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THE LORDS OF THE ZAGROS MOUNTAINS
THE STRUGGLES OF MODERN QASHQAI NOMADS AND WAYS TO PRESERVE
THEIR FLEETING CULTURE

Master's Thesis

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List of Abbreviations

CH – Cultural Heritage

ICH – Intangible Cultural Heritage

MCHTH – Iranian Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts

NAO – Nomad Affairs Organization

UN – United Nations

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

CTHH – Cultural heritage, Tourism, and Handicraft Headquarters

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Introduction

This work is a study of Qashqai nomads of Iran. The Qashqai nomads were, and partly still remain, semi pastoral nomads whose lifestyle has relied on the seasonal needs of their livestock. For the most part, they need to move within their summer and winter pastures to ensure sufficient grazing for their herds. This act of moving with livestock between the summer and their winter pasture is called “Kooch” in Persian. Kooch encapsulates the core of the nomadic lifestyle practiced by various tribes, and it is the most fundamental characteristic of the nomads in Iran (Noroozi 63), including Qashqais.

The Kooch is an odyssey, it is a long journey full of challenges. However the essence of Kooch is not just a physical migration but it is related to the identity of nomads, their culture and heritage. Kooch is heritage, and this heritage is not history, but produced in the present and in relation to our current experience. Heritage creates and strengthens social relations, values, and meanings about people’s past and present. (Zhu and Salazar 241).

Unfortunately, this heritage is on the verge of extinction. Based on the statistics, a century ago, the nomadic population was prominent in the country's demographic structure, possibly constituting approximately 25% of the total population of Iran, but this had decreased to about 1.2 million people (“Results of the basic Registration Census”) among Iran's 85 million population by 2021, with only a small proportion of nomads participating in the annual Kooch.

This decline became a motivation behind writing this thesis. I read about the history of nomads in the last century, but I wanted to learn about the everyday challenges they face and what has caused many nomads to settle down in the cities. I was curious about what they needed to keep their heritage and traditions alive, including Kooch. I previously worked as a tour guide in Kahkaran village in the Fars province of Iran. Still, for my fieldwork in March 2022, I visited multiple villages in two different provinces of Isfahan and Chahar Mahal va Bakhtiari.

Given the intangible nature of this seasonal migration, I've chosen to delve into the realm of Material Culture, aiming to render it more tangible. Culture is a pattern in the mind, inward, invisible, and shifting. Material things stand solidly out there in the world (Glassie 41). Based

on my interest, I used carpet to analyze nomads' heritage and struggles. The Qashqai nomads weave the Qashqai carpet with imaginary designs; their carpet weaving knowledge and skills have been passed down from the older generation to the younger generations.

The reason for my personal interest in carpet is that carpet for us Iranians holds a lot of significance. I still remember our red handwoven carpet that my mother received from her father as a dowry. It was the very same carpet whose intricate motifs she used to weave captivating night stories with. Now, as I reflect on those memories, I've amalgamated the notes I meticulously collected during my fieldwork. These notes serve as the foundation for me to narrate the story of carpets and their significance in the Qashqai tribe. These carpets were depicting Kooch and the summer pastures, and they were the last pieces that the mother of the family wove 5 years ago.

In the methodology section, I have used various methods for collecting data for my thesis, where the firsthand information provided by the nomads and weavers themselves in the villages of Kahkaran, Ali Abad, Imam Qeys and Cheshmeh Rahman (see Figure 2). My analysis is based on autoethnography and participant observation. Additionally, I applied ethnographic methods when conducting online interviews and using ethnographic methods with searching relevant social media platforms.

This study investigates the challenges that Qashqai nomads (as a part of broader nomadic groups) face, as well as potential solutions for preserving their culture and heritage.



Figure 1. The location of Iran (Google)

For structural purposes, this thesis is organized into four separate chapters. The first chapter describes the ethnographic setting and methodological challenges of my thesis. Following which, Chapter 2 will briefly introduce the nomads of Iran, including Qashqai nomads, as they present an ideal case study to address my main research questions. In addition, I outline the background of my ethnographic study while explaining the Qashqai history over the last century. This chapter also introduces the Qashqai carpet as their craft. In Chapter III, I analyze a few examples of carpets and the story of the seasonal migration depicted in the carpets as well as provide an overview of their struggles in holding on to their lifestyle. In Chapter IV, I introduce possible solutions in helping the nomadic communities to sustain their weaving traditions. I have provided these reflections in the context of and as a response to the governmental cultural heritage protection principles. These, in turn, adhere to the international policy making framework in the field of cultural heritage under the auspices of UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) that promotes relevant guidelines and international cooperation. Finally, I will conclude my thesis with a consideration of future research opportunities.

Chapter 1. The Ethnographic Setting and Methodological Challenges

The present thesis focuses on the Qashqai nomads of Iran, aiming to provide an in-depth understanding of their culture, their struggles in daily survival, and reflect on possible ways to protect their culture and heritage. For the subject of my thesis, I have chosen to specifically investigate the safeguarding of the heritage of the Qashqai nomads. My motivation for this topic is rooted in my previous experience as a tour guide in Iran since 2016. During my career as a tour guide, I had the opportunity to become acquainted with Qashqai community members and, subsequently, developed a deeper understanding and bond with their way of life as well as the struggles that it encompasses. This previous experience with the Qashqais as a tour guide has guided my current approach and fieldwork to Qashqai heritage and its sustainability.

To collect data for my thesis, I decided to rely on the firsthand information provided by the nomads themselves, following thus the staple principles of doing ethnography. Ethnography is the study of people and cultures from the perspective of the subject – it is aimed at getting a deep understanding of the daily lives of the people on which it focuses (Hasbrouck). Ethnography usually involves the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artifacts – in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry (Atkinson 3). In order to do so, I therefore contacted a gatekeeper – a person “who control[s] access to resources – human, geographic, social, or informational” (Schensul and LeCompte 39) – to help me organize my fieldwork.

Having a gatekeeper was helpful since nomads usually live in very remote places and getting access to them may cause difficulties. Another reason for having a gatekeeper to assist was that, even though most of the Qashqais also speak Persian, they generally speak Turkish (Amerian 307) and for some of them it was easier to communicate in Turkish. Another source of stress was my awareness that I was a female researcher, far from my safety structures, forced to trust people who I barely knew, and my gender might work to shape the kind of vulnerabilities (Demos 209). My gatekeeper's family were previously nomadic, but they now live in Boroujen, a town located in the Chahar Mahal & Bakhtiari province. He speaks two

of the local languages, is acquainted with the head of the villages, and works as a local tour guide. His presence helped me to manage my limited time with the best outcome that I could imagine.

After a month of planning, I was able to conduct 15 days of fieldwork in Iran in March 2022. This fieldwork trip gave firsthand data, as well as the opportunity to connect with participants and immerse myself in the research context. Although some of my plans did not go as planned, and some of my phone calls went unanswered, I was able to develop an excellent connection with some of the Qashqai nomads and was hoped to be able to return to Iran and be a participant in their Kooch (the annual migration of nomads which will be discussed in Chapter 2).

From my very first steps in planning this thesis, I decided to spend time with members of one of the tribes that maintained an active weaving tradition and still undertook the Kooch. My intention was to learn more about their handicraft and their lifestyle through a personal experience that would help me to understand how these two facets interacted. I wanted to get to know the people “by observing, building relationships, [and] participating in [their] conversations and daily activities” (Shensul and LeCompte 27).

For attaining the main goals of this study, I have chosen to utilize the nomads' tangible craft and especially the narrative representation of nomad lifeways in their carpets as a case study to shed light on their rich legacy. I therefore chose to enter the world of material culture, “a conventional name for the tangible yield of human conduct” (Glassie 41). Upon deciding to take a closer look at the significance of carpets for the Qashqai, I felt that my primary research needed to be experiential. I sat down with them on their carpet's loom and heard their stories while learning how to weave a carpet. What I could learn from books or discussions would pale in comparison to what I could learn from seeing firsthand or doing on my own. This made becoming a participant observer mandatory (O'Reilly). According to Glassie, things are works of art when the act is committed, devoted, when people transfer themselves so completely into their works that they stand as accomplishments of human possibility (Glassie 41). I wanted to discover how these carpets are made and what makes them unique pieces of art. To do so, I needed to learn about the people who wove them and how their experiences

affected the creation process. It is my hope that, in doing so, I will find a way that may help to sustain the survival of the craft, and the accompanying culture.

My limitation in conducting fieldwork among the nomads with this method arises from the nomadic way of life itself. The mobility and dispersal of the Qashqai and their frequently varying seasonal patterns of livelihoods, migrations, and residences complicate the issue of observing, documenting, and interpreting transformational processes. A researcher present for only a short period would have difficulty sorting out such diversity, understanding the complex processes of change, and concluding general political, economic, and social patterns (Beck).

I had planned to carry out additional fieldwork for my thesis with the aim of collecting additional material. For security reasons related to the nationwide protests in Iran in the autumn of 2022, I was unable to return to Iran to complete my fieldwork according to my initial plans. Due to these circumstances, I resorted to ethnographic research on social media platforms (e.g. Instagram) and by carrying out online interviews through a secure and accessible audiovisual platform for Iranians (Google Meet). Although all the interviewees consented to having the interviews recorded and gave their permission for me to use their real names in my research data, I decided to encode their names for safety reasons and out of a sense of my own ethical responsibility – while research that is intended to have an impact and to lead to interventions in the world necessarily has to embrace the unknown and the uncertainty of the future, ethical regulation seeks to create forms of certainty (Pink 29). To collect additional material for my research topic, I also used a relevant podcast as a source, like the Zamin O Zaman podcast. Discovering this podcast was extremely fortunate to me as the political upheavals in Iran resulted in much of the country's internet access being shut down.

To compensate for the lack of opportunities of on-site fieldwork, I turned to netnographic methods – types of social media research, which adapt the methods of ethnography and other qualitative research practices to the cultural experiences that encompass and are reflected within the traces, networks and systems of social media (Sloan and Quan-Haase). Online, I was able to pursue leads and threads that were unavailable in person. Additionally, there is a

depth of knowledge that the internet affords a researcher, even if it requires higher attention and more thorough examination than face to face discussions do.

Bias unquestionably influences this study due to my close relationship with the subject (see Stewart-Jolley). Having been born in Iran and having seen the hardships that the nomads face against the changing and unfavorable circumstances around them, I have developed a belief in the rightfulness of their demands. Moreover, after having worked with them in my capacity as a tour guide, I have come to understand their sentiments of having been left out of the general decision-making processes that affect their lives and subsidy providing circumstances. Nevertheless, I have tried to describe and give an explanation to the history and present situation of the Qashqai nomads as neutrally as possible in my thesis (Chapter 2).

The other resource I used in my research is based on autoethnography. Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno) (Ellis et al.). With doing autoethnographic method I did not only to tell personal stories. It intends to expand the understanding of social realities through the lens of the researcher's personal experiences (Chang 108). Autoethnography came out as a solution to the gap that I felt in my research due to the political condition of my country (Jones et al.). I used autoethnography starting from my childhood, to being an official cultural tour guide in Iran, and later on during my 15 days fieldwork in Iran in March 2022.

Such versatile experience has given me an opportunity to learn about the issues of nomads and their handicrafts in three villages: Cheshme Rahman and Ali Abad in the Isfahan province and Imam Qeys in the Chahar Mahal & Bakhtiari provinces of Iran. There, I learned that carpet weaving skills are endangered, particularly among Iranian nomads. The younger generation is uninterested in studying their ancestral traditions due to a lack of desire created by the challenges they experience in their daily lives (this will be further discussed in chapter 3).

Finally, I present in this chapter on methodology a list of the interviews that I conducted as well as the notes that I took during and after the interviews below. I have allocated an abbreviation, “IRN”, as a written form of IRANIAN for each person and use them in my

thesis for reference. These abbreviations helped me with a coding method in which I took my data separately based on codes and then I put the data together into new assemblages of meaning (Saldaña 6) in different chapters.

Lastly, I have compiled the names of the individuals who participated in my interviews and organized them into Table 1. The table provides information on the location where each interview took place, the gender of the interviewee, their occupations and current living situations where relevant, and the means through which the interview was conducted. I conducted the interviews in Persian, transcribed them (about thirty thousand words), and then translated the related answers into English. My thesis presented here is the culmination of a four-years-long process of collecting and analyzing the data detailed in the table below.

Table 1. Summary of interviews conducted at the time of data collection.

| Code | Location | Gender | Occupation | Ways of communication |
|------|---|--------|--|-----------------------|
| IRN1 | Tehran, Tehran province, Iran | M | An administrator at the Regional Research Centre for Safeguarding intangible Cultural Heritage in West and Central Asia under the Auspices of UNESCO (Tehran ICH Centre) | In person |
| IRN2 | Isfahan, Isfahan province, Iran | M | Carpet seller | In person |
| IRN3 | Kohgilooyeh-va-Boyer Ahmad, and Isfahan provinces, Iran | M | Local tour guide and eco camp owner (My gate keeper) | Online and in person |
| IRN4 | Kahkaran Village, Fars Province, Iran | M | Local tour guide and eco camp owner from Qashqai tribe | Online and in person |

| | | | | |
|-------|-------------------------------|---|--|----------------------|
| IRN5 | Tehran, Tehran province, Iran | M | Inscribing ICH expert at the ministry of cultural heritage, tourism and handicraft | Online and in person |
| IRN6 | Montreal, Canada | M | French speaking tour guide, translator and online activist | Online |
| IRN7 | Shiraz, Fars province, Iran | M | Tour guide | Online |
| IRN8 | Shiraz, Fars province, Iran | M | Incoming Tour operator, travel agency owner, hotel and eco camp owner | Online |
| IRN9 | Tehran, Iran | M | Previously nomad, owning a nomad tour company and a nomad market | Online |
| IRN10 | Shiraz, Fars province, Iran | F | Student | Online |
| IRN11 | Fars province | M | Qashqai nomad | Online |
| IRN12 | Boroujen, Iran | F | Weaver – previously nomad | In person |
| IRN13 | Imam Qeys Village | F | Weaver | In person |
| IRN14 | Imam Qeys Village | F | Weaver | In person |
| IRN15 | Imam Qeys Village | F | Weaver | In person |
| IRN16 | Imam Qeys Village | F | Weaver | In person |
| IRN17 | Imam Qeys Village | F | Weaver | In person |
| IRN18 | Imam Qeys Village | F | Weaver – previously nomad | In person |
| IRN19 | Imam Qeys Village | F | Weaver | In person |
| IRN20 | Imam Qeys Village | F | Weaver | In person |

| | | | | |
|-------|---------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|----------------------|
| IRN21 | Cheshme Rahman Village | M | Qashqai nomad | In person |
| IRN22 | Cheshme Rahman Village | F | Weaver – previously nomad | In person |
| IRN23 | Ali Abad Village | F | Weaver – semi nomad | In person |
| IRN24 | Ali Abad Village | F | Weaver – previously nomad | In person |
| IRN25 | Shiraz, Fars province, Iran | F | Tour guide | Online |
| IRN26 | Isfahan, Isfahan province, Iran | F | Co-founder of Startup travel company | Online and in person |

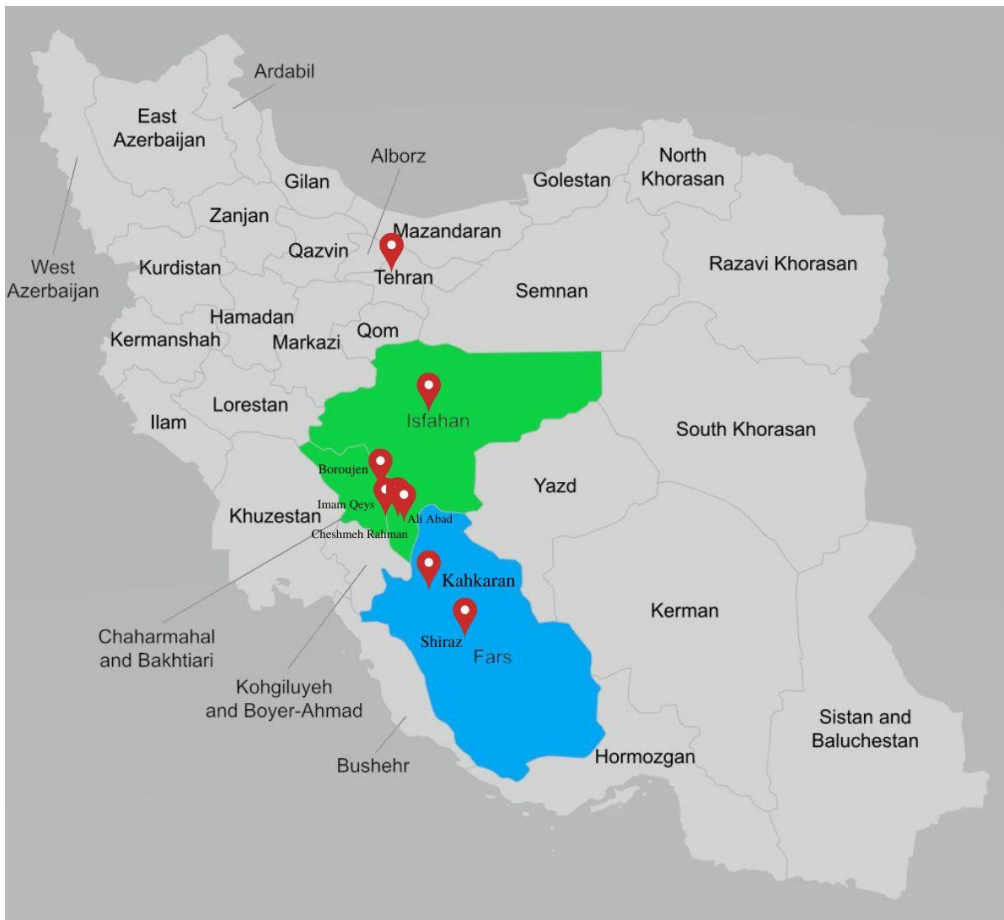


Figure 2. Map of Iran with the villages and provinces involved in this study. (Author's creation)

Chapter 2. Historical Overview

“With undertaking the Kooch, we are trying to say that the world is not a place to attach yourself to: we will all migrate one day.” (IRN11)

This first chapter gives a background overview about the nomads of Iran. It will be continued by introducing the Qashqai nomads and their handicraft. The purpose of this chapter is to contextualize the current situation of the Qashqai nomads, the challenges they face in regards to maintaining their traditions, and to provide a framework for discussing solutions to these challenges in the final chapter of this thesis.

Nomadism denotes a mobile way of life organized around cyclical or seasonal patterns, It refers to groups of people who practice spatial mobility to enhance their well-being and survival (Gilbert). A nomad is an individual who does not have a fixed home and instead travels from place to another place in search of sustenance, grazing areas for livestock, or means of livelihood (Noroozi 63).

Based on Britannica, the term *nomad* encompasses three general types: nomadic hunters and gatherers, pastoral nomads, and tinker or trader nomads (“Nomadism”). Iranian nomads are semi-nomadic pastoralists which is characterized by extensive pastoralism and the periodic changing of pastures during the course of the entire, or the greater part of the year (Khazanov). Despite governmental sedentarisation programmes and attacks on pastoralists as 'backward', some argue that mobility is still necessary for pastoralism to be successful and sustainable in this environment (Humphrey 1).

In the context of Iran, nomads have played an important role through Iran’s culture, history and even socio-political changes. As they traverse the vast landscape of the country, they practice safeguarding their intangible cultural heritage, and what they inherited from their ancestors. Over the last century, several studies have focused on Iranian nomads. Noteworthy examples include Barth's work in 1961, as well as studies by Beck in 1986, Garthwaite in 1983, and Oberling in 1974 (Szuchma).

The next subchapter will give a more detailed overview of nomadism in Iran, geographical distribution, way of life and sustaining livelihood. It will be followed by a short overview about the Qashqai nomads and their carpet.

2.1. Nomads in Iran

Due to its unique geographical location, Iran has traditionally been one of the nomadic pastures in the world (Amerian 56). Throughout history, there have been diverse livelihood patterns based on different types of rural and nomadic livestock across Iran and there is a large portion of livestock feed and feeding resources in the fields. In Iran, the term “Ashayer” (in Persian عشایر), an Arabic word meaning “tribes,” is used to refer to the various nomadic tribes. Three forms of nomadism can be distinguished: hunters and gatherers, non-sedentary nomads whose economic activities focus on tinkering and trading, and pastoral nomads. The numerous motives for nomadism in Iran include the following (Noroozi 63):

- It is considered the preferred form of subsistence
- It upholds cultural and ethnic independence
- It resists any outside interference
- It serves as a means to avoid war or ethnic hostility
- It is the sole lifestyle known and aligns with peoples’ self-perception
- No single area provides sufficient resources all year around

The distribution of nomadic tribes in the geographical area of Iran is subject to change, and it is possible that certain areas that previously had a significant nomadic population have experienced a decline today as a result of the rapid urbanization or the conversion of lands to industrial or agricultural purposes. The Iranian nomads are spread out throughout the country, with a significant concentration in the central region of Iran's major mountain range of Zagros, extending from the north-west to the southern coast (Noroozi 65). These nomads – primarily pastoral nomads who rely on domesticated livestock – migrate throughout the Zagros Mountain range to graze their herds.

Each of these individual nomadic groups has traditional sites where they stay before moving to their next location. Since they are essentially pastoral tribes, as the major portion of their income and wealth comes from their herds, the nomads must relocate and seek suitable pastures to provide fodder for their livestock, so adaptation to nature is essential for them (Barzegar et al). Iran’s nomadic livestock production systems have not received proper attention regarding legal protection of land rights, adequate support to improve animal breeding, animal nutrition and health, and access to credit and market opportunities. Instead,

the government has focused its efforts towards sedentarization of the nomads. (Ansari-Renani et al 2).

A century ago, the nomadic population was prominent in the demographic structure of the country, possibly constituting approximately 25% of the total population of Iran, but this had decreased to approximately 1.2 million people (“The results of the basic registration census of the nomads of the country”) within the 85 million population of Iran by 2021. Among the remaining groups considered to be nomadic, only a small proportion of nomads participate in the annual migration known as "Kooch."

The Kooch (in Persian کوچ) is an odyssey, an annual journey undertaken by Iranian nomads with their animals in a quest for green pastures. This annual journey's migration path is different from one nomadic tribe to another and is a long journey full of challenging adventures for nomads to find an economical resource (Amerian 52).

In Iran, the annual migration or Kooch takes place between the nomads' different pastures: Yeylaq and Qeshlaq (in Persian بیلاق and قشلاق, respectively). “Yeylaq” comes from a Turkish word referring to nomads' summer pasture while “Qeshlaq,” also of Turkish origin, refers to the winter pasture. The spring Kooch happens around the end of winter or beginning of spring with the tribes traveling from Qeshlaq to Yeylaq. At the end of summer to mid-autumn, the autumn Kooch takes the tribes from Yeylaq back to Qeshlaq. The route between their two pastures is called “Il-raah”.

Essentially, the purpose of determining and choosing Il-raah is to have the shortest and fastest passage to the pasture, with few encounters with other tribes. Such an Il-raah is regarded by the tribesmen as the property of their tribe. Their rights to pass on roads and over uncultivated lands, to draw water everywhere except from private wells, and to pasture their flocks outside the cultivated fields are recognized by the local population and the authorities (Barth).

Yet the total distance traversed during this odyssey can be up to 500 kilometers. Undertaking the Kooch means passing by the foothills and deep valleys of the Zagros mountains over a period of many days, including packing all the equipment every morning, walking for kilometers with their large herds, cooking, unpacking and setting up the tents and other

necessary equipment to settle down for the night, sleeping, and waking up the next morning to repeat the entire process until they arrive to their destination.

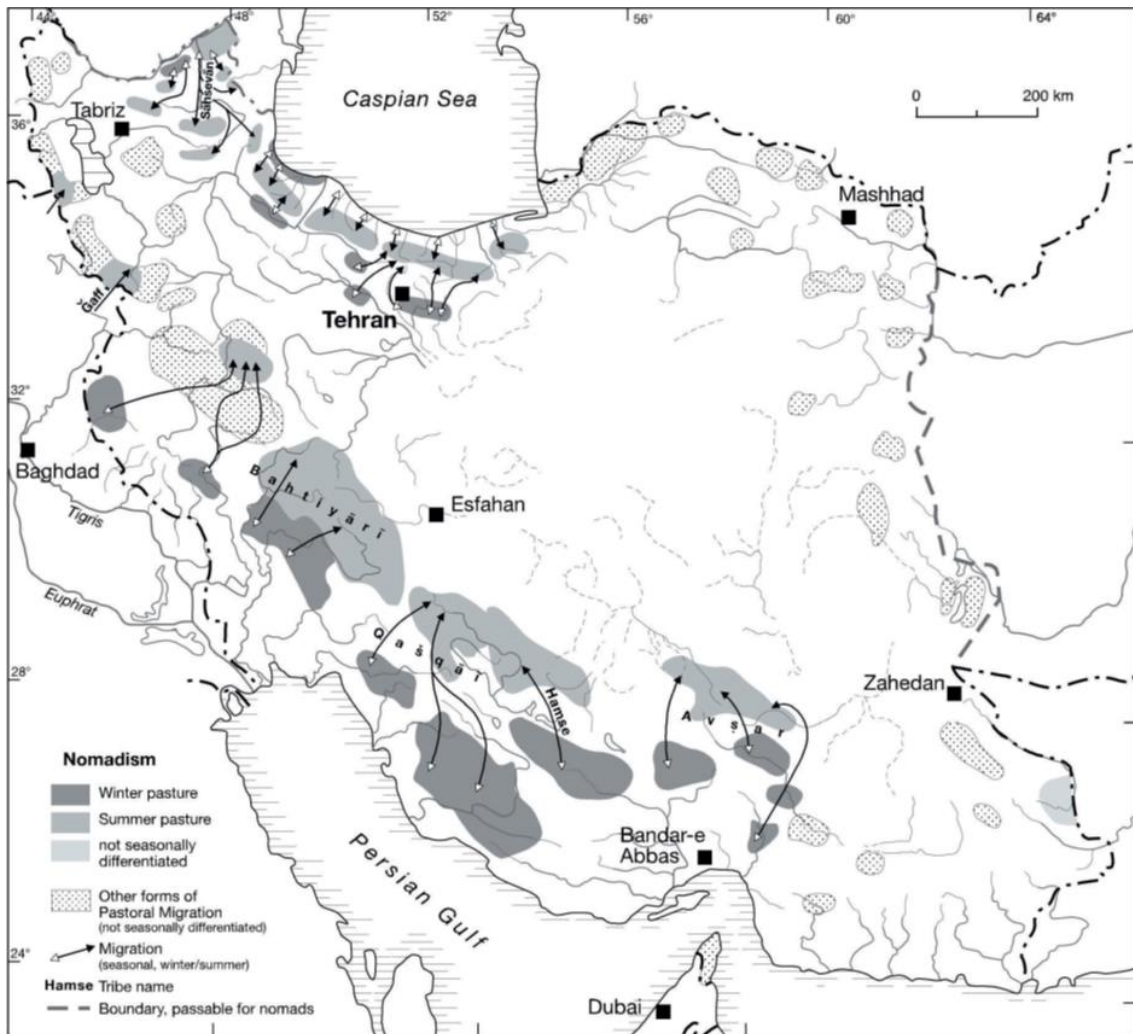


Figure 3. Map of Iran with nomadic summer and winter pastures (Noroozi).

The time of Kooch is dependent on the weather. Usually, it is possible to determine which month to have the Kooch in; however, precisely guessing the exact date and time is not always feasible. Other factors that can influence the time of Kooch are the distance between the winter and summer pastures of nomads, the seasonal flora along the route, whether or not they have an exclusive pasture, and the condition of their agricultural produce in their pastures. Aside from the effect of nature, there are certain beliefs among nomadic tribes in good and bad omens or good or bad dates and hours that can change the time of their Kooch. (Amerian 54)



Figure 4. Bahman (name) in between Bahman (plant). Translation: Bahman is the name of this grass, when it is green it's good. When it is dry it sticks to your clothes, or herds eat them and it is not good. "Bahman" is one of the signs of Kooch. (From the Instagram of Bahman Mardanloo, a Qashqai nomad)

In general, the nomads in Iran are grouped into eight tribes: the Shabsavan, Lur, Kurdish, Khamseh, Arab, Turkmen, Balouch, and Qashqai ("Typology of Iran Nomads."). Most of these groups still live in the Zagros Mountains. Each of the tribes has their own oral traditions, expressions, languages, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, as well as knowledge and practices concerning nature and traditional craftsmanship. All of these domains have been mentioned before in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention of 2003 ("Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage"), thus highlighting the importance of protecting these forms of culture among the nomads of Iran. While each group has distinct practices and crafts worthy of study, for the purposes of this thesis I will be focusing on the Qashqai, one of the pastoral nomadic tribes in Iran.

2.2. The Qashqai Tribe

“Have you ever heard of the Nissan Qashqai?¹ They named it after us because they knew how hardworking we are!” (IRN4)

The Qashqai tribe is one of the largest and most important tribes in Iran. For this thesis I will be using the Qashqai nomads as a primary case study as I am familiar with their situation and culture based on my previous experience as a tour guide in Iran. An experience which gave me valuable insights into their life. This chapter will provide an overview of the Qashqai livelihood in order to contextualize their weaving traditions (presented below). Some researchers have proposed that the origin of the word “Qashqai” may come from the Turkish word “Qach Qa’ei” which means “fled.” Another theory is that it might be derived from the word “Qashqe,” which means “white forehead horse” (Parham 64).

The Qashqais are one of the nomadic Turkish-speaking tribes inhabiting south-central Iran. According to historians, the Qashqais immigrated to this region approximately 10 centuries ago (Afshari and Alinaghizadeh). Qashqai people have lived in the provinces of Fars, Esfahan, Khuzestan, Kohkilooyeh-va-Boyer Ahmad, and Bushehr. Many have now settled down into a sedentary lifestyle, with very few of them still taking the annual Kooch. The Qashqais are tribally organized nomadic pastoralists and agriculturalists with a strong sense of ethnic identity. They are in the majority Shi'a Muslim group, unlike many of Iran's other tribally organized ethnic and national minorities who are Sunni Muslims (Huang 12). Their economy is generally based on mixed herding and farming. However, there are certain groups within the Qashqai which are not involved in farming at all, and their livelihood is based on herding alone (Amanolahi). The Qashqai population in 1970 totaled approximately 250,000 individuals. By 2013 the number of people who identified themselves as Qashqai had grown to an estimated 1.5 million, a sixfold increase in four decades. During the same period, Iran's population nearly tripled, from 28 to 79 million (Beck). As of today, around 70% of Qashqai people have left the nomadic lifestyle and live in the cities (IRN4).

¹ “The Nissan Qashqai derives its names from a semi-nomadic Iranian tribe. The Qashqai people are renowned for their brave warriors and their beautiful textiles. Nissan chose the name because the automaker believed that drivers would embrace that nomadic, adventurous spirit.” (Kidd)

The Qashqai people have suffered under different governments throughout their long history. The past century saw first the rise of the Pahlavi dynasty who took power in 1921. As the new king of Iran, Reza Shah (1921–1941) made the decision to modernize traditional Iran. He instilled a sense of nationalism in the elite who desired to see the glory of the past in contemporary Iran. The new government made many changes in Iran in their efforts to modernize the nation, with one of these being the decision to put an end to nomadism.

Reza Shah believed that the tribes were uncouth, unproductive, unruly, and uneducated savages who had been left behind in a primitive state of nature (Abrahamian 141). Under the guise of uniting a nation that consisted of a myriad of differing ethnic and cultural groups, the Iranian government undertook a campaign of resettling and re-educating the nomadic tribes. The governments of both Reza Shah and his son, Mohammad Reza Shah, viewed the Ashayers as backwards and unmodernized. Additionally, the exoticization of the nomadic lifestyle by Western cultures was seen as counterproductive to the establishment of a new national identity and sustained political viability. As a result, the Shah's soldiers forced the nomads to move from the mountains and valleys to the cities. The consequences of this forced acculturation, called "Takht-e Qapoo," resulted in the deaths of many Qashqai and other nomadic people (Cronin). Takht-e Qapoo ("Takht-e Qapoo") is a term that means "wooden gate" in Azerbaijani Turkish, but in the first Pahlavi period, it was used to refer to the settlement of nomads. This settlement was the last stage of Reza Shah's nomadic policies to make sure that they were no longer on the move.

In order to ensure the tribes' permanent subjection after defeating them, Reza Shah established army outposts in their regions, disarmed their warriors, conscripted their youth, stirred up internal conflicts, confiscated their lands, undermined their chiefs, restricted their annual migrations, and, at times, forced them into "model villages" (Abrahamian 141). However, it did not end there, and it continued during the so-called "White Revolution" or "bloodless revolution" that began in Iran in 1962. Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi accelerated urbanization and Westernization during the White Revolution through reforms that upended the wealth and influence of traditional landowners ("White Revolution"). As part of Mohammad Reza Shah's "bloodless" revolution, the usual transhumance routes of the Qashqai nomads, who were believed by the officials to be "a vestige of the dark ages" (Ansari

9), were disrupted by land reform and pasture nationalization. A state agency took control over the land previously owned by tribal leaders at the same time as the nomadic tribes were disarmed. Conflicts with non-Qashqai agriculturalists and other competitors over land use and ownership escalated. Insecure about their problematic land rights, some nomads decided to establish permanent residences (Beck 19).

When the Muslim clergy seized control in Iran in 1979 and took steps to form an Islamic state, the Qashqai wondered how and to what extent the new government would apply Shi'i doctrine and practice to their lives (Huang 4). After the Islamic Revolution the new government tried to break the link that had been claimed to exist between modernity and detribalization and settlement. It accepted nomadism as a rational ecological option and, in an ideological decision opposite to that of the previous kings but equally historical in nature, redefined the tribes as defenders of national independence (Cornin). The Islamic government's assertion of its own political control in the tribal areas was, however, absolute. As a minority group, the Qashqai suffered many similar, albeit technically different, forms of political and social discrimination in comparison to what they had to endure under the shahs' regimes.

In 1980, the Ministry of Iran established a permanent Nomadic Affairs Organization, which has two main responsibilities:

- to study the status of nomads, revive indigenous traditions and cultures, study livestock issues, ensure the security of seasonal migrations, and work on social and health services;
- to cooperate with other relevant organizations, ministries, and executive bodies that are responsible for providing appropriate services to the nomads.

For this reason, the government has to allocate finances and resources to establish centers for the preservation of nomadic monuments and heritage (Noroozi 74). The Qashqai endeavored after the Islamic Revolution to preserve their heritage, especially their language, in the face of increasing Persian and Arabic incursions. They retained their traditional Qashqai attire, despite state prohibitions, and grew more enthusiastic about Qashqai customs, particularly music, dance, and rituals. More relevantly here, the Qashqai women revitalized the styles and

designs that had been used in the past in their weaving craft. People accentuated and perpetuated what they regarded as a Qashqai lifestyle, including migrating seasonally, living in the mountains, dwelling in black goat-hair tents, tending livestock, relying on customary technologies and natural resources, and separating themselves from the non-Qashqai society (Beck and Neshat 258).

However, based on my experience of working with nomadic peoples in the field, it appears that nomadic communities, including the Qashqai tribe, continue to face a variety of obstacles caused by both natural and man-made factors. These difficulties are causing the gradual disappearance of their rich culture, including a substantial impact on the art of nomadic carpet weaving among all nomadic tribes of Iran, as is the case with the Qashqai carpet.

2.3. Qashqai Carpet

“They say you are lucky if you get these two from Qashqais: Qashqai wife and Qashqai carpet” (IRN22)

Qashqai nomads are famous for their nomadic rugs, each of which has its own unique features. Unlike their urban counterparts, nomadic woven goods are not made according to a prepared design but are improvisationally created. They are the result of a fleeting moment, each a unique piece, the likes of which may not ever be reproduced again (Sadriani 66).

Historically, the amount of raw materials, such as wool for weaving, at the disposal of each family was based on the amount of livestock and familial wealth. Moreover, the more weavers there were in the family, the larger the family's black housing tent and the number of woven textiles within it. Since the nomads were migrating and traveling, their woven textiles were smaller, not exceeding 6 meters for easier transportation. However, weaving is not done during Kooch as accessing the frame loom during traveling would lead to skewing in the warp (Oliyaei).

Men and women have distinct responsibilities when it comes to the creation of the carpet. Men in the Qashqai tribe are tasked with setting up the loom. The looms used by the nomadic tribes, and specifically those of the Qashqai, are different from what we find in the cities and carpet workshops. But it is the Women of the tribe who are typically responsible for making

yarn out of the wool the men have shorn. They have basic spinning tools, created from bones, wood and other surrounding materials (“Traditional Skills of Carpet Weaving in Fars”). The spun wool may then be dyed using organic pigments. Natural dyes come from a great diversity of plants available in the region, including madder plant, walnut, pomegranate and oak skin, which are all readily available in the Zagros mountains. Afterwards, they dry the yarns in the sunlight, then wash them in the river until they achieve the desired color. Nowadays, however, if a weaver needs a particular color, they can just buy the dyes from the carpet shops in the nearest cities, though these might have chemical coloring agents in them.

The majority of the task of weaving falls on the matriarch of the family along with other women. When the yarns and looms are ready, it is time for the craftswoman to weave, bringing all of her skill and imagination to the loom. Knot after knot, and they weave every layer of their carpet until it is time to cut the carpet from the loom. The carpet and its creation is a product of the family's intertwined skills, from shearing the wool to dyeing it to weaving it. These are inherited skills, passed down through the family, rather than learned at schools or via formal training.

Qashqai nomads are semi-pastoralist, which makes for a wide variety of designs (IRN26, IRN2); The environment and available resources can have an impact on the nomadic designs. Nomads, for the most part, use wool from their own herds. The nomads depict their livestock, their imaginations, their past or future woven in the carpet, while the sedentary nomads seem to use more design based on the market patterns (IRN2). The knots that the Qashqai nomads use vary in type, sometimes using Persian knots and at other times Turkish knots (Harris 56). Using a Turkish knot is more prominent which makes the carpet thicker and the weaving process quicker. The Qashqai carpet is famous for its elaborate designs. It is of interest to note that each member of the family contributes to producing the carpet. Since wool is the most common material for carpets, Qashqai men are usually responsible for shearing wool from their sheep. The process starts early in the morning by giving their sheep a nice bath in the nearest lake or river, usually just before Norouz (Norouz is the Iranian New Year, which occurs at the beginning of spring). After making sure that the wool is cleaned, the men start shearing.



Figure 5. Bath time for the herd. Source: Bushehr CTHH Twitter account.

The motifs on the Qashqai carpet signify the identity of the carpet. The designs are usually vivid for the experts that they can distinguish if it is the Qashqai carpet at a glance (IRN2). Like many other types of carpets created in Iran, Qashqai carpets have found their way out of the country, decorating houses and museums worldwide. Just like the painters or sculptors who used to share their stories with their art, Qashqai nomads share their Kooch stories with their carpets. Even though many factors such as technology, climate change, and politics threaten them, their odyssey continues.

Now that the quality of our life is rapidly changing due to modern technologies and conveniences, many nomads have stopped weaving as changes in technology and lifestyle affect the economic viability of the craft. The traditional skills and art of carpet weaving among the Qashqai nomads is one of their material cultures facing challenges which I will discuss in the next chapter.

Chapter 3. The Sun Is Setting in the Zagros Mountains: the Fading Heritage of the Qashqai Nomads

“What is the best way to introduce Iran? Carpet!” (IRN6)

In this chapter, I will focus on the meaning of the carpet for both the Qashqai tribe and for Iranians in general. This analysis will begin with a description of my personal encounter and experience with weaving a carpet, which I complement with the Qashqai weavers’ firsthand explanations of the narrative depiction of the Kooch experience that is reflected in their carpets (3.1.). The information presented here was gathered during my fieldwork in Iran in March 2022. With this chapter, I endeavor to tie the weaving tradition of the Qashqai with their nomadic lifestyle.



Figure 6. A thirty-year-old Qashqai carpet in a carpet shop in Isfahan, Iran. Author’s photo, 2022.

Intangible heritage usually also has a material dimension: the processes involved assume materiality and tangibility (Arizpe and Amescua 123). The nomadic lifestyle is by default a form of intangible heritage. However, this lifestyle is fading away, and with it, many aspects of nomadic culture and associated traditional practices. To present this intangible heritage

with a clearer framework for analysis, I have decided to focus on a material object within its intangible cultural context and manifold connotations. This tangible object is for the Qashqai nomads the culmination of years spent in practicing crafts that require special skills and knowledge: the Qashqai carpet. In the next part of my thesis, I am going to analyze the imagery and narratives that have been woven by the Qashqai weavers into their carpets and which I encountered during my fieldwork.

In April 2023, I posted on my social media platform the question about the “meaning of the carpet for Iranians” . From the forty answers I received, there were certain keywords that stood out as more meaningful to me. Many said that carpets equated to “wealth,” “fame,” “investment,” “gentility,” “spirit of the house,” and above all “life.” One person mentioned “a house without a carpet is not even home.” As someone who grew up surrounded by carpets in my childhood home, these were the answers I expected and understood. As an unwritten rule among many Iranians, carpets are so important that you are not allowed to walk on them while wearing shoes. Carpets are usually displayed on the walls as well as on the floors. Carpets carry a deep meaning and importance for Iranians, as well as being investments that can last for generations. Iranians hold dear a sense of respect and admiration for the carpet.

Carpets in Iran are usually divided into two separate categories: the city carpets and the nomadic carpets. The city carpet is usually based on an established pattern and the weavers use vertical frame looms to produce these carpets. Their nomadic counterparts are based on free form imaginative patterns as well as warmer colors and the weavers typically use horizontal looms. The Qashqai carpet is one of the more appreciated carpets among Iranians. The material used in the Qashqai carpet for both the warp and weft is wool.

During my fieldwork in March 2022, I had the opportunity to learn how to weave a rug from a couple of Qashqai craftswomen. Sitting next to them on their looms and participating in weaving was usually the time when they chose to unfold their stories to me.

3.1. My fieldwork experience of weaving a carpet and of telling the story of the Kooch

“Do you want to learn?” she asked, and I was thrilled. I sat next to her on the carpet that she was making. “Which of these colors is your favorite?” My choices were not much, so I started with a creamish yarn. Then she also took another yarn of the same color and showed me the place that I should use the color. I took one thread from the front and from the back – exactly the same way that I used to explain it to tourists when I was working as a tour guide in Iran. “Now how can I make a knot?” I asked the nomad woman.

She took one thread, passed it from the back warp, then turned it around the front warp and pulled the thread on the loom toward herself. Since the warps are very tight, they will not be separated. When I wanted to try it myself, I used a lot of thread. She had to re-do it for me and told me that we cannot waste the yarn because it is getting expensive.

I was very excited about finally learning how to weave a carpet, but at the same time, since she was from the Qashqai tribe, I was surprised to see that she was using the asymmetrical knot, also known as the Persian knot. She sat on the loom, smiled at me, and said “Perhaps I was too lazy to weave, your presence here is motivating me again.”

I had never woven a carpet before. As a tour guide, I used to explain it very simply: you get a warp from the back and a warp from the front, and then you make a knot. Now I could see, as she took a warp from the front side of the loom and one from its back, it was not as easy as I had originally thought. She was fast, very fast. My eyes were glued to the loom and I could see her fingers dancing across it. She made knot after knot, and cut after cut. I could hear the music that she made with the loom. Her way of weaving had a melody.

My quest to find the weavers was successful, but the carpet that they were weaving was not the one that I was initially looking for. On March 11th, I miraculously found the carpet that I had endeavored to find. It is a carpet that is very hard to find in any carpet shop throughout Iran – the carpet with the symbols and designs that I was looking for, the one that explains the story of their Kooch without any written explanation.

I had been invited to the small house of a stranger in the Cheshmeh Rahman village. As soon as I saw the floor, I could not hide my happiness anymore. My interest in their carpet

surprised them and it was at this moment that the mother of the family opened the door to their private room to show me more of her carpets.



Figure 7. A carpet made by a Qashqai woman from Cheshmeh Rahman village with the design of their summer pasture. Author's photo was taken in March 2022, the carpet had been woven in the summer of 2017.

It was not easy to communicate in Persian, as she was speaking Turkish; however, what was very easy to understand was the light in her eyes and her excitement when she was showing

the carpets that she had woven a long time ago. There were piles of carpets hidden under their bed, all of them looking very new.

Soon, I was surrounded by her daughters and they were translating their mother's words from Turkish to Persian for me. From this experience, I learned how Kooch has influenced the life, the art, and the memory of Qashqai nomads. Through analyzing the figures in the carpets, and the notes gathered during my fieldwork, the story of the Kooch took shape.

The weaver's name was Soosan². She was married to her distant cousin and had six children, two sons and four daughters. I met her in a village called Cheshme Rahman, which is located in the Isfahan province of Iran. The family had been nomads a few years ago, but they decided to settle their life in this village so that their children could have better access to an education. However, they still have a small herd that Soosan's brother takes care of.

As Soosan was only fluent in their native Turkish language, her daughter, now educated by municipal schooling, translated her tale. "She was a nomad so she spent most of her life in nature, sometimes she misses the beautiful valleys and mountains too..." the daughter said. Like many other nomads who I met, she also lost her motivation in weaving carpets. "The last carpet that she completed was five years ago," she told me. One of the daughters showed me one of the carpets and said, "This is for me, my dowry."

She unfolded her favorite carpet and started to tell me the story behind the designs. The tale of the carpet starts like this: "Once upon a time, under the blue sky and the yellow sun, there was her family who lived in their family tent within the valleys of the Zagros mountains." The Zagros mountains play an important role in the life of its inhabitants. For many, it is a sacred mountain that provides them with food, water, and shelter and has protected them throughout history.

As she was explaining the tale of the carpet, her mother was standing in the corner of the room. "Look at my mom. I guess she enjoys it when you praise her carpets," the daughter said. The carpet depicted a scene of their Kooch, a calm frozen moment within their difficult odyssey. She continued: "There is this large black tent which was her family tent. They were

² Soosan is a given name.

all living in the same tent. This tent has no door which means guests are welcome in the house. Guests are friends of God. Snow-capped mountains showing that it is spring, and nature is alive again. It is the time that you see birds in nature, singing louder than before.”



Figure 8. A carpet made by a Qashqai woman from Cheshmeh Rahman village with the design of their summer pasture. Author's photo was taken in March 2022, the carpet had been woven in the summer of 2017.

The black tent, which was present in all of her carpets, is one of the symbols of the Qashqai nomads. Their foldable home is, as mentioned before, made of wool. The tent is dark brown to black for its entropic properties, helping to cool in the summer and heat in the winter. Women in the tribes learn how to weave the black tent from their mothers, while men learn how to set up the tents from their fathers. The black tent itself can be called vernacular architecture (Hassas). “You know, nomads need to move... so they need a house that they can carry from one place to another... they used to live like this for thousands of years! The shepherd rests under the shade of a tree, he is playing Ney.” Ney, a local flute, is one of the oldest musical instruments in the world. Compared to many of the other musical instruments that can be found in Iran, Ney is easier to make and carry during the Kooch. “Here is a river, coming from the melted snow in the Zagros mountains.” Water is also an important element for nomads. It is sacred. It takes weeks for nomads to go from their summer lands to the winter ones, during which they usually walk along the river to make sure they will have water for their animals while doing their Kooch. Snow-capped Zagros mountains provide the most essential need of nomads: water.

In addition to weaving according to significant events and experiences, the designs of the carpet are also dependent on the current emotions and thoughts of the weaver. As Soosan's

daughter explained: “This carpet is woven based on spontaneous feelings which could speak for nomads without a tongue.” For example, using bright colors in a carpet represents the weaver’s happiness, whereas the use of darker colors may signify that they are experiencing sadness or grief. Specific colors may also be tied to certain emotions: “Red is the color of bravery, green is for happiness,” as Soosan’s daughter explained.

To further convey the experiences of the weavers in their carpets, a variety of symbols are utilized. Fauna, for example, is often woven to depict the experiences and knowledge of the weavers and their families. In Soosan’s carpets, one might find sheep, camels, goats, dogs, and specific species of birds, which all had particular meanings attached. As her daughter explained, “Dogs are loyal, they protect them from foxes, wolves or bears!” Goats, sheep, and camels may symbolize the family’s wealth. The larger the herd depicted in the carpet, the wealthier the family was. Camels, which are more commonly found in the south of their pastures, were appropriately placed in the lower parts of her carpets.

Among the various fauna symbols in the carpets, the goat holds an important place in Qashqai culture and may often be identified on their carpets. The goat was one of the first animals which was domesticated in the Iranian plateau. As Soosan’s daughter explained, “Goats are smart, they are fast, and very good climbers.” Moreover, the black nomadic tents are produced from goat hair, which makes their tent waterproof during the rainy days. Goats also act as a weathervane for nomads; while looking at their hair, they can determine the direction and speed of the wind.

Another example of an important animal depicted in Qashqai carpets is the donkey. While explaining their significance to me, Soosan’s daughter showed me one motif on a carpet where a woman and donkey are woven next to each other. For the Qashqai, the donkey is one of the most useful animals to nomads during the Kooch. Their place in the Kooch is vital as the donkeys carry the nomads’ heavy tools and even the lambs at times.

Soosan pointed to another carpet. The design was almost the same but there were a couple. Soosan’s daughter pointed at them and continued that “There is a couple, it is the bride and groom. And they have another tent, it is white and smaller because it is for the newlyweds. The white tent is called Aq-Chador,” she said. Upon asking who these newlyweds were

meant to represent, she held the carpet closely and said, “It is me and my future husband. This is my dowry that she [her mother] wove for me; just like how she did for herself.”



Figure 9. A carpet made by a Qashqai woman from Cheshmeh Rahman village with the design of a Qashqai bride (with a Qashqai dress) and groom on the slope of Zagros Mountains. Author's photo from Cheshmeh Rahman village in March 2022.

Wedding traditions play an important role in the Qashqai ceremonies. A Qashqai wedding is not only between two families but two clans or even with another tribe. The invited families need to migrate with their herd to get to the wedding spot. This wedding spot is usually an open air ceremony in the Iranian nature. She continued, “My mother’s wedding took seven days and seven nights, but nowadays we have smaller weddings. My brother only had one thousand and two hundred guests. Back in my mother’s time, as soon as she understood when her wedding day was, she started to weave her own carpet.”

Other life events have also traditionally been woven into the carpets. After telling me about the wedding customs within her family, I asked Soosan’s daughter if she would weave a carpet for her children, just as Soosan had done for her daughters years before. “No, too much work. But maybe I will give the same carpet to them,” she replied.

Since the Qashqai carpet does not follow any pattern, but instead the current will and emotion of the weaver, Soosan wove most of her carpets with a measure of spontaneity. When commenting on the little mistakes in their weave of her carpets, she did not deem them as mistakes, but instead the very aspect that “makes these pieces so special.” To the weavers,

the technical errors that they make while weaving are part of the story that their carpets tell. As Soosan and her daughters packed their carpets away again in the small room, safely out of reach and in the darkness, I wondered what challenges the Qashqai faced that was leading to this decline of their weaving tradition. Why was the next generation, those like Soosan's daughters, not inclined to continue weaving their own stories? This chapter will continue to examine the issues raised by nomads during interviews. These difficulties have an impact not only on their lifestyle and livelihood, but also on their craft.

3.2. Obstacles to the Qashqai Livelihood and Craft

Just as technology continues to change and impact our lives, many diverse lifestyles and traditions are changing. Elliott Oring writes that “nothing is as it was before. Change is the fact of an existing tradition.” Back in Iran, I kept thinking about this quote as I observed the traditions of the Qashqai being replaced in favor of the modern. The Qashqai weaver Soosan, for example, had told me that she stopped weaving carpets five years prior when she discovered that, although she put so much effort into the carpets, the carpet shops only offered her very little money for them. While I looked around their house, I noticed that machine-made carpets now outnumbered the handmade ones. Change had come to the Qashqai, their livelihood, and their traditions.

As the traditional practice falls out of favor among the Qashqai youth, their hand woven carpets are in danger of being lost. Within this thesis, I argue that the Qashqai carpet is a cultural property that should be recognized before the weaving tradition disappears. It is vital to maintain this tradition as each motif and symbol of the carpets represents the weavers' identity, race, class, and culture. Each of the knots and motifs on the carpets represents the Qashqais' folktales, the route of their Kooch, the beauty of the Zagros mountains, and their love of the environment around them. This overall agenda to preserve and protect the craft must be undertaken as a joint initiative that combines the efforts of the nomads, the Iranian people, and the government of Iran.

While I learned how to weave a Qashqai carpet, I conversed with the weavers about the challenges that their weaving tradition faces and why many former weavers have already stopped weaving. They mostly emphasized challenges such as governmental policies,

healthcare access, education, water shortage, and not having access to a safe road. These challenges will be discussed in further detail in the following subchapters.

3.2.1. The challenges generated by Governmental Policies

“The biggest issue from the perspective of nomads is the government. The rules of the government” (IRN9)

“The life of the Qashqai people is dependent on the decisions of the government” (IRN4)

According to the interviews, over the last century, different governments have forced the Qashqai people to settle down in the villages. Moreover, previous Iranian governments have taken land from the nomads and have declared that land as “national land.” Under the current government, the nomads own some lands, but they do not have permission from the government to use and benefit from those lands. There have been further limitations regarding these specific lands.

On the other hand, the Department of Environment along with the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources and Watershed Management Organization, are largely responsible for the nature of Iran. These ministries have the power to give or deny permission to the nomads to enter a land during their Kooch. As the current state of nature in Iran is fragile, these governmental agencies endeavor to prevent overgrazing by the nomads’ herds. Most of the nomads are happy that these agencies exist to protect and preserve the environment. However, many nomads have also reported that these agencies can be rather restrictive when allotting land for the Qashqai during their Kooch. As one informant explained:

“The Environment Department only selects a zone with nomads, and forces nomads to move from that region. That family that they forced, their life and their income is depending on a specific region for years, if you want to move them out to another spot, 100%, they will have new different challenges until they are adapted to their new zone.” (IRN4)

Another notable point concerning land policy is the government's contemporary move to define the time frame of the Kooch. In contrast, the nomads were traditionally the sole decision makers on which days would be better for them and their herds to travel. When speaking with them about these changes, many of my interviewees emphasized the fact that they deeply know the mountains and lands which they travel during their Kooch, and are determined to protect the environment of their homeland. The government setting the times and places of the Kooch – despite not knowing the land as well as the Qashqai – has therefore been a source of frustration and logistical struggle for the nomads.

When it comes to the nomads' handicrafts, the situation seems to be similarly perilous on account of contemporary governmental policy. Based on the interviews I conducted, weavers, including Qashqai weavers, do not feel that the Iranian government pays enough attention to them and their crafts' wellbeing. In sporadic cases, governmental intervention has offered some hope for the maintenance of the Qashqai weaving tradition. For example, the Iranian government has previously provided select nomads with loans to purchase the materials needed for weaving carpets, such as yarn. However, with the inflation rate rising to a recorded 50% as of March 2023 (KhabarOnline), these loans are simply not enough. Between existing poverty and recent inflation, many of the nomads have been forced to use the loan for covering their daily needs to survive. Moreover, at least three weavers have mentioned that they are not sure if they can repay the loan, signaling a future of debt for some nomadic weavers. As one such weaver recounted:

“I got a loan to weave my carpet, then the price of everything exploded and I needed to spend that loan to survive... They (bank employees) don't come here to see our struggles, they just say: money, money, money. They only need the money back.”
(IRN18)

On a more positive note, the government inscribed the traditional skills of carpet weaving in Fars in the Intangible Cultural Heritage List of Humanity in 2010 (“Traditional Skills of Carpet Weaving in Fars”). This inscription was listed in relation to the Fars province, representing the nomadic carpet of Iran, and in the city of Kashan, representing the city carpet. This inscription is noteworthy for the purposes of this thesis as a large number of Qashqai people live in the Fars province. However, while this inscription has brought some

attention to the Iranian carpet, there has been little followup in ensuring that the act of safeguarding the skills of carpet weaving has also been applied in practical terms. For weavers, this has signaled yet another instance where governmental policy has fallen short of the efforts necessary to adequately safeguard the traditional skills of carpet weaving.

3.2.2. Weavers' Access to Healthcare

Access to healthcare and insurance have caused further challenges for Qashqai nomads, as all of my interviewees observed. On a wide scale, healthcare in Iran is not free, though there are different governmental and private insurance firms that can partially cover the expenses of healthcare. Even still, most nomadic women are deprived of even the most basic healthcare treatments. As one of my weavers recounted:

“Nine or ten years ago, there was a plan from the government, they asked NAO to register all the nomads for governmental insurance. Maybe around 70% of nomads register their name for it, but the insurance is not helpful.” (IRN8)

Indeed, most Qashqai nomads are not provided with sufficient medical coverage and care. Their health problems are instead neglected on average. The lack of healthcare access has further pushed some nomads into adopting their own form of “traditional healthcare” (Ardam, IRN3). It is common for Qashqai nomads to understand which herbs in nature can help them with some basic diseases and ailments. However, when it comes to more serious conditions, their knowledge and the traditional remedies are insufficient to adequately resolve the issue. These conditions are further exacerbated by their poor financial circumstances and lack of access to general healthcare. For example, during my fieldwork, I learned that the reason why many nomads are missing teeth is because it was more reasonable for them to extract the tooth when they felt pain than to fix it. In these cases, it is more financially possible for them to resolve the condition themselves and, in many cases, this is the only possible solution; seeking medical care would necessitate moving to the nearest town, where the local doctor or dentist might not even be available that day.

Another problem that interviewee IRN4 described was related to close relatives' marriage. The nomadic communities are small and, just like other countries in the Middle East and

North Africa, marriage between cousins is acceptable. This has led to inbreeding and the issues associated with it within these communities. As he continued:

“... so cousins marry their cousins, the result is that we are having some children within our tribe that were born with Down syndrome or intellectual disorders... Now they are grown up and they need someone to support them, so special organizations should take care of them... but there is no support, that’s why some people did not bother to register for insurance.” (IRN4)

Furthermore, lack of access to safe drinking water in some parts of the country has caused skin issues, vision impairment (Ardam), and kidney problems (IRN3). The majority of the weavers that I spoke with also had their own health issues in relation to weaving. Weaving carpets, particularly on the horizontal loom of the nomads, requires sitting in the same position for several hours and focusing on small knots. The following are quotes from interviewees IRN13 and IRN14 that I collected during my fieldwork (March 2022):

“I have to bend all the time to weave the carpet, I have a backache. I have to look very carefully at my small knots, I now have eye problems too, I can’t see well. If I sell this carpet, do you think I can pay for my treatment? Not at all.” (IRN13)

“Sometimes when I work on this carpet, I feel like an arrow in my heart. I know I have heart problems. We sold our herds but it is not enough to go to a hospital and have a surgery. I think I should get used to this pain.” (IRN14)

Weaving the carpets takes the weavers several hours and a great deal of effort, which has a deleterious effect on their physical health. These testimonials from the weavers reveal the wide-ranging health conditions that weavers develop and exacerbate when producing carpets. However, without more dependable access to healthcare, the weavers will continue living with these conditions throughout their lives.



Figure 10. A weaver in Ali Abad while weaving her carpet. She has to sit in the same position for hours. (Author's photo)

Moreover, internal challenges have created a barrier to access to insurance and healthcare among the Qashqai nomads. In recent years, narratives have spread among small nomadic communities that people who have gotten insurance died. These narratives appear to have roots in the lack of education received by some of the nomads. As this lack of education has influenced their perceptions of the world around them, it is important to discuss the lack of education within the next subsection.

3.2.3. Qashqai Access to Education

“When it comes to the education of nomads, the name of Mohammad Bahmanbeigi comes to the nomad’s mind. We, nomads, owe him a lot.” (IRN10)

Mohammad Bahmanbeigi (1920–2010) was the father of nomadic education in Iran. He was from the Qashqai tribe and later became an activist for the wider community of the nomads of Iran. During his lifetime, he started a new teaching method for nomads and implemented successful educational policies for the community. Before Bahmanbeigi, Ashayers of Iran did not have equal access to education. (IRN4)



Figure 11. A nomadic school. The caption reads: “Whenever you see a white tent within the black tents of nomads which has a flag of Iran on the top of it, that tent is a school” (Photo from the Instagram of IRN25)

Thanks to these previous efforts, the government of Iran currently provides some nomadic schools to the Ashayers of Iran to ensure that the children can access primary education. These schools are held in small white tents marked with the flag of Iran, as shown in Figure 10 above. However, since the nomadic tribes of Iran are not settled in a stable location, their access to education is limited, especially during their seasonal Kooch. As IRN4 mentioned in his interview:

“The number of students has decreased since the number of nomads is less. Sometimes the government doesn’t want to pay money to a teacher to go to a remote area and teach to, for instance, two students. What they are doing is that they settle a tent in a specific location, and then tell nomads to bring their kids to those spots.” (IRN4)

There is, however, a major practical issue with gathering all of the students from different communities in one set place: the distance. Time is a very precious resource in the nomadic lifestyle, and families spending the time to take their children to school places a burden on this resource. In addition, these movable schools are not able to support higher levels of education. In order to obtain higher levels of education for their children, “some take educational leave” (IRN3), and many nomads have settled in nearby towns and cities to ensure that their children can receive a quality education. As a result, many of these newly settled families can no longer be considered to be nomads. Moreover, for some of the Qashqai people who have settled in cities, simply being educated means that you are no longer a nomad. As interviewee IRN10 mentioned:

“My mom is an educated Qashqai; that’s why she is not a nomad and she doesn’t know how to weave.” (IRN10)

Unfortunately, modernization and globalization in a developing country like Iran does not help with safeguarding the nomads’ traditional knowledge and language. It should be highlighted here that the Qashqai people speak their own Turkic language instead of the official language of Iran, Persian (also known as Farsi). Due to the unofficial status of the Qashqai language in Iran, access to education in their own language remains scarce and

requires Qashqai children to learn Persian. This places further constraints on Qashqai nomads who want their children to receive a quality education.

3.2.4. Drought and water bankruptcy



Figure 12. A lake no more. A nomad's herd on their way to an almost dried lake in Fars province. The sign on the right says "Danger of drowning! Swimming in the lake is strictly prohibited." (Author's personal archive, 2019)

The climate and environment are changing. As with everything else on Earth, Iran is influenced by the increasing environmental changes. More specifically, Iran is facing major challenges in regard to its fresh water resources: “accelerated desertification and deforestation in these regions, along with damaging environmental practices and high water consumption patterns, are stressing underground water resources and potentially causing water bankruptcy on the local level” (Keynoush). For the last two decades, Iran’s landscape has further suffered due to dams being built at the origins of the main rivers by Iran and neighboring countries. At the same time, there has been an indiscriminate construction of wells to access underground water, further endangering Iran’s environment. While these

wells and dams are built with permission given by the government of Iran, they increase the risk of drought in Iran's near future.

Moreover, "Iran holds the record for Asia's hottest official temperature of 54C (129F), which it recorded in 2017" (AJLabs). With the higher temperatures and lower water tables, Iranian nature is at its highest risk to date, and nomads are perhaps suffering from it the most (IRN7). Drought has caused great difficulties for the nomads who have used the same paths for their migration for centuries. As one informant told me:

"Iran built dams twenty times more than its yearly rainfall capacity. This means they (the government) have destroyed nature completely. Nomads have no intention to live their nomadic life. The water challenges have influenced them a lot, no green pasture has been left for them. Their herds are getting smaller." (IRN6)

At the same time, the droughts and changing climate has caused numerous wildfires in the Zagros mountains. The Zagros mountains are covered with oak trees, and as a result, it might take a hundred years for the local biosphere to recover. The situation in the Zagros mountains caused people to say "Zagros oak forests would cry out if they could" (Haghshenas).

Moreover, drought in the region has also caused sand and dust storms in the country; "this phenomenon originates from the interaction of natural drivers, such as drought, and anthropogenic factors, such as mismanagement of water, soil, and plant resources" (Bolorani et al.). Over the last years, this phenomenon has made the life of Zagros residents difficult, including that of the nomads. With many resources, specifically access to water, becoming scarcer for both themselves and their animals, they tend to move to villages where they have access to more facilities. This is a direct threat to Kooch and the nomadic life.

3.2.5. Lack of market for their produce and crafts

Nomadic communities often reside in remote places, far from urban centers. Finding a potential market or a potential buyer is not easy for them. When the migratory season is about to start, nomads need to make sure that they can sell their produce before Kooch. Undertaking Kooch requires nomads to travel very light. This is a requirement that dealers are aware of.

The dealers use this knowledge to purchase the nomads' goods at a reduced price, and then sell the products to the larger markets and get more benefits.

For other goods, such as meat, the price is preset. The nomads have no choice but to sell at a rate determined by the government.

“The meat that they produce is very dependent on the government. The government defines a price for them with what price they can sell the meat that they produce.” (IRN3).

As the main income of nomads is through animal husbandry, the government's inference in the case of buying their meat has put so much pressure on the nomads already.

“Seven months ago, the government, with the help of NAO, kept the price of meat very low all over the country. Although the price of other meats was increasing, they only put pressure on the nomads to keep their price low. This caused many nomads to sell their herds and they went to cities. The government did not place much value on their work.” (IRN9)

Furthermore, when it comes to the art of nomads, specifically their handwoven rugs, the market seems to be very limited. When visiting the Bazaar (local market) of the city of Isfahan and its multiple carpet shops, I wanted to check whether they sold nomadic carpets and if they were popular. However, nomadic rugs, particularly Qashqai rugs, were substantially more expensive in cities such as Isfahan and Tehran, whilst nomads in villages were offered relatively low prices. The conspicuous absence of information and opportunities pertaining to identifying a favorable market among nomadic communities was readily evident. As a consequence to this problem, motivation in weaving carpet among them has already been compromised. (Personal autoethnography, March 2022)

“If they [dealers] buy my rug 1 million Toman more, I will gain motivation to weave. The problem is, they always want to buy [her rugs] 2 million Tomans³ less.” (IRN19)

³ Toman serves as an unofficial currency in Iran, where 1 million Toman is equivalent to 10 million Iranian Rials, approximately amounting to 20 euros as of August 2023.

For nomads, living a nomadic life where you don't have a fixed house, or even living a semi-nomadic life through the valleys of Zagros mountains has caused problems for nomads in finding the best market to sell their carpet. Some of the weavers (including IRN17 and IRN15) sold their carpet for a very cheap price to their small local supermarket in their village. Some others (such as IRN16 and IRN19) were able to sell their carpets to a carpet dealer in the nearest city (in this case Boroujen). Yet, the price was too low and not satisfying. Knowing that for making the carpet, they need to spend a long time bending in front of or on the loom, and that the material that they need to use gets more expensive every single day, they would not be motivated to weave more.

“It isn't worth spending your time on something that they don't want to buy at a good price.” (IRN20)

The nomads' inability to find the favorable markets for their carpets along with their lack of professional relationships with the carpet sellers in the metropolitan cities has created a gap filled by dealers, acting as middlemen between the artisan and the consumer. This has led to circumstances very preferable for the dealers, who benefit from selling the carpets more than the nomads who actually create the handicraft do. Meanwhile, the Persian carpet is a considerable part of Iran's economy. Based on an article in IRNA news agency website (“The Livelihood of 8 Million People in the Country Depends on Handwoven Carpets.”), 1.5 million people in Iran weave carpets; the economic livelihood of approximately eight million people in Iran is dependent upon the industry. Unfortunately, the Persian carpets, which generated over two billion dollars for Iran in 1994, sold for only \$69 million in 2019. The international market is full of cheaper carpets coming from other countries, such as Turkey or China (“Iran's Handwoven Carpet Exports Lowest In 24 Years”)

“It makes me feel bad to see Iran losing its reputation worldwide for carpet weaving. It's sad to see women stop weaving, and their skill and knowledge of carpet weaving are not passed down to their children only because there is no market.” (IRN2)

Moreover, sanctions imposed upon Iran have hindered the exportation of Iranian-made Persian carpets to the international market. Adding to the downturn in the economic well-being of the hand-made carpet market is that machine-made carpets are cheaper and more

easily available in a greater variety of colors and designs. Unfortunately, many of the weavers appear to have lost the motivation to continue practicing the craft. Without the economic benefits of a thriving market for handmade woven goods, there is a lack of perceived value to the craft among many of the nomadic people, a sentiment shared by many weavers that I spoke with during my fieldwork.

3.2.6. Access to Roads During the Kooch

We, Iranian people, did not respect their Il-raah (Ardam).

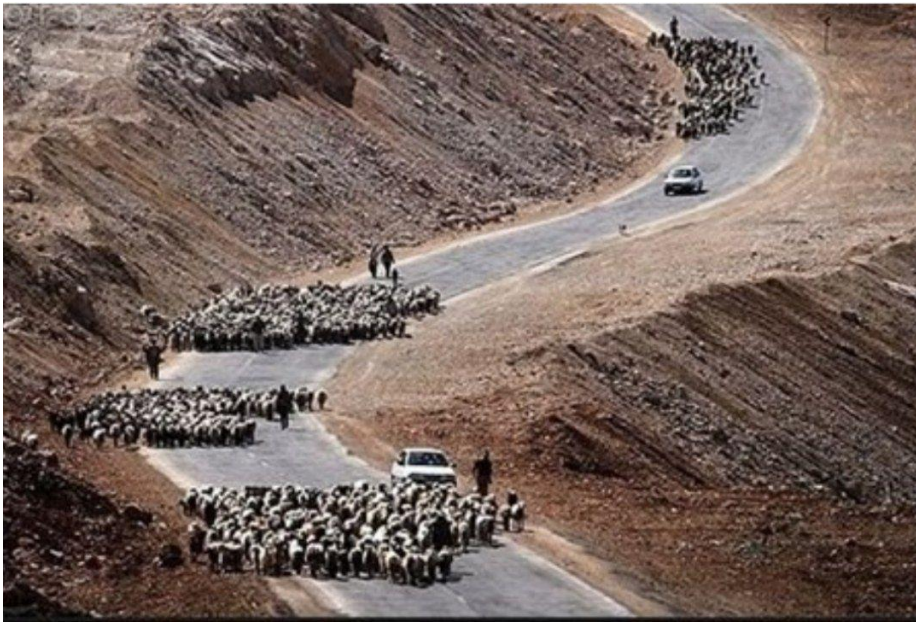


Figure 13. No more Il-raah to use (Photographer unknown; source: <http://www.asrekhodro.com/Mobile/News/84237/%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%87-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%AE%D8%B7%D8%B1%D9%86%D8%A7%DA%A9-%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%D8%B4%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1-%DA%A9%D9%88%DA%86-%D8%B1%D9%88>)

Unsustainable and rapid urbanization is another struggle for nomads. New buildings are built on their old roads, or the previous gravel roads have been covered with asphalt to connect other cities. These developments put nomads and their herds in danger. Much of the land that they used to migrate across is now agriculture fields, and there is no safe line between the asphalt road and the agriculture field for them. Nomads are forced to travel along the shoulder of the asphalt roads, with no place to stop or rest in between, to get from one place to another. Unfortunately, every year during the seasonal migration, there are several accidents which kill nomads and their herds.

“I think everyone of us (nomads) know at least one person who was killed in a car accident” (IRN 3).

There have been some promises by the government to provide nomads a safe pathway, but none of the interviewees noticed any changes to the roadways during their latest Kooch.

Mirroring the multiple dangers faced by the nomads, political, physical, financial and so on, there is a parallel danger to the unique lifestyle and crafts that are part of the Qashqai identity. To help preserve these, certain elements would greatly benefit from being identified and studied, becoming thus marked for targeted and greater care. For the Qashqai, one such element is the Kooch, the annual migration which both defines their nomad status and provides the narratives depicted in the carpets they weave.

Nomads of Iran have long been an integral part of the country’s culture and history. The nomadic lifestyle, characterized by seasonal migration (Kooch) in search of grazing lands for their livestock, is on the verge of extinction. As I have tried to demonstrate in this chapter, this decline is due to both natural and human-made challenges.

Chapter 4. Safeguarding the Kooch as an Intangible Cultural Heritage element

“Our shepherds do not see the benefit of herding their flocks along the ancestral roads. They cannot afford it. We may be the last generation who may witness the Kooch.” (IRN26)

Increasing urbanization, expanding technological and engineering developments, and globalization have, over recent decades, placed intangible heritage under threat, and made the need to record and protect it more urgent (Economou, 223).

In recent decades, cultural heritage has attracted a lot of interest within the Iranian people, partly because UNESCO is a prestigious international organization which can promote Iranian heritage to the world. This global entity upholds, among others, two important legal instruments that affect heritage practices and communities in all countries that have ratified those particular agreements: the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage ("Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.") and the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage ("Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.").

Based on the UNESCO website, Iran accepted the convention on Wednesday, 26 February 1975 and so far 26 Properties (24 Cultural Heritage and 2 Natural) and 21 elements are inscribed on the UNESCO CH and ICH list.

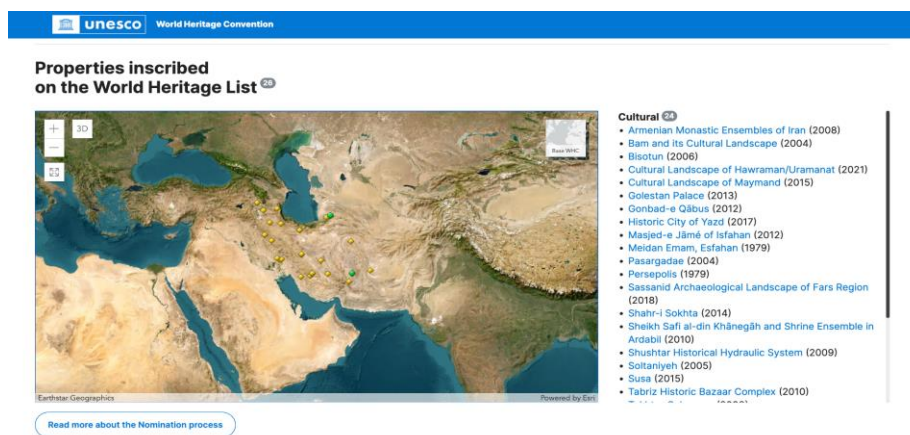


Figure 14. Iranian properties inscribed by UNESCO in the World Heritage List. (Source: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/ir>)

When a property is inscribed on the World Heritage List or as an element in the lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Register of good safeguarding practices as a Cultural Heritage site or a recognized element, Iranians know that this specific site will be promoted and protected on an international level. Heritage nominations can be mobilized for purposes of economic development and nation-building (Bendix et al. 18). No wonder heritage is employed by nations as a powerful instrument to reinforce national identity (Zhu and Salazar 241). On the other hand, inscription has caused arguments regarding the ownership of a historical site or an element. In this chapter I will introduce the governmental structure and principles of heritage management in general, as well as provide an overview of the safeguarding practices of ICH applied at the moment in Iran.

4.1. Administrative heritage management in Iran

As of today, the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts (MCHTH) is responsible for Iranian cultural heritage in both tangible and intangible aspects. However, it seems that protection and safeguarding of all the elements that may be deemed cultural heritage is not considered a necessary priority by the government. The current policy makers apparently prioritize religious elements of much older traditions, which consequently has politicized Iran's cultural heritage in a specific way. The MCHTH makes their decisions on which ICH should be recommended based on the following international criteria: (IRN5)

1) Necessities

- The necessity of selecting elements that can be defined in the form of the concepts of the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.
- The necessity of selecting elements which are alive in the current conditions and have a history of at least three generations
- the necessity of choosing elements that do not conflict with the principles of human rights.

2) Priorities

- Prioritizing the elements that culturally represent Iranian-Islamic society.
- Giving priority to the elements whose global registration will bring national harmony and social vitality.

- Prioritizing the elements that help to prove and explain the global position of Iran in the history of civilization and human thought; In choosing the options for world registrations, it is very important to explain the place of Iran in the history of science and art on a world scale and to determine what role Iran has played in the world heritage of mankind.
- Giving priority to the elements that have characteristics in the historiography of culture, science and art that refer to the whole cultural Iran and the Iranian world.
- Giving priority to the elements that are shared internationally – with the priority of neighboring countries – the possibility of global registration has it. Common intangible cultural elements of Iran with the countries that are defined under the cultural geography of Iran or are related to the Iranian world are given priority.
- Prioritizing elements that have a national or multi-provincial scope.
- Giving priority to the elements that are related to the Iranian ethnic groups living in the border areas.
- While paying attention to this criterion, it is necessary to give priority to the elements that promote harmony and national unity.
- Prioritizing the elements that can provide a special capacity to generate wealth and capital in the country or regions of the country.

The process of accepting a document for inscription into any of the UNESCO lists and prioritizing on which document to inscribe it is carried out by the World Heritage Registration Policy Council in Iran. The World Heritage Registration Policy Making Council is a specialized and consultative institution that, according to the criteria named in the “Priorities” and “Necessities” section, consider the social and cultural requirements of the country, and make suggestions in selecting works and elements for introduction to the secretariats of tangible and intangible world heritage conventions.

This council consists of the following members:

1. Deputy Minister of Cultural Heritage of the Ministry (chairman and legal member of the council)
2. Ambassador and permanent representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to UNESCO (legal member of the council)
3. Secretary General of the National Commission of UNESCO (legal member of the council)
4. Head of the Cultural Heritage and Tourism Research Institute (legal member of the Council)
5. Director General of the Ministry of Artifacts Registration (Secretary and Legal Member of the Council)
6. Head of the Tehran Intangible Heritage Center (legal member of the Council)
7. Three to five experts from among the cultural, executive and academic figures of the country in the field of intangible cultural heritage (the real member of the council chosen by the deputy of cultural heritage of the Ministry)
8. Three to five experts from among the cultural, executive and academic figures of the country in the field of historical, natural and cultural heritage

Considering that one of the most important criteria for the registration of cultural and natural heritage in the UNESCO World Heritage List is the management, protection and restoration of these works, the deputy of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, taking into account the latest protection and management conditions of the work, makes the final selection on which works will be presented to the Secretariat of the World Heritage Committee.

4.2. The Impact of Recognizing Intangible Cultural Heritage

“Is there such a thing as tangible heritage?” (Wells 15)

ICH is a nebulous concept, as varied and borderless as culture itself. This is truer still when faced with a social practice shared among people of different ethnic groups, with different religions, languages, and histories. According to an internationally prominent heritage scholar Laurajane Smith all heritage is intangible and engaged in “re/constructing” cultural

and social values and meanings: “It is a process, or indeed a performance, in which we as individuals, communities or nations, identify the values and cultural and social meanings that help us make sense of the present, our identities and sense of physical and social place” (Smith 39).

One of the missions of UNESCO is to contribute to the building of a culture of peace (“UNESCO in brief”). An example of this culture of peace for me has always been Norouz. Norouz, is a notable example of how an ICH element can unite people. Norouz means "new day" in Persian, and is the first day in the Persian calendar. It takes place on the spring equinox (usually on 20th or 21st of March on the Gregorian calendar). Norouz was added to UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2016 (“UNESCO - Nawrouz, Novruz, Nowrouz, Nowrouz, Nawrouz, Nauryz, Nooruz, Nowruz, Navruz, Nevruz, Nowruz, Navruz.”) recognizing a celebration that has endured changes in political regimes and religious practices, as well as social upheavals and cultural shifts for over three millennia. Emblematic of how Norouz promotes cultural diversity and friendship among different peoples and communities, the celebration was nominated to the List at the joint initiative of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, India, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Although the tradition is approximately 3000 years old, it is more popular than ever, being celebrated by over 300 million people today (“International Nowruz Day”) by different religions. Although inscribing an element of ICH in UNESCO may cause disagreements between countries and can be politically charged, Norouz is a celebration of unity observed in many countries, particularly those mentioned above.

Among the multiple inscriptions the country has made to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, Iran has been able to inscribe two elements under the name of “Traditional skills of carpet weaving in Fars”, representing the nomadic carpet and “Traditional skills of carpet weaving in Kashan” which represent the city carpet of Iran (“Unesco - Iran (Islamic Republic Of).”). “Fars” is a province in southwest of Iran where traditionally the majority of Qashqai nomads are still living. The capital of this province is Shiraz, which once was the main road for the Qashqai nomads of Iran. However, in the

description section of the UNESCO website there is no mention of Qashqai nomads, although the pictures in the inscription prominently display many of their weavers.

But the question must be asked whether or not the inscription of these skills into the “ICH list of Humanity” has had any obvious beneficial effect for the local communities. The answer is not unanimous. It seems that the administrative actors consider there to be a lot of weavers in Iran, and therefore the carpet weaving skills among nomads should not be in danger. However, when I asked local weavers if there were any official follow up of what is happening to that element after its inscription, the short answer was:

“To be honest, no!... monitoring ICH is not easy, it needs a budget.” (IRN5).

In the course of an interview conducted with IRN6, an inquiry was made regarding the engagement of the interviewee with extant nomadic populations involved in carpet weaving. His response was negative.

Given the current situation of nomads in Iran, a targeted action towards safeguarding the Kooch could be envisioned as to preserve both the migratory lifestyle and the carpet weaving skills of the Qashqai and other nomadic peoples in Iran.

4.3. Suggesting Ways to Preserve

The UNESCO 2003 Convention outlines the domains of intangible cultural heritage as follows:

- a) Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;
- b) Performing arts;
- c) Social practices, rituals and festive events;
- d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;
- e) traditional craftsmanship, (“Intangible Heritage domains in the 2003 Convention”)

Given these criteria, the Kooch, which incorporates both the nomadic lifestyle of the Qashqai and their weaving practices, could be inscribed to the *Intangible Cultural Heritage List of Humanity* as an initial step into the safeguarding of a disappearing culture. In doing so, it is

vital to note that the Kooch is not only the journey that the nomads undertake. It involves multiple elements of their cultural practices and objects crafted and the multitude of knowledge accompanying them. The focus could be drawn to how they turn the wool into yarn, how they dye the yarns and how they weave their beautiful carpet. A vital element discernible during a Kooch concerns the food that they eat. The Kooch is about the vernacular architecture of assembling their black tent. Safeguarding the Kooch, and by association the nomadic lifestyle, the Qashqai would be able to gain more visibility and viability. And, as the story of the annual migration is often portrayed in the Qashqai carpets, the preservation and protection of the Kooch and the nomadic lifestyle will have a positive impact on the continuity of the practice of carpet weaving.

My considerations about the visibility and viability would tacitly entail also an encouragement of the local communities of nomads. By safeguarding the Kooch as an intangible cultural heritage, nomads will attract public attention through greater social awareness and cultural tourism. The increased visibility could provide additional economic openings, which can greatly contribute to helping and rejuvenating their local communities. With the understanding that the nomadic lifestyle can maintain economic viability comes greater opportunities for the weavers and others involved in the many stages of practicing the craft. Visibility can bring back the proud feelings that some of these nomads may seem to have lost, and that could strengthen their identity. Moreover, visibility will help the nomads recognize inherited values and traditional skills. With greater visibility may possibly arise an empowered motivation for the artisans to continue weaving their beautiful Kooch carpets, alongside with the augmented opportunities for consumers to buy their carpets from these artists directly. Knowing that their art will be supported, as well as enjoying the economic stability of increased commercial success, the nomadic women will hopefully build up a conviction to continue this beautiful art and skills of weaving. All of these can result in viability which is the key to the continuity of their traditions. Viability will also help transmit tradition and keep their traditions important for nomads and other people.

In the UNESCO ICH Convention the term ‘safeguarding’ indicates the intent to take precautionary measures for preserving cultural practices and domains (see Kuutma 2015). The process of preservation refers more directly to keeping something valued alive, intact,

or free from damage or decay. Preservation and protection are usually used interchangeably as “حفاظت” in Persian, but in the context of intangible cultural heritage the connotation expands. Based on what I was told in the ICH Center of Tehran, preservation comes from the people, local communities, and their willingness to save their culture and pass it down to other generations (IRN1). On the other hand, protection needs legal power, such as governments, to protect cultural heritage in both tangible and intangible aspects. With safeguarding the nomadic lifestyle, both people and governments feel the need to save the cultural heritage and give them more value. Moreover, in recognition of the fact that the safeguarding of ICH is not just a matter of national measures but also requires a clear commitment from the international community, a framework for international cooperation and assistance is provided for (Blake 48). Thus, the government will be motivated to support these nomadic communities too.

Far from being an accidental consequence of listing, increased tourism is expected to give a boost to local economies while guaranteeing the economic viability and survival of places and practices that have lost their former economic *raison d'être* (Hafstein 106). Tourism sector can promote the nomadic lifestyle. This is particularly relevant as “tourism and heritage are collaborative industries, heritage converting locations into destinations” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 151). Based on the interviews conducted and due to my own experience as a cultural tour guide, I would like to claim that tourism presents a valuable asset to help the local communities. I saw guest houses being built with the money brought by tourism, and schools got more equipment.

Seeing some of the most beautiful carpets on the looms in different parts of my country, knowing the struggles that each of the weavers were facing, their stories and journeys of becoming a weaver, reminded me of my years as a tour guide. I knew from my experience that if tourists were here, they would definitely buy those pieces. All these women needed was a bit more recognition to have benefited from this exclusive market of handwoven carpets; just like the nomadic people in general, all they needed was support.

4.4. Inscribing the Kooch

“What does it mean to me if the nomadic lifestyle is over? Then the world will be over.” (IRN4).

The Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, the body responsible for inscribing elements in the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage for Iran, have come up with a list of necessities and priorities that must be met for an element to qualify for inclusion. Combining these criteria with those of UNESCO, several vital criteria are apparent. The Kooch is alive and it has a history for more than three generations, it will bring more vitality for Iranian society.

As this analysis suggests, the Kooch qualifies for inscription as an element of intangible cultural heritage. Additionally, given the numerous and imminent threats faced by the migratory lifestyle exemplified by the Kooch, the need for preservation and safeguarding as offered by inscription is essential to its continued practice. The visibility that accompanies inscription will offer the Qashqai greater economic viability, a necessary factor in the perpetuation of the nomadic lifestyle. Greater public awareness offers the possibility of greater direct market access for the carpet weavers. Increased tourism brings another avenue of economic stability, twinned with greater public awareness, as visitors purchase carpets and then bring them home for friends and family to see.

Inscription to the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage brings with it a recognition of value, intentional or not, from the Iranian government, a sentiment that the Qashqai have so far not felt. The tribal grazing lands were nationalized in the 1960s and later used for urban and industrial development, depriving the nomads of access to pastures for their herds (Beck). Quiet pathways were paved over, turning them into busy roads more suited for automobiles than sheep. Water scarcity has changed the verdant valleys into harsher scrubland. There is subtle pressure to settle into a more urban lifestyle, as shown through the lack of access to education and healthcare faced by the nomadic peoples. Many of these are fundamental missions of the United Nations as mentioned in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Transforming our world).

But the most compelling reason for inscribing the Kooch to the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage is what the annual migration means to the Qashqai themselves. It is an essential part of the nomadic identity as expressed by IRN9 when they said, “Kooch cannot be faked.” The sentiment is clear, to be a nomad a person must undertake Kooch. It is an essential part of the Qashqai identity. It informs their language, crafts, celebrations, and more. Without Kooch, there are no nomads. This is a frightening prospect for those Qashqai that are trying to hold on to the way of life their ancestors followed. The end of Kooch means more than just the disappearance of a lifestyle that has existed for longer than written history.

Conclusion

This study investigates the rich culture of the Qashqai nomads as part of the broader global nomadic groups, the challenges they continue to face in the rapidly modernizing, settled world, and potential solutions for preserving their culture and heritage. It examines the dangers posed to the nomadic lifestyle of the Qashqai people of Iran through their annual migration known as Kooch. My analysis is based on autoethnography and participant observation, conducting multiple in-field interviews and online interviews in Iran. Additionally, I applied nethnographic methods when researching relevant social media platforms.

My main finding is that as the annual Kooch migration encapsulates the essence of the nomadic lifestyle to those I spoke with, informing their crafts, celebrations, familial interactions, and more, it can be seen as an essential distillation of the Qashqai culture (IRN11, IRN4). This thesis further proposes the Iranian World Heritage Registration Policy Council to recommend the inscription of Kooch as an element of UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) as an essential identity of the Qashqai people. Doing so, along with the implementation of the proven safeguarding measures for ICH proposed in the 2003 UNESCO Convention, offer greater opportunities for the continuity of the long-held tradition of migratory shepherding practiced by the Qashqai since prehistory.

The findings of this study also highlight key two sets of challenges faced by the semi-pastoralist Qashqai nomads of Iran: environmental and public policy. Climate change, particularly water bankruptcy, and the accompanying disappearance of traditional grazing lands, pose a long-term threat to the viability of this lifestyle and require solutions that fall outside the scope of this thesis. Other difficulties, such as direct governmental opposition and indirect economic pressures fall into a different category of problem and are more immediately addressable. Issues such as access to safer migratory paths and readily available health care also fall within this second category. Given these hurdles and the imminent threat they pose to the migratory lifestyle of the Qashqai and other nomadic peoples of Iran, greater efforts must be made to safeguard and preserve what remains.

In this vein, this thesis suggests that inclusion of the Qashqai's annual migration, Kooch, be recognized as a vital expression of intangible cultural heritage. Based on the UNESCO 2003

Convention, Kooch qualifies for inscription to the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Kooch incorporates many of the nomads' oral traditions and expressions; their performing arts; social practices; rituals and festive events; their knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and their traditional craftsmanship ("UNESCO - Intangible Heritage Domains in the 2003 Convention. "). Of particular note is the way in which the Qashqai weave, both literally and figuratively, the story of Kooch into their carpets. This creates a bridge between the intangible and tangible cultural heritage of the Qashqai. Using material culture, in this case their carpets, the Qashqai share the stories of their Kooch through their handcraft, showing the importance of Kooch in their life and preserving its story for future generations. Additionally, the woven goods put the nomad's connection with nature on display, expressing the inseparability that the lifestyle, the people, and Kooch have had for hundreds of years.

The visibility that accompanies inscription will offer the Qashqai greater economic viability, a necessary factor in the perpetuation of the nomadic lifestyle. Greater public awareness offers the possibility of greater direct market access for the carpet weavers. Increased tourism brings another avenue of economic stability, twinned with greater public awareness, as visitors purchase carpets and then bring them home for friends and family to see.

But the most compelling reason for inscribing Kooch to the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage is what the annual migration means to the Qashqai themselves. It is an essential part of the nomadic identity as expressed by IRN3 when they said, "Kooch cannot be faked." The sentiment is clear, to be a nomad a person must undertake Kooch. It is an essential part of the Qashqai identity. It informs their language, crafts, celebrations, and more. Without Kooch, there are no nomads. This is a frightening prospect for those Qashqai that are trying to hold on to the way of life their ancestors followed. The end of Kooch means more than just the disappearance of a lifestyle that has existed for longer than written history.

Yet, this thesis also paves a path for further exploration on the preservation of Qashqai culture and of Iranian nomadic heritage. Future research may include other nomadic communities to expand the concept of livelihood resilience, to further understand the motives of retaining the nomadic way of life and to find solutions to the problems that are causing struggles in one or more of the nomadic communities. If new emerging activities and measures to help safeguard

and preserve the intangible culture and heritage of nomadic communities of Iran will be implemented, longitudinal studies could be carried out to determine the effect of such measures on these communities over longer periods of time.

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Resüme

Zagrose mägede isandad – kaasaegsete Qashqai nomaadide heitlused ja võimalused nende kaduva kultuuri säilitamiseks

Käesolev magistritöö keskendub Qashqai nomaadidele ning nende eluviisi, traditsioonide ja kultuuri säilimisele Iraanis. Uurimistöö eesmärk on anda põhjalik ülevaade Qashqai kultuurist, käsitledes Qashqai nomaadide ees seisvaid väljakutseid ning võimalikke lahendusi nende kultuuri ja pärandi säilitamiseks. Selles magistritöös on Iraani Qashqaide nomaadse eluviisiga seotud ohud kontekstualiseeritud läbi kahe põhielemendi: Koochi – nende hooajalise rände – ja Qashqaide käsitöö, täpsemalt vaibakudumise traditsiooni. Magistritöös kasutatud andmed on lisaks erialase kirjanduse uurimisele kogutud kolme meetodi abil. Esiteks sisaldab see andmeid, mille kogusin nomaadidelt endilt 2022. aasta märtsis läbi viidud välitööde käigus Iraanis. Teiseks sisaldab magistritöö autoetnograafilisi andmeid, mis põhinevad minu Iraanis kohaliku giidina töötades saadud kogemustel. Kolmandaks rakendasin etnograafilisi uurimismeetodeid, analüüsid sotsiaalmeedia platvormide ja veebiintervjuude kaudu kogutud andmeid.

Magistritöö koosneb neljast peatükist. Esimeses peatükis kirjeldatakse uurimisteema etnograafilist tausta ja uurimise metodoloogilisi väljakutseid. Teises peatükis tutvustatakse lühidalt Iraani nomaade, sealhulgas Qashqaisid, kes sobivad ideaalselt analüüsitava uurimisküsimuste raames käsitlemiseks. Lisaks kirjeldatakse selle etnograafilise uurimuse tausta, selgitades samal ajal Qashqaide ajalugu möödunud sajandil. Selles peatükis tutvustatakse ka Qashqai vaiba näitel nende traditsioonilist käsitööd kui kultuuripärandi kandjat. Kolmandas peatükis analüüsitakse teatud näiteid vaipadest ja vaipadel kujutatud hooajalise rände loost ning antakse ülevaate Qashqaide heitlustest oma traditsioonilise eluviisi alalhoidmisel. Neljandas peatükis tutvustatakse võimalikke lahendusi, et aidata Qashqai kogukonnal säilitada nende traditsioonilist eluviisi ja käsitöötraditsioone. Magistritöö lõpus käsitletakse valdkonna uurimisvõimalusi tulevikus.

Uuringu tulemused toovad esile Iraani Qashqai nomaadide paljud väljakutsed. Kliimamuutused, eriti veevarude vähesus ja sellega kaasnev traditsiooniliste karjamaade kadumine, kujutavad endast pikaajalist ohtu nomaadide elustiili elujõulisusele ning nõuavad lahendusi, mis jäävad käesoleva magistritöö teemakäsitlest välja. Muud raskused, nagu

valitsusepoolne vastuseis ja majanduslik surve, kuuluvad teise probleemikategooriasse ning meetmed nende leevendamiseks on kiiremini rakendatavad. Teise kategooriasse kuuluvad ka probleemid nagu juurdepääs turvalisematele rändeteedele ja parem juurdepääs tervishoiule. Arvestades neid takistusi ja otsest ohtu, mida need kujutavad Qashqaide ja teiste Iraani nomaadide traditsioonilisele eluviisile, tuleb teha suuremaid jõupingutusi, et kaitsta ja säilitada allesjäänut. Kuna Qashqaide iga-aastane ränne, Kooch, kapseldab endas nomaadse eluviisi olemust, mõjutades nende käsitööd, pidustusi, perekondlikke ja kogukondlikke suhteid ning palju muud, võib seda pidada Qashqai kultuuri eraldamatuks osaks. See, kuidas Qashqaid põimivad Koochi loo nii otseses kui ka kujundlikus tähenduses oma vaipadesse, loob sideme Qashqai mittemateriaalse ja materiaalse, vaimse ja ainelise kultuuripärandi vahele.

Iraani kultuuripärandi-, turismi- ja käsitöoministerium, UNESCO vaimse kultuuripärandi rakendamise ja selle nimekirja elementide lisamise eest vastutav asutus Iraanis, on määratlenud tingimused ja prioriteetsed nõuded, mida tuleb täita, et elemendi saaks nimekirja kanda. Kombineerides neid kriteeriume UNESCO 2003. aasta vaimse kultuuripärandi kaitse konventsiooniga, näitab käesolev analüüs, et nomaadide hooajaline ränne ehk Kooch täidab tingimused selle vaimse kultuuripärandi elemendiks arvamiseks. Reguleeritud meetmete rakendamine Koochi kui kultuuripärandi säilitamiseks aitab säilitada Qashqai ja teiste Iraani rändrahvaste nomaadset eluviisi ja traditsioone, seal hulgas vaibakudumise ja muu käsitöö pärandit. Koochi UNESCO vaimse kultuuripärandi nimekirja kandmine saadaks signaali ka Iraani valitsusele selle väärtuse tunnustamiseks ja rõhutaks vajadust valitsusepoolse poliitika muutmiseks. Seetõttu leiab käesolev töö, et Koochi tuleks tunnustada kui vaimse kultuuripärandi olulist väljendust ja lisada see UNESCO vaimse kultuuripärandi nimekirja.

Resume in Persian/Farsi

چکیده:

خان‌های زاگراس؛ چالش‌های مدرن و راهکارهای پاسداری از فرهنگ در حال نابودی عشایر قشقایی

این پایان‌نامه کارشناسی ارشد، به عشایر کوچنده‌ی قشقایی و پاسداری از سبک زندگی، فرهنگ و میراث آنها می‌پردازد. هدف از این تحقیق ارائه‌ی مروری بر فرهنگ قشقایی، چالش‌های پیش‌روی عشایر قشقایی و راهکارهای ممکن برای حفظ فرهنگ و میراث آنهاست. در این پایان‌نامه کارشناسی ارشد به تهدیدات زندگی عشایر با استفاده از یک عنصر میراث ناملموس «کوچ» و یک اثر میراث ملموس «قالیچه» ی قشقایی به عنوان یک فرهنگ مادی نگاه شده است.

داده‌های مورد استفاده در این پایان‌نامه کارشناسی ارشد با از چندین روش و با مطالعه ادبیات مرتبط گردآوری شده است. این داده‌ها در وهله‌ی اول از طریق مطالعات میدانی در اواخر اسفند سال ۱۴۰۰ و با صحبت با افرادی که خود را قشقایی مینامیدند جمع‌آوری شد. در وهله دوم، این پایان‌نامه شامل روش «خود مردم‌نگاری» است که تجربیات من به عنوان راهنمای گردشگری در ایران، همراه با مشاهدات من در تحقیقاتم در ایران بوده است. نهایتاً، استفاده از روش «مردم‌نگاری آنلاین (نتنوگرافی) از طریق سوشال مدیا و مصاحبه‌های آنلاین، کمک بسزایی در جمع‌آوری اطلاعات من داشته است.

این پایان‌نامه شامل چهار فصل میباشد، فصل اول شامل پیش‌زمینه و مقدمه قوم‌نگاری موضوع مورد مطالعه و چالش‌های متدولوژی و جمع‌آوری اطلاعات را تشریح میکند. فصل دوم به معرفی بسیار مختصری از تاریخچه‌ی پرفراز و نشیب عشایر ایران در صد سال اخیر، خصوصاً عشایر قشقایی که گروه هدف این پایان‌نامه هستند، می‌پردازد. در این فصل همچنین به توضیح فرش قشقایی می‌پردازم تا از قالیچه‌ی آنها به عنوان رابطی میان میراث عشایر، هنر و مهارت آنها استفاده کنم.

فصل سوم به تحلیل کوچ و مهاجرت فصلی آنها با استفاده از چند طرح قالیچه‌ی مشاهده شده در تحقیقات میدانی می‌پردازد که به زیبایی صحنه بیلاق را در فرش خود به تصویر کشیده بودند. متأسفانه آن قالیچه آخرین فرش بافته شده توسط بافنده بود. به بهانه‌ی این فرش، در ادامه به تحلیل مشکلات امروزی عشایر پرداخته شده است.

در فصل چهارم، به بررسی راهکاری احتمالی برای پاسداری و حفاظت از این سبک زندگی، با بیان پیشنهاد «ثبت کوچ به عنوان یک عنصر ناملموس در یونسکو» پرداخته شده است. راهکاری که به بقای کوچ، هنرها، و مهارتهای عشایر کمک خواهد کرد.

در آخر، این پایان‌نامه توضیح مختصری راجع به فرصت‌هایی در تحقیقات آینده در خصوص موضوعات مشابه صحبت شده است

نتایج پژوهش نشان دهنده چالش‌های فراوان عشایر قشقایی در ایران است. تغییرات اقلیمی، به ویژه کمبود منابع آبی و همراه با آن از بین رفتن مراتع سنتی، تهدیدی درازمدت برای زنده ماندن سبک زندگی عشایری است و راه حل‌هایی را می‌طلبد که از حوصله این پایان‌نامه کارشناسی ارشد خارج است. مشکلات دیگر مانند مخالفت‌های دولت و

فشارهای اقتصادی در دسته دوم مشکلات قرار می‌گیرند. دسته دوم نیز شامل موضوعاتی مانند دسترسی به ایل‌راه‌های امن تر و دسترسی بهتر به مراقبت‌های بهداشتی است. با توجه به این موانع که تهدیدی برای سبک زندگی سنتی قشقایی‌ها و دیگر عشایر ایرانی ایجاد می‌کند، باید تلاش بیشتری برای حفاظت و حفظ آنچه باقی مانده است، صورت گیرد. از آنجایی که کوچ سالانه قشقایی‌ها، جوهره سبک زندگی عشایری را در بر می‌گیرد و بر صنایع دستی، جشن‌ها، روابط خانوادگی و اجتماعی و غیره تأثیر می‌گذارد، می‌توان آن را بخشی جدایی‌ناپذیر از فرهنگ قشقایی دانست. روشی که قشقایی‌ها داستان کوچ را در قالی‌های خود می‌بافند، بین میراث فرهنگی ناملوس و ملموس قشقایی پیوند ایجاد می‌کند.

وزارت میراث فرهنگی، گردشگری و صنایع دستی ایران، نهادی که مسئول ثبت یک عنصر در فهرست میراث فرهنگی ناملوس یونسکو است، شرایط و الزامات و اولویت‌هایی را که برای گنجاندن یک عنصر باید رعایت شود را تعریف کرده است. با ترکیب این معیارها با کنوانسیون 2003 یونسکو برای پاسداری از میراث فرهنگی ناملوس، این تحلیل نشان می‌دهد که مهاجرت فصلی عشایر یا کوچ، شرایط را برای گنجاندن آن به عنوان عنصری از میراث فرهنگی ناملوس برآورده می‌کند. اجرای اقدامات تنظیم شده برای حفظ کوچ به عنوان یک میراث فرهنگی به حفظ سبک زندگی و سنت‌های عشایری قشقایی‌ها و دیگر مردمان عشایری ایران از جمله میراث قالی‌بافی و سایر صنایع دستی کمک می‌کند. ثبت کوچ به عنوان میراث فرهنگی ناملوس یونسکو همچنین سیگنالی را به دولت ایران ارسال می‌کند تا ارزش بیشتری برای بقای کوچ قائل و نیاز به تغییر سیاست از سوی دولت را برجسته کند. بنابراین، این مقاله دریافته است که کوچ باید به عنوان یک عنصر مهم از میراث فرهنگی ناملوس شناخته شود و به فهرست میراث فرهنگی ناملوس یونسکو اضافه شود.

Appendix I

Table 2. Interview questions.

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Demographic Information | Age |
| | Gender |
| | Occupation |
| Questions for nomads | How is the situation of Kooch this year for you? |
| | What are the challenges you have these days? |
| | Do you think the government has respected your way of living? |
| | What can government do to motivate you do your annual kooch? |
| | Were your parents nomad before? |
| | Where is the closest clinic? |
| | Can your children have access to high school in this village? Any teacher available in the village now? |
| | How do you like Kooch? |
| Weavers | How long have been weaving carpet? |
| | From whom did you learn how to weave? |
| | Do you have special pattern that you should follow? |
| | Where do you get the material for weaving? |
| | Where do you sell your carpet? |
| | Why do you use ... design? |
| | What are the challenges for weavers? |
| | How do you think the government support you? |
| | Did you get a loan from NAO? |
| | Are your children interested in weaving? |
| | Do you like weaving? With having X problem, do you think it is worth it to weave? |
| Officials | How long have you been working as ... |
| | What your center does? |
| | How is the process of submitting a document for UNESCO? |
| | What are your priorities when it comes to which element or property to choose for sending its document to UNESCO? |
| | when you inscribe an element, do you usually follow the influence of it within those specific local communities? |
| | Who are the people involved in the process of inscribing? |
| | You have inscribed the "skills of carpet weaving in Fars" in 2010, why you didn't bring the name of Qashqai tribe? |
| | Do you think there is a chance that we inscribe "Kooch" as an intangible cultural heritage both national and internationally? |
| | Do you think Kooch follows the domains of 2003 convention of safeguarding ICH? |

Appendix II

A page in my notebook from March 2022

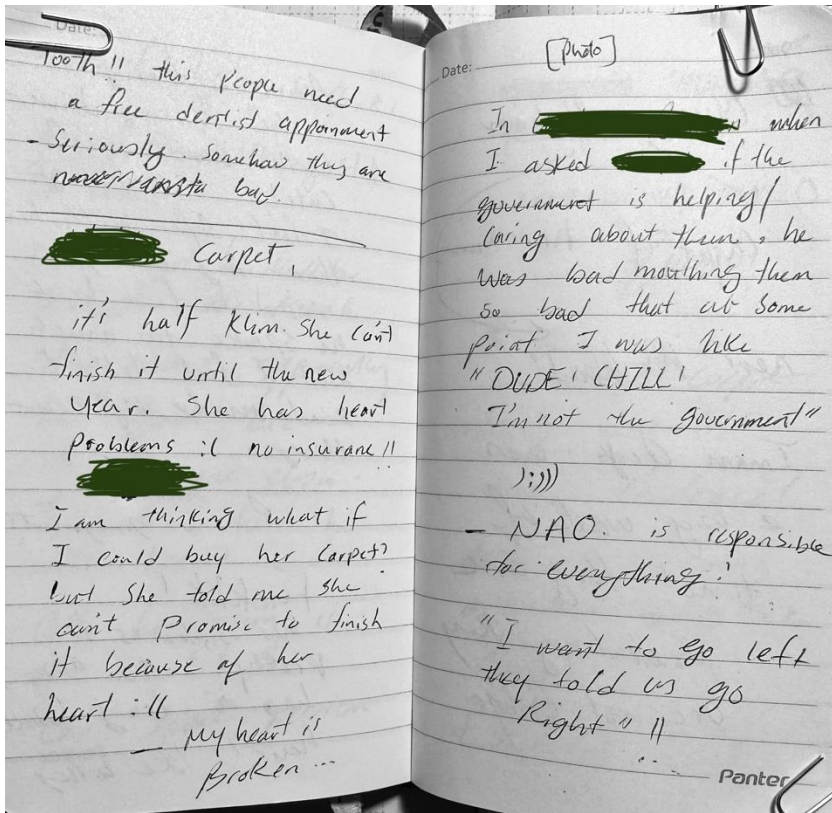


Figure 15. A page in the field.

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THE LORDS OF THE ZAGROS MOUNTAINS: THE STRUGGLES OF MODERN QASHQAI NOMADS AND WAYS TO PRESERVE THEIR FLEETING CULTURE

supervised by Prof. Kristin Kuutma

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