

1980

# Images of the Pathan: The Usefulness of Colonial Ethnography

---

Lindholm, Charles. "Images of the Pathan: The Usefulness of Colonial Ethnography." *European Journal of Sociology* 21:350-61, 1980.

<https://hdl.handle.net/2144/3846>

*"Downloaded from OpenBU. Boston University's institutional repository."*

IMAGES OF THE PATHAN :  
THE USEFULNESS OF COLONIAL ETHNOGRAPHY

Their fidelity is measured by the length of the purse of their seducer, and they transfer their obedience [...] according to the liberality of the donation.

Frederick Mackeson, a colonial officer in the N.W.F.P. in the 1850s, speaking of the Afridi Pathans (Warburton 1900: 342).

The germs of confidence once established amidst these people always bear fruit and increase [...] The deadliest of enemies dropped their feuds for the time being while I was in camp. Property was always safe.

Sir Robert Warburton, a colonial officer in the N.W.F.P. from 1879 to 1898, also speaking of the Afridi Pathans (Warburton 1900: 342).

CONTRASTS in the British colonial view of Pathan character (1) are the norm rather than the exception. In official reports they were viewed either as brave and honorable, or as treacherous scoundrels, as the quotes demonstrate.

The controversy over Pathan personality extended into literature as well. The romantic view of the courageous warrior Pathan was popularized by colonial writers like Mundy and Kipling and, in recent years, by Kaye's monumental best seller, *The Far Pavilions* (1978). The counter view was taken most strongly in Scott's classic *The Raj Quartet* (1976), in which the Pathans are made to symbolise all that is sinister, cruel and corrupt in the subcontinent.

Nor is anthropology exempt from these contradictions of image\*. Ahmed's recent attack (1976) on Barth (1965) accuses Barth of presenting a prejudiced view of the Pathan world which overvalues violence and individualism. Ahmed, on the other hand, might also be accused of presenting a picture which overvalues Islamic unity and mechanisms of social control.

It seems that these contrasting images pose a real problem for anthropological analysis, a problem which is perhaps best dealt with by going back to the source, that is, to the colonial reports and ethnographies themselves. The men who wrote these documents had their own particular inter-

\* P. WINCH, *The Idea of a Social Science* (London, Routledge, 1958); F. BARTH, *Political Leadership Among the Swat Pathans* (Atlantic Highlands, 1965); A. AHMED, *Millennium and Charisma Among Pathans* (London, Routledge, 1976); H. EL-ZAIN, Beyond ideology and theology: the search for an anthropology of Islam, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, VI (1977), 227-254.

(1) I have used the word Pathan throughout since I am talking about both the Pakhtun and the Pushtun people of Afghanistan and Northern Pakistan. A term which would include both would be Afghan, but

this might be confused as a national designation, so I have chosen to keep the British word 'Pathan' which includes both Pakhtun and Pushtun peoples.

ests in mind as the British Raj attempted either to dominate or accommodate the rebellious Pathan peoples of the north-western border in what is now Afghanistan and the North West Frontier Province (N.W.F.P.) of Pakistan. Since the authors made no attempt to escape cultural relativism, does this then mean that their reports are valueless? If the answer to this is negative, then in what sense are these writings worth reading? What exactly do they reveal?

In order to investigate these questions, we must first discuss an epistemological controversy over meaning and intelligibility in the social sciences. The argument for simply rejecting colonial accounts is stated most clearly by Winch (1958). Although his work is primarily concerned with inconsistencies in ideology, his argument can also be applied to inconsistencies in the interpretation of personality. In brief, he claims that contradictions in 'native' thought as reported by an outside observer are simply an inevitable result of cultural bias. Were one reporting from within the society being studied, the incompatible elements would resolve themselves. El-Zain (1977) takes a similar stance, arguing that each cultural system can only be properly understood from the native's point of view. It follows, therefore, that the colonial literature must be discarded in favor of more empathetic reports.

However, the assertion of the irreducibility of cultures has certain logical problems. The first is simply the determination of which native's statement is more correct. How is the reader to judge validity? What are the standards for measuring an adequate degree of empathy? Furthermore, as Hollis (1976) has noted, the theory of cultural irreducibility implies that the cultural experience of the empathetic observer is untranslatable. Like a mystical communion, it is lived, and its essence cannot be communicated. To accept this theory in its ultimate form is to accept the end of anthropology as an academic discipline.

Despite these objections, Winch's critique of Western assumptions is a valuable one, if not carried to its logical extreme. His theory that cultures do 'make sense' if viewed correctly is one which we will return to, though from a different angle, in our conclusion, where we will argue that 'sense' is not primarily a matter of symbolic order, as Winch claims, but rather a working out of the implications of social structure.

A variant of Winch's position which has found favor recently is the sociology of knowledge argument. Having learned from Marx and Mannheim that Western thought does not exist in a vacuum, but has a social base, these theorists look at colonial writing in order to unveil its underlying social foundations and interests. Carried into anthropology by younger scholars in rebellion against capitalistic and imperialistic assumptions in anthropological theory, the sociology of knowledge critique has turned colonial literature on its head. Instead of looking at colonial accounts to discover something about the indigenous colonized peoples, they look at colonial writers to discover something about colonialism itself. Winch's contention that Western reports of exotic cultures are value-laden and inadequate

is accepted, but the reports are not discarded on that account. Rather, they are used for analysis of colonial mentality and policy. As ethnography, the colonial literature is considered of little value, since the colonial writer is a person 'whose individual and corporate interest depended on the existence of the colonial order. In practical terms, this, at least, should amount to a corrective against accepting as "scientific fact" what is offered in ethnographies' (Llobera 1974: 8). Classical ethnology 'is at the heart of the colonial phenomenon [...] It eliminated the phenomenon of colonial domination. It developed in a specific relation to colonial reality, which it misrepresented' (Bonte 1975: 47). The work of the modern researcher then is the placement of colonial accounts within their real context. Asad, who is perhaps the most authoritative voice in this important critical approach, says that contemporary anthropology must begin 'to analyse and document ways in which anthropological thinking and practice have been effected by British colonialism' (1975: 114).

Application of this method to the colonial accounts of the Pathan is an instructive exercise. The British were in active communication with the Pathan peoples from 1808, when Mountstuart Elphinstone was sent to the crumbling court of Shah Shuja to inquire as to the possibilities of an alliance between Afghanistan and the Raj against a feared invasion by Napoleon. From this date until the British quit India the relationship between the Raj and the Pathans was continuous and multidimensional, rendered even more complex by the variations in the Pathans themselves. The largest segmentary lineage society in the world, the Pathans cover a wide range of ecological niches and have developed a number of social organizations, from the centralized kingdom of Afghanistan to the anarchic democracies of the hill tribes. But, for the sake of brevity, this article will have to follow the Pathan saying that 'the Pathans are rain-sown wheat; they all came up at the same time, they are all the same'. Discussion of regional divergences will have to wait for a later date, since space only allows discussion of the historical permutations of British policy.

That policy began in a straightforward manner with Elphinstone's mission. Little or nothing was known of the Pathans at that early date, except that they were a warlike people who might be willing to ally with the British against the French. The Raj was far from the Afghan borders, and there was no thought that the British sphere of interest overlapped that of the Pathans.

Elphinstone was very taken by the Pathans, especially in comparison to the Hindus of India: 'The English traveller from India [...] would admire their strong and active forms, their fair complexions and European features, their industry and enterprise, the hospitality, sobriety and contempt for pleasure which appear in all their habits; and, above all, the independence and energy of their character [...] On the whole, his impression of his new acquaintances would be favourable [...] he would reckon them virtuous, compared with the people to whom he had been accustomed' (1815, vol I:

198-9). It is, of course, a commonplace that the English admired the turbulent warrior groups of the Raj and generally despised the docile peasantry and mediating local bureaucracy. This attitude is due in part to the British self-image as a martial race, which brought with it a sense of kinship with other soldierly groups. More importantly, the martial races, when co-opted into the Raj, could be used as a police force to put down rebellions of the contemptible peasants and babus. Consciously or unconsciously, the colonial mentality recognized the tribal warriors as men with interests similar to its own, i.e., the exploitation of the peasantry.

Aside from the invidious comparisons with India, Elphinstone's appraisal of the Pathans was astonishingly well balanced. He admitted many elements into his portrait, and ended with a rounded and complex picture of the Pathan mentality: 'Their vices are revenge, envy, avarice, rapacity and obstinacy; on the other hand, they are fond of liberty, faithful to their friends, kind to their dependants, hospitable, brave, hardy, frugal, laborious and prudent' (1815, vol I: 330-1). Nor was Elphinstone ashamed to admit seeming contradictions into his picture. He was especially puzzled by the Pathan's inordinate hospitality to strangers, which appeared radically inconsistent with their propensity for highway robbery.

The balanced and open-minded quality of Elphinstone's report can be derived in part from his own personal ability. But his position was also crucial. He came to the Pathans as a guest and potential ally, with no preconceptions and no desire to dominate. He saw the Pathans as possible comrades in arms, and tried to give an honest appraisal of their merits and faults. The Pathans, on their side, simply treated Elphinstone with the openness and consideration due a guest. As Caroe, the last British agent in the N.W.F.P., notes in his essay on Elphinstone: 'He met [the Pathans] before they had become embittered by a long succession of expeditions and wars, and he felt intuitively that there was a bond to be forged between "them" and "us"' (1965: 278).

As the political position of the Raj *vis-à-vis* the Pathans changed, so did the attitude of British envoys. In the years after Elphinstone's mission, the borders of the colonial Empire greatly expanded in 'the search for a land frontier' (Embree 1977: 38). Furthermore, the distant army of Napoleon was no longer feared. The visualized threat now came from a much closer quarter: the supposed desire of Russia to establish a warm-water seaport in the Indian Ocean. The great game of political manoeuvring between the British and Russians had begun, giving added impetus to the expansionist ambitions of the Raj. It was now felt that the Pathans could no longer simply be allies. Rather, they must be absorbed into the Empire. As Embree notes, 'all through the 1830s [...] the confidential letters of the time are filled with what can only be called a sense of destiny, of the priority of the interests of the Government of India in the areas contiguous to existing frontiers' (1977: 29).

The colonial office was in this expansionist mood when it sent Alexander Burnes on his first mission to Kabul. The shady character of his activity

was indicated from the start in that he was instructed to present himself as a commercial agent rather than as an emissary of the Government of India. This transparent ruse did not fool the Pathans, and the court of Dost Mohammad treated him from the beginning as a representative of British political interests.

On his part, Burnes exhibited an attitude of casual superiority toward the Pathans. In his view, they were charming, childlike, and a bit dull. 'The Afghans are a nation of children; in their quarrels they fight, and become friends without any ceremony. They cannot conceal their feelings from one another, and a person with any discrimination may at all times pierce their designs' (1843, vol I: 144). In private conversation, Burnes remarked on 'the proverbial stupidity' of his hosts (Masson 1842, vol III: 444), while simultaneously adopting an obsequious tone in public. He felt he could gain the confidence of the King through fawning and extravagant promises, much as one would cajole a difficult child. Burnes' attitude must be seen, in large part, as a consequence of his mission. He was sent to the Afghan court not as an equal with nothing to hide, but as a combination of subversive and spy. His purpose was to bring Kabul into the British orbit. Duplicity was allowed and justified by the supposed childlike innocence of the Pathans, who would be fooled and conquered by Russian guile if not 'protected' by the British.

In contrast to Burnes was the English deserter Charles Masson, who had been a long-time resident of Kabul at the time of Burnes' arrival. Masson had come to Afghanistan penniless and in flight, and was given refuge by the Pathans. Like Elphinstone, he came as a guest and without thought of domination. In consequence, his vision of the Pathan character was much less narrow than that of Burnes, who was blinkered by his role and his mission. For example, Masson knew Afghan requests that Burnes stay on at court were merely polite shams designed to save face, but Burnes took the requests as sincere and greatly overstayed his welcome. 'Here is the cause of all our evil', Masson tells a court functionary. 'You say what you do not mean; but, unluckily, Captain Burnes has not had sufficient experience of you to know it' (1842, vol III: 473).

Burnes, of course, did not feel constrained to keep his own word to his hosts. When the colonial office ordered him to shift his loyalties from Dost Mohammad to his opponent, Shah Shuja, he did so with alacrity. This betrayal was justified as necessary for the interests of civilization, since Dost Mohammad was seen as too independent by the British. Shah Shuja, it was thought, would be more docile. Having failed to win Afghanistan by diplomatic trickery, the British then turned to brute force and conquered Kabul, installing Shah Shuja as puppet King and bringing Burnes back as a political agent. This was the widest expansion of the Raj as the omnipotent fantasies of the colonial office were lived out by ambitious men such as Burnes, who felt himself far superior to the infantile Pathans. In their petty intrigues they might fool one another, but they could never fool 'a person with any discrimination', that is, an Englishman.

It is a supreme irony then that the first man killed in the Kabul riots which ended in the total destruction of the British occupying force in 1841 was Alexander Burnes. His death (and it must be noted that he was an immensely popular figure in British imagination) coupled with the utter ruin of the British army in Afghanistan marked the end of the golden era of colonialism in the subcontinent. Confidence and the sense of manifest destiny had been unalterably deflated. The whole colonial sense of self had been threatened, and the Pathans could certainly never be viewed as children again.

For the remainder of the colonial era, the British fluctuated between two mutually exclusive policies regarding the Pathans. The first, entitled The Forward Policy, was a continuation of expansionism. The debacle of the First Afghan War did not deter the proponents of this policy, though they recognized that the obstacles were much greater than had been thought. But rather than rethinking their premises, they simply set their sights a bit nearer to India. 'By 1842 [...] the Governor-General spoke almost casually of his plans to introduce uniformity of currency and trade regulations into the whole area between the Hindu Kush, the Indus, and the sea, none of which at the time was under his control' (Embree 1977: 32). To an extent, this policy was successful, especially in the deserts of Baluchistan. But when the Forward Policy encountered the mountain retreats of the Pathan hill-tribes, it ground to a costly halt. In the interminable skirmishes and ambushes of this drawn-out border war, a new image of the Pathan was formed. No longer a child, the Pathan was drawn instead as a bloodthirsty and fanatical savage. But alongside this characterization there was also a certain respect for the fighting qualities of the tribesmen. By admiring the Pathan warrior, the British soldier was able to rationalize his own inability to win a decisive victory. From these images, Kipling drew his romance of the Pathan.

The Forward Policy was more successful in the plains than in the mountains, and direct rule was established over lowland Pathan peoples in the Peshawar Valley and in Mardan. No longer courageous enemies, lauded in order to make British defeats seem honorable, the Pathans under direct rule suffered yet another change in identity. Incorrigibly rebellious and fractious, the conquered tribesmen were often hated and feared by their harried administrators. A British military historian gives a representative statement on the way Pathans should be handled: 'They require that behind the firm hand of a master there must be a strong arm. They are swift to respect power, but equally swift to perceive the least sign of weakness' (Nevill 1911: 198). The British administrators tried therefore to assert their power and establish dominance, while the Pathans, in turn, struggled to retain their independence and freedom of action. As a result of this conflict, colonial images of the Pathan took on a decidedly sour flavor: 'The most notable traits in their character are unbounded superstition, pride, cupidity and a most vengeful spirit [...] They despise all other races [...] They glory in being robbers, admit they are avaricious, and cannot

deny the reputation they have acquired for faithlessness' (Bellew 1864: 209-10). The quote from Mackeson which begins this paper is another example of the administrative view of the Pathans in the era of the Forward Policy.

But the Forward Policy in the Northern Frontier was too expensive in money and in men, and too unproductive in gains, for the Indian Government to continue. The history of the British relationship with the Pathans is the history of a slow supplanting of the Forward Policy by the less ambitious Close Border Policy. The colonial power, unable to assert direct rule into the unyielding mountain regions, settled instead for the role of influential mediator and controller of trade. The tribesmen in hill fortresses were given the freedom to follow their customs as they pleased, so long as they did not interfere with the Raj. Bribes were given to groups which remained peaceful, while trade embargoes were applied against those who raided into colonial territory. Negotiations were carried out through loyal middlemen at first, but later these local middlemen were replaced by British officers who were fluent in the regional dialect.

The colonial administrators who worked within this system had quite a different view of the Pathan from those who attempted direct rule. Rather than being despots, the Close Border administrators were essentially judges and arbitrators. In filling this role, the colonial agent often developed a friendly personal relationship with 'his' Pathans. His job was not to conquer, but to hold the system in check. To accomplish his mission, he often became an expert in local custom and law. Furthermore, the Pathans themselves honored these colonial officers for their dedication and sense of fair play, and were glad to use their services as mediators. The tribesmen and the colonial representative were bound together in a tie of mutual respect which could survive even a renewal of hostilities. An example is Sir Robert Warburton, who lived among the Afridis for many years and was a strong proponent of tribal self-rule. As the quote at the beginning of this paper indicates, the Afridi treated him with deference and regard. When the internal politics of the N.W.F.P. led to a resurgence of British expansionism in 1897 and the armed invasion of Afridi territory, the Afridi still viewed Warburton as a friend. In one of the most moving passages of colonial literature, Warburton recounts how he rode alone among the Afridi while the British army was destroying their homes and despoiling their land: 'When I told the old men of the Afridis in reply to their cry, that it was out of my power to help them, the *jirga* [tribal council] replied: "Never mind, Sahib, whatever happens we are earnestly praying that you should not be injured in this campaign". These old men were witnessing the destruction of everything that was dear and sweet to them in life [...] And yet in that supreme hour of their distress they had a thought for the safety of the Kafir who had done nothing for them, except to try to be their friend' (1900: 344).

In the end, a modified version of the Close Border Policy won out, and the later administrators of the Frontier had strong amicable ties with the

Pathans who were their nominal charges, but who actually were more like their partners. Sir Olaf Caroe, the last British administrator, felt a deep affection and respect for the Pathans which radiates from every page of his great historical work on them (1965).

The evidence we have presented shows that the image of the Pathan varied according to the vacillations of colonial policy. We may discriminate several views: the emissary/guest, represented by Elphinstone and Masson; the naive imperialist view of Burnes; the treacherous and greedy portrait painted by direct administrators of the Forward Policy; the savage but honorable warriors seen by soldiers of the British army in the wars of expansion; the loyal and gentlemanly Pathans presented by the agents of indirect rule. These pictures are drawn by distinct individuals, but they also obviously are a reflection of particular historical colonial situations. The sociology of knowledge position is therefore verified in the Pathan case.

However, if one goes on to claim that colonial ethnographies are *only* valid for what they show about colonialism, and have no value as data on the Pathans, then the argument has been carried too far. Not only would this position eliminate as ideologically corrupt some of our most important sources on the Pathans, it also has a more insidious underlying significance. Such a viewpoint does not give any credit to Pathan culture as an autonomous structure which is perfectly capable of impressing itself upon any observer. The confrontation with colonialism was not simply a one-directional flow. Rather, it was an arduous dialectics. If we affirm (as we must) the reality of Pathan culture, and the reality of the interaction with colonialism, then we also affirm that colonial reports are something more than mere shadows of British bureaucratic attitudes. The images of the Pathan, though more or less distorted by the position of the viewer, are nonetheless images of something which exists. The anthropologist's work, then, is not only to relate the colonial views back to their administrative source, but also to demonstrate how these fragmented and angled visions do indeed make a coherent picture. The alternative is to devalue Pathan culture into a mere mirage, in which the British saw whatever they wished to see.

In order to carry out this work, we must return again to Winch's argument that a culture can only be understood from within its own framework. Winch saw this framework as cognitive: a specific symbolic order. Anthropology, on the other hand, looks instead to structures and to the social forms these structures imply. Like mathematical theorems, structural patterns have their own logical reality which is inferred by the researcher, tested against cases, and proven valid. Rather than searching for a symbolic system which will 'make sense' of contradictory data, the anthropologist posits a structure.

The structure which is applicable to the Pathans is that of the segmentary lineage, as investigated and elaborated by Evans-Pritchard (1949), Gellner (1973), Montagne (1973), Barth (1959, 1965), Salzman (1978), and others. Organization within this structure is on the basis of patrilineal kinship, and cooperation takes place only against external threat. Enmity

focuses on close patrilineal relatives. The principle of 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' is invoked to develop a checkerboard pattern of alliances dividing each Pathan group into two fluid parties (Barth 1959). Some stratification occurs in different ecological zones and especially when the system is expanding (Sahlins 1961). Leadership, usually of a religious nature, also arises when the system faces invasion. But ordinarily the Pathan society is acephalous, with each man holding himself equal to or, perhaps more accurately, superior to his neighbor. Internal rivalry is strong in this basically egalitarian structure, as groups of kinsmen manoeuvre for the meager status positions available and for their share in the resource base. Even the Afghan Kingdom, which developed in response to external pressure, was and remains notoriously shakey, while its grip on the countryside has always been minimal. The Pathan version of the segmentary system lacks primogeniture and instead divides property equally among all sons. Therefore there has never been the strong propensity for aristocratic lineages found among Mongols and Turks.

The system, as we have outlined it, is internally fragmented and hostile, with shallow hierarchies. 'It has as its premises individualism, treachery, equality and balance' (Lindholm 1979: 505). Yet it is capable of united action should the occasion demand. The ideal of manliness which accompanies this structure includes bravery, vengefulness and autonomy. Strong egoism, necessitated by the harsh struggle for survival, is characteristic of Pathans. These elements are balanced by a ritual of hospitality and a cultural fantasy of male friendship, where the emotions of attachment and affection find their expression. Friendship, however, can only be offered to an outsider, since one's people are, by definition, rivals. This, in starkest outline, is the structure which forms Pathan personality. The many regional variations have been ignored in this sketch for the sake of conciseness, but the general outline is everywhere the same.

With the structure given, we can then move on to its reaction to colonialism. We have seen that the role of guest, especially foreign guest, is highly valued within the segmentary system. Guests allow the host to demonstrate his beneficence as well as offering the possibility of friendship; the relationship most desired by Pathan men. The essence of the guest is his passivity. He should only receive and never give, for, among the Pathans, reciprocity is only between equals and therefore between enemies. Nor, more importantly, can the guest ever attempt to actively take, for he would then be insulting his host by asserting dominance. Elphinstone and Masson were guests, and from this respected but inert position they were able to clearly observe Pathan character. Burnes, on the other hand, did not remain passive. He sought to deceive, and was deceived in turn. By leaving his role as guest, Burnes entered into the web of machinations, intrigues, betrayals and alliances which constitutes Pathan politics. Within this mode, shifting loyalty and treachery is all a part of the game. A man may respect and even admire another man who has betrayed him, just as he will betray a man he likes if it appears advantageous. This flexibility

is understandable within the structure of the system. For Burnes, however, betrayal required a certain obfuscation, a rationalization that the Pathans were 'like children' and needed the British guiding hand to protect them. This false view blinded him to the fact that the Pathans were playing the game with somewhat different rules. They did not need psychic distance to betray him. He read the emotional attachment of his Pathan friends to his person correctly, but he did not understand that that attachment did not preclude treachery.

The fate of Burnes indicated how the Pathans would treat those who tried to match them at their own political game. However, as warfare became overt, the structural attitude shifted. Warfare is a stylized affair among Pathans and, given their cultural values of bravery, they could admire the qualities of the British soldiers. A sense of military honor and a code of proper conduct allowed the Pathans to respect their enemies and win their respect in return. So long as hostility was in the open, the touchy question of treachery did not come to the fore, and the relationship between the warring parties even had a chivalric aspect.

But when the Pathans were conquered, and the British attempted to show their mastery, a different aspect of the Pathan was revealed. With their structurally-derived ideology of equality, the tribesmen were utterly unwilling to acknowledge the superiority of the British overlords. Intractable and rebellious, they soon gained a negative image. The British could not comprehend the Pathan attitude. Having defeated the Pathans, it was expected that the tribesmen should acquiesce to being ruled with good grace. The segmentary system, however, operates for a balancing of parties. One is never defeated by the other. Instead, alliances shift until a standoff is reached. The system had no precedence for dealing with defeat. The Pathans were willing to use every method to throw off this yoke, and the British found themselves in a harsh and very unchivalric world in which deceit and treachery were expected. Furthermore, Britain's self-esteem took a tremendous blow when its benevolent programs did not allay native hostility. Accustomed to regarding themselves as harbingers of the benefits of civilization, the colonial forces had been able to enact their fantasies in India, where people were accustomed to central rule. But Pathan resistance was not mollified by British good intentions. Two different systems of values were at complete loggerheads in this situation: the segmentary lineage organization with its intrinsic hatred of domination and its polity of individualism and betrayal *contra* the British class system with its ethos of elitism and its values of fair play and cultural superiority.

When the British shifted to indirect rule, the colonial agents found a new place within the Pathan system which reconciled many of the contradictions which had made direct rule so uncomfortable and demoralizing. The segmentary structure, as many authors have noted, has no internal mechanism for settlement of disputes. Traditionally, a lineage of religious men were used as mediators. They were prohibited from participating

in struggles over land or political power and, in return for their mediation, they were given a position of respect by the tribesmen. Their persons were inviolable and their possessions were never stolen.

The British colonial agent of the Close Border Policy had much in common with this traditional mediating figure. Like the religious man, he had no vested interests beyond keeping the peace, nor did he hold tribal land, nor did he engage in the internal power struggles of the Pathans. Like the religious man, the colonial agent was an outsider who claimed a relation with a higher power which allowed him to dispense justice. Thus, from being a player in the continual Pathan political game of domination and balance, the British agent came to fill the traditional role of arbitrator and judge. This shift in identity made the agent a valued part of the indigenous structure while at the same time satisfying his own ego. His fair judgements not only kept the Pathans happy and relatively peaceful, but also fulfilled the policy of the Raj. The best of these colonial agents were regarded by the Pathans with the deference due a religiously sanctioned mediator, as Warburton testifies. Furthermore, since the British had now distanced themselves from actual political manoeuvring, they were again available for the valued status of friend, and strong interpersonal relationships grew up between the administrators and their charges. Many of these colonial agents are still remembered with fondness by the Pathans.

We can see, then, that the image of Pathan character shifts according to the angle of approach. Those who come as guests or as disinterested arbitrators will appreciate the values of friendship and hospitality which are so central to Pathan social structure. Deference and respect will be shown them, in accordance with the cultural system. Those who come to dominate will be treated as honored enemies outside the society, but once they penetrate inside they will be treated as every other competitor is treated, and their image of the Pathan will be one of cruelty, greed, deceit and envy.

These different images of the Pathan character, which seem so inconsistent to the Western observer, are not really inconsistent at all. Once the structural framework of the society is grasped, the contradictions are resolved and the diverse visions of the Pathan fit together into a coherent whole. Colonial ethnography thus need not be discarded, or seen only as a commentary on itself. When informed by an adequate notion of social structure, and by an historical consideration of the position of the colonial ethnographer, the work of these early writers can offer indispensable information for anthropologists, as this essay has attempted to demonstrate\*.

CHARLES LINDHOLM

\* I would like to express my gratitude to the Henry Evans Travelling Fellowship from Columbia University which funded my fieldwork in Afghanistan and the N.W.F.P. in 1969-70, and to the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare and the National Science Foundation for grants which supported my fieldwork in Swat, N.W.F.P., Pakistan, in 1977. I would also like to thank Joan Vincent for her helpful suggestions in the writing of this paper.