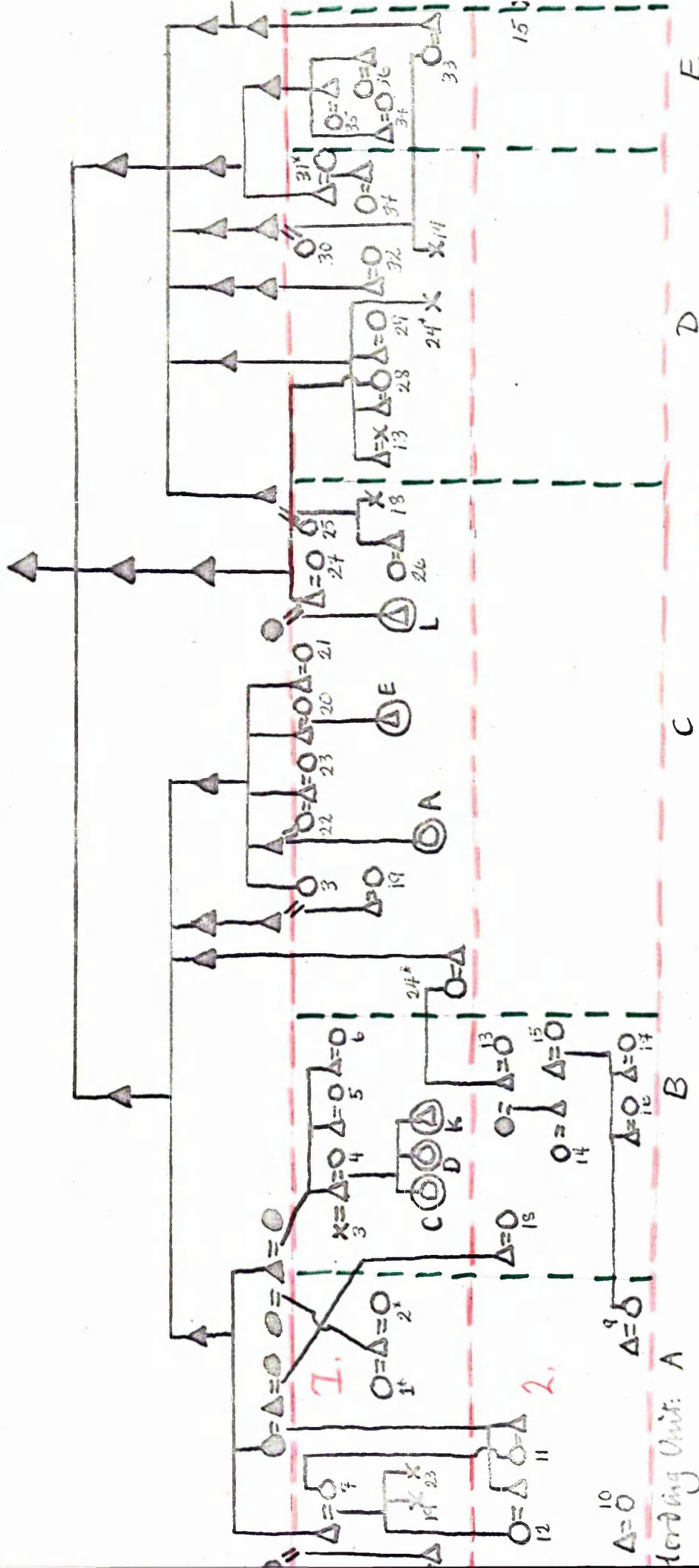
I suggest that this small group of relatives, women resident in the same tire, represents xeir-u-šärr ties in their simplest form. Women who are more important than the mothers of the principals at feast No. 4, or who are from wealthier or more influential families, have a xeir-u-šärr which, though it does include many relatives and women of their tire, is none-the-less more heterogeneous than that evidenced at this feast.

(e) Three of the feasts described above were given by members of Hajji Salim-lu tire; these were feasts No. 1, 2, and 4. Census material for this tire is complete; for this reason the actual participation of tire women in these three feasts can be compared and some explanations can be given for those women who were non-participants in some or all of the three feasts.

The genealogy presented on page 114 indicates all of the 37 women who are resident in the tire, and distinguishes between those women who are associated with men of the tire core and those who are the wives of retainers or čoban's of the core members. Herding units are also delimited. The chart on page 115 illustrates which of the tire women participated in which feasts.

The greater number of tire women present at the 2nd feast is to be expected considering that 4, the hostess and her family were wealthier and of higher standing than was





E

agnatic camp core & wires  
 Coban & retainer families  
 owners from other tires  
 holding units  
 X found elsewhere on chart

Figure 11: Genealogy of Hajji Salim-bu tire



	Feast No. 1	Feast No. 2	Feast No. 5	Total
1*	X	X	X	3
2*	-	X	X	2
3	X	X	X	3
4	X	X	X	3
5	X	X	-	2
6	-	X	-	1
7	-	-	-	0
8	-	X	-	1
9	X	X	-	2
10	X	X	-	2
11	-	X	-	1
12	-	X	-	1
13	X	X	-	2
14	-	X	-	1
15	X	X	X	3
16	-	-	-	0
17	-	X	-	1
18	-	-	X	1
19	-	X	-	1
20	X	X	X	3
21	-	-	X	1
22	X	X	-	2
23	X	X	-	2
24*	X	X	X	3
25	-	X	X	2
26	-	-	-	0
27	-	-	-	0
28	-	-	-	0
29	X	-	-	1
30	-	X	-	1
31*	X	X	X	3
32	-	-	-	0
33	-	X	-	1
34	X	-	-	1
35	X	-	-	1
36	X	-	-	1
37	-	-	-	0
	<hr/> 17	<hr/> 24	<hr/> 12	

Figure 12: Participation of Hajji Salim-in women in three feasts.

23, the hostess at the 1st feast, and her family. 4 was also the hostess at the 5th feast which explicitly included only a part of her xeir-u-šärr.

There were 7 women of the tire who came to all three feasts; they were 1\*, 3, 4, 15, 20, 24\*, and 31\*. 1\* is the senior wife of the tire aq saqal. 3 is an old woman - co-wife of 4 the hostess at feasts No. 2 and 5. 4 is of course the hostess at feasts No. 2 and 5. 15 was the oldest woman of the tire; though she is married to a retainer of herding unit B, she is in fact a member of the senior generation of the agnatic core of the tire. 20, the mother of one of the principals at feast No. 2, is the wife of the leader of herding unit C. 24\* is Mashhad Durna, the aq birček. 31\* is Simi, the midwife. There are in fact four other women one might have expected to be included in all three feast gatherings; they are 5, 25, 28, and 33. 5, 28, and 33 are all wives of leaders of herding units of the tire, while 25 is a lively and popular old woman of the group. In the description given above of feast No. 5, it was noted that 5's absence was due to a quarrel with the hostess; the reasons for the absence of 25 at feast No. 1, and 28's absence at all three feasts will be detailed below. I cannot explain 33's absence from feasts No. 1 and 5 except to say that though the wife of a herding unit leader she is not much of a personality in the tire.

Seven of the tire women attended none of the three feasts. They were 7, 16, 26, 27, 28, 32, and 38. 7 who is

با اذن و مساعدت  
 کار محترم و عزیز خانم خانم  
 شریف خانم و خانم خانم  
 خانم خانم و خانم خانم

Figure 13: An invitation to a feast

Translation:

"With the assistance of the Lord,  
 The good work of the dear light of  
 my eyes Karim Agha, begins on  
 Wednesday & ends on Sunday, and  
 make me honoured with your  
 presence and consumption of sweets."

the wife of an elderly man of the agnatic core, might have been expected to attend at least some of these feasts. She is not a popular person; but more than this, the only explanation for her absence was given by her sister, 11, who said that she simply did not like to attend feasts. 16 was a young woman whose husband was serving a two-year prison sentence for sheep-theft. She was virtually in mourning during this whole period and attended no feasts. 26, 27, and 28 were all associated with the quarrel over the engagement of Khanom Gul (A) described above, page 93 . They had hoped that the young man (L) from their own family would win her hand, but the decision had gone against him. They boycotted the three feasts because of their dissatisfaction over this decision. 25 who was also directly involved in the dispute might similarly have avoided the three feasts, but, in fact, she attended both feasts other than No. 1 which was the engagement feast for Khanom Gul herself. I think her behaviour can be explained: a.) with regard to the quarrel itself, as was pointed out in the description of the 5th feast above (p. 104 ), 25 was the senior woman among the dissidents, acting as their representative in the discussion which took place concerning the engagement. It may be noted that 25 in fact arrived late at this 5th feast; it would appear that she decided to attend only after she discovered the composition of the group already present, and easily guessed that the engagement was likely to be the major topic of conversation. b.) Of the

four women disputing the engagement, 25 would have been the most likely to have attended the feasts had there been no quarrel, for she was a popular old woman. c.) As a friend of 24\*, Mashhad Durna the aq birček, who did much at the engagement itself to resolve the conflict, 25 would have had a clear idea of how feeling was running in the tire as a whole, and being close to the aq birček she was likely readily to accept her advice and forget the quarrel since there was nothing to be gained by continuing it after the decision was made irreversibly.

Through lack of information, the absence of 32 and 37 from all three feasts cannot be explained adequately, though it may be relevant that they were the junior wives in a herding unit.

#### B. The Women's sub-society.

This topic will be discussed under five headings.

1.) Seating arrangements at the feasts. <sup>23</sup> From the material presented above, it is evident that the points made previously about the importance of a husband's position, the age of a woman, etc. are taken into consideration even on purely social occasions. This is most evident in the

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23. The women's seating arrangements at a betrothal and wedding feast held in a Turkish village are described by Dobkin. She notes that a "...very definite mechanism for ascertaining relative rank and social standing exists within the institution of purdah." (1967:65) But as she describes it, the ranking system is quite simple in that the relevant factors are age and relative standing within the lineage. (1967:70)

seating arrangements and etiquette in the guest-tent.

Old women with no exceptional personal characteristics maximize their ascribed status (principally based on age) by taking a seat at the back of the tent and not moving from this place of honour throughout the feast. Similarly, women whose leadership position is largely due to ascribed status also tend to remain seated in the back of the tent. By contrast, women leaders who have achieved their position, though they would readily be accorded a seat in the back, typically prefer to move around the tent chatting to a number of women. In the guest tent, there is a fairly rigid seating arrangement based on a summation of ascribed statuses for all women except those who are leaders because of personal achievement.

I feel that a closer examination of these seating arrangements can throw considerable light on the nature of the women's sub-society itself. I will bring out these points in a comparison of the Shahsavan arrangements with those of the Marsh Arabs which are described in great detail by Salim (1962), though guest tents or rooms are an important institution throughout the Middle East and the comments of other authors are also relevant.

The formality of the seating arrangements in both the women's and the men's guest-tents of the Shahsavan is comparable to, but not so rigid as that among the Marsh Arabs of Iraq. In the reed houses of the clan chiefs and lineage headmen:

Everyone who attends the guest house should sit in the place which corresponds to his social rank. ... Social status is shown by the distance at which a tribesman sits from [the] place of honour ... Everyone knows the

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exact standing of everyone else and treats him accordingly. ... Quite often, when ... a man insists on sitting in a lower place than <sup>his</sup> social status requires, those who fail to persuade him to sit in a higher place, may correct their false position by changing their own places and sitting lower in relation to him. (Salim 1962: 77-80)

Salim emphasizes that the guest house is a key institution in the society.

A number of factors may account for the different degrees of formality maintained in the two societies:

a.) The men of ech-Chibayish meet daily in the guest house and the group is as much concerned with economic and political arrangements as with 'being social'. The guest house rules strictly forbid joking and unnecessary noise, and those present are enjoined not to speak until spoken to by the host or an individual more senior than they.

(Salim 1962:77) On the other hand, Shahsavan women gather in such numbers as guests only on purposive occasions; they join their hostess in her joy or sadness. Pleasantries and gossip are in fact much anticipated.

b.) In ech-Chibayish, the guest house owner and host who holds a superior rank to all his guests is always present. Formal greetings are made to him and he takes the lead in any conversation. It is unlikely that a Shahsavan hostess will be of senior standing to all her guests - the importance of age-status renders such a situation improbable. Further, as the hostess with the ceremonial cook is responsible for the organization of the meal, she will spend much

of the day in the cooking tent rather than in the guest tent itself. With the hostess away from the latter much of the time, there is little need for an involved system of salutation; by the same token, there is no one around whom seating arrangements and conversation can revolve.

c.) ech-Chibayish guest house attendance is predictable and as the same men return day after day there is ample opportunity to define and redefine relations among themselves. Stirling notes that guest room groups in the Turkish villages he studied are also fairly constant and "...thus the order is one among regular associates." (1965:235) Further, he considers that "...the final order [of seating arrangements] is roughly a result not of claims but of imposed public opinion." (1965:235) By contrast, among the Shahsavan the xeir-u-šärr of any individual is always changing and it would be highly unlikely that a woman would ever attend two feasts at which exactly the same group of women was present. Continual change makes it virtually impossible for a woman to rank herself accurately in relation to every other woman in every xeir-u-šärr gathering - there are too many variables which are not readily apparent. For this reason, the women do not concentrate on placing each individual in the guest-tent, rather they only broadly define a series of statuses and formalize them in terms of places in the tent.

Women of course estimate their position vis-à-vis



women of their herding unit and tire and in a general way; their estimates can be broadcast by the colours<sup>24</sup> they choose to wear and particularly by the slight but easily discernable difference in headdress styles. Further, on entering a guest-tent, most women will be greeted by at least a few friends or relations. The status of these women then provides a base-line; the newly arrived guest would not take a seat less-favoured than that of the women who greeted her, though she might well look for a better place in the circle. That is, a woman can make claims to a seat towards the back of the tent and though she may well not be accorded such a place, in general the force of 'imposed public opinion' (cf. p. 121) is less effective than in a guest room situation where all participants are well-known to each other. The ranking system used in the guest-tents is more sharply defined than that mentioned above (p. 35 ) in the discussion of the women's life-cycle (i.e. the categories are not so broad as new bride, established married and post-menopause women) yet the personal element is too important to allow for a more accurate description. For instance, on

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24. In general younger women wear light colours, and with increasing age choose darker, more sombre colours. But more than this it would seem that women in leadership positions or those who see themselves as potential leaders choose very much more intense colours than the ones chosen by other women of comparable age. Unfortunately, I do not have more complete information about the use of colours, and colour concepts; it is possible the movement from light to dark with increasing age, and from less to more intense colours with increasing importance ties up with a larger system of colour symbolism.

occasion individual ambitions, likes and dislikes can account for seating arrangements which are anomalous in terms of ascribed (or achieved) status.

d.) This personal factor is lacking in the guest houses of the Marsh Arabs. In ech-Chibayish, social stratification is a much more prominent feature than among the Shahsavan and clans (and hence their members) are hierarchically ranked. Though this ranking system is modified by considerations of age-status and the concept of a 'good fellow' (Salim 1962:79), the position of guest house and leadership positions in general are ascribed on the basis of genealogical superiority.

Thus, there is a contrast with the Shahsavan women's society in which achievement is a recognized means to the most powerful position, that of aq birček. This fact to some degree explains why the women leaders who depend on their achieved status do not limit themselves by sitting in the back of a tent throughout a feast, for these women are aware that the mobility they have at a gathering is useful to them.

e.) Rigid seating arrangements are thus linked with ascribed status while personal factors and achieved status tend to disrupt any such formal ranking system; this is further demonstrated by the fact that when the 'notables' follow the ceremonial cook into the cooking tent (see p. 93 ) they make no effort to order their places in the tent. There are two practical points which are relevant here:

1.) the cooking tent is usually one of the smaller of the two types of tents used by the Shahsavan and to crowd in at all, the women must virtually sit in one another's lap, and 2.) the ceremonial cook, who would in all cases be one of the most important women present, necessarily has a place near the fire at the front of the tent. Nonetheless, the equality which pervades relations in the cooking tent is striking; indeed, each woman represents a combination of achieved and ascribed status which renders her a leader in her own right. An aq birçek will lead the discussions of controversial subjects but in this select group she is no more than prima inter pares.

Barth suggests, with regard to seating arrangements, that

In the fluid type of hierarchy found in the Kurdish villages, where status positions are not crystalized in a formal structure, but are constantly being re-evaluated in terms, in the final instance, of the common denominator of power, it is essential that some mechanism is found whereby relative status and power can be compared and made public by non-violent means. (1953:114)

This is borne out in the case of Shahsavan women. By way of a summary, I would add that there would seem to be a correlation between the greater use of ascribed status (which is part of a formal structure) and more rigid seating arrangements; where a comparison between relative status and power is not relevant, the seating arrangement mechanism can be dispensed with, as in the cooking tent situation.

## 2.) Wealth and the sub-society.

A woman without brothers may rarely inherit private property (see above, p. 40 ), but such a woman will not use this on her own account, rather she will save any income for her sons, and she will adopt a style of life consistent with her husband's. A woman's private resources are not an important element in daily life, and rarely, if ever, do women seem to use their property to further their own status in the women's sub-society. As was mentioned (p. 40 ), all women do have pin money which they acquire through barter of wool scraps, etc., or from indulgent husbands, but this money is not normally used for xeir-u-šärr contributions which are included in the maintenance provided by the husband. That is, if a woman and her husband both attend the same feast - the usual situation - the small sum that the wife gives is regarded as part of the family contribution. On the other hand, if a woman attends a feast on her own, it would appear that she does then use her pin money for the xeir-u-šärr gift. Though unfortunately nothing definite is known about this point, in occasional cases when šoban and retainer's wives accompany their husband's employer's wives, the small contributions that these women give possibly are supplied by their 'mistresses'. In general, the amount that women give at feasts is very small, i.e. 2 to 5 toman.

The only women who deal with money are the mama and

the ceremonial cook who are paid for their services. Unfortunately, it is not known for certain what these women do with their money; it is probably used largely on xeir-u-šärr contributions, though it may simply be put to family uses, or perhaps any savings may be put in the woman's dürdürünlük-xorjunu (see p. 41). Neither of these specialists seem to spend their money on luxury items, i.e. on clothes or scarves which might set them apart at feasts or elsewhere.

3.) The sub-society and the corresponding statuses of husband and wife.

Despite the importance of achieved status in the women's sub-society as a whole, if there is a discrepancy between the status of the wife and that of her husband in terms of achievement this fact seems to have little effect on the husband's position in the male sphere. Just as a man's opinions have little if any effect on the internal relationships of the women's sub-society, personality differences and a woman's personal accomplishments are not associated with her husband. There are three basic reasons for this situation: a.) the social segregation of the sexes prevents men and women from knowing well more than a few members of the opposite sex - hence, few men would be able to interpret another man's actions in terms of his wife's character, b.) the xeir-u-šärr connections of a man and his wife need not be identical; thus, an important woman's 'public personality' at a feast is not necessarily associated

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with her husband, who may not be included in the host's xeir-u-šärr relations and who may even be unknown to many of the guests - both male and female. and c.) men, unlike women, tend not to evaluate women in terms of personal achievements. Examples of two extreme cases will serve to illustrate these three points:

Mashhad Durnä (see above, p. 79 ) by performing tasks as ceremonial cook, etc. has achieved the most respected rank in the women's sub-society, yet her husband remains a nonentity in the male sphere. His position is due not only to his reticent, self-effacing bearing, but to structural considerations as well. He has no brothers, only three sisters, all of whom made extra-tire marriages. His wife, however, comes from the other genealogical sub-division of the tire. They camp with his own sub-division, but as he lacks brothers, genealogical seniority, and the requisite personality, he will never be prominent in the camp, even if he could find a way of using his wife's standing to his own advantage in the male sphere.

Similarly, if a woman's standing is very low in the sub-society, it does not necessarily affect that of her husband.

Fitat is the wife of a man of average standing: he is the second of three brothers, the eldest being a leader of Aga-Man-lu tire. They have six sons - one of whom is married - and one daughter. Fitat is variously described as bad, a mad woman, or a dervish and she is very much disliked by most of the women with whom she comes in contact. At feasts she either sings and dances or vents her fearful temper on women who try to persuade her to be quiet. Many of her jokes which rest on a crude, quick wit are thought to be very funny, but the women hide their laughter to show their disapproval of her general behaviour. She seems to care nothing for her reputation and delights in making easy remarks to men to infuriate the women who are listening. In spite of her reputation as a mad woman, her husband is respected as the brother of an important man

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and the father of many sons. Only within the immediate family did her position in the women's sub-society have any effect; it severely limited the amount of information she could pass on to her husband (see below, p.130) and with him she certainly lived up to her reputation as a shrew.

4.) The information service of the sub-society.

The size and heterogeneity of the group of women gathered together for a feast is very significant. These women can be seen as points in an 'unbounded' network. The opinions they each form as members of an action set at any one feast can be spread through other comparable contacts to innumerable women. There is every reason to suppose that all Shahsavan women are connected by xeir-u-šärr ties, though the extent to which this network goes beyond the nomadic population and links the tribesmen to village families of the area has not been ascertained.

Much of the information which is passed on at xeir-u-šärr occasions concerns marriage - the main topic on which women's opinions are sought after and respected by men. The women, who have a chance to assess the suitability and beauty of the young girls who attend the gatherings with their elders, are inevitably involved in matchmaking; the information which a woman collects is made available to her family. The women, through their xeir-u-šärr, have contacts with a large number of geographically dispersed, unrelated families and the intelligence system they develop becomes a tremendous aid to a potential suitor. Among the

Sarakatsani, a similar situation exists:

Kinsmen are indispensable in the delicate negotiations of 'match-making'. Before a girl is sought in marriage, very careful inquiries have to be made concerning her virtue, industry, health and temperament. A kinsman who lives near the girl's family will be in a position to give accurate details; his information will be trusted, and he will treat the affair with the discretion it demands. (Campbell 1963:39)

The matchmaking role of the Sarakatsani males is assumed among the Shahsavan by the women who, unlike their Greek counterparts, have ample opportunity at the large-scale feasts to develop an efficient information service.

Furthermore, at feasts women discover the men who have gone on sheep-selling expeditions, or who intend to make pilgrimages, and get details on the presents a man has brought home to his family after such a trip. Naturally, much of this kind of information, unlike that about marriages, is repeated in the men's guest-tents as well, but it affords the women a chance to learn directly about the changing economic position of others and the reasons for such changes. Armed with such information, a woman can keep her husband up to the mark and secure her own and her children's position. Similarly, the information a man has collected and that gathered by his women-folk make cross-checking possible and reduce the possibility of erring in an economic decision.

If there are no strange male guests in the tent when her husband is discussing economic problems, a woman will



frequently interject her opinions. Sometimes these will represent a purely feminine point of view - for instance, she may protest a move and argue that they should remain in the same camp until she has finished weaving some item as it is otherwise too difficult to move the loom; but, her arguments may take a straight masculine line - that to move the camp would be disadvantageous because such and such a camp has already moved, the pastures are good for another week's grazing, or the weather is likely to hold, etc. Though the men may not credit the woman for her ideas, they may well act with them in mind.

Likewise, a woman may express her opinion about selling sheep, the money to spend on bridewealth, or the luxury investments that the family should make. All such topics directly affect a woman's status and prestige in the women's sub-society and it is in her interest to see that family affairs are sensibly managed; she can do this largely because of the amount of information about similar situations which she has gathered at xeir-u-Sarr feasts. The more well-adjusted and happily married a couple are (frequently a man and wife are very fond of each other and there is great respect between them), the more they are likely to pool the information they have acquired independently for their mutual benefit.

In view of the information service it should be noted that the recognized leaders, Mašhādis and aq birčeks, like the wives of Hajjis, stand in a conservative and highly

orthodox position vis-à-vis the society as a whole, and it is these women whose beliefs and opinions are accepted and spread. It is possible to see how the women's sub-society among the Shahsavan acts as a pool of traditional ideals and concepts of correct behaviour. The problem this fact poses for social change among the tribespeople is significant and probably typical of many societies.

5.) The sub-society as a 'sub-culture'.

There are other ways in which the women's sub-society and values have influence on the male sphere. For example, most magic and medicine are regarded by men and women as a female concern. Recently, the women have learned - presumably from the Tabriz and Baku radio broadcasts - that cigarettes are a cause of cancer, a disease with which they are familiar. Though most women smoke when they have the money for cigarettes, one of the most frequently heard cautions is against excessive smoking. This preoccupation of the women has had its toll in hen-pecked husbands. In one case, a woman was in charge of buying and storing her husband's cigarettes. Formerly he chain-smoked but his wife began to introduce a careful rationing system which was carried even farther when she began to sneak the opium out of his pockets. But it would seem that only in rare cases like this does the women's sub-society act as a 'sub-culture' concerned with innovation and the development of new ideas.

## VI. CONCLUSION.

In the Introduction I briefly noted that an area of social activity involving all the women of a community was under study. From the Shahsavan material which has been presented, it is clear that the women do establish and maintain among themselves a range of relationships based on achieved and ascribed statuses, rules of social behaviour, and leaders, in what I term the women's sub-society. In this final section of the first part of the thesis, I will discuss A.) the choice of the term 'sub-society' and B.) the requirements essential to the development of this sub-society.

### A.) The term 'sub-society'.

The activities of the women of the Shahsavan can be analysed at three levels; in this way the points relevant to the choice of the term 'sub-society' will become clear. But first it is necessary to mention again that it is the characteristic of 'male-domination' which prompts the use of 'sub' as a descriptive term. In that the women do not overtly take part in the political and economic concerns of the larger society, their activities are of secondary importance in understanding the latter. The women's dependence on men to provide them <sup>with</sup> economic maintenance and political protection cannot be over-emphasized; for this reason, the women have in no way created among themselves relationships which parallel men's relationships with each

other. The women's sub-society is not a mirror image of the men's world, nor could it be, so long as the social segregation of the sexes prevents women from having contacts with strangers or managing their own property.

1.) A woman's freedom to participate in the activities described above is coincident with her full membership in the larger society, full membership being simply the result of her marriage. Thus a classificatory category is established based, first, on sex criteria, and secondly, on marriage. This category is similar to what Ginsberg calls a 'quasi-group':

...aggregates or portions of the community which have no recognizable structure, but whose members have certain interests or modes of behaviour in common, which may at any time lead them to form themselves into definite groups. (Ginsberg 1934:40)

2.) As all married women are eligible to participate in the women's activities, among the Shahsavan actual involvement results from the institution of xeir-u-šärr which has two main principles: a.) that every married woman is the focus of a xeir-u-šärr circle peculiar to herself, and b.) that she is also a member of the circles of all those women who are members of hers. In other words, there is a series of overlapping xeir-u-šärr circles, each centered on a woman, which extend throughout the entire community. The ideology of xeir-u-šärr is the basis of a network. Barnes describes a network:

The image I have is of a set of points some of which are joined by lines. The points of the image are people, or sometimes groups, and the lines indicate which people interact with each other. ...A network of this kind has no external boundary, nor has it any clear-cut internal divisions, for each person sees himself at the centre of a collection of friends. (1954:43-44)

#### The network

...is not a corporate body, but rather a system of social relations through which many individuals carry on certain activities which are only indirectly coordinated with one another. (1954:48-49)

Further, the network of relationships is defined by underlying criteria. (cf. Mayer 1966:98) In the Shabsavan case these are the criteria of female sex and marriage. Every woman is linked with other women, each of whom have xeir-u-šärr ties with yet others. This network is bounded only by the fact that it is exclusive to women.

Further, action-sets are implicit in the network. The xeir-u-šärr of a woman invited to a circumcision or funeral feast can be seen as an action-set in a face-to-face situation. An action-set is a bounded entity (i.e. with limited membership) based on a combination of purposive relationships linking people directly to an ego who has called the set into being. The action-set is not permanent and if, in the future, ego again constructs an action-set, the same people may or may not be involved. (Mayer 1966:108-110)

The situation at betrothal and wedding feasts is slightly different in that two women (e.g. the mother of the

bride and the mother of the groom) have each invited their own xeir-u-šärr to the same gathering. This can be regarded as the juxtaposition of two action-sets each one separately recruited by an ego. But since the women thus recruited are in no way segregated from each other and they participate equally in the gathering, at that point in time they constitute an action-set which is not ego-oriented but feast-oriented.

In so far as the xeir-u-šärr invited by a woman to any one gathering are by and large the same individuals she will invite on subsequent occasions, through time the xeir-u-šärr of one woman will resemble a 'quasi-group' as described by Mayer (1966). That is, a quasi-group is formed from a succession of action-sets centered on similar activities and recruited by an ego.

By 'superimposing' a series of action-sets, ...one may discern a number of people who are more often than not members of the action-sets, and others who are involved from time to time. Taken together, these people form a catchment for ego's action-sets based on this type of context. (Mayer 1966:115)

The actual mechanics of leadership can be in part explained by using Epstein's distinction of effective and extended networks. An effective network is described as those people with whom ego interacts most intensely and regularly and who are therefore also likely to come to know one another. In other words, it is that part of the total network which shows a degree of connectedness. (Epstein 1961:57) The extended network is simply all of ego's dyadic ties

which are not considered part of the close-linked effective network. (57)

For most Shahsavan women the tire of residence is the basis of those ties which represent their effective network. These women are neighbours and typically there are affinal if not kin ties between them. But this is not the case for the wives of rich or important men, nor for women leaders or specialists whose effective network not only involves women of their tire of residence, but also includes ties with women of high standing in many tires other than their own. Moreover, the extended network of the important women is also much more extensive than that of the average women.

Epstein considers that it is the gossip of especially the effective network which serves both to reaffirm established norms and to clarify and formulate new ones. (59) And he suggests that;

...new norms and standards of behaviour will tend to arise more frequently within the effective network of those who rank high on the prestige continuum, ... through the extended network they gradually filter down and percolate throughout the society. From this point of view the network would also appear to have importance as an instrument in examining the processes of social and cultural change. (59)

In the Shahsavan case it should be emphasized that gossip seems to reaffirm existing norms more often than it is an effective agent in the formulation of new ones; but in any case the mechanics of leadership are clear. The effective network of a woman leader includes a number of

other leaders and important women like herself; especially in cooking tent situations, the conversation of these women clearly is an important factor in determining values and regulating women's behaviour. Decisions made at feasts and elsewhere are relayed through the wide-ranging extended networks of each of these important women throughout the sub-society as a whole.

Beyond the conclusions already presented above (cf. p. 128) I have only an impressionistic view of the structure of gossip among the Shahsavan women for I was not able to discover how specific bits of information were channelled among the women, and only rarely could I tell when and by whom deliberate elaboration or falsification of facts had taken place, or where information had been withheld. Nonetheless, several points can be made; Robert Paine has recently (1967) discussed various sociological explanations of gossip and has offered an alternative hypothesis and it is my impression that his emphasis on gossip "...as a mode of passing information and acquiring information, in order to serve self interest, ..." as Gluckman (1968:32) put it, is to a great extent relevant to the Shahsavan situation. In terms of the sub-society I shall consider some of the theories outlined in Paine's article.

a.) It has been said that gossip promotes unity within a group and demarcates its boundaries (279). Though this hypothesis may be reasonable in view of some ethnographic material, when applied to the women's sub-society it is



untenable. This is so because the ego-centered xeir-u-šärr contacts serve not to recruit women for specific groups which endure through time but to link all the women of the Shahsavan at all times. Even so, in principle the women's gossip could create an atmosphere of unity among the nomadic women against outsiders in the tribal area, or it could serve to unite the women against the men. But in practice, neither of these alternatives seems to occur. In the first place, very few tribal women have any contact with non-Shahsavan women of the area, (only the men of the tribe have dealings with village men) and secondly, the sexual and social roles are compartmentalized in such a way that there is no competition between the sexes.

b.) Gossip is used to promote individual self-interest, to 'manage' the competition between gossipers, and to create leaders. (278-280) That self-interest is involved in the gossip of the sub-society is evident from the material presented above. But I submit that when women compare notes on the economic position of others, marriage arrangements, and so forth, it is the interests of their families which are of primary concern. A woman's ascriptive status is in the hands of men and only indirectly does she have any influence on them. Thus, a woman's personal concerns are identified with her family, since only through the activities of her menfolk will her goals be reached. Except for editing and passing on news on which her menfolk can act, she can

do little to help this progress.

The question of a woman's interest in 'managing' her personal competitions within the sub-society and possibly establishing herself as a leader has been dealt with above (cf. p. 87 ). That is, leadership positions in the sub-society by their very nature are not competitive. Aside from the Shahsavan propensity for giving petty orders, competition is not an important feature of the sub-society. Conversations at feasts seem to illustrate this point. Most importantly, constant criticism and backbiting are not at all prominent and women do not indulge in gossip to discredit others. For example, the tenor of Mashhad Durna's comments on the two women who refused to attend the engagement feast indicates that this is so. Neither she nor the other women present reviled the absentees and their non-attendance was quickly forgotten and seems to have had no permanent affect on their later activities in the sub-society.

This lack of emphasis on personalities can be explained as follows: It is within a herding unit that rivalry between women is paramount, while men of the herding unit - usually a group of brothers or other close agnates - are constrained not to quarrel among themselves. Where men cannot overtly compete, it is their wives who in their relations with other women of the camp react to the underlying issues, e.g. questions of inheritance or leadership.

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Elsewhere competition between men is acceptable; they alone take the field, since leadership in all such situations is regarded as a male prerogative. The herding unit can be seen as an 'in-group' and if women of a camp act out their rivalries in front of strangers at feasts, they betray the supposed solidarity of this group. On the other hand, women have notably fewer reasons for quarrelling with women outside the herding group, and in those quarrels that do exist between families of different herding groups, the men take the lead.

c.) A connection is seen between gossip and social control, and gossip is said to reaffirm shared values.

(278-279) The women's conversations at feasts (especially

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25. (From page 139)

As Srinivas notes,

It is common for the people of Rampura to say that the women who come into a joint family on marriage are responsible for its splitting. There is a great deal of truth in this statement. The brothers have many interests and experiences in common, and fraternal solidarity is always stressed in speech, and held up as an ideal. But the women who came into the family are strangers to each other, and they find the loyalties of a man to his brothers, sisters, and parents very irksome, to say the least. Usually, the woman who comes into the joint family by marriage is interested in making her husband break away from his brothers. (1952:30) ... In fact the conventional explanation that the women who come into the family ultimately break it may be regarded as a convenient myth the function of which is to protect another myth which is that of the solidarity of the brothers. (1952:30)

those in the cooking tent) do play a part in social control as has been discussed below, (cf. p. 93 )

To summarize, in the sub-society, gossip seems to have three primary functions: to facilitate the exchange of news, to act as a means of social control, and to reinforce the traditional values.

3.) The picture so far described, of a network of xeir-u-šärr ties, parts of which are activated and manifest on the ground as ego-centered or feast-centered gatherings of women, is not complete; the structured nature of the whole remains to be considered. Though there is no overall leadership or coordination, nonetheless a common system of ranking women, of positions, and roles is probably found among all the women of the Shahsavan. Both features of the larger society and elements inherent in the women's activities per se cause this to be so.

Men of the Shahsavan are differentiated and ranked in a number of ways: by birth order, which to a great extent determines leadership positions; by age - seniority deserves respect; and by wealth, which sets men off in terms of the luxuries they can buy, the men they can employ, and in terms of religious prestige - for only rich men can make the pilgrimage to Mecca. A woman is greatly affected by the ranking system of men, for her ascribed status is directly linked with the position of her father and then her husband in the community. Because only the ranking of married women is relevant to this discussion, the identification

of a wife with her husband's position is of primary importance; as was shown above, this is a result of the stability of marriage and the absence of divorce or separation. Being thus identified with her husband, a woman is involved, albeit indirectly, in his concerns in all areas of social life. This method of ranking women, determined in the larger society, has been shown to be carried over and used especially at feast gatherings to rank women among themselves.

On the other hand, the very nature of women's activities creates the need for them to rank themselves along different lines as well. In this second case, a system based only on the ascriptive status of a husband's position is inadequate, for needless to say, high ascriptive status is not necessarily related to qualifications for leadership. That is, feast gatherings not only provide the basis for an information service, but they are important in social control. Other than the fission of whole groups, there is no mechanism in the larger society for resolving quarrels between women even though the roots of such disputes are to be found there. This point has been demonstrated in the case of camp co-operation among women; the fight described (p. 67) was one between the wives of close agnates, whose husbands were in conflict over the division of their patrimony, among other things. Opportunities exist at feast gatherings to settle just such problems; from among the women who engineer settlements and so forth,

leaders emerge and they and the other women are ranked in terms of achievement.

Thus the ranking system used among women, and the positions and roles which evolve from it, are governed both by the men's ranking system and by the need to control relations among women. These structural features are assumed to be characteristic of the entire tribal community.

The structured authority positions which make up the sub-society find their most spectacular functions in the feast gatherings, and at the same time at these gatherings they receive constant renewal of strength and legitimacy. However, the main basis of women's authority, and the most fundamental, if less spectacular, occasions for its exercise occur outside the context of feast organization, in the daily face-to-face relations of camp life. Likewise, the ranking system is also dependent on relationships at the camp level. I would suggest that in fact if the day-to-day contacts of women were much more restricted, then feast gatherings would be unlikely to be structured, or purposive. Further, if positions of authority and the ranking system among women applied only at feasts, or if conversely, they were relevant only outside the context of xeir-u-särr contacts, this would not constitute a women's sub-society; it is the combination of these two contexts which is significant. Thus, the women's sub-society in the Shahsavan is built on both the opportunity for a

number of women to be in fairly constant contact day by day, and the networks of dyadic relations through which recurring feast gatherings are organized, and both of these elements are essential. For the sub-society to work, it needs both a well-defined internal structure, provided at camp level, and a continuous external structure, provided through the feast organization and xeir-u-šärr networks.

To summarize, a category of women with implicit common interests is distinguished. These common interests are manifest in the xeir-u-šärr ties which link all the women together, and it is these ties which serve to form not corporate groups or associations limited in membership and enduring through time, but action-sets and quasi-groups which are of a more transient nature. Nonetheless, relations among all women in any social situation are structured and this structure is open to analysis.

B.) The requirements essential to the development of a sub-society.

I would suggest a women's sub-society can exist only where three requirements are fulfilled. These are

a.) some degree of separation of the women's activities from men's - among the Shahsavan it would seem that this is due to the sexual cum ceremonial segregation which characterises all social activities; b.) opportunity for interaction - for the Shahsavan women social interaction is made possible not only because <sup>of the</sup> fairly large residential group of the tire, but also because they are free to

travel, sometimes alone, considerable distances to attend feasts, gatherings; and c.) a medium of interaction - this last requirement seems to be fulfilled in the Shabsavan case by dyadic xeir-u-šärr ties with their implicit reciprocity and obligations of mutual attendance at feasts. Naturally each of these requirements can be met in ways totally dissimilar to the Shabsavan solution but that they must be met is essential.

In Chapters 3 and 4 of the thesis I shall consider the relationships between women in two other societies: the Pastoral Fulani and the Tuareg of the Sahara. In particular I will determine whether the basic requirements which underlie a women's sub-society are fulfilled; if it appears that they are met, I shall examine the content of the relationships themselves.



### CHAPTER 3: THE PASTORAL FULANI.

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#### I. INTRODUCTION.

The Pastoral Fulani are scattered throughout the savannah country of West Africa. Groups of them are found from Senegambia to the western shores of Lake Chad, and north from the Cameroon highlands to Timbuktu. The total number of people who describe themselves as Fulani or who speak a Fulani language would be in the neighbourhood of six million. (Stenning 1959:1)

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26. Three groups of the pastoral Fulani have been intensively studied; the Wodaabe of West Bornu by D.J. Stenning, a group of the same name in the Niger Province of French West Africa and the French Cameroons by M. Dupire, and the Fulbe na'i, a semi-sedentary group in the Gwandu Emirate, Nigeria by C.E. Hopen. Most of the material on the Fulani was taken from the works of the above three authors, who did their field work between the years 1951 and 1955.

The fact that some of the material used in the section on the Fulani concerns a semi-sedentary group does not seem to be a significant problem, for as Dupire says, the Fulani families

...ont passé successive ment du nomadisme au semi-nomadisme et à la sédentarisation pour revenir au nomadisme, selon les circonstances économiques et politiques. Ce continuel va et vient de la plupart des familles peules entre les deux pôles de l'économie pastorale, joint aux contacts permanents entre Peuls de village et Peuls de brousse, explique suffisamment l'unité de leur fond cultural. (1955:375)

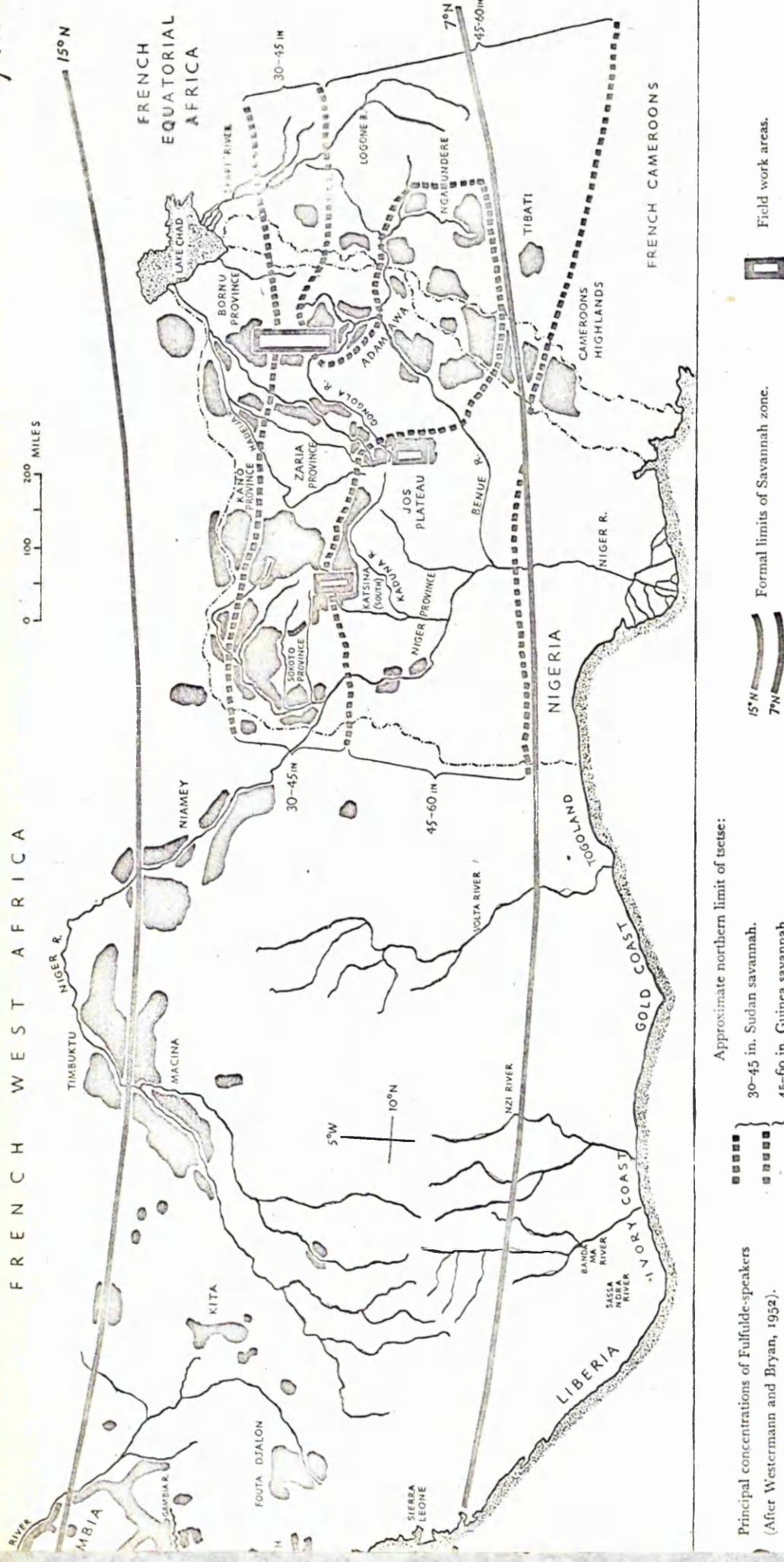


FIGURE 1. Distribution of Fulani in relation to the Savannah Zone of West Africa.

(STENNING 1957: 58 ff.)

Dominant in this area of West Africa are the Hausa peoples; this is in fact a grouping made on linguistic criteria:

...the Hausa are really an association of two ethnic groups, the Habe and the Fulani. The Habe have non-Muhammadan cousins who are known as the Maguzawa, or pagan Hausa, scattered through their territory. Those Fulani who now belong to Hausa society have nomad kinsmen called Bororo, whose way of life precludes their incorporation into any one state. (M.G. Smith 1959:240)

It is these Bororo with whom I am concerned, though in fact the groups studied by Dupire and Stenning were both known as Wodaabe, and the group studied by Hopen was called the Fulbe na'i.

Dupire maintains that the Wodaabe of the Niger are the most nomadic and the least affected by Islam of the three groups. (1962:vii) Stenning notes that the "... Wodaabe [of West Bornu], like other Fulani communities, are historically and culturally part of the Islamic world of the Western Sudan. ... They have accepted only those forms of Islamic canon law which suited them, and have evaded the rest." (1959:24-5) Whereas St. Croix and Yeld both generalize that the nomadic Fulani are in all cases less conscientious in their adherence to the tenets of Islam and are lax in their religious outlook (St. Croix 1945:14, Yeld 1960:115), the pastoral Fulani themselves might disagree with this point, though it seems to be generally acknowledged by the sedentary peoples of the area.

The pastoral Fulani have a transhumant residential

pattern based on a cattle culture.

"Il n'est pas exagéré de dire que le Bororo ne vit que pour son bétail: il l'accompagne, il dépend de lui. Tous les efforts tendent à conserver, à accroître le troupeau et à lui fournir les meilleures conditions possibles de subsistance." (Dupire 1962:53)

The cattle are not raised for meat - they are sold only in case of dire need for cash - but are bred with an eye to good dairy qualities. The savannah country of the Fulani is poor and the very existence of the people and their herds can be maintained only within strict environmental limits. Cattle ownership is the common denominator which binds the Fulani together as a group in the savannah world and the cattle take on a sentimental significance beyond their utilitarian worth.

## II. OPPORTUNITY FOR INTERACTION WITHIN THE CAMPS.

### A.) Camp composition.

A strong patrilineal slant pervades the fabric of Fulani society. Local descent groups usually take the name of a common ancestor not more than three ascending generations removed. Common interests of the local descent group centre on:

... the essential tasks of economic co-operation, marriage arrangements, inheritance of cattle, remarriage of widows and care of orphans, and leadership. (Stenning 1959:38)

Local descent groups camp together, especially in the wet season, and migrate along the same route, though single households may disperse in the dry season. A sample of

31 local descent groups shows that the average number of households was about 5.4, varying from 1 to 19. (Stenning 1959:213) Hopen notes that a large camp (i.e. local descent group) may be composed of 10 or more households, though 20 is about the maximum. (Hopen 1958:158) An arɔ is the leader of the local descent group; he is commonly an elder male of a senior branch of the lineage. But it is important to note that "The fact that camp leadership is weak or, indeed, practically non-existent is congruent with the general social structure of the community..." (Hopen 1958:158) Ideally, and commonly in fact, a household is completely self-sufficient and independent.

The Fulani also recognize patrilineal clans; that is, a number of local descent groups will have a clan name in common though they cannot cite genealogical links to support their claims. Commonly local descent groups of the same clan migrate, water, and spend the wet season in neighbouring areas.

The Fulani move northward to the upland bush in the wet season of winter, and south towards the larger rivers for the dry. (Hopen 1958:22, Dupire 1962:71) Among the Fulani, the local descent group is the largest co-residential unit, and thus most contact will be within this sphere, yet even these relations must be of a slightly tenuous nature, for in the dry season single families will disperse to the bush in search of pasturage. This suggests that there is little opportunity for daily contacts among a

large stable population of women to persist throughout the year. Nonetheless, until a woman's camp contacts are examined in detail, the above statement remains only a supposition. Relations between camp women can be understood only if a woman's status and jural position, in both her camp of origin and her camp of marriage, are described.

B.) Status and jural position of a woman.

The stated reason for marriage is procreation, "...et le statut de la femme est inséparable de son rôle dans la maternité." (Dupire 1962:168) Marriage is considered the normal and desired state and all that are not seriously incapacitated physically or mentally achieve it. Endogamy is a structural feature of Fulani clans; formerly the local descent group had control over the marriage of both males and females - "...particularly the first marriages by which families and herds were set up." (Stenning 1959:<sup>41-</sup>42) There are three stages in the usual form of first marriage; the kooggal or betrothal, biiku of first residence, and bantal, the creation of the homestead of the new family. (Stenning 1959:124)

A boy between the ages of seven and ten is commonly betrothed to an infant girl. The girl actually moves into the household of her husband's father at puberty. The couple sleep together but, "In other respects - participation in ceremonial and in work - the couple have the status of unmarried youth and maiden." (Stenning 1958:94) When the girl becomes pregnant she is returned to her father's

household where she remains throughout her confinement and until her child is one to two years old. Then she returns to her husband and the family is established independently (bagtal).

At the onset of the first residence period a ceremony is held; representatives of both families are present. The boy's father provides the meat for the feast and a Muslim scribe is brought by the family of the girl. A marriage present is made by the boy's father; most of this - about eight shillings - is given to the girl and the rest is used to pay the scribe. (Stenning 1959:113) The girl's consent to the marriage is obtained if she agrees to go to her husband for the biiku period. She can annul the marriage by her refusal. (Stenning 1959:114) Hopen mentions a number of alternatives open to the betrothed girl, to enable her to avoid a marriage which she does not want. (Hopen 1958:76)

The return of a mother with a child from her paternal home to the camp of her husband marks the most significant change in a woman's life. She returns to her family of marriage an adult, a 'complete woman' or kabo debbo. (Dupire 1962:229) At this time she is provided with a pack ox by her father-in-law and from her own family she receives household items (kaakul) which become the symbols of her new status (Stenning 1959:120), - as does the shelter "...the domain of a woman acting in her role as wife and mother." (Hopen 1958:58) Further, sadaaki or stock is given to the wife. She is a co-owner of this herd with her husband. The wife has

exclusive milking rights in these animals; thus, she takes up her necessary part in the economic life of the family by processing the milk, and by attending the market which she now does for the first time as the representative of the household. Only the children of the wife who is the co-owner have rights to inherit from this herd. (Dupire 1963:81) In cases of divorce the wife forfeits any interests in the sadaaki.

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Divorce is frequent and easy. Common grounds cited for divorce by men are barrenness, incompatibility with co-wives, insubordination to the husband, and acts which bring the husband into public disrepute such as thieving in the market, habitual lying, or adultery. Women mention a husband's incontinent sales of cattle, long absences, inconsiderate choices of campsites away from markets and water, favouring a co-wife, and meanness in providing clothes for the women for feasts. (Stenning 1959:173) Though husbands certainly have a right to repudiate their wives, this is a less frequent occurrence than the women contracting

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27. The number of marriages ending in divorce expressed as the percentage of all completed marriages for wives was ...29.4% ending in de jure divorces and 58.8% ending in de jure plus de facto divorce. This was taken from a sample of 61 wives. From a sample of 78 householders, the number of completed marriages which ended in de jure divorces was 44.1%; the number ending in de jure and de facto divorces was 82.4%. (Stenning 1959:180-181)



a deetuki or cicisbean marriage without her husband's knowledge and without a formal divorce from him. (Dupire 1963:68)

The choice of a woman with whom to contract a second marriage depends on her age, and the number, age and sex of the children she has borne, and whether there are sons with interests in the first husband's herd to support her in her old age. The second marriage is regularized by the sacrifice of cattle (and sometimes a compensation to the first husband); the children of the marriage are legitimate and belong to the husband of the deetuki marriage. This form of marriage is often between 'strangers', that is, the partners are not of the same clan. Though it is always between consenting adults, Dupire points out that it is no more stable than the betrothal marriage. The reasons she cites are the absence of social controls to keep the wife from leaving if she is not pleased, and a scarcity of women, which means what there is much open competition for them. (1963:69) Stenning notes that "There appears to be a general inverse relation between the degree of acceptance of Islamic family law in a Wodaabe group and its practice of deetuki." (1959:144)

Widow inheritance from a traditional point of view displayed "...the rights of the lineage group [local descent group] in the disposal of the fertility of its women." (Stenning 1959:137) If the widow consents to such a

marriage there is no further feasting or marriage payment, but she has the right to refuse.

Co-wives are ranked in the order of their marriage to their common husband.<sup>28</sup> There is little formal authority of the senior wife over a junior one - she cannot demand economic co-operation - but there are advantages such as the place of her shelter in the camp, her greater responsibility for her husband's personal possessions, etc. (This institutionalized ranking among co-wives is contrary to the Muslim precept of identical treatment for co-wives.) But as a woman produces children she improves her position vis-à-vis the other wives; the husband reallots the herd to provide a number of milk cows proportionate to the number of children each woman has. Many cases of divorce seem to occur because the woman is not allowed enough cows to milk; co-wives take turns in marketing milk products and one suspects that this may serve to reduce tension between them in a situation where there would otherwise be a great deal of conflict and no co-operation.

There is a strong bond of affection between a mother and her children; goods will be shared, old age support given, and inheritance will pass between them. Children bring the woman rights in her husband's herd, and because of them she gradually replaces the strong ties of affection for her paternal family with an interest in the family herds and the

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28. (See bottom of page 156)

economic welfare of her household of marriage. Her future in this household depends on her children and she in turn can become a focal point for the sibling group in fissive situations of the household or local descent group.

By virtue of their existence, a woman's co-wives and their children jeopardize her position, through either their seniority in marriage or their fertility. Antipathy characterizes relations between these women. When a new wife is brought to the homestead, the senior wife always ceremonially beats her. "...this expresses the rivalry which is a constituent feature of the relations between co-wives. Wives have a general dislike for polygamy." (Stenning 1959:187)

It comes down to the point that a man, wife, and children can be a self-sufficient unit and the compound family is an extension - but not a necessary one - of this fact.

Les travaux qui reviennent à la femme mariée ne nécessitent pas, comme ceux des champs, de participation collective en dehors des fêtes et des cérémonies: il n'y a donc pas entre co-épouses de nécessité absolue de coopération. (Dupire 1962:186)

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28. (From page 155)

The incidence of polygynous households is relatively high. "In a random sample it was found that 200 men, of all ages, who had marital experiences were married to 278 women - a husband wife ratio of 1 to 1.4. - 67 of the 200 households - 33.5% - were polygynous." (Hopen 1958:144)

### C.) Camp contacts of women.

With the description of a woman's status and jural position in a camp in mind, it is possible to underline those contacts which persist throughout a Fulani woman's life with both her family of marriage and her family of birth, and hence the relationships of camp women among themselves.

1.) Contacts with kin and affines. Among the Fulani, the couple's inauguration of their own household, their arrival at full adult and hence independent status, and their receipt of inheritance, happen simultaneously for both a man and his wife. These concurrent arrangements would seem to define clearly the affinal roles at their onset and prevent conflict between the families involved. But this does not seem to be the case and the contacts maintained by a woman with both her natal family and her family of marriage seem to be the source of considerable marital tension.

The natal family plays an important part in the marriage ceremonies, the first confinement of their daughter, and in the care and fêting of her children. A woman's father is her guardian when her husband loses control of her. The mother may assist in the second or later births of her daughter and may live with the daughter in old age if she has no sons. Membership in the natal lineage is never lost on marriage. A woman depends on her family to support her in disputes with her husband. Since marriage is commonly

virilocal or neo-local, contacts can be cut off through moves of the family of marriage. A not uncommon cause of divorce is the husband's decision to move a great distance from his affines, and the wife's refusal to accompany him because distance from her family greatly weakens her bargaining power, for she is a legal minor. (Hopen 1958:87, Dupire 1962:170)

Affective relationships seem to be between: a mother and her children; siblings; a woman and her husband's younger siblings; a woman and her mother's siblings; grandparents and grandchildren; cross-cousins (marriage between all cousins except MZS are preferred); and between wives of the husband's brothers.

Negative relations - those where there is commonly tension if not overt conflict - are sometimes accompanied by avoidance or name-avoidance taboos. This category includes relations between: father and son; husband and wife; co-wives; half-siblings; mother and daughter-in-law; father-in-law and son-in-law; and a wife and the older siblings of her husband.

This listing implies that sharing of economic chores in the same household does not go with relationships of fondness. Similarly, affective relations for a woman are those which tie her to her natal family and serve to weaken the bonds of marriage. One exception - the mother/child bond - has already been discussed. Another is the relationship of fondness and co-operation which exists between a woman and her husband's brother's wives, who frequently live in the same local descent

group or near it. "As no jealousy or rivalry enters into their relations, they usually co-operate with each other in a friendly way." (Dupire 1963:72) It is these in-laws whom a woman asks to take charge of her children or belongings if she goes on a visit to her parents or to the market.

Finally, it is worth noting that even when a number of subsequent marriages occur, a woman always maintains contacts with her former husbands and their families if there were children of the marriage.

## 2.) Contacts with neighbouring women.

The contacts which the Fulani women have with neighbours cannot really be separated from those which are made through the family of marriage, but since these two categories are distinguished in the literature there would be some value in discussing them. A woman can act as the paid hairdresser for a neighbour woman, and neighbours are often in attendance during the confinement of a woman. (In the Fulani community there are no official mid-wives, positions found commonly elsewhere). Further, co-operation in economic tasks is not often found between Fulani women, partly because of the very nature of the work itself. A woman's sister-in-law (HBW) will care for her children when she is at the markets, but little other help is extended. The fact that co-operation is not required and, in fact, not very feasible, prevents the extension of contacts through mutual aid which one finds in agricultural societies.

Though neighbours participate in the ceremonies held in the camp especially during the winter, in none of the material has this question been given more than cursory notice. The point to be made about the Fulani woman's neighbourly relations is a negative one: contacts between women seem to be limited by the lack of need to co-operate, the absence of practical or ritual positions such as that of midwife, and by the afore-mentioned problems of seasonal dispersal.

3.) Residential choices open to a woman. Camp membership is not final and a woman has some choice of the women amongst whom to associate. All the accounts of the Fulani stress the alternatives open to women in determining their future, and their consciousness of these alternatives. For example, even though the betrothal marriage is arranged for the partners by their elders, both parties do have the power to annul the marriage after the betrothal ceremony; betrothed girls can with relative ease escape an arranged marriage and meet partners for a cicisbean marriage in the markets. Divorce is frequent and it should be noted that Stenning found no example of a woman of childbearing age who was divorced and who had not remarried. (1959:164) In most cases a woman will live with one of her sons when she is old. But personal problems can result in the return of such a woman to her own family, or in her moving into the household of a married daughter. Finally, an old woman with

no living children can, among the Wodaabe of West Bornu, go to live unmarried at a chief's house after claiming kinship ties with him or one of his wives. A barren woman always has an insecure and exceptional position in the community and she may choose to leave the pastoral people altogether and become a town prostitute. Hopen cites a case in which a man was forced to leave good pasturage and put spatial distance between his wife and the other women in the camp because she did not get along with them.

(1958:112) Thus the number of choices of residential arrangements open to a woman could have a significant bearing on the emergence of a woman's sub-society.

However, both the relatively small size of Fulani encampments, and the nature of kin and affinal ties a woman maintains throughout her life, seem to preclude the development of a women's sub-society along residential lines. If residential groupings did provide the opportunity for considerable interaction among women, one would expect it to be more evident in the winter season of reunion. It is mentioned that, for life-cycle feasts, the senior female relatives of the principals are given some measure of respect and that meat is distributed according to age (Dupire 1963:52-53), but there is no indication that there is any extension of this kind of ceremonial status into other spheres. There is no detailed examination of the persons who do attend ceremonies and dances, and the



ethnographic material on this subject is very limited.

Nonetheless, as was seen among the Shabsavan, the structure of camp relationships could to some degree determine the character of a sub-society based on other than camp contacts.

### III. OPPORTUNITY FOR INTERACTION IN THE MARKETS.

So far the picture has been drawn without reference to a focal point of Fulani life. At no time during the transhumant migrations are the Fulani completely cut off from trade. This is not surprising since the whole savannah is traditionally a vast transit zone between the desert and North Africa and the sedentary south. It is mentioned that the markets are "one of the main attractions in the dry season, and the location of markets, as well as the location of pastures, and of water, influences the successive sites of <sup>their</sup> camps." (Dupire 1965:119) The importance of the market lies as much in its social as its economic significance.

The Fulani says:

...I like to go to the market because I hear the news of the world; for the Fulbe the market is a clearing house for a vast store of detailed information which is vital to them in their pastoral existence. Seen on the ground, markets may be visualized as the centres of a series of overlapping circles through which information is circulated and which provide an amazing means of mass communication. (Hopen 1958:35)

Market relations between buyer and seller tend to be very impersonal because for both social and economic reasons the pastoralists prefer to frequent large

markets. Markets visited by 1,000 to an estimated 10,000 Fulbe and Haabe are normally held at least several times a week within 15 miles (the day-return limit) of any home-stead. ... Women also prefer the larger markets because milk and butter are a sort of luxury and those who can afford them are likely to be found in greater numbers at these markets. (Hopen 1958:153)

Dupire lists twelve major types of market found in the area she studied - for example, urban or bush; markets for internal or primarily external trade; those where local buyers or where strangers predominate, etc. (1965:114)

She further notes that the Wodaabe in the dry season visit the village markets which belong to the sedentary zone in which they move. In the winter bushland, far from these markets, they are visited by itinerant merchants and meet caravans coming from the north. (1965:94 & 109) The access-

ibility of markets was also noted by Stenning: during the wet season, the 31 local descent groups which he uses as a sample were found to be centered on four villages; by comparison in the dry season, the 31 groups were attached to 28 village areas almost on a one-to-one basis. (1959:213)

Finally, on a map of the Wodaabe migration route in West Bornu one sees that throughout the year households are never further than 28 kilometres from a market and during the dry season, they are usually within walking distance of a number of markets. (Stenning 1959:230)

The treatment and sale of milk products is an exclusive prerogative of the women. The strict division of labour between the sexes determines their market activities - their contacts with the wider society. "The conviction that 'men should own the cattle and women should own the milk' ... is firmly held." (Hopen 1958:23)<sup>29</sup> Children's games anticipate adult roles and girls make calabashes and play at treating milk products; younger ones are instructed by their elders. (Hopen 1958:24)

The actual milking among the Wodaabe studied by Stenning is carried out exclusively by the women. But among the Fulbe na'i of Gwandu, this is the one task for which there is no clear cut division of labour, though the

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29. "The physical structure of the Wodaabe homestead ... canalizes the day-to-day activities of the household and symbolizes the relationships of its members, particularly those of different sex." (Stenning 1959:111) See diagrams: Stenning 1959:106, Hopen 1958:56, and Dupire 1963:51.

The traditional pattern of inheritance (cf. Stenning 1959:48ff.) was definitely patrilineal, and no women inherited; even though this system has been considerably modified by Maliki law, the Fulani have been intent on preserving male priority in the inheritance of livestock. Though now Fulani women do inherit, their portions do not accord with Islamic prescriptions, and "...women never take precedence over male inheritors in the order of succession." (Dupire 1963:87)

men prefer to do it because they do not trust the women, who are nervous about milking, with the cattle. (Hopen 1958:99) Dupire says that the division of labour is not regulated by taboos and the task is done by one sex or the other according to the customs of the group itself. In any case, she feels that the role is not irreversible if there are other factors to be considered. (1962:84-5) Perhaps Meek's comment will throw some light on the situation. He notes that there are no milking rites (1925:116): "Both men and women milk the cows, but it is said that formerly, among the more primitive Fulani, the milking was done exclusively by the women." (1925:233) It is not surprising that in milking, where there is a distinction between the complementary, but discrete, chores of the men's herding and the women's concern for milk products, there is a blurring of the otherwise rigid division of labour between the sexes.

However, the economic collaboration between men and women is compartmentalized and there is really very little confusion between the two roles. Men do not interfere with the domestic arrangements of the women - indeed, it is a point of pride among them that they do not - which gives the women considerable freedom. All the proceeds from the sales are hers to dispose of without inquiries from her husband. Any money she has left after the purchase of grain for the family - an important task in itself, for

the exchange of milk products literally means bread for the Fulani diet - "...pas de lait, pas de mil..." (Dupire 1962:135) - can be used for condiments as she pleases. The marketing power of the woman is made more significant by the fact that the Fulani economy is by no means a self-sufficient one, and the Fulani rely heavily on the sedentary population for basic items. Apart from grain, Hopen notes seven essential food items bought in the markets besides the four which the Fulani produce domestically; ten items of equipment purchased as opposed to two things produced at home; seven articles of clothing balanced only by the spun cotton made by the women; and a large number of miscellaneous items of considerable importance found only in the markets. (1958:152-153)

Women trade in those markets where they can get the best bargains and their knowledge of the market situation seems to be extensive. In one instance a woman travelled fifteen miles to a market where she knew she could get a good buy of enamel plates for her daughter. This knowledge of the markets also extends to their own produce; St. Croix mentions seven kinds of fraud perpetuated by Fulani women to sell their sour milk, butter and cream for more money. (1945:27-30)

The markets are a place of meeting for the women. They take great pride in their personal appearance, particularly when they visit a market. (Hopen 1958:107) Once there the

Fulani women more or less isolate themselves from the village people and form a group in one section of the market. M.G. Smith made surveys in the Giwa market (20 miles from Zaria City on the main road to Futua and Sokoto) on two days, one in 1949 and one in 1959. Few Fulani patronize this market; the town is a District Headquarters - "...a new town with a new market in a sparsely peopled area." (M.G. Smith 1965:164) In 1949, milk was sold there by 64 women all of whom were Fulani, while in 1959, there were 25 women. The decrease in number can be accounted for almost entirely by the withdrawal from the area of certain Fulani groups. (M.G. Smith 1965:170-173) Nonetheless, if these figures are at all typical of the population of Fulani women in a market of an under-populated area, the implication of the market situation as a meeting place for women is indicated.

#### IV. A WOMEN'S SUB-SOCIETY ?

Though there is little information on the actual relations between women (or men) in the markets, it seems not unreasonable to suppose that some sort of a women's sub-society does exist entirely within the market context. The fact that the markets are extremely important socially, and that they are frequently attended by relatively large numbers of women, is ample proof that there is 'opportunity for interaction'. The notions of 'network' and 'action-set' are implicit in Hopen's comment (see above, p. 162) that "...markets may be visualized as the centres of a series of

overlapping circles through which information is circulated and which provide an amazing means of mass communication."

(1958:35) Because of the markets, it is certainly possible that all Fulani women form a network, and that market-oriented action-sets represent parts of this network on the ground. Further, the fact that it is a strict division of labour between the sexes which actually determines the women's market participation, indicates that the requirement of the separation of the sexes in at least some social activities is fulfilled.

Because of the limited and generally vague material, it is difficult to answer the question, What constitutes the medium of interaction? Even if a satisfactory answer is discovered, a second question remains - What is the structure of the sub-society; i.e. what values do they share and how do the women actually rank or organize themselves? But broad hints to the answers of these questions do exist and will be considered in the following two sections.

A.) What constitutes the 'medium of interaction'?

The Fulani women would seem to have a number of interests in common; any one or a number of them in combination could well provide the 'medium of interaction' of the sub-society.

1.) Opposition to the Habe.

It has been noted above (p. 162 ) that the Fulani for social as well as economic reasons frequent the larger markets where buyer/seller relations are impersonal, and that the women isolate themselves in a section of the market apart from the villages (p. 166 ). One might find that the Fulani women organize themselves to face the social opposition from the Habe agriculturalists who strongly disapprove of their freedom and so-called non-Islamic ways.

2.) A marketing organisation.

It may happen that the sub-society organization is based on some kind of economic criteria. There would seem to exist considerable competition between the Fulani women to sell their products and thus provide for the day-to-day expenditures necessary to support a family. Presumably, some women would be more successful at selling (or would have more goods to sell) - would they help the other women or would they organize themselves as a Fulani market elite?

3.) Matchmaking.

It is quite likely that there is a kind of women's information service in the market, for there would be numbers of women from different lineages of the same clan and from different clans in the market area. Unfortunately, there is no material on the kinds of information that might be



exchanged. On the other hand, it is known that the markets are a place to meet lovers and 'strangers' - men from other clans, and it seems not unlikely that the heterogeneous Fulani market population might give rise among the women to matchmakers who have a wide network of social contacts. The markets are used as a courting place and all youths as well as those persons looking for partners in a future cicisbean marriage take advantage of the greater anonymity of the large numbers of Fulani who congregate in the markets to pursue these ends. Since most cicisbean marriages are between 'strangers', a matchmaking mechanism may exist to spark off these relationships in the first place. In any case, the market places provide a chance for women to compare their home situation with that of other women, whatever the results may be.

#### 4.) Sanctions and economic power.

A final possibility concerns the division of labour and the potential opportunities offered by specialization. The products of the sexual division of labour are essential to the other parts of the society and a monopoly of this kind implies "...the capacity in any relationship to command the service and compliance of others..." (MacIver 1947:82) - i.e. the control of social sanctions. Kaberry, in discussing material on the Bamenda of the British

Cameroons, notes that where women are indispensable, there is an "...association with economic independence ... whether women individually or corporately resort to economic sanctions to preserve their rights, ensure good treatment, and redress wrongs." (1952:145)

"...modern women meeting en masse in the markets (a post-Protectorate development) have begun to realize how vital they are to the pastoral economy, and this gives them a sense of power vis-à-vis their husbands." (Hopen 1958:108) A wife who is getting along with her husband might provide clothing for the family, but if she refuses to do so he is obliged to provide for these needs even if it means selling cattle. (Dupire 1962:127)

Further, nowadays the women invest their sales profits in small stock - sheep and goats - which can easily be sold when cash is needed.

Normally, small flocks of sheep and goats belong to women rather than to men. Being a form of capital that is easily convertible, they provide women with the same kind of "savings bank" as castrated cattle do for men. (Dupire 1963:76) A woman enjoys much greater economic independence with regard to the small livestock which she acquires out of her personal savings. She can in fact do what she likes with it. (Dupire 1963:80)

Women who gain control of large herds of cattle are<sup>30</sup> regarded as anomalous among the Fulani, yet all women

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30. Independent ventures by women into cattle breeding are rare for they are almost always dependent on a man to care for the animals. But Dupire mentions one case

strive to obtain their own cattle - usually from their paternal or maternal herds. The women realize that if they own cattle they will receive better treatment from their husbands. In fact, the Fulani feel that such a woman is more likely to be disobedient to her husband; but she in turn knows that with cattle she will never have difficulty finding another husband. (Hopen 1958:74 & 77)

From this last example, it would appear that economic indispensability could provide opportunities for deploying sanctions in fields other than that of economies. Among the Fulani, where there is an alternative to divorce in the gicisbean marriage, women can run away from their husbands and legally claim children still at the breast or in the womb. Since a man without a wife, even temporarily, is the subject of ridicule, (Stenning 1959:159) the losses of both wife and child would seem to be important threats which women could use to gain their own ends.

B.) How might the sub-society be ordered?

Though it is possible to discuss in some detail some

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30. (Continued from page 171)

of a woman who did not hesitate to take on masculine tasks when her husband became old and rheumatic:

...she had herself, out of her own savings, bought a heifer at the market, and also exploited commercially a herd of small livestock. The husband only smiled when people made fun of them saying "it was the woman who wore the dedo" (leather breeches worn by men) for he respected his wife's intelligence as much as her courage and fidelity. (1963:70)

devices the Fulani women would ~~not~~ seem to be able to use to regulate behaviour within the sub-society, unfortunately I have no information on those devices which might be used. Nonetheless, I feel it is important to a more general understanding of women's sub-societies to consider the organizational tools which seem to be denied the Fulani women.

### 1.) Age status.

The periods in the life-cycle distinguished by the Fulani are childhood, youth, betrothal, full adult status (when a woman has borne her first child) and 'mother' (when a woman has more than two children) and finally senility.

Youth is a time of relative social and sexual freedom and without loss of status, girls can engage in sex play.

At this time there is a great emphasis on beauty and popularity of both boys and girls, which is to some degree translated into a social ranking system. Especially

during the wet season there are evening meetings (gërewol)<sup>31</sup> for the youths and maidens where they dance and sing.

Boys and girls are graded in order of their beauty and pair off. A lame or lamiDo reuBe is selected to be the leader of the young girls, but this girl has a subordinate role to the leader of the youths, samri, who in fact chose the girl's leader himself. (Dupire 1963:85) Reed notes

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31. See Reed 1932:434ff for a description of these occasions.

that in each Wodaabe tribe there is a boy and girl leader, and when youths or girls have offended against the 'Fulani way' they are summoned to a lecture on correct behaviour by their leader. (1932:428)

Youth leaders of both sexes are found also among the Hausa people of the area; material on these latter individuals may throw some light on the situation among the Fulani.

The head of the girls' group arranges and presides over certain of the girls' dances, can levy fines for non-attendance, refusal to obey orders and the like, and can command the attendance of girls on 32 male titleholders. (M.G. Smith 1957:37)

Girls and boys continue to participate in the dances during the biiku period of betrothal marriage. But this ranking system has importance only within the youth group, and positions achieved by the girl or boy lose all significance after they are married and become the parents of a child (bantal); simply, youth leaders do not necessarily become leaders in adult life.

The status of a married woman in her household increases according to the degree to which, through her behaviour and child-bearing, she has discharged her functions and contributed (through her children) to the present and future fortunes of that household. (Hopen 1958:115)

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32. Also see M.G. Smith in M.F. Smith 1954:59ff.

This process continues until a woman achieves the position of 'mother' which corresponds with the 'elder' status of males. This implies considerable power within the household and presumably merits respect from others outside the family, though no extension of this status into wider spheres as a basis of power/authority is mentioned. This is not surprising, for a number of women would have similar positions in other households, and without other criteria it would be impossible to designate positions on this basis alone.

The final stage - senility - is when a woman is past menopause and is called by the same term as an old man; this in itself indicates a blurring of the sexual distinctions which pervade social relations in the community.

A woman is never socially equal to a man and she must always defer to him to some extent; only in old age "Near, but not absolute, social equality between spouses comes..."

(Hopen 1958:104) This would seem to imply greater liberty in all spheres hitherto forbidden to a woman. Yet among the Fulani, when a woman has reached this age, she is, in Stenning's words 'socially dead'. (1958:99) She has no personal wealth left and no household from which to rule or from which to base forays into any political/economic sphere. This last point is important; there are no longer any cattle for the old woman to milk - a fact that would

seem to bar her participation in marketing activities and hence in a possible women's sub-society.

Other evidence supports the view that old women are not active in the market sub-society. Grandmothers take a fair-sized part in the feasts given for the birth of their daughter's first child and in the weaning and care of grandchildren until about the age of five or six. In fact, a child may 'go on a visit' to its maternal grandparents until this age. (Stenning 1959:155) Much of the responsibility of inculcating the virtues of the 'Fulani way' (<sup>a</sup>pulaku)<sup>33</sup> into the child, and making the family a tightly knit unit,<sup>34</sup> falls on the maternal grandmother. Thus a 'socially dead' woman does have influence within the family; the energies of such a woman, who quite possibly is still very able physically and mentally, are channelled back into the family and might well be a kind of safety-valve.

## 2.) The position of a man and his wife.

Continually stressed in the Fulani material is the

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33. The ideals of <sup>a</sup>pulaku or the Fulani way are summed up by the words, "...familial, egalitarian, peaceful, conservative." (Stenning 1966:388)

34. Burness (1955, 1957) also discusses the importance of the grandmother in a child's education in two sedentary groups in Nigeria.

importance of the independent nuclear family and the interdependence within it of the fertility of women and that of the herds. One would imagine that since the family stands or falls together in such matters, the statuses of husband and wife would be congruent at any point in time. But, though this proposition seems true while a marriage exists, it ignores the frequency of divorce. In other words, can a woman's status be dependent on that of her husband when there is such mobility in marriage? Not only does the instability of marriage limit the sharing of status between spouses, but, what with the ranking of co-wives within a household, the husband's status would seem to be an inadequate device for ordering women among themselves. As M.G. Smith notes when discussing the status of Hausa women:

Indeed, the status differentiation of co-wives by reference to marriage-order precludes the status identity with the common husband. (1959:244)

### 3.) Private property and the sub-society.

A final point to be examined concerns a woman's ability to amass wealth, and its possible uses in a sub-society. It has been noted above (p. 164n.) that women inherit, but it is not surprising that, since much of the domestic cycle of the family and the economic situation of a household depend on the size of the paternal herd, women are by and large prevented from alienating any stock. Nevertheless, at marriage a woman may be given cattle, by her mother



from the maternal herds, by her father, or even rarely by her mother-in-law. A woman also receives a few calabashes and spoons at this time. A widow never inherits from her husband; she receives as a gift a beast from her husband's herd which marks the termination of the mourning period. Any other animals she receives are given in trust for her sons. "...neither father nor mother may inherit from their children, for inheritance does not go backwards."

(Dupire 1963:87) According to the Maliki system of inheritance, a daughter would receive one-half a son's share; but, since this would allow women to alienate cattle from the paternal herd this is unacceptable to the Fulani.

(Hopen 1958:139)

There are several jobs which a woman can take up to supplement her income from milk products. A speciality of the Fulani women is repairing calabashes; such a woman is usually employed in the villages by the day. A woman may also perform other tasks for cash, such as spinning raw cotton, or she may attend to the coiffure of certain of her relatives and neighbours. (Stenning 1959:109) Side ventures in small stock raising have been mentioned above (p.171 ).

Though means do exist for a woman to amass wealth, this would not seem to be an important element in any sub-society organization among the women themselves. It

may however be significant with regard to the medium of interaction of a possible sub-society as was shown above in the section on sanctions and economic power (p. 170 ).

In all cases, a woman's personal wealth passes on to her family on the marriages of her children and at her death.

In a sense, the Islamic notion of an individual's responsibility during death-sickness to conserve his wealth for his heirs is in play throughout the life of a Fulani woman.

A woman guards her belongings and cattle only to pass them on to aid her children; sons are given preference over daughters to the livestock which she owned, while her

personal possessions, "her clothes and her jewelry, go to her daughters in order of birth, or, if she has no

daughters, to her sisters or other female members of her

lineage." (Dupire 1963:87) One limit on the acquisition

of personal possessions of value, is that they have all

to be loaded onto the baggage animal for the migration.

Finally, Dupire's emphasis on the comparative meagreness of the other symbols of wealth, such as jewelry or clothing

(1962:127), also indicates that a woman does not, at least

ostensibly, use her possessions or wealth to forward her

own position among other women.

### C.) CONCLUSIONS.

Fulani residential patterns and the nature of camps seem to preclude a women's sub-society on those lines, but the fact that throughout the year camps are always

within reach of markets, plus a strict division of labour which gives women exclusive control over the sale of milk products, allow for the possible development of a women's sub-society.

It seems possible that neither leadership in youth, age status per se, nor the identification of a woman with her husband's position, would play much part in the internal organization of such a sub-society. I suggest that it is in the alternatives listed above as possible media of interaction that clues to sub-society organization might be found. It should be noted that though camp and household organization may play little part in stimulating or 'creating' a sub-society within the market context, this does not preclude a feedback effect from the market relations on those of the camp and household.

In so far as the existence of a Fulani women's sub-society is possible, it can be seen that relations among women present a situation parallel to that found among the Shahsavan. Married females form a classificatory category and this aggregate has common interests, in that the division of labour is such that they all must attend the markets. Given the Fulani migration patterns, and the numbers of Fulani women in each market, and a woman's attendance at different markets in the course of a year, it is not unreasonable to assume that women are linked in

a network based on market contacts. The market gatherings can be characterized as face-to-face, market-oriented action-sets which may in time resemble Mayer's 'quasi-groups'. Nothing is known of how the relations among the women are actually structured, though a number of hypotheses have been presented above.

## CHAPTER 4: THE TUAREG OF THE SAHARA.

35

### I. INTRODUCTION.

In Rodd's words:

The Tuareg country may roughly be described as extending from the eastern edge of the Central Sahara...to the far edge of the Western deserts of North Africa before the Atlantic zone begins, and from Southern Algeria to the north of the Niger and Equatorial belt between the river and Lake Chad in the south. (1926:8)

35. To form a coherent picture of the social activities of Tuareg women, both works based on material collected before the advent of the French around the turn of the century, and those of more recent ethnographers must be used. But significant problems are posed by an attempt to combine this material, for changes wrought by the Europeans in the Sahara were considerable and affected both the economic and political structure of Tuareg society.

However, several justifications for using sources from the pre and post-European periods can be offered. It would seem that,

The major change has been the abolition of warfare and consequently the breakdown of the traditional political system, but the abolition of warfare also led to important changes in the organization of caravan trading. (Nicolaisen 1963:217)

Nonetheless, in the Ahaggar, certain points emphasize the continuity of the internal social organization:

Essentially it is the hierarchical system of relationships based on the exchange of political and economic rights and duties which has been affected by the end of raiding, but 1.) even today the vassal class still acknowledges, albeit voluntarily, obligations to the noble class (Nicolaisen 1963:400), 2.) marriages between classes are still rare, (Ibid. 402), 3.) "Among the Northern Tuareg slavery is still practiced with the tacit consent of the French military administration." (Ibid. 16), 4.) the "...traditional material

(Continued on p.183)

More simply, the <sup>Tuareg</sup> belong to the Saharan-Saharan cycle.

(Trimingham 1959:45) The Tuareg are not a tribe but a  
 36  
 people united by a common language and similar patterns  
 of social and economic organization.

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35. (Continued from p. 182)

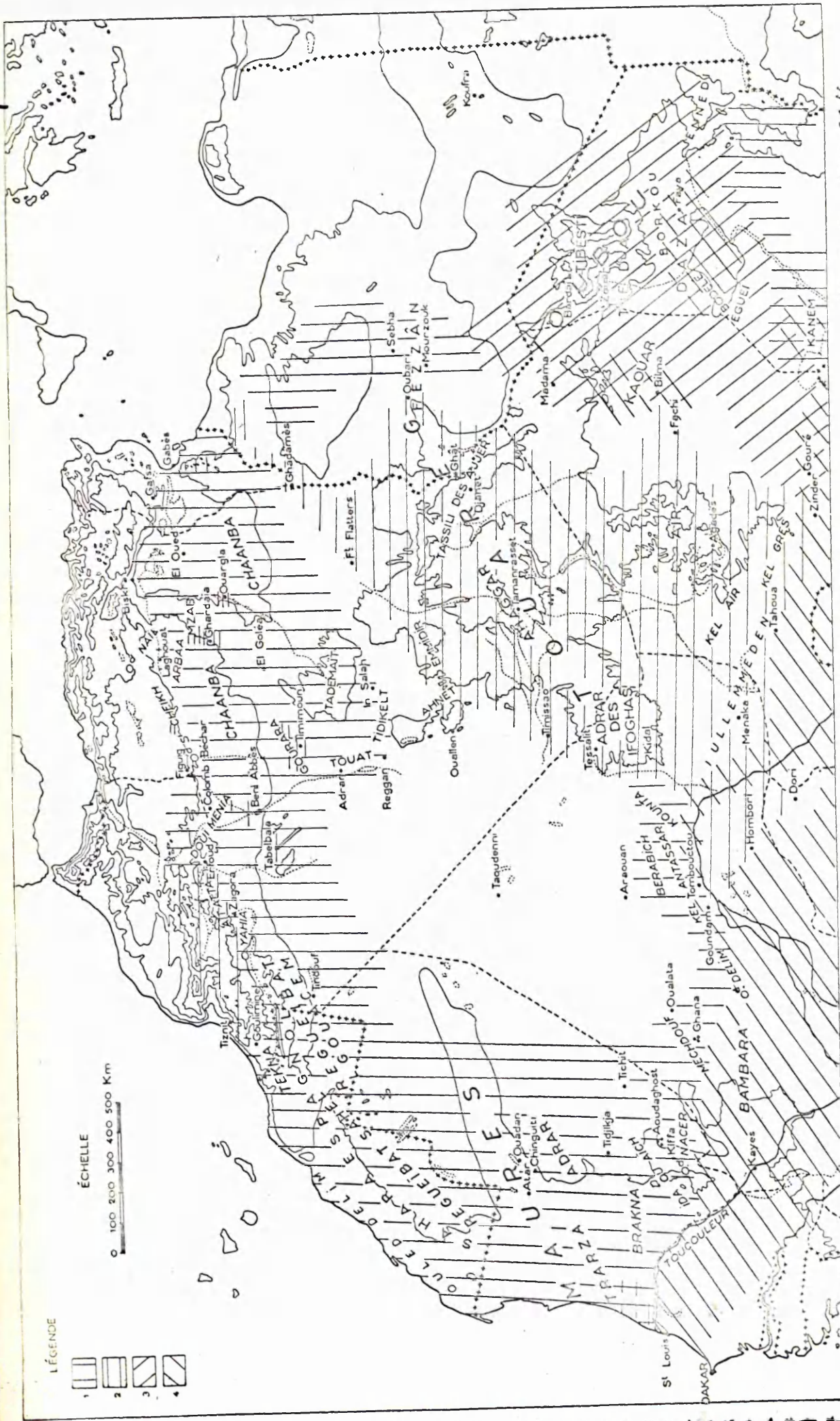
culture has persisted largely unchanged up to the present day." (Ibid. 217) Further, the changes in caravan organization have not in fact affected the nature of the residential groups on which the trade is based. (Ibid. 218)

Thus it seems not unreasonable to say that while the external environment is very different today, the internal social organization, though in the process of change, has not yet been seriously disrupted, nor have many of the institutions noted in the early literature changed beyond recognition. It does seem possible then to use judiciously the material from both periods. This approach would seem even more acceptable when dealing with women who have fewer outside contacts (e.g. most Tuareg men know a second language - Arabic or Hausa - while the women do not (Ibid. 24) and they "...have played a great part in the preservation of the Tuareg language and culture." (Ibid.) It is the topics noted above as remaining relatively unchanged - such as the prohibition of inter-estate marriage and the continued existence of slavery - which have particular relevance to this section on Tuareg women.

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36. Tamahaqq, which belongs to the Berber family of languages, is spoken by all Tuareg, who, in contrast with all other members of this language-family, have preserved the Libyco-Berber alphabet - Tifinagh. (Trimingham 1959:10)





CARTE VI. — LES POPULATIONS DU SAHARA FRANÇAIS

1. Arabophones ; 2. Berbérophones ; 3. Touhou ; 4. Nègres (On n'a pas représenté les Haratin des oasis, ni les Peuls du Soudan)

(Capot-Rey 1953: 192 H.)

Though the greatest numbers of Tuareg live elsewhere, it is the so-called Northern Tuareg dwelling in the true desert which are of primary interest in this chapter. The term 'Northern Tuareg' is generally applied to two political and territorial groups or confederations: the Kel Ajjer and the Kel Ahaggar.<sup>38</sup> The Northern Tuareg originally constituted a single political unit and are "...intimately related to one another, both culturally and linguistically..." (Nicolaisen 1963:393) Though I shall use material on both of these groups throughout this chapter, the greater part of the detailed information I will present concerns the Kel Ahaggar, a group of 4000 to 5000 individuals.

Feilberg considers the Tuareg "...purs nomades du désert." (1944:139) by which he means camel-herding nomads, (literally without any fixed migration pattern), whose principal occupation is brigandage, though they are dependent on sedentary oasis communities for basic foodstuffs like cereals and dates. (cf. Feilberg 1944:32) Two important points should be added to this description: in fact

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37. The Northern Tuareg constitute about 3% of the total Tuareg population which is estimated at about 300,000. (Nicolaisen 1963:8)

38. The Kel Ajjer live in the mountains of Tasilé-n-Ajjer on the border between Algeria and Libya, while the Kel Ahaggar occupy the Ahaggar Massif, the mountains of Ahnet, Immidir, and Tefedest, and the plains between these ranges. (Nicolaisen 1963:7) Further, in this century numbers of Ahaggar Tuareg have moved to the Tamesna plains about 500 km. to the south of the administrative centre of Ahaggar - Tamanrasset. (Nicolaisen 1964:78)



goats rather than camels are the animals basic to subsistence in the desert (Nicolaisen 1963:404) and even then the Ahaggar Tuareg "...cannot live exclusively on stock-breeding products all year round - not even in the good years..." (Nicolaisen 1963:209) Camps are continuously on the move, and usually cover 7 - 8 km. every one to two weeks. (Lhote 1944:222) Nonetheless the "...nomadic migrations of the Ahaggar Tuareg are not very extensive and occur within a limited area." (Nicolaisen 1963:149) It is only through the extensive caravan trading especially with the Sudan that the Tuareg can acquire the necessary agricultural provisions. (Nicolaisen 1963:209-210)

Though Duveyrier felt that the name 'Tuareg', which is not their own, may have been used by the Arabs to describe with opprobrium "...les abandonnés «de Dieu»..."<sup>39</sup> (1864:318), it appears possible

...that the ancestors of the Tuareg were influenced by the Arabs who came to North Africa during the first invasion of the 7th century A.D., but the second so-called Hilalian invasion of the 11th century was more important. It seems as if most Tuareg were converted to Islam in the 11th and 12th centuries A.D. (Nicolaisen 1963:479)

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39. Also see Barth 1857:227. Others tend to the view that 'Tuareg' was originally the name of a large group of nomads in the Middle Ages which was extended to include all the veiled camel-herders of the Sahara. (cf. Nicolaisen 1961:116)

The Tuareg follow the Maliki school of Islam.

I have chosen to discuss in detail only the noble Tuareg women; to make clear the reasons for this decision a longish introduction to Tuareg society is required.

#### A.) Social stratification.

Like most Tuareg groups and certainly like the Kel Ajjer of the North, the tribes of the Ahaggar confederation are organized in a hierarchical fashion to maintain the socio-economic distance between two principal social estates<sup>40</sup>, the Ihaggeren or nobles and the Imrad or vassals<sup>41</sup>. Ahaggar leadership is vested in three noble tribes<sup>42</sup> which with twenty-one associated vassal tribes constitute the Ahaggar confederation.

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40. I use this term as defined by Ginsberg 1934:165, though, as will be seen, Nicolaisen and others use the term 'class'.

41. In the North there also exists an estate descended mainly from mixed marriages between Tuareg women and Arabs, called Isekkemaren; the members of this estate have a slightly different and superior status from that of the true vassal estate. (Nicolaisen 1963:396) For the purpose of this chapter, unless stated otherwise the term 'vassal' will refer to both the true vassals and the Isekkemaren estate collectively.

Artisan and clerical (Ineden and Ineselemen respectively) are also included in the hierarchy, but are very small groups in the Ahaggar; an examination of their position in the society is not relevant to this chapter.

42. Two other noble tribes who have no vassals are also mentioned; at present they seem to be very small in numbers. (Nicolaisen 1963:339)

Census material from 1949 indicates that the total noble population of the Kel Ahaggar was 341<sup>43</sup> while that of the vassals was 3839<sup>43</sup>. (Nicolaisen 1963:398-399)

Each of the three noble tribes<sup>44</sup> has a fixed number of vassal tribes attached to it; the unit so formed, which he calls a drum-group, is considered by Nicolaisen to be the most important political unit of the society, though this was perhaps more true in the past than nowadays. Each drum-group has its own chief chosen from a particular noble matrilineage. (Nicolaisen 1963:144)

The drum-chief was the supreme political and judicial authority of ~~the~~ a drum-group, and he could organize raids and wage war upon other groups. He also collected certain annual payments from his particular vassals. (Nicolaisen 1963:396)

The head of the confederation, the supreme chief called the amenukal, is in fact the drum-chief of the Kel Rela drum-group led by the noble tribe of the same name.

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43. Though exact figures are not known, the proportion of nobles to vassals in 1850 is also estimated as roughly 1:10. (Nicolaisen 1964:76) In any case, Barth writing in 1857 says, "...the ruling class of the [Ahaggar] constitutes by far the smaller part of the population of the country, while the great mass of the population of these regions consists of a subject or degraded tribe called Imgrád..." (234)

44. The size of the noble population would seem to indicate that the three constituent noble tribes might be more appropriately considered as matrilineages, but in a personal communication Nicolaisen emphasizes that the tribe is not a true matrilineal unit. Therefore in spite of their small size, I shall use the term 'tribe' which is in fact common throughout the literature of both the past and present.

In the past the Ahaggar confederation was loosely organized, there was much fighting among its constituent tribes (Nicolaisen 1963:397) and the amenukal had no authority to intervene in the internal affairs of drum-groups other than his own, though he was recognised as the judge and war leader in matters which involved all three drum-groups, and he had a certain special religious prestige. (Nicolaisen 1963:397) Today, on the other hand, the position of the amenukal has been so strengthened by the French that his authority is "...almost unlimited." (Nicolaisen 1963:400)

There is considerable ground for thinking that the vassal tribes are largely descended from the first inhabitants of the country and that they were subsequently conquered by the camel-herding Berbers. (Nicolaisen 1963:405) Formerly the vassals were not allowed to own camels; rather they lived off their herds of goats. This distinction in the composition of the herds of the two estates is still evident today. Because camels, being inadequate as a primary source of food, are used for the caravan trade and in raiding, and because goats are the all-important food of the Ahaggar, there is great interdependence between the noble and vassal tribes. Theoretically, the rights of the nobles over the vassals are extensive; in practice, they were - and certainly are even more nowadays - limited by expediency. Duveyrier describes the relationship

between the two estates during the last century:

...le droit du maître restant absolu sur les biens du serf<sup>45</sup> le maître aime que le serf soit riche en argent, en troupeaux, en esclaves, en mobilier, et il lui laisse toute liberté pour arriver à la fortune, parce qu'il sait devoir trouver là, en cas de besoin, des ressources qui ne seront pas refusées, mais dont il n'usera qu'avec discrétion pour ne pas décourager le serf, pour ne pas tuer la poule aux oeufs d'or.  
(1864:334-335)

As between any two Tuareg estates (in fact tribes, not estates, are ideally endogamous (Nicolaisen 1963:142) ), marriage between nobles and vassals is very rare; one can see that intermarriage would in fact disrupt the political and economic structure and would destroy the grounds of racial purity on which the nobles based their superiority.

("Les IMAJEREN [nobles] ont une conscience entrênée d'appartenir à une aristocratie blanche qui les distingue du monde noir qui les entoure." (Bernus 1963:31))

A joking relationship between nobles and their own vassals is sanctioned. The Tuareg themselves say, 'People who are different tease each other to prevent troubles.'

(Nicolaisen 1959:96) Though members of groups which are tied to each other associate on intimate terms, in all other cases the relationship between members of the two estates is conditioned by extreme reserve and even avoidance. (Nicolaisen 1959:96) Demoulin summarizes

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45. Early writers used the term 'serf' to refer to the vassal class. (cf. Demoulin 1928:144)

the relationship between the two estates:

L'organisation sociale des Hoggars est donc essentiellement aristocratique et féodale, puis qu'elle repose sur la distinction entre nobles et imr'ad et sur la subordination des uns aux autres.  
(1928:145)

Or as Murphy says, "...membership in one class or another is the single most important criterion of a Tuareg's worth and standing." (1964:1261-62)

#### B.) Slaves.

Negro slaves or Iklan play a very important role in Tuareg society but they are outside the formal political structure and do not constitute an estate. (Nicolaisen 1963:439)<sup>46</sup> Slaves which in the past were bought or raided from the Sudan and the south are owned individually by both nobles and vassals. They were not usually traded and are inherited within a family. Blanguernon notes that the proportion of slaves to Kel Rela masters is 350:300 (1955:53), while Briggs counts 4400 Tuareg and 4000 Negro slaves in the Ahaggar area. (1960:125) This latter figure would seem too high, for according to the 1949 census there were in Ahaggar 1552 slaves owned by 3960 pastoral Tuareg; though in fact the Kel Rela slaves

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46. A large group of free or freed Negro agriculturalists (Izzegaren or Harratin) also have a major part in the Ahaggar economy, but as social relations between the Harratin and the Tuareg, unlike those between the Tuareg and their slaves, are in the main limited to an economic contract, they will be omitted from this discussion.

and those of one of the vassal tribes did outnumber their owners. (Nicolaisen 1963:440) In the past it certainly seems that every noble and vassal household had at least one female slave (cf. Bisseul 1988:21); today slavery persists among the Northern Tuareg and most households have slaves who act as herdsmen and domestic servants. (Nicolaisen 1963:15) Not only do they perform all manual labour in the camp but they may even take the camel herds to the south for six to eight months of the year if the insufficient pastures of the Ahaggar dry up. The trust which exists between master and slave is well-illustrated by Rognon's comment about the slave owners:

Curieux nomades, attachés à leur pays au point de préférer se séparer pendant des mois ou des années de leurs troupeaux, avec toutes les pertes que cela comporte... plutôt que de les suivre vers les pâturages assurés du Sud! (1963:61)

Female slaves, said to be more tractable than the strong-willed Tuareg women, are often taken by the Tuareg men as concubines, though marriage to a slave woman is infrequent. Unlike marriage between Tuareg of two different estates which tends to disrupt the social structure, Nicolaisen points out that this is not the case if the woman is a slave. (1963:445) If a man marries his own slave girl, the children of the marriage will assume a social position like that of their father. (Nicolaisen

1963:444) This is contrary to the principle that estate membership is determined matrilineally; as the Tuareg themselves put it, "C'est le ventre/<sup>qui</sup>tient l'enfant."

(Duveyrier 1864:337)

## II. Tuareg women.

In the rest of this chapter I intend to discuss the position of the noble Tuareg women, their activities and relations between them. This limitation is to some extent imposed by the material, for most of the early writers discussed the noble estate in considerably more detail than the other estates. Though I have accepted this emphasis, I believe the material on the noble women has wider implications, see below p. 195 , and there are other reasons which make this viewpoint attractive:

### A.) Repulsion for manual labour.

All Tuareg nobles have a repulsion for manual labour and the noble women in particular seem to be unique among pastoral women for the amount of work they do not do.

In all Tuareg groups noble women do very little work. They engage in a few very esteemed crafts such as embroidery, neat decoration of leatherwork, and in the north they cut ornamented milkbowls from wood. The true domestic duties of a noble household are performed by slaves. This to some extent is also true of other social classes among the Northern Tuareg, ... But even in vassal camps among the Northern Tuareg women have their duties and engage in all kinds of domestic work, also in stock-breeding. (Nicolaisen 1963:154)



The existence of a large number of essentially non-productive women oriented to leisure activities has interesting implications for a women's sub-society among the Tuareg.

B.) Relations of noble women with women of other estates.

Nicolaisen's comment seems to put into perspective the whole question of the relations between noble women and the women of other social strata:

The Kel Rela women, like noble women of the Uraren (Tasile-n-Ajjer) and Kel Ferwan (Ayr), do not associate freely with people of other classes. (1963:398)

Several points bear this out: 1.) Marriage between women of noble stock and men of other estates is rare, 2.) noble women of the North live in isolated camps with no opportunity or freedom to gather and mix with other women, in for instance a market situation, and 3.) women's contacts with non-Tuareg must be few, for they, unlike the men who typically know Hausa or Arabic as a second language, are familiar with only Tamahaqq. (Nicolaisen 1963:24)

Contacts with the slave women who live in the noble camps provide some relief to this insular picture of the noble women. The women do work with their slaves on some occasion, but it must be remembered that this situation is well defined as that of mistress/servant. Further, though they may have a kind of latent joking relationship

with their own slaves, it is difficult to imagine that noble women would have any casual contacts at all with slaves other than their own. In any case, slave women are as isolated as their mistresses.

The only other regular contact with 'outsiders' that noble women seem to have, is with the blacksmiths (Ineden); but this situation is of marginal importance, because many Tuareg openly dislike and fear these people and "They do not like to associate with them except on festive occasions when blacksmiths frequently act as singers and musicians." (Nicolaisen 1963:21)

C.) The relationships of vassal women among themselves.

The exclusive intra-estate contacts of the noble women seem to be of the same character as the relationships that the vassal women have among themselves. From a woman's point of view, the two estates seem to be parallel to each other both in terms of their mutual isolation and, paradoxically, because of the essential similarity of their social activities.

A major difference between women of the two estates lies in the domestic chores vassal women perform, for in the past as today only some vassal households have slaves. (Duveyrier 1864:339, Nicolaisen 1963:154); but to the extent that the vassal women have servants, they too seem to avoid domestic chores as much as possible. (Bernus 1963:33)

The similarities in the social life of the women of the two estates is such that I shall assume that conclusions about the relations between noble women are by and large applicable to relations among vassal women as well. All this is to say that, for the purpose of this chapter, noble women, because of their considerable social isolation, can be seen as a homogeneous unit - a potential sub-society - and not as members of one social estate related to other such estates. Though great interdependence exists between the noble and vassal estates in general, only men and not women are personally involved. It is activities like raiding, caravan trading, and stock-breeding which underlie the reciprocity of the 'class' structure and not in any way activities between the women of different strata.

As suggested above, for a women's sub-society to develop the three requirements which must be fulfilled are a degree of separation of women's activities from those of men, opportunity for interaction, and a medium of interaction. It is with these points in mind that I will discuss the material on the noble women among whom, as will be illustrated, there would appear to be no such women's sub-society.

### III. OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERACTION IN THE CAMPS.

It was implied above that the Northern Tuareg live in

isolated camps, but the extent to which this residential pattern influences relationships among women must be determined.

A.) Camp composition.

Tuareg tribes are dispersed. It is two smaller divisions than the tribe which are most important economically: 1.) a unit of 10 - 20 tents which co-operates in camel herding and caravan trade, and 2.) a camp group of 2 - 7 tents which co-operates in goat herding. (Nicolaisen 1963:146) The larger unit, which Nicolaisen calls a section, is essentially a kin group with a depth of four to six generations; within each section there is always a dominant matrilineage from which the section leader is chosen.

(Nicolaisen 1963: 145-146) A goat herding unit is generally an extended family. On rare occasions single families - the nuclear family and its slaves form a self-sufficient unit (Briggs 1960:137) - may search for pasture alone; though the more typical residence pattern is of goat herding units. If grazing is good, the larger groups, sections, may move together. One example of an Ahaggar section camp made up of three smaller goat-herding units has been described (Nicolaisen 1962:65); in it resided sixteen married women and six unmarried girls.

Rules for residence, which are quite complicated, are based on both patrilineal and matrilineal principles.

A newly married couple lives with the bride's parents for approximately one year, after which they join the camp of the groom's father; at the latter's death, the couple then move to the husband's matrilineal kin, e.g. his mother's brothers. Finally at her husband's death the wife with her children returns to her own kinsmen. (Nicolaisen 1963:142-143) As Nicolaisen notes, "A single death may in fact give rise to the change of territory and camp of a great many people..." (1959:104)

Though the residence rules are very different for the Tuareg and the Fulani, in the sample given above the number of Tuareg women in the section seems to compare with the approximate number of Shahsavan women in winter camps and Fulani women in the large, wet season camps. In the same way, the smaller camp units of the three peoples are of comparable size. Given these similar patterns, it is important to see what kinds of relationships Tuareg women have within a camp as compared with their Shahsavan and Fulani counterparts.

#### B.) Camp contacts of women.

1.) Kinship behaviour. Rules of kinship behaviour are characterized by a.) respect relationships towards all consanguineous relations of ascending generations, i.e. all relatives termed 'father', 'mother', and 'mother's brother' - and towards persons known as 'elder brother' or

'elder sister'; b.) joking relationships between all true and classificatory cross cousins and brothers- and sisters-in-law; and c.) avoidance relationships between parents-in-law and children-in-law "...in the way that a man avoids very strictly his mothers-in-law, a woman very strictly her fathers-in-law....Avoidance is less strictly observed between a man and his father -in-law, and there is generally very little avoidance between a woman and her daughter -in-law." (Nicolaisen 1963:455)

During the first year of marriage when the woman remains in her father's camp, relations between the bride and other women of the camp would be similar to those before her marriage. After this time when the couple moves to the camp of the groom's father, relations between women would be generally uninhibited by respect or avoidance considerations. These free and easy relations between women of a camp would continue when, after the death of the husband's father, the couple moved to his maternal relatives. After her husband's death, the wife would return to her maternal relatives where, presumably as a relatively old woman, she would be of an ascending generation meriting respect. All this is to say that contacts and potential co-operation between women in most camps would not seem to be severely limited by the rules of kinship behaviour.

## 2.) The domestic role of noble women.

In a camp it is the female slaves attached to the family who perform all domestic chores; they fetch water, cook, dismantle and erect the tent on migration, and they care for the children of their mistress. In other words, none of the domestic tasks which are left to the wife are essential to the material welfare of the family. Duveyrier says that the household slaves "...permettent aux dames de bonne famille de vaquer à leur plaisirs avec une liberté que ne connaissent pas les femmes arabes." (1864:339) The Tuareg women spend their time "...à la lecture, à l'écriture, à la musique et à la broderie." (Duveyrier 1864:430) Since the very few tasks which noble women do perform for the family are of an artistic nature, it is essential to consider the more important of these activities - possible media of interaction - in detail.

"The Tuareg are expert at skin and leather work which constitutes the most important craft in the north..." (Nicolaisen 1963:269-270) and leatherworking is the principal manual occupation of the noble women.

La peau est ... trempée dans l'eau deux jours durant pour qu'elle puisse être étirée, lissée, aplanie, coupée et cousue. Ce sont les femmes du campement qui se chargent de ce dernier travail, toutes se mettent à l'oeuvre, plaisantent, conversent et l'ouvrage va bon train. (Blanguernon 1955:91)

Northern Tuareg women take a great interest in their skin and leather artifacts, which are richly decorated with fringes and hanging tassels, and with geometric designs in different colours. (Nicolaisen 1963:282)

Presumably all women are not equally competent to work the leather into intricate patterns, and success in so doing is related to a woman's skill and imagination. Hence making leather products would seem to be a speciality in which some women could achieve high standards of workmanship. It is not mentioned in the literature whether women rank themselves according to their competence at working leather or creating new designs, but it is hard to imagine that this does not occur, at least to some degree.<sup>47</sup>

There seem to be very few items<sup>48</sup> for which actual co-operation between women is required, though the women will never remain alone to do leather work and they seek out companions from their own camp to work with them.

(Blanguernon 1955:141) All the women thus involved would

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47. In a personal communication Nicolaisen notes that while a woman who does fine leatherwork acquires some prestige from this, he is not able to gauge how much the women actually compete.

48. One of these is a large mat or asaber, three or four of which are used to decorate the interior of the tent. "Ce travail exécuté par deux femmes dure environ un an." (Blanguernon 1955:92)



have close kinship or affinal ties with each other. The women of the camp of the amenukal chief - which is larger than the typical Tuareg camp - have a daily meeting to work leather; this has been described by Fuchs as a 'court' centered on the sister of the amenukal. (1955:42) But as the exact number or status of the women who attended is not mentioned, it is not possible to know if the 'court' institution differs in any way from the groups of women who gather to work leather in other camps.

The probability that women from different camps do not co-operate is confirmed by Nicolaisen's statement that among the Northern Tuareg, who take great interest in their tents, "...the [tent] sheet is manufactured in Tuareg camps by pastoral women and their female slaves." (1963:362) - i.e. within one camp. In other words, though leatherworking is a separate activity which does provide them with a medium of interaction, it is not an occupation which offers much opportunity for interaction among a large group of women or a number of different women in the course of a year.

This impression is confirmed in another way: the goods produced by the noble women are for family use rather than market consumption. Not only are camps in which the Northern women live remote from markets, but if this were not the case they would be prohibited from attending on

pain of social ostracism. (Bernus 1963:32) As Bernus makes clear with regard to the Tuareg of Niger, because the noble women do not go to market, "Elles sont ainsi tenues à l'écart de ces lieux de rencontre où les nouvelles circulent, où les connaissances se font."

(Bernus 1963:47) It is the women of the artisan (Ineden) estate who make leather goods - particularly knife and sword sheaths - professionally. (Blanguernon 1955:60) The possibility of noble women joining together to enter into marketing activities based on leather-work, is thus eliminated.

The second 'artistic' task with which women concern themselves has to do with the language and oral literature of the society. It has been frequently stated that the women are more familiar with the Tifinagh alphabet than the men (cf. USAH 1965:95) though Nicolaisen states that he has found no proof of the truth of this statement and he notes that even now "...it is very difficult...to find adult Tuareg who do not know their proper script..." (1963:8)

Nonetheless the women have much to do with songs and poetry - "The Tuareg are in some measure all poets, but the women are most famous among them." (Rodd 1926:271) - and it seems that they are also recognized as tribal historians and authorities on custom and lore. (Rodd 1929:32)

According to Bissuel, one of the most important obligations a mother has to her children of both sexes is to pass on this knowledge and writing skills. (1888:104) But if this is the case, education would be a personal obligation of the mother to her children; one which requires no co-operation among women.

I have discovered no mention of women joining each other for the express purpose of telling stories, etc. for their children's benefit. Men do tell stories among themselves when they are travelling (Blanguernon 1955:142) and Tuareg tales are recounted at ahal gatherings (Ihote 1944:147) (see below pp. 205ff.), but in both of these cases only people of adult status are involved, and their prior familiarity with tribal lore and custom can be assumed. In other words, though the area of education and oral literature may be one in which the women have a special interest, it does not seem to provide the basis for significant relations among women.

Relations between camp women, though characterized by companionship and co-operation unlike those among the Fulani women, still do not seem to provide the basis of a women's sub-society. The typically small size of the group itself makes it an inadequate vehicle for establishing contacts among a number of women and the kinds of activities in which the camp women engage do not demand by their very

nature outside contacts, as does, for instance, marketing.

But the search for a possible Tuareg women's sub-society is not yet complete; specifically, a description of the considerable social interaction between the sexes must be made, for this is an area in which the Tuareg differ significantly from both the Shabsavan and the Fulani.

#### IV. SOCIAL INTERACTION BETWEEN THE SEXES.

The so-called equality of men and women is surely the feature of Tuareg society most frequently discussed by observers. Traditionally, Arab peoples of the Sahara have been enraged and highly vocal about this situation, which they consider totally unorthodox. (cf. Nicolaisen 1961:116-117) Early travellers have emphatically described the position of women: e.g. -

Chez les Touâreg, la femme est l'égale de l'homme, si même, par certain côtés, elle n'est pas dans une condition meilleure.  
(Duveyrier 1864:339)

Bref ce n'est pas exagérer que de considérer la société Touareg comme une gynécocratie.  
(de Zeltér 1914:359)

Often the matrilineal structure of Tuareg society has been linked casually with the equality of the sexes. Following Nicolaisen (1959:104) the matrilineal principle is valid for 1.) succession to chiefship and succession to the rights and duties associated with the 'class' structure e.g. the privileges and obligations of the nobles towards their vassals, and 2.) inheritance of rights in lands and

other property considered indivisible. Further, as has been shown above, camp members are recruited on the basis of matrilateral ties. Finally, Duveyrier mentions that part of the bloodwealth payments are received by the eldest son of a murdered man's eldest sister. (Nicolaisen 1959:90)

By contrast, Islamic rules of inheritance, with their strong patrilineal bias, strictly apply where personal property is concerned. Similarly, camel brands are passed on from father to son. Surprisingly, Nicolaisen also notes that most Tuareg have a more complete knowledge of those people related to them patrilaterally than matrilaterally. These last several points, plus the fact the all formal positions of authority - in the family, camp and tribe - are held by males (USAH 1965:119) play havoc with the facile equation "matriliney = sex equality".

The implications of the social interaction between the sexes for a women's sub-society will be better understood if the characteristics of this interaction before, during, and after the dissolution of marriage are discussed. In this way the components of a woman's status and jural position can also be noted.

#### A.) Pre-marital chastity and the ahal.

Sources are contradictory about the degree to which pre-marital chastity is required of Tuareg women. While Blanguernon (1955:144) and Briggs (1960:129) emphasize

that all women are chaste before marriage, they seem to be acting as apologists for the Tuareg and their evidence does not accord with that of other authors,<sup>49</sup> nor is it particularly consistent with the socially approved gatherings organized by the young people. After a puberty feast which signals the assumption of adult status for both sexes (Blanguernon 1955:142-143) a boy or a girl is allowed to participate in the ahal or musical soirée.<sup>50</sup> To quote Killian (1925:152), the ahal is

...une vraie cour d'amour de jadis avec président et présidente...où l'on pose des questions insidieuses sur l'amour, sur la beauté des assistantes, où l'on chante sa belle, où l'on fait assaut de poèmes, et jusque fort tard, sous la clarté lunaire les imzaden,<sup>51</sup> de leurs soupirs caressants, invitent à la volupté pendant que l'on se conte fleurette à mivoix.

Up to 100 men and women (Briggs 1960:30-31), most of whom are unmarried, may attend an evening's ahal.

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49. Aymard (1911:95), Rodd (1926:172), Murphy (1964:1262, 1268), and Nicolaisen (1963:104, 402, 454).

50. Ahal activities as described below would seem to be similar to those of guests of both sexes at many festive occasions, particularly weddings. Because of the considerable amount of material on the ahal, I will focus attention on it, but one should not lose sight of the fact that it is typical of other Tuareg gatherings.

51. female musicians

Divorcées and widows who have the status of <sup>52</sup>asri or 'free women' also participate, and it is said that married women are allowed to join an ahal with their husband's permission. (Blanguernon 1955:144) Ihote notes that men, married, widowed, or divorced, attend these soirées. (1950:505)

Primarily the ahal and similar soirées at wedding feasts, etc., present opportunities for meeting members of the opposite sex and developing romantic attachments. Typically the ahals are organized around a woman, or women, noted for ability to play the imzad, a single-stringed

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52. The asri status is described by Fuchs (1955:143) and Lédé (1954:132-133) and it seems that Nicolas is referring to this status when he notes, "...le divorce l'émancipe totalement, elle ~~est~~ libre alors de sa main et de sa manière de vivre." (1950:495) The position of these asri women seems close, though not identical, to that of the Hausa 'prostitutes' (karuwai) described by M.G. Smith (in M.F. Smith 1954:25). Gaudry and Bourdieu discuss in some detail the similar status of the azriya of the Aures region of Algeria. (Gaudry 1929:114-126; Bourdieu 1958:30-31) In all cases, the 'free' women are those who have at sometime been married, but are temporarily without a spouse through either death or divorce. Women are allowed to be 'free' however long they want - as Ihote says of Southern Tuareg women. "Si par la suite elles deviennent veuves ou divorcées, elles peuvent se remarier à leur convenance sans l'autorisation de leurs parents." (1950:504) There is no stigma attached to the fact that they may take lovers during this period, and their ability to resume a normal marital role is not limited in any way. Tuareg women - like those in both the Aures region and in Hausaland - consider the asri status a desirable one and they frequently terminate prematurely the 'idda waiting period after death or divorce. This is done individually by travelling sometimes considerable distances to a particular kind of tree upon which the women tie objects symbolizing the asri life, thus relieving themselves of the responsibilities (e.g. continence) of the 'idda period. (cf. Fuchs 1955:163; Nicolaisen 1961:148)

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violin similar to the Arab Rebaba. These female musicians accompany the traditional and impromptu songs and poetry begun at sunset and continued long into the night, until a bowl of milk is passed round, the ahal ends, and couples go off together. Ahals are held throughout the year, and when a number of groups are camped close together (especially in April when the salt caravans return from the south and the oasis harvests are garnered) they may occur nightly. (Blanguernon 1955:96)

The freedom of adolescent girls to participate in the ahals, and the fact that there seems to be no social disapproval of the lovers' rendezvous, highlights the early independence of the Tuareg girls and seems to belie any assumption that they are chaste before marriage. Other evidence supports this last point: 1.) The devil, Iblis,

...n'est pas considéré comme celui qui donne la fécondité, mais comme l'intermédiaire du sentiment fort, de l'excitation qui est nécessaire à l'acte de la fécondation.  
(Nicolaisen 1961:124)

The Tuareg associate the devil with ahals and musical instruments like the drum and the inzad. 2.) Duveyrier and Harding King both note that a girl may travel alone by camel up to 100 km. to visit the camp of a lover where she

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53. Nicolaisen (personal communication) notes that an inzad player is any woman with talent; "It is considered difficult to learn the art and there are very few good players. Many women do not know amzad-playing at all."



will live with his relatives and take part in the ahals there. (Duveyrier 1864:332; Harding King 1903:280) and 3.) Though there is a stigma attached to pre-marital pregnancy (illegitimate children and their mother are scorned (Lhote 1950:505) and both have great difficulty getting married) though divorcées for example have no such problems (Nicolaisen 1963:467) both abortion and infanticide seem to have been practised both in the past (Duveyrier 1864:428ff.) and today. (Lhote 1950:505) The importance of this discussion to a consideration of a women's sub-society is that it establishes without doubt considerable social and probable sexual intimacy between men and women.

Women gain fame for their abilities as musicians and poets, and some few women become known throughout a confederation for their skill. (Rodd 1926:271) Ahals held by a renowned musician are widely attended (Blanguernon 1955:145); conversely, an important musician or poet's presence at someone else's ahal is considered a great honour to the hostess and all others present. (Fuchs 1955:74) The names of such women and the poems and songs that they have composed may be remembered for generations after their death. (Lédé 1954:163)

Although in the nightly gatherings themselves there is certainly no separation between the men's and women's

activities, the positions women achieve as musicians could possibly serve as the basis of a sub-society; however this does not seem to be the case for the rivalry between free-born women, which will be mentioned below in conjunction with divorce, seems manifest at the ahals.

When a woman with exceptional musical talent is available, pre-pubertal girls join her and take lessons on the imzad. (Lédé 1954:163) After puberty, when the girls begin to attend the ahals, they become rivals competing for the romantic attentions of the men. "Si la jeune fille sait jouer, elle pourra briller aux réunions musicales, où on ira la courtiser." (Benhazera 1908:6) It is a point of honour for a girl to have as many admirers as possible; it proves that she is pretty and will not have any trouble marrying. (Benhazera 1908:9)

That the ahals are potentially explosive occasions is underlined by the fact that the men will choose one of their number to act as the 'sultan' of the ahal; likewise the women will choose a 'sultana'.<sup>54</sup> These individuals who preside over the ahal are required to keep order and to insure "...that rivalries are not carried to the point of causing a breach of the peace." (Fuchs 1955:74) They seem to do this in two ways; 1.) by simple reprimand, and

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54. sultan = amrar; sultana = tamrart-n-ahal  
(Killian 1925:152)

2.) by asking questions of the participants which require wit and poise to answer - "C'est un assaut d'esprit."

(Benhazera 1908:8) These questions are a formal device which helps to control the emotional level of the ahal.

For example, a man who is courting two girls may be asked, 'Whom do you love better, X or Y?' If he answers that he loves one of them more, it is regarded as an inept answer,<sup>55</sup> and he will be ridiculed. But the offices of the sultan and sultana apparently have no permanence and last only during the soirée itself. Whatever her personal qualifications, the sultana acts as a leader, or at least a mediator, in a limited context only.

A more indirect way of checking the rivalry between women - not only at ahals but in all social interaction - is by the limits set on the expression of rivalry or jealousy. Among men, "La galanterie ...est de rigueur et la jalousie sévèrement proscrite." (Blanguernon 1955:146) A man faces social ostracism if he fights or shows anger or jealousy before a woman. Similarly, women are not supposed to show their preference for any one admirer.

Une femme qui n'aurait qu'un ami ou  
qui témoignerait plus d'affection  
pour l'un de ses adorateurs serait  
considérée comme perversie et montrée  
au doigt. (Duveyrier 1864:429)

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55. The best answer would have been that he loved both of them equally. (Benhazera 1908:8)

Ideas about sorcery also indicate the extent to which rivalry affects <sup>the</sup> Tuareg woman whom Lhote describes as "...a très mauvais caractère et de plus est souvent très jalouse." (1944:293-294) Though Nicolaisen mentions that "La magie noire est toujours chez Touaregs une chose horrible et moralement condamnable." (1961:139) both he and Blanguernon note that poisons as well as love potents are prepared with a special end in mind: when a woman wishes the death of a rival, she procures some menstrual blood of the latter and takes it to a 'student of magic' who makes a poison of it. (Nicolaisen 1961:136-137; Blanguernon 1955:115-116)

To summarize, the ahals provide an opportunity for frequent gatherings of men and women and they are indicative of the considerable interaction between the sexes. They are organized in such a way that women do not compete against men, but against other women for the favours of men.

#### B.) Choice of marriage partners.

X The choice of marriage partners is said to be left to each individual; Nicolas says,

...il y a des cas de mariage par véritable consentement mutuel formel, même quand il ne s'agit pas de veuve ou divorcée. L'avis de la jeune fille est toujours capital (ainsi que celui de sa mère), même si en principe ce sont les parents qui décident de son union. (1950:494)

and Duveyrier declares that a girl's father will never intervene to prevent a misalliance. (1864:339) But these statements may apply principally to marriages after the first, for Nicolaisen notes that first marriages are frequently arranged by the parents of the couple (also see Ihote 1950:504) and that neither a man nor a woman can marry without the consent of their close relatives. (Nicolaisen 1963:463)

Nonetheless, a certain amount of free choice must exist, for the Tuareg recognize a period before marriage when a man and woman are in love with each other and there is a joking relationship between them even though they may be unrelated. (Nicolaisen 1963:465) Further, when Nicolaisen discusses the present extensive powers of the amenukal, he notes that if a man refuses to permit his son to marry the woman of his choice, the son may appeal to the amenukal whose decision is final. (1963:400-401) Finally parents are said to induce their children<sup>not</sup> to marry against their wishes by offering them a gift of camels. (Nicolaisen 1963:102)

This freedom of choice is in some ways contradictory to the ideal of tribe and ~~estate~~ <sup>estate</sup> endogamy and the expressed preference for marriage with the mother's brother's daughter. But the discrepancy is to a great extent annulled, because the principle occasions for meeting potential marriage

partners are the ahals which are usually held by and for segments of a matrilineage.

A bridewealth of seven camels is paid for a noble woman; the payment goes to the girl's father though it is said that the offspring of the bridewealth animals are given to the bride or her children. (Nicolaisen 1963:460) In any case, in a noble marriage the groom provides the tent for the couple. (Nicolaisen 1959:117)

C.) A woman's contacts with men outside marriage.

Severe punishment is sanctioned if a woman and her lover are discovered by the husband in flagrante delicto; the latter formerly had the right to kill either or both in revenge without incurring bloodwealth obligations to their families. (Duveyrier 1864:429) Yet, it seems that such action is rarely taken and the husband merely contents himself with divorcing his wife. (Benhazera 1908:19) It is not clear from the material, but either as an alternative to divorce or when the adultery of the wife results in divorce, an indemnity of three camels from the seducer and one from the wife are paid, not <sup>to</sup> the wronged husband, but to the amenukal of Ahaggar. (Nicolaisen 1963:102)

These relatively casual responses to extra-marital affairs seem to be linked to the absence of effective discouragement before the fact. There are no restraints

associated with the idea of purdah, and women are allowed to maintain friendships with men other than their husbands. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa found that the

...women showed no modesty in the presence of men and did not veil. Yet they were assiduous in their prayers. ... The women there have friends and companions amongst the men who are related to them. So also the men have friends amongst women not related to them. A man may enter his house and find his wife with her (male) friend and yet will not disapprove. (Levy 1957:127)

An off-quoted Tuareg proverb is translated by Duveyrier: "L'ami et l'amie ... sont pour les yeux, pour le coeur, et non pour le lit seulement..." (1864:429)

✧ Though men are allowed according to Islamic precepts to have up to four wives simultaneously almost all Tuareg are monogamous though some men may take Negro concubines.

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56. After puberty women have a cloth (alechou) which they use to cover their heads; infrequently, when a woman wishes to show special respect for a man with whom she has come in contact - especially her father-in-law or a stranger - the alechou is used to cover the mouth as well. (Nicolaisen 1961:114; also see Murphy 1964:1264,1267)

57. Some few members of the clerical class (Ineslemen) and marabouts of the area may have several wives. Lhote feels that this is because of their closer contact with Islam. (1944:164) Nicolaisen mentions in passing that a man may take a second wife after having paid the first one a camel and obtained her permission (1963:102) but, in a personal communication, Nicolaisen notes that polygyny is indeed an extremely rare occurrence and a Tuareg woman will not normally allow her husband to take a second wife and would prefer a divorce to that alternative. He adds that when he was among the Ahaggar Tuareg about fifteen years ago, only two or three cases of polygyny were known to him.

The rivalry between women of the same estate, as well as romantic ideals which seem to permeate the society, may act as the most important deterrents to polygynous marriage. Unlike the men, who do not reprimand their wives for their friendships with other men, Tuareg women consistently choose to divorce their husbands rather than tolerate a rival, much less a co-wife. (Duveyrier 1864:429) Thote mentions that it is the Tuareg women who most frequently terminate a marriage by simply returning to their parents' camp, (1944:294) though Nicolaisen mentions that if a woman feels herself mistreated and returns to her parents' camp, she can be induced to return to her husband if he presents her with a camel. (1963:102)

#### D.) Divorce.

It is somewhat difficult to assess the comments about the frequency of divorce; Blanguernon (1955:149) and Briggs (1960:129) say that divorce occurs only rarely, while Aymard (1911:94), Rodd (1926:176-177), and Murphy (1964:1262) writing about the Southern Tuareg disagree. Finally, Nicolaisen notes, without giving any figures, that divorce is "...extremely common in all tribes of Ahaggar and Ayr." He adds, "Briggs' statement from the Ahaggar Tuareg that divorce is both unusual and generally frowned upon is absolutely untrue." (1963:459) I accept the latter view



that divorce is frequent and that women as easily as men can obtain one. (Nicolas 1950:494; Lhote 1950:507)

A woman at divorce returns to her father's camp, though generally any children of the marriage remain with the father until his death when they then return to the camp of their matrilineal kin. (Nicolaisen 1963:458)

With regard to bridewealth,

If a man divorces his wife because she has committed adultery, he has the right to the return of his bridewealth animals, but the Ahaggar Tuareg say that it is improper to claim the return of bridewealth whatever the cause of the divorce...(Nicolaisen 1963:467)

Nicolaisen discusses at length the interesting relationship between in-laws after a divorce: if the bridewealth is not returned, joking and avoidance relationships with in-laws persist, children of the marriage retain full rights in both families (1963:468) and in-laws continue to support each other.

...some Tuareg consider it a very good thing to have contracted several marriages and thus to have obtained many in-laws who are expected to assist their son-in-law when he needs their help. (1963:470)

Other than determining the women who will meet because of residence in the same camp (which is important but cannot alone be the basis of a sub-society), the marital situation among the Tuareg does not seem to be a significant determinant of relations between women. There

is no evidence that a wife is identified with, and accorded a position which is related to, her husband's standing in the community. The absence of any association of status between husband and wife might well be related to 1.) the frequency of divorce and the ability of both men and women to dissolve a union, 2.) the freedom of the wife to participate in activities centered outside the home, and 3.) a woman's economic independence of her husband (this last point remains to be discussed). These three points illustrate a woman's ability to dissociate her own from her husband's reputation, either by severing ties with the man, or by gaining recognition or personal fame for herself outside the home.

X The exception that seems to prove the rule is the position of the tamenukalt - that is, the wife of the amenukal. In her husband's absence she receives all official visitors with ceremony and charm. (Killian 1925: 151-152) Moreover, Lédé makes the point that the tamenukalt actually governs, at least to the extent of having her own messengers and arranging some business. (1954:139) It is obvious from the title alone that the amenukal's wife gains high standing in the community by virtue of her husband's position. The importance of the position to the woman herself is described: Fuchs tells how the wife of the amenukal Bay ag Akamuks fled her husband's camp,

leaving her position and a small child, to go with her lover, a young noble of another tribe. (1955:77ff.)

It has been emphasized by Duveyrier (1864:339) that Tuareg women usually control greater wealth than do the men, but limited material makes it difficult to understand what this statement really means. Tuareg women do inherit moveable property; other sources of income for the Ahaggar women would seem limited mainly to gifts made to them seven days after their birth, and gifts at marriage.

(Nicolaisen 1963:459) But the ability to amass wealth is not the only kind of economic independence women can have.

It has been mentioned above that a woman can at any time abandon her husband and return to her parental home to live. In this sense, there are no economic sanctions a husband can use to keep his wife in the home. Further, both Duveyrier (1864:339) and Briggs (1960:133) note that a woman need never contribute her personal wealth to support the household unless she wishes to do so, which agrees with Nicolaisen's comment that,

Within the household the husband and his wife also have their individual animals. Husband and wife can freely kill or sell the animals ~~that~~ they own without asking permission of each other, but the meat and the money acquired from sold animals should serve the benefit of all members of the same household. (1963:138)

In other words, a woman need not have any vested economic interests in her family of marriage. This is even more

clearly shown among the noble Tuareg of Niger where the women leave their own livestock with their own kin.

(Bernus 1950:32)

#### V. A WOMEN'S SUB-SOCIETY?

To reiterate, I have suggested that a degree of separation of women's activities, the opportunity for women to interact, and a medium for interaction, are all necessary for the formation of a women's sub-society. The Tuareg material provides negative evidence in support of this thesis.

Among the Tuareg nobles there is no separation of the women's activities from those of the men in terms of sexual segregation of the women, and the division of labour - where slaves do all the physical chores - means that only leatherworking, as the only manual activity (aside from playing the imzad) of the noble women, is relevant to this chapter. But leatherworking, as mentioned above, is an individual undertaking removed from economic competition. In terms of leatherworking, there is a kind of separation of activity, but it is not linked with any opportunity for interaction. It follows that leatherworking is not a focal point which women could use as the theme of a sub-society.

The rivalry between women at the ahals can be seen as a possible medium of interaction for a women's sub-

society, based on the opportunity for meeting at the ahals. Rivalry is important in this way to the extent that at each ahal a so-called 'sultana' is elected by and from the women present to keep order and control jealousy at the ahal. But this office has no permanence and lasts only during the soiree itself. In this case then, opportunity for interaction does exist but rivalry does not provide a medium of interaction. All this is to say that there is no network of women among the Tuareg, nor are there occasions when women alone participate as members of action-sets. Finally, women's relations among themselves do not seem to be structured more than along kinship lines.

This conclusion is borne out in the material I have on the social activities in which women alone participate. It is very interesting that the only two occasions<sup>58</sup> when women (and not men) gather together for a social purpose are 1.) the puberty ceremony held for a girl, and 2.) the

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58. There are other occasions when men and women do act as separate units. For example, at feasts when many people come together (e.g. at a wedding) men and women eat separately in most cases. (Personal communication from Nicolaisen.)

ceremony which marks the end of a widow or divorcee's 'idda responsibilities.

1.) A puberty ceremony is held for each girl after her first menstrual period. At this time she is given new clothes and the alechou head-cloth which marks her assumption of adult status. (Nicolaisen 1961:114, Benhazera 1908:5) Unfortunately, it is not clear exactly how many and which women participate and it is said by the Tuareg themselves that the ceremony is not a very important one. (Personal communication from Nicolaisen).

2.) On the last day of her waiting period a woman is escorted by the women of her camp to the top of a nearby hill where she watches the sunrise. (Lédé 1954:191) There a collection is made for her benefit. (Benhazera 1908:24)

I submit that in both of these cases the principal - either the girl at puberty or the woman after 'idda - is in fact being formally introduced or reintroduced into the competitive world of women. Prepubescent girls and women in 'idda do not participate in the ahal rivalry for lovers and musical renown; by virtue of the two ceremonies - rites de passage - described above, other women relieve the principal of her non-participation and transform her into a rival to be accepted on equal terms. In other words, both of these activities serve to free the principal from 'the separation of women's activities from those of the men' rather than to confirm any female exclusiveness.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis is twofold: first, to describe the women's sub-society of the Shabsavan which seems to represent a form of social organization hitherto unconsidered in the literature; and second, to determine to what extent the three requirements essential to the development of such a sub-society can be used as predictive tools when applied to other communities.

The implication of the Shabsavan material is that a consideration of women's activities among themselves can be very important to an understanding of all social relations in a community. I have shown that the Shabsavan women's sub-society functions as an information service and as a means of social control. It is also possible that it acts as a psychological outlet for women in a 'male-dominated' society. These points will be elaborated, but first it should be made clear that I do not claim that only a sub-society is so structured as to fulfil these functions. The sub-society as described above is simply one alternative and certainly other forms of social organization effect the same ends. For example, Kaberry in Women of the Grassfields notes that the women's societies among the Bamenda have similar functions, though these societies (there are a number of them) are corporate

associations. (1952:98ff.)

1.) Among the Shahsavan, the information service as it exists at feasts enables a free exchange of news and information which is especially important in the larger society. It has been shown that a woman's status in the larger society is ascribed according to sex, family of birth, marriage, and age. For these reasons and because of the stability of marriage, her interests in the larger society are wholly identified with the well-being of her children and husband; when women at feasts gossip and exchange news on economic affairs and marriages, etc., the information is used, by aiding or pressuring their husbands, for the benefit of the family.

Clearly this is a situation in which

...the formal framework of economic and political power exists alongside or intermingled with various other kinds of informal structure, which are interstitial, supplementary, parallel to it; ...(Wolf 1966:2)

Aswad (1967) describes a situation which seems to resemble the Shahsavan information service. In a Muslim, land-owning lineage community in Turkey -

Although their influence is important, the majority of the women of the patrilineage remain more peripheral to major economic and political decisions. Their communication network is more informal, they gossip freely and move more freely between various sections of the village and kinship structure than men may. They therefore acquire and spread



information sometimes unattainable to men directly. While men are restricted in their visiting and speech patterns in accordance with political alliances and coalitions, women's relations with each other are somewhat freer from these restraints, partially because of the more heterogeneous background of the women with whom they live and work, i.e. including inmarrying women. (1967:149)

In so far as the women involved in this communication network share a system of common values, it is not unlikely that a women's sub-structure and sub-society may exist. This may also be so in the situation described by Bourdieu, where again women exchange information which is important in the larger society. Among the Kabyle, a fountain in the village is the place of the women. Here they carry gossip of their private lives and exchange news of a kind which men could never discuss without dishonour and for which they must rely on their wives to be informed (Bourdieu 1965:222). Similarly, in villages of South Kurdistan, the women

...have access to information, especially gossip, which the head of the family has not, and may thus be of some importance. The main aggregations of women where such gossip is exchanged are found around the water-hole, where water for the house is fetched, and clothes washed and beaten. (Barth 1953:105-106)

In both of these village cases, as among the Shaksavan, the women who participate in each network are governed by a similar constellation of social values. But a network along which information passes does not necessarily imply

a shared value-system or structured relationships among all the women involved. To the extent that the network represents a continuum of values and interests and only the women at one point along it have the same social styles, it is not characteristic of a women's sub-society. Epstein's concepts of effective and extended networks are again useful. In the effective network which "...consists of clusters of persons fairly closely knitted together." there is a tendency "...for status differentiation to be minimized;..."(1961:57) In other words people of an effective network are likely to share values and standards of behaviour, whereas these concepts may not be recognized or approved by people remotely linked with ego in the extended network. Such a case where there is no sub-society implied in an exclusive women's information network is described by Riegelhaupt. The material concerns a Portuguese rural area close to Lisbon, the capital of the country.

Were contacts of women confined to those with other village women only, the kinds of information to which they would have access would probably be quite limited. However, ... women also have contacts outside the village. These are two types: contacts made through marketing; and contacts established by virtue of domestic service. (1967:118)

Effort to engage in [many political activities] require a villager (or the community) to use "connections" (i.e. people who have access to important officials). ...it is through their access to *conhecimentos* [contacts] that women ...play significant roles in village life. (1967:122-123)

...many women spend periods of time in the city as either maids, seamstresses, or cooks. During these times they often encounter persons of sufficient prestige who, at other times, may be useful as contacts, contacts which are not generally available to most men. In this way, their external communication networks enable women to have access to a larger number and "higher-up" group of other decision-makers. (1967:125)

2.) As a means of social control, the women's sub-society of the Shahsavan functions in several ways. First it is the only social arena in which women can air and settle disputes among themselves. These disputes, as was noted, are often caused by issues in the larger society when a woman takes her husband's part in a quarrel with other men. Especially in quarrels within the herding group, when the men - usually a group of brothers or other close agnates - are constrained not to fight among themselves and cannot overtly compete against each other, it is their wives who in their relations with other women of the camp react to the underlying issues.

These quarrels among women which can have definite ramifications in the larger society (e.g. women are often the efficient cause of household or even herding group fission) are discussed at feasts or with a woman leader. At a feast not only do the disputants themselves have a chance to discuss matters (for they would probably never

visit each other in the camp itself) but public opinion about the quarrel can be assessed and the most acceptable alternative can be pursued; likewise a solution in line with the consensus of opinion can be found when a woman puts her case privately before an aq birček or other leader. Further, an aq birček can with some ease then speak to men about these quarrels among their women-folk or even about the men's own quarrels. A similar kind of channel for social control which links the female and male spheres of interest is noted by Aswad in her discussion of the Turkish village noted above.

Women have also been responsible for preventing major internal conflicts between men of the lineage. Stories are told of how they ran into the middle of some conflicts, yelling and crying for the unity of the lineage. Their gossip is also instrumental in indirectly affecting political decisions, as well as the behaviour of both men and women. The widows who have substituted for men work in both arenas, and are highly respected by both men and women if they are successful. They are also consulted for the influence in both sections, and can be said to serve as sub-culture brokers. (1967:150)

The sanction of public opinion, which maintains certain norms of behaviour and reinforces shared values, is an important aspect of the social control which stems from the women's sub-society. As Paine says, gossip is "...a catalyst of social process". and "...a powerful social instrument for any person who learns to manage it

and can thereby direct or canalize its catalytic effect."

(1967:283) Shahsavan women leaders do just that. Moreover, since much of a leader's position depends on adherence to the traditions of the community, it is these values which are confirmed in the leader's comments and opinions. Her advice is accepted in part simply because it does represent a standard acceptable to all the women. Because the feast gatherings are occasions when a woman's actions are assessed by the other women present and her standing in the sub-society is dependent to a great extent on this assessment, she is very conscious of public opinion and acts accordingly.

It is interesting that in another community where women's activities are to a great extent isolated from those of the men, the women are also highly sensitive to the standards set by other women. It would seem that this is because the women have little contact with standards of behaviour other than those generated in their own village, which might be used to justify unorthodox behaviour.

Pitt-Rivers says of women in a Spanish pueblo:

... women play a predominant part in the home, and, on that account, in the structure of neighbourly relations. And this may be allied to the fact that the women are in the pueblo all the time while the majority of men must leave it in order to work.  
(1954:112)

He also notes that because the women are continually in the town they are most susceptible "...to the sanctions

of personal criticism or gossip in the dissemination of which they play a more important part [than the men]..." (1954:121)

The isolation of women also characterizes the information passed in Aswad's Turkish village:

In regard to transmitting traditional values, the position of women is clear, particularly in an area in which women do not engage in marketing produce. Among dominant lineages, ... women marry endogamously and seldom travel to town. Their communication network, although extensive within the village and adjoining villages, is limited in terms of urban relations. A clear example of this is provided in language patterns. The women ... speak only the native tongue of the community, Arabic. The majority of the men know Turkish as a second language. (1967:150)

3.) That the women's sub-society provides a possible psychological outlet for the Shahsavan women in a male-dominated society cannot of course be proven. But in this context it is important to realize that in the larger society a woman is classified and ranked only according to her ascribed status, whereas within the sub-society her total social personality is relevant; her position and power within the sub-society corresponds to the sum of her ascribed and achieved statuses. This of course does allow intelligent, dynamic women to exercise responsibility in ways which are compatible with their abilities and skills, an opportunity not offered by domestic work,

in which all women are equally competent - even with regard to weaving - the only 'artistic' endeavour attempted.

Lewis goes into this question of an outlet or compensatory mechanism for women who are excluded from, or totally lacking, authority in many social spheres, in his article, "Spirit Possession and Deprivation Cults" (1966). He feels that spirit possession offers women an opportunity for expression which is otherwise denied them. Among the Somali, spirit possession "...operates...as a limited deterrent against the abuses of neglect and deprivation in a conjugal relationship which is heavily biased in favour of men." (314); while for Hausa women also discussed, the "...inability of the Hausa women to participate adequately in the ceremonial and public life of Islam leaves a gap which is filled by the spirit-possession cult." (309; taken from M.F. Smith, 1954:271)

I suggest that a women's sub-society may provide an alternative route to these same ends. That is, in so far as the women control information which they can use to direct their husband's behaviour, and the women leaders are able to express the women's opinions to men, the Shahsavan women's sub-society can act to control decisions taken in the larger society; while the recognition of achievement and personal characteristics within the sub-

society would seem to compensate for the dependent position of women in the larger society.

The three requirements abstracted from the Shahsavan material as being essential for the development of a women's sub-society seem to be important tools to determine the existence or non-existence of such sub-societies. By approaching the comparative material with these requirements in view, I am able to predict that among the Fulani it is very possible that a women's sub-society does exist, even though its functions and internal organization can only be guessed at because of the lack of material; while it seems unlikely that one would be found among the Tuareg where the three requirements are definitely not met.

It is important to remember that these three requirements might be fulfilled in any number of ways other than those described for the Shahsavan and the Fulani. For example, among the Baggara Arabs a women's sub-society may be based on the informal political role of women. The women play no formal part in Humr political life, and a woman's life is private while a man's life is largely public, (Cunnison 1966:116) but women are arbitrators of men's conduct. They can make or break a political career by singing songs of praise or mockery. Undistinguished men go unsung, while songs of other men sweep the country and can make their reputations. Also political decisions



made by men of a camp of a surra are influenced by the kinds of reactions that the women of the camp are likely to have towards them. The women can challenge a man's honour and force action in terms of the values they hold. (1966:117) Women and girls sing around the fires; with the changing patterns of residence at all times of the year, the songs, and hence men's reputations, are spread throughout the tribe. (1963:31) It is possible to see that in spite of the relatively small size of camp groups, the frequent changes of residence provide an opportunity for interaction among the women exclusively, for considerable social segregation of the sexes is observed. The praise-singing in which "...the influence [of a woman] which she exerts in political life is immense, and the qualities she extols are those which have a special bearing for her kind of society." (1963:31) is a likely medium of interaction.

Though it is vital to emphasize the important part women's sub-societies might play in pastoral, Islamic communities where hitherto little attention has been paid to women's activities and their influence on the larger society, it is possible by the use of the three requirements to discover women's sub-societies in communities other than those which are nomadic, Muslim, and 'male-dominated'. This is feasible so long as the boundaries

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 This is feasible so long as the boundaries of the communities are such that all women have a shared value system and common interests which differ in some way from those of the men. Such a situation is described by Frankenburg in Village on the Border. Here

The men's interests are largely turned towards the problems and amusements of the industrial society outside, while the women remain pre-occupied, despite the influence of radio and television, with the affairs of the village. This difference in outlook pervades all social activity and provides a major division in village social life which cuts across all others. ... In Pentredywaith men and women only unite; ... to condemn the external circumstances which have forced them apart. (1957:151)

The women form the most compact and the most integrated of the two sex-groups. They, unlike the men, share the same work problems, and spend all, or nearly all, their time in the village itself. They meet each other in the shops, drop in on each other during the daytime for cups of tea in one another's houses. They discuss village affairs while sewing and preparing equipment for social functions. When in the few mixed committees there is a clash of opinion it tends to divide the committee along sex lines and the women, who have discussed the issue in advance, often win. (1957:52-53)

The women's relations among themselves are structured in a number of ways which are illustrated by the women's activities on the ground: for example at the sewing-group meetings, where

...the women were sometimes able to reach unanimity in their attitude to certain

matters before they had ever been discussed in open committee. Other conflicts were resolved during the discussions of this informal work group and never came into the open at all. (1957:132)

or in the Football Supporter's Club or in other committees where

The side that people took was determined not by an impartial, objective judgement on the real issues involved, but by their own social position in the community as individuals and as members of particular groups. At the same time the division of interests between men and women dominated the discussions. (1957:147)

It has been shown that women's relationships with other women can be significant to an understanding of social relations in a community as a whole. If a women's sub-society exists, it may act as an information service, as a means of social control, and as a psychological outlet for women.

Three requirements which would appear to be essential for the development of a sub-society have been abstracted; they may be fulfilled in a number of ways and may lead to the discovery of women's sub-societies in communities other than those which are nomadic, Muslim, and 'male-dominated'.

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