

The History of a Transit Country

Why is it that the Afghans have such difficulty building a halfway functioning state? Anyone who has read the preceding ethnoses will have guessed that a tribal society such as the Afghan one must have difficulty with state structures and also with all other structures that are not rooted in tribal society.

Please, try to imagine again what it means to live in a tribal structure! These structures, the tribe, the family, the clan, only these offer you protection. The police, the social welfare office, the public prosecutor's office, there are such things. But these are hostile institutions. You can only rely on your family and a part of your clan. You are attached to your family with all your heart. Your clan is your home. The fact that the tribal structures only function if you and everyone in the tribe are unconditionally committed to the family, the clan and the tribe is not a question for you. Otherwise, everything would collapse and everyone would be defenseless.

When you were a child, people from an enemy clan had accused your father of being a terrorist to the government. Police had driven up and wanted to arrest the father. Then your uncle arrived with over twenty armed men. The police retreated and never bothered the father again. Now your uncle is in poor health. He would have to be treated abroad. But that costs. You work for a company. You have just sold something to a customer and the customer has paid you a higher amount for it. The cash register with the receipts is open. You have the key.

For you the case is clear. You book the money properly and lock the cash register. The thought of embezzlement does not occur to you at all. It would be madness to reach into the cash register. It would be found out immediately. The company would fire you. There would be criminal and civil consequences. You would never find a decent job again. Your "civil existence" would be destroyed. At least 99 out of 100 German employees think and act like you.

But you are now in Afghanistan and you are the nephew of the uncle who rescued your father. If you don't close the cash register again, but do something for the uncle, it will probably be discovered. You will be fired. But it is highly uncertain whether the story will be reviewed by a court of law. The best thing to do is to dig a little deeper into the cash right away. Then you have reserves to bribe police officers, prosecutors and judges. Getting a new job with another company wouldn't be a problem. Maybe some businessmen will hear rumors about the incident. But this kind of thing happens everywhere. You may have to apply several times. At one company you work for a while and then go to another. You always belong to your family and your clan. You will always need them. You were born into it. You are attached to it with all your heart. Your uncle saved your family. He is revered and admired. Now, if you do something for that uncle, your name will be mentioned with esteem throughout the clan.

Or you are a department head in a ministry. The minister has ordered that one person be hired in each department who can work on a computer. You can do some Word and some Excel yourself. You make the selection among the candidates for the new position in your department yourself. The candidates present you with certificates stating what schools and courses they have attended. Two men have even studied in India. But paper is patient. And there is also Ibrahim, your sister's eldest son. None of your sister's children has found a job yet. The sister and brother-in-law are no longer young and are very worried. Not only the sister and the brother-in-law are worried. You yourself are also worried. You will have to take in the sister and brother-in-law one day and take care of their children if they all remain unemployed. In addition, it would be very helpful for you if there was someone working in your department whom you could rely on.

In Afghanistan, the individual very often has no choice but to decide in favor of his or her own clan – regardless of corruption or nepotism. The positions in government-offices and also in private

organizations are filled with unqualified personnel. Money that a company has earned with its work disappears. And because all this is very common, it does not help to punish individual employees. Often you would have to fire the whole workforce. The loyalty of the Afghan to his own family, clan and tribe is much stronger than loyalty to the state or any other employer. In the client society, this does not change much. In the tribal society, one is completely dependent on one's family and clan and feels a strong sense of belonging to them. In the client society, one is entirely dependent on the community one has joined. Here, loyalty belongs to this clientele – you can also say rope team.



But why does the population of Afghanistan still live largely in a tribal society? How was it with us? Weren't the Saxons, the Franks, the Alemanni, the Frisians or the Swabians once real "tribes"? Yes, at the time of the migration of peoples, they must have been organized in a similar way as the Afghans are today.

But why did the Afghans not succeed in further developing their society? Are we Europeans better "equipped"? Do we have other talents or other genes that have enabled us to create a somewhat more enjoyable coexistence?

Not at all! If you look at the pictures that Afghan preschool children draw, you see no difference from what German children draw in kindergarten.

Ali Moral grew up in Yakaolang in the central Afghan highlands. He never went to school. Nevertheless, for years he ran a small clinic that mainly took care of tuberculosis and leprosy. Such clinics in the mountains, however, cannot devote themselves only to two specific diseases. They have

to face many health problems, because the next halfway functioning infirmary is far away. A German orthopedist worked with Ali for a few weeks. "I would wish many of my German colleagues such a diagnostic instinct as Ali has," he finally said.

Working in our organization's office is Akbari, who also grew up in a mountainous province. There, he never went to a government school. For six years, he attended a madressah, a mosque school. He learned some writing there, but it was mostly about religious education. He happily recounts how the mullah read him a short statement from the Koran in Arabic and then lectured for an hour in the local language, Dari, about the meaning of this Koranic statement. The following day, Akbari was supposed to reproduce everything the mullah had told him. We put Akbari to work on Excel programs. He was enthusiastic. The structure of programs, that kind of thing suits him. In accounting, if the amount in the statement does not match the actual cash amount, you have to get Akbari. If anyone can clear up the discrepancy, it's him. And he thinks dizzily fast.

Afghans are not differently gifted from us or from other peoples. There are very capable people among the Afghans. It's just that they don't manage to have the professional careers that they would have with us. Their society does not give them that chance.

Yes, if it's not because of talent, what is the reason that societies in Afghanistan and Europe have developed so differently?

One very important reason is history. Afghanistan is called a "transit country" because many peoples have passed through the territory of today's Afghanistan over the course of thousands of years. Mostly they wanted to go to India, where it is warm and the soil is fertile. Sometimes parts of such migrating peoples got stuck in Afghanistan, settled there permanently or moved on later. In any case, it was rough when strangers came. They were always enemies who could not afford to show sympathy to the locals. They had to drive out the locals in order to settle themselves or to be able to move on safely. These strangers had made their way by force of arms. Militarily, they were efficiently organized. Otherwise, they would not have reached Afghanistan. The locals were outnumbered and fled to the mountains. When the situation calmed down after an invasion by foreigners, the survivors had to find a way to live together again. Earlier they had lived together as a tribal society. Now they continued to live as a tribal society. They had no other choice.

When strangers had settled down, contacts between them and the old-established people came slowly. The old-timers were needed by the new masters for war service and forced labor. Trade began to develop. But before they could "warm up" to each other, foreign enemies came and they had to take refuge in the mountains. Over the centuries, life in a land of transit offered a lot of fear and terror, but hardly any opportunities for social development.

We are familiar with the war campaign of Alexander the Great, who advanced across the Indus River and left behind Greek-influenced empires in the territory of Afghanistan as well. We praise the cultural act of Alexander. Historians speak of genocide. Two centuries later, various Hunnic peoples invaded the territory of Afghanistan from the north. Then a great Indian empire occupied eastern Afghanistan. From 700 the Arabs came from the southwest and brought Islam. Around 1000, Sultan Mahmud ruled over large parts of what is now Afghan and Pakistani territory from the Afghan city of Ghazni. The splendor of this state and the fact that the center was located on present-day Afghan territory should not obscure the fact that the Ghazni Empire was perceived as foreign rule in its territory outside the city of Ghazni. After 1200, the Mongols under Chinggis Khan invaded and wiped out large parts of the local population. Less than 200 years later followed the equally brutal advance of a successor empire of the Mongols under Timur Leng. Huge areas were depopulated. Peoples from the northeast of Asia settled in the deserted areas. Still later came the Uzbeks and the Persians. Finally, the British and later the Soviets occupied the land.



How is the history of Europe different? Here, too, war followed war. Yes, here there was the migration of peoples. Warrior tribes roamed the land, driving out other peoples and leaving bloody traces. But these migratory movements ebbed away. Around 1000, the Hungarians and the Vikings were the last to settle down. From the outside, Europe was threatened by Islam. It was repelled early on in France and then, in the course of the centuries, also driven out of Spain. The Mongols advanced as far as Silesia and then retreated. Europe was lucky. From the east, Islam was carried by the Turks as far as Vienna and then successfully pushed back.

But all in all, there was a large area in Europe that was not invaded by foreigners for over a millennium. This area included France, Germany, the British Isles, Poland, Scandinavia, Upper and Central Italy. Of course, there were plenty of wars in Europe as well. The Germans invaded Italy again and again. The English and the French fought each other not only in the Hundred Years' War. In Germany, half the population was killed in the Thirty Years' War. But if you look at Europe as a framework, these were European civil wars. Europeans were among themselves. They "could come to themselves." The peoples spoke different languages and fought each other. But they were also interconnected through the churches, through trade and commerce, through the nobility, and through the emerging universities. People talked to each other. They negotiated the rules of living together. A well thought-out and reliable legal system emerged. Respected intellectuals could finally ask the rulers, "By what right do you rule us?" The nobles could not give a convincing answer. And so a participation of the population in the decisions of the states through elections developed - democracy.

In the territory of today's Afghanistan, the population could never come to its own. Social constellations could never develop that would have made it possible for the people to ask their rulers, "By what right do you rule us?"

After each new invasion of the people who had passed through, the coexistence of the survivors was arranged in such a way, or in such a similar way, as it had been before. The circumstances were exactly those that would have produced a tribal society if it had not existed yet. One trusted only a few other families and clans. From someone whom one did not know, only bad was to be expected. One met him with distrust, even with hatred.

If a modern state with ministries, police, judiciary, schools and armed forces is to be made out of a population with such a character, people who deeply mistrust each other must jointly run offices, hospitals, courts, factories and tank battalions. How is that supposed to work?