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THE THISTLE AND THE DRONE

“The Jonas Brothers are here. They’re out there somewhere,” a smiling and confident President Barack Obama told the expectant and glittering audience attending the White House Correspondents’ Dinner in Washington on May 1, 2010. “Sasha and Malia are huge fans, but boys, don’t get any ideas. I have two words for you: ‘predator drones.’ You will never see it coming. You think I’m joking?”

Obama’s banter may have seemed tasteless, given that he had just been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, but this was not a Freudian slip. The president was indicating he possessed Zeus-like power to hurl thunderbolts from the sky and obliterate anyone with impunity, even an American pop group. One report said he had a “love” of drones, noting that by 2011 their use had accelerated exponentially.¹ It was also revealed that Obama had a secret “kill list.”² Having read Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas, and their ideas of the “just war” and “natural law,” which promote doing good and avoiding evil, did not deter Obama from a routine of going down the list to select names and “nominate” them, to use the official euphemism, for assassination.³ I wondered whether the learned selectors of the Nobel Peace Prize had begun to have second thoughts.

As its use increased, the drone became a symbol of America’s war on terror. Its main targets appeared to be Muslim tribal groups living in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia. Incessant and concentrated strikes were directed at what was considered the “ground zero” of the war on terror, Waziristan, in the Tribal Areas of Pakistan. There were also reports, however, of U.S. drones being used against other Muslim tribal groups like the Kurds in Turkey and the Tausug in the Philippines, and also by the United Kingdom against the Pukhtun tribes of Afghanistan, by France in northern Mali against the Tuareg, and even by Israel in Gaza. These communities—some of the most impoverished and isolated in the world, with identities that are centuries-old—had become the targets of the twenty-first century’s most advanced kill technology.

The drone embodied the weaponry of globalization: high-tech in performance, sleek in appearance, and global in reach. It was mysterious, distant, deadly, and notoriously devoid of human presence. Its message of destruction resounded in its names: Predator and Reaper. For its Muslim targets, the UAV, or unmanned aerial vehicle, its official title, had an alliterative quality—it meant death, destruction, disinformation, deceit, and despair. Flying at 50,000 feet above ground, and therefore out of sight of its intended victims, the drone could hover overhead unblinkingly for twenty-four hours, with little escaping its scrutiny before it struck. For a Muslim tribesman, this manner of combat not only was dishonorable but also smacked of sacrilege. By appropriating the powers of God through the drone, in its capacity to see and not be seen and deliver death without warning, trial, or judgment, Americans were by definition blasphemous.

In the United States, however, the drone was increasingly viewed as an absolutely vital weapon in fighting terrorism and keeping America safe. Support for it demonstrated patriotism, and opposition exposed one's anti-Americanism. Thus the debate surrounding the drone rested on its merits as a precisely effective killing machine rather than the human or emotional costs it inflicted. Drone strikes meant mass terror in entire societies across the world, yet little effort was made on the part of the perpetrators to calculate the political and psychological fallout, let alone assess the morality of public assassinations or the killing of innocent men, women, and children. Even those who rushed to rescue drone victims were considered legitimate targets of a follow-up strike. Nor did Americans seem concerned that they were creating dangerous precedents for other countries.

Instead, boasting with the pride of a football coach, CIA director, and later secretary of defense, Leon Panetta referred to the drones as “the only game in town.”⁴ Fifty-five members of Congress organized what was popularly known as the Drone Caucus and received extensive funds for their campaigns from drone manufacturers such as General Atomics and Lockheed Martin. The drones' enthusiastic public advocates even included “liberal” academics and self-avowed “hippies” such as philosophy professor Bradley Strawser of Monterey, California.⁵ Americans exulted in the fact that the drone freed Americans of any risk. It could be operated safely and neatly from newly constructed high-tech, air-conditioned offices. Like any office worker in suit and tie, the “pilot” could complete work in his office and then go home to take his family bowling or join them for a barbecue in the backyard. The drone was fast becoming as American as apple pie.

Typical of its propensity for excess in matters of security, by 2012 America had commissioned just under 20,000 drones, about half of which were in use. They were proliferating at an alarming rate, with police departments, internal security agencies, and foreign governments placing orders. In September 2012 Iran unveiled its own reconnaissance and attack drone with a range of over 2,000 kilometers. The following month, France announced it was sending surveillance

drones to Mali to assist the government in fighting the Tuareg rebels in the north. In October 2012 the United Kingdom doubled its number of armed drones in Afghanistan with the purchase of five Reaper drones from the United States, to be operated from a facility in the United Kingdom. It was estimated that by the end of the decade, some 30,000 U.S. drones would be patrolling American skies alone. There was talk in the press of new and deadly varieties, including the next generation of “nuclear-powered” drones. Despite public interest, drone operations were deliberately obscured.

Ignoring the moral debate, drone operators are equally infatuated with the weapon and the sense of power it gives them. It leaves them “electrified” and “adrenalized”—flying a drone is said to be “almost like playing the computer game *Civilization*,” a “sci-fi” experience.⁶ A U.S. drone operator in New Mexico revealed the extent to which individuals across the world can be observed in their most private moments. “We watch people for months,” he said. “We see them playing with their dogs or doing their laundry. We know their patterns like we know our neighbors’ patterns. We even go to their funerals.” Another drone operator spoke of watching people having sex at night through infrared cameras.⁷ The last statement, in particular, has to be read keeping in mind the importance Muslim tribal peoples give to notions of modesty and privacy.

The victims are treated like insects: the military slang for a successful strike, when the victim is blown apart on the screen in a display of blood and gore, is “bug splat.” Muslim tribesmen were reduced to bugs or, in a *Washington Post* editorial by David Ignatius, cobras to be killed at will. Any compromise with the Taliban in the Tribal Areas of Pakistan, officially designated as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), is “like playing with a cobra,” he wrote.⁸ And do we “compromise” with cobras? Ignatius asked. “No, you kill a cobra.” Bugs, snakes, cockroaches, rats—such denigration of minorities has been heard before, and as recent history teaches, it never ends well for the abused people.

It is these tribal societies that form the subject of this book. Each is to be understood within its own cultural and historical context, with the main focus on four major groups: the Pukhtun, Yemenis, Somalis, and Kurds. Like their ancestors before them, these communities lived by an ancient code of honor embodied in the behavior of elders and, over the centuries, orally transmitted from generation to generation. According to anthropologists, these societies are organized along the principles of the segmentary lineage system, in which societies are defined by clans linked by common descent. All four societies have become embroiled in different ways in America’s war on terror. The Pukhtun, Yemenis, and Somalis have been the main targets of American drone attacks, and there are reports of similar strikes against the Kurds. These various populations have been traumatized not only by American missiles but also by national army attacks, suicide bombers, and tribal warfare, forcing millions to flee their homes to seek

shelter elsewhere and live in destitute conditions as hapless refugees. “Every day,” say Muslim tribesmen, “is like 9/11 for us.”

These societies live in areas administered by central governments whose ability to bomb, kidnap, humiliate, and rape tribal members at will has been enhanced by U.S. financial and military backing in the war on terror. For the tribes, this has been the worst of fates, leaving them emasculated and helpless, with every moral boundary crossed, every social structure attacked. The wholesale breakdown of their tribal system is not unlike the implosion of a galaxy, with fragments shooting off in unpredictable directions.

With their ancient practices, these tribal communities represent the very foundations of human history. In the most profound sense, they allow all societies a glimpse of their origins. The disruption of these fragile societies is a high-stakes gamble for civilization. Unless urgent and radical steps are taken to prevent this process and ensure a modicum of stability, the future for these communities looks grim; their codes of honor and revenge will lead to escalating global violence that, in the end, may well bring about the destruction of one of the oldest forms of human society.

THE THISTLE AND THE DRONE

Just as the drone is an appropriate metaphor for the current age of globalization, the thistle captures the essence of tribal societies. It was aptly introduced by Leo Tolstoy in *Hadji Murad*, a fictionalized account of a Muslim tribal leader’s struggles under the yoke of Imperial Russia. Tolstoy himself had witnessed the army’s attempts to subjugate the independent Muslim tribes of the Caucasus in the nineteenth century and likened their courage, pride, and sense of egalitarianism to the prickly thistle. On a walk, while collecting a bouquet, the narrator of *Hadji Murad* leaned down “to pluck the flower. But this proved a very difficult task. Not only did the stalk prick on every side—even through the handkerchief I wrapped round my hand—but it was so tough that I had to struggle with it for nearly five minutes, breaking the fibres one by one; and when I had at last plucked it, the stalk was all frayed, and the flower itself no longer seemed so fresh and beautiful.” At the end of his musing about the thistle, the narrator concludes: “But what energy and tenacity! With what determination it defended itself, and how dearly it sold its life! . . . ‘What energy!’ I thought. ‘Man has conquered everything, and destroyed millions of plants, yet this one won’t submit.’”⁹

One of the hardiest, most self-reliant of flowers, the thistle has a beauty all its own, despite its lack of sparkingly bright colors, soft petals, or fragrance. Some find its cactus-like air of defiance, clearly a warning to passersby, rather appealing. The tribal Scots were impressed enough to make it their national symbol. In it they saw something of their own character as a proud, hardy, and martial people ready to protect their independence with grit and determination.

Indeed, the Scottish clans are frequently compared with other thistle-like tribes such as the Pukhtun, Somali, Kurd, and Bedouin. Sir Walter Scott in the early nineteenth century, for one, was “forcibly struck with the curious points of parallelism between the manners of the Afghan tribes and those of the ancient Highland clans. They resembled these Oriental mountaineers in their feuds, in their adoption of auxiliary tribes, in their laws, in their modes of conducting war, in their arms, and, in some respects, even in their dress.”¹⁰ The British administrator-scholar and former governor of the North-West Frontier Province of India, Sir Olaf Caroe, who knew the Pukhtuns well, also compared them to the Scots in his classic book *The Pathans*.¹¹ More recently, Kurds holding training exercises in the hills and caves of Qandil in northern Iraq have tried to inspire recruits with showings of Mel Gibson’s *Braveheart*, a film about William Wallace, the legendary Scottish freedom fighter.¹² In the film’s final scene, Wallace is tortured to death but refuses to compromise, instead shouting with his last breath the one word tribesmen everywhere find closest to their hearts—“Freedom!”

Love of freedom, egalitarianism, a tribal lineage system defined by common ancestors and clans, a martial tradition, and a highly developed code of honor and revenge—these are the thistle-like characteristics of the tribal societies under discussion here. Moreover, as with the thistle, there is a clear correlation between their prickliness, or toughness, and the level of force used by those who wish to subdue these societies, as the Americans discovered after 9/11.

For all that these thistle-like tribes knew, the Americans who arrived in their midst could have been from Mars, a reaction not unlike that captured by the 2011 Hollywood film *Cowboys and Aliens*, set in the Old West of the nineteenth century. In the opening scene, some Americans are attacked without provocation by aliens who use unknown technology to capture humans and fly them away for torture and interrogation. To the tribesmen, the Americans who came from nowhere in flying machines no one had seen before and abruptly disappeared with their catch were seen as aliens, with their abnormally large frames covered in strange padding, protruding wires, protective helmets, and peculiar weapons. These invaders could see at night through their glasses, speak into those wires, and command deadly airstrikes while resting on the ground. They appeared to have few social skills and neither offered nor received hospitality. Americans were loud, rude, and violent and expressed no interest in the land or its people. The tribes thought the reasons the Americans gave for invading their regions were incomprehensible: for example, 92 percent of the people surveyed in the Pukhtun-dominated areas of Kandahar and Helmand a decade after the war began in Afghanistan had never heard of 9/11 and therefore had no idea of its significance for Americans.¹³

The Americans, even the few who stopped to remember their own Native American tribes, considered the Muslim tribes they encountered after 9/11 a remnant of the past and did not quite know what to make of them. In their

dusty settlements—outside Kandahar, for instance—the Americans saw them as primitive characters living in God-forsaken regions, some families still inhabiting caves or mud huts. Their unsmiling men wore turbans and had long beards, the women were covered from head to toe and restricted to domestic chores, donkeys and camels were the main means of transport, and their code of behavior demanded savage forms of revenge. Stories circulating of the brutal slaughter of enemies or “honor killings” of women weighed heavy on many American minds. Most worrying of all, every one of these tribesmen was a potential al Qaeda sympathizer and therefore a terror suspect. In other words, the Muslim tribesman was at best a relic from another time and at worst an enemy to be eliminated.

These perceptions of each other are not mere cinematic or literary conjecture. They are confirmed by an authoritative American survey of Afghan and American soldiers in uniform that indicates a large chasm exists between the two and explains the alarming increase in the number of Afghan soldiers attacking American and NATO forces. These incidents are described as “green on blue”—color codes that are accepted by modern Western armies to denote neutral forces (green) and friendly forces (blue). By August 2012 these attacks had become the foremost cause of death of NATO troops.¹⁴ The frequency, unpredictable nature, and implications of these attacks have had a devastating impact on the morale of international forces. “Green on blue” attacks can only be understood in the context of how Afghans and Americans view each other. Afghans thought this of Americans:

They always shout and yell “Mother Fucker!” They are crazy.

U.S. soldiers swear at us constantly, saying “Fuck You!”

Their arrogance sickens us.

We [the Afghan National Army, ANA] once loaded and charged our weapons because we got tired of the U.S. Soldiers calling us “Mother Fuckers.”

We have been ordered not to react to their insults; but we very much want to.

For years U.S. military convoys sped through the streets of villages, running over small children, while shouting profanities and throwing water bottles at people.

U.S. soldiers kill many innocent civilians if attacked. They kill everyone around.

They don’t care about civilian casualties.

They take photos of women even when we tell them not to.

They tried to search a woman. We aimed our guns at them to stop it.

They pee all over, right in front of civilians, including females.

They pee in the water, polluting it. We told them to stop but they wouldn’t listen.

Two U.S. Soldiers even defecated within public view.

[U.S. troops] constantly pass gas in front of ANSF [Afghan National Security Forces], in public, in front of elders.

They obviously were not raised right. What can we do with people like that? They are disgusting. They are a very low class of people.

They don't meet with the elders very often.

Often the U.S. lets itself get involved in personal feuds by believing an unreliable source. These people use the U.S. to destroy their personal enemies, not the insurgents.

Many ANSF respondents, the study found, "denigrated the personal integrity of U.S. Soldiers, and declared them to be cowards hiding behind their MRAPs [mine-resistant ambush protected vehicles], their close air support and overwhelming fire power."¹⁵ The Afghans thought that "U.S. Soldiers would not be brave if they had to fight under the same operational conditions as the ANSF did, without body armor, with older weapons, light-skinned vehicles, poor logistical support, and no dedicated air cover."¹⁶

American soldiers were equally disenchanted with the Afghan forces representing, ironically, a so-called major non-NATO ally:

They are turds. We are better off without them.

The ANP [Afghan National Police] are locals. I don't trust locals. They can be sleepers.

I would never like to admit that Iraqis are smarter, but they are Einsteins compared to Afghans.

These guys only seem to care about their own tribes or families.

There is a great deal of favoritism and tribalism in appointments. An officer is not promoted for meritorious work but due to tribal affiliations and depth of pockets.

How they treat their women and children is disgusting; they are just chattel to them.

They are fucking thieves.

They seem to act on emotion rather than common sense.

We do everything for them. It's like a kid you have to spoon feed.

They fucking stink.

They simply don't wash themselves.

They are as high as fuck (on hash).

They are stoned all the time; some even while on patrol with us.

The people don't want us here, and we don't like them.

Each protagonist saw the other through the prism of his own culture. The Americans with their technology and ideas of progress and the tribesmen with their notions of honor, revenge, and tribal loyalty confronted each other with ignorance as much as contempt. One represented a society that had been to the

moon and landed a vehicle on Mars; the other a people who spoke of past invaders they had resisted successfully—Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, and British and Soviet troops—as if it were yesterday.

The Clash of Civilizations and the Triangle of Terror

American troops were in Afghanistan as a consequence of the events on 9/11, which many believed to represent the larger concept of the “clash of civilizations.” While Bernard Lewis was the author of this phrase and deployed his material as a historian to expand on it, Samuel Huntington popularized the term. Most people hearing of it took it on face value to mean an ongoing confrontation between two inherently opposed civilizations—the West and the world of Islam. The war on terror may thus be seen as an extension of the “clash.” While the phrase is a gross reduction of an already simplistic frame for the understanding of history, it became hugely influential after 9/11. The attacks on that day by Muslims seemed to confirm the core idea of the clash of civilizations and offered a plausible explanation of contemporary events. Lewis was instantly elevated to the role of public prophet. Dick Cheney, the American vice president, consulted him frequently and cited his ideas on television when justifying the war on Iraq.

Cast as the irredeemably villainous enemy of the West, Islam was widely vilified and studied with the purpose of establishing its evil credentials. Commentators warned that the Quran ordered Muslims to kill innocent Jews and Christians and as a reward promised seventy-two virgins in heaven. This was both malicious and incorrect, but it was another powerful argument among the public, along with the deaths on 9/11, to justify the war on terror.

The clash of civilizations, expressed through the war on terror, was now the dominant metanarrative in world affairs. Because globalization had already created international networks in the last few years, the U.S.-led war effort was smoothly integrated into global information, economic, transport, financial, and military systems. In the aftermath of 9/11, the American philosophy of globalization, reduced to the catchy phrase “the world is flat” (popularized by American commentators like Thomas Friedman who equate globalization with “Americanization”), thus became intertwined with the war on terror.¹⁷ The war also provided the groundwork for the arguments to torture prisoners, suspend human rights, and support autocratic and blood-thirsty rulers abroad, while turning a blind eye to the desperate suffering of people on their peripheries. Considering the gravity of a war that was global in scope, hastily formulated laws and regulations were passed that blocked, distorted, and obfuscated information. A miasmatic fog descended on the war on terror and soon spread across the planet.

Because the war on terror was the first truly worldwide conflict in the age of globalization, Western nations and their allies swiftly and efficiently mobilized every aspect of society in its support. The global armada thus assembled set forth

with great élan for Afghanistan. Fifty nations deployed troops. The objectives were vague and many—from introducing democracy, development, and human rights, and “freeing” women to destroying al Qaeda, the Taliban, and Osama bin Laden. Much of the armada then inexplicably changed course and headed for Iraq with a quite different objective: to locate the elusive and illusory “weapons of mass destruction.” As the force ploughed deeper and deeper into the two wars, it became clear that no resounding victory was remotely in sight. As if these two wars were not messy enough, new fronts, however limited and temporary, were opened elsewhere—in the Tribal Areas of Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, the Philippines, and the Sahel in West Africa. Of course, the United States and central governments of these various regions also implemented educational, developmental, and other schemes to benefit the periphery. But their effect was diluted by the outsiders’ ignorance of the local culture and the periphery’s problems with the central government, not to mention acts of violence by both center and periphery, especially those in which ordinary civilians were killed.

As the conflicts escalated, the U.S. State Department began including on its terrorist list Muslim groups suspected of any possible links to al Qaeda—such as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) based in China’s Xinjiang Province inhabited by the Uyghurs. This action immediately cast suspicion on entire communities as potential terrorists. Already persecuted minority groups now found themselves even more oppressed. Even the hapless and docile Rohingya of Burma (now called Myanmar), who were prohibited from traveling outside their villages and were generally too poor to afford a bicycle, let alone an improvised explosive device (IED), were suspected of al Qaeda links owing to one Western journalist’s articles, as explained in a later chapter. Central governments cynically and ruthlessly exploited the war on terror to pursue their own agenda against the periphery. Meanwhile the periphery was unable to come to terms with this new era of globalization that had made it an easy and fatal target; indeed, the prickliest of the tribes are the ones now suffering the most.

In fact, as this study sets out to establish, if there is a clash it is not between civilizations based on religion; rather, it is between central governments and the tribal communities on the periphery. The war on terror has been conceptualized as a triangle formed by three points—the United States, the modern state within which the tribes live, and al Qaeda. The arguments presented below indicate that the third point, however, is actually not al Qaeda, which at its height had perhaps no more than a few thousand members, if that, and is now reduced to one or two dozen. It is the tribal societies that have directly or indirectly provided a base for al Qaeda and other groups advocating violence. Many of these peripheral groups had been clamoring, or even fighting, for their rights from central governments for decades. A small number of al Qaeda operatives, in Afghanistan and elsewhere, found these tribes to be receptive hosts.

The United States, however, has failed to understand not only the nature of tribal society but also the dimensions of this simmering conflict between the center and the periphery. As a result, Americans have never been clear as to where al Qaeda ends and where the tribe begins and why they resort to violence. Instead they have viewed central governments as the only legitimate source of authority and force, while ignoring all reports of the loutish and sadistic behavior of the center's soldiers, preferring to deal with Hosni Mubarak as representing all of Egypt and Pervez Musharraf all of Pakistan. Anyone opposed to these leaders was automatically seen as a foe of the United States.

The United States and central governments around the world found it mutually beneficial to forge alliances and make agreements within the ideological frame of the war on terror. For the United States and its allied central governments, the tribes across the Muslim world effectively became public enemy number one because they were outside globalization, resistant to it, and seen as the natural allies of al Qaeda. Opposition to either the war on terror or globalization was thus seen as one and the same thing, thereby risking the wrath of the United States and casting those opposed as potential "terrorist sympathizers."

The problem was that many such tribes and communities wished to benefit from globalization but not to compromise their thistle-like identity. They also had to contend with central governments more interested in monopolizing globalization's many benefits—developments in information technology, transport and communications, medicine, trade, and commerce—and in the central government's policy of promoting the politics, language, and culture of the dominant group at the center. Little more than crumbs—a cell phone here, a job in a security firm there—fell to the periphery.

Under the rubric of the war on terror, different combatants were conducting different wars for different objectives within the triangle of terror. Some were big powers fishing in troubled waters. Others were nationalist entities wanting to assert central authority. Still others were tribesmen battling to maintain their ethnic and cultural boundaries, some also unabashedly seeking to discomfit their tribal rivals. Lurking somewhere in the background were the ever-thinning numbers of individuals associated with or accused of being al Qaeda. Shifting alliances, general distrust, betrayals, paranoia, and fear marked the war on terror.

It is in the interest of the United States to understand, in all the tribal societies with which it is engaged, the people, their leadership, history, culture, their relationship with the center, their social structures, and the role Islam plays in their lives. These issues are, in fact, the subject matter of anthropology, and those commenting on or involved with the war on terror, therefore, need to become better informed about the anthropology of tribal societies. Without this understanding, the war on terror will not end in any kind of recognizable victory as current military actions and policies are only exacerbating the conflict.

State and Tribe, Center and Periphery

The relationship between state and tribe, center and periphery, ruler and those living on the boundaries of the realm has interested scholars, commentators, and politicians throughout recorded history. Those drawn to the subject range from the likes of Herodotus, Plutarch, Julius Caesar, and the Indian Kautilya of long ago to the Arab Ibn Khaldun of medieval times and Bernard Lewis and Albert Hourani of the modern era. In recent decades, anthropologists have made a rich ethnographic contribution to the discussion.¹⁸ In addition, many anthropologists have sounded the alarm about the current plight of tribal societies and connected the dots between their predicament and the role of the modern state.¹⁹

Anthropologists have traditionally found two distinct social and political structures in tribal societies: a segmentary lineage system existing outside the state, as exemplified by the animist Nuer tribes of East Africa, and a centralized kingdom with standing armies and a functioning bureaucracy, like the Zulu kingdoms of South Africa.²⁰ One category of centralized kingdoms even bigger and more complex than that of the Zulus consists of vast, highly centralized, hierarchical, densely populated, dynastic political and social entities deriving their economic and political wealth from agricultural lands with complex irrigation systems. Karl Wittfogel calls this category “hydraulic society” or “Oriental Despotism.”²¹ As Wittfogel points out, the central authorities of such societies had massive military resources at their disposal to subjugate and terrorize their populations. Xerxes of Persia had an army of 360,000 soldiers. Chandragupta of India had a standing army of 690,000 not counting his cavalry. Harun al-Rashid, the Arab caliph, gathered 135,000 regular soldiers for a summer campaign. The Mughal emperor Akbar boasted a contingent of 50,000 armor-plated elephants, which functioned much like modern tank divisions, and his grandson, Emperor Shah Jehan, had an elite cavalry corps of 200,000 horsemen. The Chou dynasty of China could mobilize 3.5 million foot soldiers and 30,000 horsemen.²² “Oriental despotism,” writes Wittfogel, confers “total power” on those at the center—as it did on Chinese, Indian, and Middle Eastern emperors and more recently on Stalin and Hitler—and unleashes “total terror, total submission, and total loneliness.”²³ Oriental despotism is the exact opposite of the political, social, and economic structure of the tribal communities examined in this study.

Rulers and administrators representing a strong center tended to view the periphery as an unattractive or less than admirable segment of society. The periphery, in turn, saw the center as predatory, corrupt, and dishonorable, an entity to be kept at arm’s length. From the time of the Mughals to that of the British, for example, the Indian center referred to the Pukhtun areas as *yaghistan*, or a “land of rebellion,” and *ghair ilaqa*, which means alien, strange, or foreign (as opposed to *ilaqa*, which means area under central government control). Central



Family of Bugti tribesmen in Baluchistan, Pakistan, in the 1980s (author's collection).

governments in North Africa have also described tribes in their mountain fastness as living in *bled es siba*, the land of rebellion, as opposed to *bled el makhzen*, the land of government. In time the sense of remoteness entered into the names of the tribes and their areas: the Tuareg in West Africa, for example, meant “abandoned by God,” the Hadhramaut region in Yemen “death has come,” and Asir in Saudi Arabia “inaccessible.” Central governments created new names for the people at the periphery regardless of their deep attachment to traditional names: the Pukhtun peoples, for example, were renamed Pathans, the Amazigh people Berbers, Nokhcha people Chechen, and the Tausug and other Muslim groups in the Philippines Moro. Many of the new names were of a derogatory nature, as in the case of *shiptar*, a racial slur applied to Albanians, *shifra* (bandit) used for the Somalis, *galla* (lowly outsiders) for the Oromo of Ethiopia, and *niak* (forest people or savages) for the Jola of Senegal.

Despite their views of each other and continued wariness, over time the center and periphery developed a *modus vivendi*, even a level of accommodation and understanding, described as a “delicate balance” and “uneasy truce between center and perimeter” by noted anthropologist Clifford Geertz.²⁴ For Carleton Coon, an anthropologist of an earlier generation, the relationship between the center and periphery was “a loose system of give and take” whereby “mountaineers and nomads come to town freely, their fastnesses are left alone, and they let the caravans of travelers, traders, and pilgrims cross the ‘Land of Insolence’ without hindrance or inconvenience over and above the normal rigors of travel.”²⁵



Kurdish children, some without shoes, in Turkey (photo by Durzan Cirano).

History shows a direct correlation between waning power at the center and increasing independence at the periphery. When strong, the center attempted to create pliable leadership and eliminate those elements on the periphery that resisted it. When weak, it withdrew to attend to its own affairs, leaving the communities on the periphery to their own devices.

In the modern age, beginning with colonization, that balance was severely threatened, only to be completely upset in the postindependence era after World War II. A common feature of the tribal groups examined here, apart from their Islamic faith, is that they found themselves, without their permission and in many cases against their choice or will, part of a newly formed modern nation-state. Clans and communities that had lived together for centuries were overnight sliced into two—and some more than two—by international boundaries. Many tribes were now at the mercy of those they had traditionally opposed or fought against. Some new states had a Muslim majority and some were non-Muslim with only a small Muslim population.

A puzzling feature of today's world is that tiny nations like Nauru (with a population of 9,300), Tuvalu (10,000), and Kiribati (barely 100,000) have independent status with full membership in the United Nations, whereas much larger ethnic groups that not long ago lived as independent or semi-independent societies find themselves divided among different nations and subjected to increasingly repressive policies in their own land. An estimated 50 million Pukhtuns have been split mainly between Afghanistan and Pakistan (Afghan, Pukhtun,

Pashtun, and Pathan all refer to the same ethnic group, and in order to avoid confusion I will use Pukhtun because that is what is used by major Pukhtun tribes like the Yusufzai, who are the proud carriers of the literary traditions of the Pukhtu language); some 30 million Kurds between Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Iraq; about 30 million Oromo between Ethiopia (which has the largest share) and Kenya; about 15 million Fulani among Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana, Senegal, and across West Africa; and 6 million Tuareg among half a dozen countries in Africa—Mali, Niger, Algeria, Libya, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria.

Once the masters of their universe, these communities have been reduced to third-class citizenship in their own homes. Ironically, those responsible for this shift were not even European imperialists; in most countries, they were either fellow Muslims or non-Muslim neighbors. In many of the regions, the discovery of oil and minerals in the twentieth century compounded tribal problems with the center, which relentlessly pursued the potential wealth for its own gains. As a result, the disparity in economic and political power between center and periphery, already wide, grew wider. Little was done for the people on the fringe—as is obvious from a cursory glance at the Baluch in Pakistan, Kurds in Turkey, and the Uyghur in China.

Now reduced to impotency, tribal peoples saw the state encroach on their lands, forcing them to settle elsewhere while flooding their areas with settlers of different ethnicities linked to the center. Government officials mocked their customs and language and denied them employment. These minority communities were demonized by the majority. Children at school and even the press and government officials often referred to them as “monkeys without tails,” “reptiles,” or “animals.”

The sheer desperation of these communities and the brutality they faced from the center are highlighted in films like *Turtles Can Fly* (2004). In it, a small group of Kurdish orphans, many of them limbless because of land mines, live between the border of Turkey and Iraq and face systematic persecution by the state. Their struggle merely to keep hope alive in a world that has shattered around them and is full of cruel adults reflects the grim realities of Muslims living on the periphery. An entire generation of young people on the periphery is growing up in a climate of fear and violence. Both Muslim and non-Muslim leaders who deal with Muslim populations need to keep this demographic reality in mind.

The assault on tribal peoples caused traditional tribal and Islamic behavior to mutate, as witnessed in the bloody and frenzied suicide bombings by young Muslim males and females of schools, bazaars, mosques, and symbols of central authority. Such incidents occur at random almost daily across regions in which tribal communities live. On August 19, 2011, for example, the Pakistani press reported that a suicide bomber blew himself up in a mosque on a Friday in the Khyber Agency, killing 56 people and wounding over 120. A Muslim killing

fellow Muslims in a mosque during holy day prayer in the month of Ramadan in the Tribal Areas is the most serious violation of tribal and Islamic tradition.

Though some violent groups like the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claim their motives are to impose *sharia*, or Islamic law, their actions reflect primeval notions of revenge. Their own larger communities are baffled by their emergence, and rumors abound that they are part of a “conspiracy” against the state of Pakistan, perhaps concocted by elements in the central government itself or “foreign” powers. No arguments about injustice or loss can be sustained amid the random and widespread violence now being inflicted by these Muslims, most often against other Muslims. While explanations of the violence are provided in this book, they cannot justify or rationalize it in any way.

The center and the periphery are engaged in a mutually destructive civil war across the globe that has been intensified by the war on terror. A clear principle of cause and effect shapes the relationship between the attacking central authority and the resisting tribes. The draconian and often indiscriminate measures enacted by the center’s security agencies and the military provoke the unrestrained retaliation of the desperate periphery. Indeed, the greater the brutalization of peripheral communities, the harsher their retaliatory violence. Neither side is prepared to give any quarter. Neither side appears to understand the interplay of cause and effect. The best place to begin seeking the causes of the breakdown between center and periphery is in the segmentary lineage system.

THE SEGMENTARY LINEAGE SYSTEM

No ancient society—the Greek city-states, the Roman Empire, the Indian kingdoms—survives today, with one exception: tribes that are organized along the segmentary lineage system. Such tribal groups have proved resilient and long lasting. Anthropologists categorize these tribes as acephalous, or without leaders—ones in which each man guards his status and independence jealously. “Every man is a Malik [elder]” is a common saying among the Pukhtun, and “every man his own sultan” among the Somalis. The same sentiment is reflected in a Mahsud elder’s suggestion to Sir Evelyn Howell, a British administrator in Waziristan in the early twentieth century: either “blow us all up with cannon, or make all eighteen thousand of us Nawabs [chiefs].”²⁶

Most authoritative accounts of Muslim tribesmen by Western scholars and administrators cite parallels with the ancient Greeks in their independent character and democratic social organization. Perhaps they thought there was no greater compliment than to acknowledge similarities with the very fountainhead of Western civilization. The nineteenth-century English scholar, explorer, and administrator Sir Richard Burton found Somali tribes to be “a fierce and turbulent race of republicans. . . . Every free-born man holds himself equal to his ruler, and allows



Profiles of Alexander the Great and of a Pukhtun tribesman (used with permission of Oxford University Press).

no royalties or prerogatives to abridge his birthright of liberty.”²⁷ Howell used the very term “Athenian” to describe the egalitarian spirit of the Waziristan tribes.²⁸ In *The Pathans*, Caroe, in keeping with the intellectual trends of his time, supports the comparison between the ancient Greeks and Pukhtuns by providing a striking pictorial juxtaposition of Alexander the Great and a Pukhtun tribesman in profile.

The Study of Segmentary Lineage Systems

Tribal societies with segmentary lineage systems had pride of place in British social anthropology when I began my studies in the United Kingdom in the 1970s. While the stock-in-trade of the discipline was to focus on the rites of passage of the peasant struggling with caste rules in an Indian village or the dance rituals of the witch doctor in an African settlement, those wanting to make a name in the discipline went to the deserts and mountains in search of tribes. These groups, with their small, scattered populations, lived in border areas of various countries and were known for their codes of honor and revenge, their feuds, and fighting. Conducting fieldwork among them carried a whiff of danger. Here was where the anthropologist became Indiana Jones.

Some notable work regarding tribes dates back six centuries, however. Renowned Arab philosopher and historian Ibn Khaldun put forth a cyclical theory of tribal society that drew on the relationship between tribal groups living in remote areas and settled groups in towns and cities in his seminal *Muqaddimah*.²⁹

Khaldun's theory stemmed from the character differences between the two groups and impact of contact between them: tribal "nomadic" peoples in remote areas lived by a code of honor rooted in notions of being equal and united by what he called *asabiyah*, or social cohesion, whereas populations in urban areas lacked these traits. As nomads raided towns or settled in them, they, in turn, began to assimilate, losing their sense of *asabiyah*; in three generations they, too, became vulnerable to domination by fresher nomads from the mountains. This was, and remains, a strong and neat depiction of a certain kind of society and gathered a large network of scholarly admirers, including prominent Western anthropologists.

But it was left to British anthropologists, E. E. Evans-Pritchard foremost among them, to articulate the discussion of tribal groups organized on the basis of the segmentary lineage system. Such tribes lived *outside* state systems and possessed their own territory, language, and particular customs and traditions that provided a blueprint for perpetuating their specific identity through succeeding generations. These societies had an organized mechanism for resolving conflict and maintaining order that was centered on the role and mediation of elders. Segmentary lineage tribal societies contained fully formed and functioning social systems; they were not one rung on an evolutionary ladder waiting to evolve in due time to a higher more "advanced" one.

As a Muslim administrating similar tribes in some of the most inaccessible areas of the world, I was particularly interested in the authoritative studies of Muslim segmentary lineage tribal groups, such as the Sanusi tribes of Cyrenaica by Evans-Pritchard, the Berbers in the Atlas mountains of Morocco by Ernest Gellner, and the Somalis in the Horn of Africa by I. M. Lewis. The British concept of the segmentary lineage system was taken up by other anthropologists of note, such as the Norwegian Fredrik Barth, who studied the Pukhtun in Swat, the Kurds in Iraq, and the Basseri nomads of southern Iran.³⁰ It should be noted, however, that not all segmentary lineage systems are Muslim. Those that are Christian, besides the Scots, include the Tiv of Nigeria, the Acholi of Uganda, the Timorese of Timor-Leste, and the Basques of Spain.

Although American anthropologists worked extensively among tribes, their views of British theories about the segmentary lineage system were mixed. Among enthusiasts were Laura and Paul Bohannon, who adopted British ideas about the segmentary lineage system in their work on the Tiv. In contrast, Clifford Geertz and Lawrence Rosen, working in Morocco, argued that the limitations of the segmentary lineage system were painfully apparent. Geertz and Rosen emphasized culture and the symbols that represent its various aspects, the capacity of the individual to manipulate networks regardless of clan and tribe, and the transformative influence of interaction outside the community. Amid the dazzling asides, devastating broadsides, cross-continental cultural comparisons, and interdisciplinary insights that Geertz deploys in *The Interpretation of*

Cultures (1973) and *Islam Observed* (1968), together forming arguably his most magisterial overview of the subject, the reader will look in vain for musings on the segmentary lineage system.³¹ It does not even merit a mention in Geertz's index; rather, the focus is on the concept of symbol systems. Some anthropologists took the middle ground, adopting points best suited to their own material, as in the case of Steven Caton's recognition of lineage blocs, alliances, ancestors, and honor in his studies of Yemen.

There are tribal peoples, however, that share many of the fundamental characteristics of the segmentary lineage system and are yet completely different in their own right. The Tausug of the southern Philippines are an example.³² They are acephalous, identified on the basis of their clan segments, and have a developed code of honor, hospitality, and revenge evidenced by their blood feuds, which can last for decades. The proverbs of the Tausug echo those of the segmentary lineage tribes, "It is better to die than be dishonored."³³ The Tausug, however, are not organized along the lines of the segmentary lineage system and do not feel the need to possess long genealogical lines of ascent to common ancestors. The Tausug may be seen as segmented tribal groups rather than segmentary lineage ones.

Controversy has also long surrounded the definition of "tribe" itself—quite understandably. Early anthropologists used the word "savage" freely to describe tribal communities. Fresher generations have challenged the very term "tribe," with its connotation of being "backward" and "primitive." Many such peoples, once the subject of Western anthropologists, are now producing their own first-class material on their communities.

One conundrum for me in this regard—while appreciating the sensitivity to political correctness and acknowledging the historical background of the controversy—is that the people under study themselves use words that are the exact equivalent of "tribe" or "clan," such as *qam*, *khel*, *teip*, *fis*, *qabila*, or *qabail*. Without getting entangled in the nuances of definition (the meaning of "tribe" will remain a source of debate as long as people ponder societies and communities), I will use "tribe" to refer to a unit of ethnic, social, and political organization in which kinship is the defining principle of social organization and interaction. While I am aware of the term's shortcomings and with all the cautions and caveats in mind, this is still perhaps the most useful way to understand a certain kind of peoples that I encountered on the borders of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The Structure of the System

The segmentary lineage system is a closed world, bounded by the genealogical charter and its concomitant code; those not included in the charter simply belong to another world. For the purposes of this study, I define segmentary lineage systems in the ideal as characterized by (a) highly egalitarian segments of a genealogical charter, and within them smaller and smaller segments, all claiming descent



Yemeni tribesman with traditional dagger in vertical position signifying a warrior identity (photo by Bernard Gagnon).

from a common, often eponymous, ancestor; (b) male cousin rivalry and a council of elders to mediate conflict; (c) recognition of rights to territory corresponding to segments, as acknowledged by tradition; and (d) a normatively acknowledged set of customs that includes a code of honor and a distinctive language.

The system is largely based on patrimonial descent and exhibits the nesting attributes of pyramid-like structures of clans and subclans on the genealogical charter. The operative level is the subsection, consisting of several extended families, which is part of a larger section, which, in turn, is part of an even larger clan. It is at this level of society that communities not only choose to lead their lives but also conceive them. Smaller units come together to oppose larger ones, as reflected in the Bedouin saying “Me and my brothers against my cousins, me and my cousins against the world.”

The tribes examined here can trace connections back through many generations to their common ancestor, whose name has often been applied to the tribe itself. For example, the Wazir along the border between Afghanistan and

Pakistan are named after their eponymous ancestor Wazir, and the Yusufzai on the Pakistani side of the border after theirs, Yusuf (*zai* means “sons of”). The Oromo in Ethiopia and Kenya are descended from their ancestor named Orma, and the Somalis from Samale. Reputed to be fiercely independent people, living in generally dry, unirrigated, low-production, and, for the most part, inaccessible areas that could not support large populations, they were isolated and avoided by outsiders. These tribes are commonly nomadic or semi-nomadic with animal herds of sheep, goats, cows, or camels. They typically live on small plots of land, which they own as members of a tribe or clan.

A tribal unit is traditionally defined by territory and usually lives in an area named after the tribe itself. Thus, the two Waziristan Agencies (administrative districts in the Tribal Areas of Pakistan) are named after the Wazir tribe, the Orakzai Agency after the Orakzai tribe, and the Mohmand Agency after the Mohmand tribe. Entire provinces and countries are also named after tribes: Baluchistan after the Baluch tribe, Afghanistan after the Afghan or Pukhtun tribes, and Saudi Arabia after the Saud tribe. Although these administrative and political units bear the name of a particular tribe, other tribes having their own genealogical charter and leadership may also live there. At least a dozen tribes, for example, the Burki and the Bhattani, inhabit the two Waziristan Agencies. Each of these tribes is a world unto itself, and though each shares many characteristics with the others, and some even a common ancestor, each sees itself as a distinct social entity.

The competitiveness for political, economic, and social gain plays out in what anthropologists call “agnatic rivalry” between father’s brother’s sons. This rivalry is captured in the Pukhtun saying, “God knows that the uncle is an infidel.”³⁴ Agnatic rivalry engenders long-standing feuds and vendettas that often end in the destruction of entire families. Viewing the constant conflict within the tribal structure, British anthropologists described these societies as “ordered anarchy.”

The authority to make decisions—including declarations of war, agreements for peace, or the mediation of disputes and blood feuds according to the tribal code of honor that encompasses all areas of tribal life—rests in the hands of a council of elders. Since their sense of egalitarianism and independence precludes the establishment of a central authority in many of these tribes, the elders rely on personal charisma, wisdom, bravery, knowledge of the code, and other personal characteristics to lay claim to that authority. Ultimately, though, their legitimacy derives from the lineage charter of the tribe. The terms for the bearers of this authority vary from tribe to tribe: among the Pukhtuns, the council of elders, or *jirga*, is composed of the *mashar*, meaning elder; decisions among the Somalis are made by the *shir*, composed of every adult male in the clan, all of whom are considered elders; and for the Kurds, it is the *ri spi*, literally “the white beards.” What remains fundamentally the same among all the tribes is the central role of the elder and the council to which he belongs.

It is a man's world, and the male carries the weight of tribal honor. The most tangible expression of this code of honor is the weapon that tribesmen in our case studies all carry, traditionally a dagger or sword, but more recently the Kalashnikov assault rifle. The mandatory weapon has long symbolized the status of a man in tribal society, signifying that he is the protector of his community. "A man's gun is his jewelry" is a popular proverb among Pukhtuns. In the ideal, a man must combine courage and honor. He must know who he is in the lineage of his tribe and be prepared to uphold its code. This outlook has given tribal men a certain air of confidence. British writers captured the essence of the Pukhtun tribesmen in their swagger and gait. As one wrote of the Tuareg in the 1920s, "The men are born to walk and move as kings, they stride along swiftly and easily, like Princes of the Earth, fearing no man, cringing before none, and consciously superior to other people."³⁵

A man's and a woman's place in their tribal genealogical charter is known in the community and allocates various responsibilities that carry social prestige—membership in the *jirga* for men and the organization of the rites of passage, such as marriage rituals, for women. However, certain groups are not included in the charter, yet play an equally important role—most notably *mullahs* or religious leaders, blacksmiths, musicians, barbers, and small shopkeepers. Although these groups provide services necessary for the business of everyday life, the tribesman's ideas of descent and accompanying notions of honor prevent him from performing such activities himself. Over time, these social divisions may assume an almost caste-like sanctity in certain tribal societies.

Small groups of non-Muslims have also become affiliated with some of the main tribes, as in the case of a Hindu community living among the Bugti in Baluchistan. During my time in Baluchistan in the 1980s, Arjun Das Bugti, who represented the Bugti Agency as a member of the provincial assembly, proudly carried both his Hindu name and that of his affiliated tribe, the Bugti. Yemen and the North Caucasus provide examples of Jews connected with Muslim tribes, and the Kurds with Christian groups. In the ideal, the tribal code encompasses all groups living within the purview of the tribe, which means these groups are protected; their honor has become a matter of honor for the main tribe.

Tribal Identity and the Code of Honor

Wali Khan, a Pukhtun leader in Pakistan and the son of the famed "Frontier Gandhi," Abdul Ghaffar Khan, was once asked about the "first allegiance" of his identity. It was 1972, a time of great ethnic tension in Pakistan, when East Pakistan had just broken away on the basis of Bengali ethnicity. A traumatic Pakistani nation wondered whether the state would survive, its people apprehensive about other communities and their ethnic loyalties. Wali Khan, who had clearly been thinking about the issue, replied, "I have been a Pashtun for

six thousand years, a Muslim for thirteen hundred years, and a Pakistani for twenty-five.”³⁶ In short, by explicitly relegating the position of nationalism and religion below that of tribal identity, Wali Khan was highlighting the primordial basis of his sense of self. He could have been speaking on behalf of any of the Muslim tribal groups discussed in this volume—the Kurds, Somalis, Yemenis, Bedouin, and so on.

For the segmentary lineage tribes on the periphery, tribal lineage and the code of honor are the basis of identity as much as Islam is, sometimes more so. Some of these codes have specific names directly related to their tribal identity—*Pukhtunwali* means “the way of the Pukhtun,” *Baluchiat*, “the way of the Baluch”; the Fulani code is known as *Pulaaku*, the “Fulani way”; the Yemeni code, *Gabyilah*, derives from the Arabic word for tribe; and the Chechen code, *Nokhchalla*, is named after Nokhcho, their mythological ancestor. The Tuareg have named their code *asshak*, meaning “honor” itself, and the Albanians *besa*, meaning “word of honor,” while the Somalis speak of *xeer*, or “tribal law.” The Bedouin of Sinai and Negev use *orf* or *urfi*, meaning “traditional law,” while the Tausug and Avars use *adat*, which is Arabic for “custom.”

The code’s paramount principle is the law of hospitality pertaining to the welcoming and protection of guests, which is said to reflect the honor of the host. Even a stranger seeking refuge, whatever his background, will find shelter among those adhering to the code. A dramatic example is provided by Mullah Omar, the Taliban leader in Kandahar, refusing to hand over his guest, Osama bin Laden, to the Americans or even to fellow Muslims, the Saudis and Pakistanis. When Muslim officials argued that under Islamic principles bin Laden should be apprehended and handed over for trial, Mullah Omar countered that the tribal code of honor took precedence. Although Mullah Omar was aware that his refusal would cost him and his people a heavy price, he was still unwilling to compromise on the code. To tribal peoples, tradition and custom need to be enacted, preserved, and guarded. While political and economic prosperity matter, and may indeed challenge traditional ways of doing things, they are disguised or couched in tribal terms.

The Bedouin refer to this characteristic hospitality as the Law of the Tent, as it gives individuals in distress the right to enter another’s tent and demand assistance, knowing that they will receive it. Hospitality entails not only protecting visitors but also representing their interests in mediations of conflict. Hospitality extends even to viewing hostages kidnapped by tribesmen as guests to be treated with respect (kidnapping is a tactic often used to highlight some complaint). In 1904, for example, Mulai Ahmed el Raisuli, a Berber chief in the Rif region of northern Morocco, kidnapped an American expatriate, Ion Perdicaris, and his son for a ransom and control of two government districts from the Moroccan sultan. This incident was portrayed in the 1975 film *The Wind and the Lion* with



Bugti elder in Baluchistan, Pakistan, during the 1980s (author's collection).

Sean Connery depicting Raisuli's notions of honor and hospitality with empathy, perhaps because of his own Scottish background. In the film, a female character played by the glamorous Candice Bergen stood in for Perdicasaris to lend a romantic element to the story. Perdicasaris would later write of el Raisuli, "I go so far as to say that I do not regret having been his prisoner for some time. I think that, had I been in his place, I should have acted in the same way. He is not a bandit, nor a murderer, but a patriot forced into acts of brigandage to save his native soil and his people from the yoke of tyranny."³⁷

The concept of hospitality is held in such high regard that it often trumps tribal requirements for revenge, as seen in the chivalrous offering of food and provisions even to enemies. During the Crusades, the famous Saladin, a Kurd,

was known to infuriate his generals by giving shelter and safe passage to Christian soldiers who would then later go on to fight against Saladin's forces, while the Tuareg, as a British author wrote in the 1920s, "will give water in the desert to their worst enemy."³⁸

Tribal hospitality on the battlefield was also evident in late 1920 when Bolshevik forces launched an offensive to subdue an Avar rebellion in the north Caucasus and reopen a major road the Avars had blocked. As the Bolsheviks captured towns, including the old Avar capital Khunzakh, and committed indiscriminate atrocities against local civilians, the Avar clans withdrew into the countryside. They then returned to besiege the towns, cutting off all supply routes and leaving the Bolsheviks to face mass starvation in the depth of winter. Their leader, Najmuddin Samurskii, saved the Bolsheviks by appealing to the Avar code of honor: "If you have honour, if you are indeed the sons of Shamil as you claim, if you want to show yourselves to be eagles of the mountain, send us some food and then we will see who will win."³⁹ The next night, the Avars approached the Russian garrison in the darkness and left sacks of food, all the while under fire from the Bolshevik troops.

The obligation for hospitality and honor can last for decades, as the following example, also from the Caucasus, shows. After the breakup of the Soviet Union and the splitting up of Soviet agricultural collectivization, an Avar descendant of Hadji Murad, who lived in Moscow, received an unexpectedly large sum of money in the mail. She realized that after the Soviet collapse a plot of land that had belonged to her clan had been given to a young family in the village of Tlokh in Dagestan. Tlokh elders had advised the family to send the woman the money, which they considered the honorable thing to do.⁴⁰

As already mentioned, the obligation to take revenge is also an integral part of the tribal code. For societies traditionally lacking the organs of civil government, such as police, courts of law, and a prison system, the collective demands for revenge help regulate behavior. An individual knows full well that any transgression against another's honor calls for revenge against the transgressor and his family, subclan, or clan by the victim's family, subclan, or clan. It is therefore in the interest of the clan to ensure that none of its own members exceed the normative boundaries of revenge. When serious wrongs do occur—such as murder, theft, or rape—revenge is taken to correct the wrong and restore honor and face. However, these acts often precipitate a cycle of revenge and counter-revenge between families and clans that can last for generations, as reflected in the saying "The Pukhtoon who took revenge after a hundred years said, I took it quickly."⁴¹

This emphasis on revenge accounts for the vital role that elders play in tribal society: they must attempt to mediate between rival parties and settle matters peacefully through methods such as blood compensation, which is paid by members of the family, subclan, or clan of the accused or through arranged marriages

between rivals, often cousins, so as to turn them into allies. According to elder tribesmen, the aim of revenge in traditional society is to provide a measured response aimed at correcting an injustice and ensuring stability.

Tribesmen are obliged to seek revenge even when a modern court system is available to them. I was struck by this reality during an interview in Washington, D.C., with Agri Verrija, an urbane Albanian with a tribal background. He recounted a recent case in Albania in which a man, tried and imprisoned for murdering a rival, was released after nine years, whereupon he returned to his village and was elected its head. In the meantime, the victim's sons had left the country and become U.S. citizens, but when they heard their father's murderer had been released from what they believed a corrupt state system, they flew back to Albania and avenged their father's death by killing him. As Agri explained, "The sons did not feel the accused was punished according to *kanun*, or tribal law."

The most sensitive subject pertaining to tribal honor is the behavior of and transgression against women as it directly relates to the honor of men in the family and clan. Because women play such an important role in tribal society, the violation of their honor is one of the greatest threats to a tribe's honor and therefore provokes the most intense blood feuds. As one anthropologist observed while studying typical marriage practices between Kurd cousins in eastern Turkey, "On a visit to a [father's brother's daughter's] family, to ask formally for her hand, the main speaker of the [wife-taking brother's] party used the following metaphor: that the *mal* (here, lineage) is like a 'house' and the daughter of a *mal* is like its 'door.' One should not open one's door to strangers (*biyani* in Kurdish), but only to one's brother."⁴² To maintain their status and safeguard their reputation, women are by and large responsible for conducting household tasks and raising children and do not participate in the male sphere of tribal activity such as the council of elders or acts of revenge. In addition, women play a crucial role in the making and breaking of social and political alliances through the rites of passage such as funerals and marriage ceremonies known as *gham khadi* (sorrow and joy) among the Pukhtun.⁴³ At the same time, women can be treated abominably, or even put to death, if suspected of compromising their honor in dress and behavior, particularly if they have contact with other men, especially outside the home.

Traditional Muslim tribes and their values are alien to modern populations in this age of globalization. Tribal emphasis on a genealogical charter that promotes ethnic exclusivity, the unacceptable and brutal treatment of women, and a complex code of revenge is neither Islamic in nature nor in keeping with the spirit of the present age. However, there is much to be applauded and in some instances emulated in tribal values—most notably the community's genuine and deep egalitarian spirit. In addition, law and order maintained through the council of elders provides swift and sure justice. The steady rhythm of life over the generations makes for a stable society and provides security for the individual. Furthermore,

unlike citizens who are part of and defined by globalization with their ambiguous and competing identities, most tribesmen know exactly who they are.

“Honor Ate Up the Mountains, Taxes the Plains”

The tribes discussed in this volume are not monolithic. Over the centuries, some of their members came down from the mountains and settled by rivers or on cultivated lands with ample rainfall. Others drifted to towns in search of better prospects. In time, the tribesmen who prospered were wearing silks and satins and eating spices and delicacies. As a result, their original tribal identity eventually became diluted and reinterpreted in different ways. Agnatic rivalry, for example, found new form in the competition for government employment or in becoming successful shopkeepers. Lineage as such became less important in defining identity, and marriages outside the community and even ethnic group for the sake of economic and political alliances became common.

Those in the hills and mountains continued to live on smallholdings as had their forefathers, with their herds of goats and camels. Clinging to tribal identity also meant doing without the facilities available to those in the towns and cities, whether hospitals, universities, or large markets. Life was simple, and no one starved because of the tribal nature of the extended family, but no one was particularly well off either. Priding themselves on their independence, the tribes in the hills, deserts, and jungles developed an uneasy relationship with those who settled in more urban areas. Despite having the same origins, over time the two developed distinct, and even antithetical, social and political ways of organizing their lives.

Tribesmen are keenly aware of the differences between these societies and their respective obligations. The dilemma for mountain tribes living by the code of honor is that it requires hospitality and revenge even at great cost to themselves. Yet those in the settled areas may not be much better off as they must deal with rapacious revenue officials and tax collectors who drain their meager earnings in the form of taxes and rents. Life is hard in either case. As the Pukhtu proverb says, “Honor [*nang*] ate up the mountains, taxes and rents [*qalang*] ate up the plains.”

During fieldwork among the border tribes of Afghanistan and Pakistan, it seemed appropriate to divide tribal peoples according to whether they defined themselves on the basis of *nang* or *qalang*.⁴⁴ More closely adhering to the segmentary lineage structure, *nang* populations are small and dispersed, whereas the *qalang* societies are typically large, concentrated, and hierarchical. The *nang* group I studied clearly corresponded with Ibn Khaldun’s nomadic category and the *qalang* with his sedentary category. Furthermore, Pukhtunwali appears equivalent to Ibn Khaldun’s *asabiyah*. Because the tribes of Waziristan—like those of the Tribal Areas—have been able to preserve Pukhtunwali, with its emphasis on *nang*, they have maintained the tribal spirit and its thistle-like nature.

Beyond the Pukhtun tribes, the other examples of core segmentary lineage systems that my team and I investigated can all be divided along similar societal lines between the local equivalent of nang and qalang. Somalia is split between egalitarian nomadic clans known as Samale after their common ancestor, with a strong adherence to their code of honor, and more hierarchically structured agricultural clans known as Sab. The division is stark, with the two groups even speaking different dialects of Somali as distinct as Spanish and Portuguese. Similarly, the Kurds divide themselves into “tribal” and “nontribal” populations. On the whole, the segmentary lineage system has remained “purest” among the Kurds in the most mountainous and isolated areas of the Middle East. The further the Kurdish communities are from the mountains, the less tribal and more peasant-like they are in their organization and behavior.⁴⁵ Not surprisingly, then, honor feuds are prevalent in the mountains but much less common in the plains, where the nontribal Kurds are more answerable to the interests of powerful landlords.⁴⁶ While tribesmen do not work for others in their own area, the nontribal Kurds are deemed unsuitable for fighting. Upper Yemen, too, has a strong tribal, egalitarian ethos. Large areas of Lower Yemen, on the other hand, have a hierarchical system of authority based on sharecropping and taxes, with settled peasants making up the majority of the population. For the settled people, the “land of the tribes” has come to be seen as an alien, primitive, and even threatening place.

DEFINING TRIBAL ISLAM

The tribesman defines himself by his Islamic faith as much as by blood, clan, and loyalty to the code. Covering his head with a turban or cloth, wearing loose flowing garments, dying a white beard with red henna, consciously invoking God before meals or important journeys, punctiliously praying five times a day, and fasting during the month of Ramadan—all these practices signal his religious affiliation with the Prophet, from whom he self-consciously derives all these actions. Similarly, Muslim tribal women are inspired by the example of the Prophet and that of the women in his household. These tribal communities approach God through oral folk traditions and emulation of the Prophet.

The Prophet as Tribal Chief Par Excellence

Tribesmen view the Prophet of Islam in a special way. They argue that no figure in human history—neither the Sanskrit sages, Buddha, Socrates, Aristotle, the biblical prophets, nor the Chinese emperors—managed to introduce a world religion, lead armies in war and congregations in prayer, preside over councils of peace, create a new state, yet remain austere and pious in personal life, deliver a message of compassion and mercy and demonstrate its practical applicability in the running of government machinery while acting as a loving parent, spouse,

and friend. The exception is the Prophet of Islam. For the tribesmen, the Prophet became—and remains—a kind of tribal chief par excellence.

The Prophet himself had emerged from a tribal society, being a member of the Quraysh tribe of Mecca, with its emphasis on clans, codes, and notions of hospitality, courage, and revenge. However, the Prophet placed the universal laws of Islam over those of tribal custom, whereas Muslim tribesmen proclaimed their faithfulness to the former yet adhered to the latter. Aware of the pulls of tribalism, the Prophet decried tribal loyalties and identity, as in his saying “There is no Bedouinism in Islam.”

All the same, tribesmen believed the Prophet made perfect sense in their tribal context and remained loyal to him throughout the vicissitudes of history. They created various genealogical links to the Prophet, placing him on their tribal charter, thereby reinforcing their relationship to him and enhancing their own prestige. Many of the tribes in this study can produce such links as proof of their Islamic credentials in terms of lineage, whether claiming their ancestors descended directly from him or had been converted by him. Anthropologists call links of this kind, meant to enhance social prestige but built on dubious evidence, fictitious genealogy.

Descent from, and association with, the Prophet is crucial to the discussion of tribal Islam. Claims that a tribe’s ancestors were converted by the Prophet establish a legitimacy in denoting the “purest” of Muslims. “Who could be a better Muslim than us?” “We carry his blood in our veins” or “We were converted to Islam by the Prophet himself,” they will say with pride. Thus, tribesmen say that on judgment day, when their fate will be decided, the Prophet will vouch for them and overlook their shortcomings as they will receive the infinite blessings of the greatest of God’s messengers. These links to the Prophet provide “a kind of cover for impurity” for groups largely ignorant of orthodox Islamic theology and practices.⁴⁷ Despite its fiction, the link with the Prophet enables tribesmen to brush aside any criticism of their unorthodox practices. To the tribesman, his tribal identity and his Islamic identity are fused, they are one and the same thing.

The notion of lineage affiliation with the Prophet makes Muslim tribal peoples even more loyal to him than are other Muslims. Any perceived attacks on the Prophet are likely to incite a defense of his honor, a reaction that stems from the combination of religious fervor and the tribal code, with its emphasis on revenge. Such was the response to Salman Rushdie’s novel *The Satanic Verses*,⁴⁸ Danish cartoons depicting the Prophet, and the poorly produced and conceived American film attacking the Prophet, which caused riots in the Muslim world amid which occurred the distressing deaths of the U.S. ambassador to Libya and his colleagues in Benghazi in September 2012.

Among the claimed affiliations, the Pukhtuns believe their common ancestor, Qais Abdur Rashid, was converted by the Prophet himself. The Yemeni tribes, well known during the time of the Prophet, were also converted by him and mentioned

favorably in many of his sayings, the *hadiths* (for details of these links, see chapter 3). Samale, the ancestor of the Somali tribes, is supposed to have come from Yemen in the ninth century and is said to be descended from Aqil Abu Talib of the Quraysh, the son of Abu Talib who was a cousin of the Prophet and brother of Ali. Farther afield, the Tausug of Jolo in the southern Philippines mention with pride that Salip Muda, also a cousin of the Prophet, was a Tausug.⁴⁹ The Berbers, too, believe that their ancestors were converted to Islam by the Prophet and that the Prophet's ability to speak the Berber language gave them special dispensation within the faith. Kurds commonly believe that Abraham's wife Sara was a Kurd and that this connection to the Abrahamic line links them to the Prophet. The Uyghur, too, claim ties with the Prophet through their putative descent from Noah and Abraham.

Few such links are as interesting and inventive as that of the Tera clan of the Kanuri in northeastern Nigeria. The Tera claim to be descended from a barber who shaved the head of the Prophet. It seems that one day this barber nicked the Prophet's scalp and it began to bleed. The barber quickly tasted the blood and claimed it imbued him with special powers that were passed on to his descendants. The Tera were thus recognized as *sherif*, a title reserved for those of noble birth and descendants of the Prophet.⁵⁰

Those directly descended from the Prophet through his daughter Fatima are called *sayyeds* and can substantiate their links to him through genealogical charts enumerating ascendants. They are especially revered among tribal societies as men of peace and learning who are often asked to mediate between warring clans. Sayyeds who have lived extraordinary lives of wisdom, piety, or grace are considered "saints." Apart from religious leadership, sayyeds provide a sociological connection to the person of the Prophet. Sayyeds more than any other group were frequently invited to become leaders and even rulers during the emirate period of Muslim history, which lasted more than a thousand years from the coming of Islam to the modern era.

Along with others who have displayed leadership and moral characteristics, the sayyeds formed the focus of saintly worship in their lifetimes, and their shrines continue to inspire their followers after their deaths. Sufis in particular are associated with saint and shrine worship. Tribesmen believe their saint, often a Sufi, whether alive or dead, will intercede with God on their behalf. Given their high levels of illiteracy, the line between appealing to spiritual figures for intercession and actually praying to them is often blurred. To orthodox Muslims, however, the Sufi reverence for shrines smacks suspiciously of praying to a pile of stones at the grave of a saint and is tantamount to heresy.

While the strength of their loyalty to the Prophet allowed ordinary tribesmen to claim Muslimness, their tribal or informal Islam did not comport with formal orthodox Islam, which is based in holy text and relies on learned scholars with a capacity for research and debate to interpret its fine points. Muslim scholars

spend a great deal of time getting it exactly right. Debates about the exact length of trousers over the ankles while saying prayers or the proper shape of the beard, for example, can therefore be heated. Formal Islam is rooted in the learning at the great centers of Islam such as those in Mecca, Medina, Al Azhar, and elsewhere.

For the purposes of this study, I cannot emphasize enough that tribal Islam practiced by largely illiterate tribesmen is antithetical in every way—sociological, ideological, and theological—to fundamentalist or literalist versions of Islam, especially the Salafi or Wahhabi Islam promoted by Saudi Arabia. The tribesmen approach God through the heart, the orthodox through the head. The dichotomy between these two interpretations of Islam has never been resolved for the large tribal groups that embraced it at its very birth. As a result, tribal attitudes to the community, elders, women, and Muslim customs and traditions differ from those of the literalists. As already mentioned, the tribesman equates tribal custom with Islamic faith, which together form his identity. By contrast, the literalist finds tribal custom un-Islamic and thinks it should be removed from Islam's pristine message and practice. Furthermore, the two even view God and the Prophet in a different light. To the tribesman, God is a benign if distant presence in his life. He knows God largely through loyalty to the Prophet. To the literalist, on the other hand, God is transcendental spirituality best approached through study of the sacred texts and prayer in the orthodox tradition. The Prophet is little more than one of the many messengers bringing the word of God to humanity. Admittedly, he is the last of the Prophets and therefore his position is singular, but any displays of excessive loyalty or devotion to the Prophet smack of idolatry and must be discouraged. Yet the aim of both approaches is to move toward God. Although the two overlap to some extent in that they are both Muslim groups, many in each camp see the other as the exact opposite of Islam and believe the two versions cannot coexist comfortably.

Pre-Islamic and Non-Islamic Tribal Customs

Another characteristic of tribal Islam, one that infuriates the literalists, is its pre-Islamic and non-Islamic tribal customs. Not sanctioned by Islam, but widely perceived to be Islamic, are syncretic practices such as honor killings and female circumcision, which are a holdover from pre-Islamic tribal traditions and are prevalent among many tribal societies. Similarly, many such societies deny the fundamental rights given to women in Islam, including the right to inherit property, initiate divorce proceedings, and give their permission before marriage. Tribal Islam is embedded in a traditional world of spirits, magic, and spells wherein tribesmen conduct rain ceremonies in the dry Saharan sands in the name of Allah, the Asir tribesmen in Saudi Arabia pray facing the sun and with their backs to Mecca, and a Tausug imam in the Philippines can ritually become the Prophet by reading an Arabic incantation while holding a dagger and spear.⁵¹

The syncretic nature of tribal Islam and the durability of pre-Islamic customs are perhaps best demonstrated by “trial by ordeal,” known in the West from the witch hunts of medieval Europe. This custom, fused with the trappings of Islam, incorporates the elements of a physical ordeal to prove criminal guilt or innocence. I first came across this practice as the commissioner of Sibi Division in Baluchistan in the mid-1980s when I found the Bugti tribe in my charge.⁵² Faced with serious offenses such as murder, rape, or kidnapping, for example, the Bugti tribe resorted to trial by fire, locally known as *asa janti*, “to put in fire.” The entire proceedings were given an Islamic sheen, with a religious figure usually conducting the ritual. This person would walk around the fire seven times while holding up the Quran and then address the holy book seven times, the number seven having significance in Islamic mythology and sanctioned as special in the Quran, and in a loud voice pronounce: “The power of truth rests in you. If this person is guilty, he should burn; if innocent, he should not.” Turning to the fire, he would mention the name of the accused and the alleged crime and say, “If he is guilty he should burn; if not, Oh fire, be cold in the name of God Almighty and the Holy Quran.” The accused would then take seven steps while barefoot through the fire. Once finished, he would have his feet washed and placed in a bowl of fresh blood from goats he had purchased. The figure conducting the ceremony and others present would then examine the feet for marks of burning. If there were none, the accused would be declared innocent, and if signs of burning were present, the verdict would be guilty.

The fire ritual clearly originated in a pre-Islamic past. Both the Zoroastrian and Hindu religions accorded fire a central role in their rituals. Surya is the sun god, and Agni, the son of Brahma, personifies fire. It is said that “Agni shall purify everything that enters his flames.” In one of the most celebrated stories from the ancient Sanskrit epic *Ramayana*, Sita, the ideal wife of Lord Ram, was kidnapped by Ravan and, when eventually returned to her husband, underwent ordeal by fire to prove that she was still “pure.” Ignoring the pre-Islamic origins of the ritual, its Muslim supporters will argue it is surely Islamic. For them, it proves *khuda ki shan*, “the glory of God,” and establishes the Quran’s power. The accused and the plaintiff both preferred this method to the delayed processes of Pakistani courts, which drag cases out for several years. Here, justice was delivered immediately, however crude and unlikely it may have been.

Trial by ordeal is also found in the Middle East and has been observed as recently as the summer of 2006.⁵³ In grievous criminal cases without witnesses, the Bedouin tribes of the Sinai and Negev practice trial by ordeal using both fire and water in a ritual called *bisha*. Here the accused individual is called on to lick a large spoon heated in a charcoal fire. At the beginning of the ceremony, the *mubasha*, the leader of the ceremony, who is considered an intermediary with God, recites the al-Fatiha, the opening chapter of the Quran. He then announces

to the gathered crowd, “They will lick three times and will be left in God’s hands.” The *mubasha* tells the accused individual, “God is one,” and asks, “Will you lick for that which is written?” The response is, “Yes, I will. I put my trust in God. Muhammad, God is one.”⁵⁴ The accused then licks the heated spoon three times, washes out his or her mouth with water three times, and has the tongue examined by the *mubasha*. If the defendant’s tongue is blistered or burned, the verdict is guilty, but if unharmed, it is innocent. There is also evidence of a similar ritual among the Yemeni Asir tribes of southern Saudi Arabia.⁵⁵

The Bedouin ceremony derives from a story of Moses found in Hebrew *midrash*, or teachings. The story recounts that when Moses was three years old, he was brought before the pharaoh, who had been warned that Moses would one day usurp his throne. Setting a gold crown and a burning ember in front of Moses, the pharaoh had him select one. If Moses chose the crown, the pharaoh would send him to his death, but if he chose the ember, this would disprove the prophecy. As he was reaching for the crown, the angel Gabriel appeared before Moses and pushed his hand toward the ember. Gabriel then made Moses pick up the ember and carry it to his mouth to lick it, thereby proving his innocence.

Trial by ordeal not only predates Islam but is rejected by Islamic jurisprudence, which relies on presiding judges who are well versed in Islamic court procedures and precedents, laws of evidence, credible witnesses, and recorded statements. Considered blasphemy by the Islamic scholar, mumbo jumbo and witchcraft by the Muslim modernist, trial by ordeal nonetheless offered many in the tribe a sense of identity and therefore pride.

Muslim Tribes in History

Despite the exotic nature of some of their customs, tribal societies are far from marginal in Muslim history. Most have proud memories of contributing in sophisticated ways to the *ummah*, or global Muslim community. Learning and scholarship are widely respected among them, as is the case with the Cyrenaica Sanusi tribes in North Africa and the Uyghurs in Central Asia. Some tribal societies evolved into kingdoms, notably the Fulani in West Africa, the Yemenis of Asir in the Arabian Peninsula, the Acehnese in Indonesia, and the Tausug in the Philippines. These societies established dynasties whose kings came to rule over more powerful neighboring centers in which the tribes were soon assimilated. Pukhtun tribal dynasties from Afghanistan—for example, the Khiljis, Lodhis, and Suris—became noted kings of Delhi.

Sher Shah Suri, the enlightened Suri king of Delhi, established an administration that would become the envy of other rulers, while the Tuareg of the Sahel founded one of the most celebrated dynasties in West Africa, the Almoravids, whose rule extended to southern Spain. Until recently, some tribes enjoyed semi-independent status in their own states with their own rulers—as did the Orakzai



Pukhtuns represent the largest Muslim tribal population in the world and have contributed to every sphere of life: Zakir Hussain, former president of India (used with permission of Narayanaswamy Ulaganathan and Subhajyoti Banerjee).



Shah Rukh Khan, Bollywood superstar (bollywoodhungama.com).



Ghaffar Khan, the “Frontier Gandhi,” with Mahatma Gandhi (courtesy of Gandhi Memorial Center).



Imran Khan, who led Pakistan to victory over England in the Cricket World Cup in 1992 (flickr.com).

Pukhtun tribe, granted its own princely state of Bhopal under the Mughal Empire, the Yusufzai rulers of Rampur in India, the Khan of Kalat in Baluchistan, and the Wali of Swat in the North-West Frontier Province. Some even achieved independent rule, as did the Pukhtun royal dynasty that governed Afghanistan.

Some of the most celebrated Muslim figures in history have a tribal background: the historian Ibn Khaldun was descended from Yemeni tribesmen; Saladin and the Sufi scholar Said Nursi were Kurdish; Usman dan Fodio and his daughter Asmau, whose voluminous poetry continues to inspire millions today, belonged to the Fulani people; the religious scholar and leader Imam Shamil, who fought Czarist Russia, was an Avar; Baybars, the Mamluk sultan, who halted

the Mongol juggernaut in its tracks and thus changed the shape of Middle East history, was Circassian; and Ali Haidar, who won the Victoria Cross, the highest British military decoration, for his outstanding valor against the German army during the Second World War, was a Pukhtun.

In spite of their martial reputation, the Pukhtun have produced celebrated artists, sportsmen, statesmen, Sufi saints, and advocates of nonviolence. Some of the most glittering Bollywood movie stars have a Pukhtun background, among them Muhammed Yusuf Khan, with the screen name Dilip Kumar; Mumtaz Jahan, known as Madhubala; and the current box office stars Saif Ali Khan and Shah Rukh Khan. Pukhtuns—Imran Khan and Mansoor Ali Khan, known as Tiger Pataudi and the father of Saif Ali Khan—have successfully led the cricket teams of Pakistan and India, respectively, and the Khan brothers from Peshawar in Pakistan dominated world squash for decades. Pukhtuns have reached the highest levels of government in modern times: Ayub Khan, a Tarin Pukhtun, became president of Pakistan; Zakir Hussain, an Afridi Pukhtun, president of India; and Salman Khurshid, Zakir Hussain's grandson, was appointed India's external affairs minister in October 2012. They have produced Sufi saints like Pir Baba and the Akhund of Swat and world-renowned leaders who advocated nonviolence like Ghaffar Khan.

METHODOLOGY

This is the third and final part of a trilogy of books in which I examine relations between the United States and the Muslim world. The first of these focused on Muslim societies in the Muslim world and their perceptions of the United States and its allies in the West.⁵⁶ The second examined Muslim communities in the United States and American views of Islam.⁵⁷ While conducting these studies, I discovered that the numerous and influential Muslim groups with a tribal background that live on borders between states and form the periphery of their nation were often overlooked by many in the discussion about U.S. and Muslim relations. Hence this work is concerned with precisely those interstices between borders where tribal Islam is found.

A good deal of my academic work and professional career has been spent studying and administering tribal communities, the one part of my life feeding the other. At different times, I was the political agent in charge of South Waziristan and Orakzai Agencies. I served as commissioner of three divisions consecutively in Baluchistan. My Ph.D. thesis focused exclusively on the Mohmand tribe in the Tribal Areas of Pakistan, and I coauthored a study that compared tribes across continents and regions.⁵⁸ My study of Waziristan, first published in 1983, found a second life after 9/11.⁵⁹ Zeenat, my wife, who accompanied me during my fieldwork and postings, and our daughter Amineh, as she grew into a professional anthropologist, supplemented my information with valuable insights on tribal women.

I felt I had contributed as much as I could to this field and moved on in the 1990s to what I felt was the looming challenge on the horizon: a growing clash between Western and Muslim civilizations. I devoted the next decades, an effort accelerated by 9/11, to generate interfaith dialogue and build bridges between different religions. My most recent studies, *Journey into Islam* (2007) and *Journey into America* (2010), were part of the same momentum. The latter of the two won the American Book Award in 2011, and I was able to speak of its themes in the media, including the *Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. In the midst of trying to explain Islam to America, I became concerned about reports filtering through the thick curtain of obfuscation and disinformation hanging over the Tribal Areas of Pakistan. All was not well there. My thoughts drifted to my earlier academic interest—tribal societies. I had left them decades ago, those rather special people, seemingly safe and secure in their remote mountains and valleys. Although a posting in Waziristan was considered one of the most difficult and dangerous of assignments, I often thought of its land and people with nostalgia.

The feeling was not unlike that expressed by Sir Evelyn Howell on looking back on his time in Waziristan from the tranquility of Cambridge in England. Howell had shared his sentiments shortly before he died with his friend Caroe, who wrote to me: “When I met him in Cambridge about four years ago he said so many years had gone by. But he would feel happier in the mountain ranges of Waziristan. It was, he said, precisely because that was the most dangerous period of his life that it had become the period that he loved most. Often in his dreams he found himself in Waziristan, and his heart flying in those precipitous gorges.”⁶⁰

That is why, when I first heard that President Pervez Musharraf had launched an ill-thought-out and hastily conceived military invasion of Waziristan in 2004, ostensibly under American pressure, I was distressed. As a political officer once in charge there, I knew these actions would not end well for the United States, Pakistan, or the tribes. I then heard of Musharraf’s order to attack the Baluch tribal leader Nawab Akbar Bugti, whom I knew when I was commissioner in Baluchistan. The military action in 2006 inevitably resulted in the Nawab’s death. With mounting anxiety, I began making inquiries, only to receive disturbing reports from both Waziristan and Baluchistan that confirmed my fears. It was time, I felt, to pause and reflect on the missing part of the jigsaw puzzle in the trilogy. I hoped my expertise in tribal studies would benefit all concerned—the communities on the periphery and the people at the center, Americans and non-Americans alike.

Reminders of my past life began to arrive in Washington. One came in the form of a letter from a young man called Akbar. He said his father, Iftikhar Ahmed, named him after me as a token of respect and affection—his father had been my personal assistant in Orakzai Agency. Iftikhar then went on to become a political officer himself in North Waziristan Agency, where he was recently assassinated by the Taliban. I recall Iftikhar from my days as political agent as a

quiet, gentle, and energetic young man. I was sorry to hear that he had become a target of the violence in Waziristan. I realized quickly that the relationship between the tribes of Waziristan, predominately the Wazir and the Mahsud, and the central government of Pakistan had become complicated after 9/11, and each party was now involved in the war on terror in different ways. The result was widespread chaos in the Tribal Areas. I began to hear of suicide bombers, and by 2010 even more disturbing reports of female suicide bombers, although their activity appeared to be restricted to Peshawar and the northern agencies. I knew that they were violating both tribal and Islamic traditions that categorically reject suicide and indiscriminate murder. I sensed that something terrible was happening among the people I had served.

The images of the people I had once met in the remote villages and settlements now came flooding back to me. These people were invariably poor, but they always impressed me with their dignity, faith, and hospitality. At that time, with all the authority I had vested in me as the representative of the central state, I could assist in so many ways. If I could do nothing for them, they still seemed happy to simply talk with me over a cup of tea. All they wanted in return was to be heard; they were grateful that by being with them I had acknowledged their humanity, and by treating them with respect I had honored them. Now, decades later and thousands of miles away, I felt that in my own limited way, as an academic on campus, I could employ my scholarship to give them a voice.

Many anthropologists, once secure in the safety of their professional lives, tend to return to their fieldwork location. They have many reasons; some have an urge to write their memoirs, others to express plain nostalgia. I, too, returned to the past. My journey had a specific purpose, however. It was to build a model of society based in the time I was there, which would allow comparison with the present. One could thus see what had changed and what remained of the past. I was particularly interested in those social institutions, such as leadership structures and the code of honor, that had helped to define society in my time.

I also had personal reasons for feeling emotionally involved with the Pukhtun. My mother was the daughter of Sir Hashmatullah Khan, whose Barakzai forefathers came from Afghanistan to India. Zeenat, my wife, is the granddaughter of the Wali of Swat, the direct descendant of the Akhund of Swat, and my daughter Amineh is married to Arsallah Khan Hoti, whose Hoti clan is considered the aristocrats among the Yusufzai, the aristocratic tribe of the Pukhtun. I believed I understood the way of the Pukhtuns and admired them. My father was the opposite of tribal in every way. Born in Allahabad, India, deep in the Ganges Valley, descended from holy lineages, he was a senior civil servant with the British Raj, and then, when it was created, in Pakistan, and spent the last part of his career with the United Nations in Bangkok. His gentle, inclusive Sufi Islam gave him the moral compass to interact with the different cultures and religions

he encountered over the span of his life contentedly and calmly. I admired him immensely, and in him I saw the Sufi precept *sulh-i-kul* or “peace with all.”

Besides, as a father and grandfather myself, I was concerned about the kind of world my children and grandchildren would be living in. If the Pukhtun and Baluch faced such severe challenges, I could only imagine the predicament of other similar tribes like the Somalis, Yemenis, Bedouin, Kurds, Fulani, or Tuareg. I contemplated the fate of these traditional peoples, renowned in history as proud warriors, and worried that they would be vulnerable and adrift in the age of globalization.

Reactions from the Field

As my team and I began putting together the material for this book, interviewing individuals associated with our case studies and publishing articles about the people we were studying, we received positive feedback indicating that we were on the right track. When Al Jazeera offered to publish a series of op-eds, I coauthored them with Frankie Martin and Harrison Akins, my senior research assistants, each one covering a different country and its problematic relationship with its periphery. With this exercise, we hoped to obtain a sense of how people would react to the ideas we were exploring in our study. The responses from the individuals living in the periphery were overwhelmingly positive in that by sharing their innermost thinking, it confirmed for us both the direction of our study and its integrity. After reading the article on his people, a Sinai Bedouin tribesman sent the following message:

I am Said Khedr, from the Aleghat Bedouin tribe. I would like to thank you for writing the article, “No Arab Spring for the Sinai Bedouin.” It is spreading quickly through the community here, and our many friends around the world. I hope that the Egyptian authorities will learn from your example, for they have never taken the time to study us or get to know us as you have. We are finding our feet in the new political system in South Sinai. Articles like this, by people like you, are very welcome support. Thank you again, and if I can ever be of help in the Sinai, please let me know.

After he read our op-ed on the Tausug, Neldy Jolo, a Tausug writer and activist from the Philippines, wrote to Frankie—addressing him as “Sir” out of traditional respect and with no intention, I am sure, of appropriating Queen Elizabeth’s prerogative to confer knighthood: “Walaikumsalam Sir Frankie,” he began. “Warm regards from our Tausug comrades. Thank you very much. Your article last time indeed help[ed] and boosted the Tausug cry for peace. It really helps. Your coming book is indeed helpful to any people of the world, especially those of oppressed.” An Eritrean reading our op-ed on Eritrea expressed his gratitude: “Thank you so much for writing about this. It’s so rare to hear news agencies speak about Eritrean people. . . . [T]hey have become the Forgotten people. We really need more people to speak out!”

Wakar Uddin, a professor at Pennsylvania State University and a leading figure in the Rohingya community, became an ardent supporter of our project: “On behalf of Rohingya people, I would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to you for your persistent support for the oppressed Rohingya people. Again, your article will go a long way in fighting for the cause of Rohingya human rights and political rights. Thank you very much.” Iyad Youghar, chairman of the International Circassian Council, was equally enthusiastic about our Al Jazeera op-ed: “This is a great paper on Circassians. It is the best I have read. It is like a statement Circassians will be able to use always to tell about our plight.”

Ufuk Gokcen, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation’s (OIC’s) ambassador to the United Nations, also acknowledged our efforts: “I am following with admiration and appreciation the series of articles that you have been posting one by one on the issues that are part of your new study.” The OIC is one of the few Muslim organizations that have made courageous, if not entirely successful, attempts to improve the plight of societies included in our study, such as the Rohingya. The scholarly OIC secretary general, Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, appreciated the scope of the project and noted its importance given the lack of “justice and human rights and the humanitarian crisis that exists in many areas.”

After I was interviewed for the Pakistani newspaper *Dawn* by Malik Siraj Akbar, a Baluch journalist who had been given political asylum in Washington, D.C., and my article on Baluchistan appeared in Al Jazeera, Malik sent this note: “Your presence among us is a blessing and your voice is one of sanity in the midst of insanity that prevails and dominates Pakistan’s power circles. I have heard from many Baluch friends who loved your quotes and advice. They may not have your contact details but they asked me from Baluchistan to convey their gratitude to you for your kind support.” The article’s comment section included expressions of encouragement like “Dr. Ahmed is an asset to all Muslims. Very intelligent, nice and logical person, wish we had someone of his calibre at the top of Pakistan’s ruling class right now.”

My team and I also received negative responses from people who felt we were exaggerating the suffering of people on the periphery. Commentators who represented their country’s majority views were always more numerous and well organized than those on the periphery. Their views were as fixed about the periphery as those of the periphery about them. We were accused, especially me, of being “American agents,” purveyors of “Zionist ideas,” and “Muslim fundamentalists,” and I was called a “Muslim traitor.”

Examining the Interstices

All members of my team were meticulous in attempting to locate information for our case studies. We read as much of the literature as possible—colonial, literary, ethnographic, and the post-9/11 work that is often framed in the

context of the war on terror. We interviewed members of both the center and the periphery. We made a special effort to track down those from the periphery in the field and were able to interview them both in face-to-face situations and through the marvels of Skype. We shared ideas and material in the book with the acknowledged experts and scholars at the established universities. However, we need to add a caveat about statistics concerning tribal societies. Due to their remote nature, the displacement of populations, and the reluctance of central governments to acknowledge them, population figures are difficult to ascertain with accuracy.

We also found that invariably all figures relating to instances of mass killing involving the center and the periphery are disputed, as in the case of Armenians under the Ottomans and Bengalis at the hands of the Pakistanis. Our approach has been to consult the most authoritative sources possible. It is important to point out for the record that even in our post-9/11 age of globalization with the unprecedented and free access to information, figures of numbers killed as a result of drone strikes and other military actions, or even confirmation that they ever took place or where they took place, are shrouded in darkness. The American Civil Liberties Union, for example, estimated that some 4,000 people have been killed by drone strikes, but this figure has been questioned by other organizations. There appears to be a deliberate attempt by official agencies in the war on terror to obfuscate and distort.

Although this study is anchored in the field of anthropology, I am acutely aware that other disciplines outside my own need to be consulted in order to fully examine tribal societies. We therefore turned to political scientists to tell us about the political systems in which they operate and the limitations of the state that they must deal with. We needed scholars of religion to inform us whether in fact some of the actions of the Muslim tribes can be traced to Quranic verses and whether their use is sanctioned. Authorities in international law were best suited to comment on matters such as rendition, regime change, and the legality of military actions like drone strikes. Human rights activists dealt with subjects such as torture and violations of the rights of individuals. Experts in international relations and development commented on the role of multinational corporations in our age of globalization and their impact on the periphery. In sum, our methodology has been to rely on a number of disciplines in order to develop as full and as rich an understanding of our subject as possible.

When I discuss “segmentary lineage systems” and “models,” readers must not lose sight of the fact that these are abstract terms employed to provide an idea of reality on the basis of surveys and aggregates. So when I place communities into categories, keep in mind that this is little more than an exercise in imagination and merely the basis for further discussion and debate. These categories are not watertight and frequently overlap.

Our findings are presented in the form of forty “case studies” of peripheral societies and their relationship to the central state. These are not typical case studies that are expected to provide detailed ethnographic descriptions of history, culture, and contemporary affairs of one particular community. While we have examined the societies represented by these cases thoroughly, our method is to select the most striking episodes, events, and anecdotes to illustrate the relationship between center and periphery.

In examining distinct ethnic and tribal groups spread over three continents—they span Muslim communities from Morocco to the Philippines—we first had to decide how to classify them. We chose the sociological route by dividing them into four broad social categories. The first category consists of our core case studies of segmentary lineage systems that have a highly developed code of honor and that have been the main targets of drones in America’s war on terror. These societies have over time split into nang (honor) and qalang (taxes and rent) populations, the former being the one explored in this book. Our core case studies examine four societies of the nang type: the Pukhtun of Afghanistan and the Tribal Areas of Pakistan; the Somali of the Horn of Africa; the Yemenis of Yemen and the Asir and Najran regions of Saudi Arabia; and the Kurds of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria.

The second category consists of Muslim societies rooted in the segmentary lineage system in the recent or distant past but not yet widely associated with the U.S. drone war. Our case studies in this category, listed alphabetically, include the Acehnese of Aceh Province in Northern Sumatra, Indonesia; the Ahwazi, Qashqai, and Bakhtiari of southern Iran; the Albanians of Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Macedonia; the Avars and Lezgins of Russian Dagestan and Azerbaijan; the Azeris of Azerbaijan and northern Iran; the Baluch of Pakistan and Iran; the Bedouin tribes split between the Egyptian Sinai, the Negev Desert of Israel, and the Palestinian territories; the Rif and Atlas Berbers of Morocco; the Chechens of Chechnya in Russia; the Circassians of the Republics of Kabardino-Balkaria, Adyghe, and Karachay-Cherkessia in Russia, with their diaspora populations in Turkey, Jordan, Syria, and the West; the Fulani of northern Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, and many other West African countries; the Ingush of Ingushetia and North Ossetia, Russia; the Jola of southern Senegal and The Gambia; the Kabyle Berbers of northern Algeria; the Kanuri of northeastern Nigeria, Chad, and Niger; the Karakalpaks of western Uzbekistan; the Nuba of southern Sudan along the new border with South Sudan; the Oromo of Ethiopia and Kenya; the Palestinians of Gaza and the West Bank; the Sahrawi of Moroccan-administered Western Sahara, with their large refugee populations in western Algeria; the Talysh of Azerbaijan and Iran; the Tuareg of the Sahel found predominately in Mali, Niger, and Algeria; the Turkmens of Turkmenistan, Iran, and Afghanistan; the Uyghur of Xinjiang Province of western China; and the Uzbeks of Uzbekistan, Afghanistan,

and Kyrgyzstan. In addition, we examined holy lineages and tribes that became royal dynasties, including those in Morocco, Jordan, and on the Arabian Peninsula in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar, along with the stateless workers of the Gulf nations known as the Bidoon.

The third category consists of Muslim societies that do not operate on segmentary lineage principles but are segmented tribal societies organized into clans not based on the lineage charter. These societies nonetheless have a highly developed code of honor and thus exhibit important characteristics of the nang segmentary lineage tribesmen. Segmented tribal case studies cover the Tausug, Maguindanao, and other Muslim groups of the southern Philippines, and the Malays of South Thailand.

Fourth, I provide supplementary case studies of Muslim societies that are not necessarily tribal in the context of our study but do reflect the larger tension between center and periphery. These groups include the Cham of Cambodia and Vietnam; the Kashmiris of Indian and Pakistani Kashmir; the Mandinka people of The Gambia, Ivory Coast, and several other West African countries; and the Rohingya of Arakan State in western Burma/Myanmar, with a large refugee population in eastern Bangladesh and elsewhere in South Asia.

Apart from the forty case studies, additional material is also provided to support the argument that if the center does not accommodate Muslim peoples on the periphery, it will most likely treat non-Muslim minority communities in the same unfair manner. Non-Muslims in Muslim nations—Christians in Egypt, Bahai in Iran, and Hindus and Christians in Pakistan—have long complained about being persecuted. But similarly, non-Muslim peripheries in non-Muslim nations, such as the Tibetans and Mongolians in China and the Nagas, Adivasis, and Sikhs in India, have a long list of grievances against the center. Each case is different, yet each falls within the frame of this study.

In all the cases just mentioned, and there are many more in each category, the center is failing to protect its citizens on the periphery and is not giving them their due rights and privileges according to the principles of modern statehood. The poor relationship between center and periphery is clearly not confined to Muslim groups but reflects a larger problem concerning the way in which the modern state is conceived and administered. Even a cursory glance at the case material makes it clear that wherever the tribes have lived and however fierce their resistance, the intensity and scale of the onslaught from the center has created the same results: massive internal disruption in the periphery that has consequences for the center. But these peripheral communities responded differently. Those of Waziristan, for example, were not prepared to submit without a fight and inflicted damage on their tormentors, while the Rohingya appeared to embrace their fate with baffling passivity. The reasons for these different reactions are explored in the following chapters.

The book is divided into six chapters. As should be clear by now, the first provides an outline of the main arguments. Chapter 2 is a study of Waziristan built on sound information and research, confirming that the Wazir and Mahsud tribes living there closely approximated to the segmentary lineage system. The terrain and nature of Waziristan's tribes have historically ensured the maximum possible isolation. I have written extensively about the region, lived among its people, and come to know its clans, their code, and their customs. I am in touch with them and am aware of their current situation. My information from three decades ago—the standard anthropological period for one generation—is used to construct the “Waziristan model” and to compare the situation then with that of today and thereby determine what changes have taken place over this period.

As a rough and ready construct, the Waziristan model makes it possible to examine similar tribal societies elsewhere in the context of their current relationship with their central governments. Indeed, elements of the Waziristan model can be recognized in the Pukhtun of the Tribal Areas in Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan, the Chechens, the Bedouin, the Kurds, and the tribes of Somalia, Yemen, and eastern Libya. It can also be seen among the Tausug in the Philippines and the Malay in Thailand, with their segmented clans and highly developed codes of honor. The model may also shed light on what contributes to peace and stability in tribal society and what does not. This is especially relevant in the post-9/11 world.

The next three chapters are structurally linked, and the findings in one have bearing on the others. Chapter 3 is about the dilemma an individual in tribal society faces in balancing the compulsions of religion and those of tribal customs. Chapter 4 turns to tribal relations with the center, and the need for it to accommodate the periphery while maintaining the writ of the state. It is the longest chapter because it depicts the historical sweep of the case studies and puts them in the context of the book's conceptual frame; without this background, it is well-nigh impossible to fully understand relations between the center and periphery. Chapter 5 continues the narrative in the context of the United States struggling to balance its security concerns and the imperative to preserve human rights and civil liberties. Together, the three chapters illustrate the tribal, national, and international levels of conflict since 9/11.

Chapter 6 shows why the United States—despite its resolve, resources, and sophisticated techniques in information gathering—has failed to understand the nature of tribal societies and the consequences of this failure. It calls for a realignment of the paradigm propelling the war on terror thus far and presents our findings and concrete recommendations for shifting from a confrontational approach to one aimed at peace and stability. Otherwise, death and destruction will continue their rampage across the world, bringing entire communities to the brink of cultural, economic, and even physical disaster. This volume's journey into tribal societies begins in Waziristan, the epicenter of the war on terror.