

Recollections of Bamian in the 1930s

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From late fall, 1966, to summer, 1968, I was doing field work in the Bamian valley and its environs, the provincial capital of Bamian province, Afghanistan. As part of that research I collected a number of statements by people in the region that I want to make available in a form that could be helpful to other scholars. Many of the statements provide clues to the nature of social life and affairs in previous decades as well as during the period of field work.

Of course statements like these have a number of problems: people have evident limitations in their knowledge, and indeed convey misinformation, often unintentionally, because they are biased by their vantage points and interests, and, with respect to their recollections of the past they are selective in memory. Just as people create a sense of place and significance in their stories about present situations they create a sense of the past through their own accounts of it, and in any case the telling itself is typically influenced by issues vital to the narrators at the time of telling. Narratives create reality as much as they reflect it. So we cannot take what people tell us at face value, as if it were a precisely accurate representation of the situations described.

But what people say about their pasts as well as of their current situations does reveal a great deal about them and their social worlds. Their narratives give cognitive and emotional coherence to their experience, enabling them to define and negotiate their experience, to conceive of what to expect and what to take as the operating causes for what happens to them. Narratives contain schemas that typify situations, display prototypes of events and roles, showing ideal forms of behavior and their consequences, and so reveal the beliefs, attitudes, ideologies, visions, and dreams that inform people's life. Stories illuminate what is real and important to people. As idealized portrayals of lived experience they reveal what is considered the status quo, the grounds of authority that are taken for granted, and so invest the experiential landscape with moral significance. Even without explicit reference to a moral issue narratives can display what a speaker thinks about the behavior of actors by evoking extant beliefs and knowledge. Oral statements can thus be useful historical texts even if they are not to be taken at face value. * {Oral History Research Office, © Columbia University Libraries 5/09/01 Philosophy behind the Collection, <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/div/oral/philosophy.html>}. For a fuller discussion of these issues as well as an extensive list of sources see Brison 1992. }

Bamian in early 1930s

This is our perspective in examining a statement about an event in eastern Bamian that may have occurred in the early 1930s. Actually what we know about that region at that time is rather feeble. We know that in previous centuries the Hazaras had been highly stratified, dominated by powerful chiefs known as mirs who were supported by cadres of close kinsmen and dependents, which gave them prominence in their communities. But as a result of a widespread rebellion against the Amir of Kabul in 1891-93 the Hazaras were thoroughly humiliated. Their leaders -- not only themirs but also virtually all other notable figures -- were either executed or imprisoned, and hundreds, possibly thousands, of ordinary people were carried off into slavery (Kakar 1971:159 ff. {Kakar, M. Hasan. 1971. Afghanistan: A

Study of Internal Political Developments, 1880-1896. Kabul: privately published. }; Mousavi 1998:120 ff.). {Mousavi, S. A. 1998. The Hazaras of Afghanistan: An Historical, Cultural, Economic and Political Study. Surry, UK: Curzon. } But the structure of social affairs in the Hazarajat in subsequent decades is relatively little known.

It is possible only to surmise what was going on generally. The Kabul regime was gaining administrative strength in its provinces (wul'yats, governorships) throughout this period. Governors were receiving better military support and larger administrative staffs. Courts were being established. In fact, provinces were getting smaller; the four great provinces of the country, Kabul (which early in the twentieth century included Bamian), Kandahar, Herat, and Mazar-i-Sharif, were divided and subdivided until there were seventeen provinces in the 1950s (based on a map produced in the 1950s in my possession) and as many as twenty-eight in the 1960s. The trajectory of change within the country at large was toward greater central control, more governmental access to local populations, and thus more involvement in local goings on. Despite a general preference among the local populations for resolving disputes through the mediation and adjudication of their own notables, more disputes were being brought to state officials for resolution.

In Bamian the functions of government were no doubt fairly limited early in the twentieth century. A governor had been established in the markaz of Bamian supported by a few gendarmes in the nineteenth century. Presumably his main role was to ensure the peace, but he would surely have been commissioned to keep abreast of affairs in the region and to enforce government policy. He exerted much of his influence through the representatives of the local populations, locally called mirs (or by the state maliks), who were required to collect taxes for the government, conscript troops, and levy workers for government projects as needed. We can presume that by early twentieth century the powers of the mirs were declining. They held their office essentially by the sufferance of the provincial governor, who was gradually able to enforce state policies with greater effectiveness. By the 1930s state officials were no doubt looming formidably in local affairs. Thus, local mechanisms of social control were being replaced by the institutions of government.

But what were those local mechanisms? How were the various populations of the rural areas organized? This is the value of the oral statements I collected in the 1960s, as they describe events and situations that took place in the speaker's own experience or were described to them by parents or grandparents. Such statements provide clues as to how the society was structured and social interaction managed.

A wedding story

In this article I examine a statement that provides some indication of how affairs were carried on among the Hazaras in the eastern sector of Bamian in approximately 1930. The statement was made by a local notable in Shibar, Mir Gholam Hasan, about problems he had in obtaining a wife from Sheykh Ali, a region to the north of Shibar. The narrative was part of a much longer oral rehearsal of his life. The event he described took place when he was a young man. As he was in his 60s when I knew him I surmise that it occurred in the time of Nadir Shah (1929-1933). When I knew him he was the mir for the Ismailis in Shibar. He could read and write and also had some land and a brother living next door who was also fairly well off. That is, he had some skills for dealing with the government and a bit of leverage in his community. In fact, this was not enough to hold on to his position, as within a few years a rival would bring him down and take his

place. His duties brought him into contact with government officials at the Alaqaḍḍri (a subgovernorship) in Shibar near his home and at the governor's offices situated at the Markaz of Bamian. Because he had served as mir for some time he was fairly well known in the wider community. He personally knew the pir, the sacred leader, of the Ismailis, Sayyed-iKayan, and the pirs several sons as well as most other mirs and arbḥbs of the province. In his long life he had had several wives, four of whom had died, but he had no male issue. Two daughters had been born to one of his wives some years earlier and they had grown up, married, and now had children of their own. When I knew Mir GholamHasan he had two wives, one about thirty years old and the other about twenty. The younger one had in fact been selected with the help of the older wife, as she had borne him only one child, a daughter who was still small. The younger woman, it was hoped, would bear him a son, but as it turned out she had tuberculosis and would pass away while I was in the area. The story that follows (minimally polished) is about how he obtained one of his earlier wives, actually the mother of the two married daughters; it was intended to show that families did not like to give up their daughters to suitors from far away.

Before I got this wife there was a man named Gholam Reza from Shek Ali who was her father [of the girl], but he died. A man named MirzaGholamOsayn married the widow, who already had four daughters by Gholam Reza. This MirzaGholamOsayn said to me that he would give one of them to me, but he said, "Give me 1000 afghanis." He promised his first daughter, whom I had already seen. When I brought the 1000 afghanis, I asked for her according to our agreement, but he didn't agree to give her right then... Then twenty days later, when I went again to ask about the marriage, the man asked for 10,000 afghanis for the bride price. So in ten or twelve days I obtained the money, and took it to him. Then the man made a promise that on a certain day I and my people should come. "Send your gifts and we will have the marriage."

The gifts and food were to be sent a few days in advance of the wedding feast. So I put 10 ser of flour on a donkey, and 10 ser of rice on another donkey, along with two ser of rowghḥn (clarified butter) and five sheep and 40 meters of cloth and sent them to him (ser = 16 paw = 15 lbs.). Then we went a few days later to the agreed-upon marriage feast. The distance was great, so I didn't take a lot of men, only forty. Along the way MirzaGholamOsayn came with all the mirs of Sheykh Ali on horses. We were on horses too, and they came to a place and stopped us on the road. Then MirzaGholamOsayn asked us "Where are you going?" And he said, "Go back to your house, there will be no marriage now." Then I said, "I can't go back now, I have brought my qawm (clan, lineage) and my people. If I go back now, I will be embarrassed." I had with me Mir Awdur and SayyedTabar, and they took the biggest man of Sheykh Ali aside and sat with him -- this man was FirqaIsḥḥn. Then they offered him a turban and a cloak (chapan) to persuade MirzaGholamOsayn to go on with the marriage. Then this man went with them to the house of MirzaOsayn and all went there with them. This was the month of Ramazan (the month of fast), and on the way these men with me had not eaten at all. When we got there MirzaGholamOsayn told us that there

was no food there; it had all been eaten. Then I bought two sheep from someone else in Sheykh Ali, and I bought rogh?n and rice and flour, etc., and then we took this to him but he still didn't give this to our people. They were left hungry all night. Then MirzaGholamOsayn brought a mullah, MullaFaqir, to do the nek? (wedding ceremony) and he sealed the marriage. During the night MirzaGholamOsayn fed ten of the elders from his own community (deh village, hamlet) in two separate rooms, but the others of us were left hungry. That night we gave this rich man the turban and chapan and to three other elders we gave three turbans. Then at two in the morning he told me and our people that we must leave now. And he said, "If the people of Sheykh Ali know that you take the girl you will not be able to have her" -- that is, we should take her secretly. So we took her that night, and went home. Our men had been away for two days and nights without eating any food. They arrived about two or three in the afternoon.

The next day early in the morning the people of Sheykh Ali came to MirzaGholamOsayn, maybe 100 men, and said they would not allow him to give this girl to the people of Dargh?n (Mir GholamHasan's lineage). When he told them that the girl had already been taken away they were much distressed, but they went away to their own homes. At my house I held a big party for two or three nights, had musicians and lots of food, and a hundred fifty or two hundred people came.

The idea of these people was that a woman should not go out of their valley. They were angry at me because I wanted to take away that girl. They said, "Are there no men in Sheykh Ali that we should give the girl to him? We are people of Sheykh Ali and he is from the people of Dargh?n. She should stay here among us, she should not go out. We have plenty of men for our women." They thought, "It is not good that our qawm should not build a household while another qawm does so with one of our women."

The only point of MirzaGholamOsayn was that he should take the money and lie his way out of it. He is now in Kabul.

After four or five years these two daughters were born (to this wife). Then she died. One year after her death, this Mirza (GholamOsayn) came and said he thought I had killed her. He said, "If I had had time I would have taken blood from you because of this."

This MirzaGholamOsayn caused a lot of trouble for his own people in Sheykh Ali. He went to the alaqad?r and claimed that someone had stolen this or that, then took money from this man (the one he had accused) to leave him alone. He did this several times, and then finally the people of Sheykh Ali complained that this man has given us enough trouble. He was put in jail. He was there in Charikar for one year. Then somehow he got out, although he was supposed to come to Kabul for two more years. Now he is secretly living in Kabul, and has paid a man to try to spring him out of his jail sentence.

Commentary

Some clues as to the social conventions of the time can be gleaned from this narrative, but it also leaves us with a number of questions. The clues and left-over questions are the following.

- There is no evidence of a formal adoption procedure. It was presumed that Mirza Gholam Osayn had the right to give the daughters of his new wife in marriage however he wished. There is nothing notable here except that this fact accrues more significance as we reflect on other issues discussed below.
- The prices in this story are difficult to compare with prices at other times because the value of the afghani varied. The price Mir Gholam Hasan paid may have been somewhat larger than what was being paid later. In about 1948 a relatively wealthy Hazara man paid 3 bulls, 3 large copper cooking pots, 1 muzzle loading rifle, and 3000 afghanis in silver coin. In the 1960s a bride among the Tajiks at the Bamian markaz (where things were more expensive than Shibar or Sheykh Ali) went for 10,000 cash, plus 1000 lbs of rice, 150 lbs rogh?n, 8 lambs or kids, 10 donkey-loads of wood, 4 loads of brush fuel, 150 lbs of wheat, 8 lbs kerosene, 30 lbs salt, 4 lbs tea, 35 lbs sugar, 150 lbs potatoes, 30 lbs onions, the non-cash goods being valued at 3000 afghanis in all (Canfield 1973: 125). This may have been an unusually high price; obviously the reputation of the girl and her family have much to do with the price.
- Cash was not easy to come by in this economy and the amount of it involved here seems substantial. By the 1960s cash was in broad use in the markaz of Bamian and along the roads where there was considerable traffic but in the villages of Shibar people didn't have much cash. The amounts of money demanded for this transaction in the 1930s seem much higher (in real terms) than were required in the 1960s. Most curious to me is how quickly the Mir obtained so much of it. This was a lot of money. He would have had to borrow at least some of it, perhaps most of it, and from several sources. He might have obtained some by selling some sheep or goats but he would not have sold land, which normally changes hands only *in extremis*.
- It was not uncommon for the family of the bride to prolong the solicitation process, so Mir Gholam Hasan no doubt expected to have to come up with more money. There is no hint here that he objected to the price. Suitors often had to make several contacts with the family before the final deal could be struck.
- It is notable that Mir Gholam Hasan considered a group of forty men from his community a small number at the time. In the 1960s that number would have been substantial.
- Likewise for the number of horses. Forty from Shibar, a hundred from Sheykh Ali in the 1960s nothing like so many horses were in evidence. In place of the horse, of course, come the automobile. Indeed, the few families who had been able to afford a truck were the only families that seemed to be doing better in Shibar. Most people's fortunes were declining. In the two year period I was in Bamian people I knew would rent out their land and move to the city for work. The decline in the number of horses was merely one indicator of the economic decline of the area.
- A critical kind of currency that sealed the bonds among these people was food. In this society, where storage of food could be a problem, raw food would have been especially appreciated, as it could be disposed of in different ways: given as gifts to pay off debts or cooked for guests. Twice Mir Gholam Hasan provided raw food and

both times it was used for other purposes than to feed him and his kinsmen. In such a society there was no other source of sustenance than the courtesy of one's hosts, and the fact that it was not given was an outrage. Such behavior would have seriously damaged Mirza Gholam Osayn's reputation. In such a society where food is perishable and protection requires loyal friends a reputation for trustworthiness, reliability, and consistency was a kind of currency, the basis for obtaining help and credit when needed. Such qualities were prominently displayed in the way one treated guests (Edwards 1996:67 ff. discusses hospitality as a Pushtun custom but it is no less important among the Hazaras). Hospitality was the supreme demonstration of character. A person with a reputation for niggardliness, conniving, or exploiting of friends and neighbors was vulnerable because fortunes could turn abruptly. The behavior of Mirza Gholam Osayn was outrageous.

- The feast that never took place was presumably supposed to be a public means of sealing the marriage not only between husband and wife but also between two communities. But the elders of Sheikh Ali were balking. We are not told what was going on at the feast for the Sheikh Ali elders but presumably it was given to accomplish something of interest to Mirza Gholam Osayn. Was this supposed to be a pay-off for help and loans already given? It seems evident that one reason for the feast was so that Mirza Gholam Osayn could persuade them to accept the marriage.
- The intensity of the opposition to the marriage is the point the speaker made of the story to show how resistant a community can be to the marriage of their girls to someone outside. But was this the only reason? We do not know if there was anything about Mir Gholam Hasan himself that detracted from his candidacy. Was there any animosity otherwise between the people of Darg'n and Sheikh Ali?
- There were several clues as to the way social relations were being controlled.
 - The notables of the two communities were managing affairs, and they did it by giving favors to each other. The elders of Shibar took aside the biggest man in Sheikh Ali and persuaded him and two other men, by means of gifts, to help move the wedding proceedings along. Turbans and chapans, nice ones, were valued and accepted as substantial gifts.
 - The number of people involved on either side of this transaction for the marriage was of course a social transaction marked the importance of the wedding. Forty men from Shibar, a hundred from Sheikh Ali a feast of the elders of these two communities, along with the mulla snek?, would have legitimated the marriage.
 - But government officials are conspicuous by their absence. As large a gathering as this was, it included no official. Presumably none were invited. In fact, we might presume that no alaqad'r had been posted in Shibar yet, in which case there would have been no official to invite. I have been told that when the alaqad'r first arrived he had no place to live; he rented a room in Bulola until facilities were built for him and his gendarmes. That the alaqad'r was later used by Mirza Gholam Osayn to exploit his neighbors and that of government figures received the complaints against him by his neighbors indicates that state institutions would soon be having a larger place in local affairs.

- The "biggest man in Sheykh Ali" was FirqaIs?Kh?n a reference to the officer's rank, perhaps FirqaMisr (roughly equivalent to a captain). But Hazaras did not normally hold officer's ranks in the army. Could the term have been mere respectful hyperbole for someone who had arrived to a non-commissioned rank? His eminence in the community would have come in part from wealth: could his wealth have brought him status in the military? In any case, he was home, and no longer in military service. And he was influential.
- Whatever the mechanisms of social control, it would seem that MirzaGholamOsayn was in trouble. In fact, as in many such cases, the way he exploits the situation, the liberties he takes with the conventions of courtesy, reveals a great deal about how the society was constituted. We often learn more about how things should be when they are violated. MirzaGholamOsayn's attempts to exploit his guests and his neighbors reveal how the society kept its members more or less in line. Eventually, as the narrator tells us, MirzaGholamOsayn pays a price for what appears to be manipulation and exploitation of the people around him.
 - The first batch of raw food sent to him disappeared -- according to him, eaten. What were the circumstances? Was he already in debt and had to use the food to pay off? His marriage to the widow of Gholam Reza would have been less costly than to a virgin. Perhaps his choice of this wife was a means of gain, as the daughters could be married out for a good bride price.
 - The second batch of raw food was served to his own neighbors, the elders in his own qawm. Why to them and not his wedding guests? Apparently the feast was an attempt to win their consent for the marriage. Obviously he wanted the bride price money but the community was opposed to the transaction.
 - His insistence on pushing the transaction through was evident in his suggestion to the mir that he take the girl by stealth. Apparently MirzaGholamOsayn failed to win the consent of his community because the next morning the elders arrived a lot of them to stop the transaction. It looks like he deceived them, agreeing to their demands during the evening feast but allowing the men from Shibar to take her secretly.
- MirzaGholamOsayn is portrayed here as manipulative and contentious in other contexts, making accusations against neighbors in order to extort money. Eventually the community -- the elders -- would in disgust bring charges against him. He was placed in prison, perhaps on a trumped up charge.
- The absence of any reference to the women may not be surprising -- after all, this is a man's story -- but like the dog that didn't bark it is a powerful statement none-the-less.
 - Indeed, the women were not marginal to these affairs. They would have prepared the food that was served. And of course the girl was the prize. In this polygamous society, of course, where several women could be matched to one man, marriageable girls were always in short supply. The story reveals the limitations on the rights of the women. Their life and their world were confined to the household. In whatever sense the women exerted influence it was within this sphere.

- The limited power of women was implied in MirzaGholamOsayn's accusation of murder. That the woman had died was apparent, but no one could know for sure precisely what caused her death. No one could know that she was not killed, so there was room for suspicion. That she died could be taken as a sign of abuse. And it could be used against the male of the household.
- In fact, other people told me that Mir GholamHasan had killed his wives. I asked one person how he knew and he said, "They are dead, aren't they?" In this society women were supposed to be under the protection and authority of men—a father or older brother in the natal household, a husband in the married household. No one outside the household could know for sure how a woman died. Purdah, seclusion, masked the actual experience of women, so there was always uncertainty about the status of particular women in particular households. And the uncertainty allowed insinuation. In a society in which gossip was powerful because reputation was the basis of friendship, help and credit, MirzaGholamOsayn's accusation was a serious threat.
- Two nuances can be derived from the accusation of murder. From one point of view women's rights were assumed to be in the hands of the men—fathers, brothers, husbands. From another viewpoint it was morally wrong for a man to kill his wife, even if the act could not be discovered. The uncertainty entailed in purdah, the seclusion of women—a broadly accepted social practice—allowed the insinuation of murder—a broadly proscribed social action—to be used as a device for character assassination. No one will ever know whether any of Mir GholamHasan's wives was murdered. And that ambiguity allowed gossip to besmudge his reputation.
- But it is worth noting that by the 1960s state institutions were being used by women as well as men, perhaps in greater numbers than before. I came to know of several suits by women against the men of their household, most of them over rights to land. The status of women was no doubt changing.
- The main moral message here is that MirzaGholamOsayn was irresponsible, but there is another subtext, that the people of Sheykh Ali were conservative, even backward.

Such are the surmises that one might make on the basis of this text about the situation in eastern Bamian in the Nadir Shah period. As more reports on life at that time come to light we will be better able to examine and test them.

Notes on the conceptual significance of this text

This story provides us with a means to reflect on social theory. It is curious to me that people respond differently to theoretical formulations than to the narratives on which they are based. My colleague John W. Bennett has often remarked that what is enduring of anthropological writings is the ethnographic details, not the theory that is proposed to inform it. This is because theory is subject to fads and the particular fad of the times fades whereas the ethnographic description continues to be interesting. At the same time Edmund Leach somewhere has said that the details bored him, and he thought also his colleagues. True, the professional social scientist does gravitate to the ideas—we glance over the details in order to get to the point and the conceptual issues it is supposed to entail. But my students are bored with theory whereas they respond to the narrative. In fact, of course, these are two different ways of telling stories; different traditions of

telling ourselves stories. What the students, and most people, respond to is the human interest. Bourdieu has noted that what social scientists produce can be likened to a map, an analogy that occurs to an outsider who has to find his way around a foreign landscape whereas for an insider, a native of the terrain, the experience of a social terrain is discovered experientially, sequentially; one learns to know one's own terrain through practical space of journeys actually made (1977:2). It is the difference between learning how to live in a society through direct encounters with one's social and material world, not as a repertoire of rules to be followed, as social scientists would have it. What is bleated out of the reality of human experience by our theoretical formulations, says Bourdieu, is the uncertainty entailed in human interaction. We enter a moment, a transaction, with certain assumptions, a set of preconceptions, about how affairs will unfold, but, as Sahlins (Metaphors) has pointed out, the world we encounter may not correspond to our presuppositions. Mir Gholam Hasan thought he had paid the price for a bride but it turned out it disappeared and he had to pay again. Even then he had to carry her off in the dead of night if he was in fact to obtain her. The reality of his experience was that at many points in the event there were surprises: a band of horsemen on the road to block his way, a prospective father-in-law reluctant to hand over the girl that had been paid for, an evening in a strange community without hospitality, extra costs for the food necessary to provide for himself and his friends, and, notably, the near failure to obtain the bride who was the object of all that trouble. A social world devoid of those surprises, of the ambiguities and uncertainties entailed in the course of affairs, as Radcliffe-Brown or Levi-Strauss would have characterized it, may have seemed systematic and orderly but it would have lost the critical elements of human experience. No wonder my students have considered theory boring.

But another feature of human experience perhaps not so well expressed by Bourdieu is the angst, the emotional content, of living through such encounters. Anthropology has learned, I think mainly from Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner, that human experience is not preeminently cerebral—the kind of intellectual struggle over strategy that Bourdieu characterizes so well—but profoundly and richly emotional. Mir Gholam Hasan tells his story in matter of fact terms. There is no reference to how he felt about the interruptions, extortions, misrepresentations, threats, and insults he experienced here. All that he assumes I, his interlocutor, would understand without explication. The story he recounts was not a ritual whose meanings enshrined subtleties of meaning that need to be unpacked, nor a cultural practice whose significance needs to be explained to outsiders. It was an event, an experience. What is not explicated is how unsettling it must have been, how dizzying it must have been for his presuppositions to be betrayed at so many points. The emotional dimensions of such an experience are, for most of us, profoundly interesting. That he tells us nothing about how he felt has its own power, for we are left to surmise what it must have been like.

But of course like all stories (Hayden White ???) this is a morality tale. What it reveals is another dimension of human experience that is poorly captured in social theory, namely, that human experience is fraught with struggles over what is right or wrong in a situation, often what ought be and isn't. For Mir Gholam Hasan this experience was, like all experiences, instructive. Social theorists often describe socialization as an experience of the young. But socialization is the experience of everyone throughout life. One learns what one's fellow human beings are like, again, experientially, sequentially,

piecemeal. It is through the recounting of an experience that one grasps its moral import. The moral assumptions that go without saying are internalized through such recounting. This, in the end, is the broader or deeper significance of Mir Gholam Hasan's account of his attempt to get a wife; it was a story about a world that human beings long for and yet never quite discover. What he learned about what not to expect, what not to do, the next time is implicit here in this account. Unfortunately, we do not know how it affected his next attempt to get a wife and how his richer understanding encountered, again, a world for which he was only partially prepared.

The more I reflect on the ambiguities and contradictions, the disappointments, deceptions, and uncertainties of Mir Ghoolam Hasan's life I wonder if the postmodernists have it wrong: it is not that the old certainties of our world are now disappearing and we are left with multiple solutions, multiple attempts to characterize our condition but that this has always been the human condition. It is only in retrospect, as we look back with nostalgia on earlier peoples and societies, that their life seems so ordered, so regular and systematic. In fact, it was anything but. Perhaps the real agenda of modern or postmodern, poststructural, postcolonial theory is to appreciate the complexities, anxieties, frustrations, disappointments of ordinary life in other societies, in other times. And that draws us back to our starting point, the quest to understand through narrative.

This was a time when several kinds of changes were taking place in the area. One change was in the status and influence of the mirs, the individuals who represented the local inhabitants in their relations to the government. We know that the mirs had been quite powerful early in the eighteenth century. Earlier but their powers had been gradually reduced. This change was manifest in the number of mirs that were operating when I was there and the relative sizes of the communities they were representing to the government. In the earlier times the mirs in Shibar, for instance, represented populations all over the plateau, from Kalu to Shibar. By the 1960s there many mirs representing much smaller populations in the region. Another change was the relative powers and influence of the Sayyeds. The Sayyeds were frequented for their sacred powers; they were believed to have powers to heal or protect or devine or at least such powers were thought to exist among some sacred figures such as the Sayyeds so that there was a regular flow of visitors, and gifts, to their doors by people in need. This imputed power enabled some Sayyeds to gain large followings, or at least to be venerated or visited by people in quest of help of various kinds. The result was that some Sayyeds were wealthy and influential. The most notable had large communities of followers, murids. By the time I was in Bamian there seemed to be fewer venerated Sayyeds among the Hazaras, but at least one of them continued to have a large following, the Sayyed-i Kayan. This constituted a third kind of change in the social order of the region because in recent years it had become known that Sayyed-I Kayan venerated the Aga Khan, which meant that he was not an Athna`ashariya Shi`a but an Isma`ili. The exposure that Sayyed-I Kayan and his followers were Ismailis seems to have taken place in the 1950s and created a crisis among the Shi`a populations of Bamian, especially those in Shibar where many of the local Athna`asharia Shias were in fact intermarried with families who declared themselves murid [followers] of the Sayyed-I Kayan. This event marked a critical change in the social order of the region as a number of families were rent apart over this sectarian

issue. Of course another change in the valley was the advance of government into the affairs of these peoples. The region had once and for all come under the domination of the Kabul state in the time of Abdul Rahman after the Hazara-Afghan war of 18??.

++Some conceptual issues: cf Bourdieu on uncertainty of reciprocation; cf Sahlins the structural changes that result from the conjuncture of structure and event.

Karen J. Brison {1992. Just Talk: Gossip, Meetings, and Power in a Papua New Guinea Village. U. California.}