Honour and violence is a major theme in the anthropology of the Middle East, yet – apart from political violence – most studies approach violence from the perspective of honour. By contrast, this important study examines the meanings of lethal conflict in a little studied tribal society in Pakistan’s unruly North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and offers a new perspective on its causes. Based on an in-depth study of local conflicts, the book challenges stereotyped images of a region and people miscast as extremist and militant.

Being grounded in local ethnography enables the book to shed light on the complexities of violence, not only at the structural or systemic level, but also as experienced by the men involved in lethal conflict. In this way, the book provides a subjective and experiential approach to violence that is applicable beyond the field locality and relevant for advancing the study of violence in the Middle East and South Asia. The book is the first ethnographic study of this region since renowned anthropologist Fredrik Barth’s pioneering study in 1954.

Are Knudsen is Research Director at the Chr. Michelsen Institute in Bergen, Norway.

‘The material itself is extremely interesting, dealing as it does with an exotic locale, and with an intractable problem of endemic violence. ... Dr. Knudsen draws this conflictual situation very well, and adds a great deal to the present-day study of violence, putting what is often seen as primordial in the context of modern conditions.’

– Professor Charles Lindholm, Boston University

We should make the best possible use of this analysis: for its daring perspectives, extreme empirical findings, and wide relevance. It deserves a very careful reading for its contributions to so many aspects of our understanding of honour, politics and human society.

– Professor emeritus Fredrik Barth, Boston University and University of Oslo

Cover illustration: A Palas elder displaying his early-19th-century muzzle-loading rifle and bandoleer.

ARE KNUDSEN
with a foreword by Fredrik Barth

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VIOLENCE AND BELONGING

Land, Love and Lethal Conflict in the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan

ARE KNUDSEN

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Foreword

Where the Indus River breaks through the main transverse mountain chains of the Himalayas on its way to the south, there are some of the most inaccessible and impenetrable mountain areas of Asia. The land is generally known as Kohistan, ‘Land of Mountains’, and is occupied by diverse, little studied communities and peoples. Dr Are Knudsen has penetrated this fastness and reached the short, steep valley of Palas, debouching into the Indus Gorge. From his visits there he has brought home unique and fascinating ethnographic materials, from which he has constructed a sensitive and theoretically challenging monograph on the indigenous society formed by its population.

This population makes up a truly stateless society, not only lacking in central authority and leadership, but essentially without instituted ways of making binding internal collective decisions. Such decisions are only made consensually and case by case in assemblies or by voluntary mediation. Knudsen recognizes and addresses the paradox that this description raises of how any person can be said to be a ‘member’ of such a social formation. The whole area of Kohistan is notorious in North Pakistan for its anarchy, its violence and danger, its lethal conflicts both within and without. Gazing across the steep landscape, you see scattered homesteads each with its fortified tower, and scattered fields, many of them uncultivated. Livelihood is dependent on mixed farming and transhumance, with seasonal shifts between lower and higher fields, and summer pastures in the high mountains. A certain export of timber down the Indus River has given a traditional supplement to household incomes. There is also a considerable diaspora of persons from Palas living under the protection of the scattered network of Pakistani stations along the Indus, as refugees in Alai, or as labour migrants in the lowlands. But what gives coherence to those still resident in the area – the persisting core of a Palas society?
Knudsen deftly chooses to discuss this issue in terms of 'belonging': what makes a person identify with the locality, and how, if at all, is this identification socially sanctioned? Basically, you belong to the community of Palas by patrilineal descent or, more correctly, by holding inherited shares in a landed estate. There is also a (diminishing) population of occupational caste members in some parts of the valley, who do not own such shares and thus, even if born in the valley, are outsiders and do not belong. The system of land rights in Palas has been changing: whereas all cultivated fields used to be only temporarily allocated within descent groups, these have now been privatized and are now occasionally even bought and sold. But oak forests and coniferous forests are still collectively allocated to descent groups, and shares in such property can thus provide an overt criterion of belonging in the valley.

Yet this is not the whole story because such descent groups do not seem to constitute the core structure of social relations in the valley, in that they are only rarely and imperfectly mobilized in defence of a person's rights, and many conflicts over land claims arise even between closely related agnates. Knudsen thus shows quite clearly that we are not simply dealing with politically corporate descent groups forming around joint interests and estates. Indeed the most startling feature of his materials is the extent of the political fragmentation that characterizes the population. There was a time, according to recent traditions, when valley communities of the size of Palas and other tributary valleys of the Indus fought bloody wars with each other. This Knudsen links with the effects of the traditional wesh system of temporary allotment of cultivated land characteristic of those times, which in effect created precisely the collective estates around which groups could form, no more – and so Knudsen grasps the nettle of searching for the roots of belonging elsewhere, in the emotions of being a person of Palas. He finds them in the intangible sense of identification and longing that is experienced when you are away from the valley. He sees them in the personal devastation that is produced when you lose a major social confrontation, and you must flee the valley. Above all, he finds them in the persons' struggles to live by the exacting local code of honour when you, against the odds, must succeed in constructing a public persona that embodies the local virtues of courage and strength to command respect.

Some of the finest materials in this monograph are on that subject. We come close to understanding the violent tournaments of revenge and feud, with their ritualized social sequence of 'taking turns' in agonistic
confrontations. In the case stories we follow closely the contests of threat and damage and killing that unfold; the heavy burdens of responsibility for family and reputation that are shouldered; the intricate discipline of constructing and defending selfhood in this tyranny of honour. Conversely, we sense the hubris when a contestant can lay down a ban on the cultivation of the very field that his opponent owns. And we meet the pater familias who refuses to seek escape and exile, and therefore must barricade himself in his house and enter into an indefinite vigil of watchfulness in self-defence within his fortified tower literally for years of stubborn intransigence.

These case materials are epic stories of violence, confrontation and contest, and lead Knudsen to the understanding that 'people fight so as to belong', and that Palas society is constituted precisely by the membership which each participant achieves as one of the contestants in this exacting theatre of local self-defence and assertion.

Such a view implies the recognition that the ‘order’ of the social form that is Palas is in the web of social relations – of partisanship, confrontation, and manoeuvre – that is continually emerging; and Knudsen is even able to provide some important evidence of major changes in external parameters of this theatre over the last century or two. To have obtained and been able to make use of such data is a major feat in itself.

Indeed, the whole construction of his analysis is one that makes great demands on the quality of his field materials. These are the more exacting, considering the lack of security in the region, the danger of movement and presence among the people of Palas that must have limited his fieldwork and his options. He has cleverly turned some of these difficulties to his own advantage, obtaining materials from the swirl of events, the commentaries of the losers living under Pakistani protection in marketplaces on the edge of Palas, and the diaspora of informants in other areas of Pakistan. He has also accumulated a considerable amount of knowledge in time and space of the persons and cases he discusses.

We should make the best possible use of this analysis: for its daring perspectives, extreme empirical findings, and wide relevance. It deserves a very careful reading for its contributions to so many aspects of our understanding of honour, politics and human society.

Fredrik Barth
Figure 0.1: District Kohistan with fieldwork site
Preface

This book explores the sense of belonging among the tribesmen living in the Palas valley, a remote and inaccessible mountain valley located in District Kohistan of the North-West Frontier Province, Northern Pakistan (Figure 1). The Palas valley has a population of about 40,000 and is inhabited by Kohistani tribesmen belonging to the Deobandi sect (‘school’) of Sunni Islam. There is no formal leadership in the valley and social organisation is best described as egalitarian and acephalous. The most distinctive feature of social life in Palas is the scale and ferocity of lethal conflict. Based on in-depth study of violent encounters (inter-group and interpersonal) and more than one hundred hours of taped interviews with resident and migrant villagers, it is my contention that the men’s proneness to fight among themselves can be put down to what they perceive as a need to safeguard their ‘belonging’. ‘Belonging’, I argue, sums up their dual concern with protecting membership of their peer group and safeguarding residence in the locality. Their practical and emotional attachment to the place and the community is underlined by the importance the villagers place on being ‘settled in the valley’ (watne bilshe boon). The threat to their belonging is underlined by frequent feuds and homicides that force those who cannot protect themselves to leave the valley. In the Palas valley, I argue, fighting should not be viewed solely as an act of violence but rather, through its transmutation, as an act of self-preservation.

As I will discuss in more detail later (Chapter 1), the Palas valley resembles the kind of social formation that Mary Douglas has termed an ‘egalitarian enclave’. In an egalitarian enclave belonging holds a special meaning because of the tendency of the enclave to shed its members. I argue with Douglas that it is in the boundary between belonging and not belonging that the essence of belonging is most clearly expressed. This book deals with those who straddle this boundary: the poor, the belligerent, the weak and the wronged. My other major concern is the constitution of the social,
moral and geographical boundaries that circumscribe the Palas villagers’ notions of belonging.

I argue that by their living up to, and adhering to, the vernacular notions of manhood and masculinity, they threaten the very belonging they seek to safeguard and protect. Not only is fighting a threat to belonging, but poverty is too and the two are closely related. Hostility is purposely targeted at one’s opponent’s agricultural production by placing a ban on cultivation. Those whose agricultural output is constrained by such bans, do not give up easily but strive to survive even though suffering from a lack of sustenance, physical discomfort and threats to their life. They persevere, because not doing so would be dishonourable: ‘The one who leaves, can no longer dispute’, admonishes a local proverb. Fleeing is considered a sign of weakness and proof of unmanliness. In order to avoid the stigma brought on by involuntary migration men can take refuge in their house. The hardiest of the men remain confined for years, hiding behind the fortified house walls. This earns them respect and a reputation for manhood and bravery. To understand why, this book offers a broader analysis not only of the acts of fighting and migrating but the local customs and social etiquette that structure the conduct of lethal conflicts.

The significance of belonging is evidenced in the narratives of those dislocated and forced to resettle outside the valley. They stress the importance of being in the valley and the fact that only there can central elements of manhood and masculinity be displayed, affirmed and validated. Unable to return, they express their longing for their homeland and the particular lifestyle associated with it. Thus, belonging has an affective dimension and, if we didn’t take this aspect into account, our understanding of Palas notions of belonging would be superficial and shallow. The affective element is communicated in song and poetry and acted out in illicit love affairs and clandestine romances. Being party to an illicit love affair is an essential expression of belonging, but at the same time, the strongest repudiation of it. Loving and longing are eulogised in vernacular song and poetry, but the slightest hints of illicit romances lead to the obliteration of unfaithful women who, unable to flee, are killed by their brothers, fathers or husbands. The antithesis of belonging is therefore not defection and migration but obliteration and death.

To the men, belonging holds special meaning and importance, and only by being in the valley and a part of the community can the masculine ideals be affirmed and validated. The fighting threatens belonging – but so does
not fighting, letting down one’s guard or displaying signs of weakness. The weak are liable to blame: ‘The water flows down to where the land is weak’, runs a local proverb. To avoid raids and attacks, a reputation for strength and toughness has a great economic value. In the Palas valley agricultural land is not only vital for economic survival but for social status and identity. Losing agricultural land undermines claim to membership in the peer-group of landowners (ulsi’ya). I propose that the bigger landowners are more likely to resort to violence than the smaller, because they are expected to embody the masculine virtues of toughness and respectability. They cannot allow infractions to go unchallenged or unpunished. To this end, they not only match the offence but exceed it in an attempt to gain the upper hand and eject the opponent. In an effort to counteract an escalation of the conflict, the relatives of those involved can exert pressure on the parties to show restraint, seek arbitration or sue for peace. Although mediation is often attempted, only rarely do conflicts end peacefully. In an egalitarian society there is no institution that can force a peaceful resolution on to the contestants. In general, forgiving a killer and refraining from revenge is not socially acceptable, nor is monetary compensation. In rare cases, however, the aggrieved party foregoes revenge in return for money and a marriageable girl.

As an autocratic moral community, the villagers act upon rules devised and sanctioned by themselves. The local moralities are not necessarily those of majority society and, in some instances, are clearly opposed to them. In the valley the use of force is fully legitimate as long as it is in accordance with the local customs and etiquette. The same applies to the right of revenge. Leaving homicide and aggression unpunished is considered a sign of weakness that may invite further attacks and incursions. Therefore, the right of revenge is not only a prerogative of those wronged, it is considered necessary to protect familial respectability and social belonging. There is, hence, an ‘ethos of assertiveness’ that compels men to defend their rights, not only for material reasons, but in order not to lose face.

In this book, my aim is not only to describe the acts of violence themselves but to analyse the social, cultural and ecological conditions that produce them. Integral to my argument is that enmity is entangled in the local system of land tenure that, with increasing commercialisation, heightens the tensions between people and their land. The ownership of all productive resources is contestable and the infractions often unpredictable and sudden but never without pretext. The book attempts to explain why
resource issues are so contestable and even minor infractions on a person’s landed property are harshly reciprocated. Tenacious land disputes provoke armed conflict between individuals and kinship groups of varying scale. Unable to resolve these disputes by peaceful means, the men resort to the use of force. Depending on the nature of the offence, the responses range from verbal abuse, threats, intimidation and attacks on property (crops, livestock, houses), to physical assault intended to maim, injure or kill the offending party. To avoid being killed, men seek house-confinement and wear protective amulets to escape murderous attacks.

Belonging is strongly linked to the landscape and the constitution of the locality. The Palas villagers’ strong emotional attachment to the valley is evidenced by the centrality of the local system of land tenure (wesh, ‘division’). The historical importance of the wesh is preserved in oral history, and mythically binds them together with the landscape. In property disputes the wesh narrative is rehearsed and its practical importance re-affirmed. This is not only a testimony to the economic importance of the land, but also the symbolic importance of its inheritance. The wesh is also the reason for the importance of sharing and equivalence – everything that is divisible must be shared according to the principles laid down by the wesh. It is in their attempts to ensure such equivalence that the most serious and intractable feuds are erupting. These conflicts involve society members on many levels and in different capacities: as contestants in interpersonal fights, as allies of close relatives or as members of opposing descent groups.

Belonging also has a spatial dimension, one that is particularly evident in the growing number of boundaries delineating the landscape. The imposition of new boundaries has gradually transformed the landscape from a topologically unbounded space to a space criss-crossed by a multitude of partitions. There is, consequently, a mimetic relation between the process of drawing boundaries around or across a geographic space (‘territorialisation’) and the social boundaries that are being drawn between descent groups. But this process of territorialisation also generates internal conflicts that threaten social cohesion and commensality.

**THE PLAN OF THE BOOK**

In recent years violence has emerged as a central topic in anthropology. In Chapter 1, ‘Introduction’, I provide an overview of this debate with a special emphasis on the ‘meanings of violence’ that have been a major impetus to my own work on Palas. The chapter also provides information about
the multi-sited approach to fieldwork in Palas and the challenges of doing ethnographic fieldwork in a geographically remote and socially inaccessible society.

In Chapter 2, ‘Belonging to the Palas Valley’, I take a panoramic view of the valley and region with a special emphasis on the valley’s linkage to economic, bureaucratic and political systems of larger scale. The chapter describes the precariousness of belonging to the valley and the tension between the value systems of the interior and the exterior and the overlapping areas where the two intersect. This tension is explored with reference to the presence of incongruent political cultures that serve to reinforce the problems of economic backwardness.

In Chapter 3, ‘The Textured Landscape’, the focus shifts to the historical institution and subsequent dissolution of the wesh, the periodic system of land rotation that continues to be a central concern of the villagers and confers a special sense of belonging to the valley. The demise of the wesh marked the end of inter-valley feuds and the beginning of inter-personal vendettas. Understanding the origin of the wesh is crucial in order to explain the emergent resource management dilemmas that have become a major cause of resentment, dispute and enmity among villagers.

In Chapter 4, ‘Land of Contention’, I offer a description of the agropastoral system and how it forms the basis for seasonal shifts in vernacular sociality. The chapter gives special emphasis to the human ecology of enmities and how food production is constrained by social hostility. The extremely low maize yields pose a threat to household viability and incite farmers to attack anyone who attempts to encroach on their land or appropriate its produce.

In Chapter 5, ‘Being, Longing and Belonging’, I explore the politics of belonging through a focus on involuntary migration, expulsion and obliteration, especially as this affects the men and women accused of being involved in illicit love affairs. The chapter emphasises the affective element of belonging and the centrality of longing in romantic love and in the migrants’ remembrance of their homeland.

In Chapter 6, ‘Condemned and Confined’, attention turns to a narrative description of a land dispute between two closely related men. This is an attempt to demonstrate the complexity of land disputes and to scrutinise the events that made a villager kill his cousin. By pursuing a micro-study of a personal vendetta is it possible to gain a fuller appreciation of the importance of belonging and its links to manhood, honour and masculinity.
In Chapter 7, ‘Magic and Honour’, I explore the role of magic in homicidal violence, based on a detailed reading of the events surrounding the murder of two women and a man. Magic and spiritual charms are used for personal safety and to reveal the identity of absconding murderers. The belief in magic is intertwined with indigenous Islamic beliefs that are now rapidly changing in the face of growing orthodoxy.

In Chapter 8, ‘Contesting the Boundaries’, the focus shifts back to land tenure and I analyse boundary disputes over oak forest and grassland. Recently, the fights have multiplied through a legal plurality that engenders conflict between descent groups. The chapter shows that commercialisation has sharpened competition for scarce natural resources and raised the prospect of armed conflict. At the same time, the parties exercise restraint and are ambivalent about the use of force.

In Chapter 9, ‘Brooding over the Big Trees’, I return to the issue of boundaries again, and why the introduction of commercial timber logging caused intra-tribal conflict and inter-valley animosity. The contingency of the boundaries and the tension between descent and locality make it possible to examine the social construction of belonging and how processes of social exclusion and inclusion influence it.

In the concluding chapter, ‘Thresholds and Transitions’, I discuss the implications of this study for understanding of the uses of violence in the Palas valley. Drawing together the findings of the previous chapters, I discuss the analytical significance of belonging for an understanding of the lethal conflicts and vendettas in the valley and beyond. The chapter argues for a more empathic approach to the study of violence and aggression in egalitarian societies.

A NOTE ON NAMING

The reader should note that the Kohistanis are found in Dir Kohistan, Swat Kohistan and Indus Kohistan. This book is about those living in the District Kohistan of the last region. More specifically, my usage of the generic term ‘Kohistani’ denotes a person from the part of Indus Kohistan that falls within the NWFP and, unless otherwise stated, excludes those living in the part of Indus Kohistan that administratively belongs to the Northern Areas.
A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION
Due to the technical difficulty of writing the Palas dialect, this book uses a simplified transcription of indigenous terms without use of diacritics and stress marks unavailable in the Times Roman fontset. In accordance with the convention among linguists working on the Palas dialect (Schmidt and Kohistani 1998), I use double vowels to indicate length; thus *badmaashi* and not *badmāshi*. The communal assemblies are known in Palas as *jargā* but I have used the more common term *jirga* throughout.
Acknowledgements

This book is a result of a long process beginning with earning a PhD scholarship from the Research Council of Norway in 1995. In the decade since then, I have been helped by a number of people and institutions and it is my pleasure to acknowledge and thank them here.

The initial ideas for my PhD project came from Mark Treacy who as a professional forester stimulated my interest in the fate of Northern Pakistan’s forests. Soon after, Nigel J. R. Allan, a veteran geographer with several seasons of fieldwork in the region behind him, made me aware of the Palas valley and the conservation efforts of the Himalayan Jungle Project (HJP). Based on helpful advice from Guy Duke, the HJP’s director, I became convinced that fieldwork in the remote Palas valley was feasible. By coincidence, Ruth L. Schmidt, one of the few linguists familiar with the oral history of the valley and an authority on the local dialect, took up a position at the University of Oslo. This fortunate move put me in touch with her long-time collaborator Mohammad Manzar Zarin. Without Manzar’s unstinting support in the field and during the write-up process, neither my PhD nor this book would have been completed. We started out as collaborators and ended up as friends.

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After defending my PhD, Lincoln Keiser encouraged me to turn the dissertation into a monograph. This revision process was financed by CMI with financial support from ‘Norges Banks Jubileumsfond for Chr. Michelsens Institutt’. Wendy Belcher midwifed the book-proposal that was later accepted by NIAS Press. Three anonymous referee reports helped me to improve several aspects of the original manuscript. Inger Nygaard finalised the editing of the manuscript, Jonathan Price copy-edited the typescript and Leena Höskuldsson of NIAS Press handled the layout and typesetting; Robert Sjursen drew the maps and Narve Rio helped with the statistical analysis. Thanks are also due to Niels Gutschow for granting permission to reproduce his drawings from Palas, Jürgen W. Frembgen for sharing unpublished articles and David Thomas for granting me access to the HJP archives in Islamabad.

I owe a special gratitude to Jan Petter Blom whose stimulating lectures provided my crucial introduction to social anthropology in general and the works of Fredrik Barth in particular. I am therefore deeply grateful to Fredrik Barth for contributing a foreword to this book.

This book could not have been written without the support of the resident and migrant men of the Palas valley. Many villagers, who must remain anonymous, offered their kind help, cheerful company and practical assistance. I am especially grateful to those that, trusting my intentions, disclosed painful memories and experiences that helped me gain a deeper appreciation of the strictures of belonging to Palas. In October 2005, Northern Pakistan was struck by a devastating earthquake. The Palas valley was close to the epicentre and at least 80 people perished in the quake, 300 houses collapsed and more than 3,000 were damaged. I would like
to thank CMI and my colleagues for their generous donation to the relief effort in Palas. The royalties from this book will be donated to the ongoing development efforts in the valley.

Last but not least, my biggest debt is to Gunn who came with me to Pakistan and made a home for us and Haakon in Islamabad. She also endured the inevitable hardships of my writing-up the thesis. By the time I defended my PhD thesis in 2001, Ingrid had just joined us, bringing my professional and private life to a happy and long-awaited conclusion. I therefore dedicate this book to Gunn, Haakon and Ingrid.
Glossary

badali exchange marriage
ban bon house confinement
baro musha ‘big man’
be’záat without lineage membership (clients)
bemuradi cowardice, unmanliness
betak guestroom
bilosh dispute
baagô taagô shares in the landed estate (literally, ‘big-small share’)
baando broad-leaved forest
choor literally, ‘thief of honour’
dadkul ego’s agnatic kinsmen
dalaal go-between (in love affairs)
dastoor customs
deero guesthouse
Faqirs non-Shin clients
gari watchtower
haq (right of) revenge
hashar communal labour
hayáa honour
hor wesh division ‘by halves’
izzat respectability
jirga consensual assembly
kandré choor trespasser of privacy
kané lethal conflict carrying revenge obligations
kané xawáano main contestant (literally, ‘owner of enmity’)
khil public wastelands
ma’keen maize-growing belt
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>maáli</td>
<td>meadows (summer habitation zone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>madan</td>
<td>truce, cease-fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maji ser</td>
<td>maize-cultivating zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>masti</td>
<td>machismo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>matiiz</td>
<td>elopement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mezgere</td>
<td>mediators in conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>miráas</td>
<td>men tracing descent from a common grandfather (fraternal-interest group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mulial</td>
<td>ego's matrikin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nazar</td>
<td>evil eye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pecha(i)</td>
<td>opponent(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pechtob</td>
<td>being on bad, unfriendly terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qaláang</td>
<td>grazing rent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarkhali</td>
<td>indentured labourers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shar</td>
<td>cultivation ban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sharam</td>
<td>shame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shariat</td>
<td>local council adjudicated by a Maulvi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shin</td>
<td>majority ethnic group (patrons)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sora</td>
<td>compensation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taigh bandi</td>
<td>protective amulets (worn by men involved in emnities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tang wesh</td>
<td>division 'by shares'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tagsimaat</td>
<td>indigenous land settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tehsil</td>
<td>administrative unit of a district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ulsi’ya</td>
<td>landowners (holding shares in the landed estate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wakil</td>
<td>legal representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>watan</td>
<td>homeland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wesh</td>
<td>ancient system of periodic land rotation and redistribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>záat</td>
<td>patrilineage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zangal</td>
<td>mixed conifer forest</td>
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Introduction

The Palas valley is the locus of frequent brawls over material and symbolic resources that more often than not turn violent. This presents us with an apparent paradox. Why is it that in small-scale societies, homicide is so common, and in apparent negation of the communality and commensality considered a trait of (closed corporate) communities ever since Tönnies coined the term *Gemeinschaft*? Why are some societies peaceful, and others, like the Palas valley, characterised by intermittent violence and homicide? The question is not a novel one and has been a major concern in social anthropology. The anthropological literature on ‘feuding’ is vast, which necessitates strict selectivity in this chapter. In order to narrow down the area, I primarily address the uses of violence relevant for understanding institutionalised vengeance in small-scale (‘egalitarian’) societies, such as the Palas valley. I begin with a short overview of the form or ‘morphology’ of institutionalised vengeance. The main thrust of anthropological studies has been on the purported functions of the feud, reflecting the functionalist bias. In the next section, I therefore discuss some of the main theories and approaches to the instrumental functions of ‘violence’, which, for the time being, I define as ‘contestably rendering physical hurt’ (Riches 1991: 295). Thirdly, I present the turn towards the expressive (communicative) meanings of violence and outline how this can be applied to the understanding of Palas society.

The discussion of institutionalised vengeance in small-scale societies has primarily been over how violence is enacted, that is, its morphology. This quickly became entangled in a debate over the terminology of various forms of violence and revenge: vengeance killing, blood revenge, vendetta, feud and war. There are important differences between these terms that need to be distinguished. At the lowest level, *vengeance killing* denotes a personal obligation to avenge homicide. *Blood revenge* indicates that avenging a previous murder terminates the conflict, while vendetta is taken
to mean alternating vengeance killings between the parties involved. Black-Michaud (1975) argued that vengeance killing should be distinguished from feuding because the former does not involve corporate responsibility while the latter does. Thus, a *feud* takes place within political entities that share collective responsibility for the acts of vengeance. *War*, on the other hand, refers to killing between independent political entities, though there is still a tendency to use war and feud interchangeably in anthropological literature. In many cases feud or blood feud is used as a generic term meaning all of the above. While this is clearly not warranted, it indicates that there are often no strict divisions between different forms of institutionalised vengeance. The personal revenge of homicide may escalate into a ‘blood feud’ or close kinsmen and allies may over time withdraw their support thereby reducing it to a matter of personal revenge. For this reason, the once intense debate over the terminology and morphology of institutionalised vengeance has abated.

**VIOLENCE AND ANTHROPOLOGY**

There has in recent years been renewed interest in the problem of violence and aggression within anthropology, especially in the prevalence of violence in societies that we, for want of a better term, call ‘egalitarian’ (Boehm 1999). In ‘pure’ egalitarian societies there is neither status nor (hereditary) rank distinction nor any insignia or emblems signalling such rank. For this reason, egalitarian societies were originally seen as lacking in sophistication and, in an evolutionary scheme, often placed somewhere between ‘tribes’ and ‘chiefdoms’. Egalitarian societies lacked an authoritarian structure and therefore also ‘organisation’ (Woodburn 1982) which made them liable to savage internecine blood feuds. This bias against acephalous societies can be traced to the seventeenth-century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes. The political theory in Hobbes’ *Leviathan* (1997b/1651) was grounded on a particular view of human nature, a moral psychology. To the question, ‘Why do they fight?’ Hobbes’ argued that it is the nature of man. Only a sovereign could hinder the stronger from exploiting the weaker. Without a monopoly over the use of coercive force society would inevitable decay into anarchy and chaos, ‘a time of Warre where every man is Enemy to every man’ would prevail (ibid.: 70). If Hobbes is right, what stops individuals from using excessive violence, and, more generally, acephalous societies from disintegrating?
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In the 1930s and 1940s, anthropologists began systematic studies of egalitarian societies, especially African ‘tribes’. In Evans-Pritchard’s *The Nuer* (1969/1941) he showed that Nuer segmentary organisation was such that homicide among close agnates was relatively frequent, the more distantly related they were and further apart they lived, the bigger the chances of conflicts escalating into a feud. The former could be quickly settled with the help of an impartial mediator (Leopard-skin chief) and compensatory payments (blood-cattle). The latter was more difficult to settle and less receptive to compensation payments. This resulted in periodic outbreaks of hostilities, to the degree that ‘a feud never ends’ (ibid.: 155). The high level of inter-personal violence and bellicosity was a challenge to functionalist theories, but Gluckman’s ‘new functionalism’ salvaged the idea of internal peace, which he called ‘the peace in the feud’ (Gluckman 1963). In the years to come, many new studies appeared on other tribal groups in Africa (and Melanesia). None of them fundamentally challenged the basic tenets of the structural-functional feud established by Evans-Pritchard’s Nuer study, although one found that feuds in segmentary lineage ‘systems’ were more complex, contingent and idiomatic than first assumed (Peters 1967).

In the 1960s, new studies from the Mediterranean ‘culture area’ linked personal honour to the debate on feud and violence (Campbell 1964, Peristiany 1965). In honour-based societies, honour is bestowed socially. Losing it is shameful, therefore honour must be protected. The functional use of violence is therefore to uphold or restore honour. From the 1970s, the Mediterranean honour-shame complex came under increasing scrutiny, with new studies questioning its validity, uniformity and regional distinctiveness (Gilmore 1987). Closely linked to this critique was the failure to account for the changing cultural construction of honour, reflecting the synchronic framework used to study it. Adopting a diachronic perspective, Keiser found that the increasing resort to homicide in a Kohistani village in the North-West Frontier Province was due to growing religious orthodoxy that made protection of honour a religious duty (Keiser 1986, 1991). Keiser’s subtle analysis tied honour together with *Iman*, the Islamic ‘faith’ that distinguishes Muslims from non-Muslims. He argued for the existence of two forms of honour: *ghairat* considered a gift bestowed by God and *aizzat* that is bestowed by the community. Only attacks on the former demand vengeance. Due to its connection with *Iman*, it was a religious duty to protect *ghairat*. At the same time, the money from new cash crops and timber logging was invested in automatic arms. This, Keiser argued,
'resulted in an epidemic of death enmity' (1991: 53). His analysis points to a more dynamic and multi-causal explanation of violence than simply attributing it to a given 'culture', a 'culture of honour' or even a 'Kalashnikov culture'. Keiser’s study also shows that the cohesion within patrilineages have been replaced by political factions whose recruitment cuts through lineage membership.

The latter is important, considering that a common explanation of the propensity for conflict in tribally organised societies is the presence of fraternal interest groups, defined as a patrilocal unit of male agnates who defend a common territory or interest. The fraternal interest group theory states that societies having such groups tend to be more violent than those without them (van Velzen and Wetering 1960). More generally, feuds in societies with a ‘tribal’ social organisation are considered to be structured by the nested system of segmentary lineages (this is sometimes referred to as segmentary lineage theory), where the individual segments keep each other in check by fusion and fission (Black-Michaud 1975, Lindholm 1981c). This ensures social cohesion, keeps the system in balance and limits the range of permissible homicide and revenge killings. In most egalitarian societies, affronts and retaliation tend to be carefully meted out. In order to prevent wanton murder, there are usually strict rules that regulate attacks and retaliation, necessary to keep homicide within acceptable limits (Otterbein 1965). In those cases where such rules do not exist or limited liability does not apply, either the size of social groups is limited and prone to frequent fission (Chagnon 1983) or the number of homicides tends to become extremely high (Knauf 1987, Nash 1967).

This points to another explanation of high homicide rates, one that locates homicide within social psychology and the social construction of emotion (‘frustration-aggression theory’). The study of emotion, sometimes referred to as ‘emotionology’ (Spierenburg 1994) is based on the understanding that emotions are a key to explain homicide. In his seminal work of 1939, The Civilising Process, Elias argued that the gradual decline of interpersonal violence and homicide rates in late medieval Europe was a result of an increase in emotional control and the state monopoly on the use of force. Violence and emotions have also been linked to gender, positing a link between masculinity and aggression. This gendered explanation locates the propensity for violence not in males in general, but in particular culturally constituted ways of 'being a man' (Herzfeld 1985: 16) and the cultural construction of manhood (Gilmore 1990). The importance of emotion has
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also been stressed in different publications by scholars working among the Pakhtun, the major ethnic group in the NWFP. While Lindholm has primarily focused on the male aspect of emotion (1982, 1998), Grima (1993) did a seminal study of the performance of emotion and misfortune narratives among Pakhtun women. Grima argues that the understanding of emotion has been marred by a Western bias against emotion as ‘irrational, involuntary and uncontrolled’.

Thus, in this perspective, emotions lead to inter-personal violence and homicide the result of an inner urge or compulsion. This makes the locus of inquiry shift from a systemic explanation of violence to a psychological one. It also involves a shift of perspective, from that of victim to that of perpetrator. For example, Heald attributes violence and frequent homicide among the Gisu in Uganda to the psychological trauma of the circumcision ritual (Heald 1999). The capacity for violence is transformative and signifies growth and transition to manhood. A similar argument is used by Abbink (1999) to explain violence among the Ethiopian Suri. In its traditional, ‘domesticated form’, ritualised violence in the form of male stick-duelling is necessary to become full members of the society. Along similar lines, Rosaldo (1980) explains Ilongot headhunting as a result of the social construction of personality and emotion that, under certain conditions, result in an urge to behead enemies. Among the Ilongot, she argues, killing is a purging or cleansing that is considered psychologically rewarding.

This notwithstanding, there are now many ethnographic examples of social disequilibrium where the use of violence has gone beyond the level of instrumental necessity. Thus, violence transcends its original purpose and threatens social cohesion. This is often accompanied by an influx of automatic weapons, especially the ubiquitous Kalashnikov AK-47 which is craved for its offensive qualities and symbolic association with machismo (Keiser 1991). It is also a potent gift that has found its way into local exchange networks while at the same time challenging the normative order of permissible violence (Mirzeler and Young 2000), and allows the better-armed groups to annihilate neighbours that compete for land or resources (Abbink 1993). The use of unlicensed violence can lead to killing sprees that the traditional systems of authority are ill equipped to handle (Abbink 1999). The breakdown of norms for permissible violence not only afflicts the male ‘warriors’, but also women and children who previously were protected by cultural proscriptions against attacks. Seeking to explain violence gone out-of-hand Abbink (2000b: 90) suggests that it can be attributed to a
‘violent habitus’ that has altered the dispositions for violence among men. This notwithstanding, the excessive use of violence is seen as an aberration caused by social normlessness – *anomie* in Durkheim’s sense.

Another strand of research takes a radically opposing view, arguing that violence is not an aberration but integral to the biological foundations of human sociality. Chagnon explains violence among the Yanomamó (Brazilian horticulturalists) as genetically coded and transmitted (1988). Linked to this assumption is another controversial socio-biological theory, that violent men (‘killers’) have greater reproductive success than non-killers (see discussion in, Abbink 1999). In evolutionary terms, being capable of violence is considered an adaptive trait that is advantageous to the individual (but may be detrimental to the group). The ethology of violence hence poses an intriguing question: if being violent has reproductive advantages, why do not aggressive males dominate in all societies? Boehm has tried to explain why social groups are not – as would have been expected – dominated by ‘killers’ and ‘bullies’. The reason is, he argues, that bullies are not tolerated and subject to a ‘reverse dominance hierarchy’ (Boehm 1993). This means that other male members of the society keep them in check by taunting, ridiculing and, if necessary, killing them. Killing deviant men becomes the ultimate levelling mechanism and hinders social dominance from overtly aggressive individuals (Boehm 1999). Still, one could ask, why are people not more strident in killing bullies or transgressors?

An important point, and one that has often been overlooked, is the ambivalence in the use of lethal force against kinsmen (Boehm 1999: chapter 10). In Montenegro (in the former Yugoslavia), those who were forced to kill one of their clansmen had to ritualise vengeance through the use charms and spells to soften the psychological shock following the murder (Boehm 1989: 928). The notion of ambivalence also has an ecological application. Detailed studies of decision-making processes among East African pastoral groups demonstrate that avenging homicide and thereby restoring honour is carefully balanced against the group’s overall need for food security (Turton 1979). The interface between feuding and ecology has also been proposed as an adaptive trait in a situation of scarce natural resources. The scarcity of land induces conflict, forcing the weaker or inferior party (group, population) to leave or flee. Feud, in this perspective, is considered a functional response, a group-adaptive feature that also serves to constrain population growth (Boehm 1984: 175–90).
**Introduction**

This short overview has aimed to present some of the main functional theories of violence and violent behaviour in small-scale societies. There is no unified theory that can bridge the many competing hypotheses, which themselves are contested (Boehm 1996, Knauft 1991). This shows that many of the conventional theories and mono-causal explanations of violence need to be questioned. Despite being a major concern of ethnography, there is consensus that the field itself is ‘under-theorised’ and has failed to address not only what violence ‘does’ but what it ‘means’.

**MEANINGS OF VIOLENCE**

In recognition of the tendency to overstate the functional uses of violence and of the idea that violence is multi-faceted and resists mono-causal explanations, there is currently an emphasis on phenomenological approaches that stress the subjective ‘meanings’ of violence (Aijmer and Abbink 2000, Blok 2000b, Das et al. 2000, Schmidt and Schröder 2001a, Spierenburg 1998, Strathern and Stewart 2002, Aase 2002). The common concern of these studies can be summed up in three main points. The first is the call for an ‘anthropology of violence’ recognising that the field is under-theorised. The second is the need for anthropologists to examine the ‘contextual nature’ of violent encounters based on detailed empirical examples. The third is the call for a ‘cultural approach’, that is a praxis approach to violence that aims to understand violence in qualitative terms, including how violence is used and interpreted by victim and perpetrator alike.

As Abbink (2000a: xiii) points out, the search for meaning does not imply an acceptance of violence, but refers to the ‘contexts in which this performance is enacted and carries “communicative messages”’. In this perspective, violence is always ‘meaningful’, in the sense of symbolically highly loaded and charged. There is, from a semiological point of view, no such thing as ‘meaningless violence’ (Blok 2000a). Still, violence is polysemic and can come in many shapes and guises, from instrumental violence as a means of coercion and domination, to symbolic violence whereby social restraint is produced by indirect cultural mechanisms rather than by physical coercion (Bourdieu 1990: 126). The functionalist approaches to violence gave prominence to the former, that is, the performative aspects, but have tended to neglect the latter.

I have previously referred to the definition of violence expounded by Riches (1991: 295), ‘contestably rendering physical hurt’. In order to capture the ‘meaning’ of violence in the Palas valley (and other ‘honour-
bound’ societies) a wider definition of violence is necessary. Under given circumstances, attacks that (retaliatorily or pre-emptively) injure or kill a victim are not contested but considered legitimate, and therefore do not conform to Riches’ definition of violence. Moreover, in order to understand what unleashes these acts, it is necessary to take into account the ‘symbolic violence’ intended to injure or sully a person’s (household’s) esteem, honour or repute. Riches is right that symbolic violence is ‘different in kind’ from physical attacks but, in the Palas valley, the important point is that they elicit a similar response. The aggrieved party retaliates ‘as if’ the aggressor had inflicted physical injury, in many cases even more harshly than if force had been applied. The people of Palas acknowledge this, and it is captured in one of the many proverbs concerning disputes: ‘One might forget a blow, but not a bad word.’ A major source of conflict in the society is over female chastity, which, pace Bourdieu (1990), can be considered the symbolic capital of her family, in-laws and agnatic kinsmen. In the Palas valley adultery is punishable by death for both the offenders – who are usually killed by close kin. Thus, the violence provoked by allegations of adultery cannot be fully understood without considering the way this harms the kinsmen’s symbolic capital.

Riches argues against the inclusion of ‘mental violence’ from a definition of violence. In the Palas valley, ‘mental violence’ is important and deliberately used to pressurise opponents. In the case of house confinement, the agony and mental anguish is formidable. Being kept in confinement inflicts suffering not only because one’s livelihood suffers, but because the person being confined lives under the threat of losing his life. The men who have experienced it therefore consider it ‘cruel’ and ‘unjustified’ (see Chapter 6). This means that in order to capture the range of violent acts it is necessary to use a wider and more open-ended definition of violence that allows us to capture the implicit meanings, not only their functions. It follows from this that violence is a communicative act and cannot be studied without considering its symbolic functions and expressive symbolism. In order to do so, we need to take a detailed look at the events that lead up to the eruption of violence and those that transpire in its wake; in short, we need to provide a ‘thick description’ (Blok 2000a: 24). This also makes it possible to counter the essentialising accounts of violence that attribute it to a given ‘culture’, even a ‘Kalashnikov culture’. It would also allow us to consider the aesthetics of violent encounters. The Palas villagers are deeply concerned about the aesthetics of fighting. Fighting is circumscribed by a ‘code of conduct’,
Introduction

colloquially referred to as ‘customs’ (dastoor),\(^5\) which specifies what are and what are not permissible actions in cases of attack. Being involved in conflicts is not condemned, only failing to conform to the local aesthetics and etiquette of fighting. In discussing some of the large feuds that took place in the ‘old days’, the men speak appreciatively of their aesthetics, referring to them as ‘beautiful feuds’ (Zarin and Schmidt n.d.). This indicates that, to them, a fight or a feud is of considerable importance and seen as a public performance. The question is therefore why, and in what ways, is it meaningful to them to fight and risk their lives or livelihood or both?

To understand this, it is necessary to focus on the historical transformation of violence (Abbink 1999, Keiser 1986). Following this lead, this book suggests that violent encounters between men can be seen as a transformation of former competitive feasting for merit. Hence, fighting bestows on the men prestige and creates a symbolic hierarchy in an otherwise egalitarian society. In the Palas valley, fighting is accorded intrinsic value because it affords the display of ‘manly’ qualities – daring, courage, fearlessness – which everyday life does not. The proverb quoted earlier, ‘The one who leaves can no longer dispute’, underscores the importance of offering resistance. At the same time, the precariousness of their position is brought home to them every day. The incessant disputes, the flattened crops, the poisoned cow lying in the outfields, the tall watchtowers on many houses, the overgrown grave of a slain father or son and the personal histories of feud and vendetta, are reminders of the potentiality of conflict and risk of eviction. The villagers tread a fine line between belligerence as a means to avoid being attacked and deference as a means to minimise conflict. Those who overstep this imaginary line tend to pay dearly for it. Becoming embroiled in conflicts, they are either killed or forced to leave the valley. Given the dire consequences, why do not scores of villagers leave willingly? A few do leave and resettle elsewhere but the large majority does not. What are the reasons?

For a long time I struggled with this question and hoped that an answer could be found somewhere in the bewildering complexity of social life and social strife in the valley. It was not until I attended a PhD course on ‘Politics of Identity and Forms of Belonging’ that the importance of ‘belonging’ to the Palas villagers suddenly struck me. Looking at my material again and re-reading the villagers’ narratives, made me realise that ‘belonging’ captured a central concern of the residents and migrant villagers alike. It was also communicated in vernacular poetry and song, as well as in oral history; it
Violence and Belonging

tied them to the locality and constituted a ‘territorial emplacement’ (Lovell 1998). Belonging has an ecological, a political and an affective (‘emotional’) dimension. As will become clearer throughout the book, I explore these dimensions from different angles, borrowing from practice theory, symbolic anthropology and phenomenology.

Let me begin with ecology. Ecology is important in understanding the precariousness of the Palas villagers’ adaptation to the environment. The marginal environment for agriculture is further constrained by using it as a ‘weapon’ in conflicts. By placing a ban on cultivation, the intention is to undermine the livelihood of an opponent, to weaken him and ultimately force him to leave. Even those who have been driven out strive to regain a foothold in the community and go to great lengths to have their belonging affirmed.

The political dimension, the ‘politics of belonging’, is important because, in an acephalous society, the shifting alliances and factionalism preclude stable bloc formations and the emergence of corporate groups. Support from kinsmen is never assured, although close agnates could traditionally be counted upon for support. Depending on the situation and the nature of the offence, a villager may therefore find himself without adequate support and outnumbered by his opponents. For this reason, belonging is never assured and always at risk. This, in part, explains its affective dimension. Because belonging is transient and ephemeral it is something that must be protected. The affective dimension is not only the positive evaluation of being a community member, but also the setting oneself apart from one’s neighbours who are considered feeble and lacking in wisdom. The Palas villagers constitute a self-conscious community that adheres to its own standards of what is right and wrong. It can therefore be considered a distinct ‘moral community’. Membership in the community is granted only through patrilineal descent and the society therefore has a strong ‘group boundary’. Social equality is maintained by what could be termed ‘militant egalitarianism’: the people are careful to control each other. Personal aggrandisement is not tolerated and strongly sanctioned.

Palas society therefore shares some of the traits that Douglas finds characterise religious sects (1996: xix–xxi): they are ‘more intransigent, more intolerant of deviation’ and have a ‘strong group boundary and weak internal distinctions’ and could be described as ‘egalitarian enclaves’. In order to prevent the defection of its members, an enclave is characterised by ‘rigorous equality’. As Douglas has pointed out, this is a social formation
Introduction

prone to internal factions. I consider her notion heuristically useful because it captures the inherent contradictions of Palas society. I find that with the qualifications given above, the notion of egalitarian enclave is applicable to the analysis of Palas society and provides a vantage point for understanding the centrifugal forces of expulsion and displacement as well as the centripetal forces that tie people to the community and the locality. Of particular importance is the constitution of the boundaries along which belonging is mediated. Douglas writes that ‘disciplinary problems loom large on the border between belonging and not belonging, and this is the point to look for the explanations of enclave culture’. As already stated, those who straddle this boundary face a particular threat to their belonging.

The subject matter of this book reflects the concern with political anthropology that has been a mainstay of the ethnography of rural communities in the Middle Eastern ‘culture area’ (Lindholm 1995). However, my choice of title for the book signals that it is located in between the traditional ethnographic approaches to feuding and the ‘narrative ethnography’ now common to Middle Eastern scholarship. The foremost study in this genre is Gilsenan’s magisterial *Lords of the Lebanese Marches* (1996), which analyses the subtle uses of violence and domination in a Sunni village in Akkar, North Lebanon. Poor and depressed at the time of Gilsenan’s study, the villagers were clients of powerful feudal lords controlling large landed estates. As Gilsenan describes it, violence in Akkar was primarily a symbolic one, subtly playing on local metaphors, linguistic invention and ‘tall stories’. As in other parts of the Middle East, the threat of violence was larger than the actual recourse to it (Abu-Lughod 1989: 286). To understand why, I was concerned with what Gilsenan has termed ‘social practices and narratives-in-use’ (1996: 57). The latter involves a closer attention to the changing notions of vernacular sociality as experientially realised in the narratives of those involved in lethal conflicts. This entails a more emphatic and practice-oriented approach (Bourdieu 1990) to the study of violence and aggression in ‘egalitarian societies’ that not only is able to render these acts ‘meaningful’, but makes possible a deeper appreciation of the complexity of the processes that generate and sustain them. I will return to this point in more detail at the conclusion of the book.

REFLECTIONS ON FIELDWORK AND METHOD

The major part of the material for this book was collected during thirteen months’ residence in Pakistan, from August 1997 to September 1998.
Some preliminary material was collected during a six-week pre-fieldwork survey in 1996 and some additional material was collected at my request by my collaborator and interpreter, Mohammad Manzar Zarin, after my departure. Together we collected more than one hundred hours of taped interviews, primarily with resident and migrant men from the Palas valley. The interviews were conducted in the local dialect and the recordings later transcribed and translated into English by Manzar. Being dependent on an interpreter poses many problems concerned with translation veracity and accuracy. I will therefore give a more detailed description about how the interviews were conducted, Manzar’s personal and professional background and the nature of our collaboration.

Manzar’s grandfather came from the Palas valley, but moved out with his family when Manzar’s father was still a child. His father later married a girl from Palas and settled near Tarbela, where Manzar grew up. During the construction of the Tarbela Dam in the early 1970s, Manzar was recruited as a research assistant for the American anthropologist Hugh S. Plunkett, who was doing socio-economic research in relation to the dam. Having been raised in Tarbela, a Pashtu-speaking area, Manzar spoke Pashtu outside the household and his mother tongue at home. Plunkett’s wife, Ruth L. Schmidt, a linguist, began to work with Manzar on his native dialect. It took her several months to figure out that he spoke a little known dialect of Shina, Palas Kostyõ Shina. The century-old but still authoritative language survey – George Grierson’s monumental *Linguistic Survey of India* – mentioned Shina as being spoken in the Indus Kohistan region from where Manzar came, but did not provide a sample. In 1980, the Berkeley Urdu Language Programme in Lahore brought Manzar and Ruth together again. While he worked as an office manager and she as a field director, they embarked on a study of the oral history of the Palas valley. This led to a collaborative study, *Discussions with Hariq* (1984), based on interviews with Hariq, an elder of the Palas valley, which Manzar tape-recorded in Lahore. Like many of his fellow villagers, Hariq had been forced to leave the valley due to personal enmities. After Ruth’s return to the USA, they continued to collaborate on the linguistics of the Palas dialect (Schmidt and Zarin 1981), but other work commitments prevented them from collecting further ethnographic material. The final translation of Hariq’s account was completed in the USA, where Manzar graduated with a Bachelor’s degree from the University of Northern Colorado in 1982. After returning to Pakistan, Manzar worked as a social organiser and field officer for various NGOs, including a short
period with Lok Virsa, the National Institute of Folk Heritage in Islamabad. After settling in Rawalpindi, his house was frequently patronised by relatives, friends and visitors from the Palas valley.

Having lived most of his adult life in the Punjab, Manzar visited the Palas valley only once as a child, and had never previously visited the more inaccessible part of it, locally referred to as Dáro. With my plans for doing research there, the opportunity had finally arrived. Exploring the valley and learning more about its people proved a momentous experience for both of us and we shared in its joys and occasional hardships. Manzar had relatives who lived in the valley, but we were dependent on maintaining cordial relations with all the people. This made us wary of offending anyone and careful to exercise caution while conducting interviews. Neither of us was in a position to request an interview. There were situations where it would have been possible to leave the tape recorder running without anyone noticing it. We refrained from doing so because it would have been insensitive as well as unethical. One of the most interesting recordings was of an unmediated exchange between a group of related men (see Chapter 8). They joked about us taping their conversation, but we could not have done so without the men knowing us and trusting our intentions. They also sensed that we recorded something for posterity, a way of life, a mode of thinking, that is slowly being eroded and, along with it, communal ideals. They also shared a self-conscious feeling that the Palas valley is an important place, a special valley, and its villagers something out the ordinary. This also applied to the men we interviewed who were involved in lethal conflicts. They welcomed us and consented to be interviewed because they wanted the truth of what had transpired preserved for posterity. At other times they wanted to give their own version of the dispute in question. Still, they were neither vindictive nor vengeful but rather saddened by the turn of events that, either accidentally or wilfully, had led to homicide.

It should be mentioned that we not only recorded interviews in the more standard format, but also songs, stories and poetic verses and couplets. I also made a video film of scenes at Ledi, the highest and most important of the Palas valley meadows: the men striking heroic poses with guns and bandoleers; boys and men engaged in traditional wrestling matches; men singing; men riding horses amidst sweeping panoramas of the surrounding mountains and flowery meadows. Its contents rather than quality made this amateur movie a big hit among the visitors to Manzar’s house in Rawalpindi.
In order not to burden peoples’ hospitality, we always brought some food of our own which hired porters and horses helped carry into the valley. This notwithstanding, the villagers’ hospitality obliged them to cook the best food for me and provide the choicest foodstuffs. They would never ask for anything in return. This would be considered an insult. In one instance, I was so tired that I walked past a household that had earlier housed and fed us on our way up the valley. When the host caught up with me down at the riverbank, he complained bitterly of my bad manners. I never did it again. The fieldwork situation was physically demanding and, at times, emotionally draining. The field trips had to be planned and executed like minor expeditions: travel to Kohistan, buy food in the bazaar, find porters or horses, inform the District Commissioner of my planned visit, wait until the weather cleared. On one occasion we approached Palas from the east, beginning our journey in the Kaghan valley. During the summer, this is an important trade route for the Palas villagers. After having waited out the incessant rain for three days in a dripping wet tea-stall and caravanserai in Kaghan, the weather improved enough for us to begin the two-days’ march. The journey took us and our hired guides and horses from Kaghan up a steep track through the dense forest to a vast mountain plateau marking the eastern entrance to the Palas valley. The panoramic views of the snow-covered peaks along the Kaghan valley, the green slopes dotted with marmot burrows and sleeping in the tiny stone mosque perched precariously on the steep hillside will always be a cherished memory.

The methodological idea was to collect material relevant to the issue of ‘belonging’ and not to be constrained by the geography of the valley. This also meant departing from the predominant tradition of ethnographic research in a mountain setting, which entails an explicit focus on a single village. What I was after, however, was a ‘valley study’ – but one grounded in the ‘flow’ of the stories themselves. I was led along by following the stories that I found most compelling and ethnographically interesting. The reason I decided to do a valley rather than a village study was also due to the empirical questions at hand. They demanded a wider spatial scale as well as greater temporal scope. The terraced fields around peoples’ houses were not simply ‘land’, but ancestral legacies that held a special meaning to their owners and were central to the constitution of identity. In a valley and a region about which very little has been written, it was necessary to use oral narratives to reconstruct elements of its history. The centrality of the land tenure system, *wesh*, a Pashtu loan word meaning ‘division’, in Hariq’s...
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detailed historical narrative (see above, *Discussions with Hariq*), was one reason why I began this study with an explicit focus on customary land tenure.

The initial proposal for my doctoral research in the Palas valley reflected my interest in human ecology and my initial forays in the Palas valley concentrated on land tenure and the ownership of natural resources, especially forest. Only at a later stage did I begin a systematic study of disputes and issues relevant to understanding how enmity threatens and sustains belonging. Neither of these topics could be pursued easily. My fear was that someone would take offence and ask me to leave the valley (Keiser 1991). This was one reason why I decided against living in the valley, and instead adopted an approach that could be said to resemble a multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995). This made sense, considering the fact that a large number of the villagers have been forced to resettle outside the valley. The interviews were conducted in the Palas valley; among migrants scattered throughout the North-West Frontier Province; and the sizeable community of Palas migrants living in the Kohistan Colony in Rawalpindi. The sensitivity of some subjects made it mandatory to avoid them in the Palas valley and the migrant communities. We therefore decided to tackle them while entertaining Palas visitors in my apartment in Islamabad or Manzar’s house in the Kohistan Colony. This afforded us, and the persons we interviewed, the privacy needed to explore such sensitive subjects as the murder of women and illicit love affairs. On some occasions, the interviews were taped with the same person over several days. The longest interview lasted nine hours, the shortest about twenty minutes and the majority about an hour. Anyone who has used interviews as a key data source knows that after a while they become less novel and less startling, until at last they become repetitious. Nevertheless, I have in many instances benefited from the fact that we interviewed many people and often on the same subjects. Particularly useful was interviewing different persons about the same incident. These allowed me to cross-check different versions and recollections of the events and arrive at a plausible version of their chronology. This was especially important because the narratives tended to be ‘episodic’ and the speakers not particularly concerned about the chronology of the events. ‘Narrative sequence is not necessarily a reproduction of temporality,’ Herzfeld (1985: 209) has observed, ‘it is more likely to express what the narrators themselves regard as a significant relationship between experiences.’ For me to understand what had transpired, it was essential to
narrativise the events according to their chronology. Nonetheless, it was difficult to achieve brevity and at the same time be true to the considerable complexity that characterised the same events.

In the Palas valley both men and women may answer to more than one name. A man can be referred to by his full name (for example Qalandar), or its contraction (Qalia). Some people also are known by their sobriquets – the Nose (Nothi), the Monkey (Mokoo) and (for a girl) the Pigeon (Kurooli). For official purposes, the villagers also have adopted a common Islamic name (for example Muhammad Shah), although this is not used in the valley. This, in some instances, compounded the problem of identifying the persons involved and finding out how they were related to each other. The men we interviewed were all well-versed in local matters. They gave long, detailed and frank answers to our many questions and were not at all surprised by our interest in them or the valley. In recounting the tragic events and misfortunes that had befallen them, they were dispassionate and impartial. In one instance, Manzar was able to interview a young woman. The interview shows her to have a profound knowledge of her village and the events that have unfolded there. Unfortunately, cultural proscriptions did not permit me to talk to, meet or even to show any interest in women's lives. The reader should therefore note that although women play a central role in the cases described, the book does not pretend to do justice to women's agency, and that their 'voice' is muted. There is also a lack of interviews with diverse other people – musicians, blacksmiths, itinerant herdsmen, agricultural labourers – who constitute the lowest rung of Palas society. They constitute a small minority of the population (about three per cent), but the addition of their views of valley life would have enriched the study. This notwithstanding, the book documents the social stigma they face and have caused many to be evicted or left the valley on their own accord due to social stigma. The politics of belonging is therefore highly relevant to them too.

My own background is also pertinent to understanding how I approached the study of the Palas valley. In 1989 I began fieldwork for my Master's degree in social anthropology in Shimshal, an isolated village in the upper Hunza valley, a two days' hard walk from the Karakoram Highway, the nearest road. The fieldwork in Shimshal was cut short after a few months by a factional conflict that implicated me in a controversy over a nature conservation project that was adversely affecting the villagers (Knudsen 1999a). This was a distressing but instructive lesson that I took with me to the study of the Palas valley. But I need not have worried. In the Palas
valley, as well as everywhere else where we met and interviewed the men from Palas, I was warmly received. The migrants, as well as many of the resident villagers who had lived outside the valley as work-migrants, spoke Urdu fluently. My spoken Urdu is weak but sufficient to interact with men and take part in ordinary conversations. ‘I had no particular interest in cows when I went to Nuerland,’ Evans-Pritchard once wrote, ‘so willy-nilly I had to become cattle-minded too.’ I am neither knowledgeable about, nor especially attracted to weapons, but the villagers in Palas are interested in arms and very skilled in their use. Therefore, I took part in hunting trips and target shooting with Kalashnikovs, rifles and shotguns. My marksmanship failed to impress anyone. More importantly for me, however, was that such trips provided an opportunity to get acquainted with young men who spoke Urdu, see more of the surrounding area and learn things not available in the more constrained setting of a formal interview. They could also yield surprising results. The following passage is a translation of my field notes from a day in November 1997:

Today when we returned from our hunting trip, the whole village had erupted. In the whole central part of the village men and women were running around and shouting. Together with Anaar [pseudonym] I waited up in the upper part of the village to assess what was going on. In the surrounding houses the women, men and children alike followed the events from the rooftops. There was almost certainly an organising principle for mobilisation as some of the men belonging to one of the lineages ran up the right side of the valley and most appeared to be armed. After the screaming and shouting in the village died down the women walked past and back to their house. When they passed the house where I was sitting, they were abused and insulted. ‘These people have no Iman’ [Muslim faith], Anaar informed me. ‘They are zaalim [cruel]?’ I ventured. ‘No, here everybody is zaalim,’ he said, ‘these people have no Iman’.

Well, soon some men ran down to a hastily arranged jirga down at the cemetery while the rest of the group gathered near a tree some 200m below us. After about twenty minutes it seemed that the jirga dispersed and the group of men close to us walked back uphill. Almost all of them were armed and the men on the rooftops didn’t utter a word as they passed. Anaar was also abusing the other people (as long as he believed that a man being killed with a stone caused the incident: this proved to be wrong). After about an hour and a half the situation calmed down and the correct information about what had happened started to filter through. It seems that the women from one group had entered into an argument with another group. Just what they were arguing about is not known but they were very worked up about it. They ran around shouting abuse at each other.
As my field notes demonstrate, I was not hampered by much knowledge of what I had just witnessed. It turned out that the incident was the fallout resulting from an illicit love-affair that led to the murder of a woman, an event I have described in Chapter 5 below. Following this observation in the field, I began to search for the origins of the incident and the events that had caused it. After leaving the village, I followed up with interviews in Rawalpindi. This gave me a general idea of the issues at stake and the main actors. Some eight months later, I made a return visit to the same village and conducted interviews with some of those involved. Armed with these interviews, observations in the field and titbits of information from other sources, it was possible to reconstruct a plausible account, a ‘thick description’, of the events that had preceded the one I had seen. More by accident than by design, the methodology comes close to what Marcus has termed ‘follow the conflict’ (1995: 110).

The villagers of the Palas valley have resisted land titling and are sceptical of anything that can be construed as a threat to their ownership of fields or forest. For this reason, I avoided quantitative surveys, village censuses or other types of formal data collection. I knew that socio-economic data had already been collected in the valley by a local NGO, the Himalayan Jungle Project (see Chapter 2). I was later allowed to make copies of the original questionnaires and undertook to analyse them, something the project had not been able to do for lack of time and money. In order to learn more about the socio-economic conditions of the migrants I undertook, with Manzar’s help, a standardised survey of the living conditions, reasons for migrating and ownership to natural resources among forty Palas migrants, most of them living in Rawalpindi. In addition, I interviewed timber merchants, expatriate experts and employees in the provincial Forest Department and the Pakistan Forest Institute in Peshawar. This provided a general background for understanding the problems of commercial timber logging, one of the most contentious issues in the Palas valley and, more generally, in the North-West Frontier Province (Knudsen 1999b).

This book deals with issues and topics that are not only sensitive and private but also painful and traumatic. Out of respect to those that ventured information and consented to disclose details of painful personal memories and experiences, it has been necessary to conceal their identity behind pseudonyms. I have also changed the names of villages and lineages and, where necessary, blurred details that could lead to their recognition. In a few cases concealment was not warranted, for example the names of
descent groups at higher levels of segmentation (tribe, clan and phratry) where the sheer quantity of people makes individual recognition impossible. Nonetheless, there is agreement that we as anthropologists have not paid sufficient attention to the problem of protecting our subjects and that the traditional method of concealment using pseudonyms is inadequate. Moreover, readers should keep in mind that the conflict narratives found in this book are my own interpretations, which the original sources might neither agree to nor would want to see broadcast. This is an ethical problem in ethnographic research more generally (Scheper-Hughes 2000), and cannot be wished away by claiming to ‘give voice’ to the victims of violence (Nordstrom and Robben 1995). In presenting the narratives dealing with disputes I have mostly used what is termed an ‘extended case method’ and ‘situational analysis’. I have sought to portray both sides to the conflicts with fairness and to avoid personal bias in favour of either of the contestants. My intention has in all cases been to bring out the complexity of the disputes and their human suffering, not to pass judgement. I have nothing but the profoundest respect for the people of the Palas valley, a few of whom I am lucky to count as my friends, who strive to belong to the valley amidst great personal hardship.

I was trained in the ‘Bergen School of Anthropology’, a colloquial reference to Fredrik Barth’s legacy as a founder of the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Bergen. Barth strongly influenced my anthropological thinking since I first read his classic monograph *Political Leadership among Swat Pathans* (1959) as an undergraduate. However, Barth’s first published work from the Frontier-region was on Kohistan (1956b), based on a three-week’s ethnographic survey during the summer of 1954. Barth’s strenuous traverse of Kohistan west of the Indus, the first by a Westerner since the Hungarian-born explorer Sir Aurel Stein in 1941, was fitted in with his much longer fieldwork in Swat. In comparing Kohistan to Swat, Barth acknowledged that he found the ‘lack of pattern and structure … and … “vigour”’ in Kohistani society ‘professionally frustrating’ (ibid.: 86). Five decades since Barth’s seminal fieldwork, this book is an attempt to invigorate the ethnographic study of Kohistan and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of contemporary Kohistani society that challenges the stereotyped image of the Kohistanis as the haggard siblings of the neighbouring Pathans.
Violence and Belonging

Figure 2.1: The Palas valley, District Kohistan
Winding our way along the road up the Indus gorge, Manzar and I are about to enter Besham, the major bazaar-cum-town in this part of Indus Kohistan (Figure 2.1). In the crowded bazaar all kinds of goods and wares can be bought, but we resist temptation and leave the car for a quick lunch at New Abasin Hotel and Restaurant. The colourful, hand-painted road map on the hotel wall tells us exactly where we are right now: 170 km north of Islamabad, the country’s capital. To the west lies the fertile Swat valley, connected to Besham by the old Indus Valley Road over the Shangla Pass. Ahead of us lies another 30-kilometre drive to Pattan, our destination. Having finished our lunch, we continue along the winding road. Green oases can be seen at regular intervals on the other side of the valley. In the depths of the gorge, the greyish waters of the mighty Indus river – Abba Sin, the Father of Rivers – weave their way towards the Tarbela Dam, long the world’s biggest earthen reservoir and a major producer of electric power. The electricity goes to the urban centres in the Punjab. The water is used to irrigate the fertile Punjabi plains. But neither water nor electricity go here to this arid and sparsely populated region, although it could use both. Long completely isolated, it has for over the past thirty years become an important route for road traffic made possible by the extension of motorable roads into the remote mountain regions. From the mid-1960s, the Pakistani authorities embarked on an ambitious programme of road construction throughout northern Pakistan (Kreutzmann 1991). The most ambitious, difficult and by far the most costly of these road projects was the construction of the Karakoram Highway (KKH) – a 1,500-kilometre artery connecting northern Pakistan with the Punjabi plains. Completed in 1978, the KKH runs through some of the most spectacular and scenic areas of northern Pakistan (Allan 1989). Pakistan did not accomplish this engineering feat alone; most of it was planned and executed by Chinese
engineers and labourers, many of whom where killed during the dangerous work of blasting a road into the sheer rock faces.

Today, the KKH is a major thoroughfare for commercial trade between China and Pakistan (Kreutzmann 1995). The people in the Northern Areas, the part of the Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir that Pakistan has held since 1947, depend on it for their provisions. The colourful custom-painted trucks carrying timber or Chinese silk roll down the road, while trucks carrying diesel and wheat flour slowly climb the road leaving behind them a trail of black exhaust. Now and then the traffic comes to an abrupt halt, queues form behind roadblocks and drivers wait for the Frontier Works Organisation to open the road. Not only goods and commodities are moved along the road. Public transport is on offer from a number of small travel agencies, whose red-eyed, chain-smoking drivers edge their Toyota minibuses along the road at nerve-racking speed. There are also the slower, but painfully over-crowded NATCO buses, travelling between Rawalpindi and Gilgit. During my first trip through Indus Kohistan in a NATCO bus in 1989, the Punjabi bus driver cautioned me – the only foreigner – not to step outside when we made a brief halt in Komila, a road-side town, fearing that someone might attack me! Young boys clambered on to the outside of the bus, while the men in the dusty bazaar milled around the bus staring blankly at me. Clutching my new, shiny, but completely useless brief case I was afraid to step outside. The Kohistanis’ forbidding image scares away all but the most adventurous tourists. The plains’ people view Kohistanis as hillbillies and country bumpkins with a streak of badmaashi (‘villainy’) and jungeli (‘of the forest’, i.e., lack of sophistication). The district administrators characterise them as indolent, backward and belligerent. Visiting foreigners see them as narrow-minded Muslim zealots and brigands. Although some of these stereotypes hold a grain of truth, they fail to do justice to the Kohistanis’ virtues – of which there are many. They are concerned about their honour, they travel widely, are highly adaptive and adventurous. They are independent individualists who value autonomy and dislike subordination, values which they share with the neighbouring Pashtun and which would also be recognisable to us in the West (Lindholm 1996). They do not expect help or charity. Neither do they ask for it. Through the centuries they have been accustomed to care for themselves.

The Karakoram Highway has had a huge impact on traditional production systems and facilitated new trade networks, rural marketing systems and bazaars (Allan 1989, Kreutzmann 1991). Moreover, it has eased travel for local
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people, many of whom commute to the larger cities in the plains for work. The completion of the Highway increased emigration from Kohistan and sparked the formation of Kohistani diasporas, which nowadays are spread over the northern Punjab and the NWFP. The diasporas and the grapevine that unites them provide a channel for news and gossip but also for a long-term cultural and religious exchange between diasporas and the Kohistani homeland. In addition, Kohistanis travel widely and many spend the winter in urban areas doing menial labour or for educational purposes, including religious training in a madrassa. This means that even in the most isolated Kohistani communities, men have for some part of their life been residing outside their village and in places where they have often learnt to speak but mostly not write Urdu, the Pakistani national language. As individuals and as members of local communities, many Kohistani men have therefore had a broad exposure to non-local cultural and religious traditions and have in many instances spent time learning these traditions as workers, friends, neighbours and students in rural and urban areas far from home.

The government’s ambitious road plans were motivated not only by a concern for the economic uplift of remote regions, but equally as a piecemeal political conquest (Ispahani 1989). During the premiership of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, a national campaign was pursued to abolish the remaining princely states and feudal chiefdoms in the NWFP (Barth 1985). This does not mean that the effort to sneak government control in through the back door was easy. Strong tribal groups continued to resist full integration into the nation’s administrative structure. During the construction of the KKH through Indus Kohistan in the 1970s, strong opposition to the road from the resident Kohistani tribesmen forced the engineers to re-route it from the eastern to the western bank – and back again. The most persistent opposition came from the valleys on the east bank, but there was also strong opposition from the Kandia valley on the west bank, forcing constructors to make a detour at Komila. Thanks to the KKH, Indus Kohistan is now well connected with the rest of Pakistan, but not fully integrated with it. In the past the local population evaded government authority and resisted outside intervention by seeking refuge in inhospitable mountain valleys, subsisting on marginal land, and leaving the fertile plains to the sedentary Pashtun (Barth 1956a). There are few other places on earth where mountains almost 6,000 metres high would be considered ‘foothills’, as they are here in the Pakistani Himalayas. These harsh and barren mountains are the homeland of the Kohistanis (a term which means literally ‘mountaineer’).
While the mountains bind these people together, the river Indus has always been a formidable barrier and has functioned as a linguistic boundary between the west and the east banks. The communities on the west bank speak Pashtu, reflecting their historical ties to Swat and the Pashtu-speaking areas to the west. On the east bank, the villagers speak the Kohistani dialect of Shina, known as Kostyõ Shina. The exact number of Kostyõ Shina speakers is not known and estimates range from 200,000 to 500,000 (Schmidt and Kohistani 1998: 107–8). If the latest population census for District Kohistan is correct, there are about 250,000 Kostyõ Shina speakers on the east bank of the Indus. In addition, there are perhaps about 100,000 living in the diaspora communities in the towns of the NWFP and the cities of the northern Punjab. Due to the increased exchange between the east and west banks, bilingualism in Shina and Pashtu is now common. More recently, the use of Urdu as a medium of instruction in schools and in the government administration has added a third language to the polyglot mixture (Schmidt 1984). The Kohistani speakers living in Indus Kohistan are tribally organised into patrilineal descent groups. They form small, independent communities that use tribal councils (jirga) for conflict resolution. They display a strong practical and emotional attachment to the valley where they live and the homeland to which they belong and are often collectively identified by the name of their valley.

Until 1976 the east bank of Indus Kohistan was a Tribal Area of the Hazara Division. On October 1, 1976 the east bank (‘Indus Kohistan’) and the west bank (‘Swat Kohistan’) were merged into District Kohistan. Today, District Kohistan is a tribal area under provincial administration by the District Commissioner (DC). To ensure impartiality, the DC is usually a Pashtun from one of the western districts of the NWFP. The DC resides at the district offices in Dassu. His superior is the Commissioner, located at divisional headquarters in Abbottabad, about 230 km further south. The DC is seconded by two Assistant Commissioners (AC), one posted at Dassu, another at Pattan. To control the unruly population the DC and ACs have at their disposal the police and the Frontier Constabulary, a paramilitary organisation. The most recent, and the only reliable, district census is from 1998 and estimates the total population to number 472,570, all of whom belong to the Sunni branch of Islam. There is considerable migration to the lowlands and population growth was only 0.09 per cent during the period 1981–98.2
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The east-bank valleys have been left out of the many developments that have benefited the valleys on the west bank where the KKH runs. One of the biggest of the east bank valleys is the Palas valley. It covers approximately 1,400 square km and stretches out in a south-easterly direction, gaining altitude as it approaches towards the highest peaks close to 6,000m. A valley system, rather than a single valley, it is made up of two watersheds separated by a ridge, draining water into the Indus river. On topographical maps, they are often distinguished by adding the Pashtu gloss ‘Bar’ (upper) and ‘Kuz’ (lower) to form Bar Palas and Kuz Palas (Figure 2.1). The villagers themselves have not adopted this nomenclature and refer to the northern (upper) valley as ‘Dáro’, and the southern (lower) valley as ‘Palas’. By implication, a man from Dáro is referred as a Dárooch while a man from Palas is a Palsooch. To avoid confusion, the name Palas valley will be reserved for whole valley while Dáro and Kuz Palas will be used to denote the upper and lower valleys respectively. The two valleys differ in many respects. Dáro is much bigger, lacks a road through the valley and is therefore more inaccessible and has a population of about 10,000. The lower valley is smaller, is served by a jeep-road running through the full length of the valley and is more accessible. It has a population of about 30–35,000. The people are united by a common language and speak their own dialect of Kohistani Shina, Palas Kostyõ Shina (Schmidt and Kohistani 1998). They have a common history and share genealogical affiliation to either the Darma or the Khuka Manka quom – the two main tribal groups. Until the late nineteenth century, they were united by a system of communal land tenure (wesh) of considerable complexity. There is a considerable internal migration between the two valleys, primarily from Dáro to Kuz Palas. Being more traditional and concerned with protecting their ‘customs’ (dastoor), Dáro is considered by villagers in both valleys as the heartland of Palas culture.

The villagers are mountain farmers who combine pastoral animal husbandry with irrigated agriculture spread out over a huge vertical gradient. Maize is the staple crop and is grown on small terraced fields located on alluvial fans, on flood plains and developed within the oak forest. The fields are mostly cultivated by gravity irrigation. The maize is eaten in the form of thick and crusted chapattis, made from unleavened maize flour. During summer and autumn gourds, pumpkins and cucumbers are added to the diet as are grapes, walnuts and wild potherbs.
To reach Dáro, one must find a public jeep in Pattan, the nearest town. Jeep transport is irregular and the vehicle usually loaded beyond capacity. With everyone on board, the driver shifts the jeep through the crowded bazaar and then, engaging shrieking brakes, follows the narrow dirt road down to the banks of the Indus and further across the river on the huge concrete Joser Bridge completed in 1985. On the east bank, the narrow jeep road becomes even narrower as it follows the east bank of the Indus. On the other side, the river flowing from the Keyal valley spews its clear blue water into the grey, silty Indus river. On the narrow riverbank, a group of itinerant gold-washers have perched their tents, scraping out a living from panning gold. Suddenly, the road makes a sharp right-hand turn, leaving the Indus behind on its eastward journey. The jeep veers constantly and dangerously between the precipice on the left and the steep rock wall on the right, past boulders and fresh rockfalls. This is a rough and risky ride but the locals are undaunted, hanging carelessly outside the tattered jeep. After about 17 km, the road ends abruptly at the entrance of the Dáro valley. The valley itself is a dead end. When you leave the bumpy jeep trail you enter a world where time has, seemingly, stood still. As one enters the valley, one is quickly engulfed in a thick oak-forest belt. A well-worn mule-track weaves its way along the river. It is the only communication route to the valley. The trail meanders into the valley, dotted at times by wooden cantilever bridges. During summer the swollen river, the Musha Ga, inundates parts of the mule-track, forcing the villagers to negotiate the submerged track along the river. All goods and provisions must be transported on mule or horseback or carried as backpacks. There is no bazaar inside the valley, no police station, no army post or any other institutions of government. There are no doctors and only a few meagre dispensaries; people rely on herbal medicines to soothe ailments and cure common diseases. Those who fall seriously ill have to be carried out of the valley tied to a stretcher. Traversing the valley is a long and arduous trek even for a fit person: two days from the remotest villages, even three days from the distant summer pastures. The men are tough, strong and sure-footed even while wearing worn out plastic sandals and labouring under a 50-kg load. Steaming hot in summer, the temperature drops below zero during the winter with frequent snowfalls. There are none of the amenities commonly found in towns along the roadside such as restaurants, hotels, tea-stalls, tapped water and electricity.

Government officials hardly ever come here. Tourists never enter. The Lonely Planet guidebook warns tourists not to visit the valleys in Indus
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Kohistan. Out of the reach of government jurisdiction, the valleys are considered unsafe. The gun-toting villagers are emblematic of the autarchy of the valley: ‘In Dáro’, the saying goes, ‘every man is a Malik (“patron”).’ The first time I visited the valley, suspicion was on everyone’s face: Who is he? What is he doing here? What does he want from us? This scepticism of outsiders is natural to people who are accustomed to care for themselves and who have resisted attempts to control, subvert or rule them. They have a long and unbroken tradition of freedom and independence. In the old times the area was referred to as Yaghistan – ‘the land of the free’, idiomatically opposed to Hokumat, the governed or settled areas. Successive waves of conquerors never managed to subdue the Kohistanis. Pushed into these hills by more powerful and better organised groups (Barth 1956a), they were never under foreign rule.

The British administrators never set foot here. The valleys on the east bank of the Indus river – which the British referred to as the cis-Indus – were never even visited, not to mention conquered. Hidden from view, they were shielded by their inaccessibility. The British administration avoided the main Indus valley gorge because it was considered a ‘death trap’. Caravan raids and livestock rustling mostly went unpunished, fines were never paid and threats of punitive missions never effectuated. An advancing army of Imperial Forces risked being annihilated by the warring tribesmen who could take advantage of the rugged terrain. Moreover, the spread of more precise arms such as breechloaders among the Kohistani tribesmen had removed the firepower advantage the British troops (Moreman 1994).

Another reason for the non-intervention policy was to keep the area as a buffer zone against an expansionist Tsarist Russia (Lindholm 1980). When the ‘forward policy’ was given up in favour of a policy of containment (‘hearts and minds policy’), the administration sought to appease the bellicose tribesmen, subdue excessive fighting and discourage attacks on the garrison stationed in Chilas in the Gilgit Agency. Without elected leaders or powerful chiefs, the area was difficult to rule and not conducive to political bribes. In November 1934 control of Indus Kohistan was transferred from the Gilgit Agency to the North-West Frontier Province. By 1940, no outsider had been able to penetrate the area. Virtually roadless except for a meandering track located in steep precipices high above the Indus, the gorge was very difficult to traverse along the river. In 1941, the Hungarian-born orientalist and explorer Sir Aurel Stein was the first to traverse the Indus gorge from the Kandia valley, the largest and most fertile of the west bank valleys, to
Besham (Stein 1942). Making his way along the west bank towards Besham, Stein found the gorge so steep and narrow that he could not determine his position by sighting peaks previously triangulated by the Survey of India. He did, however, glimpse Palas on the east bank and the valley is traced on the sketch map illustrating Stein’s journey. The sketch was made from Survey of India maps produced during 1921–35 and, as such, represented the official state of cartographic knowledge of Indus Kohistan at the time. For Palas, only the barest outlines of the main rivers are given but neither peaks, ridges, passes nor villages are shown. By virtue of its inaccessibility the Palas valley and the east bank of the Indus remained hidden from the imperial gaze.

INTO THE VALLEY

The Palas valley has a political system that has variously been termed ‘republican’, ‘acephalous’ and ‘anarchic’. Whatever the terms, they denote an uncentralised, small-scale polity without formal political offices or hereditary rank. A corollary of this form of social organisation is the individualisation of physical force. Attacks are often made with the intention to inflict pain, injury or death. Homicide and vengeance killings are part of the militant egalitarianism found in the valley. In the Pakistani and foreign news media as well as scholarly journals, such militancy and gun-toting tendencies have been termed a ‘Kalashnikov culture’. In the case of the Palas valley, the term Kalashnikov culture is a misnomer. Automatic weapons – and guns in general – are not only desired for their offensive qualities, but also for their symbolic association with masculinity and machismo. The younger men often embellish their guns by attaching carefully embroidered needlework made by their mothers or sisters during the winter to the handle, grip and stock. This apart, carrying arms is for many men not a matter of choice – it is a necessity.

There is no life insurance policy in Palas and it is only by maintaining high vigilance that a villager can survive. Ambushes, assaults and surprise attacks are common. Once enmities move beyond threats, insults and other verbal attacks, foreclosure and mediation become ineffective. If any of those involved are injured or killed, the revenge killings, ambushes and attacks will continue until one of the parties is driven off their land or equivalence is reached in injury and homicide. Only rarely do conflicts end peacefully. Those involved in mortal conflict wear leather bandoleers laden with cartridges and go armed with old Lee-Enfield calibre .303 rifles. Some also carry automatic guns such as the Kalashnikov AK-47 and AK-
Belonging to the Palas Valley

56. Sometimes a group of gun-toting men hurry along the mule track followed by an escort of supporters. Moving in broad daylight, they go on without rest. For added protection, some move only after dusk. A few men stay permanently indoors, hiding behind thick walls. Some bear amulets containing charms on their upper right arm. According to local belief, the charm will render a bullet harmless, either by letting it pass through the body without inflicting harm or making the attacker see double, so that he cannot aim properly.

The villagers not only form an autarchic political society and have resisted political domination, they also form a moral autarchy, acting upon unwritten rules and social norms validated and sanctioned by themselves. Their customs (dastoor) and traditional ways of handling disputes are legitimate within the community, but not outside it. Homicide in general is not reported to the police. Even when it is, the obligation to seek revenge remains. Not all forms of violence are considered legitimate, only those considered part of dastoor. Attacks meant to disfigure an opponent are illegitimate, but still have recently become more common:

*Climbing up the steep and meandering track leading to my host Kabir’s house, I notice a man who is busy ploughing his fields. His nose looks odd. We trade quick glances before he turns away. From my previous discussions with other men, I recognise him as one of the victims of ‘nose cutting’ (notho dooyoon). Accused of having made a pass at a married woman, Malik was branded a trespasser of privacy (kandré choor) and Hareeq, the wife’s husband, aided by two close relatives, cut off his nose and broke his leg. While the latter is traditionally considered a legitimate form of punishment, the former is illegitimate and previously was only used to punish unfaithful women. His disfigured face is a powerful reminder of the brutality of revenge. This man is forever marked. There is a blemish on his pride. His honour is tainted. The two parties are still locked in a dispute that over a period of fifteen years has left four men injured and one dead. Recently, Malik took revenge on his erstwhile enemy. Helped by two relatives, he overpowered Hareeq and cut off his nose. When the news of Malik’s action spread, his kinsmen rejoiced, others deplored it and many denounced nose-cutting as being against the local customs. But nobody knew how to stop it or prevent it from happening again.*

This resembles what Thomas Hobbes describes as people’s inability to get themselves ‘out from that miserable condition of Warre, which is necessarily consequent … to the naturall Passions of men, when there is no visible Power to keep them in awe’ (1997a: 93). Without a ‘Sovereign’ with a monopoly on the use of force, the villagers of Dáro need to be constantly
When we reach Kabir's house, located in the upper part of the village, his father carefully removes the bullets from his bandoleer and spreads them on a shawl on the roof in order to dry them in the sun. They are lead-tipped dum dum bullets that expand on impact, inflicting severe wounds and are intended for killing large game. Here they are not used for hunting, but to deter aggressors and enemies. The importance of strength is reflected in one of the many local proverbs: 'Being many do not matter – being forceful matters.' For those who are neither strong nor many, the threat of ostracism and expulsion is ever-present. Far below us a man leads his bullocks back and forth in the narrow field, making swift turns while gripping the handle of the scratch-plough. Beneath him the landscape drops sharply down towards the main river, the Musha Ga, now hidden from view in the long evening shadows of the mountains. Almost invisible, it can only be recognised by a deep rumbling sound. The steep relief of the landscape has been transformed into small terraced fields that dot the mountain slope both inside and outside the oak-forest belt. This is the middle range of seasonal habitation and the main maize-growing zone (maji ser).

Although maize yields are very poor the fields are nevertheless central objects of male antagonism and property disputes. Antagonism is deeply ingrained not only in the social psyche but in the landscape. Here and there fields are lying fallow. To put an adversary under pressure, the offended party proclaims that his fields can no longer be cultivated. With the fields 'closed' (shar) for cultivation people come under severe pressure in an already marginal agricultural environment. From a distance the grey and fallow fields are clearly visible, and stand out from the yellow fields of ripening maize. The fallow fields are telling reminders of the prevalence of antagonism that forces people into hiding or to leave the valley and resettle elsewhere.

A proud villager clad in a dull-grey shalwar kamiz walks among the tall maize stalks. Around his head is wrapped a colourful scarf. Looming high above his terraced fields are jagged mountains, narrow ridges and lofty peaks. The mountains are clothed with dense evergreen forests. Moving up and down the mountains in seasonal migration cycles, the villagers have an intimate knowledge of the natural environment. They also know its dangers. Hiding in the dense forests there are men waiting for the right moment to avenge their grievances. In some cases they are assisted by 'spies' who reveal the victim's whereabouts or disclose his travel plans. Many men have been killed or ambushed during these seasonal migrations. Concealed in the

vigilant. Those who are unprepared and caught off guard may not live to regret it:
Belonging to the Palas Valley

landscape are histories of killings, dramatic escapes, ambushes, clashes and romantic rendezvous. No singing or music punctuates the rhythm of daily life. It has been silenced by the growing influence of religious orthodoxy.

LOCALISED ISLAM

Because of the area’s isolation, the Kohistanis converted to Islam later than their neighbouring ethno-linguistic groups. For this reason, the Kohistanis have been stereotyped as ‘lax Muslims’. Eager to prove the stereotype wrong, they have embraced orthodox Islam with more religious fervour and puritan zeal than their neighbouring ethno-linguistic groups. The first wave of religious orthodoxy swept through the valley in the 1970s when Deobandi emissaries made them give up local mortuary rites – keeping wakes at graves and making food-offerings at the local shrines – and preached against singing, music and dancing. Not long after the Tablighi Jaamaat (Metcalf 1993), a missionary Islamic movement with roots in pre-partition India, reached the valley. Today, the Tablighi Jaamaat has many followers in Palas and the movement’s representatives are accorded deference and respect:

While interviewing a group of villagers on their ownership to forest we are sitting outside a deserted school building overlooking the valley. Suddenly, the buzzing interview-situation is broken. Approaching us is a group of pious-looking men walking behind what appears to me as the leader. ‘Oh, no,’ I think as the procession comes nearer, ‘they’re coming to ask us to leave.’ Those attending have by now risen from their chairs and are standing transfixed. Having reached the platform where we’re standing they offer their blessings, embracing and shaking hands with everyone, me included. Greeting us warmly, they invite everybody for prayer in the nearby mosque. Having completed their mission, the prayer-group leaves and the villagers’ posture relaxes. My first meeting with the Tablighi Jaamaat has ended.

There was no hostility shown to me as a non-Muslim. Indeed, the men who most eagerly approached me were active Tablighi Jaamaat members who saw it as their duty to convert me to Islam and occasionally criticised other villagers for failing to fulfil their duty as Muslims. Not everyone welcomed the Tablighi Jaamaat’s austere influence on society. ‘I used to dance a lot’, a man confided to me. ‘The last time I danced was at a wedding three years ago. Now it is finished, mostly due to the work of the Tablighi Jaamaat.’ Though dancing has ceased, hidden from view in the private realm oral traditions survive, albeit in a subdued form. During the summer season, the migration to the highest meadows (maáli) provides an opportunity to sing raucous
Violence and Belonging

songs, often with one man functioning as a lead singer and seconded by two or more other men. The songs may be melancholic laments of love and longing, sensual love songs or boisterous songs of joy, the latter often accompanied by rhythmic clapping. In private or in company, the women also sing and recite poetic couplets, or compose impromptu love poems or melancholy laments of unrequited love or for being married away:

ji, wo phoe thei hilaale kalil dezi aale,  
thoi buba jumte seroj waz na hano.  
wo, khushaal be na haries,  
mi bubae khushal be dao,  
wo, jang niila loti pashi.

(the boy) Oh dear, only a few days are left to your wedding. But your father is not coming down from the fields to the mosque.

(the girl) I have not happily accepted you as a husband but my father betrothed me to you when he spied the deep blue bank notes [i.e., the bride price].

Marrying within the family is common, with a preference for patrilateral parallel cousin marriages. There is a high frequency of polygyny, sometimes established through the exchange of marriageable women (badali). In dispute settlements, women may also be exchanged in marriage between former enemies to symbolise their reconciliation. A marriageable woman can also be given unilaterally to an aggrieved party as compensation. The married women reside with the husband’s family (virilocally). Beyond the inner family circle, they display extreme deference towards unrelated men. The hard and tedious work on the fields, mostly carried out by women, does not allow elaborate veiling and women only cover their heads with scarves. The symbolic seclusion of women (purdah) is created through the use of bodily kinesics – stepping aside, squatting, turning away and ceasing talking to create an effect of social ‘non-presence’. The women are subject to strict social control because they have the power to ruin the family’s honour (hayáa). This is especially important given the fact that romantic love and affection are most often not directed at one’s spouse or fiancé, but towards secret sweethearts and lovers. If clandestine and illicit love affairs become public knowledge, the transgression can only be cleansed by homicide. Adultery is not only a breach of local moralities, but it is also anathema to Islam.

The villagers are deeply religious and many are daily reciters of the Quran. Their religious devotion is visible in the old wooden mosques found in the larger villages. In the old days, these mosques were centres of Islamic
Belonging to the Palas Valley

learning that served to impart to students the tenets of Islam. The villagers of Palas are devout Muslims, but not of a dogmatic and extreme kind. Instead, theirs is a particular spirituality that, although austere and strict, is better described as tranquil and serene as evidenced in the vernacular religious songs and couplets. The spread of the Tablighi Jaamaat has not changed this fact, although it has strengthened the influence and the social standing of the religious scholars. The Tablighi method of evangelisation through lay preachers (the name means ‘community of evangelists’) is, like the Kohistani societies they preach among, based on an egalitarian ethos. The movement has, for example, tended to favour the education of girls and criticised the local system of brideprice (bridewealth) and argued in favour of dowry. In Palas, the Tablighi influence has raised the status of women and because of this women (and children) are now accorded the same share in private and communal property as men. The movement disapproves of lavish hospitality, which anyway is still in many cases beyond people’s economic means.

The old wooden mosques, with finely ornamented and elaborate designs, are central elements of the region’s wooden architecture and bear testimony to the ethos of vernacular spirituality. In the old mosque in Shared, a village in central Dáro, the floor of the prayer hall is covered with yellow straw and the water for ritual ablution is channelled from a little stream running past the mosque. Solid wooden pillars support the flat roof covered with mud. Next to the mosque lie a small graveyard with finely ornamented grave enclosures and some graves adorned by ornitomorph stone epitaphs. The origin of this symbolism is not clear, but points to a complex mix of cultural and religious influences. Throughout history, this area has been at the crossroads of the major Asian religions. Along the Indus river, near the town of Chilas, are well-preserved petroglyphs of the enlightened ‘Buddha’, of Buddhist ‘Stupas’ as well as pre-Islamic engravings of ibex, warriors and horses (Jettmar 1980). These influences are not easily traced to the region’s contemporary Islamic art, but the presence of unusual symbolical elements such as the labyrinth (Scerrato 1983) may in some way be related to region’s pre-history. In Islamic art the principles of repetition, symmetry and change of scale are key elements of the highly elaborate geometrical designs. The Kohistani woodcarvings, on the other hand, also explore asymmetrical designs and shapes. It has been inferred that the presence of asymmetrical designs can be considered emblematic of the egalitarian nature of the society and constitutes a unique Kohistani ‘style’ (Frembgen 1999: 86–9).
EGALITARIANISM AND EQUALITY

The large majority of the Palas valley villagers are poor, but although economic differentiation is limited, there is pronounced social stratification. The large majority of the inhabitants are ethnic Shins and trace their descent from one of the Shin patrilineages (zāat). Those who cannot trace such descent are known as be’zāat, literally ‘without lineage membership’, and include agricultural labourers (Sarkhali), herdsmen (Gujar) and blacksmiths (Akhar). Collectively referred to as faqirs or kamin they do not own land, houses or property and constitute the lowest rung of society (Zarin and Schmidt 1984: 13). Organised into endogamous groups, they provide services to the Shin patrons against cash or kind. Only the Shin can own agricultural land and only they can take part in and speak to the jirga assemblies. Only the Shin hold collective title (in the form of shares) to the communal estate (land, forest and pastures) and as shareholders in this estate they are collectively referred to as the ulsi’ya. The women have no formal political power, although they too are shareholders and enjoy limited inheritance rights to privately held land. The rigid social hierarchy denies women and the non-Shin any political role. There is no traditional leadership in the valley nor informal leaders (Malik) or petty chieftains (Khan). However, over the past century there were shorter periods when influential ‘big men’ (baru musha) held sway over central Dāro. As I will explain in more detail later, this role has to some degree been taken over by the elected representatives and politicians. It would therefore be more correct to say that while the Palas valley is not an egalitarian society, it is one where we find a pervasive egalitarian ideology that masks fundamental social divisions rooted in ritual purity and as well as in a gendered hierarchy.

The men and women do not socialise in public – doing so would provoke accusations of infidelity. The public sphere is reserved for men and the women only drift past as ephemeral shadows. Because of the strict sexual segregation, men traditionally congregate outside their homes or in the communal male guesthouse (deero). The guesthouses are the remnants of mid-nineteenth-century hostilities, when ferocious inter-valley feuds pitted one Kohistani valley against the next. They offered lineages protection during the protracted feuds. Now they serve as loci for peaceful socialisation. Inside, elderly men take time off from work in the fields. Sitting on an elevated wooden platform they share the latest news and a water-pipe. Increasingly, the communal guesthouses are being replaced by the smaller privately owned guestrooms (betak), adhering to the style now found in settled
areas. This is emblematic of the gradual change from communal to private concerns and the weakening of communal institutions. In Kuz Palas the big guesthouses have disappeared and, along with them, the communal rituals that bound the men together. This resonates with a general weakening of commensality that I will return to later.

In Dáro, the men still gather in the guesthouse to narrate stories, discuss the latest news, the maize harvest, etc. The men are excellent speakers and used to expressing their opinion in public. They know the valley, the details of past and present disputes and who said what, when and why. They offer long, detailed exegeses of what does and does not conform to the local traditions (dastoor). They sift evidence, express doubt, analyse events, compare accounts and argue over nitty-gritty details. This is not empty talk, but a vernacular discourse that is necessary to arrive at some consensus of local moralities. The use of force and infliction of physical harm should not make us overlook the importance of the spoken word in verbal contests, in challenges and ripostes. The people are acutely aware of the power of the spoken word to challenge and abuse offenders but also to demand justice in jirga assemblies or to convince judges in the Islamic ‘courts’ (Shariat) used to settle property disputes (see Chapter 4). What matters is not only ‘what is said’ but ‘how it is said’. The villagers value oratory skills and oral mastery both for its practical and aesthetic value. Local proverbs attest to the ‘strength’ of the spoken word by equating it with the harm inflicted by a bullet: ‘A word said and a bullet fired, do not ever come back.’

The spoken word is preserved in the oral corpus as songs, poetry, folktales, riddles and proverbs serving as the mnemotechnics of non-literate societies. As the men talk the water-pipe is passed around. One boy sits silently, waiting his turn to stuff the pipe with fresh, home-grown tobacco. Squatting in front of the open fireplace, another young boy lights a steady supply of resinous splinters by pushing them one at a time into the glowing embers. The splinter burns with a warm reddish colour that barely illuminates the dark room that is clouded with smoke, slowly drifting out through the vent below the ceiling. When the last splinter burns out the young boys undress and go to sleep on the floor. The elder men leave and go home to their own house.

**KOHISTANI DWELLINGS**

The residential unit is the house (gosh), which is usually surrounded by the terraced fields and walnut trees belonging to the family. The houses are
usually located at some distance from each other, but brothers who have set up separate households often live in close proximity to each other. The vernacular architecture combines familial intimacy and confidentiality with a need for separation and protection. The house's primary function is as a shelter from the vagaries of wind, cold and snow and, during the summer, the extremes of heat. The house is not a mere shelter, but a locus of domestic life and a microcosm of their life-world. Set deeply into the steep slope, the house closes itself off from the surroundings while at the same time enclosing and protecting those to whom it belongs (Figures 2.2a and 2.2b). Building a house is a communal undertaking that requires a large amount of timber fetched from the forest with the help of neighbours, friends and relatives. The rectangular layout of the house appears simple, but masks an elaborate and sophisticated construction technique.

The framework of the house is constructed from round logs joined by cog-joints at the corners made by fitting one on top of the other, the upper resting on a shallow groove. The resulting gap is filled with stones inserted in the empty space in between the logs. When this is completed, the walls are plastered with mud and cow’s dung with the help of communal labour. The
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roof rests on lengthways beams, supported by solid vertical pillars (thun). The term for the vertical pillar is also the vernacular term for the male household head, the one who symbolically ‘upholds’ the household. A thick door made from a single piece of wood protects the entrance to the house. The doorstep is the moral entry point of the domestic sphere. The interior of the house is centred on the open hearth, during the day primarily used by women to prepare dinners and to cook. Seating arrangements during the meals reflect rank and seniority: the household head is seated closest to the fire with his eldest son next to him, then his next-oldest son etc. On the opposite side, the most senior woman is seated and next to her the eldest daughter etc. Out of deference to her husband (if present), the daughter-in-law sits outside the semicircle (Kohistani 1998). This is also an indication of her weak position in the household and is reflected in local proverbs. Male in-laws, on the other hand are seen as equivalent of sons and accorded similar privilege: ‘People make sons by marrying their daughters’, goes a local proverb.

The flat roof is often the only horizontal workspace available and is mostly used by the women to dry and winnow the maize corn, which is
packed and stored in skin bags and huge wooden chests inside the house. In the basement, there are beehives made from hollowed cedar logs that are inserted between the foundation wall and the beams supporting the floor. There are also animal sheds used to house goats and sheep during the night. The house is also a centre for hospitality. The better-off households often have an extra, smaller guestroom built on to the roof, which they use to entertain guests or to hold meetings of men. Hospitality is highly valued. The male visitors are treated to cups of sweet tea. If a guest has travelled far, he will be treated with liberal doses of body massage. The host will direct his sons or house-servants to attend to the guest’s aching muscles, joints and tendons. There are also servings of walnuts, fresh honey, sweet grapes, dry maize bread and much more tea. The long and arduous trek to the valley is amply rewarded.

The house is not only a dwelling but also a refuge in times of conflict. In the event of an outbreak of hostilities between opposing groups, a watchtower (gari) is added to the house. The watchtower is indicative of the severity of a conflict and signals readiness to defend one’s honour, as I discuss later. The thick walls of the house not only provide safety against attacks, but are held together by a lengthways secondary beam (teri) that increases structural rigidity and enables the house to withstand earthquakes. This is important in an area which lends it name to the Kohistan Complex, a notorious seismic zone where the ‘Indian Plate’ presses against the ‘Asian Plate’, giving rise to frequent earthquakes. Palas and the other east bank valleys are located right on top of the main collision zone, which geologists refer to as the Main Mantle Trust. There are frequent tremors and minor earthquakes but none as destructive as the earthquake in 1974 that devastated Pattan, the major town in this part of Indus Kohistan. That earthquake killed more than 1,000 people and devastated 40,000 houses and buildings.6

CONTACT ZONES
Located on a fertile alluvial fan on the western bank of the Indus, Pattan is today a buzzing town with a population of about 10,000 people. A green oasis amidst scorched mountains, it is the administrative centre of the Pattan tehsil (administrative unit of a district), of which the Palas valley is a part. It houses the offices of the Assistant Commissioner, the police station, the Frontier Constabulary fort and some government residences. The people of Palas come here on foot or by jeep to peddle their goods, buy flour, sugar, tea and other necessities and to pick up news. Many come
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here to begin the journey down the KKH to visit relatives, in search of a job for the winter or, in a few cases, to flee their enemies. Some among the latter lounge in the Pattan jail, having been intercepted by the police before they could escape to the lowland. As a token of deference to the authority of the police, those who carry guns leave them with friends and relatives before entering Pattan. This is a transitional place where disparate systems of authority, exchange and legality meet. Pattan can therefore be labelled a ‘contact zone’ (Pratt 1992: 6); the space where tribal authority ends and government jurisdiction begins and where, occasionally, the two are brought into uneasy contact.7

Here the sanctity of blood revenge meets the judiciary's proscription of taking the law into one's own hands. It is also a meeting-point between the valleys' subsistence economy and the market economy of the bazaar. In Pattan the factional politics of the 'interior' meets the parliamentary political system of the 'exterior'. This is the place where the local politicians hold their campaign rallies and where the aspiring politicians have taken up residence. Having built large guesthouses there, they feed and entertain visitors who pass by en route to the valley or the lowland. The strategic localisation within the 'contact zone' provides them with an opportunity to expand the number of political supporters.

The Pattan tehsil is among the poorest in the NWFP and scores low on every development indicator. Despite this, it does not figure on any officials’ priority list. The seclusion and inaccessibility that benefited it during the colonial period have made District Kohistan an oddity within the Pakistani nation state. The marginality of the area translates into political peripherality and an inability to secure government funds for road building. The lack of roads through Dáro and Jalkot, two of the biggest valleys on the east bank of the Indus, is not a coincidence. It is a testimony to the area's lack of political clout. Remote and sparsely populated, Indus Kohistan was a latecomer to parliamentary politics. In 1971, Maulana Abdul Baqi became the first elected Member of the Provincial Assembly (MPA) from Indus Kohistan (Table 2.1, overleaf). Although Baqi came from another part of Indus Kohistan (Harban in today’s Northern Areas), it is a measure of the isolation of the Palas valley that Baqi was unknown to them: 'We never knew he represented us', a villager lamented. 'We were totally ignorant of politics'. Not until 1988 was Baqi challenged by two candidates from the Palas valley. They both lost. In 1990, however, a Palas candidate gained a decisive victory. In order to understand why the second election
Table 2.1: Electoral politics in District Kohistan 1971–99*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Constituency</th>
<th>MPA</th>
<th>Runners-up</th>
<th>MNA</th>
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<tr>
<td>1971–76 PF-50</td>
<td>Maulana Abdul Baqi</td>
<td>Malik Said Ahmad</td>
<td>Maulana Abdul Hakim</td>
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<td>PF-52</td>
<td>Maulana Abdul Hannan</td>
<td>Hafiz Mohammad Jamil</td>
<td>Malik Miskeen</td>
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<td>1976– **PF-50</td>
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<td>Maulana Abdul Baqi</td>
<td>Faqir Mohammad Khan</td>
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<td>Maulana Ubedullah</td>
<td>Malik Jahandad</td>
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<td>Malik Miskeen</td>
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<tr>
<td>1985–88 PF-50</td>
<td>Maulana Abdul Baqi</td>
<td>Malik Said Ahmad</td>
<td>Ayub Khan</td>
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<td>PF-52</td>
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<td>Malik Alimullah</td>
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<td>1988–90 †PF-50</td>
<td>Malik Aurang Zeb</td>
<td>Malik Hizbur Rehman</td>
<td>General Fazle Haq</td>
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<td>Maulana Abdul Baqi</td>
<td>Gen. Fazle Haq</td>
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<td>PF-52</td>
<td>Malik Kadam Khan</td>
<td>Maulana Abdul Hannan</td>
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<td>Maulana Ubaidullah</td>
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<td>1990–93 PF-50</td>
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<td>Malik Hizbur Rehman</td>
<td>Maulana Amin</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>PF-51</td>
<td>Maulana M. Asmatullah</td>
<td>Malik Aurang Zeb</td>
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Belonging to the Palas Valley

was more successful than the first, we need to look closer at the prevailing system of social organisation. It is a unilineal descent system, the basis of social organisation being membership to the patrilineage (záat). All men (and all women, too) belong to a named patrilineage that can range in size from less than ten households to more than five hundred. Membership to a patrilineage defines the main kinship allegiances.

The lineage stands at the bottom of a segmentary lineage system of nested clans (taabín) and tribes (qabilá), with the phratry (quom) at the apex (see Chapter 9, Figure 9.2). There are two quom, the Darma and Kuka Manka, both of which are of about the same size, but (as described in Chapter 9) unevenly distributed among the valleys. If they field separate candidates, as they did in 1988, this will split the vote between them according to the voters’ primordial loyalties. Candidates from neighbouring valleys in the constituency compete for the same seat. Therefore, by agreeing to promote one candidate (or, in the unlikely event that one is overwhelmingly favoured by all) they stand a better chance of securing enough votes to win the constituency’s seat in the provincial assembly. This was what happened in 1990. The victory was celebrated all over the Palas valley by slaughtering bulls and goats and mounting a great feast. At many mosques, the Quran was recited in its entirety many times over as a thanksgiving.

The political campaigns are run with great fervour and, to bolster their claim to influence, the candidates have many men along with them on the campaign trail. Their hosts customarily take care of their meals and lodging requirements as long as they stay among them. As a rule, the independent candidates do not have any political manifestos, at least not in written form. They mainly make use of their personal reputation, influence or powers of persuasion to convince people to vote for them. In order to underpin the claim to influence, the candidates adopt titles implying either

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* District Kohistan was formed in 1976 by merging Indus Kohistan (Hazara Tribal or Hazara Kohistan) with Swat Kohistan.


† In 1988 District Kohistan was separated out as a new electoral constituency and the number of provincial seats in the National Assembly increased from two to three.
Violence and Belonging

secular (Malik) or religious rank (Maulana). The candidates must visit each area of the constituency and make at least one personal contact in each community. Those who were not visited will feel offended and refuse to vote for him. If the candidates are not able to visit a community for any reason, they can send their agents on their behalf.

During the election campaign, the candidates have to demonstrate their economic solvency. They rent the local vehicles in large numbers, put their banners and posters on them and parade them on the local roads in large processions. They book the local hotels for as long as the elections are going on. There their supporters can eat and sleep for free, all expenses being charged to the candidates. Some candidates make secret deals with the elders of a lineage by paying a certain amount of money to them for each vote. The polling stations are established at various places depending on the convenience of the voters. The candidates buy rice, flour and cattle at each polling station in the mountains to cook meals for the voters. Different polling stations are set up for men and women to cast their votes. The candidates have their agents at each of the polling stations to prevent attacks on voters or attempts to coerce them. Women polling agents can only be appointed at the polling stations for women. The men are prohibited from going to these areas on polling day. Attempts to rig the elections are common at the women’s polling stations and therefore they are vulnerable to armed clashes between the supporters of the different political candidates. In many cases polling at these places is stopped several times before completion. The unity and disunity so typical of the valley’s factional politics influence the election results and show that primordial loyalties and genealogical affiliation play a decisive role in the final ballot.

The established politicians as well as the upstarts seek votes in return for favours, transfers, jobs or other forms of material gain or benefit. Their popularity waxes and wanes depending on their ability to attract goods and distribute them among their followers. Most of voters vote neither out of political conviction nor because of political patronage. When the politicians fail to fulfil their pledges or depart from their promises, the majority of voters desert them. There is often a mutual feeling of betrayal on both sides: the local people accuse the politicians of nepotism and embezzlement; the politicians complain that their achievements have not been duly recognised and that the voters do not understand the realities of parliamentary politics. We can sense this frustration in the Urdu inscription on the campaign poster of a candidate who failed to be re-elected:
Belonging to the Palas Valley

jab gulistān peh khazān āī tō khūn ham nē diyā
jab bahār āī tō kehtē hai, tērā kām nahīī

When the autumn came to the rose garden [i.e., when the country had bad days],
it was we who gave blood [i.e., made sacrifices to keep it alive].
When the spring came [i.e., when things improved], they say, it’s not your doing.

In the anthropological sense, the politicians are best understood as political middlemen placed between incongruent political cultures. Inside the valley, there can be no formal political leadership, principally because such leadership is constrained by the notion of equality. Outside the valley, on the other hand, hierarchy and status asymmetry is implicit in the social order and facilitates the accumulation and display of wealth. The failure of the politicians to enrich anyone but themselves has made people cynical and disheartened. Some of the MPAs have been known to trade their political conviction for money and an offer of a ministerial post in the provincial parliament. For this reason, they are derided for being political turncoats (lotaa). In their own constituencies, they usually achieve little beyond spending their parliamentary allowance on minor construction projects such as new roads, schools or basic health units (BHUs). These projects are locally referred as ‘schemes’, and are supposedly meant for community development works. Instead, they are often contracted out to influential locals as a political bribe. The work under the scheme is either not implemented, or done in such a poor fashion that the contractors can keep the major portion of the funds to themselves. So the politicians are often accused of embezzling money, an example of which can been seen related in this satirical stanza taken from a song criticising a local politician, here referred to by his official title, ‘Minister’ (wazir):

akh, wazir hano jukh the aspataal de,
shoodo chakar the, fund buto tool the, hi khari de,
ako tozrie, kacha mozi la the.

Wow, the Minister has been in the hospital for a long time now.
He exhausted himself from cheating, from collecting funds and keeping it all to himself to get rich and from talking too much.

Until 1977, there were no schools in Kohistan (Schmidt and Kohistani 1998: 109). There are now approximately 120 elementary schools in the whole Palas valley. The roughly 40 school buildings in Dáro are deserted, used for storing fodder or serving as meeting halls. There are neither teachers nor pupils, a testimony to the politicians’ habit of handing out jobs as teachers
by political patronage. In any case, most of the appointed teachers would not pass a proficiency test. This is one reason for the extremely low literacy level in the Palas valley, only 1.4 per cent according to the official estimate, compared to the district average of 12 per cent (News 1999).10

The strategic handing out of ‘schemes’ to political supporters or relatives is a problem in an egalitarian society based on the norms of social and economic equivalence. The lopsided distribution of favours, government jobs, ‘schemes’ and other economic privileges at the politician’s disposal is a source of envy and causes resentment among those not so endowed. The resentment over nepotism is one reason why politicians face problems when seeking re-election. The politicians have to spend a lot of money from their own pockets to secure votes. The seat in the provincial assembly is an opportunity to recuperate expenses rather than serve their constituencies. Once elected, the MPAs move to Peshawar, the provincial capital. This often leads them to sever their ties to the constituency and to become alienated from their electorate. The former politicians from the Palas valley have not resettled in the valley or the district. Instead, they have moved to the towns along the southern fringes of the province. There is, hence, a mechanism of social exclusion that makes the ousted politicians resettle elsewhere. This has contributed to political marginalisation and reinforced the problems of economic backwardness. The Palas villagers now look longingly across the Indus to the KKH – whose construction they opposed in the 960s. The District Headquarters planned to be located near Kuz Palas was moved to the west bank at Dassu, located 40 km to the north. Adding insult to injury, at night they can see the twinkle of electric lights across the Indus. Across the Indus river’s west bank, villagers benefit from electric power generated by two government sponsored hydro-electric plants. But in this part of the east bank, people are – literally – kept in the dark. The prospects for ‘development’ never looked so bleak. To make matters worse, the foreign NGOs that have flocked to the Northern Areas have shunned District Kohistan because of its reputation for being a lawless area inhabited by Sunni Islam zealots.11

ENCOUNTERING DEVELOPMENT

Entering Dáro, one is immediately struck by the remarkable exuberance of the valley. Its location is such that it is reached by an outlier of the monsoon, and therefore has a moister climate than the other valleys to the west and north. Beautiful flowers, lichens, plants and trees spring from the valley
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floor, watered by rain and glacial melt-water. Lizards hurry across the hot rocks with amazing speed. Inside the forest a number of elusive and rare animals can be found, animals that have disappeared from other Kohistani valleys due to over-hunting and deforestation: the endangered musk deer, rare carnivores such as the snow leopard, the wolf, the brown bear, primates such as the grey langur and the rhesus monkey, and the magnificent flying squirrel. There are also rare trees such as the West Himalayan elm and a plant new to science, the tiny *Delphinium palasianum* (Rafiq 1996). The forests provide a habitat for more than 130 bird species, including the world’s largest known population of the endangered Western tragopan pheasant.

It was the *jijil*, the tragopan pheasant, which drew the Palas valley to the attention of foreign NGOs. In the late 1980s, wildlife surveys by the English naturalist Guy Duke found 500 tragopan pairs breeding in the forests of Dáro. Under Duke’s leadership, the Himalayan Jungle Project (HJP) was launched in 1991 to protect the endangered bird. The villagers were sceptical of any intrusion into their society but also flattered by the sudden interest in their valley. The prospect of offending thousands of armed tribesmen and being chased out of the valley slowed the project down. In a region known for its aridity, it was paradoxically the rain that united the villagers and the project. In the beginning of September 1992 Northern Pakistan was struck by torrential rains which developed into a devastating flood. The worst affected area was the Hazara Division and one of the most badly hit valleys was the Palas valley. During the period 7–10 September half of the average annual rainfall fell. The heavy downpour caused violent flash floods in Dáro that wiped out most of the fields in two villages and damaged a large number of the irrigation channels and the water-mills, not to mention all the bridges along the main river. In addition, a large part of the valley’s mule-track, the only route to the KKH, was destroyed.

The timing of the flood could hardly have been worse. The disaster coincided with the maize harvest and ruined most of the maize crops. In order to avert a serious food crisis, the HJP paid for 50 tonnes of wheat, foodstuffs and other provisions and airlifted them into the valley with the help of the Government of Pakistan’s Emergency Relief Cell. The distribution of food and provisions was organised by the tribal councils (*jirga*). When the relief operation was completed, not a single kilo of wheat was unaccounted for. To the project managers, this attested to the vitality and authority of the tribal councils that had managed the internal distribution. To the villagers this catastrophic event underscored their vulnerability and showed that
not all forms of outside intervention were detrimental. There was also a
change of heart regarding the Himalayan Jungle Project which until then
had been tolerated but not welcomed by the villagers.

Following HJP’s help with organising the flood-relief operation, the
villagers now pinned their hopes on HJP as a steward of development initia-
tives. In recognition of HJP’s assistance, the villagers coined the epithet
Shahgosh meaning the ‘the man with princely ears’ as a mark of their respect
for Guy Duke, the head of the project. The HJP acted swiftly to capitalise on
the villagers’ sense of goodwill. To this end the HJP drew up an agreement
between the project and the villagers of Dáro concerning the watershed
area that was of the greatest importance in terms of biodiversity. On the
day of the signing ceremony over 200 tribal elders of Dáro congregated in
Bar Ser, a village half way up the valley. During the early morning hours a
heavily armed emissary arrived from the Kuz Palas jirga – the tribal council
of the lower watershed. He informed those present that the people of Kuz
Palas resented HJP’s focus on Dáro and its negligence of Kuz Palas. If the
project unilaterally signed a deal with the people of Dáro only, the people
of Kuz Palas would do everything within their powers to stop the project.
Only after pledging to enter into a similar agreement with the villagers of
Kuz Palas at a later date was HJP able to sign the ‘Bar Palas Agreement’
with the villagers of Dáro. In return for a portfolio of rehabilitation and
reconstruction schemes, the people of Dáro agreed to an instant ban on
the hunting of wildlife, to the designation of the valley as a special area
for conservation and development and to enter into a formal dialogue to
improve forest management (Duke 1994: 13).

Initially, the high expectations for development and prosperity were
fulfilled by a burst of project activity. The project made good its pledge to
help the community by constructing suspension bridges across the main
river, rebuilding the water mills and repairing the irrigation channels. The
villagers contributed more than 10,000 man-days of labour for this
purpose. A new term now appeared regularly in the discussions among
the men at the guesthouse: ‘d’velopment’. But just as development was
becoming a reality, the project stalled. In 1996, HJP’s parent organisation,
BirdLife International, a British-based NGO, decided that they could
no longer afford to carry the costs of the project and cancelled further
funding. Unable to finance the planned field activities the HJP was no
longer able to make good its original promises to the villagers. The villagers
lost faith in the project and the initial optimism evaporated. Amidst this
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crisis, HJP lost its founding figure with the untimely departure of Guy Duke. Unaware of HJP’s financial difficulties, the villagers wanted the project to complete the work it had committed itself to. Having kept their part of the agreement, the villagers felt that the project was obliged to ‘pay them back’, equitably and reciprocally. For the villagers of Dáro a lot was at stake. The flood disaster had made them acutely aware of the precariousness of their life in the valley. They had also made sacrifices by adhering to the ban on hunting that prevented them from hunting and trapping wild animals, even those that fed on their meagre maize crop. The flood disaster had not only ravaged their valley, it had put an end to commercial timber logging that they had hoped would become a major source of cash income.

THE EMERALD FORESTS

The flood disaster was blamed on extensive deforestation in the NWFP. A ban on commercial timber logging, ‘never before even a remote possibility, overnight became a political imperative’ (Duke 1994: 10). The ban was instituted in March 1993, but did not have the hoped effect. Soon the old system of indiscriminate logging was back, disguised by what was – on paper at least – a comprehensive timber ban. To a bureaucrat, being posted to District Kohistan is considered a punishment. Only Forest Department staffs consider a posting to District Kohistan a promotion rather than a demotion. Staff who sanction or become party to illegal logging get windfall earnings that dwarf their meagre departmental salary. The local communities that engage in illegal timber logging receive a microscopic share of the real value of the timber. Most of the profits are pocketed by the timber merchants who buy the standing trees cheaply and sell them for a much higher price (Knudsen 1999b). The plunder of the NWFP’s forest wealth has become a highly contentious issue. Timber ‘scams’, illegal logging, corruption and malpractice are regularly featured in the national press, in magazines and in official enquiries. None of this has had any significant effect, primarily due to political bickering which obstructs legislative changes and departmental restructuring. The Palas villagers consider timber logging necessary for their survival. This is a view that is shared by the other Kohistani communities in the district. When the ban on logging was imposed in March 1993, it sparked a popular uprising throughout District Kohistan. The protesters blocked the KKH, rolled stones off the cliffs and fired at any moving vehicle. The protest escalated into a minor insurgency over governmental neglect and political high-handedness.
Violence and Belonging

Deprived of other major sources of cash income, the inhabitants had looked to commercial timber logging as a solution to their problems and an avenue to prosperity.

As the German geographer J. H. von Thünen demonstrated in the early nineteenth century, land is devoted to the use that generates the highest potential rent. Roads lower transport costs. Rising timber prices increase profit margins. The combined effect is to move the logging ‘frontier’ further into the once remote valleys. The Palas valley offers an illustration of this: the road through Kuz Palas has promoted timber logging. Since there is no proper road, the forests of Dáro are more difficult and costly to log and the forests are therefore virtually untouched. Huge conifer forests clothe the mountain slopes. Nowhere in this part of the NWFP can contiguous forests of similar size and density be found. In Dáro the forests still hold the upper hand. Because migration is causing human settlement to dwindle, the advancing forests are slowly reclaiming the fields left fallow. To an ecologist this is an illustration of ‘ecological succession’. To a forester it is a unique example of a primary Himalayan forest. To the Dáro villagers the advancing forest is emblematic of the deep social divisions that run through the society and a depressing reminder of their inability to profit from what the forest has to offer on a commercial basis. In Dáro, infighting has for a long time held up attempts to begin timber logging, as has the lack of a proper road. The meagre prospects for commercial timber logging are the main reason why the forest has remained a communal estate. It has been owned like this since the last wesh, almost one hundred years ago.

HISTORICAL LANDSCAPES

The wesh (literally, ‘division’) is a central concern of all Palas villagers and validates their belonging to the valley and their concern with equality. The wesh was a system determining the periodic re-allotment of agricultural land, pastureland and forest among bona fide shareholders (ulus'i'ya). The wesh hindered the preferential endowment of arable land by according it to the share held by the adult men. Periodic reallocation of land hindered self-aggrandisement and the development of territorial power bases by individuals or kinship groups. The last wesh was completed about one hundred years ago, but remains the authoritative source of communal property rights. There is no land settlement in Palas and therefore no written record of land ownership. The wesh therefore remains a cornerstone of property rights and a large number of property disputes originate from
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contesting interpretations of the wesh or from attempting to manipulate it for personal gain:

The last time I met Kunar was in the spring. At that time he was busy clearing the fields near his house, hoping to finish in time to sow the maize. To irrigate the fields he had erected a temporary irrigation channel of hollowed logs. The original one had been destroyed in the flash flood in 1992. Now it’s late July and we are sitting together in Ledi, the highest of the mountain meadows (maáli). As one of the poorer households, Kunar’s family barely manages to eke out a living. To make ends meet, they work as sharecroppers and tenants on their neighbours’ fields. During the winter months Kunar works outside the valley: ‘This winter I’m going to work as a shoe shiner in Abbottabad’, Kunar explains. ‘Perhaps I’ll earn as much as 45 rupees per day. I have no other choice. I am not strong enough to do heavy manual work.’ While we talk Kunar receives news that, in his absence, neighbours have destroyed the temporary irrigation channel. His neighbours, who belong to another lineage, claim that the original channel has been theirs since the last wesh. Kunar and his family have neither the right to irrigate their fields with water from the original channel, nor its temporary replacement. Kunar leaves the same evening to check the damage. For Kunar and his family the denial of irrigation water is no trivial concern. It is a matter of survival. They are not many enough or strong enough to risk an armed conflict. Their opponents know this and this is why they have dared to destroy the channel. Kunar’s only option is to disprove their claim. Everything now depends on proving ownership of the channel. If they cannot win by peaceful means, they will have to leave the valley and resettle elsewhere.

Without formal land settlement in Palas, knowledge of the last wesh is vital to prevent incursions and infractions on one’s landed property. The wesh not only form the cornerstone of local land-tenure: owning agricultural land legitimises belonging to the valley and to the community. For Palas villagers, the wesh is the principal expression of their connection with the landscape. It is to the institution of the wesh as a form of government and its demise a century ago that we turn in the next chapter.
In the article “Land”, “tenure” and land-tenure, Bohannan (1963) drew attention to the embeddedness of Western concepts of land in the way we think of African land-use practices. In reality, claims Bohannan, one cannot grasp land tenure before its components ‘land’ and ‘tenure’ are examined empirically. ‘First’, says Bohannan, ‘we must ask what “land” means’ (ibid.: 101). To accomplish this we need to uncover not only emic categories of land but also its ‘historical topography’ (Kahn 1996: 193). In this chapter my aim is to contextualise the historical foundations of the wesh (literally, ‘division’), a customary land-tenure system that, a century ago, covered large parts of what is today the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan. Especially, I will focus on the historical events that led to the institution of the wesh in the Palas valley and its eventual demise.¹

Although the wesh is no longer practised, it remains the focal point for land-use practices of the people living in the valley. There is no land registration in the valley nor has a revenue unit (muaza) been demarcated. This is, in part, explained by the valley’s inaccessibility, the villagers’ resistance to outside intervention and the high incidence of blood feud. The lack of land registration and land titling offer an opportunity to examine remnants of tenurial arrangements of great antiquity. In addition to the historical significance of the wesh, there are three reasons why the Palas valley wesh merits detailed scrutiny. First, current land-use practices cannot be understood without uncovering their historical roots in the wesh. Second, the principles established during the wesh continue to function as legitimising factors in land claims and land disputes. Finally, elements of customary land tenure (of which the wesh forms a part) are inextricably linked to the wesh and ties the villagers to the locality.
PERIODIC REDISTRIBUTION: THE WESH

There is agreement that the wesh was first instituted among Pashtun tribesmen who invaded Swat during the first half of the sixteenth century (Ahmed 1976: 35). The origins of the wesh, however, precede settlement in Swat and have been seen in connection with the Yusufzai’s mythologised, heroic past as equestrian conquerors (Meeker 1980). According to this interpretation, the wesh is a remnant of an ancient system for dividing the spoils of marauding tribes. After settling in Swat, equity between descent segments mandated a system that likewise re-allotted land among descent segments. The purpose of this periodic re-allotment of land was to offset disadvantages among groups and, at the same time, offer a mythic continuation of the ‘heroic’ past. The institutionalisation of the wesh is credited to one ‘Sheikh Mali’, who devised a system of land settlement that became known as ‘Daftar-e-Sheikh-Mali’ (Wadud 1962: 89). From Swat the wesh spread to become the predominant mode of land tenure throughout the Indus Kohistan region.

The societies that adopted the wesh were all tribally organised and without elected leaders. The wesh did not escape the notice of British administrators who, in general, viewed the wesh as an obstacle to progress. One reason was that periodic land distribution hindered implementation of a land revenue system. ‘The bad effects of this system are patent’, complained the historian C. C. Davies (1932: 55), and not ‘until the Pathan realizes the advantages of fixity of tenure will the custom of vesh [sic] become extinct’. This view was shared by the autocratic ruler of Swat, Wali Abdul Wadud, who saw the wesh as a challenge to his authority. ‘The prevalent [wesh] system was a curse’, wrote Wadud (1962: 90) in his autobiography. ‘So long as it lasted it pricked in my side as a thorn.’ It took him five years (1928–32) to complete the land settlement in Swat and consolidate his power.

Save a few isolated pockets the wesh had by the mid-1930s disappeared from the settled districts (Davies 1932: 54–55), but a military report on Indus Kohistan from 1940 still found the wesh important enough to merit inclusion in the glossary. ‘Wesh (or vesh)’, states the report, is ‘a periodical redistribution of land among Pathan tribes applied not only to individuals but to whole sections of a clan in some cases.... The custom is an inconvenient one to tribes to make any progress’ (General Staff 1941: vi). When Fredrik Barth began his fieldwork in Swat during the mid-1950s the wesh had ceased to function. However, Barth was able to reconstruct elements of the wesh among the Nikbi khel, one of the descent segments...
of the Yusufzai Pashtuns (Barth 1959: ch. 6). During a strenuous survey of the western part of Indus Kohistan, Barth (1956b) found only a few men in Dubair and Kandia – two fertile valleys on the Indus’s west bank – who could give an adequate account of the now defunct wesh. Karl Jettmar, a member of the German Hindukush Expedition, visited the northern Indus Kohistani valleys of Darel and Tangir in 1955–56. There too the wesh had disappeared but Jettmar was nonetheless able to outline some of the main features of land division based on shares (Jettmar 1983: 511).

Fortunately, we have a detailed oral account of the Kohistani wesh as told by Hariq, an elder of the Palas valley. In 1980, shortly before Hariq’s death, Zarin and Schmidt recorded, translated and transcribed his account and included a provisional interpretation of his tale (Zarin and Schmidt 1984). This meticulous work remains the authoritative account of the Palas wesh, but Hariq’s passing left many questions unexplained and unexplored. In particular, important questions regarding why the wesh was broken off were not answered, nor how land was portioned out to shareholders. Fortunately, the oral traditions of Palas did not die with Hariq. The valley has a rich oral tradition maintained by skilled storytellers, poets and singers and many elder men who have a profound knowledge of their valley and its history. Trying to fill this lacuna in our understanding of the Kohistani wesh, this chapter draws on conversations with men from the Palas valley, many of whom, like Hariq, have been forced to leave the valley due to personal enmities.

THE FRAGMENTED SHIN POLITY, C. 1500–1700

The oral sources provide little information about Indus Kohistan during late medieval times, but Jettmar (1983) has presented a plausible account of the historical ethnography of Indus Kohistan. At the time, population densities were low and the majority of the population was settled in a few villages located on alluvial fans. There were ecological as well as sociological reasons for the low population densities. The inter-valley feuds were ferocious and mandated defensive use of the mountainous terrain. Inhabitants of the larger valleys therefore preferred to keep the intervening smaller valleys depopulated (Jettmar 1961: 86). This strategy created empty buffer zones (‘glacis’) between warring valleys. For the bigger part of the year, the tribesmen were confined in fortified villages and hill-top forts which offered protection during frequent inter-valley raids and enmities (Jettmar 1983: 511). The winters provided temporary relief from conflicts.
The Textured Landscape

and were spent in nucleated villages close to the Indus. The east-bank valleys had little fertile land and the potential for agriculture was limited, though in some locations near the Indus, the villagers developed paddy rice fields. There is reason to believe that elements of the *wesh* could have been in place prior to the spread of Islam. At the time, population densities were low and the lineages jointly owned surrounding agricultural land while the tribe collectively managed the pastures and meadows.

The foundation of social organisation was patrilineal clans descending from an apical ancestor. The two major descent groups were the ‘Darma’ and the ‘Khuka Manka’, each subdivided into different tribes (*qabilā*) and clans (*taabin*). Each of the latter was further sub-divided into lineages (*záat*) that exchanged girls in marriage (‘lineage exogamy’). The Darma was in a large majority in Dáro and the Khuka Manka the bigger tribe in Kuz Palas. They often vied for territorial hegemony, prompting the Kuka Manka to form temporary alliances with their kin in Kolai, a valley to the south, which the Darma countered by seeking help from Jalkot, a valley to the north. As is common in tribal societies there were no elected leaders. Beyond this, we know little of early leadership categories in Indus Kohistan. Still, it can be inferred that prospective leaders could ‘raise their personal prestige and accumulate a following through leadership in battle and redistribution of the spoils’ (Lindholm 1981a: 154). With conversion to Islam, a more peaceful way to gain a following was by means of partaking in periodic competitive feasting of accumulated agricultural surplus (Staley 1969: 234). The remnants of this feasting can be observed in the currently practised tradition of the lavish feeding of villagers as part of funeral rites. There were no regalia, no ceremonial or magical institutions sustaining such leadership, and achieved statuses were therefore inherently unstable (Barth 1956b: 86).

**EMBRACING ISLAM AND INSTITUTING THE WESH, C. 1700–1850**

There is agreement that conversion to Islam and institution of the *wesh* were concurrent processes (Jettmar 1983: 511–12, Staley 1969: 231). The Islamic missionaries from Swat helped spread Islam from the early seventeenth century. The religion imbued them with a measure of authority in an otherwise egalitarian social structure. In their wake, the institution of the *wesh* followed. The *wesh* with its periodic re-allotment not only offered easy integration with key Islamic tenets – most notably equality – but also contained elements of a full-fledged political system.7 Moreover,
the missionaries did not own land (nor did their descendants) but were given land on lease for their religious services, a device which had the benefit of guaranteeing impartiality. We do not know the precise nature of the former Shin political organisation, but the bigger Kohistani valleys probably oscillated between some form of centralised (‘principality-like’) and fragmented (‘acephalous’) political organisation (Jettmar 1961: 85, Staley 1969: 230). The smaller valleys lacked the ecological basis for producing sufficient agricultural surplus to sustain centralised rule (Barth 1956b: 85) and the spread of Islam undermined existing systems of internal stratification and rank. Still, conversion to Islam and the cessation of conflict between the eastern Kohistani valleys allowed the first wave of non-Shin immigrant craftsmen. Considered to be inferior (perhaps because they did not readily embrace Islam), they were not allowed to intermarry with the landowning Shin. This could be one reason why the menial ‘castes’ were treated harshly, expected to act subordinately and not allowed to carry arms. The Shin patrons monopolised land-titles and ownership of land – of any kind – was principled on being a legitimate shareholder (ulsi’ya). The many menial groups associated with specific occupational tasks were not recognised as tribal members, a circumstance that was reflected in the generic name for non-owners, be’zaat (literally, ‘without lineage title’).

Following conversion to Islam sometime in the late seventeenth century, a period of peaceful coexistence allowed new types of habitation to evolve. The hill-top citadels were abandoned in favour of nucleated settlements (kot) formed around village mosques and communal men’s houses in the valley. In Dáro some of the ancient men’s houses survive and their size and architecture suggest that they were not only used for male socialising but offered lineage members safety and protection during protracted feuds and internecine vendettas.

It is hard to find any ecological or adaptational traits that can account for the rapid adoption of the wesh throughout Indus Kohistan, but periodic redistribution may have served as a hedge against risk and offset disadvantages posed by catastrophic flooding and inundation of land (Lindholm 1982: 34). The wesh was not only adopted in the bigger and more fertile valleys on the Indus’s west bank but also in the ecologically marginal valleys on the east bank. The system of land rotation imposed constraints on agricultural productivity and limited the scope for agricultural intensification. Frequent rotation of fields discouraged labour investments in agriculture and was a disincentive for investing in permanent improvements (terracing etc.) which
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would benefit others during the next cycle. On the other hand, periodic re-allotment was beneficial under conditions of ecological uncertainty and risk. In areas where high risk was combined with inaccessibility and the absence of state bureaucracy, the *wesh* survived well into the twentieth century (Dichter 1967: 141–42, Nayyar 1988).

The *wesh* limited the scope for agricultural intensification in the Palas valley but there was a provision for periodic agricultural expansion by breaking new fields from public wastelands (*khil*) covered with brush and evergreen oak forest (*baando*). The villagers were allowed to break new land, but they could only utilise it for a limited period, usually ranging from 12 to 24 years. After the end of the period, the *khil* land reverted to the common pool of land for general distribution in the *wesh*. This provided villagers with some incentive for agricultural expansion and, at the same time, hindered accumulation of land among few hands. The frequent rotation also discouraged the planting of perennials and may account for the absence of fruit trees in Indus Kohistan (Staley 1969: 237). The absence of fruit trees may also reflect greater uncertainty of tenure and vulnerability to damage due to the high incidence of personal enmities.

The intervals between the *wesh* cycles were irregular. Some insist that the *wesh* was conducted every year, others suggest two, three, even twelve and thirty years. Examining the oral narratives, they can all be correct, and, especially for the decades preceding the final *wesh*, the periods between cycles were drawn out, most possibly because of its inconvenience. On average, the *wesh* was performed every three years (Zarin and Schmidt 1984: 11), which was frequent enough to allow newly adult men (above the age of 15) to claim their share. It has been speculated that the villagers did not shift their place of residence during the periodic re-allotment because this would interfere with pastoral migrations (ibid.: 47). Still, there may have been, if not compulsory movements, then voluntary shifts of residence due to the re-allotment of land.

The periodic re-allotment of land among landholding tribes necessitated a co-ordinating body. For this purpose Palas and the other Kohistani valleys adopted and later adapted the system of consensual assemblies (*jirga*) from their Pashtun neighbours. Consensual assemblies of different scales offered a measure of political integration across valley boundaries. During periods of increased military pressure on the east-bank valleys, the *wesh* as a political-cum-land tenure system united these assemblies in a loose confederacy, and temporary inter-valley alliances, made possible by
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the *wesh*, joined them as segmentary republics. This intermediary form of centralised leadership has been termed ‘macrocephalous’ (Jettmar 1983: 514). In the Palas valley, the eight clans of the Khuka Manka and Darma tribes appointed representatives (*zetu*) to a joint *jirga* council. Among the *zetu’s* responsibilities was leading groups and factions during war or under threat of war. They also acted as watchmen during the night at the gates of fortified villages (Frembgen 1999: 82). The strategic alliance and military cooperation offered by the inter-valley *wesh* for a long time warded off attacks from the bigger Kohistani valleys to the north. Towards the mid-nineteenth century, however, a new military power emerged on the northern fringes of Indus Kohistan that would render this tribal confederacy obsolete.

**DECLINE AND DISSOLUTION OF THE WESH, C. 1850–1890**

In 1846 the British signed the Treaty of Amritsar whereby they ceded ‘all the hilly or mountainous country ... situated east of the river Indus’ to the ruler of Kashmir, Maharaja Gulab Singh. Though the treaty did not endorse ‘coercing the trans-frontier peoples’ (Keay 1993: 28), Gulab Singh still initiated a series of raids in Darel and Tangir, two valleys in the northern part of Indus Kohistan (*Shunaki*). By the mid-1860s, the rule of the Kashmiri Dogra extended far into the Indus Kohistani heartlands, but thanks to their inaccessibility Palas and the other eastern valleys remained impervious to attacks: the lack of regular footpaths and tracks along the main Indus river suitable for equestrian conquerors hindered an invasion (Jettmar 1983: 515ff). On the other hand, an invasion by foot-soldiers from Swat was hindered by adopting a Pashtu political organisation cum land-tenure system that made everyone benefit from the defence of a common estate (Jettmar 1983: 512). By the mid-nineteenth century the territorial expansion of Swat had ended and with it the raids on Indus Kohistan (Lindholm 1981c: 154). However, the larger and more populous Kohistani valleys to the north (Darel, Tangir, Chilas and Sazin) still exerted pressure on the smaller and militarily weaker east-bank valleys. This notwithstanding, the increasing British pacification of the northern valleys led to a reduction in hostilities and there was no longer the same need for empty buffer zones as a defence strategy. This allowed a secondary wave of immigrant craftsmen and artisans who settled in the valley. They were subsumed into the local hierarchy of the land-owning Shin patrons controlling subordinate non-Shin clients who provided services either individually or as a group, for which they were paid in kind. Some were given land on lease in return for
their services. This also included those who performed religious services on behalf of the community. They were not accepted as shareholders but given land to lease from the joint landed estate. Those claiming descent from the Holy Prophet (*Syeds*) were also denied shareholder status and provided land on lease. In Swat, the members of occupational caste groups were attached to individual patrons, but in the Palas valley they formed around the Darma and Khuka Manka *quom* that collectively provided them land. The increasing use of agricultural tenants benefited from a process of agrarian change, made possible by substituting maize for millet (Jettmar 1961: 87). The maize had higher yields and was therefore better suited for sharecropping and allowed better integration across altitude.

The demands of the tactical doctrine known as the ‘forward policy’ required the British administration to reinforce its military powers and, from 1877, posted Colonel John Biddulph as the first Political Agent in the newly established Gilgit Agency. The importance of protecting the Indus Valley Route (between Kaghan and Chilas) meant the extension of British control southwards, culminating in 1893 with the bloody battle for Chilas (Keay 1993: 228ff). During the coming decades the larger Kohistani valleys continued to pay token tribute to the Kashmiri rulers, but the pacification of Darel and Tangir by the British had greatly reduced the threat of an armed invasion on the east bank valleys. The political situation was irrevocably changed. The need for military co-operation and defensive support offered by the *wesh* was now weakened. This chain of events can explain the eventual fragmentation of the Shin polity, a process that was hastened by deepening internal rifts between the east-bank valleys. Evidence of this rift can be found in Biddulph’s book, *Tribes of the Hindoo Koosh* (1880: 9–10). He never visited Indus Kohistan during his tenure at the Gilgit Agency, but native informants brought back news of the feuds that were now spreading among the east-bank valleys:

... the neighbouring and rival communities of Koli [Kolai] and Palus [Palas] ... are often spoken of as forming a single tribe [i.e., Khuka Manka]. They were formerly close allies, but a feud, arising out of a dispute concerning some land to which both lay claim, has existed between them for several years. It is seldom that two or three months pass without a raid from one side or the other.

The demise of the *wesh* coincided with the fragmentation of the east-bank Shin polity and the long suppressed divisions now resurfaced with a
vengeance. As indicated by Biddulph, the former allies Kuz Palas and Kolai split. A consequence of this split was that the Kuka Manka tribe that was found in both valleys was divided too. This in turn posed new difficulties for conducting the inter-valley *wesh* between Dáro and Kuz Palas.

The *wesh* was premised on a periodic balancing of land titles to dualistically opposed socio-political groups (*dalas*). The traditional way of re-allocating land during the *wesh* was to split it into comparable ‘parts’ or ‘halves’ (*hoor, hoor wesh*). For each step down the genealogical tree, the land was split into smaller pieces and selection decided by a draw (*túuli*). For this to be equitable, the two tribes had to be of comparable size. Since separating from Kolai, the Kuka Manka were fewer in number than the Darma in Dáro, but they continued to demand half of the land under division. The Darma objected to the division on the basis of *hoor wesh* (‘division by halves’) and rejected the Khuka Manka’s land claims. Shortly thereafter, large feuds broke out that quickly spread to the surrounding valleys (Kohistani 1998, Zarin and Schmidt 1984: 8). In an attempt to gain the upper hand, the Kuka Manka of Kuz Palas sought help from their former allies in Kolai and, later, from the Alai valley further to the south. A big battle near Sherakot in lower Palas left scores of men dead on both sides. According to oral tradition, the few survivors were unable to bury their slain fellows. Weakened by internal fighting, the Darma in Dáro were later attacked by men from Kolai, only to be beaten in a counterattack by a combined force of Dáro and Kuz Palas. Unlike Kolai and Alai, the Palas valley was well endowed with potentially arable land and, seemingly, offered allies land in return for military support. This is reflected in Biddulph’s (1880: 11) observation:

> The people of Palas, who are also Shins, inhabit a valley of considerable extent stretching in a south-easterly direction. ... land in Palas is plentiful, and much remains uncultivated. [and] ... this abundance has for some time caused the envy of the more crowded populations of Alai and Koli [Kolai].

The eventual break-up of the east-bank Shin polity shows some resemblance to Barth’s description of the break-up between the two west-bank valleys Kandia and Dubair (Barth 1956b: 33). Initially, the two were united in an inter-valley *wesh* where major lineage segments moved inbetween the valleys every fourth or fifth year. When hostilities broke out, this spelled the end of the inter-valley *wesh* and left major lineage segments ‘stranded’ in both valleys. This could also have been the outcome of the feuds that erupted among the east bank valleys. Although the Kuka Manka and Darma
inflicted heavy losses on each other, the Kuka Manka, supported by allies in Alai and Kolai, were unable to score a decisive victory (Zarin and Schmidt 1984: 8–10). In the end, the hostilities calmed down and a truce enabled the Darma and Kuka Manka to seek a peaceful solution to the land claims. The time had come to end the wesh and distribute land among the land-owning tribes and lineage segments. It is to this indigenous land settlement we turn next.

INDIGENOUS LAND SETTLEMENT, C. 1880–95

For almost two centuries the wesh had defined land tenure and inter-valley politics in Kohistan. Now it was to be discontinued. The step-wise dissolution of the wesh began with the demarcation of new boundaries between the valleys, thereby creating new political and tenurial entities. The break-up of the east-bank Shin polity necessitated the demarcation of the valleys (principally the four valleys Jalkot, Dáro, Kuz Palas and Kolai) that until then had been joined in the inter-valley wesh (Zarin and Schmidt 1984: 18, 43). To accomplish this, the Palas villagers took advantage of principles inherent to the wesh and, where these were found lacking, instituted new ones as they went along. This, the Last Great Wesh (akhri bari wesh), was carefully executed, guided by the skills of local wesh masters who enjoyed widespread support. Already many years prior to this last wesh, the regional boundary separating Palas and Jalkot from the ‘Northern Valleys’ (Shunaki) had been demarcated by Khawas Khan. Respectfully referred to as ‘Grandfather Khawas’ (Khawas daado), he was the first of the Palas wesh masters. The motive for this split was to preserve the territorial integrity of the east-bank valleys at a time when they were under pressure from the bigger Kohistani valleys to the north.

The second phase of the land settlement involved demarcating the boundaries between the east-bank valleys themselves. The boundaries separating Jalkot, Dáro, Kuz Palas and Kolai were identified and terrestrial boundary markers fixed. The difficult work of demarcating the boundaries (dir biriit, ‘boundary limits’) between the valleys was supervised by Lal Khan, son of Khawas and the second of the great wesh master of Palas. Lal Khan belonged to the Sorma taabín, at the time the largest clan of the of the Darma quom. He was not a religious scholar but the fact that Lal Khan belonged to the ‘Sorma … (which is credited with bringing Islam to Kohistan) may ... have endowed him with an extra measure of authority’ (Zarin and Schmidt 1984: 48).
This demarcation ended the inter-valley *wesh* and severed political ties between the valleys. Jalkot and Kolai now separated from the Palas valley and proceeded to divide their land internally, but Dáro and Kuz Palas had not yet ceased to function as one *wesh* unit. At the request of Sadat Khan, another legendary *wesh* master, they decided to stay united in order to counter attacks from their common enemy, the Khan of the Alai valley. Dáro has a fast-flowing river (Musha Ga) that is prone to flash floods. At the time, most of the cultivated land lay at or near the river bank. Some fifteen years later a flash flood wiped out all the lower-lying fields in Dáro. They were now left with higher-lying fields that had been carved out of common wastelands (*khil*). According to the rules governing the *wesh*, these fields should after a specific period of time revert to the common pool of jointly owned land, to be redistributed during the next *wesh*. Dáro was settled later than Kuz Palas, and most of the fields had been developed from wastelands. During the next inter-valley *wesh*, the villagers in Dáro would be required to pool their extensive *khils* with Kuz Palas. Having lost the lower lying fields to the flood, the villagers in Dáro now depended on the *khil*-land for their future. For this reason Sadat Khan requested the termination of the inter-valley *wesh*.

The time had come to end the *wesh* and demarcate the boundary between Dáro and Kuz Palas. The boundary followed the ridge separating the two valleys as far west as the village of Sherial. From there, it followed the Sherial river northwards to its confluence with the Musha Ga, the main river of Dáro. When the boundary had been identified, the next step was agreeing to the areas that would constitute comparable lots (*hoor*). This problem could not be solved before the size of the two tribes was adjusted by balancing the number of shareholders.

The *wesh* was principally a political instrument used to balance land holdings between opposing tribal and lineage segments. One of the biggest problems for land division had been the unequal size of the Darma and Kuka Manka *quom*. Previously there had been no way to deal with this problem. In order to make the division by ‘lots’ fair and equitable, the descent groups had to be of comparable size. Under the supervision of Sadat Khan, the smaller lineages received members from the larger ones belonging to the same clan. In some instances whole lineages were pruned from majority clans and grafted to smaller ones. A few minor lineages took additional members from menial groups (‘castes’) of their own accord. This was done to increase their number and thereby their share of land. Some among the
non-right holders (*be’záat*) thereby gained land titles. There are indications that at least some of them were later forced to give up this privilege.

In vernacular terms the balancing of shares (i.e., shareholders) was known as *cuk’ne* or *cu’nei bag’yaaran*, derived from the term *ba’goon*, meaning ‘to divide’ (Zarin and Schmidt 1984: 14–15). Balancing the size of descent groups on this scale had not been done previously, though it had been practised on a lesser scale to fine-tune (*cuk’ne*, ‘to adjust’) land divisions at the lineage level. Balancing the number of shareholders within the Darma and Khuka Manka *quom* made it possible to attend to the Kuka Manka’s land claims. To facilitate this distribution, the parties agreed to the areas that would constitute comparable lots (*hoor*). Each lot comprised two core areas (and settlements) in Dáro:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lot (<em>hoor</em>)</th>
<th>Lot (<em>hoor</em>)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kunsher</td>
<td>Kundul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gadaar</td>
<td>Karu Ser</td>
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</tbody>
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The privilege of choosing first was decided by making a toss (*tiúuli*). The toss came out in favour of the Khuka Manka and after short deliberations they decided to take the lot consisting of Kunsher and Gadaar, leaving Kundul and Karu Ser (which already were Darma strongholds), to the Darma. Dáro was sparsely populated and, beyond the village of Kundul, there was no permanent habitation, so the area therefore not subject to *wesh* division. Due to its proximity to the Indus, Kunsher was considered more valuable than Kundul, located in the interior of Dáro. Moreover, most of the villagers spent the winter months in Kool, a nucleated settlement on the banks of the Indus.

The balancing of shares was necessary to achieve parity between the Darma and the Kuka Manka *quom*, but there is evidence that in a unilineal descent system this reshuffling was not always well received. Some were discontent with their allotted land and blamed those who conducted the *wesh*. Although it is stated that people unanimously submitted to the will of the *wesh* masters (Zarin and Schmidt 1984: 21), others concede that the land settlements gave rise to enmity. The *wesh* masters were not above personal conflicts and enmities. Lal Khan was shot and killed a year before he was about to supervise a new *wesh*. A few years after supervising the division between Dáro and Kuz Palas, Sadat Khan (Sadati) was brutally killed. This, in part, explains why the *wesh* fell into oblivion. Following the deaths of Lal Khan and Sadat Khan there were no men of comparable
stature to take charge of the wesh. So this last great wesh was, in effect, the final indigenous land settlement (taqsimaat) to take place.

THE PROCESS OF LAND DIVISION

In order to explain the sub-division of agricultural land at the lineage level we need to explain the nature of ‘shares’. Rather than owning a particular piece of land, a share entitled a man to a fraction of agricultural, forest and grassland controlled by his descent segment (i.e., lineage). The number of shares that he controlled determined his fraction of the joint estate. At the time of the last wesh each male adult was considered eligible to one share unit (baagô), commonly referred to as a ‘man’s share’ (mosh baag’yo). The women and children were accorded only a fraction of a man’s share.17

For the purpose of the wesh, only the number of male shares within each lineage was counted. In order to divide land among male shareholders, it was necessary to establish an exchange rate between land and shares to make them commensurable. This was accomplished in two steps. Instead of adopting a measurement of land based on size, which – under the differing ecological conditions of Dáro and Kuz Palas – would have been unfair, measurement was based on agricultural productivity. The unit of productivity was (and still is) a rat (plural, rato), and one rat of agricultural land produces approximately 12 khala of maize flour (1 khala = 50 kg). Agricultural productivity, therefore, was chosen as an indigenous measure of land value rather than absolute size. Having converted a lot (hoor) into its component rato, the next step was to find a conversion factor that could translate shares into a field’s productivity.

Because productivity varied sharply within the valley (and between Dáro and Kuz Palas) there was a provision for adjusting the number of shares needed to obtain one rat of land. For land of average productivity, one rat was equivalent to between nine and twelve shares. For highly productive land one rat was considered equal to sixteen or seventeen shares. The division was not strictly arithmetical, but it sought to achieve equivalence between shareholders. The final division of land was conducted within the lineage, again by making draws. Individuals were assigned fields whose size approximated to the sum of their shares. The distribution of land was therefore randomised and an individual’s landholding made up of pieces that were not contiguous.
Limited rainfall meant that agriculture in Palas was dependent on meltwater from the surrounding mountains. The water was diverted from the streams by water channels (yab) and distributed to the fields. The frequent feuds and enmities made the channels vulnerable to damage and the irrigation system was therefore kept simple and spatially compact. Recognising the importance of allocating water, the land settlement system not only divided fields but also existing water channels. The channels used by a single lineage became the property of that lineage. Where more than one lineage shared rights to water from a channel, allocation of water was modelled on the principle of the hoor wesh used for fields. The total water output from the channel was measured as the sum of rato of agricultural land served by the channel. The amount of water accruing to each landowner was equal to the owner’s fraction of the total.

Having completed the distribution of fields and irrigation water, the wesh masters turned their attention to the extensive broad-leaved forests (baando) found in the dry scrub belt between 750 and 2,800 metres. The dried oak leaves and grasses at the forest edge were essential components of the agro-pastoral system, and the main source of winter feed for the animals. The importance of oak forests made it necessary to subdivide them. The principle for awarding the clans (and, in some cases, lineages) oak forests was based on the total size (i.e., rato) of their agricultural fields (at the time of the wesh).

For reasons not fully understood, the oak forests were distributed in such a way that lineages never controlled the oak forests lying adjacent to their fields. For example, if two lineages, A and B, were apportioned oak forests they were distributed in such a way that oak forests near A belonged to B and vice versa. This had several implications. First, it hindered the conversion of oak forests to fields, thus preventing accumulation of land among individuals and loss to the users of the oak forest. This not only discouraged agricultural expansion but added to the already mosaicked, scattered and dispersed pattern of land ownership. Unlike the oak forests, the mixed conifer forests (zangal) were not considered valuable or scarce enough to merit division by the wesh. In both Dáro and Kuz Palas fields and sub-alpine pastures (maali) had been created by the removal of conifer forest. The large trees were also girdled and felled to provide building materials for houses and sheds. Providing an inexhaustible supply of timber,
the vast and undulating conifer forests were therefore not subdivided but remained the joint property of the Darma and the Khuka Manka *quom*.

Because the landholdings were dispersed, it made detailed knowledge of the location of the boundaries important. This was not only important for stopping infractions on one’s own property, but to avert unintentional infringements on others’ property. Although the kinship segmentation was reflected in the landscape, it was not (as in Swat) a mirror image of the segmentary lineage. In Palas there was no homology between territory and kinship structure. Even in the case where a village was populated by a single lineage, the surrounding land and forest showed a profound mixture of ownership and entitlements. This pattern was later compounded by the resettlement of families from Dáro to Kuz Palas and vice-versa.

Field scattering was also caused by the occasional need to ‘adjust’ (*chukne*) lots by awarding a lineage (or person) additional land somewhere else. The distribution of land among the shareholders therefore gave rise to a pattern of dispersed and fragmented landholdings. The lineage-level division repeated the random division of lots at the tribe and clan level. To offset disadvantages caused by random distribution, the shareholders and shareholding lineages were allowed to consolidate landholdings through the exchange of fields. This could not alter the fact that the land settlement method scattered ownership of fields and adjacent oak forest. There are benefits from fragmented landholdings such as reduced risk from natural calamities and catastrophic loss, but field fragmentation also made land tenure more labour-intensive. At the time, the availability of agricultural tenants and serfs made this problem negligible.

**THE PALAS WESH**

The Palas valley *wesh* was an indigenous land-tenure system of considerable complexity. The *wesh* put considerable strain on the local population and would probably not have been instituted if it had not served a religious purpose. The Islamic missionaries who undertook the institution of the *wesh* were imbued with religious authority. Without land title, they could not be accused of patronage and favouritism. The institutionalisation of the *wesh* strengthened the Shin’s control of land and underwrote the symbolic separation of those having land titles (*ulsi’ya*) from those who did not (*be’záat*). Among the Shin, the *wesh* reaffirmed lineage solidarity and the importance of being a genuine resident of the Palas valley. The Shin had considerable say over their shares. Land could be leased or left in trust with
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a relative or villager without compromising a claim to ulsi'ya status (Zarin and Schmidt 1984: 46).

A pervasive egalitarian ethos, small landholdings and low productivity (which make accumulation difficult) eased adoption of the wesh. The specific socio-political conditions that accounted for the rapid spread of the wesh also accounted for its demise. The wesh was ingrained with the prevalent political conditions in Indus Kohistan and, beyond that, with the colonial quest for regional supremacy. When the political circumstances changed, the inherent contradictions in the wesh became apparent. Stripped of its political function, it was retained as a benchmark of land division and source of legitimacy for subsequent land claims and land disputes. In addition to leaving its stamp on local history, the wesh left an indelible imprint on the local landscape. Important local resources were scattered along a huge vertical gradient, often interdigitated with the fields and woodlands of competing groups and lineages. The mosaicked ownership pattern removed the possibility for any group to attain territorial hegemony. Indeed, there is tangible evidence that this was done to frustrate attempts at usurping political power and to prevent personal aggrandisement. There is therefore the possibility of interpreting the wesh as an indigenous wealth-levelling mechanism, reflecting the high value placed on social equality. The wesh was not instituted in response to ecological risk, but the impact of disastrous floods was reduced by the periodic re-allocation of land.

By the turn of the twentieth century the wesh had ceased to function even though the tenurial principles that underlay it persisted. Borrowing from Meeker (1980), one could argue that the ‘heroic phase’ of Indus Kohistan vanished with it. Territorial expansion, a feature of segmentary lineage, became a thing of the past as newly conquered land could no longer be included in the pool of jointly owned land. The finality of the last wesh had unintended sociological implications and internecine vendettas erupted because the villagers could no longer change or adjust their apportioned lots. Nevertheless, the way the last wesh was conducted is remarkable. In the western part of Indus Kohistan, bloody feuds broke out when the wesh ended and the more powerful tribe or tribal segment simply annexed the area they preferred (Barth 1985: 72). The ability to restructure their system of land tenure is a testimony to the wisdom and forethought of the Palas villagers and their wesh masters. Together, they succeeded in completing an indigenous land settlement involving perhaps 10,000 villagers spread out over a vast mountainous terrain. This is one reason why the last
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*wesh* epitomises the wisdom and acumen that the people of Palas pride themselves of. It is reflected in the oral narratives that keep the spirit of the last *wesh* alive and in the local terminology. The *wesh* is sometimes used with reference to the last, the big *wesh*, and at other times employed as a generic term for any division of immovable property that adheres to the principles of the *wesh*, in particular division based on ‘halves’ or ‘lots’.

The *wesh* in the Palas valley underscores the problem of a narrow focus on ‘land ownership’ in a Western sense. This echoes Bohannan’s critique of land-tenure studies where the ‘rights of people are being made congruent with rights in specific pieces of land’ (1963: 110). Bohannan found among the Tiv that ‘a man always has rights in the “genealogical map” of his agnatic lineage, wherever that lineage may happen to be in space. These rights, which are part of his birthright, can never lapse’ (ibid.: 106). Likewise, ‘land’ in Palas comprised different categories to which individuals held entitlements in the form of shares, and regardless of where a shareholder’s land was at any point in time his rights to land (i.e., land title) were tied to that of his patrilineage. Only when the *wesh* ended did the villagers obtain rights in specific pieces of land. In Bohannan’s terms, this marked a transition from ‘topology’ to ‘topography’.

Without formal land settlement in Palas, knowledge of local history is vital to prevent incursions and infractions on property. The closer one moves to the time of the last *wesh* the nearer one moves to the ultimate source of legitimacy. In a valley where most adult men are illiterate, the history of the last *wesh* constitutes a common – but not always the only – frame of reference that forms the ‘background’ dimension of the villagers’ relation to the landscape (Hirsch 1995: 3) and validates their belonging to the valley. In the next chapter I will turn to the social ‘foreground’, that is, the practical consequences of the *wesh* and a more detailed examination of the sociological implications of the *wesh* for agricultural production, sociality and belonging.
In this chapter, my primary aim is to examine the human ecology of the maize agriculture in the Palas valley and, more specifically, the material basis for belonging to the valley. The people have a traditional subsistence economy and most people, even the ones with more land, live in poverty. There is no land settlement in the valley and no written record of land ownership. Without formal land title, the villagers cannot utilise land as collateral to obtain a bank loan.\(^1\) The lack of a cadastral means that ownership to fields is often contested. Few acts enrage villagers more than transgressing property rights to agricultural fields. Any attempt to encroach on fields, trespass on property or appropriate produce is severely sanctioned and gives rise to disputes and conflicts. Property disputes can be mediated in a *Shariat* adjudicated by a Maulvi but often remain unresolved.\(^2\) The reason for the concern with agricultural fields is to be found in the intersection between the ecology, economy and vernacular notions of enmity. The disputes over fields and the boundaries separating them frequently lead to homicide and revenge killings. In the course of the feud, the fields become central objects in prestige fights among men and households. As I shall try to demonstrate, these fights serve to constrain agricultural production. In fact, the poor maize yields cannot be understood without taking into account the contested nature of agricultural fields. I begin by giving a general description of the agro-pastoral adaptation in Dáro, the part of the Palas valley where it is practised in its most extensive and ‘traditional’ form (Figure 4.1, overleaf).

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Palas valley is reached by an outlying part of the annual monsoon; precipitation is both in the form of snow and rain and falls mainly in winter and early spring (December–April). There are no rainfall data for the Palas valley, but the annual rainfall in Pattan (750 m), the nearest town, is 1,153 mm per year and the minimum temperature in winter is about 5 degrees Celsius, increasing to a maximum of 36 degrees
during summer (Dani and Khan 1995: 36–7). Due to its greater altitude, the interior of the Palas valley is both a lot wetter and colder than Pattan. The valley is part of the Himalayan piedmont and the topography therefore extreme, covering altitudes ranging from 700 metres at its confluence with the Indus to almost 6,000 metres at the highest peaks. The valley is narrow and the mountain slopes steep, but it opens up towards the east where the huge mountain meadows spread out beneath snow-clad mountains. Due to the steepness of the terrain, only about 5 per cent of the land in Dáro is arable. The agricultural fields are mostly located on alluvial plains near the
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main river or carved out from the steep mountain slopes. An integral part of the local adaptation is the ability to take advantage of the steep vertical relief by means of seasonal migration. The ecology of this agro-pastoral (‘transhumant’) adaptation is based on a step-wise utilisation of ecological ‘niches’ (Barth 1956a). The Dáro villagers practise an extreme form of transhumance, covering an extensive vertical gradient from about 750 to 4,500 metres. The local adaptation to this environment combines irrigated agriculture with seasonal movements of multi-species herds (goats, sheep, cattle and buffaloes) from verdant summer pastures to the open evergreen forest (oaks, olives and chestnuts) during winter. Due to their mixed characteristics and extensive form of exploitation, this constitutes a varied landscape of high biological diversity (Rafiq 1992). This should furnish the necessary livelihood for the dispersed population of the valley, but, as we shall see, it is a food-deficit area and the villagers only derive a limited part of their sustenance from agriculture and pastoral herds.

MAIZE CULTIVATION

In the Palas valley, maize is the staple crop and cultivated in the maize-growing belt (ma’keen), ranging from about 700 to 2,600 metres. The altitudinal range is utilised to skew the time for sowing and harvesting, thereby allowing ploughing, planting and harvesting to be synchronised with seasonal movements of livestock and household labour. Previously, the availability of agricultural tenants eased the vertical integration and timing of agricultural activities. The high level of male work migration – around 25 per cent of the adult workforce during the winter season – contributes to a local shortage of labour. In addition, many of the tenants and indentured labourers have left the valley and can no longer be mobilised as a source of labour. The presence of an outside labour market has made even poor villagers reluctant to work as sharecroppers. Until the mid-1970s, maize was cultivated with cereals (barley, wheat and oats). Since the transition to a monetary economy, the cereals have been supplanted by specialised maize cultivation grown in a virtual monoculture. The water for cultivation is diverted from perennial streams and led to the fields through channels and irrigation leats. The refusal to allow irrigation water is a frequent source of disputes and makes the channels vulnerable to damage. The irrigation system is therefore simple and spatially compact and best referred to as ‘hydro-agriculture’ (Allan 1991: 71). The right to water for irrigation is tightly regulated and the amount accruing to the owner depends on the size of his fields. In some villages the
streams dry up in summer. The fields only receive water from the occasional rain shower and, consequently, yields are very low.

The agricultural calendar closely follows seasonal climate changes (Figure 4.1). The cultivation of maize begins in the maji ser (‘middle fields’) in early spring by softening the hard soil by flood irrigation. When the fields are saturated with water they are ploughed using a pair of bullocks. Most of the villagers borrow a bullock, which is paired with their own. The bullocks are fitted with a wooden yoke that is attached to the steel-tipped, wooden scratch-plough. Light and easy to handle, the plough is lifted up and carried around at every tight turn in the tiny fields. The scratch-plough is made by the local ironsmiths and can, if needed, be repaired in their workshops. On average, the men plough the fields twice. After the ploughing, the women and children break the lumps of clay by pounding them with wooden clubs. When this is completed, the farmyard manure is spread on to the field. Artificial fertilisers are used by most households, but due to the lack of money and transport facilities, only in very small quantities.

Before beginning to sow maize the men in each hamlet congregate to settle the date for sowing. When the date is finalised, they offer a collective prayer for a good yield. The villagers mostly rely on maize seed stored from the previous harvest. They know that crops bred repeatedly from the previous year’s seed will decline in quality, but they have no other alternative. Maize seed is also exchanged among neighbours and relatives. Maize hybrids of different types are sometimes available through the government’s extension service, but they too suffer from poor quality. After the men have finished sowing, there is a period of about twenty to forty days before the first thinning (bidor) of the maize shoots. The excess plants are uprooted and dried for later use as animal fodder. The women weed the fields once or twice. By the time the maize begins to germinate, the animals are moved by an advance party to the higher lying fields in the ‘spring habitation’ (bazoodo bek). The early migration of animals provides important fertilisation for the higher lying fields that will later be planted with cucurbits, potherbs and some potatoes. The need to move the livestock to higher altitudes creates a shortage of labour for maize cultivation. In spite of a strong individualist ethos, the periodic labour shortage is solved through the use of communal labour (hashar). This enables a villager to rely on the labour force of his neighbours, or the entire village, when necessary. He is also expected to reciprocate when one of his neighbours calls a hashar at a later date. The person calling the work party serves tea and bread in the morning and in
the evening prepares a communal dinner for all the participants, referred to as *hasha’ri*. The most important uses of *hashar* are in connection with the sowing, hoeing and threshing of the maize. Communal labour is also needed for house-building and plastering. The periodic repair of water channels is also performed by *hashar*, as is shearing the grass in the rain-fed outfields lying between the irrigated fields and the lower edge of the oak forest. The villagers spend around twenty days in the autumn harvesting this grass. Stall-feeding has increased the importance of grass as a winter fodder and there are frequent disputes over its ownership, a matter to which I return in more detail in Chapter 8.

The seasonal movement of livestock to the higher mountain pastures requires the men to spend most of the summer season away from the *maji ser*. This poses a problem for the watering of the maize fields. To ensure that the maize receives sufficient water, some villages and hamlets appoint a communal water custodian (*wui sigalo*). When the maize has ripened in October/November, the men cut it with a sickle. After removing the maize cobs, the corn is separated from the cob by pounding it. When the maize corn has dried in the sun some of it is ground in the water-mill. The rest is stored for use later in the season. The men also store the dried maize stalks in circular fodder heaps for use as animal fodder during the winter and late spring.

**TRANSHUMANCE**

In its traditional form, the agro-pastoral system puts a certain amount of stress on the labour resources of a household. In order to ease this stress, households have traditionally entrusted their livestock to resident livestock herders (*Gujar*). For the same reason, the indentured labourers (*Sarkhali*) and house servants (*kandri*) were used as agricultural tenants. During the past decades, the external labour market has brought changes to this system: indentured groups have left the valley for paid work ‘down country’. Despite the shortage of labour, the pastoral cycle remains finely tuned with its cycle of movements through the season. This is dependent on a careful orchestration of cropping cycles, livestock movements and labour resources across a steep vertical gradient (Figure 4.1, p. 68). The latter is accomplished by dividing the household into task-oriented contingents, and, at other times, by pooling labour resources among families. The vertical gradient is divided into four main ecological zones that are homologous with the vernacular zones of seasonal habitation.
Seasonal migration begins in spring when the families leave their winter settlements (sin kari) and move up to their houses in the maji ser, the main maize-growing zone. Traditionally, the house tenants looked after the house of the owner during winter, removed the snow and undertook necessary repairs. In spring, they handed the house back to its owner and helped with maize cultivation in the maji ser. Because of the lack of tenants, families who own houses in the lower reaches of the maji ser prefer to stay there also in winter. In late spring, the families will have completed the sowing of maize in the maji ser in time to proceed to the temporary summer settlement (bazoodo bek).

The slow and laborious herding of domestic animals through the dense oak forest can be risky for men who are involved in conflicts. To minimise the risk of being ambushed, they move swiftly or at night and need to be unencumbered by livestock. The animals are therefore sent in advance with professional herdsmen or tenants. After a fortnight in the bazoodo bek the advance party spends a short time in the lower reaches of the mountain meadows before continuing to the main pasture zone (maáli), where they spend the next two months. Life in the summer pastures is pleasant and the cool night temperatures a welcome relief from the scorching heat further down in the main valley. In the maáli, the women are responsible for looking after the cattle and the production of clarified butter, curd and buttermilk. The men try their luck at hunting and collecting medicinal herbs, which they will sell later. They also make occasional trips down to the Kaghan valley to bring additional supplies of tea, sugar and other provisions.

The autumn migration in mid-September begins by descending to the spring settlement, now referred to as the autumn habitation (seryoo bek). After harvesting the crop there, the livestock graze on the crop residue. In the beginning of October, an advance party returns to the maji ser in time to begin harvesting the maize. After the harvest, the livestock are brought down from the seryoo bek to feed on the maize stalks. During this time the household again splits and an advance party is sent down to the winter settlement (sin kari) to plough the fields and sow the maize. In late November the maize in the sin kari is harvested. When this is completed, the livestock are brought down from the maji ser and the family is reunited for the winter. When the livestock can no longer find food among the crop residue and maize stalks in the fields, the villagers entrust their cows and bullocks to a cattle shepherd (gobaan). They may also leave the small ruminants with a goat and sheep shepherd (payaalu). The animals
are wintered in the lower-lying holm-oak forest. Increasingly, households spend the winter in the *majī ser*. Those who stall-feed their animals feed them a mixture of dried oak leaves and dried grass.

In Dáro a household has on average fourteen cows, eleven goats, one sheep and a donkey (HJP 1996). Two-thirds of all households own a buffalo but only a few of them a horse. There are no veterinary services and livestock suffers from a variety of diseases that are treated with home remedies. Especially in villages closer to roads, the migration of male labour promotes stable feeding, decreases reliance on transhumance and a drop in the size of pastoral herds. In Kuz Palas, the proximity to roads lessens the importance of pastoral herds, meaning that they keep fewer cows (9), goats (6) and sheep (0.5) but have more buffaloes (1.2), probably reflecting greater use of stall-feeding. Still, the pastoral realm provides the villagers with important sources of subsistence food and cash income. The villagers sell their summer produce of clarified butter to shopkeepers and wholesalers in the bazaar in Pattan and in the Kaghan valley. The price is about Rs 100 per kg. They also earn money from selling livestock, primarily goats. Some goats are sold to roving livestock merchants and some within the valley. The price ranges from Rs 1,500 to 2,000. A few men buy goats in Pattan for later resale. Also cows are sold, but not outside the valley. A cow may fetch from Rs 6,000 to 8,000. Meat is rarely eaten, except on festive or commemorative occasions or as part of mortuary rites in the form of ‘charity food’. Animal hides are sold but do not fetch much money. The villagers also earn some money from a nominal rent (*qalāang*) collected from itinerant cattle herders (*Gujar*) utilising the mountain meadows owned by the Palas villagers. The rent is divided equally among the legitimate shareholders.

The complex and tightly interwoven agro-pastoral cycle makes it possible to cultivate maize at two different altitudes (*sin kari, majī ser*) and a third crop of cucurbits in the higher lying spring settlement (*bazodoo bek*). However, the dual concern with agriculture and pastoral herd management in a marginal ecological setting is one reason why the maize yields are very low. The meagre maize crop is not sufficient to feed a family that, on average, consists of 13–16 members. The season’s maize crops only last 6–9 months. Those who can afford it, buy supplementary wheat flour from the bazaar. Those who cannot, have to rely on relatives and friends to lend them maize corn. Producing less than that needed for their sustenance makes them dependent on off-farm income and explains the relatively high level of work migration, approximately 25 per cent of the male workforce. This, in turn,
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contributes to a lack of labour which is the main reason why large parts of the total landholding remain uncultivated. It also explains why potentially arable land is not cultivated and why the households lack own labour as well as financial resources to hire labour needed to terrace the fields and prepare them for cultivation. In some locations (especially in Kuz Palas), a lack of water prevents land from being cultivated. Despite this, none of the above circumstances are sufficient to explain why the maize yields are so low. In order to find plausible reasons, it is necessary look more closely at land-use strategies and constraints on increasing agricultural productivity.

LAND-USE STRATEGIES

The most common strategies for increasing agricultural production in a mountain setting are intensification, expansion and regulation of the landholdings (Netting 1972). These strategies are inter-related and need to be considered in relation to each other. A peculiar feature of agriculture in Dáro is the absence of any significant agricultural expansion over the past century. Population density is low and potentially arable land is available, despite the great variations in altitude. In this situation, the most common form of agricultural expansion would be clearing new land for cultivation. But in Dáro there are no attempts to bring new land under cultivation. In order to explain this, it is necessary to consider the tenurial history of the valley.

In Dáro all the important natural resources – fields, forests, and pastures – are hedged about by elaborate rules of access and ownership. The origins of these rules lie in the system of periodic reallocation (wesh) that hindered preferential endowment of agricultural land. This limited the scope for agricultural intensification, although there was provision for periodic agricultural expansion by tilling agricultural land from communally owned wastelands (khil). When the wesh was brought to a halt about one hundred years ago, the redistributive cycle was broken. This meant the end of any provision for redistributing the fields developed from wastelands. Since then, agricultural expansion has ceased and prevented the conversion of communal wastelands to agricultural fields. Because of this situation, the villagers cannot expand their landholdings by clearing new land.

However, they can buy land as well as exchange their fields with those of others. This is mostly done to consolidate landholdings and reduce excessive field spacing. Land cannot be sold to outsiders, only to legitimate shareholders. Moreover, the principle known as ‘pre-emptive right’ (shufāai
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haq) requires the owner first to offer the land to his paternal relatives. If they decline to buy it, he can offer it for sale to others. The seller is responsible for indicating the boundaries of the field; for example he might point to a boulder lying at the edge of the field or a walnut tree. The potential buyer brings a few other men to act as witnesses. Together they walk around the field with the owner to ascertain its boundaries and evaluate the potential maize yield. If the buyer and seller can agree on a price, a deal is made but the entire amount is not paid at once. Part is paid in cash and the rest by annual instalments. Some of the cost can also be paid in kind. The scarcity of arable land has inflated values. Unable to buy additional land, the majority of the villagers are therefore left with the option to lease land from others, especially those who have left the valley due to conflicts or poverty. The land that for different reasons cannot be leased or sold is left fallow and labelled ‘sterile’ (shar). I will return to this in more detail shortly.

The leasing of land makes it possible to expand individual landholdings but the total amount of arable land in the valley stays about the same. For most of the villagers, their remaining option lies in increasing agricultural output through intensification; increasing their labour input, investing in inter-cropping and crop diversification and intensifying the use of artificial fertilisers and higher-yielding maize varieties. The villagers have to some degree made use of the latter two, but, as I will discuss shortly, they have not increased their labour input. The survey of maize cultivation in the Palas valley gives evidence of decreasing maize yields and agricultural de-intensification (HJP 1996). The main cultivar is still the indigenous maize varieties, but many villagers also use a variety of ‘improved’ maize hybrids. These have higher yields but their length of maturation makes them difficult to integrate with the traditional cropping pattern. The maize is inter-cropped with cucurbits such as cucumbers, gourds and pumpkins. Moreover, the villagers utilise marginal land for growing peas, tomatoes, potatoes, tobacco, lobia (red bean), radish and shanee, a spinach-like vegetable. These are traded within the valley; only lobia is marketed outside the valley or sold to travelling purchasers who come to the valley during the autumn.

The maize hybrids require costly artificial fertilisers to reach their crop potential, especially because the concentration of phosphate in the soil is low (HJP 1995: 14). As already mentioned, the villagers cannot afford to buy sufficient amounts of fertilisers and the repeated monocropping of maize has reduced soil fertility. Nor can they afford costly herbicides, and even the
more pest-resistant maize hybrids are attacked by leaf blight, stem borer and cut-worm. To ward off leaf blight diseases, a bough from a yew tree is fastened to a long stick and erected in the middle of the maize field. To get rid of the cut-worms, spiritual incantations are chanted while blowing on to a fistful of sand that is later sprinkled into the field (see Chapter 7). The maturing maize crop also attracts wild mammals living in the dense forest. As the maize nears maturation, black bears, porcupines and macaques begin nocturnal crop raids. A band of crop-raiding macaques can destroy more than 300 maize stalks in one evening. Treated as crop-pests, they are shot with handguns. The porcupines and the black bears are caught in traps set around the maize fields. The use of traps is also preferred if conflicts prevent men from patrolling the maize fields. As I discuss in Chapter 8, the meagre maize yields and the lack of money make the villagers dependent on a variety of non-wood forest products.

The agriculture in Dáro is still subsistence oriented and the villagers have not adopted agricultural innovations and cash-cropping cultivars that have been introduced elsewhere in the province. In Dir Kohistan potatoes have become an important cash-crop (Keiser 1986). In some of the Kohistani communities in Swat maize cultivation has been discontinued in favour of potatoes which have become a formidable cash crop (Allan 1987). The major difference between these communities and Dáro is the valley’s inaccessibility, which makes it difficult and costly to transport potatoes to the market. It has also hindered access to agricultural extension services that could have aided villagers in modernising their agriculture. Other reasons for not substituting maize with potatoes are that they require a considerably higher labour input, have a different watering schedule and cannot be watered by flood irrigation (Allan 1986: 91, Keiser 1991: 63). These requirements are difficult to fulfil in an agro-pastoral adaptation where frequent shifts of people and livestock remain an integral part of the yearly life cycle and households suffer from a shortage of labour.

I devote the remaining part of this chapter to the sociological factors that influence land-use and constrain labour input, namely the frequent conflicts between the villagers. The following is particularly relevant to understand the situation in Dáro, where the crop yields are the lowest and the level of inter-personal enmity highest.
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ZONATION AND SOCIALITY

The seasonal migrations take the villagers across symbolic thresholds of vernacular sociality and each of the main agro-ecological zones has its own spatio-temporal characteristics (Zarin and Schmidt 1984: 59–60). The sin kari’s location near the Indus makes it a ‘contact zone’ that used to be, and still is, oriented towards the outer world. This is also the locus for exchange of information and trade and was previously dominated by a barter economy. Now it is used to sell agricultural produce to traders and purchase basic food items from the local shopkeepers. This is also the place for picking up the latest news and the gossip that filters through the local grapevine.

By contrast, the maji ser – located upstream where the valley is broadest and most productive – is removed from the brunt of the hectic economic activity and represents a reversal of the male-dominated bazaars. In the maji ser the outer world fades away, and social life becomes inwardly focused on the collective. Here familial and lineage solidarity is traditionally most pronounced and expressive, the shortage of labour most keenly felt and the need for communal co-operation highest. The maji ser is also removed from the control of government authorities and law-enforcing agencies, including the police. In place of state authorities, local customs impose a rigid social and moral control and watchful eyes follow villagers wherever they go. This is the place where people have their most spacious and comfortable houses, separate houses for entertaining guests and wooden mosques for religious worship. The maji ser embodies the central virtues of gregariousness, piety and industriousness.

The mode of life in the mountain meadows (maáli) is the polar opposite of the maji ser and associated with individualism and freedom from hard physical labour, social control, male aggression and competition. The hamlets are more dispersed and the houses smaller and less spacious but, weather permitting, more activities take place outdoors. There is ample time for leisure, play and socialisation, which provide an emotional outlet for love, romance and courtship, expressed in oral poetry and singing. As I discuss in the next chapter, the gendered division of labour and the relative freedom of movement enable the occasional illicit contact to take place between the genders.

As I have mentioned, the maji ser was traditionally the locus of group solidarity, co-operation and commensality. It is now the scene of the most violent fights, brawls and homicides. Being the main agrarian zone, the
conflicts played out in the *maji ser* are often related to contested ownership of the agricultural fields. In this society, quarrels and brawls are not unusual and people consider it ‘normal for a pot to strike another pot’. This notwithstanding, the *maji ser* has become a severely polarised zone, with commensality being counterpointed by competitiveness, confrontation and male aggression, frequently leading to homicide. A prominent feature of the ongoing conflicts in the *maji ser* is the covert attacks on the productive resources and assets of adversaries. When parties find themselves on bad terms (*pechtob*) they frequently attempt to ruin each others’ harvest. The seasonal migration to the highest pasture zone means that the owner and his household spend most of the summer away from the maize fields. Although the owner will make frequent visits to the *maji ser* in order to look after the maize, for most of the time the maize fields are unprotected and vulnerable to attack. This allows for covert attacks on the maize crop, which is either flattened or set on fire. Other vulnerable crops, such as tomatoes, may be trampled. The livestock can also be the target of attacks, usually through livestock rustling or the killing and poisoning of free-roaming bullocks. In some cases, houses, animal sheds and stables are set on fire too. This serves to intimidate the adversary and harm his livelihood. The culprit rarely takes responsibility but those being attacked are conversant with potential suspects. The offended party will usually respond to the incursions by returning the offensive act. However, if they feel stronger or braver than their opponent, they often surpass the offence in an attempt to gain the upper hand in the conflict.

Before the advent of subsidised wheat flour in the bazaars, walnuts were an important emergency food item in the event of attacks on the maize crops. The large walnut trees were impregnable to attack and served as boundary markers in agricultural fields. The frequent attacks on productive assets have been used to explain why vulnerable fruit trees are largely absent in Kohistan (Staley 1969). The absence of an indigenous horticulture in Dáro is a response to its vulnerability to attack but also to the selling of apples for profit. The first man to plant fruit trees in the valley had his orchard razed and was forced to leave. This is testimony to the envy and mistrust that are directed against those who deviate from traditional cultivation practices for monetary gain. On a symbolic level, the attack can be interpreted as equating apples with greed and selfishness and therefore in opposition to village solidarity and commensality. Unwillingness to share is strongly criticised and a stingy person scorned as one who ‘skins
the lice and makes a bag of it’. For a society that is bent on social equality, anything extraordinary – wealth, clothes, good looks – can arouse envy. For this reason, men of all ages wear amulets as protective charms. The amulets contain pieces of Islamic scriptures and are believed to protect those wearing them from the ‘evil eye’ (nazar). The amulets are also fitted around the neck of the livestock, in particular lactating cows, to protect them from any form of harm or disease.

**FALLOW LAND AND ENMITY**

As I discussed in Chapter 3, the agricultural land used to be the joint property of the members of the Khuka Manka and Darma quom. Following the indigenous land settlement the agricultural land became individual property. The way the wesh was conducted caused extreme field scattering. This process was later intensified by partible inheritance. Scattered and fragmented fields have often been considered a sign of ‘backwardness’, but need neither be maladaptive nor irrational. In alpine environments, field scattering takes advantage of multiple ‘micro-environments’, enhances food security and reduces the risk of crop failure. However, field fragmentation increases the likelihood of property conflicts and boundary disputes. The time needed to travel to distant fields also serves to constrain agricultural output. Moreover, distant fields can be neither effectively cultivated nor defended against encroachment or crop-razing.

A peculiar feature of land-use in the Palas valley is that prime agricultural land in the midst of villages is lying fallow. The reason is the custom of imposing a ban on cultivation (shar, literally, ‘sterile’) in the fields owned by adversaries (Figure 4.2. overleaf). The ban strictly targets those considered parties to the conflict, and minimally the two main contestants. The parties involved are thereby preventing each other from growing maize crops. The practice of banning cultivation was first introduced to the Palas valley about thirty years ago and some say that it was first used in the neighbouring valley Kolai. Although it is still a contested practice, it is widely used as a means to weaken and ultimately evict an opponent. A ban on cultivation therefore threatens social belonging. In order to have the desired effect, a ban on cultivation is announced at the beginning of spring, a time when most conflicts are brought out in the open or take a turn for the worse.

This is a crucial time of the year, a threshold between the isolated idleness of winter and the expansive busyness of spring when the households prepare their fields for maize cultivation. This is a time when long suppressed grudges
surface, tempers flare and angry words fly in the air. To enforce a ban on cultivation, they will shoot at bullocks brought to the fields for ploughing. This is usually sufficient to prevent further attempts. The imposition of a ban on cultivation is dependent on the nature of the dispute and whether the cause of the conflict is considered legitimate by local customs (*dastoor*). If the two adversaries belong to the same patrilineage (*záat*) and the dispute is considered their private matter, the relatives will refuse to get involved and only the land of the two adversaries is exempted from cultivation. If they belong to different patrilineages, they will more often receive support from their fraternal interest group (*miráas*), whose members trace descent from a common grandfather. Brothers and first-cousins are considered equals and the kinship term for brother (*za*) is used interchangeably for cousins too. They are expected to help each other: ‘A brother dies for a brother’, goes a local proverb. Only in the cases where important principles are at stake or have been violated are people supported by their respective patrilineages, which also become party to the conflict and therefore also implicated in the ban on cultivation. In disputes, ego’s agnatic kinsmen (*dadkul*) are his principal allies and can fight on his behalf. Ego’s matrikin (*mulial*), that is, his mother’s male relatives (mothers’ brother, mother’s father etc.) are considered ‘supporters’: they cannot fight (or take revenge) on his behalf.

*Figure 4.2: Fields banned from cultivation (front); house with watchtower (rear)*
but are expected to offer shelter and provisions if need be. In the old times, when large feuds commonly erupted between lineages, the mulial took responsibility for feeding the dadkul and cooked large communal meals.

In enmities, the number of affected households depends on the numerical strength of individual lineages and whether they co-reside in the same village. In one village in Dáro about 50 per cent of the fields were lying fallow from bans on cultivation. Only 10 of the 29 households had been able to cultivate all their fields (HJP 1992). Conflicts prevent agricultural production for an indefinite period. There is no time limit to a ban on cultivation. It can only be lifted by the actual parties to the conflict and usually only after lengthy arbitration by mediators. The perpetrator can plead for a truce (madan), but the aggrieved party is under no obligation to honour it. As long as the fields are closed for cultivation they can neither be leased nor sold. The ban on cultivating fields only applies to men's work. The women of the households are allowed to cultivate fields using a hoe. The very low yields make this unattractive. Moreover, the women are already working hard to make up for the men's confinement. The ban on cultivation is of recent origin. Previously, there was no explicit ban on cultivation and the land suffered only because the parties to the conflict were in house confinement. On the other hand, there was no restriction on house tenants and labourers working in the fields, so warring parties could cultivate fields with the help of tenants while the animals could be entrusted to shepherds. Restrictions on cultivation are now commonplace, but their impact depends on a number of factors, such as the distance separating the main contestants.

ENFORCEMENT OF THE BAN ON CULTIVATION

In general, landowners leave a portion of their total land-holdings uncultivated. The percentage of uncultivated land increases with the size of the total land-holdings. Field scattering makes it impractical to cultivate distant fields, but it increases the villagers' options when they become entangled in conflicts and risk an interdict on cultivation. Field scattering can provide them with an escape from the full impact of an interdict. In many cases the main contestants belong to the same village or live in proximity to each other. In this case, enforcement is absolute and cultivation impossible. The enforcement becomes more difficult if contestants live far away from each other. There are certain ways to overcome this obstacle, for example by erecting a temporary shelter and watchtower (gari) in the vicinity of the
disputed fields or the domicile of the enemy. Conversely, the weaker party can seek to increase the physical distance through internal relocation. This can be done if he holds land titles to fields scattered throughout the Palas valley. The dispersed landholdings enable villagers to relocate and begin cultivation in another part of the valley where they own land. This makes it possible to escape restrictions on cultivation and the impoverishment and suffering which follow from them. The internal relocation does not entail a termination of the conflict, but reduces its intensity and may make house confinement unnecessary. Still, experience has taught the men ‘never to take an enemy lightly’. For safety, the parties to the conflict will observe a careful avoidance strategy that may involve changing their pastoral migration route as well as relocating their summer habitation. If this is impossible, they will only pass by the enemy’s village during the night or send their animals with someone else.

FROM BAN TO ATTACK

The restriction on cultivation is, in itself, an indication of an intractable conflict, and as such a prelude to further attacks. When the conflicts escalate, the hostilities become more frequent and more lethal. The parties now seek to inflict harm on their adversary through surprise attacks and ambushes. If someone is seriously injured or killed in the course of fighting, this mandates retaliation by the aggrieved party. His main concern is the right to take revenge (haq). To prevent the person guilty of the misdeed from escaping from the valley and resettling elsewhere, he registers the case with the police in the form of a First Inquiry Report (FIR). The FIR serves as a warrant for the fugitive’s arrest if he is encountered by the police. The fugitive may be able to circumvent the FIR by bribing the police, but it is still a deterrent against leaving the valley. The right to take revenge transforms the conflict from a dispute (bilosh) into a lethal conflict (kané) which threatens the honour of those implicated and involves revenge obligations.

As the corn that is threshed during the communal work-parties belongs to the owner (xawáano), the right of revenge belongs to the ‘owner’ of the grievance (kané xawáano) (Zarin and Schmidt n.d.). This holds true even if there is doubt as to who committed the murder. This is reflected in the local terminology for homicide. The offended party may have incited or persuaded someone else, a close relative or a crack shot, to do the killing or to conspire with others to do it. In some cases, the identity of the perpetrator
remains a secret. People also admit that sometimes a person is killed by accident or mistake. The man who is accused of the misdeed has the option to flee the valley and resettle elsewhere or escape into house confinement (ban bon). Because the former is considered cowardly and dishonourable, a man more often will choose to barricade himself inside his house. For added protection, he will often add a watchtower to the house. This serves as a deterrent against attacks and signals the intention to shoot at attackers. The aggrieved party can attack the house at any time, day or night, and there is no time limit to when such attacks are considered legitimate. As the conflict draws out, the abandoned fields become overgrown with grass, weeds and shrubs. During winter the forces of water and snow destroy the terraces which lose their sharpness. In the final stage of this retrogressive process, the overgrown fields are recolonised by oak and conifer trees.

SOCIAL HOSTILITY

The maize yields in the valley are far below the environmental limits. If compared to crop yields under similar ecological conditions elsewhere in the NWFP, the Palas valley maize yields are the lowest (Table 4.1, overleaf). The comparison shows that the maize yields in Dáro are lower than the yields in Chitral during the 1950s, one of the most inhospitable and least productive districts in the province. One explanation for the sub-maximal crop-yields in the Palas valley is the unfavourable social conditions, of course. The frequent conflicts lead to interdicts on cultivation and constrain productivity. Moreover, the scarcity of arable land adds to its contested nature and fierceness in resisting encroachment. In addition, many of the households are unable to cultivate all their fields due to conflicts. The involvement in conflicts requires the men to be extremely cautious. They are therefore prevented from devoting themselves to maize cultivation. The cropping pattern is easily disrupted and the short growing season leaves little room for delaying sowing or postponing harvesting. The schedule for sowing and harvesting is extremely fine-tuned and requires locally adapted maize cultivars with the suitable maturation length. The system is therefore sensitive to delays in the cropping cycle.

The use of statistical analysis sheds further light on the impact of enmity on cultivation. It suggests that the bigger landowners are more likely than smaller landowners to adopt confrontational behaviour and therefore more likely to become entangled in conflicts. Having more land (and more widely dispersed land) they are also more likely to get entangled in
property disputes. Becoming involved in enmities increases the likelihood of having land restricted from cultivation. This has a negative impact on their ability to cultivate the fields and they therefore have lower yields. However, despite being more involved in conflicts (and possibly, having more land banned from cultivation), the bigger landowners produce more maize. They can therefore better afford to involve themselves in conflicts without jeopardising their food security.

FIELDS OF FURY

In order to illustrate the implications of land disputes, I now turn to a typical case that took place in Khilbek, a village lying in the maji ser somewhere in Dáro. The origin of the dispute began when Muzmil (J4) claimed to have bought a piece of land from a man named Saidar (B2), an absentee

Table 4.1: Maize yields at selected sites in the NWFP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Yield (kg/ha)</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hazara District (Agror and Konsh valleys)</td>
<td>1940s</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>Dichter (1967: p. 80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazara District (Mansehra, Kaghan valley)</td>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>3,200</td>
<td>Dichter (1967: p. 89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chitral (Rumbur valley) **</td>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>Parkes (1983: p. 76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazara District (Allai valley)</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>2,600</td>
<td>Nayyar (1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowshera</td>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>2,400</td>
<td>Dichter (1967: p. 99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurram Agency</td>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>2,400</td>
<td>Dichter (1967: p. 142)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swat State</td>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>2,250</td>
<td>Dichter (1967: p. 60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swat State</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>2,030</td>
<td>Dichter (1967: p. 189)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swat State (Kalam) †</td>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>KIDP (1984: p. 85–6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Waziristan (Tochi valley)</td>
<td>1959</td>
<td>1,800</td>
<td>Dichter (1967: p. 199)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dera Ismail Khan</td>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>1,560</td>
<td>Dichter (1967: p. 166)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurram Agency *</td>
<td>1959</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>Dichter (1967: p. 195)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuz Palas</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>HJP (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chitral State</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>Dichter (1967: p. 188)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dáro (Bar Palas)</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>710</td>
<td>HJP (1996)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* One village in Swat had maize yields of 625 kg/ha and one in the Kurram Agency 750 kg/ha (Dichter 1967, p. 59, 141).

** This is the total grain yield. Maize alone accounts for 763 kg/ha.

† The maize yield is calculated from a seed ratio of 25 kg/acre.
landowner belonging to the Bizna lineage (Figure 4.3). In order to advertise his ownership to the fields, Muzmil constructed a house next to them and, later, added a guest house.

The news of Muzmil's purchase upset Mahabto (H4) who had inherited the same piece of land from his father (H3). About 60 years ago, Mahabto's grandfather (H9) had bought the land from Saidaar's uncle (B1). Mahabto's father (H3) tended the fields until he was killed in a dispute with men belonging to the Jerma lineage. The same dispute had some years earlier claimed the life of Mahabto's grandfather (H9). Orphaned and no longer safe in Khilbek, Mahabto fled with his uncle (H2) and relatives to another village lying further up the valley. The long distance separating the two villages made it impossible to cultivate the fields in Khilbek. As the sole heir to the land, Mahabto's ownership was not openly challenged. However, his attempt to offer the land for lease among his relatives in Khilbek failed.
For fear of antagonising the Jerma, none of the Hakisa were willing to take the land on lease. The fields had slowly reverted to fallow land by the time Muzmil began cultivating them.

In an effort to find a peaceful solution to the dispute, Mahabto and Muzmil agreed to seek arbitration in a Shariat. A meeting was called three times, but Saidar (B2), who was the key witness, failed to show up. At the fourth attempt, the Maulvis listened to all the evidence and decided the case in Mahabto’s favour. Muzmil, who was now backed by the men of his lineage, the Jerma, refused to accept the verdict. They claimed that the Maulvis adjudicating the case had been bribed.

Following this refusal, Mahabto decided to take back the field by force. With the help of six close relatives (H1, H2, H5, H6, H7, H8) belonging to his miráas, he went back to Khilbek and during the space of one night, quickly erected a makeshift watchtower that overlooked the contested fields. From the safety of the watchtower, Mahabto destroyed the maize crop in the contested fields. To intimidate Muzmil, he later set fire to his guest house while he was away on seasonal migration.

In a final effort to avoid a bloody confrontation, Mahabto and his allies offered to settle the matter in a new Shariat or in a jirga. The Jerma refused their offer and let it be known that they preferred to fight for it. Formally, the two parties were now on ‘bad terms’ (pechtob) and considered opponents (pechai). Mahabto and his allies spent the next four weeks in the watchtower. The women belonging to their households brought food for them. The time passed without shooting or exchange of gunfire.

The time for sowing maize was rapidly approaching and the Jerma prepared to plough their fields. Shouting from the tower, Mahabto warned the Jerma that they would shoot at any bullocks brought to the fields for ploughing. One Jerma household headed by Anar (J) did not want to take part in the dispute and secretly asked to be exempted from the cultivation ban, but to no avail. Outnumbering the Hakisa by four to one, the rest of the Jerma-lineage showed no intention of heeding the ban on cultivation. This made the Hakisa panic: they could not attack all the Jerma men. In a desperate attempt to convince the Jerma to heed by the ban, a woman of the Hakisa lineage was sent to them. She explained that they were honour bound to heed it. The ban could only be lifted after a settlement in a Shariat. The Jerma refused to listen to her, rebuked her and sent her back.

Mahabto was determined to stop the Jerma from ploughing their fields. As long as a lethal conflict had not been declared, it would be considered
cowardly to shoot from the safety of the watchtower. In order to show their daring and machismo (masti) they decided to sneak out at night. One evening, he and four other men slipped out of the tower, and, picking up the trail, crossed the river and reached the other side of the valley. During the morning hours, the Jerma men began to plough the fields. Mahabto and his allies were waiting for them. In the early morning mist the bullocks were visible only as tiny spots across the river. They fired a volley of shots across the valley to warn the Jerma. The sound reverberated in the hillside. When the noise died down, they noticed that one man had slumped to the ground. Before they could find out who had been hit, they could see the Jerma men picking up their guns and coming towards them. To avoid further bloodshed, they escaped down the valley and spent the night in the guest house belonging to the Sherka lineage. There they learned that the person who had been killed was Ayub (J1), the son of Anar. The next morning, the Sherka men escorted them back to the village. Below the village they were joined by another five of Mahabto’s relatives and reached Khilbek at night.

For the next four months and until the end of the summer season, Mahabto and his allies kept watch from the tower in order to prevent the Jerma from cultivating their fields. The relationship between Mahabto and the Jerma was now formally one of lethal conflict. Arbitrators belonging to another lineage attempted to bring peace between them. Recognising that Ayub could have been killed by a mistake, the Jerma offered to forego revenge if the Hakisa paid Rs 60,000 in compensation. Mahabto’s uncle (H2) accepted this on the condition that the Jerma gave up the disputed field first. The Jerma, however, would not give it up. Without a compromise in place, the conflict escalated. The Jerma made several attacks on the men in the watchtower. An attempt was made to storm it, but was repulsed by Mahabto and his allies. Nonetheless, they were now unable to withstand the onslaught any longer and shortly after left the village in the dead of night. In their absence the Jerma demolished the watchtower, thus making it impossible for Mahabto’s group to return.

The case is not closed. Nobody knows whose bullet hit Ayub. Because Mahabto is the chief protagonist in the case, he is considered Ayub’s killer. Mahabto is now under threat from Bakhto (J2), Ayub’s brother. Mahabto and Bakhto are considered the ‘owners’ of a lethal obligation (kané xawáano) and Bakhto has the right to avenge his brother. Mahabto can no longer pass the village during day, and is forced to sneak past during night time. Nor is he free to leave the valley. The Jerma have filed a warrant for his arrest with
the district police. Bakhto has left the valley after falling out with the men belonging to his lineage. The Jerma were dismayed that Anar’s household did not want to oppose the Hakisa. They have therefore refused to help Bakhto avenge Ayub’s murder. Among the Hakisa, there is speculation that Ayub was not hit by a stray bullet, but killed in secret by Muzmil or one of his sons (not shown) for Anar’s failing to support Muzmil’s lineage against the Hakisa. Following Mahabto’s departure from Khilbek, the Jerma have again begun cultivating their fields. The disputed fields are lying idle.

LOW-YIELD AGRICULTURE

Low-yield agriculture is a feature of small-scale, egalitarian social formations that lack status or rank distinctions. There is general agreement that an egalitarian ethos restrains material accumulation (Sahlins 1972: 82). Being free from outside coercive control and feudal exploitation, the Palas villagers have not been obliged to produce agricultural surplus for a fund of rent (Wolf 1966: 9). In the larger Kohistani valleys further north (Darel and Tangir), the influential and wealthy villagers used to set aside productive surplus for redistribution in competitive feasting for merit (Staley 1969: 234). A similar tradition for merit feasting was not common among the ecologically marginal valleys on the east bank of the Indus. Still, ceremonial feasting did probably play a role in the production of agricultural surplus in the Palas valley until the time of the last wesh a century ago, as it still does in the ecologically marginal Kalash valleys in Chitral (Parkes 1992). The persistence of lavish feeding during funeral rites and at important social events seen today is probably linked to the former tradition of merit feasting in the Palas valley. The demise of merit feasting may also be related to the increase in internecine vendettas when the wesh ended, something I return to in the next chapter. The low crop yields that are found today suggest that surplus production was intimately tied to the use of agricultural tenants and indentured labourers.

The construction of the Karakoram Highway through Indus Kohistan in the early 1970s led to a gradual departure of indentured labourers from the Palas valley. Increasing social stigma and new economic opportunities made them leave. This coincided with political and religious changes that led to a rise in conflicts among the Shin and increasing levels of homicide that further depreciated the maize yields. Since then, the isolation of the valley and the lack of money and local credit facilities have hindered the
introduction of more capital-intensive means of cultivation that could have compensated for the loss of labour resources.

In the Palas valley, low-intensity agriculture and frequent resort to homicide and violence reduce the agricultural yields. The available data supports the hypothesis that large landowners are more often involved in conflicts, which is why they have more land with restrictions on cultivation and are less able to cultivate the remaining land as efficiently. For this reason, their yields are lower than those of smaller farmers.

As the case study shows, Mahabto was willing to kill, and to be killed, for fields he could neither cultivate nor lease. The consequences of his decision were far-reaching and caused an innocent man to lose his life and the victim’s brother to leave the valley. Mahabto now lives under a threat of being killed and cannot move about freely. The conflict caused extensive economic damage and cultivation in the village was stopped due to a dispute that, initially, involved two families. The increasing number of land disputes and homicides has changed vernacular notions of sociality and made the maji ser a severely contested zone.

The ban on clearing new land precludes agricultural expansion. The existing fields can be sold or leased to fellow villagers, but the total pool of land is not increasing. At the same time, the valley’s inaccessibility is a hindrance to agricultural intensification. On top of this, the frequent conflicts depreciate maize yields and promote agricultural de-intensification. Together, these factors constrain agricultural production to the degree that the valley has become a food-deficit area and cannot accommodate population growth. What little growth there is, is siphoned off by migration. The threat of being killed, in combination with a lack of sustenance, forces families and, on occasion, whole lineages to leave the valley.

As I will examine in more detail in the next chapter, the threat of expulsion from the valley is one reason why the men fight for their landed property. To better understand why the villagers fight over their fields, we need to examine how fields are central to the constitution of identity and confer on villagers a sense of belonging. As I will try to show, they fight over land because it is intimately integrated with their identity as villagers (Palsooch, Dárooch) and community members (ulsi’ya). The fields become key tokens of value that transcend their commodity state as they become implicated in disputes that are, initially, unrelated to land ownership.
CHAPTER 5

Being, Longing and Belonging

The Palas valley is a particularly appropriate place for examining the ‘politics of belonging’. Belonging cannot be taken for granted. It must be achieved and protected through the use or implied use of force. The fundamental dilemma facing the villagers is that the struggle to belong can endanger that very belonging. Frequent fights over private (fields) and communal (forest) property as well as women, engender homicide and vengeance killings for which there is no peaceful solution. The sources of these conflicts are not unique to the Palas valley or Indus Kohistan. Among the neighbouring Pashtuns the conflicts, brawls and enmities are rooted in the proverbial zan, zar, zamīn – women, gold, land (Barth 1959: 73). Although the sources of conflict are not unlike those found among surrounding ethnic groups, the mechanisms of social exclusion are more severe. My argument is that belonging and social exclusion are most fruitfully analysed within a political formation or system that Mary Douglas has described as ‘egalitarian enclaves’ (1996: xix). Many of the attributes of Palas society are typical of ‘enclaved’ societies such as defection, militant egalitarianism and internal factions. In egalitarian enclaves, writes Douglas, ‘disciplinary problems loom large on the border between belonging and not belonging, and this is the point to look for the explanations of enclave culture’ (ibid.: xxi). In the previous chapter I focused on the sociological implications of conflicts over landed property. In this chapter, I foreground how conflicts over land become entangled in brawls over women, especially when clandestine, illicit love affairs are involved. My aim is to use this as an entry point for examining Palas notions of belonging.

The lack of outside authority and law enforcement means that all dispute resolution is local and characterised by the individualisation of physical force. In the absence of an outside coercive authority, physical prowess and a faculty for violence are necessary. Being armed is not always an option
but a necessity in cases of lethal conflicts involving revenge obligations (kané). Ambush, surprise attacks and assaults are common. This is why a villager can be observed carrying a rifle while working in the fields. For those involved in lethal conflicts being armed is not sufficient to ensure a minimum of safety. For protection they must keep indoors, confined in their own houses. On many houses tall watchtowers (gari) are silhouetted against the sky. Inside, men hold out against their enemies for months and years, passing the time behind the thick mud and log walls. Peeping out through narrow loopholes they watch their enemy’s every step. For the time being safe inside, they cannot come out. They are trapped in a fortress of solitude.

The nature of factional politics in Palas bears certain similarities with what Hobbes considered the ‘Natural Condition’ of mankind: ‘warre of every man against every man’ (Hobbes 1997b: 71). A society not ruled by a sovereign, Hobbes hypothesised, would run the risk of complete anarchy. Although the local social code is more complex and elaborate than that envisioned by Hobbes, he pointed to an enduring problem of how to maintain social order in the absence of outside coercive power. In the present case, I would argue that it is important to examine the nature of belonging in a situation with no central authority to protect social belonging and ‘citizenship’.

In Palas the frequent strife and conflicts have serious implications not only for the individuals involved but for the viability of the whole society. The villagers who cannot maintain an adequate defence are usually forced to leave. There is significant demographic decline – mainly caused by migration due to enmity. According to my estimate, about 129 families have left the Palas valley due to conflicts since the early 1980s. The large majority are from Dáro (110) and only a minority from Kuz Palas (19). During the same period, 13 families left due to poverty, all of them from Dáro. With 10–15 people to a family, the total number of persons being forced to leave the Palas valley is substantial. During the period 1988–2000, there were a total of 40 homicides in the Palas valley: 35 men and 5 women; an average of three homicides per year. Of these, 23 took place in Dáro, 12 in Kuz Palas and 5 people were killed outside the Palas valley. In a structured interview with forty 40 migrants from the Palas valley living in Rawalpindi, I found that 28 had left the valley due to conflicts, 3 because of poverty and the remainder for various unspecified reasons.
Violence and Belonging

These figures substantiate my assertion that lethal conflict represents a significant threat to belonging to the Palas valley in general and to Dáro especially. With only about 10,000 inhabitants, Dáro has by far the largest number of involuntary migrations and homicide. In addition, there is an equally substantial number of internal migrations from Dáro to Kuz Palas. Secondly, the figures indicate that in most cases the hostilities are temporarily brought to an end by the weaker party leaving the valley without bloodshed. The figures given above are indicative of important differences between Dáro and Kuz Palas. However, in what follows I consider belonging in relation to the Palas valley as a whole.

BEING

It is evident from the narratives of the Palas migrants that they strive to belong to the valley and to be able to return. Belonging is based on recognition as a member of the tribe. This, in turn, provides entitlements to the joint landed estate. Hence, in order to understand belonging, it is necessary to understand the vernacular social categories of being a member of the community. The essence of belonging in the Palas valley is through being a bona fide resident of the valley. Being regarded as an ‘original inhabitant’ of Palas is a prerogative for those who can trace descent to any of the Shin patrilineages (záat). The Shin monopolise land-titles, and ownership of land – of any kind – is predicated on being a legitimate shareholder (ulsi’ya). In order to gain recognition as a shareholder one needs to hold a land title to agricultural land anywhere in the valley. Whether this piece of land is big or small, cultivated or fallow does not matter – what counts is that one’s ownership to this piece of land is undisputed and affirmed by others. Being a bona fide villager, that is, a holder of a land-title to agricultural land, also makes one a shareholder with shares (baagô taagô, literally, ‘big and small shares’) in the joint landed estate. For the past hundred years, the villagers have shared ownership of pastures (maáli), oak forests (baando) and mixed conifer forests (zangal). The shareholders are entitled to proceeds from commercial timber logging as well as grazing tax (qaláang) collected from non-resident livestock herders (Gujar). The earnings are divided among all shareholders, including women and children. The proceeds from commercial timber logging are distributed among the resident villagers and the migrants who have left the valley. The migrants who fulfil the ulsi’ya criteria retain the rights bestowed upon residents. They are also entitled to take part and talk in the consensual assemblies (jirga).
Although the Shin are fiercely egalitarian, social stratification is a feature of the society. The Shin are political patrons of non-Shin groups who perform various services for payment in cash and kind. They are not recognised as tribal members, as reflected in the generic name for non-owners, be’záat. In recent years, whole strata of the menial population have been sloughed off. This in particular involves the Dom, originally an occupational caste group of messengers and musicians. When the tide of religious orthodoxy reached the Palas valley thirty years ago (see Chapter 2), the local Maulvis branded their singing un-Islamic and sinful, compelling most of them to leave. Also agricultural tenants are getting scarce. Their numbers decrease as they seek to escape poverty and social stigma. The same applies to the professional herdsmen who leave the valley to work elsewhere.

In a valley where blood feuds and vendettas are common, it is essential to know whether a stranger is friend or foe. This is reflected in greeting rituals and the importance placed on establishing a person’s identity. When villagers unknown to each other meet, the central focus of interaction is establishing lineage and, thereby, clan membership. Because of the seasonal movements between settlements at different altitudes, many villagers decline to name their ‘village’. Their identity is not delimited to the ‘village’ but incorporates the whole valley, most often referred to as the ‘homeland’ (watan).

Being in the valley is premised on being able and willing to defend landed property – if necessary – weapon in hand. The majority of the households own guns and rifles. More recently, automatic rifles such as the Kalashnikov AK-47 and AK-56 have become more common among the villagers and arms and ammunition are priority items in the household budget. However, being armed is not the ultimate reason for the prevalence of vengeance killings, although the spread of automatic rifles has increased the severity of the conflicts. As I discussed in Chapter 3, the valley has long traditions of feuding and vendetta. The scale and intensity of fighting is a major reason for the rural exodus from this and other Indus Kohistani valleys. This is how a Dáro migrant sees the strictures of belonging:

A man who tends to be pious and chooses to live a harmless life, cannot live in the native land at all. Only one who is carrying a gun in his hands all the time and is prepared to stand up to the people, can live his life there. It is better to live in one’s native land if you are able to handle the threats posed by the community there. If you cannot stand the challenges of life there, then living your life down here is better. If you have property, you have
your land, you do not need others, and you have your people to support you in difficult times, then you can survive in the native land. If not, then you cannot live in your native land (watan).

Being in the valley and of the valley entails living with the threat of exclusion. The only way to survive in the valley is by strictly adhering to local notions of honour (hayáa) and respectability (izzat). This involves being prepared to stand up for one’s rights, even when it means risking your life. The risk of being killed or ambushed can be minimised by the support of kinsmen and non-kin allies. Still, every adult male has to strike a delicate balance between deference as a means to minimise conflicts and aggressive defence of one’s interests to hinder incursions. On either side of this imaginary line lies the potential for downfall: economic marginalisation and being treated as a pushover or becoming implicated in vendettas that will drain resources and, possibly, force one to leave.

Fighting is not for everybody and traditionally is a prerogative of the ulsi’ya. At the same time, being involved in, or party to, conflicts confers prestige: it shows that you are concerned about your honour and willing to defend it. Moreover, it underlines the symbolic separation from the menial groups who lack lineage titles (be’záat). Considered as feeble and less resourceful, the menial groups have traditionally been treated unfairly, expected to act subordinately and not allowed to carry arms. Their lower social status has prevented them from protecting their honour. Instead, one of their duties was to assist Shin households embroiled in disputes. Traditionally, the Sarkhali, one of the menial groups, took care of the domestic and agricultural chores of their Shin patrons. Likewise, the local livestock herders (Gujar) took care of the domestic animals. In cases of lethal conflicts, the confinement of the warring parties had limited impact on agricultural production because agricultural chores continued to be carried out by tenants and servants. As I explained in the previous chapter, this no longer applies. The fields where cultivation is banned (shar, literally, ‘sterile’) cannot be cultivated by anybody and revert to fallow land.

The households with more land and more adult members (and therefore fire-power) will be emboldened to keep a high profile and more aggressively to assert their rights. This makes them more likely to become embroiled in serious conflicts, brawls and enmities. By the same token, poor households tend to keep a lower profile and show deference to more powerful and better-off households. On the other hand, among the ulsi’ya the ethos of equality is pervasive and nobody can assert his right or superiority over another
except by force. The formal decision-making takes place in consensual assemblies (jirga) of varying scales. There is no opportunity for individuals, political factions or other interest groups to force opinions or decisions on others at a jirga. However, the parties to property disputes may agree to seek voluntary arbitration in the local courts (Shariat), supervised by a Maulvi. In many cases, the losing party disputes the ruling as well as the qualifications of the Maulvi involved and fighting resumes. For this reason, the term ‘might is right’ is an appropriate metaphor for the ability of powerful groups and individuals to assert what they consider their rights by coercion and force. As explained in the previous chapter, this at first involves attacking productive assets by damaging crops, followed by covert attacks, which will make the parties seek house confinement (ban bon) for protection. To increase the pressure on the opponent the parties declare a ban on cultivation that sets in motion a war of attrition with economic loss and hardship. Invariably, confinement involves estrangement – being at once ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the community. As a rule, conflict leading to murder makes arbitration difficult if not impossible. Homicide must be revenged until the scores are settled on each side. Except in rare cases, monetary compensation for homicide (‘blood money’) is not socially accepted. Instead, institutionalised vengeance is entrenched in local traditions (dastoor) and the right of revenge (haq) is religiously sanctioned.

LONGING

The essential part of belonging is being of the valley and therefore a legitimate heir to the joint landed estate. However, being of the valley does not necessarily mean being a ‘resident’. Because of the serious repercussions of lethal conflicts and homicide, many villagers are forced to move and settle elsewhere. Involuntary migration does not mean giving up the claim to being of the valley or homeland. The migrants normally leave their fields in the custody of relatives or lease the land to tenants. If the land is disputed or closed for cultivation by a cultivation ban it will remain fallow or be forcibly annexed by the enemy. In most cases the migrants choose to resettle in areas that already have a diaspora Kohistani community and often move in with resident kinsmen. The choice will be informed by economic considerations and by the need for protection against attacks. The migrants manage to keep themselves informed about local matters, news and incidents through visitors and the local grapevine. Despite this, as they can no longer live in the valley their local identity is in jeopardy.
In many cases such migrants end up among the urban poor, surviving as self-employed artisans or day-labourers. The lowland cities and towns offer many amenities not found in Indus Kohistan, but the migrants express their longing for the valley and the particular lifestyle associated with it. Central cultural values of male bravado and daring can only be displayed within the realm of the valley. Outside Palas and Indus Kohistan, there is neither any arena nor any forum for displaying those manly qualities considered essential to ulsi’ya status. A Palas migrant comments on the dilemma like this:

Many times the thought has flashed through my mind as to why God had created me an ulsi’ya ... and not a Gujar or Sarkhali? If [the latter had been the case] people would not have taunted me. They would have ignored me had I been a Gujar or a Sarkhali. Now people judge me as an ulsi’ya ... while I cannot act like that. I am stuck. It is not easy to be an ulsi’ya.

The migrants foreground their strong emotional attachment to the valley. Closely linked both emotionally and practically to the term ‘belonging’ is its grammatical root or stem, ‘longing’. Belonging cannot be understood without this emotional undercurrent. This especially concerns those who have been forced to leave the valley and are unlikely to re-visit their homeland. A 60-year old migrant living in Rawalpindi describes his feelings in this way:

It is my earnest desire to be in my ‘fatherland’ (malo dade watan). If there were no conflicts – is it not the earnest desire of [everyone] to live in the fatherland? ... We are forced to stay here because of our conflicts. There is no alternative. It is good to be without conflicts. If one has no conflicts and enough prestige and strength, a person’s rightful place is the fatherland. It is the fatherland that is a fitting place to consider honour (hayáa) and shame (sharam). .... What worth does our life [here] have now?

BEING IN LOVE

As described in the previous chapter, agro-pastoralism as practised in the Palas valley is labour-intensive and does not allow for any elaborate seclusion of women. This is especially the case in the highest pastures (maáli) used during the summer season. The men’s work-migration has reduced the available labour and added to the women’s workload. In addition, women’s work entails long treks up the mountain sides and into the dense forest in search of firewood and potherbs. The women go together in groups giving them an opportunity to be on their own, as well as providing a symbolic
being, longing and belonging

protection of personal reputation. At the same time, this freedom of
movement enables them to escape the close gaze of family, relatives and
other villagers. This affords them the freedom to indulge in romantic love
affairs, clandestine meetings or chance encounters with a man or boy. Since
time immemorial, the maáli has been the main locus of Palas cultural life,
and is associated with poetry, story-telling, singing and romance (Zarin
and Schmidt 1984: 58).

In the Palas valley, marriages are frequently between close kin, with a
preference for paternal-cousin marriage. Apart from reducing or avoid-
ing the considerable costs of the bride price (ranging from Rs 80,000
to Rs 200,000) it has the added advantage of keeping landed property
undivided within the extended family. Alternatively, when a suitable match
cannot be found within the family, girls are given in exchange marriages
(badali), thereby forming new bonds of solidarity. Love affairs are not
simply a reaction against prescriptive marriage. Rather, a more sensitive
interpretation of passionate love will reveal romance, longing and loving
as an enduring feature of gender relations in Palas society and, more
This is also supported by studies from the Pashto-speaking region where
romance is considered the ‘mirror image of purdah’ (Lindholm 1982: 222)
and romantic love ‘an alternative model of behaviour for men and women’
stressing complementarity between the genders (Tapper 1991a: 223). For
this reason, vernacular poetry is characterised by a lack of references to sex
since that would destroy the ideal of ‘complete mutuality’ (Lindholm op. cit.: 226). Therefore, in the poetic corpus, songs and narratives, relationships are
never consummated. This notwithstanding, oral poetry, songs and poetic
couplets in Palas approve of romantic love, romance and longing for the
beloved.

The Palas valley has a rich poetic tradition and poets are admired for
their oratory and narrational skills. Having been involved in love affairs is
considered a precondition for becoming a poet (Zarin and Schmidt 1984:
58). In Palas the duality of female chastity and extreme deference vis-
avis unrelated men – shown by squatting, covering their head, turning
away, lowering their voice – is counterpointed by vernacular poetry and
genre singing where romance, courtship, longing and separation are key
ingredients. Love poetry is, by its very nature, about illicit love reminiscent
of the Urdu poetic genre ghazal (Mukhia 1999). In vernacular poetry the
man is often likened to a bumble-bee (bhoraa), the lover of flowers. By
the same token, the woman is referred to as *nargas*, a wild jonquil flower, longing for her lover:

*mi wajuuder booga den, wo molo,*
*bazoodo gahe shiri,*
*yaaze bhoraa,*
*gul mo nargase shiri.*

Oh boy, [emotional] waves are bubbling up in my body like the stream in the spring season.

The bumble-bee is flying around longing for me
I am like a jonquil flower.

Women express themselves through poetry, like in this lament sung by a girl from Palas following the death of her lover who was killed in a feud:

Oh sun-beam of the autumn season and my wild nightingale, you steal many flowers [for me]. Oh sun-beam of the autumn season, you steal them from the gardens [for me].

Oh sunbeam of the autumn season, you steal many flowers for me. Oh my wild nightingale, I will not forget you. I am standing and watching you.

Extramarital love affairs are a custom that has persisted despite being opposed in Islam, which is suggestive of its pre-Islamic roots. Extramarital love affairs are not subject to arbitration or mediation and both the male perpetrator (*choor*, literally, ‘thief’) and the indulging woman are killed. However, an accusation of ‘improper relations’ (*choor thoón*) with a woman can in certain cases be subject to mediation by *jirga* assemblies. It is likely that love affairs and elopement were once treated more leniently and mediated by compensation payments. Extramarital love affairs are not subject to arbitration or mediation and both the male perpetrator (*choor*, literally, ‘thief’) and the indulging woman are killed. However, an accusation of ‘improper relations’ (*choor thoón*) with a woman can in certain cases be subject to mediation by *jirga* assemblies. It is likely that love affairs and elopement were once treated more leniently and mediated by compensation payments. Until recently, sexual advances, hints or remarks made by a boy that the girl had not encouraged were punished by breaking the leg of the offender with the back of an axe. In such cases the offender was termed *kandré choor* (‘trespasser of privacy’), one who has stolen respect. This practice has been overtaken by far more stringent reactions, as mentioned in Chapter 2. Currently, even minor infractions such as using a pocket mirror to deflect the sun’s rays in the direction of a girl are severely punished: the accused is liable to have his nose cut off, sometimes along with one or both ears. People denounce this practice as unjust and alien to local traditions (*dastoor*), but it is still becoming more common. The weaker the offender and his lineage – and therefore the less likely they are to seek revenge – the greater the likelihood of such reactions being enforced.
Being, Longing and Belonging

In the Palas valley, extramarital liaisons are condemned and harshly punished. Moreover, the spread of the Tablighi Jaamaat has contributed to sterner religious orthodoxy, so the persistence of extramarital love affairs is therefore quite remarkable, given that if they become public knowledge, this is a form of misconduct punishable by death for both offenders. Despite the harsh punishment meted out for illicit love affairs, infatuated young girls throw themselves – seemingly without hesitation – into romantic liaisons and secret trysts with men. Initial contact between a man and a woman is usually established with the help of a girl acting as go-between (dalaal). If a girl is willing to have an affair with a man, she sends him a necklace or bracelet as a memento. This attests that she is willing to engage in a love affair. The messenger takes it upon herself to protect the two and keeps watch during their initial encounters. For added protection, the boy will often bring along a close friend who guards the couple. Being a go-between involves considerable risk and, in some cases, the go-between has been killed rather than the woman who was party to the love affair itself. After the couple has established contact, the messenger stands in the way of the love-struck couple, as suggested by this stanza from a boisterous song performed by two men:

Come baby, let’s not depend on the ignorant messenger (dalaal) any more and directly engage in a love conversation.

Although love affairs are common, elopement (matiiz) without prior engagement is rare and considered a sin punishable by death for both parties. Elopement as a public display of illicit, corporal love is qualitatively different from love affairs that only thrive in secret. The majority of the love affairs are temporary liaisons that at one point will be broken off. This is reflected in this stanza where a girl pleads with the messenger to help her reunite with her lover:

Oh unfortunate man, be patient with what you get of your bad luck.
My unjust beloved would not care even for my tears of separation.
O’ messenger (dalaal), please bring reconciliation between us.
He is haughty by heart and I am not able to find him.

Because of their sensational character, love affairs are difficult to keep secret, as reflected in the local proverbs ‘secret love affairs and fear make one sleepless’ and ‘who can get away with secret love affairs?’. Hints, rumours and careless remarks quickly give rise to village gossip, sparking accusations of indecency and infidelity. Such rumours may also be spread deliberately to harm an opponent, for example in revenge for a perceived
injustice. The women are extremely vulnerable to such rumours because, once they become public knowledge, their veracity is no longer an issue. Despite the harsh punishment meted out for illicit love affairs, the women decline offers to help them escape for fear of dishonouring their family. Unlike men, they cannot leave the valley. Their lives are circumscribed by Islamic and cultural proscriptions which make them dependent on their fathers or husbands. Single or unaccompanied women have nowhere to seek refuge or shelter. For them the valley is – literally – the end of the world. Unaccustomed to the outside world, the women seldom travel beyond the confines of the valley. Unable to escape, they are compelled to await their fate while attempting to hide any visible sign of fear.

Depending on the circumstances, strong households can delay, but rarely avoid, killing a girl accused of being, or having been, involved in a love affair. When the family, either voluntarily or bowing to public opinion, kills the girl, this increases the pressure on the boy’s kin to reciprocate. In many cases, the man accused of engaging in or being party to a love affair is able to escape from the scene and seek refuge elsewhere, usually to a town somewhere in the NWFP. By absconding, men have in many instances been able to avoid prosecution, although they live in fear of ambushes and attacks. Being forced out of the native land to a life in estrangement and isolation is considered shameful and a punishment because:

\[\text{watnej giao to bilshej giao}\]
One who leaves the native land, can no longer dispute
[i.e., fight for his honour]

The men locate the risks they take with their love affairs within the realm of daring (\textit{masti}) and vanity (\textit{bariaar}). From this, it can be inferred that young men are expected to engage in secret amorous relations and that it is considered proof of virility and courage. As I will go on to show, being party to or engaging in love affairs represents an essential and highly emotional part of being and belonging to the valley and community. This is also a leitmotif in the poetic corpus. A local poet has put it this way:

\[\text{Didnej bili to támá chhin,}\]
\[\text{wo móù rui aae tol wátan bu}\]
If possible, give up hope of seeing me,
Without you this land will become like a ghost to me
In order to illustrate the social implications of love affairs on belonging, I recount here parts of a more extensive and tragic case involving a young man and a girl. The whole thing started in a small village located in the maji ser (Figure 5.1) when a rumour spread that Wazir (7) was having a secret love affair with Gulbadan (3), the young wife of Zewar (4).

By the time this rumour became public knowledge, Gulbadan had already been kept indoors for a month. During this time, her husband and father-in-law (13) had pondered their options. Their first priority was to prevent further damage to their own reputation and that of their patrilineage, the Yūn. Keeping Gulbadan indoors also prevented Wazir from eloping with the girl. Secondly, by keeping quiet they hoped to kill Wazir before he realised that they had found the couple out. Seemingly unaware of the threat to his life, Wazir attended to his duties as usual. However, he was now in grave danger.

The first opportunity to kill Wazir presented itself shortly after. Together with his cousin (10), Wazir was busy ploughing the fields in preparation for the sowing of maize when Gulbadan’s brother (2) and cousin (not shown) approached them. Armed with guns, they pretended to challenge Wazir
and his cousin to a target-shooting match. Wazir greeted them but soon the friendly tone evaporated and fighting broke out. Wazir was able to wrest a gun from the attackers, and buried it in the mud as he and his cousin ran for cover. The attackers fired a volley of shots at them but Wazir and his cousin escaped without injuries. As the attackers ran uphill, Wazir’s friends and relatives joined in and soon the hillside reverberated with rifle shots. Surprisingly, no one was hurt. The attackers slipped into a house and disappeared from view. Shortly after, a go-between was sent to the Yûn to find out why they had attacked Wazir. He came back with the news that the Yûn-lineage was charging Wazir with involvement in a secret love affair with Gulbadan. Wazir was therefore their choor (‘thief of honour’) and could legitimately be killed. The disclosure spread like wildfire throughout the community. Traditionally the Yûn and Sûri lineages had enjoyed close relations and commonly exchanged girls in marriage. Now they had suddenly become formal ‘opponents’ (pechaj).

The shooting episode offended members of Wazir’s lineage, the Sûri, who immediately assembled for an impromptu jirga. The jirga decided that the Yûn had not justified their attack on Wazir or proved that he was a choor. However, the jirga ruled that if the Yûn killed Gulbadan, they would accept that Wazir had become a choor. In order to reinforce the point, the Sûri produced Wazir from his hiding place. In an attempt to save his life, the Sûri sent a group of mediators (mizgere) to the Yûn, requesting that they modify their accusation and reduce the charge from choor (‘thief of honour’) to kандрé choor (‘trespasser of privacy’), the punishment for which would be to break his leg with the back of an axe. The girl’s husband (4) and brother (2) refused to modify their allegations. When the mediators informed the Sûri of the rebuff, they did not hand over Wazir to the Yûn but shifted him back to his hiding place.

By delaying the announcement of the choor’s identity, the girl’s husband and father-in-law had hoped to kill Wazir unawares. The Yûn were now under pressure to prove misconduct and secretly prepared to kill Gulbadan. She had now been in confinement for more than a month and was warned every day that ‘this day will be your last’. Soon after, she was moved to an empty house lying at some distance uphill and out of earshot. There she was told that the time had come to kill her and was asked to lie down. She asked them to wait until she had offered her last prayers, two cycles (rakat) of nafal, to show her devotion to God. When she finished, she repeated her innocence and scolded them for not believing her. Unaffected by this
denunciation her husband shot her twice. After she dropped dead on the floor, not a single drop of blood trickled from her wounds (this is construed as proof of innocence). She was buried immediately.

Among the Sūri, the majority argued that, with Gulbadan dead and buried, it was no longer possible to deny the charge against Wazir as being a choor. During the rest of the summer, Wazir kept out of sight and was not allowed to move about freely. During early autumn he made a brief appearance at the wedding of one his cousins. Soon afterwards, he was secretly escorted down to the main road by night and sent off to a village in the Punjab. Believing that Wazir was still hiding somewhere in the village, the Yūn continued to search for him. Shortly after, Zaboor (14), Wazir’s father, found that in his absence someone had removed the doorstep of his house. His relatives tried to calm him down and offered a variety of explanations: a cow could have done it, the house was weak and old, but Zaboor insisted that someone from the Yūn had removed the doorstep.

Removing doorsteps is a highly loaded symbolic act and a thinly veiled threat, but Zaboor kept quiet about it until early next spring. Then Zaboor, supported by two of his cousins (16, 18), declared two of Barkat’s (11) sons (not shown) and Gulbadan’s husband guilty of the misdeed, terming them kandré choor. The Yūn denied the charge. An influential villager mediated but failed to convince Zaboor to drop the charge. The Yūn responded by calling Zaboor and two of his sons (not shown) kandré choor. Two of Zaboor’s cousins (16, 18) sided with Zaboor and were joined by their sons (9, 10). The rest of Zaboor’s cousins (not shown) declined to get involved in the dispute. This was not due to cowardice or unmanliness (bemuradi) but because there was no longer any justification for rejecting the allegation that Wazir was a choor. They resented Zaboor’s proclaiming the three men kandré choor because it would escalate the conflict and ultimately weaken the lineage. Other members of the Sūri lineage also objected to this strategy, commenting that declaring three men kandré choor was impossible and contrary to local customs.

Heightened tension soon translated into new exchanges of gunfire in which Barkat (11) and Zaboor (14) narrowly escaped injuries. Following this incident, Zaboor declared that from now on cultivating the fields of the Yūn would be banned. The Yūn reciprocated by declaring a ban on cultivation in the fields of Zaboor and his two allies (16, 18). They also banned cultivation in the fields of a third cousin (19) who had stayed outside of the dispute.
Hopelessly outnumbered by the Yūn-lineage, Zaboor was forced to remain confined in his house.

In a feeble attempt to exclude all but Gulbadan’s father-in-law (13) from the dispute, Zaboor insisted that only he could pronounce Wazir a *choor* and have a right to kill him. The Yūn rejected this claim, arguing that anyone of them could kill him. A section of the Sūri not involved in the dispute supported this view, but, in order to help Zaboor, asked a local Maulvi to resolve the dispute by Islamic jurisprudence (*Shariat*). The Maulvi declined, because Islam does not absolve adultery. All the options for a peaceful compromise had now been exhausted.

As is to be expected, a contested and ambiguous case such as this invites alternative interpretations and opinions. Gulbadan’s brother (2) now claims that she was wrongly accused of having an affair with Wazir. If this is confirmed and Wazir cleared of the charge of *choor*, he has vowed to kill her murderer. Friends of Wazir say that he swears that he never met Gulbadan, but admits to having an affair with her sister-in-law (6). Before she was killed, Gulbadan is said to have denied ever meeting Wazir, but having admitted to an affair with one of her cousins (1). Wazir’s supporters now believe he was sacrificed in order for Gulbadan’s uncle (11) to save his son (1). After Gulbadan’s burial, a local Maulvi inquired of her husband whether he had seen her with Wazir or witnessed her adultery. The husband confided that he had not seen them together, and killed his wife at the instigation of his father (13) and her brother (4).

Zaboor’s brother (15) would normally be his closest and staunchest ally but he has not defended Zaboor because his daughter is married to one of Barkat’s sons (1). With conflicting loyalties, he is therefore placed between the warring parties. He has scorned his nephew Wazir for being involved with Gulbadan, and, at the same time, unsuccessfully lobbied with both parties to withdraw the charges of *kandré choor* levelled against each other.

The following spring, a man from another village managed to broker a temporary ceasefire (*madan*) between the Yūn and the Sūri. Taking advantage of the ceasefire, Zaboor managed to escape, but left behind a son (*not shown*) to care of his property. After resettling in a lowland town, his son Wazir was reunited with him. Following Zaboor’s departure, the arbitrators made the Yūn and the Sūri lift the mutual ban on cultivation.
Involvement in lethal conflicts legitimises one’s belonging to the valley and the homeland but the main protagonists often jeopardise not only their own lives, but also those of other male family members, relatives, and can have a weakening effect on the patrilineage. In most cases, the weaker party will be forced to leave due to increasing poverty and numerical inferiority. The party forced to leave first is the one which, having exhausted his assets, finds himself isolated and without sufficient kinsmen to ensure adequate protection. In cases where the dispute is over landed property, the warring parties will strive to displace their adversaries. This is testimony not only to the current economic importance of the land, but to its symbolic value as an inheritable good. Without ancestral land, *ulsi’ya* status is jeopardised.

This can be observed among the migrants living in the neighbouring Alai valley. If overwhelming forces threaten a party to a dispute, concealment and house confinement cannot provide adequate safety. Unable to prepare an orderly departure and move to a city or town, the only remaining option is to flee to the Alai valley. An autocratic ruler known as the Khan of Alai governs the valley. The Palas migrants who seek refuge in Alai must plead loyalty to the Khan. This offers them a minimum of safety but – due to the valley’s proximity to Palas – not immunity against attacks. The Khan provides them with some land for cultivation. The migrants can neither leave Alai without the Khan’s permission, nor seek revenge without his approval. They are the bonded serfs of the feudal lord. One of the Palas migrants in Alai lamented:

> Bondage is the worst thing in the world. Your own place – even if it is a tiny house – is a source of great honour ... You are worthy of respect when you’re living in your own house, even if it is made of two logs. You will be looked down upon if you live in a bungalow that does not belong to you. We all yearn to live in Palas. We are helpless. We have enemies – we all do.

There is a long history of antagonism between Alai and Palas since the time of territorial expansion in the mid-nineteenth century (Leitner 1893: Appendix, p. 4). The root cause of this animosity is the contested ownership to the meadows of Chör, located along the boundary between the two valleys. The Khan controls the southern part of the meadow, the Palas community only a minor northern part. The Chör river is a major tributary of the Dário watershed. In recent years, the conflicts over Chör have intensified, pitting Palas villagers against the Khan’s militia. The Khan’s tenants are
required to serve in the militia which is organised to such an extent that it has commanding officers (kardaar), group commanders (jamdaar) and foot soldiers (naukar). In order not to cross the Khan, the Palas foot soldiers fight their own countrymen in the skirmishes over the Chōr meadow. The Chōr issue unités all the Palas villagers (including the menial groups) in the effort to protect the territorial integrity of their homeland (watan).

The Palas community considers it disloyal and an enhancement of enemy power to seek refuge with the Khan. The Khan’s willingness to lend them refuge can likewise be viewed as a humiliating tactic. The Palas villagers are sensitive to this humiliation and therefore disown those seeking refuge in Alai. They seek to suspend defectors’ privileges as ulsi’ya and deny them their share of the proceeds from the joint communal earnings such as the rent from grazing and local commercial timber logging. This behaviour is rooted in an attempt to negate offenders’ ulsi’ya status. In other words, their belonging is no longer acknowledged and they have in effect become outsiders and strangers.

BELONGING AND EXCLUSION

In Leviathan, Hobbes (1997b: 70) formulated what he saw as the principal causes of quarrel: competition, fear (‘diffidence’), and honour (‘Glory’). We see these long-standing traits behind the majority of brawls, clashes and conflicts in the Palas valley. I have argued that aggressive posturing in defence of honour leads to more disputes, more brawls and new enmities. Belonging, therefore, contains the seeds of ostracism. As I have shown, there is a contradiction between the values associated with belonging to the homeland and the centrifugal forces of the ‘enclave’ (Douglas 1996) that compel many men to leave the valley under duress. Belonging to and longing for the homeland become inseparable and it is impossible to understand one without the other. Defection through involuntary migration dramatises the opposition between ‘being’ and ‘belonging’. The migrants, unable to return to the valley, strive to maintain their belonging in some form. Their struggle to affirm belonging is not primarily for economic reasons but for the reinstatement of their ulsi’ya status. In the villagers’ perspective voluntary migration does not mean loss of honour but involuntary migration does. In the final stage of the process of ostracism, the remaining party may appropriate the land of the migrant. The stronger party has, thenceforth, not only evicted the enemy, but erased his source of, and claim to, belonging. Belonging has both a social component (patrilineal descent) and a material
component (fields). As already stated, these fields are not ordinary, but of a type that hold special meaning for the community. This explains the political nature of belonging in Palas, and especially the crucial nature of ancestral land.

In an ‘egalitarian enclave’ belonging is not affirmed once and for all but must be reiterated and re-enacted, protected and guarded. The ‘politics of belonging’ is an apt metaphor for this struggle by the villagers to remain in the valley and of the valley. Social life is characterised by a ‘militant egalitarianism’ which engenders competition. Belonging therefore carries a high price, namely the high incidence of violent clashes and homicide. The main sources of conflict are those related to production (fields) and reproduction (women). While social exclusion and murder is common in both of them, women are the main victims when it comes to transgression against local moral dictates. Women tread a fine line between the cultural ideals of female chastity and deference to unrelated men and engaging in secret love affairs. We could hypothesise that, for women, ‘taking a lover’ is a reverse cultural ideal that finds its imaginary expression in oral poetry. In real life extramarital liaisons are impermissible. The slightest hint of infidelity causes a woman to be condemned by the community and disowned by her family. Rejection and expulsion of an offending woman are inadequate to restore the family’s honour. Instead, she is killed, thereby eliminating her belonging. Yet, as Tapper (1991b: 191) has observed:

Though it is impossible to know how women perceive personal risks they take, it is without doubt the case that on occasion it is the women rather than men who either initiate or willingly agree to an illicit relation.

More broadly, conflicts in the Palas valley lack ‘finality’, a ‘conclusion’ or ‘ending’. This is a characteristic of vendettas that suspend the contestants in a prolonged state of liminality (Turner 1967). Why is this seemingly unavoidable? First, only a limited repertoire of actions and responses is available to contestants and some of them – such as homicide – are irreversible. This forces contestants into a reciprocal escalation of the conflict, reminiscent of Bateson’s (1972: 109) ‘symmetrical schismogenesis’. We can see this in the case of Zaboor, who is fighting a lost cause against an overwhelming aggressor. His intransigence reflects the normative cultural ideals of manhood but nevertheless ensures his expulsion and jeopardises his belonging to the community. Disciplinary problems are, as Douglas (1996: xxi) has pointed out, a constant problem of enclaved societies and the
main reason why they lose their members. At the same time, it is essential to recognise that although Palas society is subject to powerful centrifugal tendencies, romantic love and longing can be considered an ‘emotional glue’ that binds people together and counters the disintegrative effects of the enclave (Lindholm 1998: 257).

In the Palas valley, a central element of enclave culture is the ritualistic nature of male combat. As I will explore in more detail in the next chapter, it is possible to view enmities as conflict rituals in which the contestants engage in fights not only over material gains, but also, more fundamentally, over the nature of belonging. Among the male Shin, the lack of internal stratification and rank means that fighting may be considered an occasion for the symbolic display of individual prestige and bravery. We can, therefore, speculate that modern fighting is a subversion of former sacrificial prestige feasts that served to establish a symbolic hierarchy in an egalitarian regime (see Chapter 4). The fact that fighting traditionally excluded the menial groups (be’zāat) and was reserved for those of high rank (Shin), supports such an interpretation, something I return to in Chapter 10.

In the next chapter I shall present, in narrative form, the events surrounding a land dispute that implicated two men in a lethal conflict. The events highlight the cultural construction of blood revenge and the suffering and hardship of house confinement that only the hardiest of men are able to endure for long periods. This will enable me to investigate yet another aspect of belonging, namely the resistance put up by people against threats of expulsion from the community. Those who persevere and fight for their cause are accorded respect and a reputation for manhood and bravery.
My main aim in this chapter is to get as close as possible to the events that led Baram, a proud, passionate and, at times, belligerent man in his sixties, to kill his cousin. On a drab and cloudy spring morning, Baram, in a fit of anger, fired his gun at his younger cousin Hilal. Fatally wounded, Hilal fell to the ground and died shortly after. The underlying conflict that led to this tragic incident was an inheritance dispute over a piece of land covered with oak trees, locally categorised as pare, located between the houses of Baram and Hilal. The dispute progressed through a series of ‘conflict events’ that, in the final instance, made Baram kill Hilal. A detailed examination of these events sheds light on the ritualised aspects of lethal conflicts (kané) and local notions of honour and revenge. Moreover, it illustrates the prevalence of land disputes and competing claims to ownership of landed property.

PREAMBLE
The village Jhumra is reached after a day’s climb up a steep footpath. Located in the maji ser, approximately 2,000 metres above sea level, the villagers increasingly use the village for year-round habitation without seasonally migrating. Jhumra looks like a tranquil mountain oasis, but, in reality, the village plays host to a number of persistent disputes and vendettas, witnessed by tall watchtowers visible on top of many houses. Due to these conflicts, many men never step outside their houses without their rifles, automatic guns and heavy leather bandoleers loaded with cartridges. For those involved in lethal conflicts, being armed no longer provides enough safety. For protection they must keep themselves confined in their houses. In rare cases, they must stay in house confinement indefinitely.

Since the day of Hilal’s (8) killing, Baram (4) has been hiding from Hilal’s brother Khushal (7) who seeks to avenge his brother’s death (Figure 6.1. overleaf). Confined to his house (ban bon), Baram cannot move about
freely. Visits help break the feeling of isolation, but confinement is both mentally agonising and physically straining. Together with his two sons, Baram spends a large part of the day praying, reading and reciting from the Quran. He also plays affectionately with his grandchildren. Some of Baram’s opponents say that he should neither pray nor study the Quran because for a murderer there is no salvation. Baram smiles at such remarks. He believes that his thirty-year experience of hunting and the long hours he has spent waiting for game have prepared him for the mental strain of being in confinement.

As is common among the men of his age, Baram keeps his head shaved and his beard a fist’s length. Seated in his shalwar kamiz and woollen cap with tightly rolled up hem, Baram is a friendly and conscientious host. It makes it easy to forget that he is also a formidable foe. An experienced hunter, Baram’s agility does not betray his age. Baram has earned a reputation for being quarrelsome. His toughness has entangled him in many disputes. The Kohistanis do not recognise formal leadership, but Baram is a prominent member of one of the larger Shin patrilineages in the village. His forceful protection of his interests has earned him many enemies and ill-wishers. Since he killed Hilal, even his elderly mother curses him.

Situated in the upper part of the village, Baram’s home is a rectangular, one-storey house. The thick wooden doors shut out the cold and enemies.
Inside are a big chest for storing maize, a few agricultural implements, some carpets, a blanket and cooking utensils. On the wall a rifle, a Kalashnikov and bandoleers, hang within easy reach. The brown mud walls are capped by thick wooden beams blackened by smoke from the open fireplace. The only light seeps in through the vent between the roof and the wall. During the evening, Baram sits with his family around the fireplace where wooden splinters are burned to give light. Behind the wall in the cooking quarters, the women talk in hushed voices as they prepare food and sweet tea. Because the men are confined, the women are obliged to collect the firewood and tend the animals.

Due to the conflicts, Baram has built a watchtower on top of his house. Peeping out from the top of the watchtower, he can follow the yellow maize fields on the hillside until the valley drops suddenly out of sight. Looking uphill, he can see the house of his cousin, his present enemy, below the evergreen coniferous trees. Beyond them are the lofty peaks that Baram knows so well from his hunting trips but now is prevented from visiting. He can also see some women sifting the dried maize for grinding. Further down in the village the old mosque is barely visible. He can hear the call to prayers from the mosque, but is obliged himself to pray at home. The soothing hum of the gushing stream and the irrigation channel blend with the occasional sound of barking dogs. From his home, Baram can see the houses of his brothers and neighbours. The fields of his neighbours are yellow from maturing maize, but his own fields, and those of his brothers, are lying fallow. Involved in enmity, they have not been able to cultivate them.

**INHERITING THE PARE**

In order to understand the origin of the conflict between Baram and Hilal, and many others like it, it is necessary to retrace the history of the disputed pare, a piece of land that originally belonged to Mir Khan (12), Baram’s father. As is customary, Mir Khan apportioned most of his property among his heirs before his death. According to the tradition, his wife received 1/8 of the property while he kept 1/3 of the remaining to himself. The rest (approximately 2/3) was divided among his six sons; as is customary, Mir Khan’s three daughters (not shown) refrained from claiming their rightful share of the inheritance. After the death of Mir Khan the pare, his remaining 1/3 of his land, remained undivided. Although it was not cultivated, its location and many oak trees made it valuable. The pare was
divided equally among the six brothers. Later on, some of them traded their parts of the *pare* among themselves. This reduced the number of owners to the four brothers (1, 2, 3, 4), with Walia (2) receiving the largest part (Figure 6.1). The boundaries of each section were demarcated using stones and they agreed that neither of them would sell his part of the *pare* to outsiders without everybody’s consent. Nonetheless, the brothers continued to wrangle over their inheritance.

Some years later, Walia sold his share of some fields located near the Indus that he had inherited together with his brothers. Shortly after, he bought a costly piece of land in the village. Baram had opposed the sale of the fields and was able to have the deal revoked through a *Shariat*. With the deal nullified, Walia came under pressure. He suddenly owed money to the person who had sold him his land and was in a bit of a fix. In spite of the brothers’ earlier agreement, Walia went on to sell his part of the *pare* to his cousin Hilal (8) for about Rs 40,000, to be paid in cash and kind. When Khushal learnt that Hilal had purchased the *pare* he immediately sensed that Baram might oppose it. At the time, Baram was away on a trip and was therefore unaware of the deal.

THE KILLING OF HILAL

When Baram returned to the village a fortnight later, he learned about Walia’s sale of the *pare*. He was determined to have the deal cancelled and tried to convince Hilal to revoke the purchase. By now the dispute had become public knowledge and the whole community anxiously watched as tensions grew. Neither Baram nor Hilal were inclined to compromise, fearing, that by doing so, they would lose honour (*hayáa bojon*, literally, ‘honour goes’) and be shamed (*sharam ayon*, literally, ‘shame comes’) before the community.

On the fateful day of the killing – a wet and chilly morning near the first planting of maize – Hilal was alone in his house. In the morning Baram dropped in, carrying his gun on his shoulder. They took tea together and were joined by Hilal’s father Sojat (13). After a while, Baram raised the subject of the *pare* pleading with Hilal and his father to cancel the purchase. They refused to do so and suggested that Baram sort it out with Walia instead. Baram repeatedly asked them to revoke the deal and reminded them that Walia could not sell it to them without the consent of his brothers. Hilal again refused to cancel the deal and, although Sojat tried to calm him down, yelled at Baram: ‘You’re getting on our nerves. You don’t want us to
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keep the pare [but] I'm going to cut the trees in the pare down right now.' On the point of leaving, Baram shouted angrily at Hilal: 'By God, I will kill you if you touch a single tree.' Sojat tried to restrain Hilal but he was not to be stopped and, grabbing a hatchet, came after Baram as he left the house:

Hilal followed me with a hatchet in his hand. I shouted, 'Man, do not follow me. I will not allow you to touch the trees.' Hilal responded that he would never give up. I swore I would kill him if he came near me. He stopped for a moment, but then walked towards me. I swore again that I would kill him if he took another step. I warned him. But he came at me. I loaded a bullet into the chamber and pointed the gun at him. He stopped ... but then came at me again. I moved to aim at him. He raised the hatchet above his head. I lost my senses. Suddenly I saw that Hilal was lying on the ground. That is all. This is how it happened.

Shortly after, Baram ran towards his house and bolted the door. When Khushal heard the rifle shots he quickly left his work nearby and ran home. There he found Hilal lying on the ground. He was still breathing but bleeding profusely. Khushal ordered family members to move him to a bed indoors. They recited the Kalima, the Muslim declaration of faith, and shortly after Hilal expired. The news of Hilal’s murder spread quickly and soon relatives and neighbours gathered around the body. Hilal’s father Sojat was shattered. He put his son’s head in his lap and cried and wailed that his son had been martyred (shaheed). To validate this, Sojat told the onlookers that he had spotted the sun through the cloudy sky. Sojat advised Khushal in front of all the villagers that it would have to be up to Hilal’s sons when they grew up whether they wanted to take revenge. At Sojat’s request, the only item of Hilal’s clothes to be removed was his waistcoat because martyrs are buried in their own clothes and not, as is customary, draped in a shroud. Hilal was buried the same day in a graveyard near his house. Khushal arranged for some relatives to serve charity food (kherat), and scores of people, including Baram’s wife and daughters came to offer their condolences. Khushal also invited Baram’s brothers, who hesitantly joined the congregation of mourners.

Later the same day, Khushal rushed down to nearest police station and registered a ‘First Inquiry Report’ (FIR) with the police to start a criminal investigation. As material evidence, he handed over Hilal’s bloodstained waistcoat. Khushal had to bribe the policemen to make them walk back to Jhumra with him to arrest Baram. By the time they arrived, Baram had escaped and neither he nor his sons were to be seen. People disapproved of
Khushal’s bringing policemen to the village and nobody was willing to be recorded as a witness. In the end, only Khushal’s eldest son was willing to witness. Their investigations completed, the policemen returned to base the next morning. They were never heard from again.

The villagers unanimously condemned Baram for killing Hilal, saying that it was unjustified. Baram’s brothers vowed to stay impartial, since the deceased was their own cousin. Baram’s two step-brothers, Draz and Jumal (5, 6), also refused to support him and, in addition, averred that they would stay impartial because they were married to Hilal’s sisters (9, 10). Baram’s two sons (not shown) sided with their father and joined him in his house confinement. As they would be legitimate targets for revenge killings, they were left with little choice. In local terms, Khushal and Baram had gone from being mere ‘opponents’ (pecha) to becoming ‘owners’ of a lethal conflict (kané xawáano).

ABDUCTION AND COMPENSATION

Why did Baram get so passionate about a piece of land sold by his brother to a paternal cousin he otherwise was not only on friendly terms with, but who on many occasions had supported Baram against critics and opponents? And why did he not direct his animosity towards his younger brother Walia, who had violated an explicit agreement among the heirs that they would not sell the pare to an outsider? To explore plausible motives, we need to look back in time. Some years prior to the dispute over the pare, Sojat (13), Baram’s uncle, had beaten the wife of his nephew Draz (8). To make matters worse, Draz’s infant son had been hurt in the brawl. When Draz learned about this he became furious. In order to insult Sojat, he vowed to take Sojat’s daughter (10) forcefully as his second wife.

When Sojat came to know of Draz’s claim to wed his daughter, he refused ever to let the marriage happen. Some relatives urged Sojat to compromise, giving him a guarantee that an adequate compensation would be paid to him. Sojat declined again. Draz, watching the girl’s every step, later abducted her and dragged her into an empty house nearby where they spent the night. When news of his daughter’s abduction reached Sojat he was terribly shocked. A makeshift jirga of Sojat’s relatives urged him to pardon Draz. Although dishonoured, Sojat seemed willing to compromise and forgave Draz on condition that a girl was given to his son Hilal as compensation (sora). Shortly after, Draz came out of hiding and went to Sojat’s house and asked his forgiveness by offering an ox and a goat for slaughter at his
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threshold.\textsuperscript{3} To help Draz, his brother Mosam Khan promised one of his daughters to Hilal and she was later engaged to him. (However, before Hilal could be married to the girl and consummate the marriage, Baram killed him.)

This settlement brought hostilities between the parties to an end, but hidden grievances and mutual distrust lingered on. According to public opinion, Hilal’s purchase of the \textit{pare} had been motivated by a wish to slight Draz, who had abducted his sister. By buying the \textit{pare}, Hilal was taking covert revenge for the abduction of his sister. While this is only one of several interpretations of Hilal’s purchase, Baram certainly took it as an insult to his honour. This explains Baram’s frustration and Hilal’s stubbornness. The \textit{pare} was no longer merely a piece of land. It had turned into a symbol of the perceived insult to their honour. Another factor that could have weighed heavily on Baram was that all his agricultural fields were subject to a cultivation ban (\textit{shar}). Khushal had not enforced the interdict – although doing so would have been legitimate. Hakia (\textit{not shown}), Baram’s neighbour, had enforced it. For Baram, the \textit{pare} was hence a crucial source of animal fodder.

THE TROUBLESOME \textit{BAANDO}

As mentioned above, the ban on cultivation preceded the dispute with Khushal and is linked to Baram’s long dispute with Hakia over the ownership of an oak forest (\textit{baando}) located far below the village. More than fifty years ago, Baram’s father had leased the oak forest from a man living in another village. Later, Hakia’s father claimed to have bought it from the owner. Thus began the dispute between the two that Baram and Hakia inherited from their fathers. To end the problem and invalidate Hakia’s claim, Baram purchased the oak forest from the grandsons of the deceased original owner. He later offered to settle the issue with Hakia through a \textit{Shariat}, but Hakia refused. The dispute had slowly soured their relationship, and finally Hakia banned Baram and his brother Guldad (1) from cultivating their fields. The reason that Guldad’s fields were included in the ban was that he shared with Baram the ownership of the oak forest. In return, Baram placed a cultivation ban on Hakia’s land. Shortly after, Mosam Khan’s (3) maize fields were mysteriously razed to the ground. He suspected Hakia’s cousin Maroof (\textit{not shown}) and destroyed his maize crop in retaliation. The conflict now entered into a phase with sporadic exchanges of gunfire. In one of these exchanges, Hakia wounded Baram and his eldest son. Later,
Violence and Belonging

Mosam Khan and Walia wounded Hakia in an ambush. This attack got Hakia to place a cultivation ban on Mosam Khan and Walia’s fields. Since Baram killed Hilal, his confinement has prevented him from exerting pressure on Hakia. Moreover, he suffers from having all his land under a cultivation ban. It is therefore understandable when Baram says:

The matter of banning cultivation (shar) is highly inappropriate. If someone kills a man, one man is killed in revenge. Similarly if a man is accused of being involved in an illicit affair, just one man is held responsible. But by banning cultivation, the subsistence of women, men and children is jeopardised. The livestock also suffers. This practice is recent and strange and ... banning cultivation is alien to [our] traditions and religion.

In order to ease the hardships inflicted by the ban on cultivation, a mediator managed to broker a cease-fire (madan) between Hakia and Baram for a period of forty days. Baram and Hakia agreed to settle their differences in a Shariat, but the dispute is complicated because, firstly, Hakia claims that the original owner owned only some and not all of the forest, and, secondly, Hakia’s cousin Maroof has put in a claim for his grandmother’s share of the forest. With the exception of the cease-fire, Hakia, Mosam Khan and Walia were kept in semi-confinement. This precluded new attempts at mediation. Moreover, because Baram was confined already, Hakia was not in a hurry to settle the matter.

CONFINEMENT AND MEDIATION

Khushal’s strategy has been to keep Baram in constant confinement. Still, a year after Hilal’s death he agreed to a two-month cease-fire. Since then, Khushal has rejected Baram’s every plea for a cease-fire or a peaceful settlement. Khushal’s justification for keeping Baram in confinement is that it allows Hilal’s sons to grow old enough to decide whether to avenge their father. In response to Khushal’s refusal of further cease-fires, Baram declared that he would no longer be allowed to utilise the pare. Khushal consequently put it in the custody of a local Maulvi, but Baram’s household repeatedly let their animals graze on it, much to Khushal’s resentment.

A year later, pressure mounted on Khushal to agree to a cease-fire with his opponent. Khushal insisted that the girl (11) who was originally betrothed to Hilal should be betrothed to him without further delay. Mosam Khan, the girl’s father, indignantly refused and would only betroth her if Khushal paid a bride price of Rs 200,000. According to Islamic jurisprudence (din), there is no precedence for Khushal’s claim on Hilal’s fiancée. Because the
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girl was betrothed but not married to Hilal, Mosam Khan was not obliged to let her be betrothed to Khushal. Khushal sees this as irrelevant, arguing that according to local tradition, the girl was bound to marry him as compensation for the abducted sister (10).

Watching the conflict between Baram and Hilal with increasing displeasure, men belonging to their patrilineage decided that it was time to intervene. In preparation for their mission they took an oath that they would treat all parties equally and not hide anything from each other. They also called God’s destruction – ‘ill-pray’ (*shao*) – on anyone who violated their agreement. Then the *jirga* of about twenty men assembled on the roof of Khushal’s house. They first asked his permission to consult all parties to the conflict (Table 6.1). A few members placed their caps in front of Khushal, a traditional way to enforce a request. They also warned Khushal of the seriousness of the matter and that the bad feelings were getting out of hand. They asked Khushal for a ‘free hand’ to settle the matter. Hesitantly, he agreed to let the *jirga* meet the parties but refused their request to be given a free hand to settle the matter. The *jirga* left.

They returned the following day after consulting the contestants. Two of the *jirga* members kept insisting that Khushal had given them a ‘free hand’ to find a solution. In the end Khushal became angry and urged them to remember how the conflict had started and that the previous *jirga* had secured Mosam Khan’s daughter as compensation for his abducted sister. In addition, Khushal wanted the *jirga* to settle the unresolved dispute over the *pare*. Promising to address these grievances the *jirga* members asked for a three-day cease-fire, something Khushal angrily refused. After more wrangling, Khushal reluctantly agreed to a twenty-four-hour cease-fire so that the *jirga* could try to broker a temporary cease-fire with all involved.

**Table 6.1: Baram’s opponents and allies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parties to the conflict</th>
<th>Sources of the conflict</th>
<th>Types of enmity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opponents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khushal</td>
<td><em>pare</em>/homicide</td>
<td>lethal conflict (<em>kané</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hakia</td>
<td>oak forest/wounding</td>
<td>opponent (<em>pecha</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maroof</td>
<td>oak forest</td>
<td>dispute (<em>bilosh</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosam Khan</td>
<td>oak forest</td>
<td>opponent (<em>pecha</em>) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walia</td>
<td>oak forest</td>
<td>opponent (<em>pecha</em>) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guldad</td>
<td>oak forest</td>
<td>dispute (<em>bilosh</em>) *</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Involved in the dispute with Hakia but not Baram’s enmity with Khushal
The *jirga* members went from house to house to make everybody agree. Baram was more than willing, saying that even if they decided to throw him before an armed Khushal he would not object. The other parties all first declined to give the *jirga* a free hand, but later agreed to abide by its decisions. Baram’s main allies, Mosam Khan and Walia, were also unwilling to give the *jirga* a free hand, but under pressure, agreed to abide by whatever it decided. Relieved that they had been able to get all parties to co-operate the *jirga* decided to make the verdict short, decisive and unequivocal:

Khushal keeps the *pare* and Mosam Khan’s daughter. Moreover, Baram will pay him Rs 200,000 in compensation – reducible to Rs 100,000 at Khushal’s discretion – for killing Hilal. Additionally, Baram and his brothers will choose one of their daughters to be engaged to Hilal’s eldest son.

The oak forest will be divided between Hakia and Baram. Hakia will give one third of his part to Maroof. If not, Baram and Hakia will pay him an equivalent value in cash. Hakia is required to present a bullock and a goat to Baram, seeking his forgiveness. Baram will then absolve him from having wounded his son.

The verdict acknowledges the loss suffered by Khushal and, accordingly, awards him compensation. This should put an end to his enmity with Baram and settle his claim to Hilal’s fiancée. It should also end Baram’s and Hakia’s cultivation ban and share the oak forest between them. However, the verdict absolves Baram for killing Hilal and releases him from confinement through monetary compensation. For Khushal, accepting ‘blood money’ for his brother’s murder would be dishonourable and hence unacceptable. Despite this, the *jirga* members pleaded hard with him to make him accept it. Feeling that he was being treated unfairly and made a scapegoat, Khushal lashed out against the *jirga* members and asked them to leave.

At Khushal’s refusal, the settlement fell apart. A last-minute effort by the *jirga* to salvage it proved fruitless. All parties reverted to their initial positions. Mosam Khan would no longer give his daughter to Khushal without monetary compensation; Hakia would not share the forest with Baram and Baram even threatened Khushal that, from now on, all his fields would be banned areas (though not Hilal’s). At this stage, the *jirga* members declared that there would be no further attempts to mediate nor would they take any interest in the well-being of the parties. The *jirga* members scorned Khushal for not giving them a free hand to settle the matter. They also suspected him of conspiring with Hakia to keep Baram confined indefinitely.
BARAM’S CONFINEMENT

Baram has repeatedly showed willingness to follow any decision reached by mediators. He has also offered to let Khushal have the pare. His willingness to compromise and his explicit expression of guilt have redeemed him in the eyes of the community. His honourable behaviour and confinement have slowly moved public opinion in his favour. He is well versed in matters of local tradition and has frequently travelled beyond Indus Kohistan. In addition to his native Shina dialect, he is fluent in Pashtu and Urdu. His two sons have had a religious education from a madrasa in the Punjab. While confined, he arranged for his youngest son to be married in an exchange marriage (badali). Even in confinement, he is able to take care of his household’s interests. He has sold most of his livestock because the conflict prevents the household from tending the animals. Nonetheless, he has purchased agricultural land in the village. This has been possible by sending his two sons off during the summer to mine gemstones. It is the money made from mining that has saved the household from poverty.

Khushal is alone, without grown-up sons, and cannot leave the village for mining work. He also needs to keep watch over Baram. In sheer fighting power there is no doubt that Baram and his sons could easily overpower and kill Khushal. By keeping himself confined Baram is strictly adhering to the local code of honour, rather than being kept in confinement by Khushal. Despite being watched over night and day, Baram and his sons are occasionally able to sneak out of the village. Baram never ventures far but his sons travel to Rawalpindi and towns with a Kohistani diaspora. Khushal has never attempted to kill or ambush any of them nor conspired with others to kill them. Baram and his sons are wary of him nonetheless.

Once, Khushal’s young son picked up a gun and fired at the house, barely missing one of Baram’s sons. Demonstrating how the idea of revenge is alive in children, Khushal’s son is said to have lamented: ‘They killed my beautiful uncle.’ Nonetheless, Baram’s teenage grandson moves freely in the village and even plays with Khushal’s sons. In this sense, enmity is limited to the main protagonists, and the children and women can move about freely. By playing his cards wisely, Baram has marginalised Khushal, who, to make ends meet, has been forced to sell much of his livestock. Unable to cultivate his fields located beyond Jhumra, Khushal has been forced to buy wheat flour in the bazaar. Lacking other sources of income, he is struggling to feed his large family. If Baram makes good his threat of banning cultivation in Khushal’s fields, Khushal will have no choice but to leave.
Due to the tussle with Hakia, Baram has not been able to cultivate his fields for the past five years. Because he killed Hilal, he has spent four years in confinement. As long as he is in confinement, there is little chance of a settlement with Hakia. Baram feels that his attempts to appease Khushal have been of no use and that he must increase the pressure on him. The first step would be to declare a cultivation ban on Khushal’s land. Up to now, he has not done so out of guilt for killing Hilal. Baram accepts that Khushal has a right to kill him:

There are precedents in our land for solutions. There have been [other] rivalries around here. Even brothers have killed one another. Cousins have also killed each other. In rare cases, they have avenged [murder] also but some of them have compromised as well. People accept diyat [religiously fixed monetary compensation] too and there is a saz qasas [mutually agreed monetary compensation] too … If he killed me, I would not have resented it. He has the right (haq). I will not be offended because I am in debt to him. As for the pare, if he acquires it by God’s law (Shariat), he can have it. He is not obliged to forgive me. The pare should not be a cause of bloodshed. Economic and bloodshed issues are resolved differently.

As Baram points out, monetary compensation is sometimes used to settle murder among close kin. The enmity between Baram and Khushal is a threat to the cohesion of the patrilineage and weakens them vis-à-vis the other patrilineages. Infighting is discouraged and, even in the event of homicide between close relatives, the parties can be pressured to overcome their differences and to accept monetary compensation. Baram is a tough man, even reckless in his self-assertive behaviour. This can sometimes make him a liability. Still, his boldness discourages incursions by the rival lineages. For this reason, Baram’s patrilineage, including Khushal himself, is apprehensive of the situation. This is why the men of his patrilineage formed a jirga in an attempt to solve the enmity.

Under great pressure, Khushal is considering leaving the village and moving elsewhere. In retrospect, he regrets filing the FIR with the police, but laconically remarks, ‘The weak person must always go underneath someone’s lap, either in the beginning or at the end. I am a weak man and he is a wrestler.’ He does not foresee a peaceful solution to the conflict and thinks that it will not be resolved even until the ‘Day of Judgement’.

Walia recently moved out with his family to a town in the northern Punjab. He works there as a woodcutter. With his fields closed to cultivation,
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he saw no other option than to leave the village. Walia has offered to return the money to Khushal that he paid Hilal for the pare. Khushal cannot accept his offer because it would be construed as revoking the original deal.

Hilal’s death still haunts the community. Some years after his death, a person who helped dig a grave next to Hilal’s noticed a small hole in the side wall of the grave. Peeping through the hole, he saw Hilal’s undecomposed body. According to local belief, martyrs only sleep in their grave, and this observation seemed to confirm Hilal’s martyrdom. Later, some saw a bright flame emerging from Hilal’s grave, further evidence, many believe, that he was a martyr. However, the local Maulvis argued that such flames are made by Satan rubbing his hands and nails together to misguide people.

NARRATIVE AND SUBJECTIVITY

In this chapter I have attempted to frame events which, although they happened recently, have been retold, remembered and reinterpreted by the actors justifying their actions. In order to tell this complex story, the ‘narrative’ has been used as a literary device (White 1990). This narrativisation of scenes and events comes close to what Ryle has termed ‘thick description’ (1971: 482). It tries to convey not only ‘what happened’ (causation, temporality) and ‘why it happened’ (interpretation, rendition), but also to describe events as experienced by those ‘to whom it happened’ (subjectivity). Baram’s land dispute and the subsequent killing of Hilal allow us to seek out the complexities and deeper motivations of institutionalised vengeance, a practice that is often miscast as an expression of a ‘Kalashnikov culture’.6

While internecine feuds and vendettas are common, mediation and reconciliation can bring enmities to a peaceful conclusion. While it is unwise to generalise from this one case, especially because homicide among cousins is rare, we can also see why enmities drag on, despite attempts at mediation. In the case of lethal conflicts the aggrieved party can disregard jirga decisions – but only at great social costs. To an outsider it would appear that everyone loses in these lethal conflicts. Homicide transfers the antagonisms beyond the original source of the conflict, spurring a defence of ‘honour’ and the right of revenge (haq). The problem of retaliation can be summarized by a ‘Damn you if you do – damn you if you don’t’ attitude. If the aggrieved party takes revenge, retaliation will follow until the scores are settled. If the taking of revenge is renounced, honour suffers again. This underscores the seriousness of lethal conflicts compared to minor quarrels,
tussles and shoot-outs. For this reason, there is a tendency for lethal conflicts to become privatised and limited to close kin belonging to the same miráas (i.e., descendants of the same grandfather). Increasingly, close relatives, even brothers, can remain impartial and avoid involvement.

The bans on cultivation and fallow fields leave visible marks in the landscape: they carry tales of enmity and confrontation. Property relations are not only social and economical, but are contained by moral precepts and the historical trajectories of enmity. Property disputes invoke contested stories of ownership, which take on properties of ‘tournaments of value’ (Appadurai 1986: 21) that turn the fields and oak forests into key ‘tokens of value’. The idle fields symbolise central cultural values and the sites of contests of honour. In the course of such contests, the division into separate realms is reflected in the fact that homicide can only be mediated through the ‘law of land’ (dastoor) in consensual assemblies (jirga), while ownership of land is decided on the basis of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) in Shariat courts.

Without formal land titles, the contestants cannot refer property disputes to outside arbitration. This makes ownership of land inherently contestable. Land ownership is supported by the history of de facto ownership, where ‘might’ is equally important to ‘right’. The custom of partible inheritance, together with a large number of offspring and frequent polygamy, causes severe field fragmentation. The scarcity of land and subsequent poverty compel villagers to vigilantly defend what property they have. Herzfeld is right to point out that the ‘division of property among co-heirs ... is often marked by tension, mutual distrust, and occasional violence’ (1980: 91). We have seen that people do not wrangle over their inheritance only, but also over land purchased or leased from others. In doing so, they get entangled in brawls, disputes and enmities. This does not explain the genesis of blood revenge, but can explain why disputes literally become a matter of survival.

Rural villages are often considered a ‘moral community’, a Gemeinschaft, where there is a pronounced communality. With the prevalence of paternal cousin marriages and local exchange marriages in Jhumra, most of the villagers are related to each other. Nevertheless, the value system of the community legitimises the frequent antagonisms. Being involved in, or party to, conflicts is not condemned – only failing to conform to the local aesthetics and etiquette of fighting is condemned. Moreover, this case study shows that poverty makes villagers vulnerable and liable to repulse even
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minor infractions on their property. Similarly, concerned as they are about their honour, even petty insults are harshly reciprocated. On top of this, adult men care strongly about their prestige (ghairat), which encourages them to harm their enemies as much as possible. In more abstract terms, competition for property and prestige is a ‘zero-sum game’ where one person’s loss is equalled by another’s gain.

The conflicts do not involve arbitrary violence, but carefully meted out pre-emptive and retaliatory attacks. Retaliation is made to match the offence and there are rarely unfounded murders. On the contrary, the conflicts are carefully scripted and ritualised events that tend to follow a stylised pattern of:

1. Provocation,
2. Confrontation, followed by either
3. Mediation,
4. Reconciliation, or, failing this,
5. Retaliation,

In the latter cases (5, 6), rather than swift and decisive retaliation, people may sometimes wait for many years before taking revenge. As long as they do not publicly retract their right of revenge, it does not infringe upon their honour. By seeking confinement, a family risks a painful war of attrition and a slow, but inevitable, drift into poverty and misery. Poor families are, in general, unable to stay confined for long periods and are forced to resettle in one of the lowland Kohistani communities. Resettlement gives temporary relief from hostilities but does not end them. Instead, attacks, raids and ambushes often follow. It can be speculated that paid work as seasonal labourers makes it possible to prolong hostilities. This provides sustenance in lieu of agricultural produce. Although the families involved are suffering, their honour is not compromised. The importance of finding ways to earn supplemental money is clearly shown by comparing the financial status of Baram and Hilal. Baram’s fields are closed for cultivation, but, thanks to the money earned from mining gemstones, he is better off than his opponent.

The men who are confined hold out against great odds, thereby living up to the ideals of manhood. Nonetheless, being confined to the house day and night involves a degree of self-sacrifice, because the house is primarily a female and domestic domain. Those who are confined for long periods invariably alter their house by adding a watchtower (gari). This not only
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provides them with better protection from attacks, but transforms the house (*gosh*) into a fortress (*qal'a*). This, it can be speculated, symbolically alters the nature of confinement: the man is no longer hiding in his ‘house’ but is defending his ‘fortress’. This changes the symbolic meaning of house confinement from one of potential effeminacy to one of forcefulness and masculinity.

There is a homology between the dynamics of social strife and the narrative structure of enmities. They tend to lack a key narrative element, namely one which provides an ‘ending’, ‘closure’ or ‘finale’. The absence of this narrative element is a general characteristic of the vendetta: it goes on and on without end. Instead of ending, disappearing or vanishing, the histories of enmity remain inscribed in the collective memory of the community and imprinted on the landscape as untilled fields, imposing watchtowers and scenes and sites of killings.

In the next chapter, the interface between homicide and honour is explored further. Especially, I examine how honour is conceptualised locally and intertwined with magical rites believed to promote personal safety and reveal the identity of absconding murderers.
CHAPTER 7

Magic and Honour

Magic has been defined as ‘the purported art of influencing the course of events through occult means’. This is why a belief in magic and the use of amulets and charms are anathema to Deobandi Islam and considered un-Islamic (Alawi 1987: 31). Nevertheless, the men in Palas carry charms meant to help them entice village women or render enemy bullets harmless. This practice is not seen as being opposed to ‘Islam’, but in a strong sense as being embedded within it: the charms will only work if those who wear them pray regularly. Thus, the use of magic and spiritual charms is intertwined with indigenous Islamic beliefs that are now rapidly changing in the face of growing orthodoxy. Complementing scholarship on magic from the Frontier region, my intention in this chapter is to locate magic within the system of honour and revenge in Palas. In a society where treacherous murders are common, magic and spiritual charms grant men symbolic protection from injury and death. The first-hand accounts of men party to lethal conflict and practitioners of magic offer new insights into the cultural aspects of homicidal violence that is often passed over or disregarded in the study of so-called ‘honour killings’ (Knudsen 2005). They show that homicides are closely aligned with heterodox Islamic practices and indigenous notions of honour and respect. This points not only to an alternative way of coming to terms with loss and bereavement but also to an alternative cultural frame for interpreting homicide and lethal conflict.

LOVE MAGIC

Despite its social significance, magic has received scant attention in the ethnography of the Frontier region. Lindholm’s (1981b) study of love magic among the Pakhtun found that love potions were used by women to entice and control men. Lindholm’s structuralist account explains the importance of women’s love magic as a result of women’s weak position in a patrilineal society, but does not delve into the more practical uses of magic in Pakhtun...
society. Frembgen’s (1998) folkloristic account of magical practices finds that the striped hyena is associated with love, fertility and purity. Among Pakhtun men, the hyena’s sexual organs are believed to possess magical powers and are used to entice lovers. We know from Pehrson’s (1966) account of the pastoral Marri Baluch that the use of love magic was common and elaborate. In love relations, women were men’s equals and voluntarily engaged in secret love affairs involving the exchange of reciprocal gifts, courting and love poetry. According to Pehrson, infatuated men paid large sums of money to a ‘sorcerer’ for a charm that, at best, could arouse a woman’s interest or, at worst, kill her (ibid.: 64). In his study from Chitral, Marsden (2005: 178ff.) found that trained amulet makers were of two kinds: those deeply concerned about preserving amulet writing’s permissibility within Islam and those considering it a trade in esoteric knowledge. The former carefully avoided amulet writing whose purpose was questionable and never accepted payment for their services. The latter routinely violated such precautions and engaged in forms of amulet writing that was in demand and profitable, especially amulets used to entice village women. Collectively, the examples given here attest to the widespread use of ‘love magic’ and the inherent tension between magical practices and orthodox Islam.

MAGIC AND SORCERY

In Palas (and in neighbouring Kohistani valleys too) the use of magic serves many functions.¹ The most important use of magic is as a precaution against personal injury, death and misfortune. Using spells and amulets, protective magic can help foretell the future, reveal hidden information and attain God’s guidance in important matters. Curative magic is used to ward off disease, relieve pain and heal injury and involves what is colloquially known as ‘casting a blow’, where a verse or spell is recited or chanted while blowing onto a fistful of sand which is sprinkled on the injured body part. Magic is also used to ward off the ‘evil eye’, and to render harmless evil-doers and ill-wishers, colloquially referred to as an ‘ill-pray’ (see Chapter 5). Finally, magic is used by men and women to entice and infatuate the opposite sex (‘love magic’). Taken together, these magical practices are subsumed under the term ‘amliyat’, meaning ‘chants’ or ‘executions’.²

One man in Palas was renowned for his skills in writing protective amulets, but nowadays magical practices are increasingly the domain of ritual specialists. Any religious person can learn and practise amulet writing,
but he has usually completed a formal educational course at a religious seminary (earning him the honorific title *maulvi*) and then, as a roving mendicant, has been tutored by specialists all over the North-West Frontier Province. In order to become an acknowledged practitioner of magic he must lead a pious life, pray and fast regularly and observe certain food taboos. This allows magicians to gain access to the hidden spiritual domain inhabited by evil spirits, witches, demons and ogres. The supernatural spirits are fully visible to the magician but not to ordinary people, who may become victims of spirit possession. Exorcising evil spirits is a dangerous practice and should only be undertaken by magicians with the necessary skills. In order to prepare for such an ordeal the mendicant isolates himself for days or months, devoting himself to fasting and prayers.

Interviews with practitioners from Kohistan find that they agree that magic is a fact of life but disagree over the types of magic allowed by Islam and those that are heretical. There is agreement that sorcery (‘harmful magic’) meant to harm or ruin a person is neither permitted in Islam nor morally acceptable. Nonetheless, they claim knowledge of how to counter harmful magical spells:

*I can recite and ‘blow’ these words ... [reciting a magical spell, *mantara*] ... on a sorcerer to make his magical charms useless. Then none of his magical spells will work on that person. No way at all. But I have given up magical practices. ... I have given it up entirely because magic is mainly based on infidelity.*

To resolve the problem of infidelity, practitioners claim that they have abandoned magic and turned to Islam after finding that the Quran is equally useful for curative purposes. Nonetheless, the association between infidelity and magic is deeply troubling and makes it mandatory to carefully delineate what is and what is not permissible according to the Quran. This especially applies to the writing of amulets meant to protect the bearer from violent death or injury, colloquially referred to as *taigh bandi*. Protective amulets are of special importance to men involved in lethal conflict, as the amulets are believed to shield the bearer from gunshots. From the practitioner’s viewpoint the protective amulet cannot save the bearer from death – this is heretical because only God can decide the time of death – but protects the bearer by making the person aiming the gun unable to aim properly. One practitioner even insists on performing a practical test on his protective amulet to ensure that it is working properly:
When I do a *taigh bandi* for someone, I always ask him to test it first by having someone shoot a bullet [close to where] the bearer of the amulet is sitting. If the gunshot goes off and sends a bullet in his direction, then the *taigh bandi* has to be redone for him. If not, I will allow him to go ahead and use it for his protection.

Other practitioners frown at this practice, pointing out that the protective powers of *taigh bandi* have been disproved numerous times by shooting and killing domestic animals wearing amulets. Moreover, they argue, there is no basis in Islam for such a practice and people in Palas do not trust the protective power of amulets any more. Nonetheless, men involved in lethal conflict are inclined to use *taigh bandi* as one means to survive a lethal conflict. The amulets contain selected Quranic verses and are often written in secret numerals rather than Arabic script. In order to strengthen the amulet’s power the text is written with ink made from saffron or musk from the musk deer. For the amulet to work properly, it must be written on days having a special religious significance – a Friday or a religious holiday. The amulet is usually worn under the armpit, tied to the upper right arm. It can also be wrapped in a rag and burned over a clay lamp together with the recitation of magical spells. The amulet can also be soaked in rose water and the resulting brew drunk by the person seeking protection.

Magical charms and amulets are not only used for protective reasons but also to entice, attract and infatuate young women as illustrated in this stanza from a song recorded in Palas:

> Up there in the praying arc (*mehraab*) of the mosque lies my Book [of Fate] ³
> Get it down quickly so I can make ‘the feet of that shy girl rise in the air’ [by writing an amulet from it]⁴
> The Maulvis of our native land have not been able to do it.
> So, let’s go to the mendicants of Kaghan to seek their help to get the girl with the red lips.
> Oh Maulvi, I could have given you money [to write an amulet for me], but I am poor.
> Please, write an amulet for me for the sake of Allah.

Practitioners stress that demanding money from clients is a sin and that they will accept any remuneration deemed appropriate by their clients. Nonetheless, they admit that, occasionally, clients offer them large sums of money for magic meant to harm or ruin their adversaries. They insist
that they always decline such offers because they are immoral. The stanza quoted above alludes to the fact that money is needed to pay for ‘love magic’. This is a problem in a society where money is scarce, hence the plea for help without payment. It also laments the lack of knowledge among local Maulvis and the need to solicit help from the mendicants in Kaghan – a valley to the southeast – known for their magical skills. The stanza underlines the moral and religious ambivalence in the use of magic both among practitioners and clients (Marsden 2005: 85).

**HONOUR AND VIOLENCE**

In Palas honour is a multi-dimensional term that includes familial respect (*izzat*), modesty and chastity (*hayaa*), and social prestige (*ghairat*). While property disputes endanger the former two, physical injury, homicide and sexual abuse sully the latter and carry revenge obligations (*haq*). In the latter case, the avenger’s motive for taking revenge will colloquially be referred to as *ghairat gi marao*, meaning ‘he killed [him/her] due to prestige’. Nevertheless, a man is not condemned for taking a long time to avenge a murder. As long as he does not forswear revenge, his prestige is intact, irrespective of his socio-economic status, as attested in the local proverb: ‘The poor man is not necessarily without pride.’ However, failing to revenge homicide is not only a dangerous display of weakness, but also condemned as proof of being a despicable coward who is prideless (*be-ghairat*), immodest (*be-hayaa*) and without social respect (*sharaam*). This is also reflected in the local proverb: ‘A man without a pride is not hesitant to indulge in bad deeds.’

In local disputes, whether over land or property, the monetary value of the disputed object does not matter. Winning a dispute is what matters. The winner will have earned *izzat* and *hayaa*. The winner will often have spent more money than he earned. Yet, he is expected to employ all available means to win and never to give up. Only claims backed by either religion or tradition stand any chance of succeeding (see Chapter 8). Those who fail this requirement will either give up or lose the dispute. In either case, the contestant will lose *izzat* and *hayaa*, besides being rebuked by society.

As shown, honour can be described as the relationship between a person’s own feelings of self-worth and that of the peer-group (‘honour group’) to which he belongs (Stewart 1994). Hence, honour is bestowed socially, is ephemeral and can be lost. Losing honour invites ridicule and disgrace and subjects the family to ‘shame’. Honour cannot only be lost, however, but also regained by returning the offensive act. A wide range of acts are considered
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shameful, but none more than those that compromise female chastity. If they become public knowledge, romantic transgressions invites shame on the offenders’ families and are punishable by death. While male offenders are sometimes able to escape punishment, offending women are killed (see Chapter 5). In honour-bound societies, female chastity represents the family’s ‘symbolic capital’. To protect it, the offending woman must be killed rather than divorced or excommunicated, acts that in themselves are considered shameful (Tapper and Tapper 1992). Killing her removes the offensive act, redeems family honour and resurrects its prestige.

A common cause of homicide in Palas is accusations of female adultery (see Chapter 5). To understand why, it is necessary to consider not only the role of honour but also the structural opposition between romantic love and marriage (Lindholm 1998: 251). In Muslim societies marriage, in which romance has no place, upholds the social structure through alliances between families and lineages, and of course is linked to reproduction and the creation of offspring. Hence, marriage is instrumental, a means to an end. Romance, on the other hand, is the structural antithesis: concerned with personal gratification, always in secret and in contravention of official morals. This may seem a mundane observation, but it is crucial in order to understand why men and women risk involvement in secret love affairs. The structural opposition between love and marriage helps explain why all forms of illicit romance provoke condemnation, ostracism and the frequent killing of those involved: it is not only a threat to ‘personal honour’, but also to that of the ‘honour group’ who subscribe to the same honour code (Stewart 1994). This honour code is also adhered to by migrants, despite the fact that living in urban and peri-urban areas increases their risk of being apprehended by the police and prosecuted by the courts. The remainder of this chapter deals with one such migrant and provides details of the events that claimed the lives of two women and a man.

JALIL’S STORY

This is the story of Jalil, a man in his late twenties, who came from the Palas valley. When Jalil was still a teenager his elders were killed, victims of an age-old vendetta. As Jalil and his brothers grew older, threats to their lives made them leave the valley and they moved to a town with a sizeable Kohistani diaspora. When Jalil became an adult, he left for another city where he found work as a taxi driver. After some time, he was suddenly called back to his home. There his brothers informed him of the rumours
that their younger sister was involved in a secret amorous relationship with Jabbar, a Kohistani émigré. Engaged to be married to another Kohistani man, Sherdan, she had been held back in her natal household due to a quarrel with her in-law’s family. For this reason, she was now in her brothers’ custody but not aware of the serious charges levelled against her. Jalil and his brothers decided to kill their sister, but not before killing Jabbar first, because otherwise his lover’s murder would tip him off and allow him to escape. It was decided that Jalil should kill him since he was the most concerned with protecting the family’s prestige (*ghairat*).

Needing to act swiftly, Jalil began searching for Jabbar and decided to ambush him in the small town close to where he lived. Hidden in his pocket was a pistol loaded with bullets. The tension had made him unable to eat and he was now pale from exhaustion. Stumbling across Jabbar in the centre of the town, Jalil struck up a casual chat with him and they took tea together and talked for a while. It was now getting dark and they finished the tea and began walking together through the town centre. Suddenly, Jalil grabbed Jabbar’s arm, pushed him into a deserted alleyway and quickly fired several shots into his back. He then dragged the bloodied corpse off the road, fled from the scene and began the long trek home.

On his return home, he informed his family of the murder and together with his brothers decided that the time had come to kill the sister. She was at this point not aware of the accusations levelled against her, nor of the fate of Jabbar. She was killed shortly afterwards, being shot near the house. Her death was kept secret, as were the reasons for killing her, which were only disclosed to a few close relatives who took part in the hasty funeral rites. Should the need arise, the relatives would testify to the legitimacy of their actions, as well as be witnesses to her death. According to customary justice, the killing of the girl and her paramour was legitimate and considered proof of illicit relations. At this point, however, only Jalil, his brothers and a few relatives knew that Jabbar and their sister had been killed for their involvement in a secret love affair.

Fearing retaliation from Jabbar’s family, Jalil relocated his family to a new town while he resumed his former work as a taxi driver. One year passed before he was finally found by Jabbar’s relatives and apprehended by the police. As he was led away to a police car, Jalil confessed to the policemen that he had killed Jabbar but that his arrest was of no use because he had ‘good reasons for killing him’. He sent word of his arrest to his brothers and soon afterwards was shifted to the district jail. After three years of
wrangling in the district court, the jury found Jalil guilty of manslaughter and, based on the *diyat* (‘blood money’) provision in the crime legislation, ruled that he should compensate Jabbar’s family and his only heir by paying them monetary compensation.\(^5\)

In private, Jalil’s brothers now contacted Jabbar’s relatives and pleaded with them to withdraw the court case. They disclosed that Jalil had killed his own sister for having illicit relations with Jabbar, arguing that, according to custom, the killings were justified. To prove their point, Jabbar’s relatives were shown the grave where she was buried and witnesses of her murder were brought forward. Reluctantly, Jabbar’s relatives agreed to withdraw the court case. Jabbar’s widow, however, kept insisting that he had been murdered unjustly. To appease the widow, they agreed to withdraw the case from the district court and bring it before the Islamic Qazi Court.\(^6\) After hearing the evidence, the Qazi Court ruled that Jalil should only compensate the victim’s heir (*Wakil*). Nonetheless, because paying monetary compensation was perceived as dishonourable, Jalil declined to pay:

> Now, if we paid this money, by [our Kohistani] traditions, my opponents would have been deemed to have saved their ‘face’ [i.e., honour]. People would have considered us incapable of defending our honour. So we did not pay the compensation and I remained in jail.

Having refused to pay the fine, he lingered another year in jail. At that point, the parties to the conflict reached an out-of-court settlement that entailed compensating Jabbar’s heir by transferring agricultural land in Palas. Still unwilling to pay any compensation, Jalil was helped by a friend to obtain a land deed which falsely testified to the transfer of land to the victim’s heir. The court accepted the document as genuine and ordered his release. At this point, Jalil had been jailed for four years and had spent almost as much in lawyer’s fees and other expenses as he was supposed to pay in monetary compensation. On his release from jail, locals lauded Jalil’s bravura in killing Jabbar, while rebuking the cowardice of Jabbar’s relatives.

Following his release, Jalil moved back in with his extended family and married a cousin from Palas. A year and a half later, his wife was found murdered while being home alone. Desperate to prevent a police inquiry into her murder, incriminating evidence was painstakingly removed before her body was taken away for burial in her natal village. Grieving over his wife’s untimely death, Jalil was determined to find and kill her murderer.
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In secret, he went to see a local Maulvi known for his magical skill. He told the Maulvi his story and asked him to perform a magical spell that would help him identify the killer. At their first meeting, the Maulvi persuaded Jalil to wait and see if the killer would give himself up or make himself known. After learning of Jalil’s contact with the Maulvi, the mother of Sherdan cried foul and rebuked Jalil for finding a reason to blame his wife’s murder on Sherdan. Prior to this event, Jalil had not suspected Sherdan of the murder of his wife, nor was there any evidence of his involvement. Now he became suspicious of Sherdan and tried to find and talk to him, but Sherdan found excuses for not meeting Jalil.

Determined to identify his wife’s killer, Jalil again approached the Maulvi, asking for his help to find the murderer. This time the Maulvi was willing to help him and told Jalil to repeat to himself; ‘Oh Allah, the most informed, let me know’ 170 times after performing his night-time prayers. For the spell to work, he was advised to put on clean clothes and bed sheets and go quietly to sleep after completing the recitation. Jalil followed the Maulvi’s detailed instructions and the first night had a strange dream, full of blurred, abstract images. The second night, however, he dreamt:

I was walking along a stream holding a beautiful rosary in my hand. Suddenly, I found that Sherdan was accompanying me. We began to cross an ankle-deep stream. Abruptly Sherdan hit me on the hand with the rosary. The rosary broke and all the beads dispersed in the stream. I could see the beads at the bottom. I quickly reached out to pick them up but did not succeed in picking up any of them. This was all I had in my dreams that night.

The next two evenings, he again recited the spell and in his dreams for the first time caught a glimpse of his late wife walking in front of a large group of women. The following night he again recited the spell and in the dream was able to make contact with her:

She told me that at the time of her killing she was hit by something that looked like a sharp three-edged dagger. Then her throat was squeezed so she choked to death. I asked her if the killer was either her brother or mine. She responded in the negative. I then enquired if Sherdan had done it. She nodded to say yes. I asked if she wished to tell me anything else. She signalled to me that she could not talk anymore because her throat was blocked.
The dream convinced Jalil that Sherdan had killed his wife, but he did not tell anyone about his dream, nor what was revealed in it. A few days later, however, Jalil returned to the Maulvi and told him about the dream. The Maulvi listened carefully, then told him that he was in grave danger from his enemies and should watch his every step. In order to protect himself, the Maulvi advised him to recite a verse – Sura Yasin – from the Quran fifty times. Following each round of recitation, he should stab a raw clay brick with a dagger. When the recitation ended he should wrap the shattered brick in a burial veil (‘coffin cloth’), perform the regular funeral rituals and bury it. This procedure, the Maulvi assured him, would protect him from enemies and evildoers. Jalil followed the detailed instructions and, with the Maulvi leading the funeral rites, buried the brick on a deserted river bank.

Believing himself out of harm’s way, Jalil intensified the search for Sherdan and contacted two hit-men who were known to kill people for money. Both men declined to kill Sherdan, saying that they had already killed too many and the risk was simply too great. Sherdan’s whereabouts are still unknown, but Jalil has learned that he sometimes denies killing his wife and at other times admits to the crime, claiming that he wanted to revenge the murder of his own fiancée by Jalil. Jalil has not filed a First Inquiry Report (FIR) against Sherdan with the police, nor does he intend to do so: ‘Now we have found the killer; but it is too late to register a FIR against him. A FIR would have done no good, anyway,’ he laments:

... you don’t get justice if you refer your case to a court. ... Only influential and rich people are given justice. In Kohistan there is no such thing. You make justice for yourself by yourself. You know the rules. You decide whether to kill [somebody] or not. You are free to decide right or wrong for yourself.

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This ‘thick description’ of Jalil’s story opens up new avenues for understanding honour killings and serves to illustrate the intimate relationship between honour and magic in Palas. We learn from the story that Jalil kills his own sister and her alleged paramour based on a rumour that they were engaged in illicit relations. He feels justified in killing them and emerges unrepentant after serving four years in jail. He does not pay any monetary compensation to the male victim’s family, who stand doubly dishonoured for bringing the case to court and failing to kill Jalil. Released from jail with accolades from...
his peers, Jalil marries a cousin who is later murdered. To track down her killer, he consults a magic specialist. The magical rituals appear to enable Jalil to ‘dream’ the killer, and they symbolically grant him protection from injury and death. He tries to hire a hit-man willing to kill his murdered sister’s fiancé. In the end, the suspected murderer is at large, while Jalil ponders his options for revenge. Lamenting the courts’ inability to provide justice, he defends personalised justice and the taking of revenge.

Magic is used strategically by Jalil to make contact with his late wife, protect himself from revenge killings and identify his wife’s murderer. The form of magic used has three archetypical elements: a spell or a verse (which is repeated a set number of times), a simple rite (which in this case mimics the deadly threat), and the specific requirements of the incumbent (attesting to his serenity and purity). Jalil is clearly not alone in believing in the power of magic. When news of his visit to the Maulvi reaches Sheridan's mother, she blames Jalil for plotting to kill her son. Thus, despite growing Islamic orthodoxy both in urban and rural areas, a belief in magic persists among migrants and locals alike. People distinguish between malicious sorcery and magic. On the other hand, magic is often not identified as such, but forms a repertoire of ritual practices that people turn to in times of need. In Palas, as elsewhere in the Muslim Middle East (Kruk 2005: 48), magical practices have:

... over the centuries become intricately interwoven with religious elements ... so that ... the line of demarcation between what is forbidden and what is allowed is so blurred that neither the practitioner nor the client is often aware of transgressing the boundaries of orthodoxy.

We see in this story the importance placed on protecting familial honour and prestige and the use of magic to help identify killers and exact revenge. Despite being a Palas émigré, Jalil strives to adhere to the honour code shared by his peers. This earns him respect and validates his symbolic belonging to his natal valley. In accordance with local requirements, Jalil, supported by male kin, spends large sums of money to extricate himself from legal prosecution. He also forges a sales deed to avoid paying the victim’s family any compensation because this could be construed as paying ‘blood money’ and admission of wrongdoing. A key to the local code of honour is therefore retaliation, which is different from monetary compensation, locally construed as dishonourable and therefore unacceptable. Moreover, the case shows that Jalil is unwilling to give up any land in his natal valley,
despite the fact that he and his brothers no longer reside there. This suggests that parting with land may not only be a matter of pride but also undermine his symbolic attachment and belonging to the locality. There is no guarantee that Jabbar’s family will not try to kill Jalil at some point for cheating them of their compensation, despite having grudgingly accepted the legitimacy of his murder of Jabbar. According to Palas notions of honour and revenge, Jalil’s murder of his sister and her paramour are legitimate, while Sherdan’s murder of Jalil’s wife is not. The appropriate target for a revenge killing would be Jalil himself and not his wife. Similarly, hiring a professional hit-man to kill an adversary is a breach of Palas traditions, which requires the relatives and in-laws of the deceased to take revenge themselves. These breaches could indicate that the importance of revenge has become more prominent and that urban migrants, who are more likely to be apprehended by the police, are inclined to exact revenge through intermediaries.

Jalil’s story shows that women and men are killed on mere suspicion of illicit relations. Jalil feels justified in killing his sister and her alleged paramour. Nevertheless, his narrative reveals that he suffered from intense emotional stress when plotting to kill Jabbar. It is worth noting that both murders are premeditated; the victims are killed according to a preconceived plan and not in a state of shock and distress. Only the murder of the man is reported to the police and the offender brought to trial by the victim’s family. The murder of the two women remains unrecorded. The reason is that reporting the homicide of women to the police, whatever the cause, is considered shameful. Jalil’s story shows that the homicide of women is avenged by male kin and in-laws if they doubt the veracity of the indecency allegation. It also attests to the fact that wrongful homicide, whether of women or men, implies loss of honour and carries revenge obligations. This explains why the murder of women often provokes an inter-family vendetta (Knudsen 2005).

This chapter has demonstrated a common ‘thread’ to most, if not all, personal conflicts in Palas: the centrality of landed property either as the subject of the dispute or used as a compensatory object. Picking up the thread from chapters 3 and 4, I return in the next chapter to a more detailed examination of the landscape and the interface between the social and geographical boundaries of ownership, in particular as it affects disputes over the oak forests. Like agricultural land, the oak forests are important to the villagers’ livelihood and provide supplemental sustenance and income. But this is not the only reason for their contested nature. Like the fields, the
oak forests are part of the ancestral inheritance since the time of the last wesh. As an ancestral domain, they therefore hold symbolic value for their owners. As I will examine in more detail in the next chapter, the ownership of oak forests is subject to internal divisions that create new boundaries and challenge old ones.
Contesting the Boundaries

Why do the villagers of Dáro fight over the oak forests and what makes their use so critical and their ownership so controversial? Upon entering the valley, the first thing that meets the eye is a green, undulating belt of thick oak forest that meanders through the valley. It is apparent that there is no scarcity of oak forest. Indeed, the valley has some of the largest broad-leaved forests in the province and includes an exceptional population of the threatened West Himalayan elm. With the low population density, there should be more than enough forest for everybody. Nor is the broad-leaved forest spatially constrained to the lower reaches of the valley. From about 700 to almost 2,800 metres it forms a thick carpet that reaches the most remote and far-flung of the villages in the interior of Dáro. There is no village anywhere in the valley without broad-leaved forests in its vicinity. Indeed, some of the lower-lying villages are surrounded by oak forest on all sides.

To answer the question of why disputes erupt over oak forest we need not ask ‘where the forest is’ or ‘how much of it there is’, but instead, ‘what makes it so valuable’ and ‘how is it owned’. In order to examine these questions, we need to consider the ecology of the broad-leaved forest, its importance to household economy and the system of land tenure that mediates the relations between the oak trees and their owners.

I begin by examining the ecology of the oak forest and the villagers’ dependence on non-wood products collected from the oak forest. Secondly, I examine the system of ownership of the oak forest and the entitlements to productive resources (grass) that follows from it. Thirdly, I describe the nature of boundary disputes and illustrate this with a transcript from a tape-recorded discussion. My aim is to demonstrate that economic change and jural plurality has increased tensions between villagers. The dissolution of the oak forest as an ancestral domain challenges communal solidarity and, with it, the villagers’ sense of belonging to the valley.
Contesting the Boundaries

FOREST ECOLOGY

The broad-leaved forest is a distinct category that is locally referred to as *baando*. The *baando* is interdigitated with the conifer forest (*zangal*), but still distinct from it by its spatial distribution and ecological composition. From around 700 to about 1,800 metres, *bani*, the holm oak, plays a dominant structural role in a series of lush and complex plant communities. Above 2,000 metres, *jarin*, the green oak, replaces the holm oak and extends to about 2,800 metres. The oak forests are an essential part of the agro-silvo-pastoral adaptation and both oak species are carefully managed for oak leaves. These, together with dried maize stalks, represent an important source of winter feed for the livestock. The villagers practise selective, rotational lopping of the oak trees for animal fodder in three-year cycles. Depending on the altitude at which the livestock grazes, a wide range of broad-leaved trees is used as an additional source of fodder.¹

The broad-leaved forests also provide the villagers with essential products. They have an intimate knowledge of the broad-leaved forest and make use of a broad range of plants, herbs, bushes and trees that grow there. The villagers of Dáro have an extensive ethno-botanical knowledge. More than 130 tree and plant species are in customary use and about 70 species have known medical properties and are used to treat common ailments and illnesses afflicting people, livestock and crops (Kohistani 1997, Rafiq 1992). An example is the bark of the Himalayan yew that is used to treat arthritis. It is also used against the leaf blight disease which each year ruins a substantial part of the maize crop. The very low maize yields make the villagers dependent on forest products to meet their dietary needs. They collect wild stocks of olives, grapes, cherries and walnuts.² During the spring and summer the women collect a variety of wild potherbs that they use as ingredients in the diet. The most highly valued forest products are those that provide the villagers with cash income. Their importance to household viability is demonstrated by the fact that the villagers rank them as the primary source of cash income (HJP 1992). The forest products can be collected by all the villagers, also the menial groups.

The most important among them is the morel mushroom (*gugusili*) with an estimated market value of more than Rs 5.5 million (ibid.). The collection of mushrooms is labour-intensive. The larger households can make from Rs 20,000 to Rs 30,000 from mushrooms in a season (HJP 1994). In Dáro, the average yearly income from mushrooms is about Rs 4,000 per household.³ The villagers also collect wild honey and most of
the households keep domestic bees in wooden hives located on the ground floor of their houses. The beehives are made from hollowed cedar tree logs. Poverty has increased the villagers’ dependency on forest produce, which makes the forest vulnerable to over-harvesting and depletion. Local poverty also threatens the wildlife. The villagers hunt the species that pose a threat to their livestock, damage agricultural crops or have commercial value. Among the latter, this especially concerns the endangered musk deer, captured bear cubs and fat and fur from adult bears, as well as different species of pheasants caught alive or sold as skins to itinerant merchants or in markets outside the valley. This notwithstanding, hunting intensity is not very high and there are almost no full-time hunters left. There is no shortage of rifles, but the villagers no longer devote much time to hunting. The scarcity of labour is one reason, involvement in disputes is another. The vast broad-leaved forests continue to provide refuge to a number of rare animals, including the endangered Western tragopan pheasant.

THE INVERTED FOREST

The ownership of the oak forests is perplexing in its complexity and paradoxical in its spatial distribution. The oak forests belong to the majority Shin population, those recognised as shareholders (ulsi’ya). During the last wesh, the oak forests were distributed among all the clans (taabín). As described in Chapter 3, the distribution of the oak forests was inverted on the pattern of land ownership, so that the agricultural fields and the adjacent oak forests had different owners (or owning lineages). The implications of this are reflected in this quote from a Dáro villager: ‘In the old distribution (wesh), it was done in this way that if your fields are located here, then the grasses and the oak forest were owned by someone else.’ Since that time, every area of the broad-leaved forest is owned by a clan, lineage, and, in a few instances, a family group tracing descent from a common grandfather (miráas). The final distribution could neither be arithmetically accurate, nor, in every instance, continuous. In many cases the oak forest ‘lot’ (hoor) comprised near and distant forest patches. This divided the oak forests owned by one group throughout the valley, in some cases in neighbouring valleys too.

Most of the land-owning families employed professional herdsmen (Gujar) to tend their animals during the winter as well as agricultural tenants to till the fields (Sarkhali). This relieved them of the burden of herding and reduced the inconvenience of excessive spacing of the fields. Today, the
pastoral migrations have lessened and people tend to stay for longer periods in one place, usually near their best and most productive fields, unless enmities force them to move elsewhere. That fact that people are increasingly considering the excessive spacing and fragmentation inconvenient is evident in attempts to consolidate the oak forests with agricultural land through exchange or sale. But there is more than reducing spacing and travel time involved. The consolidation process is part of a general movement towards subdividing and privatising oak forest ownership.

Due to the system of ownership, most of the oak forests are located so far from the owners that a large number of the lots have been hired out on lease-agreements to those living adjacent to them. The lease of the oak forest has added to the complexity of the already mosaicked system of forest ownership and forest usage. The lower-lying oak forests can be hired out on short-term leases during the winter, for which the owner is paid a nominal rent (qalaang). This only entitles the lessee to graze his animals in the forest. The oak forests are also rented out on long-term lease agreements (ghaana) that either involve the whole forest (trees, land and grass) or are restricted to the trees and the grass or the land on which the trees grow. The lessee usually pays for the lease in kind, most often in maize flour. There is no written record of the lease. With the passing of time, this can tempt the lessee to construe the lease as ownership on account of having used the forest for such a long period. Without a written deed, it can be difficult for either party to disprove the other’s claim to ownership. There are now owners who nullify their leases in order to foreclose ownership claims. Some have set fire to the houses constructed by the lessee in the oak forest or uprooted the walnut trees planted there in order to reassert their ownership of the forest and to subvert claims to the contrary.

This multi-layered and overlapping ownership of the oak forest was previously not so problematical. But with increasing commercialisation, the rights to the oak forest and the entitlements stemming from such ownership have emerged as potential sources of conflict. Ownership of the oak forest is crucial not only because of the economic benefits, but because of the entitlements (‘use-rights’) that are vested in it. Those who share ownership of an oak forest also have usufruct rights to the adjacent conifer forest growing above it. The grass that grows within the oak forest is not freely available but hedged by elaborate usufruct rights with roots in the system of customary land tenure. This – as I will explain in more detail later – especially concerns the grass growing in the irrigated or rain-
fed grass fields (dooli, pare) developed within or in the vicinity of the oak forest. First, it is necessary to look at the increasing exchange value of the oak forest.

FROM USE VALUE TO EXCHANGE VALUE

The broad-leaved forests provide the villagers with firewood. Many different tree species are used as firewood, but oak wood is preferred. Because the oaks provide essential fodder, only the dead and fallen wood is used for firewood. There is no evidence of over-harvesting of firewood for subsistence use. However, a recent development is the logging and sale of oak trees for use as firewood in the local markets. The new roads provide an opportunity for marketing oak trees as firewood in the roadside towns along the Karakoram Highway where the local timber resources have become depleted. The more accessible oak forests are now being cut and sold as firewood. A jeep-load of the oak wood earns the seller about Rs 1,000. Even this meagre sum of money is a windfall by the local standards. The villagers are cognisant of the long-term negative impact of felling the oak forests, but under the current circumstances see no other option to solve pecuniary needs. In some cases, the lure of a high profit has caused the theft of oak trees from the forests owned by migrants and absentee title-holders. Resident outside the valley, they have not been able to protect their trees. The commercialisation of forest products has also enticed some men to engage in the destructive harvesting of the root-bark (dindasa) of the walnut tree, a common species in the broad-leaved forest. It is collected by digging out the roots of the tree and peeling off the bark. In most cases, so much of the bark is removed that the tree dies. Most of the collection has taken place in forests owned by migrants and absentee landowners. Lack of money has also made some owners mortgage their walnut trees to raise cash, pay debts or to gain favours.

The oak forests are mostly owned collectively by the bigger kinship groups such as clans (taabín) and lineages (záat). The logging and sale of oak trees for firewood cannot commence without the consent of all the owners. In many cases, there is no such agreement, because those who live nearer to the forest and depend on it for their sustenance do not want to sell, while those who live far away and hardly utilise the forest do want to sell. In this case, the owners need to subdivide the ownership among themselves and partition the oak forest accordingly. This poses the problem of finding an equitable solution. The traditional way of dividing the forests
Contesting the Boundaries

was – like in the wesh – to identify ‘lots’ or ‘halves’ (hor wesh). The lots were awarded to the claimants after making a toss (túuli). As explained in Chapter 3, this is equitable if the descent groups are of comparable size and, in this case, gives them an equal part. If the claimants do not compose a comparable number shareholders, then hor wesh benefits proportionally the smaller group since it receives half of the total. For this reason, the bigger groups no longer accept this method of subdivision. The fact that the core of forest ownership is one’s status as a shareholder has opened for an alternative way of dividing the forest, namely by counting the shares of all the shareholders: men, women, and children. This assigns to each shareholder a fraction of the total and is known as tang wesh. This benefits the bigger groups who have more shareholders because they receive forest (or land) in proportion to their number. The smaller groups resist tang wesh on the grounds that they will lose their customary half of the total. Neither hor wesh nor tang wesh are uniformly accepted and they have become competing paradigms of oak forest division. The fact that tang wesh does not discriminate against age or gender has strengthened its credibility. The Maulvis have promoted it as an ‘Islamic system’ and, thereby, strengthened its legitimacy. The division by halves (hor wesh) is backed by the traditional legitimacy of the wesh and the local customs (dastoor). Regardless of which of the two principles are used, the process of division causes the numbers of boundaries to multiply. The proliferation of new boundaries adds to the indeterminacy of ownership and provokes more property disputes. As I will show, this also affects entitlements to grass.

DISPUTING OVER GRASS

The wesh was principally a division of agricultural land. No special provision was made for the irrigated grass fields that are located in a narrow belt above the fields and below the oak forests. The grass is an essential resource in the agro-silvo-pastoral system in Dáro. During the autumn the grass is cut by communal work parties (hashar), dried and stored as bundles. Reflecting the importance of grass as a fodder resource, there is rich terminology for the different types of grass. The most important grass source is the grass fields (dooli, pare) located inbetween water channels and agricultural fields. This land poses an ownership problem, because the agricultural fields and the adjacent oak forests usually have different owners. The grass that is collected in this zone is not freely available, but regulated by complex usufruct rights. Customarily, the owners of the oak forest collectively were
entitled to the grass growing in the grass fields located beneath the forest. Non-owners could be allowed to cut the grass if a formal request was made to the title-holders. The failure to seek such permission was considered an infringement and punished by setting the bundles of dried grass on fire, often followed by attacks on the transgressors.

Following a major dispute over grass in a village in Dáro, a Shariat verdict revoked the customary rules of entitlement to grass and ruled that the grass was the property of the owner of the fields. This reversed the customary entitlement to grass, and made the entitlement extend from the edge of the fields and uphill, not as previously from the edge of the oak forest and downhill. The verdict is contested and not unanimously accepted. The reason is to be found in the spatial distribution of oak forest ownership. In the major villages, the non-resident lineages and clans own all the oak forests. This means that the residents own the fields but not the adjacent oak forest. This, traditionally, made the non-resident clans (or lineages) the rightful owners of the adjacent grass fields. The residents have therefore been obliged to lease the oak forests as well as the grass fields from one or more among the non-resident lineages. The following quote from a Dáro villager is a good illustration of the complexity of the situation:

We own an oak forest in K----- [village]. But it goes like this that the fields [below it] belong to the resident Jerma [lineage]. The grass and the trees along its edge belong to us, the Damira [lineage]. Over the past few years, the owners of the fields have prevented us from utilising the grass along the edges of their fields. They argue that since the field is theirs, the grass around it also belongs to them. There is an ongoing dispute. ... We had leased the grass on the edges to the Hakisa [lineage]. The Jerma told them to refer to us for their lease money and that the Damira should have a Shariat with them on that matter. We did not ask them to hold a Shariat. The Hakisa are now forcefully harvesting grasses from some portions and the Jerma are cutting the grass wherever they can. If we hold a Shariat with the Jerma, they will beat us, [we know this] because we have spoken to the Maulvis about it. The distribution of such grass by wesh is not accepted anymore. Now the general principle is that the grass around the field belongs to the owner of the field.

As the quote illustrates, the non-resident lineage (Damira) owning the oak forest had leased the grass to the Hakisa, one of the two resident lineages. When the Shariat verdict revoked the Damira's entitlement to the grass, the problems multiplied. The Hakisa, the lineage that had leased the grass from the Damira, were prevented from collecting the grass by the new owners,
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the Jerma, and told to recover the lease money from the original owners (Damira). The Damira, on their part, have given up contesting the case because their wesh-based entitlement to grass is no longer considered valid and they would lose if they brought the case before a Shariat for settlement. For the two resident lineages (Jerma and Hakisa), however, the entitlement to grass has become a bone of contention. As I will discuss shortly, only a minority of the non-resident lineages have followed the Damira’s example and given up their grass collection privileges without a fight.

Historically, the entitlement to grass collection has been one of the most controversial resource issues in Dáro, and, more generally, in the Palas valley. There is never unanimity of opinion over the use and ownership of vital resources. The local system of ownership is so complex and diffuse that no claim to ownership can be rejected outright. Every claim to the broad-leaved forest and forest produce (grass) is contestable. This leads to angry verbal exchanges with the opponents berating, rebuking and threatening each other. If this is not enough, the verbal message is reinforced by aggressive posturing signalling the intent to use force. There are a number of stories about men who have been brutally killed in disputes over entitlement to grass and grass fields. The contest over oak-forest areas has a divisive effect on community solidarity and social relations. There is an associated symbolic change from communal unity to one of disunity. This is a process that the villagers approach with a certain unease and ambivalence. In order to illustrate this, it is necessary to take a closer look at the conflicts themselves. They can be categorised as either boundary disputes, entitlement disputes or ownership disputes. There is no clear distinction between them, and all three can be at stake at the same time.

‘THE BOUNDARIES ARE WRITTEN IN OUR HEARTS’

The men make frequent trips to the oak forest in search of firewood, to look after the livestock, and to collect grass and leaves. During such trips the men familiarise their younger brothers, sons and relatives with the layout of the forest and its boundaries. In general, the boundaries are traced along major landscape features such as a gully, a mountain slope or a peak. In the words of one man, ‘the boundaries are written in our hearts’. It is because the boundaries are emotionally inscribed rather than physically demarcated in the terrain that they give rise to frequent disputes. The disputes can erupt over as little as one to two metres of land. There is little material benefit from engaging in disputes like this. The objective is to validate the right
Violence and Belonging

to land publicly and thereby prevent incursions on what is considered the clan’s or lineage’s ancestral domain. The oak forest therefore carries a high symbolic value and is one reason why the owners must protect it.

In order to illustrate the nature of boundary disputes, it is instructive to examine an ongoing dispute between two patrilineages. At the time of the last wesh, the forests were divided among four patrilineages but recently, two of them, the Shamza and the Chulia, clashed over the location of the boundary separating their oak forests. The boundary follows a broad gully. The Shamza claim the western edge of the gully as the boundary, the Chulia the eastern. For the past eight years, the Shamza have disregarded the Chulia’s claim and collected grass from the disputed section. This has angered the Chulia who, on different occasions, have set fire to the bundles of dried grass, claiming that it was collected in their area. The Shamza have countered this claim by pointing out that, across the river, to the south, the Chulia’s oak forests are bigger than those of the Shamza. Should the Chulia continue to press their claim, the Shamza are demanding that the principle of equivalence be applied south of the river too. This would require the Chulia to relinquish a portion of their oak forest to the Shamza.

In spite of this disagreement, the two lineages share a history of friendly relations. The least divisive way to resolve the dispute was to ask an elderly man to serve as moderator. His knowledge of the local tenure system and of the wesh was taken to guarantee a fair verdict. Therefore, the Chulia at first pledged to heed the sworn testimony of a respected elder of the Shamza community, known for his knowledge of the wesh. The man testified that the western boundary, the one claimed by the Shamza, was the correct one. Despite pledging to heed this decision, the Chulia would not accept it, but neither were they prepared to pick a fight with the Shamza over the issue. The next step would be to bring the dispute for settlement before a Shariat court. It is not dishonourable to lose in a Shariat but both sides know that it would be harmful to their relations and formalise their disagreement.

The case now hangs in the balance: the Chulia have neither prevented the Shamza from cutting the grass, nor retracted their claim to the disputed part of the forest. There are a number of latent disputes. An insult or intimidation can provoke an attack and be enough to turn a latent dispute into a manifest one.
Contesting the Boundaries

ENTITLEMENT DISPUTES

Customarily, the right to grass was an entitlement stemming from holding collective rights to the adjacent oak forest. As I have already explained, this is no longer valid. If a dispute arises over the ownership of grass and the matter is taken to a Shariat for settlement, then both parties are required to vouch for who owns the ‘four sides’, referred to either as the ‘limits’ or ‘sides’ (huduud) or as the ‘boundaries’ (dir, plural dire). Credible evidence of ownership of the land that borders the grassland validates the ownership of the grass field. The party that wins the disputed land falling within these four sides is deemed the rightful owner. In other words, by giving the names of those who own property adjacent to his, the claimant has specified the identity of the land that belongs to him. The knowledge of who owns the surrounding land only serves the purpose of identifying the field or the land itself. This places the communal owners of the oak forests at a disadvantage.

According to Shariat rules, the court can only hear property cases between individuals or between men who have been elected to represent a group of owners (Wakil). This poses no problem for the resident owners of the fields. Theirs is individual property. The absentee owners of the oak forests, on the other hand, are shareholders in a communal estate. They cannot elect one among themselves as a Wakil because, as shareholders, they all own it and cannot contest it as a single, legal entity. The Shariat rules therefore, at the outset, undermine their claim to grass on the basis of oak-forest ownership. Their only remaining option is prove ownership of the grass field itself. This can be done, but only with great difficulty and little chance of success.

The men in Dáro spend a considerable amount of time debating the merits of such claims while sitting together in the male guesthouse. In order to illustrate the ethos of the debates, I cite from the transcript of a tape-recorded discussion. The discussants belong to the same lineage and live in the same village. They are absentee owners of a large oak forest, located near another village, about ten kilometres further downstream. They are debating whether to contest their rights to the grass near this village. Some of the interjections have been omitted or summarised (indicated in the text):
I have asked you before about harvesting the grass [in that oak forest] and if you want it at all. But you never did anything about it. Last year again, I asked you about it. But you did not harvest the grass. So I decided to harvest it myself. I went down there for this purpose but they did not allow me. Now I have informed you about it. It was Hakia’s son who kept me from harvesting it. The grass that grows in that oak forest belongs to all of us. It is now up to you whether you want to settle this dispute by [bringing it before a] Shariat or by traditional means (dastoor).

Why did they not let you take it and what did they say?

They claimed that the oak forest was theirs and it did not belong to anyone else at all.

Is the grass in the field or around it?

Some of it is in the field and some around it.

Are there the boundary lines (huti) around the field?

Yes. They demanded that the matter should first be settled in a Shariat or they could not help restricting us from cutting the grass.

Does Hakia’s son Kushal own the field?

Yes, the field belongs to Kushal. They said that they were willing to settle the issue in a Shariat. However, they also made it clear that they were not prepared [to hold a Shariat] right away.

Now look at that. They have been using the grass without our permission … and now they are disputing with us about it!

They have been grazing [their livestock] in the oak forest and cutting grass from it for a long time. Moreover, they have developed a [grass-] field in it. But since it is located far away from us, they do not care that it belongs to us. If the field was located here, we would have thrashed each other over it. Firstly, it is a thing of the ‘public’ [i.e., communal property], of so many people, and secondly it is located far away. This is why [they know] they can get away with it without causing a dispute. If the field were located around here, people would have dug into each other [i.e. taken up arms] to acquire it. The people [around here] have forgotten about because it is hidden from their view. We should do Shariat about it. …

You are not able to indicate who owns what on the four sides (huduud) of the field. One cannot identify the property located on the four sides of public property.

What public property? He might know [who owns] the four sides and he might have the ability to narrate [the ownership of] the four sides. Maybe, that is why he is claiming the field. He must know all the boundaries.

The Book says so. Your opinion does not prevail over the Book. Then at least we could tell them not to harvest the grass. If not, eventually, the matter will become even harder for us.

How can you hold a Shariat alone? Oh man, no one can arrange a Shariat individually [in order to settle a dispute over communal property].
Contesting the Boundaries

20 (MK) Will not a person who is not able to come, be able to authorise someone else in his place? Suppose a person appoints someone else to represent him and authorises him to carry out the distribution of the field. Even so, it is not possible to do a *Shariat* right away. The matter must be deferred to the next year.

21 (NK) No. It will not be deferred to the next year if you did not want to do so.

22 (MK) Will the ownership pass into their hands by harvesting the grass for another year – yes, yes!

23 (NK) No, it cannot be theirs. Oh God, even after they have made use of the grass there is a need to question it.

24 (MK) Have they not already been using it for a long time? Yes, but they have always harvested the grass with our permission.

25 (I) Wait. Since when have they been harvesting the grass here? They harvested it last year and the year before that without seeking our permission.

26 (MK) No, no. We were not able to harvest that grass last year and we gave it up that year willingly.

27 (I) No, no, no … I do not look good to lose to this man without bringing him before a *Shariat*. If he beat us in a *Shariat*, that would be fine. There is no disgrace (*sharam*) if he were to get it from us by a decision of the *Shariat*. No one knows. Allah knows. The Book does not see *halal* [right] or *haram* [wrong], but it only considers words of mouth [on which to base its verdict].

33 (NK) Oh God’s dear, how can one do so [i.e., appoint a *Wakil*] when it does not entirely belong to a single person. Where is your share?

34 (I) I share all of it.

35 (NK) It cannot exist in all of the oak forest. Your oath goes wrong this way.

37 (NK) The thing will be lost as soon as it is claimed to be ‘theirs’. The *Shariat* is done by *wakalat* [i.e., represented by a *Wakil*]. We have checked it and one is justified in claiming something to be ‘his’ if he is doing so on behalf of someone else, that is representing someone. If he is not a *Wakil* and many people commonly own the thing, the *Shariat* will not approve of the statement claiming that it [the forest] is ‘theirs’. However, if one person claims under oath that it [the forest] is ‘his’, he would clearly have witnessed falsely, because it does not belong to him alone but commonly to many people. A single person is not supposed to state under oath that a thing is ‘his’ when it in fact belongs to many men.

38 (I) If so, we can neither ‘do’ a *Shariat* nor can we win.

41 (NK) … I would be required to describe the location of the properties on the ‘four sides’ of the disputed property. Will it not be so? I would say that such and such a thing exists on each side of the disputed place: Oh Maulvi, the place within these boundaries is ‘mine’. If we say it is ‘ours’ instead, it would not be a true statement (*bian*) by the Book. But if I say that it is ‘mine’ … I would be required to take an oath claiming that the place lying within the stated boundaries is ‘mine’. Obviously, if it’s not mine, I would have falsely taken an oath.
The speakers recount a previous boundary dispute between two kinship groups adjudicated by Maulvis. The Shariat were forced to recognise joint ownership because it was obvious that both parties held collective title to the forest and could not appoint a person to contest their rights as his private property (Wakil). For this reason, ten men from each side testified under oath and the disputed area was divided equally among them.

45 (K) No one knows all the details needed to carry out a Shariat. There is only one man who knows all of it and that is uncle G----- of the S----- [lineage]. He has a great memory. His ancestors conducted the wesh and they explained everything to him. He has recounted all the details to me, but now I do not remember a word. These details pertain to the ancient times, but he remembers them all. We should visit him and find out these details. Even if they won the possession through a Shariat, let them take it. There is nothing to oppose then.

48 (MK) This oak forest, and not the grass, is jointly owned by us, the H--- -- [lineage] and the K----- [lineage]. Those people have developed all the land under the oak forest into fields. They irrigate it and get fodder from it.

81 (I) I swear that they will not give up a slice of it. If they do not give up, at least we can pick a dispute with them.

87 (K) No one just rushes blindly into a fight with someone about such things. It will take some time.

88 (I) Why not fight if people harvest your fodder? What else can one do? He has been harvesting the fodder for the past seven or eight years now.

89 (MR) Be patient for another couple of years.

98 (K) There will be a hundred and one witnesses for it in that case because the grass has been associated with oak forests in all the areas below K----- [village] during the wesh. If witnesses are not provided, the opponent will have to state under oath that the grass has not been associated with oak forests but with the fields.

107 (I) Who would have a Shariat executed by Maulvi M----- [reference to a particular Maulvi] in Kuz Palas? He is an honourless man (begherat).

108 (MR) A cousin of my mother once told me that someone bribed the Maulvi with Rs 5,000. He gave a verdict in his favour. [In another case] a man bribed the Maulvi with his walnut tree and the Maulvi decided in his favour.

109 (K) This Shariat cannot be handled with one Maulvi. It would take three or four Maulvis together so that the matter is resolved forever.

128 (I) Let there pass twenty years or forty years, as long as we have a claim over it. Eight or nine years have already passed.

129 (K) If they tend it even for a hundred years, it cannot become theirs.

130 (NK) Pay attention. If something were in the stomach of someone else, he would always think about it.

138 NK) Such things cannot be won just by quarrelling.
Contesting the Boundaries

139 (I) Nothing can be achieved just by crying if one does not have strength in one's arse [i.e., a strong will].

148 (MK) It is not a matter of making a verdict. We are discussing the merits and demerits of having a Shariat.

149 (I) It is only a matter of nattering.

150 (NK) This discussion is important in order to reach a reasonable standpoint – inquiring about what they might say and what others might say and what might make them lose the Shariat. There is no benefit in quarrelling over it among us.

The discussion begins when one man makes the rest of the group aware that their collective rights to grass are being violated and admonishes the others to settle the issue by taking it to the Shariat (1). They discuss the centrality of the boundaries that are critical to establish ownership (6). The other party will not allow anyone else to collect the grass (7), but are willing to settle the matter with a Shariat (9). This, as one man says, is a challenge to their ownership and tantamount to beginning a formal dispute (10). Because the oak forest is located far away, they have let the matter slip from their attention. The discussion therefore turns to which line of action will help them win it back in a Shariat. They know that the other party will testify to their version of ownership and find witnesses who support it (17). The longer they let the other party harvest the grass, the more difficult it will be to contest ownership (22). The opposing party can rightly claim that no one has been complaining.

The problem is that since the oak forest is jointly owned by three lineages, they cannot identify the pieces of land that belong to the individual shareholders (16). And because they hold collective title to the forest in the form of shares, neither can they claim private ownership to it as individuals (37). If they choose one man to represent them in a Shariat (20), he cannot claim to be the owner of the forest without committing perjury (37). The men recount an instance involving two kinship groups where joint ownership to forest was acknowledged in a Shariat (42–44). Still, it is questionable whether this would be applicable in this case, because it would involve individual versus plural legal entities. The men never return to this point again in their conversation. In order to find a way out of the problem, they contemplate soliciting advice from an elder who knows the details of the last wesh (45). This might enable them to prove that the oak forests were distributed before the fields in the last wesh, thereby legitimising the pre-eminence of the oak forest for rights to grass. The problem remains that they hold collective title to the oak forest together with two other lineages.
Violence and Belonging

(48). The main protagonist is eager to have them assert their right to the grass and, if necessary, to start a dispute over it (81), but he is restrained by the others (87, 89). They know that a case can be lost by the other party bribing the Maulvi adjudicating it. This is a critical resource issue and will require at least three Maulvis and lengthy deliberations (109). For this reason, they discuss who among them can be trusted with a verdict and who are known to accept bribes (107–8). The main protagonist reiterates that the claim to grass is not diminished by the passing of time (128). The point is to show strength and that nothing can be won unless one is being forceful (88, 139). All the men know that it will be difficult to win the case in a Shariat. The custom of claiming rights to grass on the basis of forest ownership is losing credibility. The main protagonist complains that none of them are serious about the matter and only ‘nattering’ (149). One man counters this by pointing to the fact that they need to examine the case before committing themselves to a Shariat (150).

What is at stake in this case is the right to grass, not to secure it for immediate use. As the transcript shows, the other party used to ask permission before collecting the grass (25). The asking of permission represents an admission of the others’ ownership. By the same token, not asking permission is a negation of ownership and a concealed challenge, ‘and now they are getting into a dispute with us about it’ (10). They do not need the grass now, but they want to see their rights to the grass affirmed. If the grass fields had been closer to home, they would not have been prepared to sort out their differences in a Shariat but ‘thrashed’ each other. Still, there is a certain degree of ambivalence concerning the use of force. Those who are involved are reluctant to risk open confrontation and want to restrain the use of force. The case illustrates the contingency that characterises the property disputes. The indeterminacy persists also after holding a Shariat because the losing party often seeks to overthrow the verdict by the use of force. To illustrate this, it is instructive to look more closely at an ownership dispute that turned violent.

Some years ago a dispute erupted between two men owning fields lying adjacent to each other. The fields lay near a large oak forest located on the hills above the fields. For a long time the two owners had used the oak forest together. Suddenly, the landowner belonging to the Salera lineage lay a claim to the oak forest. According to him, all the trees were his property because ‘he had acted as the owner of the trees for a long time’. The other landowner belonging to the Sutra lineage, rejected this claim and vowed
that he was the sole owner of the trees above because the fields had been in his possession for a long time.

To settle the dispute, the matter was brought before a Maulvi hailing from a neighbouring valley. After the Shariat proceedings the Maulvi ruled that the claimants should divide the oak forest equally. The Salera man refused to act upon the Shariat verdict and shortly after made an attack on a relative of his opponent. A year later, the Sutra man avenged the attack by severely beating a young man of the Salera lineage. This young man sustained serious head injuries from which he never fully recovered. This incident fuelled the conflict and both parties enacted a ban on cultivation and sought house confinement. Early the next spring, the intermediaries managed to broker a cease-fire, thereby allowing them to come out of hiding and to sow maize. A cease-fire normally gives immunity against attacks, but the Sutra decided to move temporarily to a lower lying village. During the cease-fire, some of them paid a visit to the main village. There they stopped to offer their prayers in a local mosque. They removed their guns and bandoleers and hung them on the wall. Having finished their prayers, they emerged from the mosque and assembled outside. There they were ambushed by a group of Salera men who attacked them with clubs. One Sutra man was killed on the spot and another died a few days later from his injuries. Following this incident, both sides went into house confinement again. The men that were assaulted filed a warrant for the arrest of four of the attackers with the district police but none have been arrested. The case has become a matter of principle. The main contestants are supported by their kinsmen. The conflict therefore has the potential to escalate further. Despite the scanty details, it is evident that the claims of the two contestants lacked precedence and neither of them was sanctioned in the Shariat. This can explain why there was a need to resort to force which, in due course, violated the sanctity of the cease-fire and escalated into a tit-for-tat process of revenge and retribution.

**TENURIAL COMPLEXITY**

The complexity of land tenure in the Palas valley is an unforeseen consequence of the attempt to ensure inter-group equality by instituting the wesh system of property allocation. A means to this end was making the spatial distribution of oak forest non-contiguous with the resident patterns. The inconvenience of this arrangement was, to considerable degree, ameliorated by the use of lease contracts. Still, it contributed to
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tensions between the non-resident owners of oak forests and the resident owners of the agricultural fields. This tension was exacerbated by revoking one of the principles of customary land tenure in a situation of economic change, jural plurality, resulting in worsening social relations. These changes focus on the centrality of boundaries, both physically inscribed and socially mediated.

Many of the oak-forest disputes in Dáro are the result of ill-defined boundaries. Sillitoe (1999: 332, 335) has noted that:

The ill-defined nature of boundaries is an integral aspect, maybe even an inevitable outcome, of containment in an acephalous context of power plays that might try to extend control over access to productive land resources.

... It is axiomatic in acephalous contexts, with their emphasis on equality, that the existence of boundaries should be diminished and blurred, thus reducing the demarcation of dominant relations.

As Sillitoe argues, the system of acephalous political organisation is incompatible with clearly demarcated boundaries and precludes the formation of territorial bases and domination. Sillitoe's analysis is suggestive of the underlying reasons behind the many property disputes in Dáro. One could add to Sillitoe's analysis that the blurring of the boundaries incites male posturing, leading to violent clashes and homicide, a problem that afflicts other acephalous societies too.

The examples presented in this chapter point to a shift in the tenurial boundaries and the growing importance of private property at the expense of communal land entitlement. This change is resented by many, not only because it appropriates collective assets for personal gain, but, more abstractly, because it reflects the demise of communal solidarity and commensality. This is exemplified by the theft of trees or destructive harvesting of forest produce from forests owned by absentee title-holders and migrants. To claim that an asset belongs ‘to me’ implies appropriation and inequality. In comparison, claiming that it belongs ‘to us’ implies sharing and equality. The latter is a validation of patrilineal membership and an affirmation of genealogical belonging for the utilisation of natural resources. The discussion that has been reviewed in this chapter shows that the villagers spend a lot of time and energy debating the validity of land claims, examining their virtues, eliciting their weaknesses and judging their merits. This constitutes elements of a vernacular discourse on the
transformation of use-rights and, more generally, on the dissolution of common property regimes.

The examples presented in this chapter point to a tension between indigenous and introduced legal systems. Are the disputes over oak forests to be solved by local customs and the wesh or is this an issue that properly belongs in the religious domain of a Shariat? In the same vein, should the oak forests be divided according to the principles of equivalence (hor wesh) or proportionality (tang wesh)? They draw their legitimacy from the wesh and the Quran respectively. There is increasing resort to Islamic jurisprudence and the wesh is no longer the only source of legitimacy in land claims and land disputes although it is still the master narrative of customary land tenure. On account of being genealogically ‘closer’ and temporally ‘nearer’ to the last wesh, the most knowledgeable among the elder men are the key moderators of the wesh narrative. Because of its status, the narrative can be invoked as a challenge to the authority of the Islamic jurisprudence mediated by the religious scholars. There is an ambivalence regarding the veracity of the Maulvis, who are criticised for insincerity and hypocrisy. The frequently heard denigration of the Maulvis can be interpreted as a negation of their claim to superior status and higher rank which, in the final instance, makes it possible to disregard their verdict.

The most striking feature of the disputes over oak forests is the absence of compromise. Neither of the cases explored here (nor any of those discussed earlier) were settled through compromise. A plausible explanation of this concerns the boundary of the ‘self’ (Keiser 1991) and what Abbink has termed an ‘ethos of assertiveness’ (2000b: 82). The men are compelled to defend their rights, not only for material reasons, but, more importantly, in order not to lose face. Once a claim is made public, it cannot be retracted without loss of honour. A compromise is usually only acceptable after a gunfight and when there is an equivalence in the numbers of persons injured or killed, or, more abstractly, a ‘balanced reciprocity’. Otherwise, accepting a compromise is equated with weakness. A weak person or group is always vulnerable and open to blame, as summed up in the local proverb:

\[wui kamzor de khar phutaano\]

water flows down to where the land is weak

This can be linked to an underlying social competitiveness whereby the actors seek to hinder and foreclose the social ascendancy of fellow villagers.
As pointed out by Woodburn (1982: 432), egalitarianism cannot be taken for granted but must be affirmed and validated:

People are well aware of the possibility that individuals or groups within their own egalitarian societies may try to acquire more wealth, to assert more power or to claim more status than other people, and are vigilant in seeking to prevent this.

Nowhere is this tension more visible than in the commercial timber logging of conifer trees. The prospect of windfall earnings and affluence contributes to a ‘politics of envy’ over the distribution and exchange of wealth. Integral to this process is the making and un-making of the forest boundaries that are used to delineate forest ownership. The contingency of the boundaries and the tension between descent and locality make it possible to examine the social construction of belonging and how processes of social exclusion and inclusion influence it. This is the topic of the next chapter.
CHAPTER 9

Brooding over the Big Trees

It was the time of Noah. His people were very against him. Noah was very annoyed with them. Then God decided to destroy them. Some people say that Noah had planted a cedar (*phuluúizo*) that grew to become a tree in one hundred years. Others say that it had grown naturally. However, God ordered Noah to fell this tree, make wooden planks made from it and build a boat. No one could cut the tree. There was a man named Hesh. He was so big that the hair on his head touched the sky. He could never get his fill from eating. Noah asked him to fell the tree and promised that he would give him his fill as a wage for doing so. He was not sure that Noah would be able to give him his fill. But Noah told him that he would give him food to his satisfaction. God had granted much strength to Hesh. He broke the tree into large logs, like breaking sugarcane, into the required size and, working with his nails, made wooden planks from all these logs.

This introduction to the story of Noah’s Ark was narrated to me by Songali, one of the famous storytellers in Dáro. It testifies to the mythical and practical significance of the forest for the local people and their long-time association with things of the forest and in the forest. Huge conifers dominate the interior of Dáro. They are never out of view. On their yearly migration cycle, the villagers pass through a succession of forest belts. Moving beyond the broad-leaved forests, the landscape becomes dominated by mixed conifer forests. The villagers refer to them as *zangal.* It is the most important, valuable, and contested natural resource in the Palas valley. In this chapter my intention is to provide a provisional history of two centuries (c. 1800–present) of commercial timber logging in Palas. As I will show, modern timber harvesting delineates the forests into identifiable ‘compartments’ which are suitable for commercial forestry but at odds with the local system of joint forest ownership. This causes intra-tribal conflict and inter-valley animosity.
Most of the adult men have a keen and encyclopaedic knowledge of the forests, their location and details of past disputes as they pertain to the whole valley. Intimate knowledge of forest ownership in time and space is also common among the men who have settled permanently or semi-permanently outside the valley. Covering more than 40,000 ha, the mixed conifer forests of the Palas valley are remarkable for their size, density and unbroken sweep (Figure 9.1). Many different conifer and deciduous tree species grow in the zangal, but there is a preponderance of four species of conifer trees, referred to as the ‘big trees’ (bāra tōbī), that is the defining feature of zangal.²

The zangal is a distinct forest category, but the ownership and use-rights to zangal cannot be understood without reference to other categories, such as the broad-leaved forest and the agricultural fields. Ultimately, ownership of the forest and the economic benefits from it depends on belonging to the Shin community (ulsi’ya). The symbolic importance of the conifer trees
Brooding over the Big Trees

is evident from the ‘Tree of Life’ motif painted on or carved into beams and door-frames and, occasionally, engraved into boulders and rocks. In addition to serving as an archetypal motif, tree symbolism is important to religious imagery.

The motif adorns the prayer niche (mirab) in the mosque at Shared, the oldest and most prominent wooden mosque in Dáro. The big trees are also practically important and provide firewood, logs for cantilever bridges, agricultural implements and, most importantly, the timber that is used for the local dwellings. As explained in the previous chapter, there is continuity between rights in the broad-leaved forest and use-rights in the conifer forest growing above it. As in the case of the broad-leaved forests, this means that non-resident lineages are custodians of the conifer forests. To ease the practical problems this creates the resident clans and lineages enjoy extensive reciprocal usufruct rights in the conifer forest. They can log trees for personal use without permission. However, if a large amount of logs are needed, for example to build a new house, they will seek permission from the custodians. The timber (yoom) is usually free but the custodians might request that timber is not wasted. Customary selective logging of single trees to meet local timber requirements has hardly made a dent in the forest cover. This form of logging is referred to as bidor, a term that is taken from the term for ‘thinning’ of the maize fields.

Being essentially untouched by the colonial forest policies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the conifer forests of the Palas valley were not so much managed as left untouched. The system of forest ownership in Palas is a remnant of the former system of periodic re-allotment (wesh). When the wesh ended about a century ago, the vast conifer forests were left as the joint property of the two main tribal groups, the Darma and Khuka Manka quom. The indigenous land settlement system (taqsimaat) divided agricultural land and oak forest among the patrilineages, but left the conifer forests as the joint property of the Darma and Khuka Manka. The dissolution of communal land tenure did not dissociate the forest from other categories in the joint estate. The right of ownership (i.e., to a share) in the forest remains rooted in a proved genealogical link to agricultural land at the time of the wesh. Because agricultural land can only be owned by the Shin, forest ownership is likewise linked to the owning of shares (baagô taagô) and being a member of the community of shareholders (ulsi’ya). Customarily, the custodians of all the forests are the ulsi’ya, that is, the members of the Darma and Khuka Manka quom. They include resident
and migrant men recognised as shareholders in the joint landed estate. For the past twenty years commercial timber logging has made the forest economically important and led to changes in the local system of forest ownership. In many cases, these changes pose intractable dilemmas that can only be solved after lengthy negotiations, featuring local innovation as well as continuity with the principles established by the wesh. The two watersheds that make up the Palas valley, Kuz Palas and Dáro, have not come equally far in this process. In the following, I give an explanation of why this process poses problems and has increased the importance of belonging to the valley, or more specifically to the peer-group of landowners.

**EARLY TIMBER LOGGING**

A century ago the villagers did not exploit the forest for monetary gain, nor were they fully aware of the high exchange value of logged timber. The earliest record of timber logging is from around 1800 (Kohistani 1998: 106). The timber trade along the upper Indus grew, and by the mid-nineteenth century the Palas valley had become an important supplier of timber (Stebbing 1922: 468). The timber logging was in the hands of the Kaka Khel, a group of timber merchants who held a near monopoly in the timber trade in the upper Indus and Swat rivers. From around 1884, the Kaka Khel merchants undertook sporadic logging in the more accessible parts of the Palas valley. A village elder remembers that:

> In the old days, anyone could get a contractor from the ‘down’ country to arrange the timber logging. No one would object to it. The contractor took most of the money. Only the people whose land was used to bring down the timber were paid a little. Mostly the people from the Mian family from Kaka Khel, Nowshera, used to be the contractors.

The Kaka Khel timber merchants took advantage of the fact that, initially, abundant timber resources were free for legitimate users and could be logged without remunerating owners. From the turn of the century, the timber merchants shifted their attention to the more accessible timbers in Dir Kohistan (Godfrey 1912) and Swat Kohistan (Parnell 1928). The system of social organisation also played a major role. The ‘village republics’ with their rivalries and vendettas were a hindrance to effective timber logging. The timber firms preferred to deal with feudal rulers and petty chieftains whose authority could be counted upon to minimise the financial risk.  

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This can explain why timber logging by the Kaka Khel merchants made a resurgence in the Palas valley during the 1930s. At the time, Dáro was temporarily under the spell of a few influential villagers, deferentially referred to as Maliks. One of the best-remembered men is Kutu Malik, a tall and fearless man whose lineage for a period dominated central Dáro. Like his father before him, Kutu was an influential big man (*baro musha*) who periodically organised timber logging in the valley. An elder man remembers that ‘No one could stop them if they wanted to do anything. They were very strong.’ With the help of Mian Karam Shah, a Kaka Khel timber merchant, Kutu Malik brushed aside opposition and undertook a series of timber loggings in Dáro. Most of the timber logging was concentrated in Chōr, a side-valley that was a disputed territory with the Khan of Alai. The meagre revenues from timber logging were considered mere celebration money (*sobot*) and only distributed among the influential men and the elders. By the time of Kutu Malik’s death in 1960 the influence of his lineage had waned and the timber logging subsided. After Kutu Malik’s demise it was no longer possible for a clan or tribe to unilaterally log timber and appropriate the profit. The few who tried were fined and forced to share the proceeds with all the shareholders in the valley. This reduced profitability to such a degree that indigenous commercial timber logging vanished.

**COMMERCIAL FORESTRY**

In 1957 the forests of the Palas valley were transferred to the Hazara Tribal Forest Division and the local forests declared *Guzara* Forests. This is an idiosyncratic category in the sense that forest management is vested in the Forest Department, while the villagers have nominal ownership. As legitimate shareholders, they are entitled to proceeds from the sale of timber (‘royalties’). The proceeds range from 60 to 80 per cent of the revenues with the remainder going to the provincial government.

In order to hinder illegal logging, commercial timber logging was banned until 1965. In the late 1960s, timber logging picked up again, only to be stopped for a second time in 1973. This time the ban was imposed to prevent the timber merchants (‘forest contractors’) from logging the timber. In the early 1970s the Palas valley was still a traditional society with minimal contact with the outer world. The major change came with the completion of the Karakoram Highway through Indus Kohistan in the late 1970s. The bridge across the Indus near Pattan was completed during the construction of the KKH, but it took another decade before the narrow jeep road reached...
the end of Kuz Palas and the entrance to Dáro. This marked the dawn of large-scale commercial timber harvesting.

The work of surveying the forests of Indus Kohistan began in the late 1960s, using aerial photography (Malik, Jan, and Khan 1972). Only after the completion of the Karakoram Highway was it possible for department foresters to begin ground surveys. In 1978 the first team of surveyors mapped the forests of the Palas valley in order to prepare the first forest management plan, known as a ‘Working Plan’, for the valley. The plan is prepared after field surveys and is used to determine the spatial extent of the commercially exploitable forests and the amount of timber to be logged. The local owners accepted that the forest management was in the hands of the provincial Forest Department, but would not allow a semi-autonomous agency, the Forest Development Corporation (FDC), to conduct the logging. The plans to let the FDC take charge of timber harvesting sparked a revolt in Indus Kohistan, during which the villagers blockaded the Karakoram Highway. The protest against the new timber policy spread to the Malakand Division, where the army was called in to control hundreds of armed tribesmen (Keiser 1991: 101). The force of this protest forced the provincial government to concede to the demands and amend the Hazara Forest Act (Knudsen 1999b). This allowed the local shareholders to organise the timber harvesting through the creation of Forest Harvesting Societies. With this change, commercial forest exploitation was allowed to begin.

**DIVIDING THE BIG TREES**

With the expectation that commercial timber harvesting would commence around 1982, the Dáro villagers changed the rules that until then had guided ownership and use of timber from the big trees. They first declared all the big trees the property of the shareholders (**ulsî’ya**). The members of the menial castes (**be’zåat**) who until then had been allowed to log timber for their own use, were no longer permitted to do so. Furthermore, to prevent anyone among the **ulsî’ya** from logging timber for personal profit, all the big trees were declared the joint property of the **ulsî’ya**, even those growing on privately owned land. There were isolated cases of opposition to this decision, but in the end all were brought round to the same view. In a short time, these changes tightened the ownership of the big trees among the **ulsî’ya**, but also prevented any attempt to log single trees for personal gain. The Dáro villagers also changed the established practice concerning claims to forest ownership. Previously, a villager buying land anywhere in Palas
Brooding over the Big Trees

would claim ownership of the adjacent broad-leaved forest, and beyond that, the conifer forest. From now on, the villagers decided, such claims would be rejected. This had the effect of divorcing land acquisition from ownership rights in the adjacent forest. This change was probably instituted to prevent speculation by the wealthy landowners for the purpose of gaining rights in the forest. 4 The timing of this change (c. 1983) coincides with the completion of the first forest management plan ('Working Plan') for the Palas valley. This suggests that re-drawing the boundaries and tightening ownership to the four most valuable tree species was undertaken in anticipation of commercial timber logging.

By 1983, the prospects for commercial timber logging seemed brighter than ever, but the the villagers knew that logging would generate ownership conflicts. In order to avert competing claims to ownership, they decided to subdivide the ownership. The Cerata and the Poensa, the two tribes (qabila) that constitute the Darma quom (Figure 9.2), therefore adopted the old principle of division by 'lot' (hoor wesh). They agreed that all the conifer forests on the northern side of the valley would constitute one lot, and those on the southern side another. Following lengthy deliberations, it was agreed that the Poensa would be custodians of the northern lot and the Cerata of the

Figure 9.2: Overview of main genealogy (lineages not shown)
southern and both would be responsible for subdividing ownership of the lots among their constituent clans (*taabín*). The decision has yet to be effectuated. The reason it has not been implemented is because of the problems it poses at a lower level of genealogical segmentation.

In principle the two tribes or ‘sides’ (*chaar*, literally, ‘side’) of the Darma *quom* – the Cerata and the Poensa – have agreed to begin subdividing the forests among themselves. The problem has been finding a principle for the division that everybody can agree to. There are two possibilities, but none serve all the forest owners equally well (see Chapter 8). The generally accepted way of dividing the forest is through division by ‘lots’ or ‘halves’ (*hoor wesh*). This benefits the smaller groups that receive half of the total, the same amount in absolute terms as their bigger counterparts, though more proportionally of course, which is why the bigger groups have begun to resist this method of division.

The alternative would be to give all the shareholders an equal amount (or part) of the total (*tang wesh*). This benefits the bigger groups with more shareholders. For the same reason, the smaller of the constituent lineages resist *tang wesh* on the grounds that they will lose their rightful half of the total. Neither *hor wesh* nor *tang wesh* is therefore uniformly accepted. When the Cerata moved to divide their part among the constituent clans (*taabín*), the Sorma refused to share a ‘lot’ with their binary clan, the Phirye. Similarly, among the Poensa, the Derkhana refused to share a lot with the Bohe Mugla. The rationale behind these problems becomes clearer when considering the approximate number of constituent shareholders.

The Sorma have almost twice as many shareholders as the Phirye, so after the internal distribution the Sorma shareholders receive smaller amounts than the Phirye. So division by *hor wesh* is not acceptable to them either. The Derkhana have almost four times as many shareholders as the Bohe Mugla and therefore also oppose the division by *hor wesh*. The Sorma and Derkhana demand division by *tang wesh*. The smaller clans reject this and challenge the claim to numerical inferiority. They argue that there are no trustworthy population records, and that nobody knows the exact number of shareholders. The only way to find out would be to count all the shares (*hisab kitab*, literally, ‘taking stock of shares’) in each of the constituent patrilineages. There is a general unwillingness do this for fear that it might undermine vernacular notions of reciprocal strength. For the time being, there is a preference for keeping such information opaque and therefore contestable. In the meantime:
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Everyone [in Dáro] is thinking of [ways to] implement the division of the forests. It will take time but it can be worked out since both the tribes (qabilá) are willing to do it. However, they are not in a hurry to do so because there are no roads. So, there are no prospects of timber logging in Dáro. The people are not able to reap any benefit from these forests. For these reasons, the local people are depressed. They are getting poorer to the extent that some people have sold their agricultural fields to buy food.

Unable to initiate commercial timber logging, the villagers in Dáro have closely followed developments in Kuz Palas. The extension of the jeep-road to Sherakot brought commercial timber logging to their doorstep. The Kuz Palas residents were ready to cash in the windfall earnings from timber logging. Or so they believed.

LOGGING IN KUZ PALAS

In Dáro, the Darma quom forms a large majority and constitutes almost 100 per cent of the population. Because of wesh entitlements to land, many Darma families also live in Kuz Palas. Presently, the Darma constitute about 50 per cent the population there. The other half is made up of the Khuka Manka quom. The presence of two different quom in the same valley has necessitated the division of forest ownership. The Khuka Manka and the Darma therefore decided to subdivide the forest in Kuz Palas between them. By following the principle of hoor wesh, they identified all the major forests in Kuz Palas, grouped them into comparable forest ‘lots’ (hoor) and divided the lots by common consent. The Khuka Manka proceeded to divide the forests internally among their own constituent tribes and clans. Shortly after, the Darma followed suit, and split the forests in Kuz Palas among themselves by assembling two forest lots of comparable size. The two lots were divided among the constituent tribes, Cerata and Poensa, by the use of the toss (tiiuli). Using the same procedure, the Cerata and Poensa later subdivided ownership among their own constituent clans (Figure 9.2).

One problem, however, remained unresolved. The four Darma clans had constituent lineages whose members lived in both valleys. Should those living in Dáro be included as co-owners of the forests located in Kuz Palas? To both sides this was a highly emotive issue. Those who lived in Dáro considered themselves legitimate shareholders to the forests. Without any timber logging in Dáro, they also needed the money. Those living in Kuz Palas knew that if they included the Dáro segment there would be less money for each shareholder. When one of the Darma tribes in Kuz Palas undertook their
first big commercial timber logging they first tried to keep it a secret. This was bound to fail. Here is the reaction of a Darma elder in Dáro when he discovered that timber logging had started without their consent:

I felt as if I had been shot in my heart. I became furious. How come, to think that they cut the trees without consulting me. I – an owner – belonging to Dáro; my ancestors were residents of Kuz Palas and migrated to Dáro after the last wesh; we still own land there that was given to us during the wesh. Do not people discuss such matters with the owners? I am a man who attends and speaks at jirga assemblies and I am entitled to a share from the logging of these forests.

Within days, many men from his tribe walked from Dáro to Kuz Palas and took control of the logged timber. This provoked a big dispute in which the Khuka Manka was asked to mediate. After five days of intense discussions it was decided that the constituent patrilineages in Dáro and Kuz Palas would share the proceeds from timber logging across the valley boundary. The patrilineages vary greatly in size and range, from five to more than three hundred families. After another round of heated discussions it was decided that the principles of tang wesh and hor wesh should be used simultaneously. In order to understand how this decision was reached we must consider the details of the case.

Two separate compartments had been selected for logging, both of them owned by the same clan. One of the compartments was big, the other smaller. Initially, the five lineages that constituted the clan (taabín), decided that the proceeds from the bigger of the two compartments should be divided according to tang wesh, thereby benefiting the bigger patrilineages. The proceeds from the smaller compartments should be divided by a hor wesh that would benefit the smaller lineages. They also agreed that, in future, proceeds from timber logging should be split according to tang wesh. When the timber logging was nearing completion, some of the smaller lineages changed their mind about the agreement. They demanded that the proceeds from both compartments should be shared according to tang wesh, thereby benefiting all the shareholders to the same degree. The bigger lineages would not accept this proposal. In a show of force, they chased away the logging crew and took control of the logged timber.

At first, the parties to the conflict engaged in lengthy jirga and Shariat negotiations. When these failed, they turned to indictment and litigation in the district courts, including an appeal to the Peshawar High Court. After two years of pleading the case in court, the conflict escalated and, at
home, the parties traded gunfire, which led to bans on cultivation and house confinement. A year later, there were new attempts to find a negotiated solution, meetings with the District Commissioner, a Shariat in his office in Dassu,\(^5\) and a number of informal meetings with the contractor in Peshawar and Rawalpindi. In the course of the protracted conflict the contractor was going broke and losing, by his own account, at least Rs 60,000 per day. Desperate to move the timber and recover his expenditures, he supposedly paid more than Rs 200,000 in bribes and secret under-hand deals to various people, hoping they could persuade the owners to release the logged timber. Finally, five years after the dispute started, the timber was released and the case resolved through the intervention on an influential local politician. He made them agree that the money from the bigger compartment should be divided equally (hor wesh) among the five patrilineages, while the proceeds from the smaller should be divided on the basis of shares (tang wesh). The bigger lineages were unhappy with this decision, but felt compelled to accept it. Internally, the lineages continued to dispute over who had accepted bribes from the contractor. All in all, the deal earned each shareholder about Rs 1,000 and an average sized family close to Rs 12,000.

LOGGING AND DISPUTES

During the first decade of commercial timber harvesting, the total timber volume that was extracted from the Palas valley was significantly lower than from neighbouring valleys. In the period 1980–88, less than 3 per cent of the 5.5 million cubic feet (155,763 cubic meters) planned for extraction was harvested because of the frequent ‘intertribal disputes over ownership to forest’ (Mushtaq 1989: xiv, 38). This, together with the valley’s inaccessibility, had caused timber logging to lag far behind what had been planned by the Forest Department.\(^6\) The local people wanted to log their forests, but were prevented from initiating large-scale logging due to the persistent ownership disputes. The timber that had been logged had not alleviated local poverty because the system of timber logging deprives the owners of most of the market value of the logged trees (Knudsen 1999b).

Following the amendment of the Hazara Forest Act, timber logging was supposed to be carried out by Forest Harvesting Societies, usually referred to simply as ‘committees’ (kâmitis). At least one person from each clan (taabín) is included on the committee. The forest regulations require the committee to pay the cost of logging timber in advance of market sale. This is a huge amount of money, which the villagers, for obvious reasons, do not have. To
underwrite such expenditures, the committee could seek to obtain a bank loan in the nearest town. However, because Islam condemns bank loans with interest, they are left with the option of accepting advance payments from the forest contractors. The contractor and the committee negotiate the price for logged timber. The price is given in rupees per cubic feet for each of the big trees. On reaching an agreement, the committee elects one man to act as their legal representative (Wakil). He will enter into the contract with the contractor on behalf of the tribes included in the deal. The Wakil signs the agreement by affixing his thumbprint to a legal paper. If there are problems during timber logging, the committee will be responsible for dealing with them. It is customary for the contractor to pay ‘celebration money’ (sobot) to the members of the committee as well as some money in advance to be distributed among the owners. The remainder is paid after completing the felling and transport of the timber to market. When the contractor deposits the advance money for timber logging with the Forest Department he becomes the de facto owner of the trees included in the deal.

The lack of forest roads usually makes it necessary to transport the logs to the nearest road or stream on timber slides (patruu) that are built on-site for the purpose by skilled lumberjacks. Before the logs can be slid down the slides they are squared with a saw or an adze. The dressing of the squared log or ‘scantling’ (sleeper, chali) wastes from 50 to 60 per cent of the original volume. This does not affect the contractor’s profit. He only pays for the amount of timber that remains after the conversion to scantlings (‘converted volume’). Moreover, the price to the locals is usually only between 20–25 per cent of the open market price. After transporting and selling the scantlings on the provincial timber market, the profit is divided between the government (20 per cent) and the contractor (80 per cent). Having previously bought the trees, it is the contractor who collects the villager’s share of the profit. The difference between the low price paid for the standing trees and the high market value of the logged timber on the open market makes the contractor’s net profit four to five times higher than the amount accruing to the villagers. In addition, the contractor covers risks on his investment by extensive over-cutting, either with or without the consent of the villagers. Adding to the damage, the logging is often concentrated in the more accessible parts of the compartment, which results in local clear-cutting and collateral damage to remaining trees.

The Palas villagers pin their hopes of a better life on income from timber logging as the ‘green gold’, but, in reality, realise only a fraction of their
timber’s worth. Due to the advance sale of standing trees to the forest contractors, they are paid less than 10 per cent of the timber’s market value. In addition to being economically unrewarding, it is illegal and a violation of the forest laws. Nonetheless, the villagers in Palas prefer it because they do not trust the Forest Department with logging their trees. They know that although the market price is a lot higher, there is a big risk that their share of the money will be squandered or withheld by the corrupt officials. This makes it safer to sell the trees to a contractor who, although he pays only a fraction of the timber’s worth, is accountable to the owners. This strategy is also reinforced by the frequent malpractices, frauds, and timber logging scams which afflict the provincial forestry sector and deprive the locals of their rightful share of the earnings.

The Palas villagers are aware of the negative impacts of commercial timber logging: destructive harvesting, systematic over-cutting and loss of non-timber forest products (HJP 1992). The system of joint ownership makes the negative impact of timber logging disproportionally affect those who live nearer to the compartment being logged. The majority of the owners live elsewhere and benefit from the income from timber logging. The minority are unable to oppose timber logging despite it being to their detriment. Despite this idiosyncrasy, all the villagers have one thing in common. They have an immediate need for cash income and therefore cannot afford not to log timber or to wait for better payment in the future. For this reason, the Palas villagers rejoice even at the meagre earnings they make from timber logging. The distribution of the celebration money and the proceeds from logged timber give a temporary relief from economic worries. Most of the money is spent on clearing outstanding debts for household expenditures, loans from fellow villagers and in some instances, automatic arms. The Palas villagers take great pains in distributing the proceeds among all the legitimate shareholders. In some cases, the distribution can take years to complete but, in the end, both the resident and migrant shareholders receive their share of the money.

INCONGRUENT BOUNDARIES

In Dáro, there has traditionally been an important difference in the ownership of broad-leaved and conifer forest. The former is identified with reference to the title-holding lineage, for example the ‘Chuthio’ baando (i.e., the Chutia’s oak forest), but the latter is referred to by its location, for example the ‘Devaone zangal’ (i.e., the ‘Devan conifer forest’).
other words, the naming of the conifer forest underlines its ownership as communal rather than private. The introduction of commercial timber logging is about to change this; clans and lineages are staking out claims to forest ownership. Forest ownership has become a highly politicised topic and foremost on the agenda of the villagers. The location of the boundaries has also become a central topic of discussion at the guesthouse where the men sit together and discuss social matters. In general, the boundaries are traced along major landscape features; the exact boundaries are difficult to pinpoint, however. The absence of boundaries was formerly of little importance. The introduction of commercial timber harvesting has made forest boundaries crucially important. As I mentioned earlier, the forest ‘Working Plan’ is prepared after field surveys to determine the spatial extent of commercially exploitable forests. The boundaries are drawn on a topographical map, and each forest compartment is given a name and a number for future identification (Figure 9.3).

When forest compartments are delineated local people are usually not consulted, nor is the local system of ownership taken into account. The boundaries usually follow prominent surface features to ensure convenient
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size for timber harvesting operations. This makes the compartments rather small, and much smaller than the size it is possible to hold under joint ownership. The compartment boundaries are therefore not congruent with the vernacular forest lots (hoot) and their boundaries (bana). This has several implications. If a compartment (or compartments) selected for logging straddles two forest lots, it gives rise to a boundary conflict between the owning clans. If the compartment falls within one large forest lot, the lineages that constitute the clan disagree over whose parts are circumscribed by the lot. A solution could be to proceed with the internal partitioning to make the forest lots smaller, but the villagers say that this would create too many boundaries and hence more boundary conflicts. The division of the forests, people believe, cannot proceed beyond the level of the clan (taabín) or else they will be too small. In the case of boundary disputes, the parties involved appoint their own forest guards, whose duty it is to protect the forests. In some cases the guards are paid, but those who are shareholders are obliged to stand guard without any remuneration. Their primary duty is to stop illegal logging.

In a recent boundary dispute two clans, the Bohe Mugla (Darma quom) and the Khota (Khuka Manka quom), disagreed over the boundary in a forest compartment located in Kuz Palas that straddled their forest lots. In the course of the dispute, the Bohe Mugla moved the logged timber down to the nearest road without the consent of the Khota. In order to halt the transport to the market, the Khota filed a complaint (FIR) with the police. Shortly after, they set fire to the timber, which burnt to ashes in a huge bonfire. The watchman, who had been hired by the contractor to look after the timber, was shot and killed when he attempted to stop the arsonists. The case was resolved by the intervention of an influential politician. The timber was deemed to belong to the Bohe Mugla and the Khota were therefore faulted for setting it on fire. Accepting blame, they agreed to compensate (saaz) the family of the deceased watchman and offered the forest contractor an equal amount of timber from their own forest lot.

Not only is the boundary of the compartment important, but also where it is located. This especially concerns the compartments that are situated along the ridge between Dáro and Kuz Palas. In order to understand this, it is necessary to consider the boundary between Dáro and Kuz Palas. From the time of the wesh, the boundary between Dáro and Kuz Palas does not strictly follow the topography of the watersheds (Figure 9.1, valley boundary, on p. 158). Instead, the dividing line is an indigenous political boundary.
which, during the early and midnineteenth century, oscillated back and forth depending on the status of the fierce inter-valley feuds. In the late nineteenth century the indigenous land settlement (*taqsimaat*) established the boundary in its present position.  

As I have explained earlier (Chapter ), the boundary was never demarcated and follows major ridges, peaks and rivers. When commercial timber logging commenced around 1980, boundary disputes re-emerged. On various occasions, the Khuka Manka in Kuz Palas and the Darma in Dáro have claimed ownership of the forest compartments located along the boundary separating the valleys. Moreover, due to the much bigger and pristine forests in Dáro, the Khuka Manka of Kuz Palas have repeatedly tried to gain rights to all the forests located there. Knowing from past disputes that the boundary is inalterable, the Khuka Manka have challenged the forest proprietorship of the Darma and attempted to invalidate the boundary between the valleys as relevant for determining ownership of the conifer forest. This they have legitimised by reinterpreting and recasting the old land settlement agreement (*taqsimaat*). The Khuka Manka claim that the land settlement awarded the two *quom* reciprocal rights to the forests in Dáro and Kuz Palas. They legitimise this with reference to the reciprocal use-rights to Moru, a large meadow (Figure 9.1). The meadow lies on the Dáro side of the boundary but the Khuka Manka also use it. In response, the Darma have threatened to prevent the Khuka Manka from utilising Moru should they attempt to log timber north of the boundary. It is worth noting, however, that when the Darma and Khuka Manka are faced with external boundary violations, they support each other. In a recent forest boundary dispute between the Khuka Manka and men from Kolai, a valley to the south, the Darma and the Khuka Manka fielded almost two hundred armed men. Outgunned and overwhelmed, the Kolai opponents gave up after a short volley. They later withdrew their claim to the forest.

**SOCIAL BOUNDARIES**

The money from timber logging in Kuz Palas and, to a limited degree, in Dáro, has increased the importance of being a formal shareholder. Being able to prove ownership of agricultural land from the time of the last land distribution (*taqsimaat, wesh*) is crucial both to one’s status as a Shin as well as for claiming a share of the revenues from timber logging. Those among the migrants who leave the land in trust with someone have not invalidated the privileges accorded to them as *ulsi’ya*. They retain all their rights in the...
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forest. Those among the migrants who have sold their agricultural land or lost it to enemies and opponents have invalidated their status as ulsi’ya and forfeited their rights to a share of the proceeds from timber logging.

Due to the fact that many villagers have been forced to leave the valley and lost their land in the process, the criteria for granting rights in the proceeds from timber logging have been broadened. Those who no longer own agricultural land received in the last wesh may contest rights to a piece of arable land in the village of Shuki Ser. The special status accorded to land in Shuki Ser – a village in central Dáro – is that in this particular village the land settlement awarded all the Darma and Khuka Manka lineages a piece of the fields and arable wasteland (khil). The ability to prove ownership to a minuscule piece of arable land in Shuki Ser establishes the claimant as a bona fide shareholder and entitles him to proceeds from timber logging. If they cannot convince the resident villagers that they received any land in Shuki Ser, their final option is to establish a credible genealogical link to one of their ancestors known to have been included in the land settlement. This is usually done by giving a testimony under oath in a Shariat. Very few have contested their rights in this manner and even fewer have been successful. Being recognised as a shareholder is a matter of honour and the main reason for the strongly emotional nature of forest ownership: receiving the proceeds affirms ulsi’ya status and belonging to the community of Kuz Palas (Palsooch) or Dáro (Dárooch). As I will show in the following section, the migrants therefore go to great lengths to have their belonging affirmed and to be considered as rightful recipients of the proceeds from timber logging.

CLAIMING THEIR SHARE

In one of the first episodes of commercial timber logging to be carried out in Kuz Palas, the key question was whether the lineages of the Derkhana clan of Kuz Palas should share the proceeds from timber logging with their constituent patrilineages in Dáro. The main obstacle was that the number of shareholders in the two valleys was uneven. For this reason, the majority living in Kuz Palas refused to share proceeds with the minority in Dáro. To complicate the matter, the families who belonged to a constituent patrilineage, who had left Kuz Palas and resettled outside the valley, heard news of the timber logging and demanded their share of the proceeds from the logging. Unable to stop the logging by physical means, they filed a lawsuit at a local court, demanding to be formally acknowledged as rightful
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coop-owners to all the forest being felled by their clan. Both sides hired a lawyer and litigation proceeded in the district courts. After wrangling over the issue for eighteen months, the resident Derkhana of Kuz Palas concluded that they could not unilaterally include the non-resident families in the group of recipients. In order to do so they would need the consent of the Derkhana of Dáro. In an ‘all Derkhana’ jirga the issue was resolved, the decision being to make all Derkhana shareholders in each other’s forests. This allowed the Derkhana of Dáro to benefit from income from logging and the Derkhana of Kuz Palas a share of the proceeds from future logging in Dáro. The migrants’ share in the proceeds was also confirmed. The decision was formalized by being written on legal (‘stamped’) paper. The contractor had paid five million rupees for the timber and more than half a million rupees in advance. Some of the money was wasted on the lawsuit and some disappeared in secret deals. In the end each shareholder was paid only Rs 800. The money itself was not considered very important. It was the principle of division among all legitimate shareholders that was crucial.

The importance placed on sharing, dividing and equity applies to all levels of genealogical segmentation: the phratry (quom), tribe (qabilá), clan (taabin) and lineage (záat). The use of physical force, litigation and third-party intervention shows how difficult it is to reach an agreement on dividing the proceeds from the timber logging. The frequent intense disputes make timber logging financially hazardous. This has made the forest contractors reluctant to take the risk of logging timber in the Palas valley and has helped local politicians to gain a foothold in the timber logging business. Their familiarity with the local culture and belief in their ability to solve disputes have made them emerge as timber merchants in their own right. They also tend to pay higher prices than the non-local timber merchants. The lure of timber logging is still the enormous economic profits. As in the other parts of the NWFP, the timber fortunes are employed to launch political careers, entertain a steady stream of visitors and, most importantly, to underwrite the huge sums spent for political support during the provincial elections.

The villagers are dependent on the forest contractors but this does not mean that they are well liked. Most people see them as a necessary evil, even as ‘thieves of the forest’ (jungle choor). On account of being able to penalize the contractor by withholding or setting fire to the logged timber, most people prefer to deal with them, rather than the representatives of the Forest Department. In Kuz Palas some of the clans have managed to avoid (or suppress) internal disputes. They log and sell the timber on their own,
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without using a forest contractor. The timber is cut illegally and the price is therefore quite low. They also have to bribe the forest rangers and the other Forest Department staff. Still, this is more than compensated for by avoiding the use of forest contractors as middlemen. The higher profit margin is an incentive to intensify the timber logging. Lacking the skills and manpower needed for large-scale logging, they primarily engage in single-species logging of the Himalayan cedar, the most valuable of the big trees. The Forest Department does not allow the installation of sawmills in Kuz Palas. It is believed that they would encourage illegal logging. But it also means that the villagers are deprived of an opportunity to develop small businesses and realise more of the timber’s worth.

TIMBER BAN

Just as timber logging was beginning to become economically important it was suddenly stopped. In September 1992, torrential rain caused devastating floods that struck the whole of northern Pakistan (see Chapter 2). The extensive destruction was blamed on rampant deforestation, leading the federal government, in March 1993, to impose a nation-wide ban on commercial timber logging. The ban has been ineffective and counter-productive. It has been ineffective because illegal logging is widespread and counter-productive because unregulated logging is even more destructive than ‘normal’ harvesting. It also deprives the provincial government of its 20 per cent share of the earnings.

Despite the authorities’ inability to halt timber logging, the ban has become highly unpopular all over District Kohistan. The villagers of Palas strongly oppose the ban too. When it was imposed, it sparked an immediate outcry and the Kohistani tribesmen blockaded the Karakoram Highway for two weeks. Since then, the Palas villagers and the other affected communities have held meetings, staged protest marches and rallies in Pattan, dispatched delegations to the Chief Minister of the NWFP in Peshawar and petitioned the local MNAs and MPAs to try to have the ban lifted. Some of the Palas villagers have even threatened to leave their native land if the ban were not lifted. In one instance, a forest compartment in Kuz Palas was deliberately razed in frustration over the timber ban. The political economy of timber logging deprives the villagers of their rightful source of income and prevents them from having a meaningful say in their management. Lacking a proper road through the valley, the people of Dáro have been unable to initiate timber logging on a larger scale. Having seen the
results of destructive timber harvesting in Kuz Palas, the villagers in Dáro do not want to ruin their forests; ‘The losses (bexeeri)’, they lament, ‘will exceed the benefits (xeer)’ (HJP 1992). Still, the present system of forest management leaves them with little choice. When the ban is lifted, they either will log their forests destructively or not at all.

**RICH FORESTS, POOR PEOPLE**

The introduction of commercial timber harvesting has changed the communicative aspects of the *zangal* and its ownership. The gradual dissolution of common property ownership can symbolically be interpreted as a weakening of solidarity and commensality. In Kuz Palas the growing number of boundaries in the forest reflects genealogical divisions that, mimetically, are mirrored in the landscape. The open forest canopy typical of incipient deforestation is clearly visible in the landscape of Kuz Palas. Inside the harvested compartments there are heaps of broken trees, a testimony to the wastage of commercial timber harvesting. In Dáro, however, the area that is affected by timber logging is localised and insignificant in comparison to the overall integrity of the landscape. When the men from Dáro are asked to pinpoint the boundaries of the conifer forest in the valley, they cannot identify them. The forests are unbounded and identifiable only by their place names. One can go there to see the forests, but not delineate or circumscribe them (Ingold 1986: 150ff). In Dáro, the forests belong to all (*kule tsiiz*, literally, ‘thing of the people’) and are shared by all (*mush’taraka*, literally, ‘shared’, ‘common’).

The ‘territorialisation’ of forest ownership entangles the Palas villagers in incessant boundary disputes. It is evident from the case material that in most cases the disputes are solved without bloodshed. The risk of a feud between major kinship groups makes them seek redress by legal means. But it is worth noting that none of the cases described here, nor others that I have recorded, were solved by legal means in the district or provincial legislatures. On the contrary, a third party, either another tribe or an influential person most often solves them. From the point of view of forest conservation, the fractious and rebellious nature of Kohistani society has prevented large-scale timber logging. It is the fight over the forest boundaries, rather than the clear demarcation of them, that has prevented wholesale timber logging. The commercial timber harvesting pits the strictly defined and carefully traced boundaries of the Forest Department against the ill-defined, malleable and contested boundaries of the villagers (Sillitoe 1999). This is the reason for
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the incessant disputes that induce the villagers to make and un-make their forest boundaries. The Palas villagers are not alone in having boundary disputes. They are integral to an acephalous political organisation. There is no better illustration of this than a quote from the Tiv, an acephalous farming society in Nigeria. To the question, ‘Where is the boundary?’ the men reply, ‘We don’t have a boundary; we have an argument’ (Bohannan 1970: 45, 46).

The commercial timber logging engenders ownership disputes due to the timber’s high market value. Diverting the timber’s commodity path (Appadurai 1986) contributes to the ‘politics of envy’ and increases tensions between the villagers in the two valleys. In the case of the members of the Darma quom, their dilemma is whether to give preference to locality or descent. As I have shown, the importance of descent allows the Darma villagers living in Dáro to be included as rightful recipients of the proceeds from timber logging in Kuz Palas by virtue of their belonging to a unilineal descent group. Finally, as I have tried to show, the villagers do not log the forests out of greed but out of necessity. While the forests in Kuz Palas are being depleted, the conifer forests in upper Dáro are advancing and recolonising abandoned farmland in a process of ecological succession. The advancing forest is a troubling reminder of the precariousness of the villagers’ position and the transience of their belonging to the valley. It is a profound irony that despite living amidst the richest forests in the province, the villagers remain poor.
CHAPTER 10

Thresholds and Transitions

The transitional periods have all the properties of the threshold, the boundary between two spaces, where the antagonistic principles confront one another and the world is reversed. Boundaries are where battles take place: boundaries between fields, which are the sites of the causes of very real struggles.

Pierre Bourdieu (1990: 225), The Logic of Practice

In the preceding chapters of this book I have focused on the moral and geographical spaces where belonging is constituted, mediated and threatened. In particular, I have tried to ‘follow the conflict’ (Marcus 1995: 110), in order to explicate the conditions and arenas in which villagers become embroiled in disputes and the effects of these disputes on the villagers’ sense of belonging. In this final chapter I want to draw together the many strands of the analysis, and then, by way of a conclusion, summarise and expand on the main findings.

I have described a society that until recently was geographically remote and physically isolated: most natural resources were held as joint property, local systems of conflict resolution persisted, customary ways of thinking as well as gender relations had survived into the late twentieth century. However, the construction of the Karakoram Highway brought the valley out of its isolation and into contact with alien forms of political systems and religious beliefs. The formation of District Kohistan in 1976 started a process of political incorporation that, though it never went very far, brought changes to the Palas valley, changes that the villagers and the other Indus Kohistani communities forcefully resisted. The increased accessibility opened the valley to Deobandi emissaries whose religious orthodoxy led to growing intolerance and a deepening rift between the menial groups and their Shin patrons. The musicians were the first to leave and they were later followed by the other craftsmen and agricultural labourers. Animosity
increased not only between patrons and clients, but very likely also among the Shin themselves whose social, religious and political institutions were now changing. The traditional ways of conducting feuds changed too. There are only scanty data on villagers leaving the valley during the period 1949–69, but what little there is suggests that only those families whose very survival was threatened left the valley. Rather than a steady trickle, there were intermittent exoduses of many families. For example, in 1949, thirty families left the village Shared in Dáro due to a feud with other members of their lineage. In 1960, fifteen families left the village Kundul (Dáro) due to a feud with families belonging to another lineage also resident in the village.

Around 1970, the tradition of banning cultivation was introduced in the Palas valley. Involvement in conflicts now began to threaten the livelihood of whole families, not merely the lives of individual members. This, as I suggest in Chapter 5, often led to the departure of the weaker part. ‘Previously, there used to be long feuds because people did not run away’, a Dáro elder explained, ‘and the parties remained on their native soil and continued killing each other. Now people leave so the feuds have become shorter.’ The survey mentioned in Chapter 5 carried out among migrants from Dáro living in Rawalpindi suggests that the conflict rate peaked in the mid-1970s, leading to more involuntary migration.¹

In the late 1970s, the Tablighi Jaamaat made its presence felt in the valley. Can we therefore conclude that religious orthodoxy increased violent encounters and the resort to homicide in Palas? In order to answer this question we need to examine the complex relationship between religion and violence in more detail. First, the Tablighis’ emphasis on personal virtues like sincerity and self-denial had a pacifying effect and, among other things, caused many villagers to rid themselves of the vicious watchdogs that they used to keep for protection. Moreover, a closer examination of the ethnographic data shows that villagers condemn homicide on religious grounds. For example, Baram is condemned by fellow villagers for murdering his cousin, claiming that ‘for a murderer there is no salvation’ (Chapter 6). Although Baram disregards such remarks, his intense daily study of, and recitation from, the Quran indicates that he too considers murder sinful and seeks God’s forgiveness for his sins. His year-long house confinement can likewise be interpreted not only as a security measure, but as a self-inflicted punishment for his misdeed.

There are several other indications that villagers are keenly aware of the tension between their customs and the tenets of Islam. The remark that

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‘here everybody is cruel’ (Chapter 1) implies that villagers now evaluate their practices from the vantage point of Islam and denounce excessive violence as forfeiting their Islamic faith; ‘these people have no Muslim faith (Iman)’. Homicide, hence, becomes associated with infidelity, not piousness. We can clearly discern this in the remark by the Palas émigré claiming that it is ‘impossible to be pious and live in the native land’ (Chapter 5). In other words, he too sees the belligerence associated with living in the valley opposed to Islam. Yet, he also recognises that in order to survive there, you need to behave and think in ways that are not reconcilable with Islamic tenets. If we examine the local concepts of honour (Chapter 7), we find that there is no direct link between honour and religion: protecting honour is a social, not a religious obligation. Villagers are keenly aware that violence and homicide is condemned by Islam. This has changed local perceptions of homicide but not local practice. Taken together, this points to a complex and multi-layered relationship between customs and normative Islam.

The mid-1970s peak in violence and migration mentioned above therefore cannot simply be attributed to the spread of religious orthodoxy. Instead, it was probably caused by concurrent social, economic and religious changes brought about by the completion of the KKH. This led to an increase in the number of violent encounters – if not necessarily the number of homicides since the weaker party was more likely to leave than be killed. We have no reliable data on involuntary migration from Dáro for the 1970s, but what we know does give reason to believe that the general increase in the conflict rate, together with the added pressures from cultivation bans, made more people face exile as their only hope of survival. These factors, taken together, widened the threat to belonging to include a much larger proportion of the population. But while this might explain the growth in involuntary migration that started in the mid-1970s, it cannot explain the origins of inter-personal violence. For this we need to move back in time.

BOUNDARIES OF BELONGING

Since the days of the earliest political entities in the late nineteenth century, boundaries have been central to the constitution of Palas society and provided a measure of territorial integrity in an egalitarian polity. During the era of British rule, Palas and the other Indus east bank valleys remained little affected by colonial policies. They were affected, however, by the gradual pacification of the greater Indus Kohistan region by British–Indian control, which influenced their mode of political organisation (Staley 1969: 180
But as the inter-valley defensive co-operation ended, feuds broke out. When they calmed down, new political boundaries formed between Palas and their former allies. The end of the *wesh* initiated the system of fixed tenure, whereby the size of fields could no longer be adjusted. There is not enough evidence to claim that the *wesh* masters were killed because of their involvement with the *wesh*, but the end of the *wesh* marked the transition from inter-valley feuds to internecine vendettas. ‘There were rebellions,’ an elder villager commented, ‘it is said so. Breaking apart is never easy. The land in Palas lay uncultivated for many years due to the disagreements at the last *wesh*.’ But while the end of the *wesh* inaugurated a major upheaval in social organisation and land tenure the rupture with the past was not a complete disjuncture and the idea of *wesh* continued to be of major concern to the people and a cornerstone in their territorial emplacement. It also validated ownership to communally owned natural resources and added a temporal dimension to the local belonging to the landscape (Ingold 1993). As the warp is stretched lengthways in a loom, the *wesh* is the ‘strings’ which provide the association with the landscape of the past. In the same way as the warp is crossed by the weft, social acts are played out on the *wesh* so that they together form the ‘textured landscape’ (Chapter 3). This is an indication of the physical texture of the landscape as well as its ‘textuality’ – in the form of the oral narratives that keep the memory of last *wesh* alive.

It is not surprising that villagers belonging to an isolated valley should feel strongly attached to their land: indeed this is often considered a defining feature of closed corporate communities. What makes this community different is the number of long-standing, divisive and deep-rooted enmities that have claimed, and continue to claim, the lives of men and, occasionally, young women. This is not a society where everyone can find his place, but where belonging must be constantly re-validated, re-proved and defended. Not all the men in the Palas valley fight, nor carry a gun. But all of them must be ready to defend themselves and use a gun. It is the potential for conflict that is the defining feature of the society. Those running the risk of being killed never know when their luck will run out. As insurance, they carry amulets containing spiritual charms. This is not enough for all the men though. Many men find it too hard, too dangerous and too straining to put up with the effort of living in the valley. Only the hardiest remain. But many who remain have little other choice, lacking formal education, money and the skills necessary to make a better living outside of the valley.
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Most of those who either forcibly (exiles) or voluntarily (émigrés) resettle outside the valley join the ranks of the unskilled labourers and the urban proletariat.

Palas émigrés display a strong emotional attachment to their homeland and continue to act and think in ways that underline their symbolic belonging to the valley and adherence to its customs (Chapter 7). In this sense, they are still a Palsooch, albeit also a migrant. Yet, despite lamenting their longing for life in the valley, they are not blind to the fact that residence in towns and cities has several advantages, foremost education for their children and menial jobs. Like migrants elsewhere, Palas émigrés want to have it both ways – residence in areas offering a safer, simpler and more prosperous life and yet a connection to their homeland and a recognition as respected members of their communities. Their residence in the diasporas strung along the main road allows them to continue their involvement with Palas through a show of hospitality, offering meals and a bed to occasional visitors, friends and kinsmen. They have not severed their ties to the valley and indeed are strongly involved in the lives of their kinsmen still resident in the valley. By continuing to act in ways that validate their communal identity and indeed by forcefully insisting on their membership status (ulsi’ya) being acknowledged (Chapter 9), they are able to retain elements of their local belonging.

Those who have been forced to leave the valley due to enmity are not so fortunate. As exiles, they need to hide from their enemies, and hence must settle in a remote village or an urban metropolis far away from their kinsmen and must minimize contact with fellow villagers. The weakest among them seek exile in the Alai valley (Chapter 5) where they put themselves under the protection of the Khan. However, by doing so, they forfeit their Palas identity, jeopardise their belonging to the valley and lose their status as community members.

Nonetheless, it is still pertinent to ask why more villagers do not willingly leave the valley. Why does living in the valley hold such a special meaning for them? I have argued that belonging and being ‘settled in the valley’ constitutes a countervailing force that makes men and their families resist eviction. Social identity is closely related to membership in the peer group of landowners. Being forced to leave is dishonourable and explains why some men endure years in confinement rather than giving up and leaving. I have argued, furthermore, that Palas villagers fight in order to belong. Fighting is an expression of belonging and not principally motivated by a
desire to harm an opponent. They are unable to renounce taking revenge because the morality of the Shin community demands it. Suing for peace is considered shameful and dishonourable. Property is protected irrespective of its economic utility. Another and more important reason is that ownership of land is constitutive of social identity and necessary for membership in the peer group of landowners. People do not give up ownership of fields willingly, but poverty may force them to sell some of their land to fellow villagers. Those who are forced to leave seldom sell their land, preferring to lease it to neighbours or leave it in ‘trust’ with close relatives. The fields are not only commodities (with use and exchange value), they transcend their ‘commodity state’ (Appadurai 1986: 17) by being drawn into conflicts that have no material linkage to land ownership. This puts pressure on the opponents and turns the conflict into a quest for belonging. The low-yield, subsistence agriculture provides the villagers with only the barest means of survival and food security is further compromised by kané-type enmities.

The prevalence of enmities – sometimes in combination with poverty – is the main reason why individual households and, on occasions, whole lineages, are forced to move out and resettle elsewhere. I have proposed that involuntary migration disproportionally affects the households owning more land. At the same time, the poorest of the households (both Shin and non-Shin) leave the valley because they are unable to continue as viable units and are hoping to find better opportunities elsewhere. It can be hypothesised that in the long run this dual migration process sloughs off the poorer and richer among the households and limits economic differentiation. This particularly concerns Dáro, where the persistent enmities reduce crop yields, curtail population growth and account for the demographic decline.

The valley is an out-of-the-way place and an economic backwater. Teeming with wildlife and rich in timber resources, it is nevertheless a food-deficit area that cannot sustain its current population. The villagers qualify as ‘forest dependent’, but not in the euphemistic and patronising way this is often used by Western scientists and development agencies. The dependency on non-timber forest products can be interpreted as a proof of the villagers’ positive association with the forests and the richness of their environment. On the other hand, this dependency can be construed as a symptom of the lack of other income sources and widespread poverty. In most key market transactions, the Palas villagers are dependent on outsiders working as middlemen. Lacking the business skills and the
money needed to bypass them, the villagers earn pitifully little from most market transactions. The income from commercial timber logging could have provided them with dividends on their share in the forest, raised living standards and reduced poverty. Instead, commercial timber logging opened up new arenas for inter-village conflict. As I showed in Chapter 9, timber harvesting is premised on delineating the forested landscape into identifiable forest ‘compartments’ suitable for commercial forestry but at odds with the local system of joint forest ownership. The resultant boundary disputes between kinship groups claiming ownership of the forest raises the stakes for internal conflict. The division of forest ownership creates boundaries that are mimetically reflected in the social boundaries drawn between descent segments and further involves them in struggles over the conditions for membership in the peer group of land-owners (ulsi’ya). The conflicts have ‘hardened’ the ethnic boundaries between the Shin and non-Shin and between the Darma and Khuka Manka quom.

As I have shown (Chapters 8 and 9), boundaries are contested spaces – both morally and geographically – and this is why disputes over them are not only a matter of deciding their physical location but of the principles used to legitimise them (Bourdieu 1990: 225). The boundaries in the landscape, whether clearly visible or poorly demarcated, are not so much about marking off resources as expressions of a tournament of value (Appadurai 1986: 21) turning forests into key ‘tokens of value’. Thus, the forest is not only a commodity that has a high exchange value, but also a symbolic resource that is used to play out political rivalries within the Darma quom. It also pits Dáro against Kuz Palas in boundary disputes that are reminiscent of midnineteenth-century territorial conflicts.

SITUATING VIOLENCE

This book gives prominence to the conditions that generate violence and sustain lethal conflicts. To this end, I have explicated the historical (Chapter 3) and material (Chapter 4) properties that underlie such conflicts. In particular, I have emphasised the cultural construction of violence as expressed through the personal narratives of men involved in them (Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7). In particular, I have argued that there is a need to move towards a more empathic approach to violence and aggression: privileging first-person accounts of conflicts probing deeper into the men’s personal motives and perusing the dilemmas faced by opposing factions. The men’s narratives demonstrate that there is a plethora of emotional issues that
incite them to get involved in conflicts. The problem with emotion is that it is often assumed to be a female domain and that men are only involved in political rhetoric and agonistic duelling. The performance of oral poetry in the Palas valley suggests otherwise. We find male oral poetics centrally concerned with emotional subjects such as loving, longing and separation. The verses and couplets are sung by men of all ages, although primarily by young men and skilled poets and singers. The recurring themes in the poetic corpus are melancholy laments of unrequited love and attachment to the locality as a form of territorial emplacement. In order to better understand conflicts, the cultural constitution of emotion must be considered alongside the ‘segmentary rule’ of situational fission and fusion of kinship segments. Moreover, there is a need to combine the structural analysis of kinship with a ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973) of the unfolding conflict events. This entails a shift of emphasis from the abstract analysis of ‘the feud’, to the personal narratives of the ‘feudists’ (Waller 1988). It is in the nitty-gritty of these narratives that the underlying motives for homicide and vengeance killings can be discerned and their meaning uncovered. By privileging specificity over generality we gain a fuller appreciation of the complexity of violent confrontations. It also allows a closer attention to the temporality of conflicts and to their transitions.

A year and a half after leaving the field, I learnt that Khushal, who was bent on avenging the murder of his brother Hilal (Chapter 6), had been killed. An assailant wielding an automatic rifle ambushed him in broad daylight and killed him with a hail of bullets. The suspected killer was known to hold Khushal responsible for the murder of his own brother who had been killed under mysterious circumstances a few years earlier. Khushal had repeatedly denied any involvement, and since no one had publicly charged him with the murder, he saw no reason to take extra precautions. A meeting of Khushal’s kinsmen discussed avenging his murder, but ruled it out because the killing could have been justified. They also exonerated Baram from any involvement in Khushal’s murder. Eventually, it will be up to Khushal’s sons to decide whether to avenge their father. After Khushal’s funeral, a group of mediators was able to broker a twelve-month cease-fire between Baram and Khushal’s sons. The mediators also made Baram and his neighbour lift the ban on cultivation. After enduring more than five years in confinement, Baram could again move about freely and cultivate his fields. But what will happen when the cease-fire ends?
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A similar situation faces Kunar, whose irrigation channel was ruined by his neighbours (Chapter 2). With the help of mediators he was able to unearth another channel, one that had belonged to his neighbours since the last wesh. Relieved that he had disproved the claim to the channel used by his family, Kunar considered the matter over. His neighbours, however, were not to be put off so easily. They claimed ownership to both channels. Until the matter is settled in a Shariat, Kunar continues using the disputed channel. His position is precarious but – for the time being at least – he has warded off the attempt to evict him.

As much as we would like to see conflicts reach their ‘end’ or ‘conclusion’, it is often impossible. Marcus’s advice to ‘follow the conflict’ can only be adhered to so far. In the end, the case has to be abandoned by the ethnographer. In this book I have not only tried to follow contemporary conflicts but attempted to give a diachronic analysis of their historical roots. This has enabled me to situate them within a temporal framework that also considers the transformation of violence. I have also broadened the spatial scale in order not to be constrained by the geography of the valley but to include religious and political influences that originate elsewhere.

However, my foremost intention has been to draw attention to the personal hardships of living in the valley and the villagers’ struggle to belong to the Shin community and the ulsi’ya.

REVENGE AND RETRIBUTION

The examples that I have presented show that there are a number of contingencies that determine how men respond to what they consider transgressions and subsequent attempts at reconciliation. There is a strong moral obligation to retaliate, but also an obligation to accept mediation and pleas for truces and ceasefires – though this usually stops short of accepting monetary compensation for homicide, a practice that used to be acceptable (Barth 1956b: 45–6). In cases of murder, only revenge can restore social honour. The principle that guides revenge is equivalence, and the parties can legitimately take revenge until parity is achieved with regard to murders and injuries. When this point is reached, it may be possible to negotiate a peaceful compromise or settlement. Many of the homicides I have recorded could be described as accidents following shoot-outs where the intention is to scare or injure but not to kill the opponent. Accidental homicide can be mediated in the consensual assemblies or through other third-party intervention. This can range from temporary truces to
formal settlements involving monetary compensation and the exchange of marriageable girls. In comparison, premeditated murder is rarely solved peacefully and a compromise is considered dishonourable. This explains the narrative structure of kané-type conflicts which tend to go on and on without ending (Chapter 6).

It is clear from the present study that homicide is mostly confined to the level of the personal vendetta. At higher levels of kinship segmentation, homicide is rare. One reason for this is that personal honour at these higher levels is not at stake, another that feuds wreak such havoc that people seek to avoid them and back away as far as possible from the use of force. Kinsmen are reluctant to become party to disputes because of their potentially ruinous economic consequences. Earlier, lineages had more power in settling disputes and could force contestants to end conflicts (Barth 1956b). Nowadays, the lineage no longer has such authority. Increasingly, those involved in enmities disregard pressure from the lineage jirga for a peaceful settlement and to forego revenge. The lack of credible sanctions on behalf of the lineage suggests an imbalance of power in favour of privatised, ego-centred factions in which the lineage no longer plays a decisive role. This perpetuates the conflict and allows it to escalate (Keiser 1991: 92).

Another important reason why conflicts escalate is the tendency for men to respond to incursions by outdoing the original insult, a process that is reminiscent of Bateson’s ‘schismogenesis’ (1972: 109). This is both a systemic property of conflicts as well as a reflection of the ethos of assertiveness common to the men in the valley. Indeed, it is a personality trait that may be considered integral to their socio-cultural adaptation. Lindholm (1982: 217–18) finds a similar personality type among the Pakhtun men in a village in Swat where:

... a man who does not present a proud and even insolent figure is doomed to be taken advantage of by his more aggressive neighbors. ... Each man struggles to conquer and rise in the shallow hierarchies the system allows. ... A man without bravery and pride is soon destroyed, as there is no room for the weak-willed in Swat.

I have argued that the cultural ideals of bravery and machismo incite men to become involved in disputes. There are indications that assertive behaviour is differentiated along an economic gradient. The bigger landowners are more likely to seek redress by violent means than smaller farmers. I have linked this to the tradition of merit feasting which created a symbolic
hierarchy in an otherwise egalitarian society. It provided those of higher rank (Shin) with an outlet for the display of manly qualities and can be seen as a continuation of a ‘heroic past’ (Meeker 1980). Feasting for merit was primarily a feature of the pre-Islamic period, but probably survived long after the conversion to Islam (Staley 1969: 234). It can be hypothesised that merit feasting in Palas ended at about the same time as the *wesh* came to an end, creating a situation that was conducive to more violent forms of male status rivalry. The fact that only those of higher rank could defend their honour supports the possibility of such a ritual subversion. The rise in internecine warfare at the time of British–Indian control of Indus Kohistan also supports such an argument.

Presently, the brunt of violent male interaction is located within the main maize growing zone (*maji ser*) where people now spend the longer part of the year. The changing notions of spatio-temporal sociality associated with the *maji ser* threaten household viability and, in the process, social belonging. Introduced to the Palas valley around thirty years ago, banning cultivation in an attempt to evict opponents remains a contested practice and one that many find alien to local customs. Increasingly, villagers resort to the use of physical force, including unlicensed violence that is not recognised by local customs: murder where a punch would suffice; disfigurement where a firm rebuke would have been appropriate. Although contested and considered a violation of religious precepts, such arbitrary acts of violence are, from the villagers’ point of view, in no way ‘senseless’ but make violence more unpredictable and unmanageable and therefore more dangerous.

The elder villagers unanimously lament this disintegration of social relations, arguing that people were earlier more considerate of each other, more helpful and more forgiving. In bygone days, anyone who needed a donkey could borrow one without asking the owner’s permission. The livestock could be grazed anywhere along the migration route and no one would mount any objections. The men had close friends, ‘pals’ (*yarni*), who would come and go freely in the household like adopted sons. During winter, the wedding processions paraded through Dáro accompanied by local musicians with feasting and dancing going on day and night for a whole month. Now the wedding processions are gone, the musicians expelled from the valley and the *yarni*-tradition all but disappeared. Just recently, the last blacksmith in Kundul, a village considered the cultural centre of Dáro, packed up his things and left with his family. The blacksmith’s ancient workshop is now empty. Who will now repair the scratch ploughs,
sharpen the sickles or mend broken implements? This is only the latest example of the trend towards ‘defection’ (Douglas 1996: xix) that is integral to egalitarian enclaves and threatens viability. This notwithstanding, the propensity for lethal conflicts in Palas society should not make us overlook the fact that the centrifugal forces of eviction are paired with a strong centripetal association that binds individuals to the place. The use of unlicensed violence is contested, but the capacity for violence is positively evaluated as an expression of male concern with personal honour and repute.

The men who lived in the ‘old times’, the elder villagers reminisce, were not only stronger and braver but also oblivious to pain and personal hardships. The clearest example of the promotion of this ideal can be found in the stories about the legendary cultural hero Alamgiir, a tall, handsome and brave man. He once challenged a group of men he was travelling with to pierce the palms of their hands with their daggers. When nobody took up the challenge he drew his own dagger, pierced the palm of his hand, and put it back in its sheath without uttering a word. As a true warrior hero, Alamgiir was oblivious to personal danger and killed when he was still quite young (Zarin and Schmidt n.d.). The stories of Alamgiir suggest another side of indigenous sociality: the heroic cultural ideal of manhood who courts death and who therefore is ultimately doomed to a tragic end. This cultural imagery expresses a heroic ethos that still has currency among men and can account for the concern with personal honour and machismo. ‘The people of Dáro are indeed machos’, a valley migrant opined. ‘If you drink the water in Kundul, your disposition will change towards machismo (masti) in no time. This is the main reason why the men in Dáro indulge in secret love affairs.’ This observation is interesting in that it points to a vernacular understanding of machismo that ties it together with the locality. In this perspective, machismo is not an inherent quality of manhood, but is acquired by men by virtue of their residence in the valley. This also ties in with the belief that those who leave grow soft and incapable of defending their honour. For those who reside in the valley, machismo is a defining feature, and one that, as remarked above, explains why men risk involvement in love affairs.

A major reason for the personal vendetta is the importance of female chastity (Chapter 5). The contested practice of cutting off the nose of men accused of having jeopardised a woman’s chastity is also indicative of the increasing importance of defending personal honour. The fact that only a minority of the villagers consider this form of punishment legitimate
underscores the awkward balance between traditionally more lenient sanctions and those that demand revenge and bodily mutilation. The boundary between customary and more extreme social sanctions is edging closer towards Dáro. At a roadside village in Kuz Palas, the green and red flag of the Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), an Islamist party, flew from a tall watchtower. Elsewhere, a young villager who had spent some months fighting alongside the mujahedin in Afghanistan eagerly showed me a textbook of guerrilla warfare titled ‘Al-Jihad’ (Holy War). These examples are indicative of the spread of a militant Sunni Islam that has yet to make an impact in Dáro but at one point probably will, posing new moral dilemmas for deciding what are legitimate sanctions and what are not.

MORAL DILEMMAS

This study has portrayed a society at the crossroads between a subsistence-based and a market-based economy. This transition poses moral dilemmas and creates tensions between an egalitarian ideology and new income opportunities. In the process, religion plays a key role by upstaging traditional ways of awarding access to natural resources and in the dissolution of common property regimes. In property disputes, Islamic jurisprudence is increasingly taken as the norm although in various instances it is challenged by the customary system of land tenure that is considered the authoritative source of common property rights. Caught between the two, the villagers find themselves embroiled in serious disputes that can only be solved after lengthy arbitration or, if this fails, the use of force. Having resisted land titling, they have to protect their land against incursions. The lack of recorded deeds increases the prospects for conflicts over land, as does the system of partible inheritance. Most of the villagers’ land is acquired through inheritance. The inheritance system reflects the egalitarian ideal in which none of the male siblings are disinherited, though they often wrangle themselves out of their inheritance. The women seldom claim their share but their sons and grandsons may do so at a later stage. This explains the incessantly surfacing claims, counter-claims and brawls over land that is one reason why a large part of the landholdings are always lying fallow.

A preliminary statistical analysis suggests that there is a causal link between lethal conflicts and maize yields. Frequent fighting reduces the maize yields and the majority of the households make a living below subsistence minimum. This makes them dependent on non-wood forest products as a supplement to their diet and as a source of cash earnings. Households that...
are embroiled in conflict quickly exhaust their food supplies and, unless they have alternative sources of income, need to make incursions into their productive capital (livestock, land etc.) in order to remain viable. Resource scarcity makes the fields contested, and attempts to appropriate the produce are therefore harshly reciprocated. The considerable complexity of local land tenure adds to the reasons why the villagers so often are at odds with each other over ownership and entitlements to productive resources. Particularly, the incongruity between residency and ownership of fields and forest carries the seed of inter-personal, inter-village and inter-valley conflict.

The problems of reconciling ‘tradition’ with ‘religion’ are central concerns for Palas villagers. Is for example the ‘banning of cultivation’ – preventing an adversary from growing crops – a legitimate or illegitimate practice? Here the villagers’ perceptions differ and those who suffer from such bans are by necessity its strongest critics, arguing that it is both opposed to religion and tradition. Since banning of cultivation is a foreign import – it was adopted from a neighbouring valley – is it a part of Palas traditions? And who is to decide? We find the same dilemmas reflected in the villagers’ ambiguous relations to magic and magical practices (Chapter 7). While sorcery is condemned by practitioners and clients alike, benign magical practices are not. In many cases there is no clear answer to whether these and other practices are ‘objectionable’ or ‘undesirable’ (makrooh) rather than forbidden (haram) or sinful (gunna), meaning that neither the Quran nor local tradition provides a ready answer. Therefore the possibility arises of more forceful individuals or groups trying to ‘invent tradition’. This tends to provoke more disagreements and bitter arguments, which, more often than not, turn violent.

LETHAL CONFLICT

Just how violent is Palas society compared to other Kohistani communities? In the Dir Kohistan village fictitiously called ‘Thull’, the incidence of homicide averaged two per month in a population of only 6,000 (Keiser 1986: 503). From the part of Indus Kohistan administratively falling under the Northern Areas, Chaudhary (1998) found that in Chilas (population 43,000) and the twin valleys Darel and Tangir (population 37,000), the annual incidence of homicides reported to the police in 1993–94, averaged 25 and 26 respectively. The Palas valley, in comparison, has on average 3 homicides per year in a population of about 40,000. In terms of homicide,
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it is by far the least violent. What could account for this difference? In addition to being more segmented and autocratic, the other communities derive considerable income from timber logging (and, in the case of Thull, cash crops) which the villagers mostly invest in automatic arms (Keiser 1991, Aase 1999). The Palas villagers derive much less income from timber logging and spend their meagre earnings more judiciously. Although the Kalashnikov is a prestige object which men desire, its utility in conflicts is limited due to the tradition of house confinement. This is neither dishonourable nor cowardly. Unable to kill the opponent, the aggrieved party seeks to evict the enemy by banning cultivation. This changes the revenge aim from elimination to eviction and from physical violence to mental violence, whose immediate goal is not to kill the opponent but to force him to leave. The evicted party is dishonoured and has little chance of regaining his social position. In the final instance, the remaining party may appropriate the defeated person’s land, thereby erasing his source of, and claim to, belonging. In a society where individual identity is closely linked to being part of an ethnic Shin community and peer group of landowners, such banishment is an extremely harsh punishment. The kané-type conflicts are (at least temporarily) brought to a halt by exile rather than homicide. This is a plausible reason for the lower than average incidence of homicide in the Palas valley as compared to the other Kohistani communities. In parts of Kohistan murder used to be considered a public offence and the perpetrator forced into temporary or permanent exile (Barth 1956b: 64, Lindholm 1981c: 152). The Palas practice of forcing enemies into exile can therefore be considered a continuation of a customary system of conflict resolution.

Only in the case of adultery is eviction insufficient to restore familial honour and respectability. Women charged with adultery are killed. The men involved are often able to escape prosecution by leaving the valley and resettling elsewhere. The killing of defenceless women for the purpose of restoring social honour poses difficult ethical problems that go beyond the ‘cultural meaning’ to the people involved as well as to anthropological relativism. As I have noted earlier (Chapter 5), in the period 1988–2000 there were a total of 40 homicides in the Palas valley: 35 men and 5 women, i.e. seven times as many men as women. Although some of the men accused of adultery are able to escape, many of them are later tracked down and killed. In the end, they therefore fare no better than the women. Concentrating condemnation of ‘honour crimes’ against women may
Therefore inadvertently divert attention from the plight of the many men who likewise are brutally killed (Knudsen 2005).

Given the dire consequences, why do love affairs persist in an orthodox Islamic setting? I have argued that the practice is a remnant of gender relations pre-dating Islam. At that time extramarital relations, even when they were made public, were not a legitimate reason for murder and were resolved by the paying of a proper compensation. Love poetry and the fact that love-struck couples communicate with the help of go-betweens, sending each other mementoes, suggests that we are dealing with a tacit institutionalised practice rather than deviant behaviour. Further study on the subject would need to focus on the uneasy co-existence of Islamic injunctions against adultery and romantic love affairs. Tentatively, I would propose that what makes this co-existence possible is the operation of two discursive levels at the same time. At the religious level of Islam, adultery is a sin punishable by death. Yet, at another, poetic level, the villagers condone discreet love affairs. Not sexual unions but real romances, they consider them qualitatively different from adultery and therefore pardonable. We can sense this moral duality in this stanza from a love poem:

O’ Maulvi, allow me to present
my case for your ruling.

Then tell me of your verdict.

Is it sinful that I circle around [her]
like a moth, with a thirsty heart?

My soul will not come to rest.

This dualism is also expressed as a bodily dichotomization in this short couplet said by a woman to her lover:

My body below the navel is reserved for my husband.
I have saved my beautiful body above the navel for you.

The couplet points to an embodiment of moral boundaries that juxtaposes illicit eroticism with conjugal procreation, expressed through the metaphor of the female body. When love affairs become public knowledge, this tacit duality can no longer coexist and the obligation to punish offenders becomes impossible to ignore. The reverse situation applies in the case of homicide for reasons other than adultery. In this case, Islam condemns homicide but the Shin as a ‘moral community’ consider it legitimate as long as it conforms to local customs and protocol. Those who kill someone for ‘just’ reasons are unrepentant. Those who seek revenge think that it is their...
right, and in this sense ‘revenge *is* justice’ (Strathern and Stewart 2002: 110). Nonetheless, the religious and local customs can be considered as two moral systems that sometimes reinforce each other and sometimes are at odds with each other. In most cases, the villagers strive to adhere to both at the same time: ‘We follow both religious customs and our own customs, don’t we?’ a villager explained. However desirable this may be, it is often impossible.

Most conflicts start out as inter-personal disputes. Traditionally, kinsmen always supported each other: ‘The clay from the grave goes back to the grave’, goes a local proverb. Because segmentary rule is no longer strictly adhered to, kinsmen often back out of lending their support for fear of jeopardising their own livelihoods and putting their own lives on the line. Political support is carefully calculated and, as the case studies show, self-interest tends to win over primordial loyalties: even brothers fail to come to each other’s aid. Nevertheless, they are often supported by their closest agnates in the same *miráas* who are generally residents in the same village.

On a very general level, this can be considered to support fraternal interest group theory (van Velzen and Wetering 1960). The size of the groups drawn into a conflict ultimately depends on the gravity of the offence and the issue(s) at stake, and it is not so much ‘groups that engage in feuds, as feud that engages groups’, to paraphrase Harrison (1993: 18). If the conflict involves kinship groups (rather than individuals), segmentary opposition is an organising principle and the main reason why the division of forest ownership has proved so difficult. When faced with an external threat to the territorial integrity of the valley or its forest resources, the two major tribal groups, the Darma and Khuka Manka *quom*, coalesce, thereby forming a united front. They may also unite during provincial elections in order for a Palas candidate to secure a seat in the provincial assembly (Chapter 2). The importance of segmentary rule differs in relation to the level of kinship segmentation. This is concomitant with the critique of the ‘segmentary lineage model’ on the grounds that social praxis rarely conforms to the idealised model of alliance and opposition. This is in conformity with a general lack of ‘structure’ in village politics and the strength of factional (rather than lineage-based) conflict (Barth 1956b: 86).
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THE POLITICS OF BELONGING

The Palas valley example teaches us that micro-studies of small groups and societies can provide a better understanding of the underlying motivations for homicide and violence as a human condition. It can also serve as a corrective to the erroneous assumption that violence is an ‘aberration’. Rather, it may be argued that the capacity for violence is a human universal and a troubling reminder of our common humanity. The example of the Palas valley shows that the egalitarian utopia, unburdened by a Hobbesian sovereign control, is exacted at considerable personal and societal costs. Nevertheless, it is worth keeping in mind that in Pakistan justice is seldom served through the state judiciary (Knudsen 2005). In this way the private use of violence is, if not preferable, at least understandable. Moreover, there is always the danger of overplaying the propensity for conflict and suppressing or forgetting the countervailing forces that promote village peace (Lindholm 1982, Marsden 2005). The importance of a more nuanced understanding of the Pakhtun (Pathan) ethos is also reflected in Banerjee’s (2000) perceptive study of the pacifist Khudai Khidmatgar movement (‘Servants of God’). An important revisionist account of twentieth century Pathan political history, her study is a much needed counterpoint to the literature on the Pathan’s warrior image and opens up new avenues for a broader and truer appreciation of the Pathan ethos.

In her retrospective account of ‘Ballybran’, a rural community in western Ireland, Schepker-Hughes (2000) reflects on her depiction of the ills of this egalitarian society: rampant schizophrenia, demographic decline and cruel ‘coddling’ (teasing), the local variant of Bateson’s ‘double-bind’ that ensures that no one unduly stands out or outshines his peers. All adults with their ‘wits’ intact left Ballybran and most never came back. Only those reared for backwardness, the pitiful last-born bachelor ‘saints’ stayed – not competent enough to leave, barely good enough to stay and care for their elderly parents. Those frustrated men and women who could not cope or reacted in ways considered improper were put away in mental hospitals. This is the dark side of closed corporate communities and Schepker-Hughes’s painfully forthright ethnography eloquently charts the final days of a dying village (Schepker-Hughes 2001). For just this reason it was also a highly controversial work, one that angered the villagers of Ballybran and Irish sensibilities alike. Does this have any bearing on our understanding and portrayal of Palas society?
Like Palas today, Ballybran in the 1970s was caught in the transition between a subsistence-based economy and a capitalist market economy. The perils of this transition were similar too – demographic decline, frustration, a silent acceptance of their fate; all of which imperilled the society and robbed it of its vitality. Thus, Ballybran’s crippling psychological violence and the Palas valley’s physical violence caused a major rural exodus that in Ballybran left behind the meek, in Palas the assertive. In both cases, Douglas’s (1996: xix) concept of ‘egalitarian enclaves’ helps us understand why the communities suffered from defection and the powerful centrifugal tendencies of the local moral code.

As I have demonstrated in this book, Palas villagers are caught in ‘webs of significance they themselves have spun’, to paraphrase Geertz (1973: 5), that impel them to defend their rights, even to kill for them. There is no escape from the ‘politics of belonging’: to belong is to subscribe to the values of the community and its ideals. Although people deplore the acts of violence they do not see them in connection with the local ethos of assertiveness – the essence of which is not discussed, much less condemned. Their view of their own society and of themselves is to a large degree shaped (and constrained) by the morality of the community and the importance of honour. This is not to deny the possibility of choice or agency that may make individuals ‘go against the grain’, but, as Blok (2000b: 2–4) argues, there are powerful limitations to individualism that make this, if not impossible, at least improbable.

This brings me back to the question of writing and ethnography. Schmidt and Schröder (2001b: 13) have observed that anthropologists find it difficult to write negatively about their subjects. Nonetheless, Scheper-Hughes wrote about Ballybran exactly as she saw it, ‘warts and all’. With the benefit of hindsight she admits to missing the endearing sides to Ballybran (2000: 29). In my depiction of Palas society I may likewise have dwelled on the society’s ills at the expense of its virtues. ‘Do take the side of a brother, but always speak truth for the sake of God’, goes a Palas proverb. In the question of violence ‘the truth’ is always contested and the anthropologist often removed in time or space from the actual conflict and therefore unable to observe and experience it (Schmidt and Schröder 2001b: 13). Therefore, describing and explaining violence is fraught with the risk of distorting its meaning and demonising its perpetrators. There is no methodology that can guard against this, but a closer attention to the personal narratives of...
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perpetrators and victims alike may increase the prospects not only of a more meaningful but also a more truthful ethnography of violence.
Notes

CHAPTER 1

1. Although the use of violence is common to ‘simple-societies’ it is not limited to them. Feuds, vendettas and duels also occur in societies with centralised political authority, although usually somewhat early in the stages of state formation and therefore in situations of weak central power (Blok 1975, Spierenburg 1998, Waller 1988).

2. To some degree, this poses a clear link to another systemic explanation of feuding, namely cybernetics (Rappaport 1968).

3. The evidence is not conclusive and some dismiss the theory (Kuschel 1993) while others endorse it (Knauft 1991).

4. This also applies to acephalous societies with more complex systems of centralised authority. In Barth’s (1959) analysis of the political system in Swat, he showed the crucial importance of land ownership and the homology between kinship (‘segmentary lineage system’) and patterning of fields. This could explain rivalry between collateral agnates and, more generally, the political system. Relatively stable division or ‘blocs’ (dala) formed around the big landowners (Khan) serving as informal political leaders. Still, blood revenge and insults to personal honour were considered a personal matter and regulated by a local ‘code of honour’.

5. Dastoor is a Pashtu loan word and could indicate that the idea of a ‘code of honour’ is borrowed from the neighbouring Pashtun. Keiser quotes a villager living in Dir Kohistan: ‘We may be Kohistanis, but we consider ourselves Pakhtun’ (1991: 104).

6. My use of Douglas is restricted to this notion, and not premised on the application of ‘culture theory’ of which it forms a part.


CHAPTER 2

1. Northern Areas Transport Company (NATCO).

2. This figure may be incorrect, given the fact that the previous census in 1981 grossly overstated the size of the local population.
3. At regular intervals the Indus could be crossed by skin rafts and cantilever bridges but Stein stayed on the west bank where the Swat state’s annexation provided security cover.

4. A fourth group, the Dom (messengers, musicians), was expelled from the Palas valley around 1970, when the Maulvis branded their singing and dancing un-Islamic.

5. The details of the local building techniques rely on Gutshow’s (1998) architectural survey in the valley. More information on the material culture of Indus Kohistan can be found in Akhtar (1997) and Andrews and Jettmar (2000).

6. The estimates of how many were killed range from 1,000 to 5,000 people. In October 2005, another major earthquake struck the region. The total number of casualities in Indus Kohistan is not known.

7. So as to underline this duality, the men (and women) have two names: one name used for official purposes and inscribed on their identity card and another name by which they are known in the valley.

8. The Palas valley is organised into six ‘Union Councils’ (UCs). The UCs in Indus Kohistan have proved to be effective in promoting social relations and developing economic matters at the local level. Membership is by election but there has not been any UC election in Indus Kohistan since 1989. The ex-members of the Palas valley UCs have no formal political power but some exert personal influence over the people in their respective areas. The UC members and the Chairmen play a very important role for the MNA/MPAs in the general elections. Among the local residents, they are used as brokers to secure votes.

9. A lotaa is an Urdu term for the spouted jug (or its substitute, the old tin can) used everywhere for pouring water for ablutions or after using the toilet. An item used by everybody, it has become a colloquial expression for those who sell out their political convictions for monetary gain.

10. This estimate is probably too low, as many are able to identify the characters of the Arabic script (Schmidt and Kohistani 1998: 109–10). A recent survey in Dáro puts the literacy level to about 5 per cent (Razwal Kohistani, pers. comm.).

11. An example is the GTZ’s (Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit) decision not to initiate a rural development programme in Indus Kohistan (Dani and Khan 1995).

12. After completing a rapid rural appraisal (HJP 1992), the project undertook specialist studies of wildlife, botany, non-timber forest products and maize cultivation.

13. Razwal Kohistani, pers. comm.

14. The HJP had in 1994 secured funding from the European Union, but bureaucratic problems in the EU and in Pakistan held up the transfers. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) agreed to take over the project and cover the running costs until the EU funding arrived. In 2001, the HJP’s successor, the Palas Conservation and Development Project (PCDP) was launched with funding from the EU.
Notes

CHAPTER 3

1. My reconstruction of past events is based on oral sources and therefore not ‘factual’. By the same token, my delimitation of historical ‘epochs’ and ‘phases’ is an attempt to develop a plausible chronology of past events.

2. Like Barth, Meeker argues that the Yusufzai Pashtuns were past nomadic ('heroic') conquerors (1980: 686). Lindholm has opposed the claim to a heroic past, arguing that the Yusufzai more probably were sedentary agriculturalists (Lindholm 1981a).

3. Barth’s interpretation of the wesh has been criticised by Ahmed (1976: 37–8).

4. Additional documentation of the origins and transformation of the wesh can be found in Kohistani (1998).

5. Only late nineteenth-century sources contain population figures. Leitner, quoting his informant Mir Abdulla, puts the population of Palas at 9,000 (Leitner 1893: Appendix II, p. 4). Biddulph refers to the population of Palas as ‘scattered’ with the ability to ‘muster about 5,000 fighting men’ (1880: 10).

6. The settlement patterns varied among Kohistani valleys, reflecting the ecological conditions and history of each valley (1960, Jettmar 1961: 85). The settlement patterns ranged from dense pueblos, via nucleated villages (kot) with adjoining fortress(es), to single fortified houses with huge towers situated in the middle of fields.

7. Staley’s (1969: 231) claim to conversion to Islam by force is unlikely and contradicted by oral history (Zarin and Schmidt 1984).

8. The short-lived reign of Raja Pakhtun Wali, ruler of Darel and Tangir (1911–17), is a case in point (Sökefeld 2002).

9. Kot is frequently found in local place names, for example Kabkot (Dáro), Sherakot (Kuz Palas). Kohistani (1998: 176) refers to the now extinct village of the Sorma lineage, the Sormo kot.

10. The relevance of wesh-induced field scattering was demonstrated when the devastating flash flood hit Dáro in the autumn of 1992. The flood crushed houses and wiped out most of the fields belonging to residents of the village Dum Bela, lying at the confluence of the Nila Ga and Chor Ga rivers. Taking advantage of a distant piece of land received during the wesh, they were able to develop new fields and resettle further downstream.

11. The historical events leading up to the treaty are covered by Stellrecht (1998: 63ff).

12. Barth saw this system as closely related to the ‘jajmani system’, without its Hinduist religious content (Barth 1959: 64).

13. The first Gilgit Agency lasted only four years (1878–81). The Agency was re-instituted in 1889.

14. The boundary was located at a place known as ‘Botie Kao’ and marked by beating a slab into a crack in the top of the mountain.

15. A tüuli (‘toss’) requires three people. One person, who cannot see or hear the other two, holds two straws. The second person tells the third person that if a certain straw is thrown by the first, then the outcome will be so and so. The first person decides which straw to throw and this determines the outcome.


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17. The size of shares has been revised and at present a woman’s share (taagô) is equal to that of a man’s. A share is now usually referred to as baagô taagô (lit., ‘big-small share’).

18. There is disagreement over this point. Some argue that oak forests were distributed before agricultural land.

CHAPTER 4

1. Moreover, taking a loan is considered sinful (haram) and contrary to Quranic injunctions against charging interest (ribaa).

2. In the Shariat adjudications of property disputes the defendant and claimant appear before at least one Maulvi (religious scholar), as agreed by both parties. The Maulvi hears the statements of the representatives (wakil) of both sides, weighs them according to religious rules and principles and gives a judgement that is supposed to be binding. The losing party can, and often does, appeal the verdict and ask for a new hearing under another Maulvi. Non-property cases are not heard in Shariat courts (Zarin and Schmidt n.d.).

3. The system could be described as ‘agro-silvo-pastoral’, that is, a land-use system in which woody perennials are grown with agricultural crops, forage crops and livestock production.

4. The sharecropping contracts are of various types, but the most common comprises the leasing of the land for half a share (horej) of the crop, or on payment of a prefixed amount of maize after the harvest (hijara). Those who lack land altogether are left with the choice of becoming agricultural tenants.

5. Due to social stigma most of the blacksmith families have left the valley. Only in a few larger villages do the blacksmiths still perform their traditional crafts, mostly against payment in grain.

6. The livestock figures are based on surveys in the more accessible parts of Dáro and Kuz Palas. The villages in the interior of Dáro may have significantly larger herds. The figures should therefore be treated with caution.

7. In 1997, the conversion rate of the Pakistani rupee (Rs) was Rs 44 against the US dollar.

8. In Northern Pakistan the spatial extent of ‘single-crop’ and ‘double-crop zones’ cannot be determined on the basis of height above sea level, but must be considered alongside other factors such as aspect, slope relief and variation in radiation and sunshine hours (Whiteman 1988).

9. It is a measure of the importance people place on this subject that they still wrangle over land (khil) that was not redistributed before the wesh cycle was brought to an abrupt halt. The villagers still identify this land as khil to ensure that its original designation is not forgotten and ownership is still contested.

10. The taxonomy of indigenous maize cultivars can be found in Zarin and Schmidt (1984: 36–8).

11. A few villages and individuals have been targeted for seed trials using improved maize hybrids (HJP 1996).
Notes

12. In the Palas Shina dialect, there are no verbs for ‘to buy’ and ‘to sell’. Instead, monetary transactions are called múli haroón (to take for a price, i.e., buy) and múli doón (to give for a price, i.e., sell) (Ruth L. Schmidt, pers. comm.)

13. The local practice of placing an interdict upon cultivation is specifically targeted at subsistence needs and is therefore harsher than bans practised by Montenegrin farmers ‘where truces were used to interrupt vehement feuds so as to get in the harvest’ (Boehm 1989: 929). Moreover, the aggrieved party could only assail the perpetrator’s house and property for three days (Boehm 1984: 108).

14. Recently some women attempted to circumvent a ban on cultivation by ploughing the fields with a plough pulled by bullocks. The opponents opened fire on the women and injured one of them in the leg. The other villagers decried this as a breach of tradition, but the opponents proceeded to prevent all the women and children from cultivating the fields.

15. This is based on a preliminary statistical analysis of data from a survey of maize cultivation covering twenty hamlets in ten major villages (HJP 1996).

16. The aggrieved party may be persuaded to withdraw the FIR if paid compensation. Retracting the FIR need not affect the conflict itself, which usually continues unabated.

17. The data are drawn from a survey of maize cultivation covering twenty hamlets in ten major villages (HJP 1996). The sample includes villages lying from 900 to 2,500 metres above sea level and covers the altitudinal range of the main maize growing zone (maji ser). The largest part of the sample was collected in Kuz Palas (n = 89) with a smaller sample from Dáro (n = 19). The data set was analysed with the help of Excel (spreadsheet) and SPSS (statistical software).

18. These findings may not be generalisable to all the villages and until a broader sample can be examined, the findings should be considered tentative.

19. The limited potential for agriculture strained the redistributive system and caused periodic shifts between egalitarian (‘acephalous’) and centralised organisation (‘chiefdom’) (Barth 1956b: 84–5).

20. At present, the Sarkhali constitute less than 3 per cent of the population (Zarin and Knudsen 1999).

21. Knauft (1991: 417) has suggested that there is an evolutionary link between low-intensity human ecology and violence.

22. This should not be taken to mean that a marginal environment is a sufficient explanation for the propensity for violence: studies from nearby valleys link agrarian change and transition to cash crops to a sharp rise in community violence and homicide (Keiser 1986). One reason is that the newly found wealth is often invested in automatic guns, thereby increasing the homicide rate.

CHAPTER 5

1. Because of the internal migrations from Dáro to Kuz Palas, the Darma quom now constitutes about 50 per cent of the population in Kuz Palas, something I refer to in more detail in Chapter 9.
2. Only ownership to agricultural land that was distributed among villagers in the last general land distribution (taqsimaat, wesh) about 100 years ago, qualifies for ulsi'ya membership.

3. Although rare, there are now internecine vendettas among menial groups (be'záat).

4. Involuntary migration means that households are forced to leave the valley because of their involvement in lethal conflicts. Migration due to poverty is not included here.

5. Despite the danger involved, some exiles do re-visit the valley. By walking during night or having an escort they are able to partake in important rites de passage (marriages, burials).

6. There are indications that poets were formerly excused for their transgressions and considered outside the norms regulating conduct between the sexes.

7. Evidence in support of this argument can be found among the non-Muslim Kalasha ('Kalash Kafirs'). Among the Kalasha wife-elopement is common – more than 70 per cent of betrothals and first marriages are dissolved by run-away brides. Elopement is mediated by an elaborate institution of compensation payments that discourages would-be suitors and lovers (Parkes 1996: 49–50).

8. The same practice is described by Boehm in his analysis of blood revenge in Montenegro in the former Yugoslavia (Boehm 1984: 80). Cutting off the nose (and, occasionally, the upper lip) was also used to punish unfaithful women and to make them unfit for new marriage. A similar practice among the Swat Pashtuns is noted by Lindholm (1982: 219). Bourdieu (1965: 235) has noted that among the Berber (Kabyle, Algeria) the word for nose (nif) also means 'honour' or 'the point of honour'.

9. There is no specific vernacular term for ‘love affair’. ‘He has secret love affairs with her’ would be translated as ‘se so mulia se chap de biyan’ (lit., ‘He sits with that girl in secret’).

10. Another and less severe form of elopement is known as zas thoón, meaning the elopement of a girl with her fiancé. In this case, elopement does not give rise to hostility, nor may the eloping couple be killed because the Nikah has already been performed meaning that technically, if not formally, they are already married. In such cases some form of compensation in the form of money or the exchange of girls for marriage will serve to restore relations between the parties. Tapper has noted that among the Durrani in Afghanistan elopement is common and not ‘regarded with great moral opprobrium’ (1991a: 224).

11. Praying (namaz) is made up four different units (rakats) of ritual action (faras, sunnat, nafal and vitar). The five daily prayers combine the four rakats in different ways. Importantly, nafal, which is prescribed in three of the namaz prayers, is optional and can be left out (Keiser 1991: 36–7). Gulbadan's inclusion of nafal may, hence, be considered a demonstration of piety and plea of innocence.

12. In the 1970s the khanate was abolished and the Khan (Nawab Ayub Khan) demoted to a parliamentary delegate. Nonetheless, the feudal institution persists. The current Khan is a member of the provincial assembly (MPA), while his younger brother is a member of the national assembly (MNA).

13. The plans for a large hydro-electric development project in Alai have recently re-ignited the conflict between Alai and Palas. The plan to divert water from the river Chōr to the Alai watershed was abandoned after vehement protests by the Palas villagers.
Notes

14. Giving up asylum in Alai leads to a reinstatement of the offender’s privileges.
15. I build this argument on Parkes’ analysis of prestige feasts among the Kalasha, a non-Muslim minority living in Chitral, a remote corner of the NWFP (Parkes 1992). In the larger Kohistani valleys there was earlier periodic competitive feasting of accumulated agricultural surplus. Remnants of this custom can be observed in the tradition of lavish feeding of villagers as part of funeral rites (Staley 1969: 234). Among the Nuristanis in Afghanistan, merit feasts and the killing of tribal enemies co-existed and both conferred higher rank on individuals. This served to increase internal cohesion and cooperation while pushing violence outside the community (Keiser n.d.). For a more detailed discussion of rank and merit feasting in Nuristan, see Klimburg (1999: 111–139).

CHAPTER 6
1. The women inherit half of a man’s share. They seldom claim their share in order to help their brothers.
2. Brothers and first cousins are often perceived as equal and the term for brother (za) is used interchangeably for cousins too.
3. Taking animals to an offended party is a sign of sincerity.
4. Women accompanying their husbands or other close kin involved in lethal conflicts are not attacked. In rare cases, women are legitimate targets, such as if a women accompanies the enemy to help ambush a man sitting in confinement.
5. Losing in a Shariat assembly is not dishonourable, but there are many examples in which the losing side later disputes the ruling as well as the qualifications of the Maulvi.
6. This is a misinterpretation that has historical antecedents in colonial ethnography’s distortion of the hill peoples and frontier tribes of British India (Kennedy 1991, Lindholm 1980).

CHAPTER 7
1. Although primarily used to aid humans, magic is also used to protect livestock and crops: see Chapter 4.
2. There is no local term for ‘magic’ or ‘magician’; these are commonly referred to by their Urdu glosses: jadu (magic), jadu ghar (magician) and tawīz ghar (amulet writer).
3. According to Muslim belief, the ‘Book of Fate’ is presided over by God and records the fate of all human beings.
4. ‘Make her feet rise in the air’ means ‘make her fall madly in love’.
5. In 1990, the sections of the Pakistan Penal Code of 1860 dealing with physical injury, manslaughter and murder were amended. In 1997 the amendment was passed by parliament as the ‘Qisas and Diyat Act’ (‘Retribution and Compensation Act’). The act privatises justice by shifting the emphasis from homicide as a crime against the state to a private offence against the victim. This allows the victim’s legal heir (wali) powers to close the criminal investigation, accept monetary compensation (diyat) and to pardon the accused at any stage of the prosecution as well as to commute the death sentence (Knudsen 2005).
6. In 1978 Pakistan instituted a parallel system of justice with the introduction of ‘Sharia Courts’. In 1983 local level Qazi courts were introduced, led by an Islamic cleric (qazi) acting as judge.

7. It is believed that the reciting of Sura Yasin resolves difficulties, removes pain, attains wishes and forgives sins. For this reason it is often written on a piece of paper and worn as an amulet for protection.

CHAPTER 8

1. This includes trees such as the Himalayan yew (Taxus wallichiana), chestnut (Aesculus indica), walnut (Juglans regia), willow (Salix spp.), maple (Acer spp.), birch (Betula utilis) and the West Himalayan elm (Ulmus wallichiana).

2. Depending on the age of a tree and the altitude at which it grows the yields range from 150 to 400 kg. The walnut kernels are an important addition to the subsistence diet and are used as gifts on festive and commemorative occasions and in betrothal and wedding ceremonies.

3. Due to poverty and urgent cash needs, the mushrooms are sold at the first opportunity to roving traders. The villagers could earn more if they could afford postponing trading until later in the season. The income from selling mushrooms is used to repay loans, buy some cattle, some land, a gun or food from the bazaar.

4. On the other hand, the fact that forest produce is freely available for bona fide villagers serves to balance processes of socio-economic differentiation. This is a point that is also stressed by the villagers themselves.

5. The villagers hunt wild ungulates (grey goral, markhor, ibex). The animals are becoming scarce and the hunting has almost ceased. Traditionally, the meat was shared among kinsmen and neighbours and eaten in communal meals.

6. There is agreement that in old times the oak trees and the land on which they grew often had separate owners. Even today this pattern can be observed in some places. This is a result of the way the land settlement was carried out.

7. Originally, the ownership of the oak forest and the conifer forest was discontinuous. While one clan controlled the oak forest, another had the use-right to the conifer forest growing above it. The impracticality of this arrangement made the villagers revoke it by common consent. This change made the owners of the oak forest holders of the use-rights to the conifer forests. The exact timing of this change is not known but can tentatively be set at around 1930–50.

8. The root-bark has traditional medicinal uses and is harvested in small quantities for local use. The commercial extraction of dindasa is illegal without special permission.

9. During the last wesh a century ago, equity could be enforced by regrouping and reshuffling the lineage members and, on occasion, pruning and grafting lineages on to neighbouring lineages belonging to the same clan. This is no longer possible because it would require coercion and upset political and economic ties that have been unchanged for a long time. For this reason, people have become more inclined to divide the forest in proportion to the number of shareholders (see Chapter 9).

10. The term ‘Book’ (kitab) is a reference to the Quran. In more specific terms it means ‘Fiqah’, that is, the Islamic law as derived from the Quran and the Hadith.
Notes

CHAPTER 9

1. **Zangal** is a derivative of the Sanskrit *jangala*. Dove has traced the etymological transformation of *jangala*, meaning ‘savanna’, to the contemporary Urdu term *jangal*, or jungle, meaning ‘forest’ (Dove 1992).

2. The four species referred to as the ‘big trees’ are; Himalayan cedar (*Cedrus deodara*), blue pine (*Pinus wallichiana*), East/west Himalayan fir (*Abies spectabilis, Abies pindrow*) and spruce (*Picea smithiana*).

3. During the iron rule of chieftain Raja Pakhtun Wali (1911–17), timber logging in Darel and Tangir soared. Raja Pakhtun Wali ‘had an income of 2,000 mounds [= 80 tonnes] of wheat beside one or two lakhs [1–200,000] of rupees in hard cash which the Kaka Khel woodcutters paid him for cutting timber’ (Schomberg 1935: 240). Having disarmed his subjects and opponents Raja Pakhtun Wali’s rule repressed internecine feuding and provided a safe cover that encouraged timber logging.

4. Some villagers contend that the principle was also reversed. If a villager sold his part of an oak forest, he also lost his share in the accompanying conifer forest, but retained his rights in the rest of the tribe’s estate.

5. The Shariat verdict was invalidated because the two learned Qazi judges adjudicating it were not from Indus Kohistan, hence unfamiliar with the local religious jurisprudence.

6. Studies from northern Pakistan show a high correlation between roads and deforestation (Schickhoff 1993, 1995). However, even though roads facilitate timber logging, traditional techniques allow timber logging to take place where there are no roads. In particular, timber-slides (*patruu*) and skyline cranes (*zangå*) are used to transport timber down the mountain to the nearest river or road (Knudsen 1999b).

7. In a meeting between the representatives from District Kohistan and the Governor of the NWFP, they petitioned the Governor to allow the Forest Department to advance the money for timber harvesting. The FD was unwilling to do so and argued that if they lacked money, they would have to go to the Forest Development Corporation (Mushtaq 1989 Appendix xii, 401).

8. A case study from Kuz Palas shows that two compartments were over-cut by almost 300 per cent in the case of cedar and 180 per cent in the case of blue pine, the two most valuable tree species (Usui 1994: 28–29).

9. In Dir Kohistan, one forest contractor was paid Rs 26.17 million over a two year period (1994–96) as royalty rights payment for timber logged in the Gawaldai valley (Panjkora, Dir Kohistan). The enquiry commission found that he had withheld the money accruing to the local owners. Each of the 4,035 shareholders was entitled to an estimated at Rs 6,609 (Khattak, Khan, and Sial 1997).

10. The main reason is the way the final land settlement was carried out. As explained in Chapter 3, the Khuka Manka of Kuz Palas got additional land in Dáro. The largest part, Kunsher, lies northeast of the main river, the Musha Ga.

11. Because there is little material gain from owning minute fields most of the larger land-owning patrilineages have left their land ‘in trust’ (*rahan*) or leased it to the residents in Shuki Ser who cultivate the land on a half-share basis (*hijara*).

12. In a few cases, the Palas villagers have collectively sponsored their political candidates and borne all the expenses of their election campaign.

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CHAPTER 10

1. The survey found that the mean (and median) year for leaving the valley due to enmity was 1975.

2. Because many households have one or more family members working as labour migrants, the number of families leaving Dáro due to poverty is low compared to those forced to leave due to enmity (Chapter 5). Lethal conflict should not, however, be considered a ‘functional response’ to land scarcity (Boehm 1984).

3. Razwal Kohistani (pers. comm.).

4. This is not only a local phenomenon, but a part of a more widespread regional pattern (Frembgen 2006).

5. The men involved in lethal conflicts took precautions against attacks – fortifying their houses and keeping vicious watch-dogs – but they were still often ambushed.

6. Abu-Lughod (1986: 248ff) has made the persuasive point that poetry is a privileged ‘discourse of antistructure’ allowing individuals to express sentiments and feelings that contravene public morals (‘antimorality’) without fear of reprisals or sanctions.

7. This ties in with the dress code and the importance of the trouser-cord as a symbolic expression of moral values in Pakistan (Frembgen 2004).

8. A telling example of this distortion is Schomberg’s (1935: 246) rendition of the ‘history’ of Darel and Tangir: ‘the history of the two valleys has been but a dreary tale of murder and blood-feuds. So bad has it now become that there is no house without a vendetta, and life has become intolerable. Even murder appears to have lost its charm; and the savages are sated with blood.’

9. Gilsenan (1996: xv) found that despite most men’s pervasive defense of social honour, there were those who stood aside from the ‘aggressive masculinity’, wishing to lead an untroubled life.


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