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978-0-521-86169-4 - Sorrow and Joy among Muslim Women: The Pukhtuns of Northern Pakistan

Amineh Ahmed

Excerpt

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## INTRODUCTION

Death and destruction on 11 September 2001 in New York and Washington DC and on 7 July 2005 in London forced the world to ask fundamental questions about the nature and society of Islam. Unfortunately in the rush to provide answers inadequate and even distorted explanations were provided. Some sections of the media explicitly equated Islam to fanaticism and terrorism. Muslim groups like the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan with their stringent and brutal ways came to symbolise Islam. In this din and confusion the normal and ordinary lives of Muslims threatened to be lost. More than ever we need to know and understand Muslim society.

This book is one such attempt. It is based in Pakistan which is important for a number of reasons: first, because its founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah believed in the vision of a modern Muslim nation; it is the only nuclear Muslim country; Pakistan has a population of about 160 million people; and there are millions of Pakistanis living abroad in the West, in the Middle East and the Far East (see footnote 19). Finally Pakistan is situated in one of the most sensitive and turbulent places in the world. All these factors make Pakistan an important geopolitical nation to study.

My anthropological work is based on an examination of the Pukhtun people of northern Pakistan (locally referred to as Pashtun or 'Pathan' from colonial English) who live not only in Pakistan but also along the eastern half of Afghanistan. Pukhtuns are one of Pakistan's and Afghanistan's numerically and politically most significant ethnolinguistic groups. Karachi, Pakistan's main commercial city, has one of the highest concentrations of Pukhtuns. Yet the Pukhtun people are too often conceptualised as occupying a timeless world distinct from other regions of Pakistan. Pukhtun families and clans have traditionally migrated from outside their homeland to other parts of the subcontinent.

With the focus of the United States shifting to Afghanistan after 11 September 2001 the significance of Pakistan on the international stage was confirmed. Pakistan became a key geopolitical ally to the United States: in 2004 President Bush called Pakistan its 'major non-NATO ally': billions of dollars of US aid were earmarked for the country. Yet, so little is known of its culture and traditions and even less about its women. The need to understand Pukhtun society specifically and Muslim society more generally through a diachronic and in-depth study is thus even more

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urgent. This book is therefore an attempt to portray ordinary Muslims leading their lives in an important part of the world. It is an attempt to explain how Muslims organise their lives through an examination of rituals conducted by women. Using anthropological perspectives and analyses this work lifts the veil from the lives of Pukhtun women – the ethnic group identified with the Taliban – known traditionally for their stringent observance of the veil and segregation; and because the author is a woman from that part of Pakistan it allows unprecedented access to the lives, stories and dreams of women in northern Pakistan. The reader hears how women cope with the burden of death and how they prepare to celebrate the joys of marriage. This particularistic account has far-reaching ramifications for the study of Muslim society.

One older Bibi (wealthy lady), sitting on a *kat* (straw bed) alongside various other visiting Bibiane (plural), village guests and maids – all sipping tea under a persimmon tree in the cool mountainous Swati breeze – told me, ‘The world is established through the work of existence!’, ‘*dunia pa zeest-rozgar wadana da!*’ This profound saying emphasises the significance of events such as death and weddings for the women and men living in Pukhtun society. This book explores this aspect of the social lives of Pukhtun women through Bibiane in northern Pakistan. Its ethnographic focus is on the enactment of particular life-cycle or *gham-khādi* ceremonies (such as funerals and weddings). The widely used Pukhto term *gham-khādi* both refers to specific segregated gatherings commemorating death, marriage, birth, illnesses and other such events, and designates the emotions of sorrow (*gham*) and joy (*khādi*) which they elicit. While I focus on the *gham-khādi* of Bibiane and their maids in this work, it is important to make clear that *all* Pukhtuns generally, across the social hierarchy, practise and actively engage in *gham-khādi*. This study thus explores the emotional practices surrounding funerals (*gham*: sadness) and weddings (*khādi*: happiness) among Pukhtun women generally with a specific focus on elite women from Mardan and Swat, now living in Islamabad. *Gham-khādi* comprises a body of ideas and practices of life, in which happiness and sadness are understood as indissoluble, and are celebrated communally within networks of reciprocal social obligations. Different *gham-khādi* occasions are categorised in a hierarchy of importance with attendance at *gham* (the paramount emotional, thoughtful and bodily experience) taking priority over *khādi*. The scale descends through illness (*najorthia*), birth (*paidaish*) and relatively minor *tapos* (enquiries) on moving, *afsos* (condolence) following an election defeat, or felicitations (*ombaraki*) to winners. Thus, were a death and a wedding in two separate families to fall at the same time, an individual expected to attend both should go to the funeral (*gham*) (see also Lindholm 1982: 156). Although highly complex, in order to illustrate the concept of *gham-khādi* from a local perspective, I intentionally look at the concept to imply mainly funerals and weddings, the two most hierarchically important events of *gham-khādi*. *Gham-khādi* has been divided into two categories of priority: ‘major’: funerals and weddings, and ‘minor’: births, accidents, illnesses, returned-*haj* visits and birthdays, and so forth by Benedicte Grima, an American anthropologist, who conducted a groundbreaking study on the performance of *gham-khādi* emotions

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and narratives among Pukhtun women (1998). In this book, I focus on ‘major’ *gham-khādi* events of Bibiane, as these are considered most significant in the making and breaking of social relationships. Preparation for and attendance at *gham-khādi* events is locally understood as ‘women’s work’, a set of complex activities integral to Pukhtun identity or *Pukhtunwali*.<sup>1</sup>

The term ‘Pukhtun’ is widely used, and has been previously defined, in three principally variable ways. First and more generally, all Pukhto-speaking people, the ethnolinguistic group predominantly living in Pakistan’s North-West Frontier Province (NWFP, or Frontier), are known as Pukhtun (or Pashtun, ‘Afghan’ (Hoti 1942), or, more commonly, ‘Pathan’ by people living outside the Frontier areas). Pukhtuns are described as ‘the largest tribal society in the world’ (Spain 1995: 23), as sixty Pukhtun tribes comprise six million in Afghanistan and ten million of Pakistan’s total 2002 population of 147,663,429 (S. M. Khan 1997; Shinwari 2000). Second, though the ability to speak the Pukhto language distinguishes the Pukhtun, speaking in itself is not sufficient. A Pukhtun must also ‘do’ Pukhto, i.e. seek to live up to a set of honour-based practices, also called *Pukhtunwali* (Barth 1981b: 105). Pukhtun identity is thus bestowed by adherence to notions of honour, especially in tribal areas where people are supposed to revert to ‘ideal-type behaviour’ (or *Pukhtunwali*) in order to be recognised as full members of society (A. S. Ahmed 1980). Third, lineage and genealogy distinguish the wide majority of the Pukhtun population, i.e. Pukhto-speakers, from landowning persons of the dominant Yusufzai tribe, also called Pukhtun, as opposed to a Pukhto-speaking *nai* (barber). ‘Pukhtuns’, descended from a common ancestor, have the right to ‘full citizenship’ on the basis of previous conquest (Barth 1986: 3). In its 258 interviews, at least, this work focuses on the Pukhto-speaking saintly and lordly landed families (particularly the Wali of Swat’s family, the Khanān of *bar* (upper) Swat, the Nawabān of Hoti and the Toru of Mardan). These families are connected to a wider range of families in northern Pakistan.

Conventionally, anthropologists have characterised *Pukhtunwali* as an ‘ideal-type code’ based on such principles as *badal* (revenge), *melmastia* (hospitality), *nanawatee* (refuge), *tor* (female honour) and *tarburwali* (agnatic rivalry) (e.g. A. S. Ahmed 1980; Barth 1986; Grima 1998; Lindholm 1982; Singer 1982). This study suggests that *gham-khādi* has come to assume a priority among Pukhtuns as a contemporary principle of *Pukhtunwali*. Many of the concepts characterising *Pukhtunwali* (such as forms of hospitality, revenge, agnatic rivalry) are acted out in funerary and wedding events (*gham-khādi*). On the basis of ethnographic data, I will argue that *gham-khādi* constitutes a ‘work of life’ (*zeest-rozgār*), through which Bibiane maintain the fabric of social life by sustaining inter- and intra-family relationships.<sup>2</sup> This book identifies and explores a Pukhtun construction of work

<sup>1</sup> *Pukhtunwali* has been defined as the core of Pukhtun identity, and its social and cultural life (see A. S. Ahmed 1980: 3, 89; Q. I. Ahmed 1994; Banerjee 2000; Barth 1970: 119; 1986; 1995: 104; Grima 1998: xi; A. M. Khan 1994; G. Khan 1990; M. T. Khan 2000; Lindholm 1982: 210; Mohmand 1966: 44; Singer 1982: 51; Tahir 1980; Tair and Edwards 1982: 71).

<sup>2</sup> The Western concept of the ‘family’ fits uneasily with indigenous models (see Altorki 1986: 13; S. A. Khan 1996: 13; cf. Le Wita 1994: 118; Shore 2002: 2), which involve extra-familial networks

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divergent from professionalism or physical labour measured and quantified by production output. What I seek to show is that the Pukhtun construction considers work as producing not things but social relations and transactions (cf. Strathern 1990: 177).

This book, therefore, seeks to contribute to anthropological debate on a number of issues. First, it attempts to establish the distinctive sociality of Pukhtun Bibiane in terms of their participation, within and beyond the household where they observe *pardah*, in *gham-khādi* festivities, joining them with hundreds of individuals from different families and social backgrounds.<sup>3</sup> Second, in tracing the extent of the *gham-khādi* networks of the wives of the landed wealthy ('Bibiane'), the study adds to the ethnography of 'the elite' of South Asian and Muslim societies (see Shore 2002: 1, 12 on 'studying up'). Moreover, it presents an alternative perspective to the characterisation of elite South Asian women as 'idle' (Alavi 1991: 127) by documenting their role in Pukhtun families in the household and in the wider society.<sup>4</sup> Third, it contests the conventional academic portrayal of Muslim societies as contexts in which men claim a greater measure of reason or social sense (*aql*) than women (Anderson 1985; Shalinski 1986; Torab 1996). In describing the segregated female contexts of *gham-khādi* as a space of agency, it reconstructs how, in one educated Bibi's words in English, Bibiane 'call the shots', exercising minutely differentiated senses of both social propriety and personal strategy in negotiating procedures. Focusing on this agency helps us to revise previous anthropological accounts of Pukhtun society, which project *Pukhtunwali* in predominantly masculine terms,<sup>5</sup> while depicting *gham-khādi* as an entirely feminine category (Grima 1998). Attention to Pukhtun society's *rites de passage*, as these represent key elements of social structure and behaviour, makes it possible to re-examine widely held views about Pukhtun society as a domain of male-dominated honour and shame values through considering the role, organisation and actions of its women. Fourth, the book is concerned to capture the contemporary dynamism of Pukhtun *gham-khādi*, which is subject to negotiation, in particular as relatively young married Bibiane take issue with its 'customs' (*rewāj*) as offending against Islamic precept.<sup>6</sup>

of alliance (Bourdieu 1991: 178). In the vernacular, the term 'family' is variably: a) the descendants of a single ancestor consisting of some twenty-five or more households but sharing one family name; b) a husband and wife unit; or c) a wife.

<sup>3</sup> The Arabic/Urdu word '*pardah*' denotes curtain (Papanek 1982); *pardah* is an entire system of segregation entailing veiling and avoidance behaviour.

<sup>4</sup> I use the term 'elite' not so much analytically as a local reference to members of landed families; it should not obscure some degree of social mobility only partly captured in my account. For comparative definitions of 'elite cultures' see Altorki 1986: 14–18; Altorki and El-Solh 1988: 52; Deutsch 1998; Hoodfar 1991: 122; Gilson 1996; Le Wita 1994; Shore 2002: 10; for calls for a redirection of anthropological attention to elites, see Comaroff and Comaroff 1992.

<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere I have analysed *Pukhtunwali* from a female perspective (A. Ahmed 1994; 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Henceforth, when I refer to 'Islam' I am referring to the principles prescribed or proscribed in the Quran and Hadith. From a Muslim perspective, Islam as a set of rules is distinct from the diverse and multiple practices and experiences of Muslim peoples. Contrast Gilmartin and Lawrence who use Hodgson's term 'Islamicate' to describe ways of life 'not restricted to the practice of Islam as a religion' (2000: 2).

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Based in three localities of northern Pakistan, this study was conducted in Pakistan's capital city, Islamabad, and two villages (*killie*), Saidu in Swat and Hoti in Mardan, both in the North-West Frontier Province.<sup>7</sup> Mardan and Saidu Sharif are significant fieldsites in the study of Pukhtun society specifically and Pakistan more generally for a number of reasons. First, as the home regions of the elite Yusufzai Pukhtuns, they represent what are understood as 'essential' or the 'traditional' fieldsites. The Yusufzai are the most hierarchically important and widespread Pukhtun tribes. They have lived for centuries in their traditional location and define themselves through political action and literature. The Yusufzai are traditionally recognised as the embodiment of *Pukhtunwali*. By studying the Yusufzai Khanān and Bibiane, I am arguably looking at the core, the heart of Pukhtun identity. Second, both sites are the seats of historical crossroads: one of the most ancient civilisations in South Asia, Buddhist monasteries and archaeological finds have been located in both sites, Alexander's army crossed both cities, the British encountered the Pukhtun tribes in both areas. Third, the rich legacy of history in these sites together with the unsubmissive nature of the Yusufzai Pukhtuns prompted historians, colonialists and anthropologists to write on the Pukhtuns of Swat and Mardan. Fourth, the town is of considerable significance for the understanding of contemporary Pakistan society and the understanding of the Muslim world more generally, yet anthropological accounts tend to focus either on 'tribal' settings or on large cities, and there are only a few accounts of small town life in Pakistan. Swat and Mardan being the two major towns of the Frontier and close to the border of Afghanistan are significant entry points. The events of the past decade have caused a spill of Afghan refugees into Pakistan – many of whom live in Mardan and Swat. Although I am aware of these transformations I did not want to shift my focus from the Bibiane. I worked with Bibiane in Islamabad but this would not have been possible if they were from the Wazir or Mahsood tribes living in the remote tribal areas. Lastly, the valley of Swat with its ruling family allowed a striking contrast with the plains of Mardan and its lordly families. Yet in interesting ways these families are connected, as I document, through several intermarriages.

The districts of Swat and Mardan consist of several villages and may be characterised as segregated *pardah* contexts, in which patrilineal descent is common and marriage is typically both endogamous and virilocal. Swat is dominated by

<sup>7</sup> NWFP lies to the north-west of Pakistan with its western border or FATA, the Federally Administered Tribal Area, contiguous with Afghanistan along the Durand Line. The Frontier covers 41,000 sq. miles. It is one of the four provinces of Pakistan and borders Afghanistan to the west and Punjab Province to the east; anthropologists have variously placed studies of the Pukhtuns under the rubrics of Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies (Grima 1998: 2; Nelson 1974: 552). Donnan (1987: 21) attributes this definitional difficulty to the course of the Indus River across the south-eastern Frontier as it marks off the subcontinent (see also Banerjee 2000: 21). Historically, the Yusufzai Pukhtuns conquered the Frontier in successive waves from 1500 to 1600 (AD). During British rule in India the Frontier served as a neutral zone, interposed between the two Imperial frontiers of Russia and British India (Chakravarty 1976: 53; see also Richards 1990). The Frontier has retained its English colonial name despite many attempts to rename it *Pukhtunistān* (the land of the Pukhtuns) (Hanifi 1976: 442; Jansson 1988).

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landowning Pukhtuns, referred to as Khanān. It was governed between 1926 and 1969 as an autonomous state under two rulers, Badshah Sahib, and his heir, the Wali, who were descended from the famous shepherd saint, the Akhund of Swat (1835–77). The Akhund's male descendants are referred to as Badshahyan (descendants of a ruler). Mardan is also dominated by landed lords or Nawabān, whose families, from the Patriarch Nawab Akbar Khan, were incorporated into British colonial rule as a landed elite. Women of both saintly and landed descent go by the honorific Bibiane.<sup>8</sup>

In both Swat and Mardan, the village (*kille*) is still, as Barth observed in the 1950s, 'the most important unit of territorial reference' for Pukhtuns (Barth 1986: 13). The Pukhto proverb: 'no matter how far you go, you'll eventually return to your village' (*che ze ze no Abazai la ba raze*) insists on an ideology of Pukhtun identity being vested in its rural heartlands, as well as in Pukhtun villagers, who are said by many Khanān and Bibiane to embody a purer form of Pukhto. While complex, village organisation is shaped by the dominant role of landlords on whose hospitality, patronage and landownership all other categories of villagers depend (cf. Barth 1986: 3, 10). Khan status derives from tenants' allegiances and patrilineal land inheritances. Land is mainly agricultural in both the valley of Swat and plains of Mardan. Among the categories of villagers (discussed in more detail later in this chapter), farmers, tenants, agricultural labourers, shopkeepers, barbers and dancers are all directly or indirectly dependent politically, economically and socially on landlords' families with whom they share reciprocal visiting relationships of *gham-khādi*. In addition to these, an entire category of male and female villagers belonging to these occupational groups as domestic helpers (wet-nurses, servants and maids) come to hold quasi-familial degrees of prominence and power in Bibiane's houses. Bibiane's performance of *gham-khādi* thus affects their relationships both with other families of equal status and with a variety of socially subordinate villagers.

The importance of focusing on the funerals and weddings of Khanān and Bibiane as a social group is not that their embodiment of *Pukhtunwali* is taken to be more authentic than that of the *gharibanān* (poor) – on the contrary it is the *gharibanān* who are seen by Bibiane and Khanān to embody *Pukhtunwali* in its most authentic form – but that the practices of Bibiane and Khanān have potential to disseminate more widely across village and metropolitan contexts. As many as two thousand people drawn from a broad social spectrum may attend big landlord families' funerals. As this study documents, landlords' migration to the capital Islamabad is precipitating transformations in these Bibiane–villager bonds. Transregional patterns of habitation mean that the observance of *gham-khādi* ceremonies in natal villages represents a vital ligature connecting often absent landlords to their traditional dependents and patrimony. Interactions between urban Bibiane and

<sup>8</sup> My use of the plural 'Bibiane' refers to Pukhtun women from landowning families, not the Urdu usage, 'bibī/an', a gender-specific respect title for women of various social strata. More widely, see Dalrymple 2002.

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rural villagers demonstrate divergences in the understanding of convention, while the migration of Bibiane to a provincial region outside their own thus challenges some of the core features of Pukhtun identity. This creates many painful paradoxes for Bibiane as wedding and funerary procedures are revised, and the acceptable forms of ethnic and cultural continuity called into question.<sup>9</sup>

Bibiane from Frontier families who have left the village context for the city, for at least some part of every year, form the ethnographic focus of this study. Married Bibiane in Swat and especially in Mardan rarely leave the home for tasks not connected to *gham-khādi* (principally weddings and funerals, but also covering a range of other procedures of congratulation and condolence). These excursions, which take place as often as two or three times a day during the spring and autumn 'wedding season', and as infrequently as once a week in winter, tie them to a wide network of relations with hundreds of individuals from different families and social backgrounds.

According to an interpenetration of personal and social concepts of identity within Pukhtun conceptions of the family and kinship, Bibiane apprehend *gham-khādi* as both an enactment of social relations and a source of personal self-definition. A person's identity, as Daniel has argued, in a South Asian context, is not 'individual' but includes his or her spouse, offspring, kinsmen and so forth (1984: 103).<sup>10</sup> Every adult of a given family – both men and women – occupies a unique position within a thick web of relationships in local, regional and national contexts. Kinship among Pukhtuns is typically conceptualised as dense and multi-filiated. Individuals conceive themselves as having relations not only to immediate kin (parents, children and siblings) but also to a range of distant relatives and affines, usually connected through the marriages of female relatives (who may be cousins several times removed). Bibiane's sense of social identity derives from a married person's participation in circles of *gham-khādi* formed primarily through kinship and marriage, but also through friendship, clientage and political faction. Likewise, families are conceptualised as large corporate structures, belonging to different households but sharing a common ancestor (see footnote 2). *Gham-khādi* circle membership bestows on Khanān and Bibiane the obligation to attend fellow members' *gham-khādi* occasions, creating a complex pattern of overlapping bonds, loyalties, allegiances and debts between families (extended and nuclear). Each individual *qua* family member is bound to others by a pattern of reciprocal visiting.

At major *gham-khādi*, funerals and weddings, Bibiane engage in a number of practices of hosting (preparing the house, giving food) and attending (gifting, offering congratulations or condolence), observing 'proper' or ritualised forms of procedure and decorum. Bibiane (and not their husbands) in these contexts

<sup>9</sup> On the topic of inherent paradoxes within forms of religion (Islam) and practice (Pukhto), see A. S. Ahmed 1976; Tapper and Tapper 1986: 65; Titus 1998: 675.

<sup>10</sup> In contrast, quoting Foucault, Rabinow writes: 'What is distinctive about Western culture is that we have given so much importance to the problem of the subject ['objectified by a process of division either within himself or from others'] in our social, political, economic, legal, philosophical, and scientific traditions' (1986: 7).

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Pukhto:	<i>gham</i>	<i>rogh-ranzoor</i>	<i>khādi</i>	<i>paidaish</i>
Translation:	(sadness)	(well-ill)	(happiness)	(birth)
	↓	↓	↓	↓
Event:	death	illness/accident	wedding	birth
	↓	↓	↓	↓
Performance:	<i>lās-niwa</i> (condolence)	<i>tapos</i> (enquiry)	<i>ombaraki</i> (congratulations)	<i>ombaraki</i>
	↓	↓	↓	↓
Offering:	money/food	money	money/(cloth)	money (baby clothes)
Offerer:	Wife or mother-in-law on daughter-in-laws' behalf (Iqbal 1997: 85)*			

\* Naveed-i-Rahat, in the context of Meharabad in Punjab (Pakistan) notes: 'Transfer of roles from senior to junior generation takes place in Meharabad not from mother to daughter but from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law' (1990: 58). Further, Mernissi notes: 'The mother-in-law's role as imitator of *savoir-vivre* is as important as her role as instructress in matters of birth, sickness, and death' (1985: 126).

characteristically offer money, food or gifts in accordance with family status and accounts (*hisab-kitab*) of earlier debts and donations (Table 1). These activities represent the most pronounced forms of a general social system of *tal-ratlal* ('going and coming'), conceived of by Pukhtun women generally, and Bibiane specifically, as an ongoing 'work of life'.

It should be stressed that, although the primary material of this study concerns funerary and wedding ceremonies, this analysis provides only an indirect contribution to the anthropology of death and marriage. *Gham-khādi* events among Bibiane are, rather, understood as complementary aspects of the concept of 'life' or 'existence' (*zeest*). This study draws on local understandings of marriage and death that do not rehearse established anthropological distinctions between the two, since Pukhto idioms consider such distinctions foreign. Moreover, as annotated in Raverty's dictionary, usages of '*gham*' (sadness) and '*khādi*' ('joy, happiness . . . gaiety') (1982: 670) suppose essentially public or ceremonial contexts for emotions. A speaker may denote a defining condition (say, childlessness or widowhood) as their *gham*, as well as gesturing towards personal feelings. The spoken verb, '*khādi kawal*', denotes the 'manifest(ation)' of 'gladness' specifically at weddings (*wada*), birth-visits (*ombaraki*), circumcisions (*sunnat*), naming and hair-shaving ceremonies (*haqiqa*), as well as less formal events such as returns from the *haj* pilgrimage, birthdays, election victories, professional promotions and housewarmings. Partly eliding the distinction between ceremonial and everyday visits, Bibiane specifically and Pukhtun people more generally place the term *gham-khādi* within the context of *tal-ratlal* and a third expression, *zeest-rozgār* (literally the 'work



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of life'), thus confounding any anthropological attempt to establish a separate ontology of *gham-khādi* ceremonies (cf. Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994). Pukhtuns use variants of the word '*rozgār*' in contexts other than *gham-khādi*, referring to professional work ('*kār-rozgār*') as 'employment', which is distinguished from less specified purposive activity, '*kār*' ('*kor-kār*', housework). The word tends to relate more to people's roles or identities than to the effort invested in contingent tasks. The two available English–Pukhto dictionaries amplify these verbal transfers in defining *zeest* as 'life, existence, employment' (Bellew n.d.: 88; Raverty 1982: 537), and *rozgār* as 'employment', 'service, earning' and also 'time' (Bellew n.d.: 82; Raverty 1982: 516). Bibiane's own discourse suggests that visiting, gifting and attending ceremonial events are all parts of a conceptually single, though highly complex, process of 'making kinship' (cf. Carsten 1997) and building social relations – a process, moreover, experienced as a form of work.

Such a concept of 'work' – first, a practice of social relations not completely identified with any one task; and second, an array of conceptual (not only physical) activities – necessarily complicates and enriches debates within anthropology as to the definition of this term.<sup>11</sup> In the 1970s–80s, a number of women anthropologists took issue with the broadly Western conceptualisation of work as a salaried, professional task taking place in a 'public sphere', adducing the domestic context of socially meaningful labour (Mackintosh 1979: 175; Povinelli 1993; and Strathern 1984: 13, 18). Others criticised the then-dominant model of work as 'patriarchal' (Grint 1991: 33, 40; Kondos 1989: 29; Lewenhak 1980; 1992: 1, 16; Morris 1990: 3–5; Navarra 1980: 35; and Wallace 1987: 1). This book builds on such work by presenting an ethnically specific concept of Bibiane's 'work' as they enact 'proper' ceremonial observances. Attendance and participation count as Bibiane's work under a number of headings: first, these actions entail conformity to or negotiation with conventional practices. Second, they are physically and mentally arduous (a matter of strategy). Third, the participating women collectively perform a 'work' as a means of Pukhtun self-representation ('*Pukhtunwali*'). And last, they are understood by Bibiane as an ongoing social effort, characteristic of living itself. The analytical concept of 'work' I deploy in this book identifies the term with the small- and large-scale, highly organised, transactional activities that make up social relationships. Bibiane's entry into a *gham-khādi* circle, on marriage, commits them to a category of social relationship with other families in which *gham-khādi* obligations subsume all other ties, as *gham-khādi* and *tlal-ratlat* participants understand themselves to be performing an identity-making practice of 'Pukhto'.

<sup>11</sup> Western female anthropologists have been at pains to problematise assumptions about work, e.g. Andersen 2000: 144; Franks 1999: 4; Gray and Mearns 1989: 29; Hochschild 1997; Humphrey 1992: 179; Kelly 1986; Mackintosh 1979: 175, 179–90; Navarra 1980: 22–5; Oppong 1994: 1–13; Pahl 1989; Reagan and Blaxall 1976; Singh 1992: 3; and Wallman 1979: 12–13. On other activity in the hidden economy as 'work' (Daniels 1988), such as voluntary work, see Jahoda 1982: 8–9, and on charitable work, see Reynell 1985: 232–3.

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This study aims to build upon a rich body of anthropological literature about NWFP Pukhtuns, from a female context, for its representation of the actions of individual Bibiane in *gham-khādi*.<sup>12</sup> Most anthropological enquiries in the NWFP discuss ‘tribal’ village contexts (Donnan and Werbner 1991: 3).<sup>13</sup> Barth’s account of political leadership among Swat Pukhtun Khans (‘chiefs’ or landowners) of the Yusufzai tribe (1986)<sup>14</sup> showed that although Pukhtun society, in theory, is egalitarian, in reality it is structured by caste-like divisions. The ‘Pukhtun’ (conventionally landowning and widely referred to as Khan) forms the apex of such structures, along with certain religious groups (for example the Wali’s family). Barth argued that ‘Khans’ derive authority from the ownership of land, provision of hospitality and reputation for honour. In Swat, Khans, in the capacity of autonomous agents, build support and status by receiving visitors in their men’s guesthouse (*hujra*). In a series of ‘games’, both the landed (*mōr sarī*: satisfied men) and their adherents (*wūge sarī*: hungry men) are granted an individualistic agency in exploiting their respective resources (land or support and labour). Barth argued that in a series of temporary choices, relationships are dyadic, contractual and voluntary (ibid.: 3). In contrast, I argue below that although Bibiane are able to exploit relationships within society to further their individual choices through *gham-khādi*, such relationships are, however, characterised by a complex, and sometimes negotiable, sense of duty and obligation.

Although Barth’s focus on singular actors, agency and negotiation marked a new phase in anthropology (from that of Evans-Pritchard’s and Radcliffe-Brown’s models of social structure), and was the first substantial ethnography on ‘elite’ Pukhtuns, his theoretical presuppositions were challenged variously by Marxist, indigenous and feminist anthropologists. Asad (1972) argued that Barth obscured Khanāns’ exercise of systematic domination through their control of scarcity. Second, Ahmed questioned Barth’s Western presumption of individual interests, which downplay the emergence of the self-abnegating ruler (Badshah) or Wali and his Sufi ascetic ancestry in Swat (A. S. Ahmed 1976; cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:

<sup>12</sup> A. S. Ahmed 1975, 1976, 1980, 1984, 1988; Asad 1972; Banerjee 2000; Barth 1958, 1986, 1960, 1961, 1970, 1981a, 1981b, 1995; Caroe 1992; Dupree 1978, 1984; Edwards 1996, 1998; Grima 1998; Lindholm 1981, 1982, 1988, 1995, 1996; Safdar 1997; Singer 1982; Shah 1993; Shah 1999; Spain 1962, 1963, 1995. On Afghan Pashtuns, see Lamb 2002; Tapper and Tapper 1986; Tapper 1981, 1991; Tapper 1984. Historical and colonial accounts include Bellew n.d., 1986, 1994; Beveridge 1987; Elphinstone 1815; Goodwin 1969; Howell 1979; King 1984; Kipling 1987; Merk 1984; Raverty 1982; Thackston 1999.

<sup>13</sup> A Pukhtun ‘tribe’, in this context, means the group of people who claim descent from a common ancestor, Qais bin Rashid in the seventh century, who had three sons: Sarban, Bitan and Ghurghust, from whom all Pukhtun tribes trace their descent (I shall elaborate on this in Chapter 1). All Pukhtun tribes also share a common ‘culture’ called *Pukhtunwali*; speak a common language, Pukhto; and usually occupy a specific geographical area, such as the North-West Frontier Province in Pakistan. For a definition of ‘tribe’ in the Middle Eastern context, see Khoury and Kostiner 1990: 4.

<sup>14</sup> Among the Pukhtun tribes the Yusufzai Pukhtuns who make ‘the class of *khans* and Pukhtuns’ (Charles Lindholm 1996: 78) aspire to ‘positions of leadership’ (Lindholm 1982: 213). They are one of the most powerful tribes in the Pukhtun hierarchy. Both Mardan and Swat regions are dominated by the Yusufzai Pukhtuns (see A. S. Ahmed 1976: 7, 1977a: 14; Barth 1986: 7–11, 25–8; Bellew 1994; Caroe 1992: 12–13; Wadud 1962: xxiv).