

Abbreviations

DS	Demokratska stranka	Democratic Party
DSS	Demokratska stranka Srbije	Democratic Party of Serbia
G17 Plus	G17 Plus	G17 Plus
SPO	Srpski pokret obnove	Serbian Renewal Movement
SPS	Socijalistička partija Srbije	Socialist Party of Serbia
SRS	Srpska radikalna stranka	Serbian Radical Party

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Power vs. Consent in Tribal Political Systems in Iran: Salzman on the Basseri Khan

Comments on an Extreme View

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In the spectrum of Near Eastern tribal political systems and types of leadership, Iran stands out in that forms of undoubted centralised authority and effective exertion of power developed there. Nevertheless, even in the most distinct cases, such as those of the Qashqa'i and Bakhtyari, a strong segmentary counterweight represented by the leaders of component subgroups, and hence an element of dependence and transactionality, has remained. It is this element or aspect that has received most attention in the modern theoretical treatment of these systems (see, e.g., Loeffler 1978). Not surprisingly, it has also often been overemphasized and exaggerated in accordance with the individualist, antiessentialist, and symbolist tendencies of modern theoriz-

ing – see, for example, the change in content and style noticeable in Lois Beck's articles of 1983 and 1990 respectively. A recent and quite extreme case in this development is Salzman's (2000) reassessment of the role of the Basseri khan (as depicted in Barth's seminal monograph of 1961) in which the above-mentioned trends are still reinforced by a postmodernist preference for construction, superficiality, and appearance, and, it must be said, a postmodernist nonchalance in the treatment of the writings of other authors (cf. Barth 1992; Street 1992). This review article¹ is the subject of the present short contribution.

That Salzman has chosen Barth's analysis for his reinterpretation is no coincidence. It is true that Digard denounces it as a further example of the "rite[s] de l'anthropologie nord-américaine, qui consiste à procéder à la nième relecture critique de l'ouvrage *Nomads of South Persia* (1961) de Fredrik Barth" (2000: 179). However, these efforts may well be conceded a more rational motivation: given the book's character as the opening document of the modern anthropology of Iranian tribes and as their "classic ethnography" (Bradburd 1992: 315), it seems that any new insights gained in relation to it are bound to be of wider significance. This also holds true for Salzman's views – and, consequently, for their critical examination. Decisive for Salzman, however, is the fact that the theory put to work in "Nomads" proved in retrospect to be in line with the general direction which anthropological theory since has taken. This imparts to the book an aspect of lasting modernity. For the same reason it can be regarded as a sort of precursor, as heralding achievements of which it held the potential but which it itself did not attain. It is possible, therefore, to criticize it from the vantage point of insights, which its author failed to secure but which – supposedly – lie in the line of his theorizing.

This is the stance Salzman assumes in his reinterpretation of the role and power of the Basseri khan as depicted by Barth. Whereas the latter viewed the power of the khan as dependent on the inability of ordinary members to create effective resistance, Salzman considers it virtually nonexistent, an illusion jointly upheld by the khan and the tribesmen in an effort to impress other tribes and representatives of the state. However, Salzman declares this reduction of khan power to mere "image management" to be "Barthian in spirit" (2000: 50). He claims, in other words, that his thesis represents

an insight Barth himself would have gained if he had pursued his analysis far enough.

Not surprisingly, therefore, Salzman's reinterpretation is an attempt to demonstrate that Barth had "overstated" the power of the khan and "understated" his dependence on the consent of the tribesmen. The aim of the present observations is to show that Salzman does not arrive at his somewhat extravagant result by simply correcting Barth's contentions but by reversing them, that is, by *understating* the power of the khan and *overstating* the importance of consent. To achieve this, he resorts in more than one instance to distorted representations of data, statements, and conclusions, and to rhetorical devices in amplifying the latter.

Note should also be taken of a more general flaw in Salzman's article. By concentrating on the outcome of Barth's analysis and criticizing the lack of determination in his conclusions, Salzman passes over the major problematic point in the foundation of Barth's study. It is the fact that in the historical situation from which Barth proceeded, the political system of the Basseri, similar to all other tribes in the region, had undergone profound change and lost much of its significance. It is important to note that this applies not just to the time of Barth's fieldwork (1958) but also to the time-span shortly beforehand (1956), as envisaged by Barth in his reconstruction of the system (1961: 71, fn. 1). Hence although the approach adopted by Salzman of pinpointing commoners rather than the leaders of subgroups (*tīre*, *tāyefe*) as the opponents of the khan in the tribal power-household (cf. Ganzer 1988: 47f.) may make sense for that particular stage – judging from comparative evidence it is undoubtedly a misconception in relation to periods prior to this (see, e.g., Loeffler 1978; Ganzer 2005).² The same holds true for the equally basic assertion that the khan "lacked substantial coercive means" (Salzman 2000: 52). Considering the existence, in all the tribes of the region, of officials (*tofāngčī*) in the khan's retinue, whose duty it was to apply this very coercion,³ it is only plausible for the period subsequent to the above-mentioned change. Hence the facts Salzman attempts to reinterpret are confined to a specific period, a particular phase in the development of Basseri society, and any propositions on these facts would have to be qualified accordingly.

1 Salzman, Philip Carl: Hierarchical Image and Reality. The Construction of a Tribal Chiefship. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42.2000: 49–66.

2 Cf. Tapper: "I would argue that Basseri ethnography is totally inappropriate for extrapolation onto earlier nomadic tribes, for various reasons" (1990: 60).

3 See, e.g., Loeffler 1978; Fazel 1979; H. Gāffārī 1368 [1989]; Šafī-Nežād 1368 [1989]; Šāhbāzī 1366 [1987]; Mağdī 1372 [1992]: 463f.

Salzman completely fails to do this. Instead, he couches his statements in a comprehensive, though undeclared, ethnographic present, the tone of which he sets in the very first sentence of the article.

Salzman grounds his allegation of Barth's "overstating" on a number of arguments. One of them is the consideration that – contrary to Barth's claim – the ordinary Basseri tribesmen were well capable of resistance vis-à-vis the khan, since they possessed the tools of military force, i.e., firearms and riding horses (2000: 53). According to Salzman it is difficult to reconcile Barth's image of the "omnipotent, autocratic chief and his subservient, submissive subjects" with the "reality of a universal distribution of the means of armed coercion among skilled and hardy tribesmen" (2000: 53).

This argument is the first and most obvious example of Salzman's use of the *gradatio*, i.e., the gradual amplification of a concept or statement. Ascending from the initial references "Many Basseri owned horses for riding (Barth 1961: 6)" (2000: 53) and "Firearms were esteemed (Barth 1961: 74, 88)" (53) over the conclusion "Thus the tools of military force – firearms and riding horses – were in the hands of ordinary tribesmen" (53) he reaches the climax by declaring the aforementioned "universal distribution of the means of armed coercion" an established fact (53, compare "All tribesmen were warriors and owned weapons and riding animals, and had the skill and inclination to use them"; 62). As a matter of fact, Barth said much less than is attributed to him by Salzman in the two references: At no time does he mention that "many Basseri" owned horses (see Barth 1961: 6),⁴ and the remark concerning the high esteem of weapons, while in itself undoubtedly true, is a conjecture of Salzman, drawn from factual information about ceremonial gifts (2000: 53).

Judged independently, with or without its being couched in Salzman's dubious present tense, the assertion concerning the distribution of firearms is untenable. In the societies in question, distribution was certainly less than universal in Qajar times as well as in the period following forced disarmament during the Reza Shah regime. Distribution reached its peak in the years after the latter's removal (1941) when the tribes of the south and southwest carried out a large series of attacks on army and gendarmerie posts with the

primary aim of securing weapons and ammunition (Taḳawī-Moqaddam 1377 [1998]: 407 ff.). But even then, not every tribesman owned a rifle. After the fall of the garrison at Semirum (1943), for example, when more than 3,000 weapons fell into the hands of the victorious Boyr-Ahmad (Şafī-Nežād 1368 [1989]: 455), tribal blacksmiths were occupied with converting automatic guns from the booty into ordinary rifles (Ṭāherī n.d.) – indicating that despite this huge influx the supply of rifles was still inadequate.⁵ It was sufficient for tribal warfare, but tribal warfare and raiding generally involved only a limited number of armed men. For the Bahma'i of Kohgiluyeh their percentage – as against various unarmed supply troops – was estimated by Şafī-Nežād as not more than 23 percent.⁶ Moreover, the ratio of weapons per tribe does not give an accurate picture since their distribution was unequal. Khans and lesser leaders held large stocks of weapons with which they equipped their armed retainers (Şafī-Nežād 1368 [1989]: 474,⁷ Şahbāzī 1366 [1987]: 95; Mağdī 1372 [1992]: 464).⁸ That firearms were a scarce commodity is also visible in much of the tribal folk poetry, where rifles and the desire for them – equalling the desire for a beautiful girl – are a prominent theme (Y. Gaffārī 1362 [1983]; Friedl 1977/78).

If for the sake of argument one were to concede the universal availability of firearms, the question of how this potential for resistance was exploited would still remain. Salzman's answer is a conjectural inference, again followed by a *gradatio* leading to a supposition of fact: "[I]f arms could be turned against foreign enemies, could they not also have been turned against internal enemies? If a chief could have been brought down by an assassin's bullet, he could have also been brought down by a rebel's bullet" (2000: 53). "Yet Basseri

4 Concerning the Boyr-Ahmad of 1909, the British Vice-Consul in Shiraz (in a letter to the Legation, December 15th, 1909) remarked that "only a small number" of their fighters were mounted (National Archives, Parliamentary Papers, Cd 5656).

5 A month after this event, one section of the Boyr-Ahmad raided the town of Ardakan. In a telegram to the Legation in Tehran (August 16th, 1943), the British consul in Shiraz specified the attacking body as "700 bandits of which 200 were armed" (National Archives, FO 248/1420, Internal situation: Fars 1943).

6 Şafī-Nežād 1368 [1989]: 460; cf. Beck 1983: 308; Şahbāzī 1366 [1987]: 95; Bayāt 1365 [1986]: 118.

7 Şafī-Nežād presents the facsimile of a list, dressed before a raid, containing the names of the guard members, the type of weapons handed out (to be returned after the raid), and the number of cartridges given to each man (1368 [1989]: 475).

8 Cf. the following observation made by a British intelligence officer: "On my last visit to Kazerun I was told that some of these Cheriks [road guards] were earning their living by hiring out their rifles for a portion of the loot . . ." (National Archives, FO 248/1409: Intelligence report [Information obtained during a tour to the Mamassani area], March 5th, 1942).

commoners, as we have seen, had many resources of resistance at their disposal: ... threat of or actual violent attack ...” (54). “The ineffective or oppressive tribal chief, if he survived assassination ...” (55). Acts of this kind committed by individual common tribesmen or small groups (cf. p. 55) are presented in this manner as something normal. In actual fact, they were at best a rare exception. In the history of endless succession conflicts, at least in Kohgiluyeh, there is no known case of a khan having been killed by a commoner, unless he acted on the order of a person of higher rank. Even assassination by subleaders was a very rare occurrence.

Salzman seeks to support his argument by quoting a remark made by Bahman-Begī (in the translation by Monteil (1966: 134)) on the Qashqa’i: “Le fait ... que les nomades soient armés et de caractère vif rend la tyrannie (*estebdād*) impossible” (2000: 53). But he fails to take notice of the paragraph immediately after it (omitted in Monteil’s translation), where Bahman-Begī admits that to some extent fear constituted the basis of the khans’ power and that their capricious volition occasionally had disastrous effects on the life of the tribesmen (Bahman-Begī 1324 [1945]: 57). The same author mentions tribesmen as inmates of a sort of mobile prison of the *īlḥānī* (paramount leader of the Qashqa’i), who followed the movements of his camp in chains.⁹ The fact that such *estebdād* or *zōlm* existed in all of these societies is a fact beyond question. Writing on the Boyr-Ahmad, Loeffler mentions a striking example of this, commenting on the bad reputation of the above-mentioned *tofangčī*, which was the outcome of “lending a hand in that gravest of all moral trespasses, oppression.”¹⁰ The danger of khan rule becoming oppression – to the detriment also of the central state – was omnipresent. Pretenders for *zōlm*

to harm their opponents in the eyes of the state authorities (Taqawī-Moqaddam 1377 [1998]: 268). In some cases where degeneration had already occurred and become intolerable, the khan was done away with by someone who thus promoted both factional interests and the welfare of the tribe as a whole (Akbarī 1370 [1991]: 26 ff.; Taqawī-Moqaddam 1377 [1998]: 260). This someone was, however, not an ordinary tribesman but a subleader or a conspiratorial group of subleaders. In the light of all this it seems clear that the chance of falling victim to a malcontent commoner was certainly not a factor that would have scared the khans into making concessions that weakened their power.

The second factor to have this effect according to Salzman was the almost unrestricted mobility of the subjects that enabled them to withdraw from the khan’s reign: “This mobility gave them a full capacity of rapid and complete retreat from threats of any kind. Tribesmen could have, if they wished, literally walked or ridden away from their chief” (2000: 53). Their aim in such cases was to affiliate themselves to another chief, which was not a difficult feat considering that “[t]he presence of neighboring tribes and their chiefs presented alternative leadership options for common tribesmen ... If tribesmen believed that their interests were better served by the chief of a neighboring tribe, they could have switched allegiance” (54).

Salzman adopts this view from Barth, who likewise has described the relationship of the tribesmen to the khans as characterized by option. According to him, the authority of a strong khan was felt in neighbouring tribes too and could lead to a change of rule: “Camps, oulads and sections seek out the strong chief and submit to him ... Any imbalance between tribes in the effectiveness of centralized authority stimulates an extension of the stronger centre’s claims to authority, and a voluntary flow of commoners from the weaker to the stronger centre” (Barth 1961: 85). It is important, however, to be aware of the “stamp of Swat” (Paine 1982) in this notion, i.e., of the bias resulting from Barth’s former research on the Pakhtun of northern Pakistan. The landlords there were said to have competed for the services of the landless non-Pakhtun – the concept of khan authority as a competitive relationship for the allegiance of commoners and its implications, as cited above, bears the unmistakable imprint of this model. The bias at work here is also apparent in the examples given by Barth. Whereas the “flow” in the above quotation is presented as voluntary and the relation between the protagonists of the affiliation process as essentially individualistic, the subjects of the changes are nowhere con-

9 Bahman-Begī 1368 [1989]: 56, 79f.; see also Akbarī 1370 [1991]: 161; Šafī-Nežād 1368 [1989]: 599; Mağīdī 1372 [1992]: 468f.

10 Loeffler 1978: 155; cf. Hošeynī 1373 [1994]: 14; see also Akbarī 1370 [1991]: 22f.; Mağīdī 1372 [1992]: 463f., 469; Taqawī-Moqaddam 1377 [1998]: 260; Ganzler 2000: 77f.

As late as 1943, it was possible for members of the tribal elite to commit acts such as the following: “Malek Mansur, the juvenile chief of the Basht Bavi, has recently further weakened his position. A kadhoda of the Bekesh tribe, into which Malek Mansur has recently married, was robbed of his rifle while visiting a Bavi encampment. Malek Mansur quite naturally visited the camp, but, finding the culprit absent, is reported to have had six of his relations shot; he is said to have killed two of the relatives – mere boys – with his own hand” (National Archives, FO 371/35090: Ahwaz situation reports, Ahwaz diaries, 16th to 31st July 1943).

glomerates of single households but named tribal sections – with the right of the option undoubtedly lying with the leaders of these, not the common tribesmen (Barth 1961: 85f.). Likewise, an observation on flows and the implied change of locality sheds light on the “voluntariness” of these processes: “Defections from the tribe by larger groups of commoners are caused ... by the ruthlessness[s] of strong chiefs ...” (Barth 1961: 84). Although Salzman quotes this sentence, he introduces it in such a way that its meaning is seriously distorted. For him, the abandonment “resulted from tribesmen’s *rejection* of their tribal chief” (2000: 54, my italics). Thus, what in reality is a desperate measure or flight becomes in his interpretation the exercise of an option or a vote.¹¹

Comparative evidence, too, shows the assertion that changes of this kind were voluntary to be questionable. In Kohgiluyeh, for example, their main reason – apart from the punitive dislocations ordered by the state (see, e.g., Mağīdī 1372 [1992]: 233, 418f.) – was defeat in factional and intertribal struggles.¹² The groups that took refuge with neighbouring tribes did not resort to this measure on the grounds of discontent or in the hope that their interests would be “better served” there but because they were actually driven from their homelands or dreaded being subjected to *gārat*, i.e., campaigns of wholesale plundering. Leaving the country meant the loss of numerous tribal and familial relations and the adoption of a precarious and reduced status that was to last for many years. The associated perils were even greater for single households and individuals (cf. Ganzer 1988: 45). Only an exigency like the threat of blood revenge could motivate such a step, but certainly not the prospect of some limited advantage.

With the factuality of the “leadership option” proving to be no less doubtful than that of universal armament, Salzman’s thesis that Basseri commoners were under no obligation or pressure to obey their chiefs seems groundless. Sure of having established it, however, Salzman proceeds to pose the question as to why they nevertheless obeyed the chiefs. In his interpretation, they did so out of their

own free will: “[T]he Basseri chief was able to rule because he had the consent of his tribesmen ... He knew that their consent was the foundation of his political power” (2000: 55).

In support of this contention, Salzman brings another quotation from Bahman-Begī who, allegedly, “stresses the sensitivity of chiefs to the preferences of his [sic] tribesmen” in the appointment of sub-chiefs (2000: 55). According to the author in question (as translated by Monteil [1966: 134] and cited by Salzman) the *ilkhān* of the Qashqā’i “ne peut nommer chef de tribu ou de clan que celui des candidats ... que soutient l’opinion publique. ... En général, les nomades peuvent choisir leurs chefs” (2000: 55). This appears to be a clear statement in favour of Salzman’s argument – but is it really the case? It is regrettable that Salzman draws on the translation rather than the original Persian text, as the tenor of the latter is quite different to that of its French rendering. The restriction of freedom of choice does not relate here to public opinion but to the exclusiveness of succession, hereditary in certain lineages. Monteil’s translation omits the entire issue. The taking into account of public opinion is merely an additional point in the original text, a moral injunction to be observed by a good ruler, and not something that effectively restricts him in his choices (Bahman-Begī 1324 [1945]: 57).

In the second part of the quotation, the omission is on Salzman’s side: The dots separating the first and second part represent 12 lines in Monteil’s translation and a full 25 lines, or four paragraphs, in the original text. Understandably, the topic changes after that. What Bahman-Begī says in the passage is this: when pretenders for leadership agree on the partition of their *ṭāyefe* in an attempt to avoid discord and fighting, the choice of allegiance to one or the other of the ensuing halves (*ṭaraf*) is occasionally left to the members of that *ṭāyefe*. Of late, this has become the rule (Bahman-Begī 1324 [1945]: 58). Monteil’s use of “chefs” for *ṭaraf* in his translation of the passage seems defensible in the context and does not lead to misunderstanding. It does so, however, in Salzman’s quotation, where the phrase has been stripped of its context and appears (and is meant to appear) as a general statement on relations between khan and commoners – enjoying the special dignity of coming from an author who, “himself a member of the powerful Qashqai tribal confederacy” (2000: 53), has to be regarded as an unassailable authority on the matter.

It would be of no avail to add further examples of *zōlm* and *estebād* to those already given above in refuting Salzman’s contention. Only when the term “consent” is understood in a very gen-

11 Cf. Beck (1990: 195): “Leaders were usually limited in their ability to apply force because tribespeople could ‘vote with their feet,’ deny allegiance to leaders, and form ties with other groups and leaders.” Some years earlier it read: “The actions and demands of leaders were checked by the ability of dissatisfied followers to sever their ties. Leaders dissatisfied with tribal followers were also, however, in a position to apply sanctions and punishments” (1983: 309).

12 Bāwar 1324 [1945]: 88; Mağīdī 1372 [1992]: 377; Şafī-Nezād 1368 [1989]: 709; Akbarī 1370 [1991]: 160.

eral sense can the assertion that the power of the khans was dependent on consent of the tribesmen be said to have some truth. There was undoubtedly consent to the khans' rule inasmuch as it afforded protection against other tribes and the central state, held the prospect of booty in warfare and robbery, helped to maintain the superior status of nomad and tribesman as distinct from that of defenceless peasant, and constituted an element of tribal grandeur. Less consent was clearly the case with regard to material exaction in its various forms, e.g., taxes, tributes, and levies, and, above all, with regard to the injustice and oppression into which khan rule frequently degenerated. Fundamentally, of course, this rule was accepted because there was no alternative to it. Only when the potential of resistance of the tribes had been destroyed by the development of military techniques and the state had begun to change its policy by turning threats and benefits directly towards the nomads did consent in this nonspecific sense begin to dwindle, impairing the khans' overall political stature in the process. The failure of the last uprising of the Boyr-Ahmad in 1963 was due to these factors (cf. Taqawī-Moqaddam 1377 [1998]: 517 ff.). So, khan power was in a certain sense dependent on consent, but certainly not to the extent alleged by Salzman, according to whom "the 'effective and continuous exercise' of his [the khan's] authority ... required that he only command what he knew his tribesmen were willing to obey, to lead only where his tribesmen were willing to follow" (2000: 62).

Having criticized Salzman's thesis up to this point, I will be brief on its final conclusion, i.e., the assertion that "[t]his image of the omnipotent chief and his obedient subjects ... can be appreciated as a conspirational misrepresentation jointly engineered ... by the chief and the commoners. This 'presentation of (collective) self' was the facade exhibited by the Basseri to the wider world, to encourage respect and fear and discourage opposition and aggression" (2000: 58).

The main evidence to support this idea comes from a passage by Lancaster (1981: 82f.) relating to a feast given by Rwala-Bedouin sheikhs for visiting officials. In the course of their dealings, "impression management" came into play, the impression conveyed being one of "power and magnificence" (in Salzman 2000: 58): "All these services were performed by slaves and servants at a sign from the sheikh and every action was carried out promptly. One would have said that they went in fear of their lives if they disobeyed or were even careless." Evidence that this was no more than a show manifested itself the moment the guests had departed. All pre-

tension of command and obedience was dropped: "The slaves lolled in the recently vacated seats, the sheikhs poured their own tea ... I heard the same slaves, those paragons of domestic service, telling the sheikh that it was too hot to do what he had asked, he'd have to do it himself" (Lancaster in Salzman 2000: 58f.). This is clearly an indisputable example of impression management. Less clear, however, is the precise quality or relation exhibited in the show. The last sentence in the quotation (which Salzman fails to comment on) raises some doubt: "How far anyone is taken in by these phoney displays of omnipotence is hard to say; presumably other Bedu aren't, but maybe government officials and other non-Bedu guests are, to some degree" (Lancaster in Salzman 2000: 59). This leads one to suspect that the object of the exercise was not to demonstrate the omnipotence of the chief or submission to him but the unreserved dedication of all group members, from sheikh to slave, to the well-being of the guests – in other words, that it might not have been submission in the political sense but in the very different one of Goffman's "deference" (1956).

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How Friarbird Got His Helmet

Some Novel Features in an Eastern Indonesian Narrative

David Hicks

In 1992 Gregory Forth drew attention to the appearance of the friarbird as one of two antagonists in ten narratives (considered as a set) from eastern Indonesia, the other being another bird of variable species, and after subjecting the stories to a structural analysis, elicited several recurrent themes. The pivot upon which the plot turns is the quarrel between a friarbird and his antagonist. The former wishes to have a short day and night that alternate as at present whereas the other species wishes a day to last the equivalent of seven days alternating with a night lasting the equivalent of seven nights.

His paper subsequently motivated me to examine two comparable tales from Timor, the largest island in the region, that existed in the published literature (Hicks 1997), and which were obviously members of the “friarbird” set. In concluding my own analysis, I referred to a friarbird text I had collected while carrying out research on the island during my first fieldwork there in 1966–1967 and I remarked my wish to present it in published form