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# Religion and Politics in Muslim Society

Order and conflict in Pakistan

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*To my wife, with love*

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# Preface

This book attempts to discover, first, what is happening in the Muslim world and, second, the underlying causes. It does so by illuminating the social structure and the operative principles in contemporary Muslim society, especially Pakistan. The answers may well help us to understand the forces that are creating tension and the dialectics of social change.

I had three specific objectives in examining Waziristan: First, I wished to place the revolt of the Mullah of Waziristan within the context of similar contemporary movements elsewhere in the Muslim world and in so doing to create the Islamic district paradigm as an aid to a better understanding of that world. Second, I wanted to provide an ethnographic and contemporary account of Waziristan tribes, which have long been neglected by scholars because of Waziristan's inaccessibility and remoteness. Both the major case study of the Mullah and smaller cases involving the political agent (PA) helped me realize this objective. Third, I wished to illustrate and to emphasize the reader's need for certain information about the anthropologist conducting the study and about the circumstances surrounding it; without such information the reader cannot properly interpret the findings. Who is the anthropologist? An academic? A consultant for an international organization? An official working for the government? What are the anthropologist's biases? What was the cultural and political climate of the period? All these questions require explicit answers.

The task of anthropologists is more difficult and complex if they are natives of the society they are studying. They must guard against any possible bias toward their group that, if it were to remain unchecked, might distort analysis. They must endeavor to portray society as it is, not as it should be; they must depict actual society, not an ideal. Because they are in a position to provide special insight, it is



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imperative that native anthropologists document their societies. Such efforts are a necessary preliminary to the identification and solution of modern problems. By concealing or distorting our own vision of society, we ultimately deceive only ourselves.

As a native anthropologist—and also an actor in the drama—I found this book difficult to write. Personal issues are involved: ideology, loyalty, judgment. As a Muslim I respect the learned theologians of Islam—the ulema—but what is my position on the role of the mullahs in society? By discussing administration and its problems, am I in some way letting it down? By citing certain material that concerns me, am I being immodest?

I am not certain whether the problems mentioned in the preceding paragraphs have been satisfactorily solved in this volume. Grappling with the issues has been a humbling experience for me; so many difficulties remain, and so many questions are yet to be answered. I hope my attempts to discover answers and to clarify my own vision are at least somewhat illuminating and spur further discussion and debate, thereby adding to our understanding. I am tempted to agree with the answer given by M. J. M. Fischer, an anthropologist at Harvard University, to one of Iran's leading ayatullahs regarding the nature of the anthropological method. The ayatullah's rather shrewd query echoed Lévi-Strauss: Was anthropology “cooked or raw” (*pokhta ya napokhta*)? Fischer replied: “Raw, not yet a science! Perhaps it is not a science at all, but a humanist attempt at dialogue and learning, both for myself and as an aid for others” (1980, p. 244).

Part One of the book, which comprises the first three chapters, introduces and defines the models and methodology of the study and discusses the geography and history of Waziristan pertinent to an explanation of agnatic rivalry between its two tribes. The title of Part Two, “Observation,” stresses my role as observer and leads to the core of my argument. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 contain an extended case study of the Mullah of Waziristan. Its preparation was facilitated by my position as political agent, South Waziristan Agency, from November 1978 to July 1980, which afforded me access to source material, including office notes and, of course, the diaries of the Mullah, which would not otherwise have been available to me. I have of course drawn for the present study only on material of a politically nonsensitive nature. Chapters 4 and 5 are based largely on written data obtained from the offices of the PA, which fact perhaps accounts for a certain discernible bias against the Mullah. Also extensively consulted, however, were Wazirs, Mahsuds, and officials of all categories.

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Part Three, "Participation," comprising Chapters 7, 8, and 9, provides a counterbalance by shifting the study's focus to the role of the PA. Chapter 7 contains a series of smaller, though related, cases in which I participated and which illustrate the principles of my main arguments. Chapter 8 discusses the political agent, both past and current, as anthropologist. The last chapter addresses the methodological and conceptual problems involved in any attempt to define Islam and segmentary societies.

In a paper written on Waziristan tribes and their role in the Great Game, I indicated a few years ago the desire to pursue "one strand of the argument" (Ahmed 1979). I would like to express my profound gratitude to the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton – especially to Clifford Geertz – for allowing me to follow during the academic year 1980–1 the strand that has become this book. For their comments on my work I warmly thank Eqbal Ahmed, Hamza Alavi, Hamid Algar, Talal Asad, Jonathan Benthall, Sir Olaf Caroe, Louis Dupree, Dale Eickelman, Isma'il al Faruqi, Ernest Gellner, Ashraf Ghani, Monica Das Gupta, David M. Hart, Adam Kuper, Ira Lapidus, Hafeez Malik, David Maybury-Lewis, Adrian C. Mayer, Muhsin Mahdi, David J. Parkin, Fazlur Rahman, Edward Said, André Singer, and Nur Yalman. I am also grateful to the following members of the Institute who commented: John Gumperz, Stephen Humphreys, Bernard Lewis, Amal Rassam, Theda Skocpol, Jean-Claude Vatin, Annette Weiner, and M. Crawford Young. Finally, I acknowledge the involvement and support, as always, of my wife.

# Abbreviations

APA	Assistant political agent
APO	Assistant political officer
DIK	Dera Ismail Khan
DO	Demi-official (letter/correspondence)
IGFC	Inspector general, Frontier Corps
JUI	Jamiat-i-Ulama-i-Islam
NAP	National Awami party
NWFP	North-West Frontier Province
PA	Political agent
PPP	Pakistan People's party
SWA	South Waziristan Agency
SWS	South Waziristan Scouts
TAM	Tribal area Mohmand