AN INQUIRY INTO THE MILAN TRIBE WITH AN INTRODUCTION TO NOMADISM IN IRAN

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ABSTRACT

Iran with its unique geographically most suitable for animal husbandry and has always been a home for myriad of tribes who have played a significant role in its socio-political history. Milan, among the many, is one of the largest nomadic Kurdish tribes in West Azarbaijan province, about which no information except for few is available. Applying qualitative method and semi-in-depth structural interviews and reviewing historical documents, we examined the historical roots of Milan and its socio-economic life in Iran. The findings show that Milan is originally a large Kurdish confederacy in northern parts of Iraq that was forced to move to Turkish borders with Iran during the Ottoman period to counter the Safavid regime's attacks. Due to fertility of lands, Milan resided there forever and then after, some branches migrated to Iran and settled down in its northwestern parts.

Keywords: Milan tribe. Nomadic tribe. History. Nomadism. Socioeconomic life.

RESUMO

O Irã é geograficamente apropriado para a criação de animais e, de forma ancestral, o lar de uma míriade de tribos que desempenharam um papel significativo em sua história sociopolítica. Milan, entre as muitas, é uma das maiores tribos nómades curdas na província do Azarbaijão Ocidental, sobre a qual pouquíssimas informações estão disponíveis. Por meio do método qualitativo utilizamos nessa pesquisa entrevistas estruturadas, semi-estruturadas e revisão de documentos históricos, objetivando analisar as raízes históricas de Milan e sua vida socioeconômica no Irã. As descobertas mostram que Milan é originalmente uma grande confederação curda no norte do Iraque que foi forçada a se mudar para as fronteiras da Turquia com o Irã durante o período otomano, a fim de conter os ataques do regime safávida. Devido à fertilidade das terras, Milan instalou-se lá e, a posteriori, alguns ramos migraram para o Irã e se estabeleceram na região noroeste.


SUMMARY

Iran is geographically suitable for animal husbandry and has always been a home for a myriad of tribes who have played a significant role in its socio-political history. Milan, among the many, is one of the largest nomadic Kurdish tribes in West Azarbaijan province, about which little information except for few is available. By applying qualitative method and semi-in-depth structural interviews and reviewing historical documents, we examined the historical roots of Milan and its socio-economic life in Iran. The findings show that Milan is originally a large Kurdish confederacy in northern parts of Iraq that was forced to move to Turkish borders with Iran during the Ottoman period to counter the Safavid regime’s attacks. Due to fertile lands, Milan resided there forever and then after, some branches migrated to Iran and settled down in its northwestern parts.

Keywords: Milan tribe. Nomadic tribe. History. Nomadism. Socioeconomic life.

RESUMEN

Irán es geográficamente adecuado para la cría de animales y, ancestralmente, hogar de una miríada de tribus que han desempeñado un papel importante en su historia sociopolítica. Milán, entre muchas, es una de las tribus nómadas kurdas más grandes de la provincia de Azarbaiján Occidental, sobre la que hay muy poca información disponible. A través del método cualitativo que utilizamos en esta investigación estructurado, entrevistas semiestructuradas y revisión de documentos históricos, con el objetivo de analizar las raíces históricas de Milán y su vida socioeconómica en Irán. Los resultados muestran que Milán es originalmente una gran confederación kurda en el norte de Irak que se vio obligada a trasladarse a las fronteras de Turquía con Irán durante el período otomano con el fin de contener los ataques del régimen de Safarí. Debido a la fertilidad de las tierras, Milán se estableció allí y, a posteriori, algunas ramas emigraron a Irán y se establecieron en la región noroeste.

INTRODUCTION
The Middle East [and specifically Iran] is frequently looked upon from an angle of tribalism [ROSS AND MOHAMMADPUR, 2018]. Tribes have always played an important role and formed a remarkable part in Iranian socio-political history. Among all others, Kurdish tribes are of those who have resided in the mountainous western regions of Iran and the larger parts in Iraq, Turkey, and Syria. Because of their characteristics, and as Bruinessen argued, at most times, Kurdish society has existed at the periphery of, and functioned as a buffer between, two or more neighboring states [BRUINESSEN, 2002]. In pre-modern era, and due to their courage and bravery, groups of Kurdish tribes were forcefully crossed the eastern borders of Iran to confront with the Uzbek invasion during the Safavid and Afshar dynasties [TOHADI, 1980, p.520], and this strategy continued by later on governments especially in modern Iran. “Comparison of the names mentioned in various sources over the past four centuries shows that some tribes disappeared while new ones kept emerging, but that many of the larger tribes showed a remarkable continuity over time.” [BRUINESSEN, 1992 IN: YOUNESI, 2005, p.65].

Milan, as one of the greatest Kurdish confederacies in the Middle East, is one of that kept its duration along the time, but albeit of continuity, its Iranian branch has a big gap in its history so that nothing can be find in Persian literature and even in the community. This article is a part from a sociological research done around the tribe and its communal lands in north-west region of Iran. The main purpose here, is to illuminate the black side of the tribe’s history and some information about its socio-economic structures but besides, some general information has debated on nomadism in Iran too.

GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND
Iran with its unique geography is most suitable for migratory Nomadic form of subsistence and has been a country of nomads throughout its history. Power and political influence of nomadic tribes in Iranian political arena was so great that from the 11th to 19th centuries, “with the exception of Safavids (1501-1722) who themselves were not nomadic but whose access to power was aided by nomadic tribes, all dynasties [eleven out of total twelve dynasties] had nomadic tribal origins” [MOGHADAM, 1996, p.20]. Even “several of Iran’s royal houses, including the Saljuq, Il-Khan, Timurid, Safavi, Zand, and Qajar, were carried to the throne by tribal power” [ISSAWI, 1971, p.4].

Iran, with its total area of 1,648,195 km² has located in an arid and semi-arid zone of the earth. In its southern half subtropical and in northern part the temperate climate with a huge desert area at the middle is the main geological feature of it. [BADRIPOUR, 2008, p.1].

Figure 1. Iran’s aridity map

Source: Badripour (2006, p.3)
Iran’s topological and ecological characteristics have had unique impressions on its historical experiences and socio-political construction along its history. Inadequacy of agricultural lands, prevented formation of an efficient peasantry system leading to centralized powerful governments and capitalist form of production rather, abundance of rangelands produced a condition most suitable for generating a huge and yet, unique kind of nomadism “and the most reason for establishment of unique and yet great nomadic confederations in Iranian society” (KEDDIE, 2006, p.2; TAPPER, 2011, p.8).

**DEVELOPMENT OF TRIBAL NOMADISM**

‘Nomadism’ as a way of life in arid and semi-arid zones is an adaptive strategy of human with his natural environment. It relates to permanent and more or less regular migrations of people between different locations, but with definite routes and destinations. In general, and loose usage, three forms of nomadism can be distinguished: nomadic hunters and gatherers, pastoral nomads, and non-sedentary people whose economic activities focus on tinkering and trading. Sometimes gypsies may be considered as nomads too. In some case refugees or fishing communities are also subjects of nomadic people (CARR-HILL et al., 2005, p.69).

In the narrow meaning (as in anthropological and sociological texts), nomad has its specific definition entirely corresponded to pasture. As Frederik Barth argued, utilization of pastoral lands may result several forms of pastoral adaption: sedentary form of residence, or transhumance, or long-term nomadism. Sedentary residence is possible when a community has sufficient resources of fodder for collect and store to maintain the animals through the period when no pastures are available. In the time pastures are available, of course they take the herds into pastures around the village. ‘Transhumance’ as the other form permits people and herds normally resident in one type of ecologic area. As they cannot store any sufficient fodder for the time of shortage, thus, the herds invade in adjacent area temporarily during its period of productivity. At this form, seasonal pastures can be utilized, while the herds are withdrawn and return to their home areas when the season is ended.

Effective utilization of the pasture resources … therefore always depended on the third type of pastoral adaptation: that of long-range nomadism. This pattern involves seasonal migrations of the whole human and animal population over long distances in an alternation between the two main types of seasonal pastures: mountain pastures in the summer, and lowland pastures in the winter and early spring. The complimentary of these two kinds of pastures is thus the determining factor in this kind of nomadism; on the journey between the two extremes, the herds find pasture by following the advancing spring into areas of higher and higher altitudes, while on the return journey in the autumn they depend mainly on the stubble of the harvested fields. The distances covered in the course of such a yearly cycle may vary from 100 to 1000 miles and the migrations involve numerous moves and relatively short marches, implying continuous or predominant tent-dwelling for the nomads (BARTH, 1960, p.343).

Garthwaite states that sedentary agriculturalists were able to adapt to their environment by plugging the lands, bringing water into the farms, sowing and weeding and everything needed for cultivation, but pastoralists maintained a symbiotic relationship with environment. Nomads did nothing or little to change or improve their environment. Instead, they made changes in themselves; if pastures were poor they move to other pastures, if flocks were thirsty, they guided them towards the water resources, if weather was warm they take the flocks to temperate highland areas (GARTHWAITE, 2009, p.26).

Our information about the origins of Nomadism in Iran as a kind of subsistence comes from archeological and ethnographical investigations. According to discoveries, in Iran, Central Zagros Mountains are the first area in which nomadism has been appeared. Gilbert argues that “despite much progress in understanding the development of Zagros pastoralism, impressive gaps remains in our knowledge of its organizations, degree of autonomy, subsistence activities, and economic relations with cultivating groups” (GILBERT, 1983).

What we know is general information about the early form of pastoralism in the West Central Zagros Mountains; transformation of a village-based herding system in the Neolithic period into a full-fledged nomadic pastoralism by the Late Chalcolthic period is obvious. Division of labor may be the main reason behind the development of nomadism in Iran. Accordingly, the initial development of pastoralism in the Central Zagros Mountains was an adaptive strategy to a highland environment with limited and dispersed resources in order to supplement a primarily agricultural village-based economy but, with expansion of the agricultural regime, the distance to be traveled to pastures by herders became greater, and as a consequence, the organization of labor involved in herding had to be modified to meet the more complex task of moving sizable herds over larger areas (ABDI,
There is, as it stated, very scarce written evidence that documents nomadism since the Safavid period in which massive translocation and resettlement of tribes has been documented (PERRY, 1975; TAPPER, 1979) Most reliable resources are almost available from the mid-19th century onward, when travelers, anthropologists and especially political agents from Western countries came to Iran and recorded data from pastoral nomadic life (IRANICA N.D.). Anyhow, in 19th century, the overall situation of country was characterized by widespread tribal nomadic groups with military and political power and large territories which by no means under the control of State rulers as central governments (IRANICA N.D.).

‘TRIBE’, ‘NOMADIC TRIBE’ AND ‘CONFEDERATION’

Generally, in Middle East and especially in Iran the concept of ‘Tribe’ differs from that of other countries. The word ‘Tribe’ itself is one of the controversially used concepts on which there is no interdisciplinary common understanding. In so many cases tribe is considered equal to ‘Primitive’ community. Most of the people in pre-colonial were tribe in the sense of primitive societies in this perspective. Pritchard defines the tribe as a largest community which settles the disputes among its members down inside the community. They can be combining against other communities of the same kind and against foreigners. In a tribe there is a sense of unity and legal norms that are acknowledged within the members. “A tribe is divided into territorial segments which regard themselves as separate communities. We refer to the divisions of a tribe as primary, secondary, and tertiary tribal sections... a tertiary section is divided into villages and villages into domestic groups” [EVANS-PRITCHARD, 1940, p.278-281].

Tapper believes that these larger groups to which Pritchard referred to are ‘confederacies’ and locates ‘tribes’ at a lower level of political structure. ‘Tribes’ commonly (but still by no means always) combine territorial and political unity under a chief with an ideology of common descent (TAPPER, 1997, p.7). A tribe for Rondot is a political unit especially in Kurdish tribes. It is “a little world falling back upon itself, a defence organism. It is a traditional and conservative institution” (WHITE, 2000, p.19). Bruinessen criticizes Rondot for ignoring the role of kinship in the concept of tribe. He believes that Hay and Rondot saw a tribe just as a political organization (BRUINESSEN, 1992, p. 64).

‘Nomads’ (all three forms) are essentially economic presences and are not tribes but as Tapper stated, they can constitute a tribe by developing a unity consisted of different groups of nomads or none-nomads. In a scale larger than tribe, we have confederations. They are not as much integrated as tribes. Their boundaries—in sense of identity and territory—also are not as clear as tribes. But, political color in confederacies is more prevail than tribes. ‘Confederacies’, as groups of tribes are more politicized because they “united primarily in relation to the State or extra-local forces, from coalitions or clusters of tribes, more ephemeral unions for the pursuit of specific local rivalries, perhaps within a confederacy and probably without central leadership” (TAPPER, 2011, p.9). Lois Beck in a same word believes that, “Nomadic pastoralists… organized themselves as members of tribes and the confederation for the defense of natural, economic, and social resources; the expansion of territory and power; and the right of migratory passage. In this organization, they followed existing patterns and improvised as circumstances changed” [BECK, 1991, p.7].

MILAN

Due to its geography and historical events, Iran is a country of tribes as Issawi stated. Although the most part of its tribal community and diversity has been experienced a decay through the history, but there are so many tribes that are continue the life in its ancient forms. In the following map, location of Iranian tribes that are still pursuing their subsistence have been shown; Kurds (Jalali, Milan and …), Lurs (Bakhtiari, Mamasani, and …), Turks (Qashqa’i’s, Shahsevans, Afshars, and Turkmans), Arab (Khamseh), and Baluch, are the largest ethnical/nomadic tribes of the country.
Figure 2. Distribution of the largest nomadic tribes in Iran

Source: Manjusha (2009)

Figure 3. Territory of Milan (wintery and summery pastures) in North part of Iran

Source: Manjusha (2009)

Milan, is one of the prominent Kurdish tribes of the West Azerbaijan province that's territory has expanded in Maku and Chaldran cities (colored in blue in figure 3). According to census 2008, the total Milanian size in West Azerbaijan province was about 14,995 people that organized in 2,594 families (SOCIO-ECONOMIC CENSUS OF MIGRATORY NOMADS, 2009).

Myths and origins
As the second tribe in sense of size in West Azerbaijan, Milan has a big black hole in its early record in Persian scholarship and even oral history of indigenous Milanian people. No one from existing generation of Milan whom which we did inquiry, was aware of the tribe's ancient origins and its historical trajectories. They just knew that so many Milanian people are still living in eastern parts of the Turkey. In Persian literature also, the sole
information exceeds no more than few lines which belongs to Kalantari who says: “It is believed that, while this tribe was founded by a person whose name was Mili, so, it nominated as Milan. Some others believe that Mel is a notion refers to a mountain” (KALANTARI, 1966). Or, Eskandari-nia who states; Milan and Zilan were two brothers each one had his own Teyfe. Zilan (SOCIO-ECONOMIC CENSUS OF MIGRATORY NOMADS, 2009) had a grandson from his elder son was named “Jalal” and had two other boys by the names of Heidar and Brou. After Zilan passed away, Jalal, Heidar, and Brou were separated and each one established a Teyfe for himself orderly called Jalal, Heidar, and Brouki (ESKANDARI-NIA, 1987, p.51). Accordingly, as to the literature and fieldworks we did, Milan—or Mili in Turkish literature—was once a well-developed tribal confederacy in Ottoman Empire whose territory, power and wealth was proverbial among all, therefore, we tried to trace them back in Turkish historical context.

Sykes, whose precious work in identification of Kurdish tribes of Ottoman Empire was contemporary to Milli confederacy, talks about it as in following expression: “Milan is the original mother tribe of the great Milli confederation in North Mesopotamia. Milli, has a curious and peculiar mystery attached to it, which innumerable cross-examinations on my part of every kind of Kurds has failed to elucidate to my own satisfaction. Some people merely say that the Milli were a powerful tribe who were broken up by the Turks in the 18th century” (SYKES, 1908). In a story by Ahmed-khani named Mem-o-Zin, Kurmanji kirds had three divisions: Boti, Mehdedi, and Siili. The third one (Siili) also had two sub-groups called; Miland Zil (were brothers) or Mil and Zili. Milli groups were living in Erzurum, Bitlis, Van, and Dersim cities in Turkey and some border lands near to Iran (GOKALP, 1992, p.28-30). There is a point to Milan-Zilan category in Ibrahim Pasha’s own words, too:

[...] years and years ago the Kurds were divided into two branches, Milan and Zilan; there were 1200 tribes of Milan, but God was displeased with them and they were scattered in all directions, some vanished, others remained; such as remained respect me as the head of Milan (SYKES, 1908).

McDowall referring to an appositional dichotomy exist in Kurdish society, recognizes the Mil-Zil often based on an imagined conflict harking back to imagined origins two or more millennia ago, between two ancient groups, called Zilan and Milan (MCDOWALL, 2004, p.17). According to Sykes, and based on Ibrahim Pasha’s arguments, Milan is a very ancient tribe whose history goes back prior to Islam. Milan tradition is that they are children of Shem and most probably had been Christians or Yezidis on that time. Hence, they are originated from Arabia and been settled in the Dersim zone in Sultan Selim’s era (SYKES, 1908).

When Sultan Selim conquered West Kurdistan, his Vizier saw that Kurds wandered up and down the Dersim slopes, and that the land was crowded with nomads, the Vizier ordered such as wish to cultivate, to build houses, and such as wished to remain in tents, to go south; some built houses, learned Turkish and veiled their women, others fled to the Dersim fastnesses, and others went south, among the latter the chief family of whom Ibrahim Pasha is now the head (SYKES, 1908).

Identically, Faith Unal ascribes residence of the Milli tribe in the area, to Sultan Selim’s reigning, but clarifies beside that it was Iranian interruptions in the border lands that provoked him (Sultan Selim) to reside the Milli at eastern parts of the Turkey in order to prevent Iranians interventions (UNAL n.d.). This inference seems more reliable according to political relationships existed between the Ottomans and the new Safavid rulers in Iran. They were both from powerful Turkish dynasties who expanding the territorial limits of their empires. The battle of Chaldiran and its aftermath played a key role in region’s history and structure. Before the battle, it was evident for Kurdish rulers that their fate would connect to either side: the Ottomans or the Safavids. The Mirs (Kurdish Aghas or leaders) who initially were in Safavid Shah Ismail alliance but then had been arrested by him, arranged to escape to the Ottoman Empire. They succeeded and were joined by others in their way. Through the mediation of Idrisi-i Bitlisi, a notable Kurd in service of Sultan Selim I, the Kurdish chieftains united in assistance to the Ottomans on the condition that in the return from the battle, their autonomy and territory as of what they had in the past would be granted. As so, their loyalty to Sultan Selim was the most reason for residence and development of Kurdish, especially the Milli tribes in the east parts of Turkey in the Ottomans era (KLEIN, 2011, p.54).

1Ibrahim Pasha was the most prominent leader of the Milli, one of the biggest Kurdish tribes of the Ottoman era.

2He, the Ottoman Empire by 1512-1520, was the most powerful sovereign whose territory was the largest among the Islamic world. He formally recognized as Caliphate of Muslims by the last heir of the Abbasid Caliphate...
Earlier leaders

Kelesh Abdi Agha, born in the beginning of 18th century, probably had been the first master of the Milli tribe as it is stated. He could get Ahmad’s—governor of Baqdad—trust and found a well position in Baqdad government which thenhelped him to achieve the tribe’s leadership (GOKALP, 1992, p.32). Chieftaincy of the tribe after Kelesh Abdi Agha’s death, delivered to his son, Teymur Bey. He, in his first year of leadership entitled as Mir-i-Miran (lord of the lords), one of the highest titles in Ottomans era, but then after in 1789, he sentenced to death for some revolts he flamed. He lost all his responsibilities and titles and was prosecuted by Ottomans troops. Teymur resisted against them but when he realized his definite failure, escaped to Baqdad and was protected there by Abdolqadir Guliani. Teymur Bey excused by Baqdad’s governor through mediation of Abdolqadir Guliani and came back to his tribe’s leadership again. In a short time, Ayyub Agha—son of Teymur—got enough authority to lead the tribe and reorganized its members while his father could not prevent his leadership. Teymur had another son named Mahmud Agha. Teymur tried to replace Mahmud Agha with himself, but disappointed and hereupon was banished by his son, Teymor, to a small village beside the Firal River up to his death (GOKALP, 1992, p.32).

According to documents, Ayyub Agha had more than 40-50 thousands of horsemen and could be able to control so many other tribes of the East Anatoly region. He was so ambitious and plundered so many lands so that was familiar to golden stirrups. Hereat, he developed disgust for himself among people and consequently, in 1834 he dismissed from leadership through the reforms and arrested by Faris Pasha in the region. Thereafter, Ayyub died in 1837 and ‘Mahmud’ succeeded his brother. Mahmud’s leadership was so short and got end by his death in a quarrel with Kiki tribe. Soon after, ‘Mahmud Agha II’ came to leadership of the tribe and settled in Urfa region. The Milli tribe under the leadership of Mahmud Agha II welcomed by the Ottoman ruler because, the people who vacuumed from the Milli tribe were impelled to join Arabic barbarian tribes of Sammar and Anaze. Soon after, Mahmud Agha II who was capable in sense of ethics and management, succeeded in unifying the Milli tribal groups. He left the Urfa and replaced in Viranshehir and made a castle for himself. After some time, due to quarrels with Tay and Shammar tribes and chaos in the region and disobey from the government, Mahmud Agha II was arrested by Omer Pasha, Governor of Diyarbakir and his son, ‘Ibrahim Pasha’ was replaced him.

The period of Ibrahim Pasha

He used Hamidiye Cavalry and government resources to expand his own agenda. The Milli tribe was certainly a less populous tribe than of its adversaries, but it is evident that the Milli was the most important Hamidiye tribe in the region through which Ibrahim pasha could build a significance following. The feuds of the Milli against their rivals generally over pastoral lands continued for subsequent years.

Figure 4. Ibrahim Pasha: leader of Milli tribe in Turkey until 1908


Ibrahim Pasha continued his expansion by attracting new clients, some of whom were volunteer groups
intending attach themselves to a powerful resource and some others were those who feared from intimidations of Ibrahim Pasha for paying tribute or being plundered. In 1905 his position was stronger than ever before and he did this by enhancing the relationships with outer powers, especially Britain, while ignoring the local and national authority. However, a coalition formed against Ibrahim Pasha by a group of notables in Diyarbakir whose interests were threatened by him and mounted in 1907. Imperial troops were sent to enforce him to depart for Aleppo, but Ibrahim Pasha once again could gain the graces of the Sultan by demonstrating his loyalty through sending his Hamidiye regiments to the Hijaz, to protect Baghdad railway. After the constitution was announced in 1908, government decided to conduct a campaign against Ibrahim Pasha, leader of the Milli tribe and Hamidiye commander, who had grown into one of the most powerful figures in Kurdistan and who oversaw what some called a 'little empire' (KLEIN, 2011, p.97-104).

(...) however, the government continued to send expeditions to forcibly seize all of the Milli’s sheep and other animals, on the pretext that the late pasha owed a huge debt to the government. The government also rearrested the sons of Ibrahim Pasha, and continued to detain the late pasha’s wife at Mardin. Deprived of its leaders, its wealth, and particularly its government support, the power the Milli held just months before was now gone (KLEIN, 2011, p.97-104).

**Milan in Iran**

Milan—in Iranian part—was governing at the level of clans. Every clan had (and still has) its own leadership but we rarely found a person who was familiar with his tribe’s leader because, the large part of the tribal population and their ancestral leaders had lived in Iran. Milan, far from its ancestry line, although was genealogically stemmed from the Milli tribe of Turkey, but its political history impressed by Iranian socio-political features. So, among the Iranian large tribes and confederacies, Milan has had a marginal role so that its fate has generally molded in the body of Kurdish tribes of Iran at all.

At the time when the Milli tribe was so powerful in Turkey, in north-west region of Iran—Maku zone—, Morteza Gholi Khan Sardar who's title was Eqbal-al Saltaneh (1863-1923) the son of Teymur Pasha Khan Sardar, grandson of Ali Khan Sardar, great grandson of Hossein Khan [Sardar and Governor of South Azerbaijan Iran] and great great grandson of Ahmad Sultan was governing the region including of Turks and Kurdish tribes.

**Figure 5. Eqbal-al Saltaneh: the leader of north-west region of Iran—Maku zone**

**Source** Bayat (2015)

As a modern thinking man, Sardar intended to develop and correct the places he governed and their system. Examples of this would be the building of a new school (named Eqbal) using a Russian schooling system in 1917 that would teach it's students Russian and French as well as Farsi.
Maku was completely independent from Tehran and to this Sardar would have very strong relations with Russia, Turkey and its neighboring States. Of high intelligence and speaking numerous languages his diplomacy was second to none, spending much of his time throughout Kafkas Russia and Europe. His dress was very handsome as like the Lords of England, Austria and Germany (KLEIN, 2011, p.97-109).

Kurdish tribes at least in contemporary Iran, unlike to other Iranian nomadic tribes and large and powerful confederacies have almost been influenced and provoked by foreign forces against central governments. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as it was the case in Turkey too, Kurdish tribes of the region and Iran were supporting by Ottoman Empire in order to strengthen the foundations of Empire against the Russian and Iranian sovereignties. Hence, it was important for Ottoman to integrate the Kurdistan of Iran and increase of Ottoman’s presence in the region. So many cases have cited in the history of Iran-Ottoman relationships through which Ottoman side provoked Iranian Kurdish tribes,

For example, bands of Hamidieh that crossed into Iran to help Khan of Maku (Sardar), a loyalist at the time, were taken into custody upon return in to the Ottoman side. It was even reported that the CUP3 sent a group of Silahsor, or men at arms, to help the Iranian constitutionalists4 overthrow the Shah5. Headed by the CUP strongman Enver Pasha’s uncle Halil, thirty members of the group crossed into Iran, where Halil met with leaders of the Jalali, Hayderan, Takori, Milan, Shemsik, and Hazeran tribes to convinces them to join the pro-constitutionalist side (ATES, 2015, p.263).

Or,

In a private meeting with the Ottoman consoul, Mushir-ı Divan, one of the most important notables of Sinne, observed that the region had between four hundred thousand and five hundred thousand Sunni inhabitants with close geographic and sectarian ties to the Ottomans and argued that a majority of its Ulama, a’yan, and tujjar wanted to be included in the Ottoman Empire. However, he warned that some were becoming pro-Russian (ATES, 2015, p.263).

This kind of relationships prolonged until the end of Qajar dynasty in Iran. When Reza Shah came to power, broke the integrity of tribal communities down by different policies.

At the time of WWI (World War I), the Russians were watching Sardar very closely worried that with his power, influence and modernized thinking he would side relations with the Ottoman’s. Therefore, in 1923 as Sardar’s wealth and influence rose, Reza Shah who was the commander of Iranian army at the time, knowing of Sardar’s extended power and riches (at the time Sardar was the second richest man in Iran after Zel al Soltan) sent Sar-Lashgar Amir Abdullah Khan Tahmasabi (a senior military commander) to get close to Sardar and finally befriended him. After initially making a good friendship Tahmasabi convinced and tricked Sardar to go to Tehran on the Shah’s request. Travelling through Tabriz, Tahmasabi arrested Sardar and imprisoned him. It is said that whilst in prison Sardar had suffered a heart attack and died, although this version is not clear as many believe he was poisoned (ATES, 2015, p.263).

In duration of these policies and after demise of Sardar, some groups of Milan –like to other tribes– were forcefully expelled by Reza Shah to other parts of the country –mostly to Khorasan province– and therefore their integrity, political power and activities diminished but socio-economic functions keep continued up to the present day.

Social structure of Milan

**Mal**

Family is the most sensible and integrated unit among tribes and even agrarians that is a plane for all economic activities. A family includes husband, wife, single children and sometimes grandfather, grandmother, uncle or

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3The Committee of Union Progress (CUP) (Turkish: Itihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti) began as a secret society established as the “Committee of Ottoman Union” (Turkish: Itihat-ı Osmani Cemiyeti) in Istanbul in February 6, 1889.

4The Constitutional Revolution of Iran took place between 1905-1907 in Tabriz and led to establishment of parliament during the Qajar kingdom dynasty.

5Iran’s King at the time.
aunt. It sometimes happens a man has other wives. At this case, those are also members of the family too.

MAL (Family) in Milan’s tribal structure is also the first and smallest socio-economic segment. In the past, extended family was the popular form of Mals and still is the prevalent form, but nuclear form is also going to develop especially among young couples.

In Milanian Mals endogamy is popular. They tend not to marry out of the tribe at all. Most of the couples had kinship relationships before the marriage. Hardly one can find a Mal in which couples are from different tribes or relatives in law in terms of anthropology. This tendency is different among elders and young in sense of range and type. For elders, the circle for choosing a mate was too narrow while for young its range extended up to tribal boundaries and sometimes even out of tribe.

Everything in a Mal is common. No one works for him/herself and no one has right to be idle even children. Mal is the sole base for economic activities (e.g. animal husbandry, farming, carpet or rug weaving, etc.) and there is no other economic institution to perform this duty. A Mal is indeed a little factory in which all members are working hard and no excuse accepted even for education or pregnancy. So many children I saw were fully illiterate or had left the schools especially among the poor Mals just due to their role in economy of Mal. During the interviews I found that situation among rich families somehow is different. They were capable to hire workers and have close connections with city centers and therefore let their children to educate in schools or higher levels. Therefore, employing of children in economic activities was not a matter of cultural characteristic, but a necessity resulted from poverty.

The children, who were working in carpet weaving, were almost daughters and most of them, especially those who were old-timer, had physical problems such as weak eyed, curvature in backbones, and shorting. Of course, except of Khoy district, carpet weaving has ceased in Milanian tribe, because, there are no fair demands for their carpets in new markets and about the rugs also, no one intends to use them anymore.

Consumption, like production, had common character; whatever prepared for the subsistence of a Mal (food and other necessities of life) ought to be consumed communally. Ownership was extremely concentrated so that men were the only owners of the property a Mal had. Man (Father) was on the top position of Mal and while a Mal was the sole base for economic activities so, head of a Mal (father) undoubtedly possesses a high degree of power and authority in relation to Mal's management.

High socio-economic status of men in Milanian Mals has customarily defined in their traditions. Patriarchy has been always a dominant system among tribal communities through which males found superiority over females in all aspects of society. This system was prevalent in Milan whereby men order their wives what to do or what not to do. Apparently, male superiority in Milan institutionalizes from the childhood. Mothers in dividing the food, among their children, set apart more portions for boys in comparison to daughters. During my interviews, I never saw a daughter came to the room we, MEN were talking, but boys, matured or immature, were allowed. Division of labor also was sex-based through which daughters ought to help their mothers in homework, milking, weaving, and bringing water from spring while boys had nothing to do inside the home but out they were working on farms or grazing the animals in pastures.

Milanian women were almost hidden from our sights during the interviews. This was not so much because of our outsider-ness position or their religious belief as it is the usual case among Shia followers in Turkish tribes and communities, but because of the character of our meetings (masculinity issues). In their community, women had not permission to take part in male-character issues such as conflicts, farms, pastures, relationships, serious managements and so on. In my previous researches among Turkish rural people, women also were absence from our eyes, but their absence had completely religious reasons through which communication of a woman with a stranger man was strongly restricted. Rigidity of line between man and woman is not so much clear among Sunni people.

According to census 2008, the total Milanian size in West Azerbaijan province was about 14,995 that organized in 2,594 families (Statistical Center of Iran). The figure (13) illustrates distribution of Milanian families across the province. Data in the figure are based on the census 2008.
**Figure 6. Distribution of Milanian households across West Azerbaijan**

Source: Research findings

As it shows, north part of the province is the main locus of this nomadic tribal group. The locations indexed in the map are their wintery (Qishlaq) territories and their pattern of distribution will change of course in the summer when they migrate to summer pastures.

**Ova/Oba**

At the beginning of Yaylq period some families come together in Qishlaq, mix their herds, and collectively start their migration towards the pastures. These groups called Ovar or Oba. In the past, when pastures were dividing between nomadic groups, some Mals who had close relationships formed a group (ova) for themselves and registered a piece from the main pasture for their own group. So, members of an Ova were fixed but could be all from the same village, or different tribal villages.

During Yaylq period, every Ova settles down in a particular location in the main tribal pasture and starts grazing its herd in a systematic manner in definite parts of the pasture. In spite of common grazing, animals of each ‘Mal’ are quite separable from others through the signs that are meaningful for them. A person on the top of an Ova, called Sar-Ova or Obaba-shi is who has more animals in general. “Management and division of labor in Ova, organizing of migration, division of pasture for grazing, communication with other Ova(s) or tribal categories and administrative, accepting of guests, and hiring of ranchers are main responsibilities of a Sar-Ova” (Eskandari-nia 1987, p. 30).

As we see, Ova is indeed a kind of corporative organization in order to managing of pastures and herds and has no kinship or lineage character among Milanian nomadic groups and therefore, it does not consider as a rank or position in tribe’s hierarchical structure.

**Bav or Tireh**

Bav in Kurdish language means Father and in Milan’s tribal structure as well as all other Kurdish tribes refers to a category by which families tie together through a common ancestor. Bav refers to a forefather who had salient characteristics and important role in development of a lineage group. Therefore, unlike to ova which is a system for organizing the economic activities (management of herds and pastures), people under the name of a Bav have close kinship relations and generally try to keep their purity by endogamy. Bavs at this sense are pillars of Teyfe and Eshira in Milan.
Teyfe
Unlike to its lower layers, Teyfe in Milan tribe is a socio-political unit consisted of different Baves. This is a common structure among all nomadic tribes in West Azerbaijan by which a nomad distinguishes or introduces him/herself (ESKANDARI-NIA, 1987, p.32). A Teyfe has a specific territory with at least two distinct regions for summer and winter settlements for both households and herds. On the top of a Teyfe, there is a head its position is congenital and in almost belongs to elder sons. While members of a Teyfe are well aware of their lineage and know that are separated from a common ancestor, so they call each other as cousins.

Around the divisions of Milianian tribe there are different Statements; ‘Kalantari’ distinguishes two main streams for Milan tribe: Milan and Khalkani. Milan has five sub-divisions consisted of Mam-Kanlou, Dud-Kanlou, Mandole-Kanlou, Sheikh-Kanlou and Sarmanlou. Khalkani has also two sub divisions: Dallaei and Khalkani. Again, Khalkani finds six branches: Kechelianlou, Geli-Kanlou, Amoe, Meroei, Ghordoei and Khazuei (KALANTARI, 1966). According to our inquiries, Milan has divided into 12 sub-divisions that is shown in the figure [7]:

Figure 7. Divisions and sub-tribes of Milan tribe

Source Research findings


A formal document prepared by the NAO of Chaldiran city counts Milianian divisions about nine included of; Sheikh-Kanlou, Dallaei, Ghordoei, Meroei, Brouki, Geli-Kanlou, Gholiki, Kechelianlou and Amoei. But, there is nothing in detail about their hierarchies in their document.

Eshira (IL)
Eshira is the last and the largest layer of a Milianian nomadic tribe that is combined of some structured groups called Teyfe. In the figure [15] we have tried to illustrate social structure of Milan. As it shows, Eshira is equal to tribe and is on the top of the structure. It is combined from few Tayfes. Each Tayfe is consisted of few Bavs and each Bave is consisted of few Mals.
Figure 8. Social structure of Milan

Source Research findings

This structure is somehow common among Kurdish tribes. As Bruinessen (1992) also stated, a Kurdish tribe is a socio-political and generally regional unit on a kinship base—real or imaginary—with an internal specific structure. Each tribe is divided into some Sub-tribes and so on to smaller units such as Clan and Lineage (BRUIJN, 1992 IN: YOUNESI, 2005, p.66).

Economic Structure of Milan

Everyday life is what a person daily does, feels, and thinks. Much of everyday life is automatic in that it is driven by current environmental features as mediated by automatic meaning systems processing of those features, and without any mediation by conscious choice. Life span in spite of its complexity in urban areas, is a routine which its reputation lengths as long as a day. In other words, it is a repeating experience of every day. If we take a look at an urban dweller’s normal life, except for special events will find a repeating daily course which mostly makes it boring. Additionally, people in urban areas are similar to atoms each one has his/her own experience so that in well-developed cities the smallest unit of society are individuals. But, in tribal communities extraction of individual from the family is not possible because an individual has been defined to the system through the family. In the life span also, their experiences’ circle is wider and extends to the whole size of a year. Life is in harmony with nature and thereof everyday life in tribal communities lasts as long as a full year. Life of a tribal family transforms concordant with changes in the nature. They have to adapt themselves with requisites arise from natural environment. Hence any discussion on everyday life in tribal community ought to be in family level. In addition, circulation of life in tribal community is not in daily mode.

Accordingly, we have sketched a Milanian family’s economic life through a year in the figure (16). We start by 21th of March, the first day of New Year, Norouz. At the beginning of spring simultaneously with revival of nature, tribal groups also start their activities. Those nomads who have farmlands, are two times busier than those who have not. The farming for them is a supplementary activity for husbandry. By this way it is possible to produce forage. So, the crops they cultivate are consisted of Alfalfa, Barley, wheat, and sometimes corn or sunflower.
Figure 9. Annual economic activities of a tribe in Milan

Source: Research findings

They generally in 15 days do culture their lands (See the area numbered 1 in the figure). These lands are not pastoral lands, but in few cases we observed some who had no animal, did farm in pastoral lands. The crops cultivated at this time, usually would harvest in July or August (Area number 4). Sometimes tribes do cultivate two times a year. At this case their first cultivation done in second half of October (Area number 6), will harvest in last days of April up to end of May (Area number 2) and the second time will immediately start after harvesting in June (Area number 3) and will harvest in September up to half of October (Area number 5). According to experts, cropping two times a year without using soil fertilizers will absolutely degrade the quality of soil and even quantity and quality of crops. According to our investigations they seldom consider to these details and just concentrate on overusing of their lands to cover animal husbandry costs, but the main business for a tribal family is animal husbandry.

Shamo, 47, nomad:

[…] We sleep when animal sleeps, wake up when it wakes up, we move with it and stay when it stays. When it bears a child, as like as our own child we take care of it… we have never rest… we have nothing except of animal.

By end of April, animals extract from sheepcote. The pastures almost around the village called Qishlaq pastures are the lands use for their grazing. April and June is the time fold generates so that one can see lots of tiny lambs jumping around. These lambs are carefully feeding for joining to fold (in female cases) or to be sold (in male cases) at end of Yaylaq period (beginning of September).

According to obligatory rules of the NRO, in almost from 15th of June it is possible to migrate to pastoral lands and stay there about 2-3 months. Tribes who are wishfully waiting for such a day, without any delay move on towards the pastures.
The migration pattern among Milanian tribes had been traditionally a very systematic and harmonious with nature.

Faris, 62, nomad:

[...] On that time it took one month to reach Yaylq from here. We went there step by step. There were intermediate pastures and definite tribal roads. In backing also the same method was using. Therefore neither animals nor pastures got tired. ...but now in one day we reach there by trucks or 3-4 days on foot. There is no tribal road. All lands are cultivated and we have to use roads.

Chief decided the exact migration time. His decision was based on pasture’s quality and weather’s situation. Intermediate pastures also were belonging to tribes and they used them as stations for rest and refresh. But now, unlike to its traditional form, the migration is done by trucks or sometimes on feet but in short none stop period.

Hosein, 58, nomad:

In the past times we had tribal roads. Those roads belonged to us and no one could object us. Those roads were all dusty roads. We had not to use these tarmac roads. Tarmac injures the hooves of our animals. Many animals die by car accidents in tarmac roads. If we try the other paths, peasants invade us. We don’t know what to do...

As in quotations submitted, migration by trucks is a troubous requisite there is no way except of acceptance. In a week they arrive to the pasture. Every Ova/Oba knows where to settle down. According to agreements, thresholds of the pastures are the best strategic places enable them to protect the land from encroaching of others. So, each Ova/Oba does camp on special frontier part of the pasture.

Shamo, 47, nomad:

By camping in border parts of pasture, nobody can enter into the land. It also helps us to graze well. Because, every group starts grazing its animals from peripheries towards the center and by this way division of pasture and its utilization is better.

The immediate action after camping is segregation of lambs from the fold. This is necessary for tribes in order to produce dairies for sale. If lambs stay in the fold, they will drink their mothers’ milk and left nothing to produce for dairy. Butter, Cream, Cheese and Yogurt are the main dairies they produce.

The number of days and number of animals that are permitted to stay in pastures depends on the quality of a pasture. The NRO is the only authority who offers permission letter to tribal groups. According to interviews, the average number of animal per hectare is ½. In other words for each sheep one needs to have one hectare.

The NRO, (M.):

Previously the qualities of pastures were very good. On that time we let them to take two sheep in one hectare, but they didn’t obey the rules and overloaded the pastures by their animals and destroyed the lands. Now our pastures are too weak and must be quarantined in fact, but on the other hand we have to offer them to be utilized by nomads. Now the option we have is reduce of permission to ½ of an animal per hectare...

By considering of these limitations, Milanian tribes usually are permitted to stay in Yaylq pastures 2-3 months. Therefore beginning weeks of September is the time they ought to evacuate the pastures, but before leaving there they decide to sell the well matured male lambs (bucks/rams). Some brokers come to Yaylq and buy all of bucks on the table. According to Milanians, situation has defined so that the main benefits transfer to brokers’ accounts.
Aziz, 38, peasant:

[...] in Turkey they sometimes add zam to all variety of goods equally. But here it is not so. For example the price of forage increases while the price of red meat decreases or stays fix. This is not good because by these activities, one group becomes richer and the other group becomes poorer... I sold my animals 6400 Tomans [Iranian currency] for each kilogram while the person who bought them from me, sold them 12000 Tomas for each kilogram. I take care of animal and tolerate with its problems along the year while the benefits goes to broker's packet...

Mozafar, 53, nomad:

[...] it is not possible for us to sell them quickly. For selling them one by one, we have to wait long time. It needs a shelter to keep and feed them and a place for us to stay. We don’t have any option except of offering them at whole to brokers.

After selling of animals, it is the time to back home. Family members all back their homes but one from each family or sometime just a rancher takes the Ova/Oba’s animals to Qishlaq pastures. They have special shelters or fences over there to preserve animals. These pastures are almost weak in quality in compare to Yayql pastures so, they sometimes have to feed them by forage as supplementary for grazing.

Family gets busy with home routines and besides with agriculture if has any farmland and animal stays in Qishlaq pasture up to snow fall in almost around end of November or first half of December. By snowing, animal takes back into sheeepcote and rest there for about four months [near to half of April] and currently circulation of Milanian economic life wheels one full adventurous year.

According to what we observed, Milanian tribes practice transhumance form of nomadism through which livestock do migrate between summary pastures in mountains and wintery pastures in lower altitudes but family stays in the site of their settled area usually in a village.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Due to its unique geographical features, Iran has historically been known as a country of nomads and tribes. Due to their special characteristics and warfare spirits, Kurdish tribes have been always employed by many countries in the Middle East as effective forces to counter the invasion of foreign countries and this has often led them being sent to border areas and act as a front line of defense if necessary.

In this regard, a very large and notable Kurdish tribe –Milan- was forcefully migrated from the northern parts of Iraq to the common borders of Turkey with Iran during the period of Ottoman to resist against the expansionist invasions of the Safavid governments. Thus, an important part of Milan settled inside Turkey near the Iranian borders and remained there forever. But later, some groups of Milan moved into Iran and settled in periphery lands in northwestern regions of Iran. Since these tribes were branches of the great tribe of Milan in Turkey so, inside Iran they did not have a complete tribal structure for themselves, because the head of the tribe was based in Turkey. Since nomadic sub-tribes have always had a longitudinal relationship in the tribal structure and do not interact with each other transversely therefore, Milan’s sub-tribes in Iran –particularly in younger generations- became unaware of their ancestral history. They lived a relatively independent life separate from the others and forgot their tribal affiliation and history over time.

This article examined the historical roots of Milan and its traces in Turkey, sheds light on the dark parts of the Iranian branch of Milan, and at the same time provided an information about the tribal structure and socio-economic life of these scattered sub-tribes.

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