# The Boundaries of Afghans' Political Imagination

# The Boundaries of Afghans' Political Imagination: The Normative-Axiological Aspects of Afghan Tradition

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# CONTENTS

# THE RULES OF TRANSCRIPTION

A simplified transcription of Dari, Pashto, and Arabic names and terms has been used. It is based on the English spelling rules. The names and terms of Arabic origin are given in the version used in the contemporary Dari and Pashto languages, if different: for example, Hoseyn instead of Arabic al-Husayn, Jalaluddin Haqani instead of Arabic Jalal ad-Din Haqani.

| Dari and Pashto letters | Transcription |
|---|---|
| ا | a,o,e |
| ب | b |
| پ | p |
| ت | t |
| ث | s |
| ج | j |
| چ | ch |
| ح | h |
| خ | kh |
| د | d |
| ذ | z |
| ر | r |
| ز | z |
| ژ | zh |
| س | s |
| ش | sh |
| ص | s |
| ض | z |

| | |
|---|---|
| ط | t |
| ظ | z |
| ع | ' (only in the middle of word) |
| غ | gh |
| ف | f |
| ق | q |
| ک | k |
| گ | g |
| ل | l |
| م | m |
| ن | n |
| و | v, w, u, o |
| ه | h |
| ی | i, y |

**Pashto letters (additional)**

| | |
|---|---|
| ټ | t |
| ځ | dz |
| څ | ts |
| ډ | d |
| ړ | r |
| ږ | zh |
| ښ | sh |
| ڼ | n |
| ې | e |
| ۍ | ay |

# INTRODUCTION

Afghans have always aroused respect. As diligent soldiers in the armies of the great Persian and Moghul states, they also inspired fear, and were a force which was difficult to curb. They defended their autonomy by cultivating their old customs and by preserving separate languages and dialects. They made up a mosaic of peoples scattered throughout the barely accessible Hindu Kush mountains. Diversity was therefore a norm which penetrated almost all areas of their social life. Afghans were determined to fiercely defend their independence in the sixteenth century, and, later on, after the formation of their state in 1747, to defend Afghanistan. It used to be a land of diversity, which towards the close of the nineteenth century still did not have well-established boundaries, and which even by its inhabitants was called in various ways: Khorasan, Zabulestan, or Kabulestan.

Afghans repelled foreign invaders from their country, fighting fiercely against the Persian, the British, and recently the Red Army. However, solidarity in the face of a common foe did not turn into a sense of community that would unite the entire society. When they chased away the strangers, they fought among themselves. This fighting has continued until today, and there seems to be no end to it. What is the logic of this fight against all rational judgement? What are the norms in Afghan politics, and what are its future prospects? How do Afghans understand the concept of the order which constitutes the core of political consciousness?

The questions thus formulated touch upon the most fundamental issues of community life: its structure and organization, its system of values as well as of patterns and imaginaries delineating the standards of the world. This may be the subject of study for a multitude of disciplines: sociology, anthropology, history, but also linguistics and the philological sciences, which through language and text enable us to reach the most profound layers of culture. And this a means of inquiring into the consciousness of the Afghans, which seems to be sorely neglected (the languages of Afghanistan are less known to most researchers), at the same time as being truly important in order to understand the essence of the Afghan cultural specificity.

In many research currents, the active and determining role of the language in culture as a whole has been underlined. Which is why, in the opinion of researchers who deal with culture, any attempt at a subjective

reconstruction of culture and of its conceptual forms must take into account the study of the language. Wojciech Burszta writes that the "subjective reconstruction of culture must begin by verbalization of its constituent judgements (normative and directive) by using relevant subject-matter concepts."[1] Researchers in this circle perceive culture as a certain "intellectual reality" in which language plays a dominant role. This role, however, is interpreted in different ways.

The ethno-linguistic view assumes that language is a guide to social reality, and it constitutes a basic key to its proper reading and understanding. Language is a system, and not a set of norms; its structure sets the direction for thinking and imposes a conceptual network upon the external world. Benjamin Lee Whorf argues that:

> We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native language. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds—and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds.[2]

The central hypothesis of this current is that it is only through cognition of linguistic messages and of the linguistic background of every culture that one can reconstruct cultural systems that are "intellectually" different. The conceptions of Benjamin L. Whorf and Edward Sapir, which were further developed by Jane O. Bright and William Bright, belong to the key ideas in the development of this linguistic orientation.

A different role is ascribed to language in the approach of Claude Lévi-Strauss and the advocates of structural anthropology. Here, language is perceived as a precondition of culture and as a means of transmission of culture, as well as a common structural entity, shared with other culture systems (religion, mythology). In this conception, both language and culture are situated on the level of unconscious thought; they are two parallel manifestations of a more fundamental activity of the human mind. For structuralists, the uncovering of unconscious systems within the language is a method of discovering similar systems in other domains of culture. Lévi-Strauss considers language to be the most fundamental cultural fact. He claims that it is not only part of culture, but also a basic instrument and a privileged medium which enables us to absorb the culture of our group. He emphasizes that language is the most central of all aspects of the cultural order which form systems, regardless of the principle being used. So if we want to understand the nature of art, religion, law, or even the rules of politeness, we need to understand that

these are the codes generated by the articulation of signs according to the model of linguistic communication.[3] Language, as one of the aspects of culture, was the easiest to describe and formalize; that is why the theory and methodology of structural linguistics have come to be so important for the study of various domains of culture. In America, we witness the development of cognitive anthropology, also called ethno-science, which makes use of the achievements of structural linguistics. For cognitivists, semiotic analyses are the point of departure, and the concept of the sign has been expanded to include other aspects of culture. The leading representatives of ethno-science, such as Ward Goodenough, Stephen A. Tyler, Anthony Wallace and others, view linguistic messages as the chief source of cognition of culture codes, that is to say, basic standards of perceiving, believing, assessing, and acting. They argue that through the intermediary of language we may understand the ways in which people conceptualize both the natural and the social world. For these researchers, the norms of linguistic behaviour, arranged in their particular phonological, morphological, syntactical, semantic, and symbolic systems, are the catalogue of forms imposed by an individual upon the experienced reality. Linguistic forms, therefore, come to be a kind of code for extra-linguistic forms, that is, a whole range of notions and experiences used by people to understand the sense of the world.[4]

Ethno-linguistics, cognitive anthropology, and ethnological structuralism form the basis for the theory of culture in the theory of language. This shift to a linguistic analysis across the social sciences has also brought change to the object of study. In recent decades, the key to the study of culture and social communities has become a quest for the subjective sense, that is, the semantic content of cultural phenomena. Researchers have focused a great deal of attention on the sense which societies and individuals give to the institutions, activities, imaginaries, events, or habits. The subjective sense came to form the basis of anthropological research in the first half of the twentieth century. An important representative of this orientation is a British functionalist, Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard, who claimed that the main task of anthropology was to capture the sense and meaning of particular norms or institutions for the participants of the culture under study. As the object of the study changed, the methods and logic of the explanations did as well. Interpretation became the key tool of explication. Clifford Geertz, an American anthropologist who was considered to be the greatest authority of the new anthropology in the 1980s, argues that cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions. Every interpretation starts, in a way, from a sheer beginning; this means constantly collecting new

data that will be used for further analyses which will be different from the previous ones.[5] Thus, interpreting is a continuing, never-ending process during which researchers try to find an answer to the question: "how this people or that, this period or that, this person or that makes sense to itself and, taking that into account, what we understand about social order, historical change or psychic functioning in general."[6]

To find out this meaning one must capture, among other things, the meaning of symbols, signs, and accounts. These are the sources of basic information explicating the relationships that occur in a society and the sense which is given to them. They allow us to interpret systems of values and ethical patterns, and to reach the collective imagination. Striving to understand cultural phenomena through the study of subjective sense has become main purpose of symbolic anthropology, a rapidly developing discipline in recent decades. The fundamental assumption of the "new anthropology" is the belief that people organize their activities not according to objective conditions of the sort that the researcher may observe from the outside, but on the basis of their own vision of the world. The reconstruction of the intellectual model of the world is possible through the study of symbolic structures, myths, ideologies and rituals, religious and magical beliefs, etc. An interpretation of the fundamentals underpinning the new anthropology was given by one of its founders, Edmund Leach, in his book *Culture and Communication* (Cambridge, 1976). Today, most anthropological research, particularly in Great Britain, is made up of the study of symbolic culture; much research has focused on the problems of ritual and symbolism, and their classification.

The works of Kenneth Burke, Ernest Cassirer, Michel Foucault, or Emil Durkheim, which were published earlier, exerted a considerable influence on the orientation associated with the idea of symbolic research. They contributed to the development of studies on the relationship between social structures and representation systems. In the social sciences, the concept of myth has been used to describe socio-political reality, allowing scholars to distinguish the category of social and political myth. Analysis of political events confirmed that consciousness-related phenomena, but also illusory ideas of reality, determine their course.[7] Thus, in recent years the concept of "imagination" has become a subject of study pursued by many disciplines. Each of them—anthropology, sociology, psychology, and history—has discovered diverse functions of the imagination in collective life, specifically those related to the exercise of power, since political power is particularly based upon imaginaries, symbols, and myths.

Most recently, the social sciences have undergone a significant shift, bringing them much closer to the traditional humanities. Human sciences such as philology or psychology have become an object of interest to many sociologists. Representatives of social sciences admit that the understanding of social life only in the categories of function, organization, and structure does not exhaust its nature, and the picture of a society behaving like a machine has long become obsolete, as it was incomplete and distorted. The number of adherents to the ideal of a social physics that gauges various functions, based on measurements, facts, and analyses, has progressively diminished, since it does not exhaustively interpret the diversity of the world and the plurality of forms and phenomena. The positivist model, of science transferred from the natural sciences to the science of culture, did not bring about the expected coherent theoretical system that would explain all cultural phenomena, since such aspects of culture as thoughts, emotions, and imaginaries could not be represented in the form of structural models.

New social theories, therefore, refer to the world of arts, psychology, literature, and language. Scholars seek analogies in the world of human sciences. Some of them, for example, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Peter Winch, or Erving Goffman, perceive collective behaviours using game theory.[8] The description of social activities is performed using the model of the behaviour of partners in a game. Accordingly, the correctness or incorrectness of a given behaviour may be determined only within the realm of the game in which this behaviour is a move—in Wittgenstein's thought, in the context of the given language-game. He holds that the language-game is a process consisting in the use of expressions in a definite rather than an arbitrary manner. In his view, language is not used to relate what takes place and what does not, but to allow people to communicate with each other. However, in order to bring this communication into existence, people must learn the language, that is to say, they must learn not only how correctly to pronounce (write and read) the expressions, but also how to use them in a manner appropriate to the existing language-game. Advocates of game theory argue that any form of behaviour must always be viewed through the prism of the specific rule under which it falls. It is only the knowledge of the rules that permits a proper appraisal of behaviour and a proper definition of its meaning.

Great interest has been also aroused by the concept of consolidating meanings, in which the description of behaviours is based on the analogy of the actions of the writer and the reader. In this approach, life is like a text which has consolidated the speech. Researchers treat the area of culture and tradition (and sometimes the entire reality accessible to us) as a

text that is subject to interpretation. All social activities are, according to this conception, a manner of building the text and of comparing symbols for the purpose of expression. Approaching an analysis of the means of record used—which may comprise institutions, habits, social change, and so on—like a textual analysis allows one to establish how the society consolidates its activities, how it organizes itself, how it ascribes sense, and finally what sense it ascribes. One representative of this trend is a linguist, Alton Becker, who holds that the new philology provides an opportunity for social research. He maintains that the study of texts must be inseparably related to research into social phenomena. Translation, explanation, and the rendering of words only will not suffice. The new philology should determine the nature of the texts, i.e., the principles of their construction, and combine the work on the consolidated meaning (text) with the work on social processes which execute that consolidation (which may include jokes, rituals, sermons, the caste system in India, the custom of widow burning, etc.) Becker sees the new philologist as "a specialist in contextual relations in all areas of knowledge in which text-building is a central activity: literature, history, law, music, politics, psychology, trade, even war and peace."[9]

Other researchers draw an analogy between drama and social life. A relationship between actors and audiences corresponds to social activities. The main representative of the theory of "social drama" as a process of regeneration is a British anthropologist, Victor Turner. From the point of view of this theory, on all levels of social organization, from the family to the state level, there is an ongoing social drama. Conflicts of various intensity, arising on various social levels, reach their culminating point. These conflicts may be resolved through diverse ritual processes, "due to public, spectacular, highly conventionalized behaviours." They may include litigation, vendetta, sacrifice, or prayer; these forms delineate and impose boundaries and order. Violation of these forms leads to change in the *status quo*, and thereby to transformation.[10] These theories are based on the conviction that social balance is unstable, and that any society is fraught with conflicts that are not rooted in pathological deviation from the norms or external influences, but are in the very character of the social structure.

Social structure is the principal notion in the structuralist orientation grounded in British social anthropology, as represented by Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown. He maintains that the phenomena related to symbolic culture, including language phenomena, are secondary to social structure. Two notions are central to this conception: social structure and function. To Radcliffe-Brown, social structure is "an orderly arrangement

of persons in institutionally controlled or defined relationships, i.e., socially standardized behaviour patterns."[11] In this theory, a structure is a direct cause of all social processes, that is to say, behaviours and interplay, within the groups under study.

The stability and conservatism of social structure contrasts with Turner's notion of "anti-structure," which he uses to designate a marginal sphere of social activities. Turner places special emphasis on the dynamic character of social process, applying a category of marginality or liminality from which he derives a theory of social change. Under this theory, society creates specific margins of structure which remain in part beyond the reach of an established system of norms. These marginal areas make it possible to experiment and introduce new ideas, which—if accepted—are incorporated into the general system of the living standards. While marginal, these areas of life are most important from the perspective of social change, and comprise science, arts, and ritual, but also include all kinds of enclosed and isolated communities which govern themselves by their own rules, for example convents, secret societies, and youth communes. Turner holds that the marginal situation allows one to free oneself from cultural limitations and to propound alternative patterns of social order, and in effect leads to structural transformation.[12]

In our research into the Afghans' political imagination we have taken into account specifically those scholars who use language as the basis of their research, but we have also taken into consideration theories which give priority to structure in the shaping of behavioural patterns. In order to define the "logic of Afghan politics," it was necessary to establish its normative and axiological conditioning factors. The subject of our studies, therefore, was the system of values and norms of law, as well as the structure of social organization reflecting the concept of order which is at the core of political consciousness. The main key to the analysis conducted in this work was language.

Since political choices and decisions are largely determined by the system of professed values, the first part of the work discusses the ethical systems which have shaped the attitudes of the Afghan people. As the basis of our study we have used language, which constitutes (expresses, reflects) a specific vision of the world, and which, by the same token, becomes the main tool enabling cognition of its basic values.

In Afghanistan, two languages are constantly struggling for predominance: Pashto and Dari (an old name for Persian).[13] Dari means "the language of the court," from Persian *dabar* or *dar* (the court). There is also another interpretation of this name, "the language of the valley," from Persian *darra* (valley). The name Dari was officially adopted by the

Afghans in 1958 in lieu of the hitherto-used Farsi (Persian). This change of name was to emphasize that it was a separate Persian language used in Afghanistan, and was connected with the rise of nationalistic tendencies in Afghanistan at that time. Both Pashto and Dari belong to the Iranian group of languages.[14] The proper term for this group is New Iranian, the name adopted for the Iranian languages spoken today. The history of the Iranian languages is subdivided into three periods: Old Iranian (approximately the ninth to the fourth century BC), Middle Iranian (the fourth century BC to the ninth or tenth century of our era) and New (Modern) Iranian (from the ninth or tenth century to modern times). Only two separate New Iranian languages are a continuation of Middle Iranian languages: New Persian (together with Tajik and Dari) and Yaghnobi.

Both Dari and Pashto embody separate systems of values that are recorded in poetry, as well as in legends, songs and proverbs, living in oral accounts over the centuries. One of the most important sources in the Pashto language in shaping ethical patterns is the *Pashtunwali*, that is, an unwritten code of the Pashtun people. The first and only attempt to depict the code is made in the book entitled *Pashtunwali*, written by Qiyamuddin Khadim and published in Kabul in the year 1331 of the Hijra (1953). Fragments of the book appeared in the Polish language in the periodical *Etnografia Polska*.[15]

A very valuable source is the work of an Afghan researcher, Mohammad Ibrahim Atayee, *De pashtani qabilo estelahi ghamus (hoquqi – jazai – ta'ameli)* (A Dictionary of the Terminology of Pashtun's Tribal Customary Law and Usages), published in Kabul in AH 1357 (1978).[16] The book is the result of many years of research carried out in provinces such as Helmand, Kandahar, Paktya, and Nangarhar. The author underlines that all the terms are used today in the regions in which tribal institutions are still very powerful. This applies in particular to the Afghan–Pakistani borderland, where tribal traditions are very strong and deeply rooted in the pre-Islamic era. The author writes that during fieldwork in this region he encountered a very old dialect of the Pashto language called Wanetsi.

Many norms and truths regarding the system of values have been preserved in folk songs and in proverbs. In this book we have used a collection of Pashtun proverbs, *Pashto Mataluna*, published in Kabul in AH 1358 (1979). The collection appeared in the Pashto language, and was translated into the Dari language by A. R. Benawa, and into English by A. M. Shinwari.

Another valuable source were the folk songs of the Pashtun people. They were first collected and translated into French by a French

orientalist, James Darmesteter. In *Chantes Populaires des Afghans*, edited in Paris between 1888 and 1890, the author presented the texts of the ballads which he had collected during the scientific expedition to Afghanistan from 1886 to 1887. Darmesteter was one of the first authors to point to the role of songs in the life of the Pashtun people. He wrote that folk poetry, despised and rejected by educated people, was an extremely valuable phenomenon. Composed by illiterate poets, it expressed their feelings and recorded the true life of a nation. The work also includes an outline of grammar and a brief history of literature in the Pashto language.[17]

A collection of Pashto songs has also been translated and published in Russian. Traditions of oral literature were studied by Georgii Fedorovich Girs, who, in his work *Istoricheskiye pesni Pushtunov* (Moscow, 1984), collected Pashtun songs extolling the fight for faith and freedom, mainly during the Anglo–Afghan wars.

Also, *Pata Khazana* (The Hidden Treasure), the oldest collection of Pashto poetry, preserved the ideas and values delineating the standards of the world of the Pashtun people. It was published for the first time in 1944 and aroused very heated discussions regarding the authenticity of some of the collected poems. It comprises poems in the Pashto language dating back to the seventh, eighth, or ninth centuries, which are not corroborated by any other sources. The beginning of Pashto literature dates back to the fifteenth century. Poems and their poets' biographies were collected by Mohammad Hotak, who for many years recorded Pashto poems and information about their authors that had been kept alive in the memory of the Pashtun people. He began to write this work in AH 1142 (1764), and in 1945 the translation of the collection into the Dari language was published.

A valuable source of material for the study of the axiological aspects of Afghan tradition are the poems of a seventeenth-century warrior-poet who praised Pashtun ideals, Khushhal Khan Khattak. His poems, sung and recited by the bards, have survived in the oral tradition. They also had many editions and were translated into a number of languages (by Cuthbert Edward Biddulph, David Mackenzie, Georg Morgenstierne, M. Eremina, A. Gerasimova, Georgii F. Girs, and others).

In contrast to Pashto, the Dari (Persian) language has a much richer and older literary tradition. It found its fullest expression in the Sufi poetry which flourished in those areas. Poetry was preserved in oral accounts not only among educated people, but also in the vast circles of Afghan society. This was one of the ways in which Sufism reached the most remote places

in Afghanistan, thus shaping the attitudes and values of the people living in inaccessible valleys and in remote mountain villages.

Sufism, as a religious and philosophical stream of Islam, with its many stages of development, has been discussed in many works devoted to its various aspects, with studies being conducted by European, and somewhat later by American, Canadian, and Japanese, orientalists over the past two centuries. Out of a wide circle of scholars, the greatest contribution to those studies was made, without doubt, by Louis Massignon, Arthur Arberry, John Spencer Trimingham, and Annemarie Schimmel. In the field of Iranian and Central Asian Sufism, the works of Evgenii Bertels, Marijan Mole, and Henry Corbin are of major value. An important contribution has also been made by the Iranians themselves, and the works of Sayyed Hoseyn Nasr and Abdul Hoseyn Zarinkub represent a Muslim point of view. In Afghanistan alone, religion was not the object of major studies, and for this reason there are not many works relating to the development of Sufism in these areas either. In recent years, this gap has been filled by the work of David B. Edwards and by valuable works by Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, discussing the history of Sufism in India. Most recently, the work *Tarikh-e khanaqah dar Iran* has appeared in Iran. Its author, Mohammad Kiyani, studies the area of historical Khorasan, which now belongs in part to Afghanistan.

Sufi traditions expressed in the form of poetry were part of the religious education of Afghans, and, by the same token, of their social education, since social and political intentions in Muslim societies are expressed in a religious form. Therefore, the materials concerning religion are sources of primary importance for gaining knowledge of the society. In this work we have made use of popular texts for the teaching of religion entitled *Panj Ganj* (Five Treasures) and *Kolliyat-e Chahar Kitab* (A Collection of Four Books), the contents of which were known in the remotest villages and settlements.

Out of many research problems concerning Sufism we have been interested, in the first place, in its ethical aspect, as well as in the organizational structure of the Sufi brotherhoods. For in order to understand the logic of Afghan politics, apart from ethical standards one must investigate how the concept of order was perceived, what was the pattern of organization of Afghan society, and what were the archetypes of power. The answers to the questions posed here are sought in the second part of the book, *Patterns of Social Order,* in which the tribal structure and the structure of the Sufi brotherhoods is analysed. The fact that these structures are different shows that, to Afghans, the concept of order had diverse meanings and was developed according to different patterns, and

their traces and symbols have survived in their habits, in their proverbs, and in their poetry.

In the third part of the work, *The Boundaries of Political Imagination*, demonstrates how ideals, patterns, values, and moral norms preserved in the collective memory of the Afghans affected political choices and attitudes, and how they shaped their political activity. It also shows what kind of order was defended by the legal norms which were widely accepted in Afghanistan. Since politics acquires a general meaning alongside the rise of the state,[18] our focus is on the periods when the Afghan state was extremely active, from the time of the rule of Emir Abdur Rahman, throughout the reign of Shah Amanullah, the government of President Mohammad Daud, up to the period of the totalitarian state governed by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) to and the disintegration of the state during the time of the civil war.

## Notes

[1] W. Burszta, *Język a kultura w myśli etnologicznej* [Language and Culture in the Ethnological Thought], (Wrocław: Polskie Towarzystwo Ludoznawcze, 1986), 132.
[2] See B. L. Whorf, *Język, myśl i rzeczywistość* (Language, Thought and Reality), trans. into Polish T. Hołówka, (Warszawa, 2002), 286.
[3] G. Charbonnier, *Rozmowy z Lévi-Straussem,* (Entretiens avec Claude Lévi-Strauss), trans. into Polish J. Trznadel, (Warszawa, 1968), 142.
[4] For more details on this topic, see W. J. Burszta, "Antropologia kognitywna: charakterystyka orientacji" [Cognitive Anthropology: Characteristics of Orientation], in *Amerykańska antropologia kognitywna* [American Cognitive Anthropology], (Warszawa: Instytut Kultury, 1993).
[5] See C. Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 20.
[6] C. Geertz, "Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought," in *Local Knowledge: Essays in Interpretive Anthropology,* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).
[7] For more details on this topic, see S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych* [On the Peculiarities of Social Sciences], (Warszawa, 1983); S. Filipowicz, *Mit i spektakl władzy* [The Myth and the Show of Power], (Warszawa, 1988); T. Biernat, *Mit polityczny* [The Political Myth], (Warszawa, 1989).
[8] Cf. L. Wittgenstein, *Dociekania filozoficzne* (Philosophical Investigations), (Warszawa: PWN, 1972); P. Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science* (London: 1958); E. Goffman, *Człowiek w teatrze życia codziennego* (The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life), (Warszawa, 1981).
[9] Quoted after C. Geertz, "Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought," in *Local Knowledge: Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 7.
[10] Cf. V. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, (New York, 1982).

[11] A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Method in Social Anthropology* (Chicago, 1968), 177.
[12] Cf. V. Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors* (Ithaca, 1974).
[13] Both names, Dari and Persian, will be used in this work. For an interesting description of both languages using the sociolinguistic approach, see J. Pstrusińska, *Afghanistan 1989 in Sociolinguistic Perspective*, Central Asian Survey Incidental Papers Series 7 (London, 1990).
[14] *Języki indoeuropejskie* [European Languages], vol. 1 (Warszawa, 1986), 163.
[15] J. Pstrusińska, "Paştunwali – afgański kodeks postępowania" [Pashtunwali – the Afghan Code of Conduct], *Etnografia Polska* 21, no. 2 (1977): 63-79.
[16] In 1978, its English translation was published: *A Dictionary of the Terminology of Pashtun's Tribal Customary Law and Usages* (translated into English by A. Mohammad Shinwari), (Kabul: International Centre for Pashto Studies, Academy of Sciences of Afghanistan, AH 1358).
[17] J. Darmesteter, "Afghan Life in Afghan Songs," *Contemporary Review* (London, October 1887), 454.
[18] Maria Szyszkowska argues that politics begins with the rise of the state, and emerges later than the law, which, in the form of the law of nature, also exists prior to the establishment of the state. See: M. Szyszkowska, "Związki filozofii polityki z filozofią prawa" [Relationships between the Philosophy of Politics and the Philosophy of Law], in *Elementy filozofii polityki* [The Elements of the Philosophy of Politics] (Warszawa, 1992), 53.

# PART I

# ETHICAL STANDARDS IN THE AFGHAN WORLD

# CHAPTER ONE

# PASHTUNWALI: THE WARRIOR ETHOS

Determination of the principal standards and patterns according to which "Afghans" organize their world and their reality is not simple, since there is a variety of peoples, languages and cultures behind this concept. The country is inhabited by the Pashtuns and the Tajiks, who speak Iranian languages, living side by side with the Uzbeks and the Turkmen, who belong to the Turkic language group, as well as the Hazara and Nuristani tribes, who speak different languages or dialects again. To distinguish the values which are most important to these groups and to determine the standards by which they perceive the world and themselves, this research will explore their use of language, as this is the oldest symbolic system and one of the most powerful forces in consolidating communities.[1] Many researchers argue that language represents an all-embracing and ever-present human interpretation of the world. The theory that language is also a perspective on the world is put forward by both philologists and philosophers, even though it is understood in different ways. However, the two systems of thought regarding language share the belief that an individual, when learning a language, at the same time acquires a specific vision of the world that is determined by this particular language. He or she does not learn to communicate, but to think. Hans-Georg Gadamer states that each language is a measure of our finite existence, and "What is said in it constitutes the common world in which we live and which belongs also to the whole great chain of tradition."[2]

In Afghanistan, two languages determine the measure of the world: Pashto and Dari. Both of them belong to the same family of Iranian languages, and they show signs of culture which has been evidenced in writing for more than 2,500 years. The range and the level of development of these languages vary greatly. While Dari (Persian) has achieved the status of the court language and was the language of culture and sophisticated poetry, Pashto has remained a regional language, spoken by about 20 million people, mainly in Afghanistan and in the north of Pakistan. Dari was the language of the town and crafts, as well as of the

court, while Pashto expressed the world of herdsmen, nomads, and warriors. Igor M. Reisner argues that animal husbandry terminology is purely Pashtun, whereas the terms related to the town and crafts are Dari and Hindi.[3] Despite its limited range, however, Pashto has retained a strong position in Afghanistan and, like Dari, is the country's official language. The status of the Pashto language is the result of the dominant position of the Pashtuns in the recent history of Afghanistan. This ethnic group has dominated the Afghan political life by holding power for almost the entire period from the early eighteenth century to modernity. Despite the turbulent history and endeavours to "govern the souls," which were particularly intensive on the part of Pashtuns involved in promoting the Pashto language, neither language succeeded in becoming dominant.[4] Both have coexisted for centuries, thus allowing different interpretations of the world and uncovering different notions and different truths about it. This, no doubt, testifies to the power and persistence of the values which are encoded in them.

The mutual relationship and active character of the two languages, however, must have also led to a kind of linguistic fusion, to mutual interplay and borrowings. Thus, the ongoing process of the overlapping of the languages was, at the same time, the overlapping of the two worlds, resulting in countless borrowings and grammatical changes. Prolonged contact with the Dari language has left profound traces in the lexicon and to some extent in the grammar of Pashto. In the social sphere, the fusion has given rise to many conflicts, but it has also created a new perspective, and it has become an impulse for new ideas and values.

The notion of value has a wide variety of meanings within the human sciences. For the purposes of this study, the term refers to the phenomena occurring in the sphere of human consciousness. The definition given by Stefan Nowak seems to be the most appropriate one: he defines values as "certain pictures or visions of things, states or processes, which are considered to be proper, morally right, or such as those one would like to see."[5]

Antonina Kłoskowska writes that language is, without question, the main way to familiarize oneself with values and to get acquainted with the "symbolic culture," which is the basic source of ideas about values. It comprises explicitly formulated symbolic models, norms, assessments, and accounts, that are part of cultural tradition.[6] Grouped in systems or ideologies, they generate a network through which direct stimuli of the external world are filtered.[7] In addition to literary works, an inexhaustible source of information about values is provided by proverbs, medical formulae, prayers, codes, myths, texts of songs, and genealogies. Often

preserved only in oral accounts, they tell us much about the perception of the world and about the "cultural grammar" of a given community.[8] Cultural grammar encapsulates the essence of the phenomenon of culture, about which Goodenough writes that it is a non-material phenomenon: it does not consist of things, people's behaviour or emotions, but is rather an organization of all these elements. It is the form of things that people have in mind, their models of perceiving, relating to, and interpreting the world.[9] Lévi-Strauss took a similar stance when he wrote:

> Culture is neither natural nor artificial. It stems from neither genetics nor rational thought, for it is made up of rules of conduct, which were not invented, and whose function is generally not understood by the people who obey them. Some of these rules are residues of traditions. Other rules have been consciously accepted or modified for the sake of specific goals. Yet there is no doubt that, between the instincts inherited from our genotype and the rules inspired by reason, the mass of unconscious rules remains more important and more effective; because reason itself is a product rather than a cause of cultural evolution.[10]

Many researchers, including Stanisław Ossowski, Ward Goodenough, and Claude Lévi-Strauss, think that this axionormative aspect of culture, which applies to the values and norms shared by the community, is the most important one.

In Afghanistan, there has been a clash between the two different systems of values. They were shaped by the *Pashtunwali*, belonging to the tradition of the Pashto language, and by Sufism, which was mainly expressed in Persian. The need to choose between these systems, which became increasingly intense along with the strengthening of the state and its institutions, resulted in the conflict of values, as, under the influence of the two systems, different personality patterns were shaped. They carried a different hierarchy of values, and they expressed and approved of different lifestyles. Different kinds of ethos were shaped which determined the political attitudes of the Afghan people. One consequence of the re-evaluation in the ethical sphere was the change of political order, since the system of values determines the measures of the world, including those pertaining to politics. Thomas Landon Thorson writes that "a man in politics whether he be theorist or actor or both will react to problems according to the way in which his cultural equipment allows him to perceive them."[11] The most important system of values and ideas to have been preserved in the Pashto language is, without doubt, the *Pashtunwali* code that comprises a set of cultural and legal norms defining the principles and standards of the world of the Pashtun people. The term

*Pashtunwali* alone is difficult to define in one word. The Pashto–Russian Dictionary says that it represents the norms and customs of the Afghans, and also their honour code.[12] In other publications it is translated as "Pashtunness,"[13] or a "picture of life of the Pashtuns."[14] The Afghans alone hold that this term encompasses the idea of a socio-economic, political, and cultural tribal system.[15]

Pashtuns, who are mostly descendants of the Iranian peoples, originally inhabited the mountainous areas of Ghor.[16] Researchers dispute the location of their primaeval settlements. The region of the Sulayman Mountains is not excluded either, but oral tradition and Afghan sources in Dari and Pashto languages most often mention Ghor as the cradle of the Pashtuns.[17] In *Pata Khazana*,[18] the oldest collection of Pashto poetry, Ghor appears as a land of happiness in which the mountains were green, the flowers bloomed and the girls danced the *atan*.[19] Those areas were occupied by the Pashtuns together with the Tajik highlanders, who were in the majority, and with the Turks. Over time, the latter underwent the process of both language and cultural assimilation. The chronicles mention the Turkish Khalaj tribes, which occupied the lands neighbouring Ghor. The Khalaj lost their identity very early—they adopted the Pashto language and featured in the Pashtuns' genealogy.[20] Most researchers hold that the descendants of those tribes are the contemporary Ghilzay, constituting, alongside the Abdali (Durranis), the largest federation of Pashtun tribes in Afghanistan. Thus, the Iranized Turks, and most certainly Turkish traditions, which are similar to local Pashtun ones due to their pastoral origin, play an important role among Pashtuns. Despite the fact that the Ghilzay adopted the Pashto language and became part of the genealogy and tradition of the Pashtuns, they failed to achieve status equal to that of the Durrani tribes. Neither bravery nor the number of the Ghilzay made their position equal to the Durranis, who regarded only their own group of tribes as the Pashtun proper.

Until the eleventh century, Pashtuns did not play a major political role, either in the region of Ghor, or in the vicinity of the Sulayman Mountains. The reasons for their expansion into the valleys have not yet been completely clarified. They are thought to be related to the depopulation of those formerly agricultural areas, due to damage to the irrigation systems caused by the Mongols. The fact is that the Pashtuns gradually occupied the cultivated oases of Kabul, Kandahar, and Herat, which had been held by the Tajiks for centuries. They fought against Hazars over the pastures, pushing them deep into the mountain ranges. As they expanded eastwards, they reached the right bank of the Indus River, and they occupied the areas inhabited by the Hindu population.

The social organization of the Pashtuns has largely preserved its tribal character, in which the traditional law and the principles of the *Pashtunwali* code are still in force today. The principles of the code, which were inculcated from childhood, even though they were often contrary to the law in force, have remained sacred to most Pashtuns, thus forming the foundation of their political imagination and their cultural grammar, to use the expression which is very accurate in this case.

*Pashtunwali*, the system of norms which is often known in literature as the "honour code," had existed over a long time only in the oral tradition. Transmitted from one generation to another, it determined the principles of co-existence to be observed by the members of the tribe, and comprised the norms of customary law as well as the ideas and values that shaped Pashtun tradition, distinguishing the tribe from other tribes. The code determined, among other things, a set of features which were deemed characteristic of a genuine Pashtun. The code of conduct does not exist in the form of commands, prohibitions, or recommendations, but most often in the categories of moral obligation. It was written down by Qiyamuddin Khadim and published in Kabul in AH 1331 (1953) under the title *Pashtunwali.* In a few dozen chapters, the author discusses the characteristic features and attitudes that are representative of a genuine Pashtun, and illustrates his arguments with excerpts from Pashto poetry and examples from history.

The majority of attitudes that are worthy of imitation are derived from a belief regarding a common ancestor from whom the Pashtuns are descended, supposed to be a legendary Qais Abdur Rashid, Prophet Muhammad's companion.[21] The legend has it that Pashtuns are the descendants of Israelites, who were expelled by Nebuchadnezzar and settled in the Hindu Kush mountains in the vicinity of Ghor. There, they got the message about Prophet Muhammad from his closest companion Khalid ibn al-Walid. Many Pashtun chieftains set out for Medina. The name of the strongest was Qais, and he was said to have descended from Adam in the six hundred and third generation. Having adopted Islam, Pashtuns defeated many Kurayshites and attained high positions. The Prophet himself conferred all kinds of graces upon them and gave the name of Abdur Rashid to Qais. As he was to be the master-guide of his people, the Prophet also conferred on him the title of "Pahtan," "which is said to signify 'rudder' in the Syrian language."[22] Many dervishes and saints are descended from him. Qais took Khalid ibn al-Walid's daughter to be his wife, and she gave him three sons: the eldest was named Sarban (also Sarbaran), the middle one was named Batan (also Bitan), and the

name of the youngest was Gharghusht (also Ghurghusht). They were the forefathers of all Pashtun tribes.[23]

Their belief in descending from a common ancestor and the adoption of Islam through their own choice and not due to forced conversion was of great importance for the shaping of social relations. Pashtuns believed that this heritage determined their special and privileged position among Muslims, as they were elevated above others. Traces of such thinking have survived in social divisions among Hindu Muslims. In the opinion of Louis Dumont, Muslims in India can be generally subdivided into two large groups: the nobility, called *ashraf*,[24] who consider themselves to be descendants of the immigrants from the time of the conquest of India, and Hindu converts to Islam, *ailaf*.[25] The nobility, in turn, can be subdivided into four categories: *sayyed*[26] and *sheikh*,[27] i.e., Muslims of Arab descent, and two other categories, Patan[28] and Moghul, which refer to their ethnic origin. Louis Dumont compares *sayyeds* and *sheikhs* to brahmins, whereas in his opinion Moghuls and Patans might be an equivalent of the caste of the Kshatriya. Many Rajputs who were converted to Islam considered themselves Patans.[29]

The belief regarding their special position among Muslims, stemming from their descent from Qais Abdur Rashid, obliged Pashtuns to cherish specified attitudes and behaviours. Genealogical traditions were very strong, although in the opinion of some researchers, knowledge of the family tree did not reach further than several generations back and usually did not reach beyond the boundaries of the clan. Full genealogical structures were established and written down relatively late: not earlier than the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries.[30] Pashtuns called their male-line ancestors *nikagan* (Pashto for "ancestors").[31] Their names functioned as eponyms, since tribes and clans took their own names from them. For the tribal community, the name *nika* was sacred. Mohammad Ibrahim Atayee writes that "tribal man feels that his life is inseparable from that of his sacred *nika* and therefore when acting on some impotrant matter, will pray for help from the name of his *nika*."[32] Each tribe cherished its legends about *nikagan*, hence gave high social status to the poet-bard, *shargar*,[33] who knew and preserved the memory of the genealogy of the tribe. Although in the Pashtun tradition there was not one common genealogical line and various variants and systems existed, the belief regarding the common ancestor was widespread, and by providing the basis for their identity, it somehow compelled them to cherish some specific attitudes and determined their mutual relationships. Among the ideas which arose from this tradition, there was a belief regarding the equality of all Pashtuns, *mosawwat*. Equality was expressed, *inter alia*, in specific rights

given to the members of the tribe, for example, in the right to participate in the sessions of the council, *jirga*[34] (where all its members are equal), or to take part in the system of land allotment, *wesh*,[35] but above all it was understood as the right to freedom and independence. In *Pashtunwali*, Khadim distinguishes three levels of freedom: freedom of thought, freedom of speech, and freedom of action, all of which bear particular importance to the Pashtun. Every Pashtun had the right to defend those values. They are consistent with the Old Iranian ethical principles of the pre-Islamic period. Good thoughts, good words, and good actions were the principal moral imperative. In the *Pashtunwali* code, the concept of good was replaced with the concept of freedom. Good thoughts are nothing but the freedom of thought, good words mean the freedom of speech, and good actions stand for the freedom of action. This interpretation of the Old Iranian ethical pattern indicates that the concept of good was identified with freedom, which was a right that stemmed from the principle of equality. The sense of equality was so strong that the code dictated that the opponent, the rival, *siyal*, with whom one competes, should hold the same social status. This then brought honour and privilege.[36] This can be seen in the very term of *siyal,* which in Pashto means both a "man of equal status" and a "competitor" or "rival."

At the same time, equality obliged one to behave in a specific way: not to distinguish oneself with one's attire, to show restraint and moderation and to treat all the people (that is, Pashtuns only) in the same way, without distinction and irrespective of the position held. The code stipulates:

> In speech, like in actions, Pashtuns are not the advocates of ceremony and complicated forms of politeness. They do not use them and, moreover, they do not like them and they do not want them. This also refers to persons holding high positions. This was even a characteristic feature of the Pashtun emirs, who, for example, had their meals together with common people, sitting on an ordinary carpet and demanding no splendour.[37]

Boastfulness, lack of modesty, and haughtiness are features regarded as blameworthy. The acceptance of aesthetic values based on the simplicity of attire and behaviour was an expression of acceptance of equality. Aesthetic values often play a legitimizing role: splendour and dignity are supposed to testify to superiority, thus the rejection of such a vision of beauty was tantamount to the rejection of hierarchy.

A strong sense of equality, however, did not exclude social differentiation, i.e., rising above others. In the *Pashtunwali* tradition, there is a term *asil*,[38] which designates a man of particular nobleness who is keeping his word. Thanks to his actions and attitude, a Pashtun might

become an *asil*, which meant that he attained a special position among the members of his tribe. "Those considering themselves *asil* do not consider others their equal."[39] The term could also be applied to the entire tribe, which might be regarded as *asil*, most frequently due to victories on the battlefield or other merits. *Asilwali*, that is to say, being an *asil,* was hereditary. This title, however, made one feel obliged to confirm it continuously through appropriate attitude and actions. In the case of behaviours and actions inconsistent with the notion of the *asil*, the tribal community would withdraw its recognition. Most probably, the tribes called *khan-khel* (e.g. Sadozay or Hotaki), and the clans from among which *khans* were elected, were among those privileged and regarded as *asil*. The term shows great consistency with an archaic concept of glory called *khvarena* (in later writings called *farr*). It was a kind of "divine grace," and, at the same time, a type of energy and glare, having a triple nature. Gods and heroes fought over it. *Khvarena* was symbolized by three sacred fires. *Avesta* enumerated three kinds of glory: *khvarena* of the priest, *khvarena* of a worker, and *khvarena* of a warrior. The winning of *farr*, or proving that one possessed it, is the theme of countless legends about heroes put to diverse tests during which they would win that glory or lose it. *Farr* became hereditary over the course of the period of late Zoroastrianism.[40]

The belief regarding the equality of all Pashtuns, stemming from the faith in a common ancestor, was the concept that gave every Pashtun the right to freedom and independence, but which also made them continuously confirm this equality, giving it a dualistic character: on the one hand, it was every Pashtun's inalienable right and, on the other hand, there was an obligation to confirm this right. The purpose of actions and the proper attitude was to guard the right to freedom and legitimate it. In our opinion, the dualism of this and other ideas constitute a principle that delineates the basic thought patterns which were part of the cultural grammar of the Pashtuns. It concerned not only the idea of equality but also the concept of *asil* and "Pashtun." According to the tradition, it is not enough to be a Pashtun by birth or to have a common ancestor; one must continuously justify one's Pashtunness and confirm it by actions, i.e., "one must do the Pashto." This is the moral obligation imposed by the code on every Pashtun.[41]

As a consequence, this sense of obligation gives rise to continuous rivalry, pursuit, and competition for prestige and for the status of a genuine Pashtun. In the code this is termed *siyali*, that is, to be better than one's rival in every aspect of life.[42] Everybody was the rival, above all a patrilateral first cousin, a *tarbur*. The rivalry between cousins was