Sons of Haji Omar

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GEOGRAPHY & HISTORY

Afghanistan is a large mountainous country located at the western end of the Himalayas. It is a landlocked country, bordered by the Soviet Union to the north, Pakistan to the east and Iran to the west. The topography is rugged and varied. The central area is occupied by the Kohi Baba range, and its sloping fingers eastwards. The highest mountains, the Hindu Kush, with peaks well over 20,000 feet, are located in the northeast; they are the extension in Afghan territory of the Karakoram range of north Pakistan. Flatlands also abound, mostly at the country's periphery along the Amu Daria river (the Oxus of classical times) facing the Soviet border, in the regions of Harat and Farah near Iran, and all along the South.

The area is basically a semi-desert. Precipitation, mostly in late winter, varies considerably from 2 inches in the southern deserts to 13 inches in the eastern regions. It increases with elevation and the higher mountains receive much snowfall. This important accumulation of snow is at the origin of numerous rivers flowing in all directions which in turn feed the irrigation canals in the valleys.

Considering the dry climate with long, very hot summers and short, uncomfortably cold winters, the vegetation is sparse, consisting mostly of grasses and shrubs. Only in the eastern mountains of Nuristan and Pakhtia which are reached by the monsoon, can true forests be found. The scenery is marked by extremely rugged and tortuous mountains, snow-capped peaks, and deep, irrigated valleys.

The long history of the Afghan area is characterized by extreme instability: A succession of conquest empires, petty states, tribal confederacies created a chaotic sequence of political forms. Some invasions like that of Alexander the Great infused new life in the urban centers. Others like

Genghis Khan brought devastation, while still others transformed the local culture permanently. This was the case with the Arab conquerors in the 7th century who brought Islam. Historically the Afghan area has been the recipient of cultural influences emanating from three directions: the Iranian plateau (irrigation technology, some settlement patterns, Persian language, etc.); Central Asia (the horse complex, Turkic languages, elements of urban architecture, etc.); and the Indian subcontinent (Mahayana Buddhism before the arrival of Islam, Dravidian languages, etc.). It is essentially an area of cultural synthesis.

Over thirty different languages belonging to at least three major language families are spoken in Afghanistan: Indo-European, Uralo-Altaic, and Dravidian. By far the most important are the two official languages: Persian, locally called Dari meaning "language of the court'', which is also the lingua franca in bazaar transactions, and Pashto, the language of the politically dominant group. Both are part of the Indo-European family.

With the exception of a few Hindus, Siks, and Jews, practically all Afghans are Muslim. Islam is essentially a legalistic and puritanical religion with important elements borrowed from Judaism and Christianity (Kroeber, 1948, pp. 418 and 598). It exerts a strong and continuous influence on individual behavior and social life in many fields of activity. Of fundamental importance are the Five Pillars of Islam: 1) The profession of faith (''There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is the Messenger of Allah") 2) The prayer performed five times daily after ritual ablutions 3) Almisgiving considered as an act of purification 4) The ritual fasting during the month of Ramadan 5) The pilgrimage to the sacred city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

The Islamic community is divided into numerous branches and sects. The vast majority of Afghans including the Pashtuns are Hanafi Sunni and rely on a particular interpretation of the Qur'an and Hadith, the sacred book of Islam and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad respectively. Near the Iranian border and in Hazarajat, in the central part of Afghanistan, are numerous followers of Shi'a Islam, which is the state religion in Iran. The Shiites recognize twelve successive imams or religious leaders after the Prophet Mohammed. Further, in northeastern Afghanistan there are numerous communities belonging to the Isma'illya sect with the Agha Khan as religious leader.

Afghanistan is clearly a nation of many ethnic groups. Most numerous are the Pashtuns, about 7 million with approximately an equal number living in Pakistan. They are of Caucasoid stock. Next in importance are the Tajik who are settled mainly in the northern valleys. They number nearly 4 million and their physical type is mostly Mediterranean. The Persian-speaking Hazara in the central mountains and the Turkic-speaking Uzbak and Turkoman in the northern plains are basically of Mongoloid physical type. Other ethnic groups are the Baluch caravaneers and nomads, the Dravidian-speaking Brahui who are mostly tenant farmers, the recently converted Nuristani, etc. (Dupree, 1972, P. 57 ff.)

From an occupational point of view, Afghan society is divided into three socio-economic segments: the pastoral nomads following very different migratory circuits and at various stages of sedentarization; the city-bazaar sector comprising the merchant class, government officialdom and other urban elements; and the agriculturalists who practice mostly mixed farming with plows and constitute the

bulk of the population. The film, *The Sons of Haji Omar*, is a descriptive statement on the interrelatedness of these three socio-economic sectors as perceived by a pastoral family in process of sedentarization and in a historic period of rapid change.

THE LAKENKHEL TRIBE

The family portrayed in *Sons of Haji Omar* belongs to a relatively small Pashtun "tribe" called Lakenkhel and are settled in the valley of Narin, Baglan province, northeastern Afghanistan. The Lakenkhel belong to the Ghilzai group of tribes whose original home is the hilly and arid region of southwestern Afghanistan. Pashtun tribal organization implies the distinction of several levels of integration and a parallel process of segmentation or subdivision. Accordingly a given tribe will be subdivided into several branches, with each one of these named branches fragmented into still smaller groupings and so on down to small localized lineages. Each of these tribal and lineage units is named after its apical ancestor. In the case of recent lineages of little genealogical depth it is possible to ascend the genealogical ladder directly to the founding genitor. For the larger tribal units the villagers are unable to establish links to the apical ancestor.

People continue, however, to assume a vague kinship between various tribes with the result that all Ghilzal could theoretically be considered kinsmen.

The Lakenkhel have had a turbulent history. They are part of the larger Andar tribe with traditional lands south of Ghazni. During the latter part of the nineteenth century they suffered greatly in the Ghilzai revolt against the rule of Amir Abdur Rahman. They were severely punished, their leader exited, and their flocks destroyed. Without property they were forced to settle on the southern slopes of the Hindu Kush, an agricultural area where they became laborers on the estates of the local landlords. It is within this context that the Lakenkhel learned the rudiments of farming. In time the more enterprising among them reconstituted their sheep flocks and camel herds and began caravaning between the city of Peshawar in British India and the northern bazaars along the Oxus valley. Here begins the life of Haji Omar, the principal character in this film.

Haji Omar's father was a wealthy flock owner and a respected leader in the community. During the Ghilzai revolt he suffered greatly and lost his property. Thus Haji Omar was born into a distinguished but poor family and at an early age had to struggle in order to reconstruct the family flock and assemble a sufficient number of camels in order to begin caravaning. This became the determining experience in his life. "Look at the peasants'', says Haji Omar, ''they stay in their villages and wait there. In the old times they didn't know about money, about other people, about new goods and distant bazaars. In contrast with them were *maldar* (pastoral nomads) and *ujjar* (traders). We traveled extensively, got acquainted with many people and many places

and got experience. We had some sheep we could sell and get money. With this money we could buy trading goods, and we also had camels to carry our goods, and with the help of experience we had everything to succeed in this difficult world."

The caravan route from Peshawar to the Oxus valley climbed up Pancher valley, across the Hindu Kush at Khawak Pass and then along Narin valley to the northern plains. Narin valley at the beginning of the century was inhabited mainly by semi-sedentary Uzbak. They lived mostly in yourts- felt-lined, semispherical dwellings- well adapted to their transhumant patterns. They also practiced dry farming, but were poorly acquainted with irrigation methods. Most importantly, the Uzbak did not have a strong sense of land ownership, due to their semi-sedentary way of life. As a consequence Narin valley was sparsely populated with many marshy or bushy areas. This situation attracted many settlers from other parts of Afghanistan, mainly Hazaras, Tajik, and Pashtuns. The Uzbak abandoned Narin valley without struggle and moved to higher elevation. It is within this context that about fifty years ago the Lakenkhel settled in Narin valley with the help of the government. Instead of selling their sheep and becoming full-time agriculturalists in a new land, the Lakenkhel opted for a dual form of domestic economy. Households tried to keep and even increase their sheep flocks while at the same time farming in the most intensive manner. This was done mainly with the labor force of the household and a few hired hands. A typical case may be represented by a fraternal joint family with the first brother the sedentary farmer and the second in charge of sheep-breeding and pastoral migrations.

Although the Lakenkhel now consider this form of economic arrangement to be the best of many alternatives, history established a different and painful process of socio-economic differentiation.

At the beginning of the sedentarization process some Lakenkhel men, like Haji Omar, avidly acquired agricultural lands, while many others, thought that there was no great benefit in farming and remained "pure'' pastoralists. Sheepbreeding, however, is an activity fraught with risks. In late winter, bitter cold and occasional heavy snowfalls may bring the already weakened sheep to starvation. Various sheep diseases may also take a heavy toll. Flock composition thus undergoes considerable variation in time. Consequently, yesterday's wealthy flockowner may suddenly become

tomorrow's poor pastoralist. In the course of the last fifty years, following the increase in landholdings by some and the vicissitudes of pastoralism suffered by others, an important process of socio-econamic differentiation took place. This process was related to the lineage structure of the Lakenkhel.

The Lakenkhel tribe comprises basically three lineages, each about seven generations deep. The Sharamkheli were the first settlers in the area. Their leader during the initial period of sedentarization was an educated man, a holder of a position in the public service in a different part of the country. The government rewarded him for his services with a land grant in Narin valley. Many of his lineage members followed his example, abandoned pastoralism permanently, and settled as farmers near his estate. The second lineage, the Baramkheli whose leader was Haji Omar, followed a different economic policy. With Omar they realized the importance of agriculture as a stable activity producing a regular income. On the other hand, they were fully aware of the dynamism of pastoral activities and this despite the inherent vicissitudes of sheepbreeding. The cash obtained from the sale of sheep could be entirely used for the acquisition of new agricultural lands. This continuous transfer of capital was possible because the subsistence needs of the household were already covered by the regular farm produce. This was exactly the economic policy adopted by Haji Omar. He repeatedly used the fresh capital generated by his flocks to acquire new farm holdings. In this he was followed by a number of other Baramkheli, albeit less successfully. On the other hand, most members of the third lineage, the Badirkheli, shunned farming and decided to remain essentially pastoralists. In the course of time following a series of misfortunes they lost their sheep and were left as paupers. They became the tenant farmers and servants of rich Baramkheli like Haji Omar.

This historic process led to the emergence of social stratification among the Lakenkhel. *Der mur* and *mur* are rich land and flock owners, *guzarani* are self-sufficient without debts, *kam-pagala* are dependent upon the rich for work and do have debts, while the *mizkin* are hopelessly poor and stand no chance to better their position.

These brief notes on the recent socio-economic history of the Lakenkhel provide the context for the understanding of Haji Omar's testimony in the film. He opted clearly for a highly diversified domestic economy. He started as a caravaneer, rebuilt the family flock, obtained land cheaply, continuously engaged in various forms of trading, invested fresh capital in new land holdings, and gradually constructed a vast family estate. In all his complex endeavors he was energetically helped by his sons and nephews. *Sons of Haji Omar* tells the story of this intra-family collaboration. The activities of the family take place within the framework of a capitalistic market economy. The actors are highly conscious of prices, costs, and benefits immediately translated into monetary terms. The lesson taught by Haji Omar is how to succeed in a pre-industrial market economy.

PASTORAL NOMADISM

Pastoral nomadism in Afghanistan is a specialized subsistence activity well adapted to certain environmental characteristics. Basically the nomadic strategy implies a systematic effort at exploitation of grass availability at different attitudes and in different seasons. Pastoral nomadism constitutes a part culture (Kroeber, pp. 276-279). No pastoral nomad

will kill his sheep in order to eat the meat. Rather, sheep are sold for cash to be used to purchase necessities, including food. The sheepbreeder is thus obliged to enter in contact with traders and ag- - riculturalists to acquire their goods. Pastoral nomadism has a symbiotic relationship with the other socio-economic sectors of Afghan society; it is part of an integrated regional economy.

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The pastoral year for the Lakenkhel begins in spring with the establishment of a lambing camp in the lowlands of Gerdau near the Kunduz River. These pastures are protected by the government, and they have been regularly used by the Lakenkhel and other Pashtun nomadic groups for about two generations. In recent years following rapid demographic increase, neighboring villagers have continuously tried to bring these pastures under cultivation. Such encroachments have led to pen fighting and hesitant government intervention. In 1976, at the time of filming, the Lakenkhel considered these pressures to be endangering the pastoral enterprise and moved to another spring location, at Col, where grazing rights were negotiated by Haji Omar.

Around early May the lambs are strong enough to undertake the move to the high mountain pastures. Flocks and caravans travel separately. The flocks move slowly around mountain slopes where grazing is available, while the caravans travel quickly on the roads at the bottom of the valleys and stop frequently. At the stop in Narin, the camels are loaded with summer supplies and the caravans are enlarged by the addition of cattle and many horses to be fattened at the high mountain pastures. Around early June, flocks and caravans reach Daraykhar valley, elevation about 3000 meters, in the heart of the Hindu Kush. There the Lakenkhel have traditional grazing rights. According to custom, these pastures belong to the Tajik villagers who are established in the lower valley and own mostly goats which are better adapted to the bushy vegetation of lower altitudes. The Tajik villagers are the subjects of a powerful local chieftain, and it is to him that the Lakenkhel pay tribute, the amount of which is renegotiated every year. The Lakenkhel remain at the green pastures of Daraykhar until the middle of August when the male lambs are sold to related Lakenkhel traders residing on the southern slopes of the Hindu Kush. Once back home the Lakenkhel pastoral families behave as sedentary villagers completely separated from the flocks that graze throughout winter on wheat stubs and dry grass on the hills around Narin valley.

Lakenkhel migratory patterns reveal an unstable process of ecological adaptation. In the spring, lowland-pastures agriculturalists and pastoralists compete directly for land. This is a long historic process well understood by both groups. Demography and modern technology (utilization of tractors) favor the agriculturalists, and present government policy can only delay the final outcome. It is thus unfair to state that these pastoralists occupy an empty ecological niche that no other group could exploit. At the upper end of the migration trek the situation is reversed. Two generations ago, a very large number of Lakenkhel exploited the Daraykhar pastures. At present, the small

pastoral segment of the Lakenkhel is faced with an overabundance of summer pastures. However, this favorable situation is due to the Lakenkhel's ability to retain their preferential grazing rights in the area. Persistent cold in late winter and the resultant heavy snowfall is a prime killer of sheep and another factor of instability for Lakenkhel pastoralism. Frost affects the various flocks differently, depending on precise flock location, the shepherd's technical abilities, and the application of rescue measures by flock owners. It is clear that Lakenkhel pastoral adaptation is a dynamic process in response to a variety of social and environmental pressures.

The technology associated with pastoral nomadism is relatively simple. Most important is the black tent, a large comfortable shelter providing good protection against rain and sun. It is made of goat's wool woven by traveling weavers belonging to the Wardak tribe. Inside the tent are numerous woolen mattresses, pile and felt carpets, blankets and cushions--all important sleeping accessories for cold nights. Cooking utensils and milk containers are made of metal. Leather and woolen bags complete the equipment which is all unbreakable, can be packed quickly into bundles, and loaded on camels.

What are the basic organizational forms of Lakenkhel pastoralism? Sheep are owned individually except in the case of fraternal joint families where an alignment of brothers exercises joint ownership. Flocks vary greatly in size, from about 50 to over 500. According to local preferences 500 sheep is an optimal number, although a flock comprising 300 to 500 sheep is considered a good flock. It is said that a flock of this size moves at a good grazing speed, a smaller flock travels too fast, while a larger flock is difficult to control by a single shepherd. It is impossible to relate flock size to household size because flock management is accomplished by the owner and hired hands (the shepherd and his assistants) without the necessary intervention of additional household members. Considering further that there is no limitation to individual access to pastures, an owner should be capable in principle of increasing his flock indefinitely. However, this clearly does not happen.

What are the factors limiting flock size? First, the obvious catastrophes: various sheep diseases, predation by wolves, losses due to snowfalls, etc. Second, structural factors specific to inheritance practices: at the time of marriage or later, a son (or sons) may ask for his share of the flock in order to establish himself separately. This causes the breakup of the large flocks, and, in a sense, the process of fission in the developmental cycle of the family is projected on the flock. Fissive tendencies are stronger in polygynous households and in the presence of very large flocks. Third, personal factors may be important, such as the varying managerial abilities of flock owners.

The functions of the shepherds are crucially important in flock management. The shepherd is supervised by the owner, and generally important decisions are made during continual consultation. Yet the shepherd is the person mainly responsible for the flock's welfare. Shepherds are hired on a one-year contract in two phases; for six winter months they are paid a salary of up to 8,000 afghanis (about $160). For the six summer months they get 1/6 of the total number of newborn male lambs and 1/20 the total number of newborn female lambs. It is obvious why shepherds prefer large flocks. A shepherd is always assisted by a salaried servant. A shepherd is a trusted individual with high prestige pre-selected by the flock

owner from among his relatives. Small flock owners are obliged to join forces and establish an association with the aim of managing a common flock. Members of such associations are always relatives (*hpil* meaning related people in general or more specifically *uragiray/sakanayi tirbur* – distant/ close cousins). The owner of the largest share (*djamdar*: holder of the totality) is responsible for flock management and selecting shepherds. The manager and associates share in the expenses of flock management prorated according to the number of sheep owned by each. In case an associate's family is not present in camp, the manager has the right to milk his sheep. Despite frequent quarrels among partners, such associations have an average life span of four years.

Lakenkhel pastoralism is absolutely and fully part of a monetized market economy. All male lambs are sold in summer in toto in a single transaction to a single trader. The sale of old, senile sheep is a continual activity throughout the year under a variety of circumstances.

The sale price of the male lambs is directly determined by national and international markets. The Lakerikhel are very frequently informed about sheep prices in the various bazaars of northern Afghanistan. The sale price of the male lambs follows the *baybala* practice – the trader is charged an overprice for delayed payment. This is used in place of interest on cash loans which is forbidden in Islam. It should be noted that *baybala* payments are used in all sectors of the economy. The Lakenkhel rigorously avoid killing sheep for consumption. So strong is this attitude that even sick or wounded sheep killed prior to natural death are sold to neighboring villagers at a low price. Thus, the Lakenkhel consider their sheep "capital on hoofs" to be exploited in the most rational way possible. Clearly Lakenhkel sheep represent a "Valeur d'echange" and not a "valelur d'usage" as P. Bonte assumes (Bonte, 1978, P. 10) Milk products, however, remain outside the market economy. They are strictly for domestic use, and it is considered degrading to sell any.

Two additional activities are closely related to Lakenkhel nomadic sheepbreeding. The first is the breeding of a substantial number of cattle, camels, and horses which follow the caravan on the migration trek. These are fattened at Daraykhar valley and later sold to villagers and in bazaars. Thus the availability of the rich Daraykhar pastures has allowed the Lakenkhel to extend their breeding activities to other species. The second is trading. This is a continual and exuberant activity carried all along the migration trek and in camp. In a sense any pastoralist, rich or poor, is primarily a trader. The propensity to trade is so strong that practically anything (animals, carpets, guns, etc.) can be bought or sold provided that the price is right.

Among the Lakenkhel, sheepbreeding leads to fresh capital formation consecutive to both sheep sales and flock increase. With fresh capital the Lakenkhel acquire agricultural land or engage in trading ventures. Therefore, it is clear that while the immediate objectives of Lakenkhel pastoralists are centered on the flock, the long range objectives of pastoralism fall outside sheepbreeding, into other economic sectors. This process is similar to the Basseri situation described by Barth (Barth 1961, p. 110) with an important difference: In the Basseri case only rich flock-owners transfer capital into the agricultural sector while among the Lakenkhel practically all pastoralists, whether they own 50 sheep or 500, are engaged in this transfer process.

MARKET LIFE

Narin bazaar occupies an important position in the regional economy. At the beginning of this century Narin bazaar comprised only a few shops owned by Persian-speaking merchants. Today there are numerous traders: general store operators, tailors, silversmiths, blacksmiths, carpenters, gunsmiths, butchers, potters, butter vendors, druggists, and many specialized shops for the sale of textiles, radios, shoes, salt, grain, etc. Several flour mills use water power provided by the local irrigation canal grid. A rice mill is located upstream. Numerous *caykhana* (teahouses or restaurants) serve as important meeting places for travelers. All these are stable commercial establishments open seven days a week. Mondays and Fridays are bazaar days. On these two days, hundreds of peasants from the surrounding villages and peddlers from other towns converge on Narin in order to buy and sell, conduct business in some government office, and meet friends. The grain and animal bazaars attract most of the visitors. These are vast open places where either grain is bought and sold, or sheep, goats, and cattle change hands.Narin bazaar perform the function of a regional distribution center for many foreign goods: transistor radios from Japan, pharmaceutical products from Germany, pots and pans from Pakistan, rubber shoes and matches from the Soviet Union or even tea from India.

Many articles are also imported from other parts of Afghanistan: sugar, textiles, leather shoes, salt, dry fruit, etc. The peasants from the valley and the surrounding hills bring their meager surplus: wheat, barley, sheep, goats, and cattle. The local grain, considered of high quality is purchased by traders, loaded on trucks, and exported to the major cities of the country. The livestock is mostly acquired by needy households and generally redistributed in the area. While grain prices are established nationally and involve little discussion, there is endless bargaining over the cost of animals. Bargaining is a complex bazaar ritual performed in front of onlookers who participate in the debate, evaluate the arguments, and make suggestions of their own. Spontaneously a mediator emerges and negotiates a compromise between the antagonistic parties. Money keeping is an additional and interesting function performed by the local shopkeepers. Peasants very rarely keep cash in their houses for fear that it may be stolen by relatives. They deposit their money with a trusted shopkeeper who will return it upon request. This practice is performed on good faith. There are no written records and there are no known cases of malevolent appropriation.

It is clear that Narin bazaar is the integrator of the regional economy, the link with other economic sectors of Afghanistan, the regional distribution center for practically all imported goods, and the collecting point for the local surplus. Corresponding to its economic

importance, Narin bazaar is the center of the regional government. It is the seat of the *wuluswal* or subgovernor of Narin administrative district who is responsible to the *wali* or provincial governor, located in the provincial capital of Baghlan. The *wuluswal* is the highest district officer and controls the activities of all other government officials in the area, including the police. Cases of trouble are reported to the police; yet the *wuluswal* has the right to preliminary hearings to attempt reconciliation before the case is forwarded to the judge or *kazi*. This gives the *wuluswal* considerable latitude to control directly the state of affairs in the countryside. In the performance of his various administrative functions the *wuluswal* is helped by the *alakadar* in charge of sub-districts and the various *malik* representing the major ethnic groups in the area. While the *wali*, *wuluswal* and *alakadar* (in descending order) administer distinct territorial units, the social groups represented by the *malik* are widely dispersed and consequently lack territorial continuity.

The only high school in the area is also located in Narin bazaar. It is, in general, only for boys who belong to the wealthier families in the area. Instruction is very formal in the sense that both students and teachers closely follow the textbooks, section by section, one chapter after another with little deviation. There are very few other books in the school, students do not read them and no effort is made for the students to make a personal synthesis or a critical evaluation of the material presented in class. Students are passive, and taught by rote. Generally, only the better and more ambitious students intend to further their education and enter a professional school in a major city. Their aim is to enter officialdom by becoming teachers, judges, police chiefs, etc. The high school serves as the first recruiting source for the government cadres and as a separation line between the traditional segments of Afghan society and the modern bureaucratic sector. It should be noted that high school students in Narin represent a very small proportion of the total population in this age bracket. Only two Lakenkhel boys have attended the high school; the first is a son of a wealthy sheep and land owner who is attending law school in Kabul and the second is Ismail, son of Haji Omar, who intends to become a police chief.

It is clear that Narin bazaar is the nexus through which modern tendencies penetrate the highly traditional and conservative countryside. Modernity may use the channels of commerce, government administration or education. Narin bazaar depends closely on

modern communications to fulfill its many diverse functions. Most important is the highway leading to the provincial capital of Baghlan. An exotic fleet of Russian jeeps and trucks and American-made vehicles transport passengers and goods. Travelers bring news from the major cities and Kabul. This information is transmitted first to careful listeners in the *caykhana* teahouse and from there travels to the remote corners of the countryside. Local officials depend on the telephone for frequent contact with their superiors. This is a single line

system linking only government offices. Most important as a link with the outside world is the transistor radio. Many town and peasant households including nomad camps own a transistor and often listen to folk music, the national news and various educational programs. In the absence of newspapers the transistor is an extremely important link between the national government and the people of Narin district. It is a direct link in the sense that the information is not mediated, and it is also an essential instrument in the development of national identity and consciousness.

RIVALRY

Rivalry is an important theme in Afghan social organization. It is clearly illustrated in this film by two episodes: the dog fight and *buzkashi*. According to the local saying: ''A chief is the rival of a chief, a shepherd is the rival of a shepherd and a woman is the rival of a woman." Two terms are used in describing these complex dyadic patterns: *tirbgania* and *aiali*.

The term *tirbgania* derives from *tirbur* which means cousin and *tirbgania* refers to forms of competition between cousins of varying degrees and is applicable mainly within the kinship group. Cousins live nearby and have the opportunity to observe each other daily. Each one independently strives to increase his assets: build a better house, marry additional women, accumulate more sheep, acquire more land, etc. Since goods (capital and land goods) available for acquisition are considered to be in limited supply, it is assumed that the economic growth of one cousin can only be to the detriment of the other. Therefore, cousins are topographically and genealogically the closest competitors. They remain locked in hostile competition for life, and *tirbgania* continues until the collapse of one of the rivals, which is always perceived as beneficial to the other. The applicability of the term *siali* is wider. *Sial* means equal and *siali* refers to rivalry among equals. When two men of roughly equal status meet and form an interacting dyad in the presence of others, *siali* is expressed immediately in order to establish the primacy of one person over the other. *Siali* nicely illustrates the inclusion of inequality within equality and is indicative of the prevalence of the hierarchical principle. *Siali* is a neverending process; it includes rivals outside the kinship circle, and when acted out by chiefs it gives rise to the performance of elaborate political strategies including constantly shifting alliances.

The dog fight sequence at the lambing camp illustrates *tirbgania*. Anvar, the camp leader, is a rich man who owns over 1000 sheep and much land in co-propriety with his brothers. His cousin Mamanur, who is his rival, is almost equally rich. Although Anvar, a member of a chief's family, is usually arrogant and his behavior overtly assertive and despotic, Mamanur is considered a quiet peaceful man. He is a very capable manager of his estate, and is determined to overcome Anvar in wealth and power. During the filming, relations between the two were bad, Mamanur accused Anvar of stealing from other people and bringing shame to his lineage. Mamanur separated his tents from Anvar's and established camp on the other side of a ridge. One evening Mamanur and Anvar's dogs were incited to fight. Men and children gathered around and the pace of action quickened. It became clear that the two rivals were using their dogs in their own competition for prestige in front of the audience. Unable to confront each other directly, they employed substitutes. The political clients of each rival took sides according to their allegiance. Faqir, a rather independent individual

assumed the role of active mediator and supervised and stimulated the dog fight. The people expected that Anvar's dog would perform more aggressively by virtue of its belonging to the chief. When it became apparent that Anvar's dog was winning the fight, Anvar withdrew it from the action circle and declared it the winner. Faqir brought the dog back and after a second fight Mamanur left – feeling angry, cheated, and 'that Anvar manipulated the

dog fight unjustly to his own advantage.' Just before Mamanur's departure, the whole audience turned in admiration towards Anvar.

Buzkashi is illustrative of *aiali* or the wider pattern of rivalry. As an insider explained, "everything in *buzkashi* rivalry." *Buzkashi* is an exceptionally violent game with few rigid rules played on horseback by North Afghanistan tribesmen.Playgrounds located near villages, should be grass-covered and free of rock, to avoid hurting horses' hoofs. It is a winter game; the season usually begins in the autumn, after the rainfall, and concludes shortly after the Muslim New Year's Day, March 21. Every Friday afternoon in the villages the horse owners, the *chapandaz* or riders, and a crowd of on lookers gather on the game grounds. The field itself has no precise boundaries; on one side stands a line of mounted horse owners, elderly and influential people, and government officials. In addition to these notables, several rows of spectators sit on the ground. In front of the elders is the goal, a circle about ten feet in diameter, outlined with gravel. In the opposite direction a pole is stuck in the ground.

The game president (*rais*) places the buz in the goal. The *chapandaz* then struggle briefly until one of them manages to grab the carcass. The lucky horseman is then supposed to round the pole and return to the goal. If he manages to throw the buz inside the circle, he wins a point. En route however, he has to face the other *chapandaz*, who try to take the buz away from him. The ensuing violent clashes are the game's *raison d'etre*, the enactment of the horse owners' political rivalries. This game may continue indefinitely, until the buz or two or three carcasses have been torn to pieces.

Through *buzkaski* the local landowners or chiefs compete directly against each other trying to outdo their rivals. Year round, chiefs breed, buy and sell horses, lavish them with care, try to attract the ablest *chapandaz* and secure their loyalty, and provide horses and riders with the best gear. Since these are expensive projects, *buzkashi* is an aristocratic game, a political strategy applied by local chiefs for the maximization of social prestige. As for the *chapadaz*,they are rivals of each other by definition, every *chapandaz* struggles alone and competes directly with all other *chapandaz* in the arena. Society even projects its pattern of rivalry on the horses themselves as it 'is said that horses develop rivalries of their own, spontaneously biting and kicking each other. Clearly *buzkashi* is a good illustration of the pattern of rivalry in Afghan society

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Study Guide Design by
Razan Alzayani

Contact Information

Documentary Educational Resources
101 Morse St.
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800-569-6621 or 617-926-0491
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