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Special Issue

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PREFACE

This special issue focuses on the topic of nomads in politics. In so doing, it attempts to make a contribution to academic debates on pastoral nomads as well as to the general literature on politics in non-state societies. The individual articles deal with political competition and decision-making in a variety of contexts, within and between nomadic groups (including post-nomads) and between them and external actors. They are united by an interest in the agency of nomadic or post-nomadic actors and by a flexible heuristic framework, the political field, that allows for innovative studies beyond dichotomies such as ‘tribe and state’ and ‘nomadic societies and sedentary states’.

The studies presented in this volume are based on research undertaken within the Collaborative Research Centre ‘Difference and Integration’ at the universities of Halle-Wittenberg and Leipzig, which has been funded by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) since mid-2001 (see www.nomadsed.de). The Research Centre brings together scholars from many fields, including historians, social anthropologists, ecological modellers, geographers, archaeologists and others, who are interested in regions as diverse as the Tibetan highlands, the Moroccan high plateaus, the Eurasian Arctic and the desert and steppe lands of Egypt and Sudan. In particular, the Syrian Steppe and the Turko-Iranian world have been major areas of investigation, which is reflected in this volume.

The overarching assumption of the Research Centre is that nomads and sedentary people interact in manifold ways, and that this interaction with the sedentary world has been a fundamental feature of nomadic life since its inception in the Bronze Age. This interaction may take peaceful forms, such as trade and exchange, but also more violent ones. Moreover, mobile livestock breeding is often only one of the economic pursuits by which groups we call ‘nomads’ secure their living. Making use of a mix of resources for a living is another characteristic feature for many, if not most, nomadic groups. The Research Centre has opted for a broad understanding of nomadism, with the mobility of the entire group over the whole year and interaction with settled people as basic criteria. Over time, we have also seen the need to include ‘post-nomadism’ on our agendas because the boundaries between ‘real’ nomadism and ‘post-nomadism’ are blurred and because many people continue to cultivate a self-representation as ‘nomads’, or are still seen as such by their neighbours, even after several generations of settled life.

One of the main difficulties, in history and archaeology as well as in the social sciences, has been and still is to make nomads visible (see Hauser 2006; Holzwarth 2002; Leder 2004; Paul 2006). In history, this has resulted in new approaches to terminology in a number of languages; in archaeology, new methods have been devised to detect the traces nomads may have left on the landscape; in the social sciences, the resilience of nomadic identities in a generally ‘post-nomadic’ world.
has been one of the issues. The representations of nomads in texts and artefacts produced by both settled and nomadic peoples are therefore of major interest for many projects within the Collaborative Research Centre.

The authors of the studies in this volume mostly belong to a study group within the Collaborative Research Centre that is focused on problems of power, authority and domination (*Herrschaft*), both within nomadic societies and between nomads and actors representing settled people. The study group is interdisciplinary and includes anthropologists, geographers and historians. The research methods used are very varied. Some of the study group’s members have specialised in fieldwork, quantitative as well as qualitative, some in oral history and historical anthropology, some in archival research and some in the analysis of narrative and non-narrative sources from the pre-modern world.

Over time, the study group has become more and more interested in researching nomadic agency, including strategies to secure a livelihood by mixing various resources, and strategies in nomads’ dealings with external factors, such as state agents. Often, this means, for historians as well as for anthropologists and geographers, that the perspective of the official accounts needs to be reversed. In other words, instead of following established narratives on ‘what nomads are’ and how state governments deal with them, we try to focus on the nomads themselves, on their concrete activities, their interaction with their sedentary neighbours and on their representation and self-representation in specific contexts.

During our discussions in the study group, we have found it useful to conceptualise the setting in which we see nomads act and interact as a specific ‘political field’. Thus, in contrast to approaches that work with preconceived entities such as ‘the nomadic group’, ‘the state’, ‘the ecosystem’ and so on, we take stock of the actors, resources and rules that we encounter in the particular situation we study and try to understand this ensemble of factors as a specific ‘field’ (see Bourdieu 2000; Gledhill 2000: 135–49). This has allowed us to move towards a common terminology across disciplines and thus enables tentative comparison between different case studies.

Today, the term ‘political field’ is often identified with the work of Pierre Bourdieu, with whom we share the idea of a field that is constituted by a complex of actors, resources and rules. However, in contradistinction to Bourdieu in his lecture on the *champ politique* (Bourdieu 2000), we do not aim at making generalisations about the political field as an autonomous sphere of activity within a given society, similar to other spheres such as religion or science; i.e. instead of taking ‘the field’ as subject of analysis, we use it as a heuristic device. Thus, whenever we use the term ‘political field’ in this volume, we refer to concrete arenas of political interaction and competition that are reconstructed solely for the purpose of a better understanding of specific problems.

In the interaction between people who follow a largely sedentary way of life and those for whom mobile livestock breeding is an important means of securing
the group's livelihood, it is evident that there is cooperation as well as competition. Competition concerns, on a very material level, resources such as land and water, animals, the use of routes and territory (rights of way), job opportunities and so forth, and, on a more abstract level, control of means of coercion and power as well as communication. The production of representations in narratives and artefacts must also be mentioned. Many of the contributions here show, in their very particular settings, forms of cooperation and conflict between actors on the 'settled' and on the 'nomadic' sides within a defined framework. As mentioned above, one of the ongoing objectives of the Research Centre is to make nomads visible as a set of actors who pursue their own agenda in the context under study, as people who are not only being administered, contained, rolled back and kept out (including through sedentarisation schemes), but who have their own agency and make their imprint on the course of events on a day-to-day basis.

To make the nomads visible thus includes the assumption that they follow rational choices no less than their sedentary counterparts. For example, it was a preoccupation with the securing of pasture rather than an innate (and therefore irrational) lust for plunder that made the Turkic 'tribes' who had come to Anatolia in the eleventh century head for the Caucasus (Peacock 2010); the need to acquire and maintain access to pasture must indeed be considered one of the foremost objectives of nomads acting in the political field. This need may materialise in a more defensive strategy (for instance in contemporary settings), but also in more expansionist strategies. The relative strength of nomads in the political field depends largely on the ways they can bring in their military skills and potentials.

We are aware of the problems surrounding the term 'tribe' and its various uses in the social sciences and in history (see Sneath 2007). We have therefore avoided 'tribal' terminology where the sources do not hint at it, which is often the case in the Turko-Iranian world. In other cases, we have opted for translating a number of terms in the languages spoken in the field and written in the sources as 'tribe' (e.g. the Arabic terms qabil and 'ashira). However, no general definition of the term 'tribe' is intended. Indeed, this would run counter to our observation that 'tribal' terms acquire their precise meaning only in specific contexts. Moreover, it needs to be kept in mind that, while people may use the idiom of 'tribalism' to conceptualise their social relations in some contexts, in others they often use other terms.

The results of our current research projects are now published simultaneously in two scholarly journals, *Nomadic Peoples* and *Eurasian Studies* (vol. IX 1–2, 2011) under the overall title of 'Nomads in the Political Field'. These research projects were mostly led on an individual basis, but they have been discussed by and have benefited from the expertise of the other members of the Research Centre in general and of the study group in particular.

It is important to stress that there is no conceptual framework that is binding on the Collaborative Research Centre or its various individual projects and study groups. Concepts such as 'agency' and 'resources' have, besides the 'political
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field', proven to be useful tools for a number of authors, but not all of them refer to this terminology explicitly.

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The contributions presented in this volume focus on concrete political processes, which are analysed on the basis of all the kinds of sources available. Typical questions are: Who does what? Who has the right to what? What constraints limit the political field, in psychological or physical terms? (In contrast, the contributions published in the Eurasian Studies issue may ask similar questions, but they depend mainly on one body of sources and take a reflective stance vis-à-vis these sources and the representation of nomads in them.) In the present volume, each study reconstructs its own 'political field' as a complex of actors, resources and rules.

This is done in two ways. The opening article by Kurt Franz takes a long-term perspective and attempts to present a systematic overview of the entire political history of the Bedouin in the Arab Middle East. The article takes issue with the idea that the history of the Bedouin can be reduced to interaction with settled population groups. Instead it aims, in a systematic fashion, to assess the extent to which the history of the Arab Bedouin has been determined by external or internal factors. Starting from Antiquity and continuing up to the present, the author shows that, depending on the period considered, either intrinsic or extrinsic factors prevailed, and thereby offers a rare comprehensive view of Bedouin history and a unique periodisation of that history, which takes the nomads' primary agency as its main rationale. This is certainly an ambitious endeavour and its various conclusions will need to be tested through in-depth studies on Bedouin groups.

The other four contributions in this issue present extended case studies (see Evens 2006) that cover specific episodes in the history of particular groups. David Kreuer's study of the use of pastures in contemporary eastern Morocco is perhaps the most concise illustration of a political field in this volume. The study is based on data from an extensive household survey. Political struggles on the ground are explained by a detailed actor-centred analysis which at the same time takes dichotomies such as 'state and tribe' seriously, not as essentialised entities, but as frames of reference that condition the actors' perception. The careful reconstruction of the political field allows Kreuer to reach clear conclusions about two key concerns of this volume: the political agency of (highly varied) nomadic actors and the way territorial rights emerge in the region under study.

Johann Büssow's contribution follows a similar line of argument. The study takes an intratribal revolt among the Sb'a Bedouin as a window onto the political dynamics of one of the influential groups within the famous 'Anaz tribal confederation between the two world wars. The article shows that
there were tensions between ordinary Bedouin and their officially recognised representatives, the shaykhs, and that specific political conditions (especially the rivalry between the British and French Mandate administrations) empowered the former to defend their interests against the latter. This case also sheds light on the broader structure of the 'Anaza – an often-cited but underresearched entity in the history of the modern Arab Middle East. The author suggests that the confederation gained its legitimacy and durability through serving as a reference system that was flexible enough to serve the interests of various Bedouin actors as well as state agencies, and thus helped to arrive at viable compromises between these actors in the political field.

The fourth article, by Thorsten Schoel, deals with the political dynamics of another 'Anaza group, the Hasana (or Ḥsana). The episode described here on the basis of an oral history account is a case of murder and retaliation that took place in the Syrian town of Homs in 1979. Unlike in the interwar period, the Bedouin now had to deal with centralising ideologies and government policies. The analysis presents two interrelated political fields, a broader one constituted by the interaction between the Ḥsana and outside actors and a narrower one within the Hasana polity. With regard to the broader political field, the case shows the great extent to which the Syrian government, despite its modernist and centralist rhetoric, depended on the support of local groups, among them the Bedouin.

The fifth article, by Peter Koch and Judith Miggebrink, takes us to the Sámi reindeer herders in present-day Norway and Sweden. The Sámi are the only ethnic group in Europe recognised as an ‘indigenous people’ by the European Union. As in Kreuer’s Moroccan case, pasture is the key resource in the political field under investigation. The article reports on a conflict over the mutual use of pastures by Sámi reindeer herders across the Norwegian-Swedish border. The authors ask what kinds of identifications related to different kinds of spaces are referred to in this conflict, hypothesising that the legal status of an ‘indigenous people’ might play a prominent role. However, the results of the investigation show that reindeer herding today is a nationalised business and that the notions of ‘being a Sámi’ and ‘being a state citizen’ are more important.

These five articles raise a number of issues that are of relevance beyond their specific areas of research and which might be of general interest to the study of nomadic groups and societies. Some of these will be highlighted in what follows.

Agency and Resources

The political agency of nomadic groups and their representatives is a key concept in all the articles in this special issue. Many discuss the leverage of particular groups and individuals in terms of resources they possessed (on the concepts of nomadic ‘multi-resource economies’ and ‘resource portfolios’, see Franz 2005; Gertel 2007; Khazanov 1994: 69–84; Salzman 1971).
Kurt Franz makes agency and resources central criteria for his periodisation of Bedouin history. From a macro-perspective, he highlights a number of factors that enabled Bedouin in the past to change the political reality according to their own dispositions: an independent economic basis grounded in pastoralism and other mobile occupations, political representatives backed by a broad consensus, military strength, control over territories, and finally, alliances and protection treaties with neighbouring groups. The Sba'a Bedouin in the 1930s, who are described in Büssow's article, had this whole range of resources at their command. However, many elements in this portfolio were weakened, which led to a severe internal political crisis for this group. Their economic specialisation made them vulnerable to climatic extremes and economic changes, and national borders began to fragment their region. In addition, government police forces had gradually curbed their ability to use military means of coercion and to impose protection treaties on other groups. In this situation, their main representative, the tribal shaykh, was no longer able to generate consensus within the group.

Kreuter's article describes livestock, land and social networks as the key resources at stake in the political field of land use negotiation in the eastern Moroccan highlands. His findings suggest that there is a dynamic of social polarisation within the (post)nomadic communities and that a new educated elite is increasingly able to challenge the authority of the traditional notables within their region. Land use is also a central political theme in the case of the Sámi who are the subject of Peter Koch and Judith Miggebrink's article. In contrast to the other cases in this issue, political negotiation processes surrounding land use took place here in the context of democratically governed societies with a well-established statehood. The authors show that, after the incorporation of the Sámi into a state population and the integration of their business into the national economy, the state became a guarantor and representative of the herdsmen's pastoral interests. National pastoralist associations were thus formed to secure the pastoralists' interests against other interest groups with regard to land use within a given country.

The oral narrative of a contemporary Bedouin shaykh based in Homs that forms the central source of Thorsten Schoel's article can be read as an account of how the 'incorporated resources' (Gertel 2007: 21–25) – especially strategic and rhetorical skills – of a Bedouin politician were employed in political action. It also shows how rhetorical skills are used again in producing a highly stylised account of this action. In fact, this is a case in which we have a political actor boasting of the resources at the command of a previous leader of his group, as well as of his own.
Mobility, Territories and Boundaries

The categories of ‘space’ and ‘place’ receive the most detailed treatment in Koch and Miggelbrink’s contribution, but they are also prominent in the other four articles. It should not come as a surprise that the spatial mobility of nomadic groups is repeatedly identified as a major factor in the determining of their political options. The political success of the above-mentioned Hasanayn shaykhs, for instance, can be explained to a large extent by their strategy of allying themselves with the governments of two neighbouring countries, using their connections in one country as an asset in the other and using their spatial flexibility to play off neighbouring governments against each other. Following an observation by Werner Caskel (Caskel 1953: 20), this strategy may be termed ‘see-saw-politics’ (Schaubelpolitik). Kurt Franz describes it for the Syrian Bedouin in the thirteenth century who were enabled by the Mamluk-Mongol conflict to play off two rival governments against each other. See-saw-politics was also employed by the Sbâ’a Bedouin, as related by Büssow, who during the 1930s attempted to play off the governments of British-controlled Iraq and French Syria against each other.

In the case of the Sámi, different types of pastoral mobility over long and short distances are practised within territories that have been regulated over the last two centuries by an elaborate and still growing body of legal provisions. The examples in this special issue suffice to show that it is hard to generalise about nomadic territories. In the case of the pastoralist groups in eastern Morocco described by David Kreuer, we encounter habitual territories that are named after eponymous tribes and nowadays roughly coincide with municipalities, although the borders between them are not officially delineated. The Sbâ’a Bedouin in Büssow’s article did not possess a bounded territory. In contrast to other Bedouin groups of the Arab East (cf. Stewart 1986), they created boundaries in the steppe only when they were based in their summer camps close to the agricultural zone. Otherwise, they simply claimed the right to use certain places in the steppe that offered vital resources, such as pasture, wells and camp sites.

In the modern age, state borders have become a major issue for nomadic groups throughout the world. In the case of the Sbâ’a Bedouin, the national border between Iraq and Syria impinged on the pastoralists’ mobility, but its existence also increased the Sbâ’a’s political importance in Syria and Iraq, at least temporarily. Koch and Miggelbrink draw a similar picture of the effect of borders on the Sámi. On the one hand, borders often interfered with nomadic mobility (as in the case of the border between Russia and Norway, which was closed in 1852), but on the other their enforcement was accompanied by the recognition of certain pastoral rights within the states concerned and structured the herders’ self-perceptions as state citizens (as in the case of Swedish and Norwegian Sámi).

A territorial boundary, especially if it is policed with modern technical equipment, can severely affect the herders’ ability to migrate between pastures.
If this were not the case, a border would be quite meaningless for them – no more than a line on a map. However, as part of a wider process of nation state formation, including the idea of a state territory and a national legal regime, it can become part of a complex of rules that impact on the nomadic economy, especially if different legal provisions are enforced on either side of the border. Thus a state border need not only be a negative factor in the nomads’ life but may also create new possibilities.

Identity and Representation

Identities come into play when the ‘nomadic’ or ‘post-nomadic’ actors under investigation are labelled by outsiders or present themselves and their cause to the outside world. We need to keep in mind that when we define the subjects of our investigation, we often use terms that carry strong connotations concerning a certain way of life or a certain ethnic identity (Tapper 2008).

The authors in the present special issue are aware of the pitfalls of such classifications. Instead of imposing a priori terminology, they take the local use of such categories seriously, be they self-identifications or externally ascribed labels with political relevance in the given situation. If reference to the language of the sources is not a feasible option, as for example in the article by Kurt Franz, terms such as a ‘nomadic way of life’ or ‘Bedouin tribes’ are used as ideal types, and the authors do not expect any actual individual or group to conform precisely to certain patterns commonly associated with these terms. In general, we expect identities of nomads to be multiple, situational and re-negotiated on a daily basis.

The contributions on the Sámi and the Moroccan nomads both provide empirical evidence of plural identifications and self-identifications in the political field that were situationally generated. With regard to the Sámi, Koch and Miggebrink refer to notions of self-understanding rather than using ‘identity’ as an analytical concept. Based on interviews, the article shows how specific identifications such as ‘being Sámi’, ‘being a businessman’ or ‘being a state citizen’ were raised and put to strategic uses in specific situations. With regard to eastern Morocco, Kreuer explains that leading a nomadic way of life is much less important for local self-identities than belonging to the a’rāb (‘Arabs living in the steppe’) and to a certain tribal group. In what follows, he is careful to explain what a ‘tribe’ can mean in his context and is thus able meaningfully to speak of ‘tribal actors’ and ‘tribal territories’.

A very graphic case of self-representation of a (post-)nomadic actor is the oral narrative of a Bedouin shaykh that is analysed in Schoel’s article. Here, the social categories used in the article are taken directly from this narrative. Büssov’s article shows how, in the past, such self-representations interacted with externally ascribed identities. In this case, the French colonial administrators in Syria imposed on the Bedouin population categories, such as ‘nomads’, ‘semi-
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... sedentaries’ and ‘tribes’, that had far-reaching legal and political consequences. The Bedouin’s agency becomes clear when we see Bedouin themselves taking up these concepts in an attempt to make the most of their limited options.

At this point we would like to end our general survey of topics treated in this special issue. This is also a convenient opportunity to point again to this issue’s partner volume, Eurasian Studies vol. IX 1–2, 2011, where the topics of representation and identity are explored in more detail. Finally, we have pleasure in thanking Saverio Krätli and the Nomadic Peoples editorial team for agreeing to publish our articles. Many thanks also go to Borleis & Weiss cartographers (Leipzig) for drawing the maps, to Dawn Chatty (Oxford), Jean-Claude Garcin (Aix-en-Provence), Frank Stewart (New York) and Richard Tapper (London), who kindly answered numerous queries during the editing process, and, last but not least, to Carol Rowe (Sheffield) for her careful copy-editing.

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