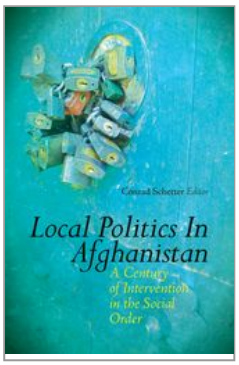

Local Politics in Afghanistan: A Century of Intervention in the Social Order
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Trust, Friendship and Transversal Ties of Cooperation Among Afghans

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter examines the role of trust, friendship, and cooperation in Afghan society. It shows that Afghans move in a number of social spaces that overlap but do not fit together exactly. On the one hand, the relations that involve the most compelling duties are also those that can lead to the most serious conflicts. On the other hand, there are bonds of trust and cooperation, solidarity and protection that transcend the limits of social groups and state frontiers.

Keywords: Afghan society, solidarity, trust

In summer 2004, I travelled to the city of Ghazni. I met with the regional Hazara strongman, Ali Akbar Qasemi, a historic figure of the resistance against the communist regime. He was known for having expanded his constituency by exploiting grievances against Pashtun nomads who seasonally brought their flocks to areas dwelt by Hazara sedentary farmers. I talked with one of his most trusted men, a Tajik who has fought in Qasemi's militia since the 1980s. He attributed this lasting tie to the supposed moral qualities of the jihadist commander and listed—with some pride—the names of all his non-Hazara comrades.

This brief anecdote is only one example of the limits of ethnicity for explaining the logics of Afghan social, economic and political life. Situated between Kabul and Kandahar with a mixed population of Pashtuns, Hazaras and Tajiks, of Sunnis and Shiites, Ghazni province is an illustrative case.[1] Confrontations among ever-evolving factions have shaped the **(p.148)** struggle for power,

hardly following a clear ethnic or religious divide.[2] After the intervention of the US-led military coalition in 2001, for instance, some political newcomers gained control over the distribution of resources with the support of the government and developed their own patronage networks across ethnic boundaries. In Ghazni, from 2002 to 2005 the provincial governor, Asadullah Khalid, an ethnic Pashtun, was allied with Hazara commanders but alienated large segments of the Pashtun population, who joined the Taliban insurgency. Hamid Karzai has also played a multi-ethnic ticket for the presidential elections of 2004 and 2009. When he established the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) in 2007 (charged with monitoring and influencing figurations of power at the sub-national level), he was well aware of the importance of appointing a Pashtun as director and a Hazara as deputy.

There is no doubt that certain political leaders have utilised the ethnic dimension. But considering ethnicity—along with kinship and tribalism—as the most determinant factor in national and local politics is based on a partial perception of the way trust develops. The multiple and overlapping sources of solidarity and protection, as well as the importance of friendship and other transversal ties, have tended to be overlooked in the anthropological literature dealing with Afghanistan so far. Afghan society is extremely divided due to demographic pressure, scarcity of agricultural land and the lack of water, as well as due to the competition for outside help (military and humanitarian). Subtle and constantly changing strategies cross one another. There is a fundamental ambiguity—exacerbated during the civil wars—in which two opposite features coexist: family and group solidarity on the one hand, and internal competition and rivalry among relatives and peers on the other. Cooperation and trust do not automatically emerge from a given social tie, and it is always useful to have long-term relationships with people outside of one’s solidarity group. In a context of uncertainty, the most successful social actors are those who prove capable of diversifying their political alliances and their economic assets.

Trust and Cooperation in a Context of Uncertainty

In the Afghan context, the state does not have a monopoly on legitimate violence. Before the Soviet invasion, relations between the Afghan **(p.149)** government and the rural population were tense and typically involved ‘politics of mistrust’.[3] Local communities had developed effective networks of cooperation and sought to minimise contact with the central administration (see the contributions of Barfield and Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont). The legitimacy of rule was based on the preservation of a certain social order and a claim to be defending Islam against foreign forces. But this modest basis vanished at the moment of the Red Army intervention. The trust that may exist at the level of the family, neighbourhood or dyadic friendship is the corollary of the prevailing mistrust towards the outside, including the state.[4] Today in Afghanistan a stranger is potentially dangerous and a relation of trust can come

about only through long interaction. The main risks stem from human violence: bombing, pillage and the exactions of local commanders or brigands.[5]

To understand trust in Afghanistan, I draw on the work of the political theorist Robert Axelrod,[6] who asked how cooperation can develop and maintain itself in a society of egoists that lacks a central authority. He builds his approach on the prisoner's dilemma, a classical problem of game theory.[7] **(p.150)** According to Axelrod, cooperation may develop on the basis of a small group of persons who practise reciprocity; it becomes a profitable strategy that will grow progressively stronger. To promote cooperation, it is therefore necessary to 'widen the shadow of the future',[8] either by lengthening the time spent together or by increasing the frequency of interaction. This may result in a certain social exclusiveness, so that interaction takes place with members of a given social group among whom reciprocity is the rule, and not with outside persons with whom relations of mistrust prevail. The aim is precisely to restrict the number of people with whom one has dealings, in order to increase the probability of meeting them again. Cooperation between two persons arises from the likelihood of future encounters and entails a relationship based upon reciprocity. These remarks may be extended to the Afghan context, with its high level of violence and insecurity as well as its intense cooperation. What kind of social order is possible in a situation of conflict and uncertainty, when no institution guarantees that interpersonal commitments will be respected? The latent 'war of all against all', and the fact that one can never know whom to trust, are close to the world of egoists on which Axelrod bases his argument. The crucial issue, however, is not whether individuals actually do seek to promote their own personal interests, but whether, even if that is so, it would be advantageous for them to defect in a one-off encounter or to cooperate in a longer-term perspective. The greater the likelihood of future encounters, the lower is the risk of defection.

Marcel Mauss has pointed out the crucial significance of time: a return gift must be delayed to be properly appreciated;[9] the passage of time is the measure of trust.[10] Maurice Bloch maintains that immediate reciprocity actually negates the moral dimension of the relationship,[11] whereas kinship is based upon moral principles that guarantee long-term reciprocity (see the contribution of Andersen). The task is to find a balance between short- and medium-term relations with immediate economic utility and the lasting solidarity involved in kinship ties. In other words, relatively unstable **(p.151)** relations have to be repeatedly activated if they are not to disappear, whereas kinship imposes moral obligations that no one can shake off without incurring social sanctions. Bloch's thesis that the most lasting relations are not necessarily the most frequent may seem flatly to contradict Axelrod's view that stable cooperation is based upon a high probability of future encounters. But their levels of analysis are different. In the Afghan case, kinship—whether paternal, maternal or through marriage—constitutes a reservoir of diverse relations more than an undifferentiated solidarity group. It tends to imply a high-level of control and constraint. In the

1990s, when I was conducting research among the Afghan refugees in Quetta (Pakistan), I met a man originating from Herat. After having married three of his six daughters to relatives to strengthen his ties with his place of origin, he decided to also diversify his social relationships and give two other daughters, both particularly successful in their education, to men exterior to the circle of his kith and kin (*begana*) whom they met during their studies. He explicitly explained to me that kinship could also restrain personal trajectories and that his family needed to diversify its social capital and open novel options for future cooperation.

The logic at work cannot be exhaustively reduced either to kinship structures or to the frequency and future likelihood of interaction. Genealogical ties never predetermine the relation. Trust, like cooperation, eludes any attempt at exclusive formalisation. For instance, without information on the past, it is impossible to know if the sons of two brothers have joined two different political factions as a tactic with the intention of protecting each other, or because they have a serious conflict over a plot of land formerly owned by their common grandfather.

In Afghanistan, cooperation and rivalry are not mutually exclusive concepts. Honour (*aberu*, *'izzat*), hospitality (*mihman-nawazi*, *melmastia*), reputation (*shuhrat*), name or renown (*nam*; *nik nam* or *bad nam* according to whether it is good or bad) and vengeance (*enteqam*) occupy a large place in Afghan lives. These concepts acquire their full significance when one is moving in a world where everyone knows everyone else. *Badal*, a word of Arabic origin, means exchange, replacement or substitution in Persian and, by extension, 'vengeance'. It is also used to denote the custom of giving a woman as a gift to ask pardon after an offence.[12] Similarly, the Pashtu word **(p.152)** *por*, whose primary meaning is debt, also refers to the reparation necessary after an offence.[13] The spheres of reciprocity, exchange and vengeance are therefore superimposed on one another.

Trust, like friendship, is a wager on future interaction. It represents a counterpart of reputation, which consists in the information concerning the past behaviour of an individual. This is an essential social capital, especially for people involved in trade, because it influences the relations they have with their clients and widens the circle of people who can be mobilised in their home village or in a migratory context.[14] Only people whose social relations partially overlap can gather information about their respective reputations and ideally predict their reactions. To know someone's reputation is to know his name and therefore his identity. But risks always persist. In 1996, I heard about a Hazara migrant in Iran who collected the savings of some fellow tribesmen—the equivalent of several thousand dollars—with the promise to deliver the money to their families in Afghanistan. He disappeared and was subsequently reported to have settled in Canada. But the cost of defection was too high. Ostracised in

North America by other Hazaras who had heard about his swindle, socially isolated in an alien country, while his father and brothers were receiving threats in Afghanistan, he sent a letter back to his village of origin two years later, offering his abject apologies and making the commitment to reimburse all his victims as quickly as possible. Such an example shows that relatives are not so much people one can trust as people one knows; this makes it possible to take vengeance in case of defection, either by locating them and resorting to physical violence, or by ruining their reputation in a shared social milieu. If reputation is the shadow of the past, the possibility of vengeance is the shadow of the future.

Ethnicity as a Political Process

Ethnicity is a process undergoing continual redefinition, a type of social organisation, not the legacy of a history going back to time immemorial.[15] **(p. 153)** People are liable to change their identity by crossing the boundary of their social group and incorporating themselves into another group. In Afghanistan, ethnic groups tend to be seen as huge agnatic kinship groups; each tribal segment is supposed to stem from a common male ancestor, himself related to the ancestors of collateral branches. Such a segmentary system, based on interlocking structural oppositions, is an ideal representation and is far from exhausting the logic of alliances and conflicts nor the constant reframing of tribal genealogies. In the central highlands of Afghanistan, for instance, there are many lineages and tribal segments supposed to be Pashtun who integrated into the local social fabric. That is the case of the Shamulzai of Jaghori, who are said to have been defeated in a tribal feud and to have taken refuge among the Hazaras. The memory of their distinct origin is progressively fading. Identity shifts are not difficult to document in Afghanistan: the son of a Sunni Tajik civil servant, who was sent several decades ago to live among the Shiite Hazaras and married a local woman, considers himself a Hazara in his everyday interaction but may put forward the origin of his father in specific contexts; a young man praying with his forearms crossed on his abdomen (according to the Hanafi prescriptions) is publicly said by older Shiite Hazara men to be a Hazara whose ancestors have been converted by force to Sunnism, but he tells me in a private conversation that he is actually a Tajik; and Kabuli, Persian-speaking members of the middle class may suddenly reactivate a distant Pashtun tribal origin, having expressed their contempt for the backwardness of rural people a moment earlier.

These individual and collective strategies are compounded by political considerations. Cultural entrepreneurs and new elites take over the role as ‘agents of change’, since they are often the people most in contact with the goods, services and organisations of neighbouring or distant societies.[16] For the purposes of political mobilisation and social advancement, these social and political actors use all kinds of strategies to control the codification of identity idioms: they select and promote certain markers and obscure others, by inventing or reinventing traditions in the course of political rallies, by

commemorating heroes or martyrs, by celebrating festivals, by **(p.154)** consuming particular dishes or by wearing clothing that they consider typical.[17] Conflict situations are a favourable setting for the emergence and strengthening of ethnic distinctions, either because members of the old elite use them to stem the erosion of their power, or because new leaders use them to legitimate their own rise to power.

In Afghanistan, the ethnic dimension became more visible after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. Although the nationalities policy of the Soviet-inspired communist government probably played a role in this process,[18] it has been more pronounced since the fall of Najibullah in 1992.[19] War provided the framework for a challenge to social barriers. Spectacular upward and downward mobility became possible as the old elites lost their pre-eminence. The disappearance of these intermediate powers went together with an expansion of identity references and spheres of action, eventually leading to a certain ethnicisation of Afghan society and political debate.[20] In summer 1996, for instance, I was in Bamiyan for the seventh anniversary of the founding of the Hizb-i Wahdat, a party recruiting mostly among the Hazaras. A seminar gathered many speakers addressing the topic of the 'restoration of identity' (*ehia-yi howiyat*) of the Hazaras. In parallel, concerts and theatrical performances were held for the large crowd that came from far away. During one of these shows, a man stood up in the crowd of spectators and began shouting that he had lost his identity card. He walked to the stage where he was welcomed by an individual speaking Persian with a strong Pashto accent. **(p.155)** The unfortunate man had to serve tea to his benefactor, who did not hesitate to punish him for the smallest mistakes. He freed himself from this domination only to fall under the thumb of a sententious character dressed like an Iranian mullah, who constantly corrected his dialectal Persian and ordered him to shout 'Islamic Revolution hihihi! Islamic Revolution hohoho!', 'But who am I? Who am I?' eventually exclaimed our hero who asserted, at last, his rejection of both Pashtun hegemony and Iranian influence. The festivities were concluded with an imposing military parade that displayed the might of the Hizb-i Wahdat and raised popular enthusiasm.

These ethnic discourses of political legitimacy and mobilisation are promoted by cultural entrepreneurs; they do not prevent the existence of subtle forms of transversal social relations that inform everyday life. Afghan society is shot through with tendencies to fusion and fission that depend upon the relationship between the group in question and the outside world; insecurity furnishes a negative principle of cohesion that can make up for the deficiency in positive principles: 'I hate my brother but I hate those who hate him.'[21]

Kinship and the Ideal of Friendship

A careful description of social practices would tend to reduce not only the salience of ethnicity but also the primacy of kinship in favour of other aspects, particularly transversal relations among neighbours or friends.[22] For instance, classmates (*hamsinf*) or work colleagues (*hamkar*) adopt a freedom of speech, which may include sexual jokes, that is inconceivable within the close circle of relatives. Such a relaxed relation may constitute the base for an economic joint venture, the social costs of a possible split being much lower than between cousins.

In Afghanistan, moral obligations and respect ensuing from kinship often go hand in hand with a hierarchical relationship and a certain formalism. Status may be quite strictly distributed within families. On the one hand, hostility between brothers is seldom openly declared and more often deflected on to the relationship between their spouses. On the other hand, tensions between paternal cousins and more generally agnates, who are **(p.156)** considered as equals and strive for independence from each other, may be acute. The terms for paternal kinship imply respect, but the idea of competition and jealousy is never very distant. Indeed, people related by patrilineal descent may be in conflict over land inherited from their common male ancestor, to which their matrilineal relatives are not entitled. Major obligations entail major tensions; the circle of solidarity is also one in which conflict is common. One of my first interlocutors on the field, for instance, refused to comply with the decision taken by his father and father's brother to marry his *dukhtar-i kaka* (father's brother's daughter) to appease a land dispute. At seventeen he escaped from home and headed to Pakistan, provoking a lasting bitterness between the two brothers and a reactivation of their feud.

A person's attitude is often less affectionate and relaxed towards his close patrilateral relatives than towards his distant agnates, matrilateral relatives or family by marriage. Ties of matrilateral kinship do not involve the same degree of constraint and formalism. The fact of smoking or joking while seated together is a good indicator of the level of freedom and bonding. When two men of a different age who do not know each other interact in a public space such as a bazaar, the use of the terms *kaka* (father's brother) or *mama* (mother's brother) by the youngest conveys a different meaning, the former implying more formality and distance, the latter more complicity. The terms *baja* (husbands of two sisters) and *bola* (children of two sisters) are both symmetrical. In many respects they are privileged relations, since they are devoid of the obligations and precedence inherent in agnatic kinship. They are closer to the idea of friendship. We might risk drawing a parallel here between kinship and ethnicity. Although Afghan society is characterised by intense relations within the paternal kin and the various ethnic groups, the weight of transversal relations should not be disregarded.

Recognising the importance of ties among individuals who do not belong to the same kinship circle, several authors have emphasised the role of friendship in tribal societies. Thus nomads often entertain dyadic relations with individuals belonging to sedentary society, relations that have a markedly pragmatic and economic dimension. At first ambivalent and fluid, they may become friendly over time.[23] Among sedentary farmers, too, these **(p.157)** transversal relations exist. In the ethnically mixed provinces of Ghazni and Wardak, there are many instances of relations between specific Pashtun and Hazara households, whose members visit each other on a regular basis but not each other's neighbours. These social ties are explicitly presented as a social insurance, a strategy to spread risk in a context of insecurity where violence may always erupt. These transversal ties characterised by more freedom also exist in the urban context. The confidant with whom a man will talk about his extramarital affairs, drink alcohol, but also—if necessary—borrow money, is very often not someone from the same regional, tribal or ethnic origin.

Born out of shared experiences of joy or suffering, friendship is experienced as free and disinterested—even if it also imposes obligations. Ideally, it is a relationship that no source of rivalry, jealousy or resentment can disturb, although in reality not every element of hierarchy or instrumentality is excluded from it. Often formalised and ritualised (blood kinship, foster kinship, etc.) and consolidated by a code of honour, it enables an individual to create alliances with persons outside his or her group. Gifts and return gifts sustain the social bond; commodities become culturally invested and objectify social relations. Women, as guardians of the home, hold a major position in this system of invitations and favours. Although their role is publicly undervalued by men, they exert subtle power and intervene in decision-making that affects the household unit. They play in particular a crucial role in the lives of the younger members of the family, influencing marriages or migration destinations.

In Afghan society there are two ways of consolidating friendship. First, it may be converted into an alliance. For instance, I saw two Afghan migrant workers in Teheran who broke a chicken wishbone and committed themselves to having their son and daughter—both younger than ten at that time—married in the following years to seal a friendship that had developed on the building sites. But this carries a risk, as tensions can arise during premarital negotiations or from living under the same roof. Second, friendship can be institutionalised in pseudo-kinship,[24] between men usually (but **(p.158)** not always) of the same age and a similar socio-economic status. Sometimes a relationship of this kind will already have existed between their fathers; in this case people talk of *biradar-khwanda* (sworn brothers). Among Shiites this relationship may be formalised before a mullah, who declares two men *biradar-i dini* (religious brothers).[25] Like foster brothers (*biradar-i shiri* or *biradar-i reza'i*), *biradar-khwanda* enter into the private family circle, the *mahram*, which is made up of persons among whom marriage is prohibited. From that point on, each can see the other's *namus* (the

women for whom the man is responsible and whose conduct is decisive for his own honour: his wife, daughter, sister and mother).[26] In some cases, a man may receive some property from the father of his *biradar-khanda*, who thereby recognises that he has a more than symbolic right to a share of the inheritance. Like marriage, a pseudo-kinship of friends may also serve to assuage the hostility between two families.[27] The close friends are treated as members of the family, and any marital union is prohibited.

(p.159) Even as a fieldworker not expected to integrate into the social fabric, I have developed pseudo-kinship relationships that were recognised publicly. During a trip in summer 2004, for example, Haji Sahib—who had helped me in the past—went to an important commander to obtain an identity card. As I accompanied him, he introduced me jokingly as his younger brother before adding that I should be entitled to such a document too, considering how much time I had spent in Afghanistan. The commander, who was fully aware of my true identity, welcomed the proposal seriously. In doing so, he showed his deference to Haji Sahib and endorsed the symbolic relationship of brotherhood that united us.

Among Afghans, rules governing politeness and respect impose a constant terminological overstatement. In the case of a man whose origin is not known but whose age and status appear equivalent to those of the speaker, it is permissible to address him as *watandar* (fellow countryman) or to draw upon the vocabulary of kinship. A person of slightly inferior status is often called *biradar* (brother), whereas equality may entail a term such as *lala* (elder brother). A man calls his paternal cousin *biradar*, any distant male member of his lineage *kaka* (father's brother) or *bachcha-yi kaka* (father's brothers's son) and any person with whom he is on familiar terms *mama* (mother's brother) or *bachcha-yi mama* (mother's brother's son). The point is not to conjure away the genuine genealogical link, but to valorise the relationship by amplifying the degree of proximity. Conversely, if a man publicly calls his father's brother's son *bachcha-yi kaka*, he displays distance, as the warmer term *biradar* would have been expected.

In their everyday life Afghans have a relatively flexible kinship system, together with multiple registers of solidarity that are brought into service in the case of war or forced migration. Political unity and joint possession among brothers are symbolically valued, but the division of property is often more profitable from an economic point of view. Relations between agnates may display solidarity and competition by turns. In other words, relations of trust and distrust usually overlap and are more intense than in societies where the state acts as guarantor of contracts and maintains a degree of security.

Kinship relations are not chosen. They are formal relations (excluding any reference to sexuality, for example) and are marked by rivalry, whereas friendship is perceived as free and disinterested, permits (or even prescribes) great freedom of tone and ideally involves no competition. Interpersonal relations are always ambivalent and open to change; hostility can die down **(p. 160)** and closeness can degenerate into conflict. Charles Lindholm emphasises the strong tensions among Pashtuns in the Swat Valley in Pakistan.[28] In such a context individuals feel a deep affective need, and often this is invested in a stranger who is outside the social hierarchies and the competition for land, women and prestige.

A Strategy of Diversification

As we have seen, interaction only within a clearly defined group lessens the risk of fraud and abuse. Nevertheless, Afghans move in a number of social spaces that overlap but do not fit together exactly. On the one hand, the relations that involve the most compelling duties are also those that can lead to the most serious conflicts. Ties of solidarity are always unstable and may always give way to conflict, as the Pashto word *tarbur*—signifying ‘paternal cousin’ but also ‘enemy’—well illustrates.[29] On the other hand, there are bonds of trust and cooperation, solidarity and protection that transcend the limits of social groups and state frontiers. Afghan refugees, in particular, must contact members of other social groups, Pakistanis, Iranians or even Westerners. Sometimes they must ask for favours from local people, officials or employees of international organisations or NGOs. Hazara shopkeepers whose activities span Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran need to have partners among the Baluch and the Pashtuns of the Iranian–Pakistani and Pakistani–Afghan borders to ship their commodities. A trader from Mazar-i Sharif will not hesitate to enter into a joint venture with a counterpart from Kandahar to expand his business to Dubai. But in all cases, the relationship will be built progressively with a long period of mutual observation and monitoring.

In Afghanistan, the contextual morality based on proximity, as described by Marshall Sahlins in a different geographical context,[30] is counterbalanced **(p. 161)** by the universal values of Islam. Moreover, Islam and the tribal code see eye-to-eye on the value they attach to hospitality. A tribesman must know how to appear aggressive towards his equals, who are also his rivals. By contrast, a religious guide is a mediator who obeys different norms of conduct geared to moderation and equanimity. In all cases, however, the good man must protect the weak and display generosity and hospitality. A host may assert his prestige when he entertains many guests, but this undeniably leads to a social and affective openness to the outside. It is said in Afghanistan that travellers have rights and that ‘a house without a guest is a house without God.’

As we have seen with my Herati interlocutor, two different social strategies often coexist: some seek to strengthen the cohesion of the group of brothers (or even paternal cousins) by promoting the integration of the domestic and economic spheres; but many prefer to diversify the activity among members of the family unit and to cooperate with persons outside the circle of agnates. The fact that members of the same kinship group have opposing political allegiances may not prevent the continuation of strong ties of solidarity. Indeed, to deal with uncertainty and to spread the risks, people may systematically opt for multiple social relations but also economic activities and political affiliations. Such diversification is a kind of guarantee in the event of a worsening of the security situation. I witnessed, for instance, how three Hazara brothers from Ghazni province decided to each join one of three different political factions: Hizb-i Islami, a party recruiting mostly among Pashtuns, or Nasr and Sipah, two pro-Khomeinist groups whose ideological proximity did not prevent a bitter struggle for local pre-eminence. Their aim was to have at least one winner in the family. In an insecure and quickly changing context, political groups tend to form in specific contexts, for a specific purpose, and then dismantle again. An ever-evolving factionalism is thus a constitutive feature of the Afghan landscape. The social and political fragmentation is so extreme that national cohesion seems out of reach, but paradoxically it coexists with transversal ties across political and social groups and thus has also had the effect of preventing the formation of large antagonistic blocs that might have led to the partition of the country.

(p.162) Behaviour must therefore be contextualised if it is to be properly understood. Kinship and ethnicity do not systematically entail mutual support or cooperation. But friendship remains a difficult ideal to achieve. Afghan society exhibits an ambivalence of interpersonal feelings:[31] on the one hand, a complex mixture of internal competition and solidarity; on the other hand, a human warmth that has not failed to charm travellers but is insufficient to balance the weight of families. While open to the outside world, Afghans are caught up in mutual obligations that tie them to members of their own kith and kin. The complex interlacing of solidarity and exploitation, trust and competition, generosity and jealousy is certainly what makes Afghan society so beautiful and so difficult, for insiders as for outsiders.

Notes:

(1) This chapter is based on observations and interviews conducted since the mid-1990s during various phases of field research in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran.

(2) See Robert Canfield, ‘Ethnic, Regional, and Sectarian Alignments in Afghanistan’, in Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner (eds), *The State, Religion, and Ethnic Politics: Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986, p. 99.

(3) M. Nazif Shahrani, 'Afghanistan's Muhajirin (Muslim "Refugee-Warriors"): Politics of Mistrust and Distrust of Politics', in E. Valentine Daniel and John Ch. Knudsen (eds), *Mistrusting Refugees*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1995, p. 196 and Pierre Centlivres and Micheline Centlivres-Demont, 'Village en Afghanistan', *Commentaire*, 16, 1981–2, pp. 516–25.

(4) Pierre Centlivres and Micheline Centlivres-Demont, *Et si on parlait de l'Afghanistan? Terrain et textes 1964–1980*, Neuchâtel: Institut d'ethnologie/ Paris: Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1988.

(5) Afghan society scarcely fits the model of 'trust theorists', who counterpoise 'low-trust societies' to 'high-trust societies', such as Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*, New York/London: Free Press, 1995 and Alain Peyrefitte, *La société de confiance: essai sur les origines du développement*, Paris: Odile Jacob, 1998. For a distinction between facework and faceless commitments, see Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity, 1990. In the Western world, everyone has regular contact with unknown persons without feeling suspicious of them. Institutions act as guarantors of the interactions, while in Afghanistan trust cannot be detached from relations of proximity. For a general discussion of 'trust', see also Diego Gambetta (ed.), *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988 and Revue du Mauss, *A qui se fier? Confiance, interaction et théorie des jeux*, Paris: La Découverte/Mauss, 1994.

(6) Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation*, London: Penguin Books, 1990 [1st ed. 1984].

(7) Shaun Hargreaves Heap, Martin Hollis, Bruce Lyons, Robert Sugden and Albert Weale, *The Theory of Choice: A Critical Guide*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992, p. 99.

(8) Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation*, p. 129.

(9) Marcel Mauss, 'Essai sur le don: forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques', Sociologie et anthropologie, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1985, pp. 143–279 [1st ed. 1923–4].

(10) Pierre Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique*, Paris: Minuit, 1980, pp. 178–83.

(11) Maurice Bloch, 'The Long Term and the Short Term: the Economic and Political Significance of the Morality of Kinship', in Jack Goody (ed.), *The Character of Kinship*, Cambridge/London: Cambridge University Press, 1973, pp. 75–87.

(12) *Sar-badal* (literally: exchange of heads) refers to the discredited practice whereby two men marry each other's sister at the same time. It scarcely exists any more except among poor people or to end a cycle of vengeance.

(13) M. Ibrahim Atayee, *A Dictionary of the Terminology of Pashtun's Tribal Customary Law and Usages*, Kabul: International Centre for Pashto Studies, Academy of Sciences of Afghanistan, 1979, p. 78.

(14) Alessandro Monsutti, *War and Migration: Social Networks and Economic Strategies of the Hazara of Afghanistan*, New York and London: Routledge, 2005.

(15) Fredrik Barth, 'Introduction', in Fredrik Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget/London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969, pp. 9–38.

(16) Ibid.

(17) Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

(18) Pierre Centlivres, 'Exil, relations interethniques et identité dans la crise afghan', *La Revue du Monde musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 59/60 (1991), pp. 70–82. The pro-Soviet regime in Kabul referred to nationalities by the Arabic-Persian term *milliyat*; see Pierre Centlivres, 'Les groupes ethniques et les "nationalités" dans la crise afghan', in Riccardo Bocco and Mohammad-Reza Djalili (eds), *Moyen-Orient: migrations, démocratisation, médiations*, Geneva: IUHEI; Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1994, pp. 161–70.

(19) Centlivres, 'Les groupes ethniques et les "nationalités"'; Olivier Roy, 'La guerre d'Afghanistan: de la guerre idéologique à la guerre ethnique', *L'Homme et la Société*, 17 (1993), pp. 85–92; Bernt Glatzer, 'Is Afghanistan on the Brink of Ethnic and Tribal Disintegration?' in William Maley (ed.), *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban*, London: Hurst, 1998, pp. 167–81.

(20) Conrad Schetter, *Ethnizität und ethnische Konflikte in Afghanistan*, Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 2003; Conrad Schetter, 'Ethnoscapes, National Territorialisation, and the Afghan War', *Geopolitics*, 10 (2005), pp. 50–75.

(21) Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique précédé de Trois études d'ethnologie kabyle*, Geneva: Droz, 1972.

(22) Alessandro Monsutti, 'Cooperation, Remittances, and Kinship among the Hazara', *Iranian Studies*, 37, 2 (2004), pp. 219–40.

(23) Fredrik Barth, *Nomads of South Persia: The Basseri Tribe of the Khamseh Confederacy*, Prospect Heights: Waveland, 1961, pp. 93–100; Richard L. Tapper, *Pasture and Politics: Economics, Conflict and Ritual Among Shahsevan Nomads of Northwestern Iran*, London: Academic Press, 1979, pp. 147–52.

(24) The Afghan friendship can be compared to the Spanish concept of *compadrazgo*. *Compadrazgo* has its origin in the ritual relationship between the parents and godparents of a baptised child. It is a complex system, which makes it possible either to strengthen family cohesion or to create a network of solidarity external to kinship. Spiritual kinship is sometimes used to resolve conflicts between groups and to avert the cycle of vendetta; see Sidney W. Mintz and Eric R. Wolf, 'An Analysis of Ritual Co-parenthood (*compadrazgo*)', *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, 6 (1950), pp. 341–68; Julian Pitt-Rivers, 'The Kith and the Kin', in Jack Goody (ed.), *The Character of Kinship*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973, pp. 89–105; and Michael Herzfeld, *The Poetics of Manhood: Contest and Identity in a Cretan Mountain Village*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985. However, in contrast to *compadrazgo*, Afghan friendship entails familiarity and a great freedom of tone. It is not buttressed by such a strong religious dimension, and it does not unite men who are close agnates. Whereas in Andalusia one can ask an elder brother to be the godfather of one's son, in Afghanistan one's brother cannot be considered a friend.

(25) Other expressions include *qawl-i biradari* (promise of brotherhood) or *biradar-i qor'ani* (Koranic brothers), since the commitment is sometimes inscribed in a copy of the Koran.

(26) Brian J. Spooner, 'Kinship and Marriage in Eastern Persia', *Sociologus*, 15, 1 (1965), pp. 22–31.

(27) The relationship between two 'sworn brothers' is more symmetrical than that which exists between two brothers-in-law, since the man who gives a woman acquires a certain precedence that is close to that of the father-in-law. Moreover, the Dari terminology of kinship distinguishes between the taker of a woman (*yezna* or *damad*, the latter term being used for both the sister's husband and the daughter's husband, i.e. both brother-in-law and son-in-law) and the giver (*khusur-bura*, a term which is used for the wife's brother, constructed on the basis of *khusur*, a term which is used for the husband's or wife's father, i.e. father-in-law).

(28) Charles Lindholm, *Generosity and Jealousy: The Swat Pukhtun of Northern Pakistan*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

(29) The relationship between paternal cousins and, more generally, between agnates (*tarburwali*), who share ownership rights to their grandfather's land, is inherently ambivalent and ambiguous, characterised by equality and rivalry, mutual support and jealousy simultaneously; see Akbar S. Ahmed, *Millennium and Charisma among the Pathans: A Critical Essay in Social Anthropology*, London: Boston and Henley, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976 pp. 43–5; and Atayee, *A Dictionary of the Terminology*, p. 95.

(30) Marshall Sahlins, ‘On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange’, in Michael Banton (ed.), *The Relevance of Models for Social Anthropology*, London: Tavistock Publications, 1965, pp. 139–236.

(31) Lindholm, *Generosity and Jealousy*; Jon W. Anderson, ‘Sentimental Ambivalence and the Exegesis of “Self” in Afghanistan’, *Anthropological Quarterly*, 58, 4 (1985), pp. 203–11.