

## The Compulsion for Glory

Every Afghan must be ready at all times to prove himself in battle, to protect himself, his family and his property, but also to stand up for his clan against other clans, even to defend the interests of his tribe. He cannot deviate from this basic attitude. It is his duty. If he is not willing to defend his property, all others have the right to encroach upon it. If he does not protect his wives and daughters, they are fair game. And if he shirks the fight, neither the clan nor the tribe can rely on him. Then he is nothing.

Peace and harmony prevail within a large family or a clan at best sporadically. Many families of a clan have been bitter enemies for a long time and strive doggedly to harm each other. Tension and competition exist at all ethnic levels. Violence is a constant threat. Overall, the groups for which an Afghan feels genuine affection are manageable. The rest are enemies or at least people who cannot be trusted.

Shaima kept our office clean for several years. One day she asked for a vacation.

"Yes, why?"

"Oh, it's a sad story. In my homeland, a young girl was shot dead. Enemies wanted to shoot her eleven-year-old brother. The sister stood in front of the brother and was shot herself. I would like to travel to the funeral services."

"Do you have a lot of Taliban and fighting between Taliban and government forces?"

"Yes, we have that too. But this was a private matter between families. There are three houses there. If someone steps out of one house, they can expect to be shot at from one of the other houses."



A wedding was taking place in Logar province. More than a thousand guests were invited, mostly relatives from the large family and the clan. A judge who works in Kabul had arrived with his two sons in his own car. After the party, they were on their way back. Suddenly, three armed, hooded men blocked their way. The judge and his sons were prepared. They were carrying pistols ready to shoot. At the same time, the three men jumped out of the car, opened fire and shot the hooded men. One of the sons was slightly injured. They removed the face masks of those who were shot. They were relatives who had celebrated with them at the wedding.

Within large families and clans, there are tribal elders and other notables who mediate so that disputes between different families do not become too numerous, because, of course, any internal dispute weakens the large family, the clan and the tribe. However, mediators can only make suggestions to the opposing parties. Only if both parties agree, the arbitration is successful. The arbitrators' proposals often comply with sharia law. Among Pashtun tribes in eastern and southern Afghanistan, there are also ancient tribal laws that are applied in arbitration. Arbitration prevents or postpones bloodshed. It does not create sympathy between opponents. However, if a party to a conflict is unwilling to accept a conciliator's proposal, it makes itself unpopular in the tribe. Also, the enmity of families, large families or clans recedes somewhat into the background when the tribe has a dispute with another tribe.

After the communists surrendered in 1992, the victorious mujahideen fell upon each other in a civil war. Things were particularly cruel in Kabul. In many provinces, the same mujahideen parties were represented as in Kabul. But despite all the mutual antipathy, they tried hard not to let it come to a fight. At that time, I traveled several times to Wardak province, where our organization at the time was building a hospital. During one of my stays there, a young man murdered another. The victim and the perpetrator were close to different parties. But the local party leaders managed to keep the truce. The murderer was caught and handed over to the care of a third party. The parties are not actually ethnic units like large families or clans. However, it can be assumed that in the countryside, membership in the parties corresponded to membership in certain families and clans. The murderer was treated according to the rules of Sharia law. The families involved have the opportunity to come to an agreement. Mediators try to mediate. The family of the murderer can pay the family of the murdered person a so-called blood money. It can also offer the other family two girls, who are then married into the family of the murdered person. If the family of the murdered person refuses such compensation, the murderer is killed. The whole process is lengthy. I had to leave before it was completed. Here, the use of party leaders as mediators prevented a major dispute from breaking out between the clans and parties involved.

In the same area, several years later, a man had committed a sexual assault on a girl. The girl's family lured the man into a trap. An altercation ensued. The girl's father was wounded by a shot. The sexual offender was killed. Good friends of the killed man told me that everything was done perfectly correctly. Mediators of the tribe did not have to intervene. When I asked about the father, I was told that he was in the hospital in Kabul, where his wound was being treated. For the state authorities, the case was also settled. Further bloodshed was not to be expected.

So each individual must radiate defensibility at all times. He must show off a bit. But he must also show again and again by deeds that he dares to do something. When it comes to a controversial exchange of words, he must never give the impression that he is backing down. And when the going gets tough, he must fight. If you have the impression that a man meets these requirements, he is held in high esteem. If he has already proven himself in battles, he is a hero. Everyone strives for this glory – at least officially. I have met Afghans who spoke honestly about the fears they had endured in battles with the communists. But no one questions the glorification of battle and glory.





Every man wants to show that he is a fighter. Men need opportunities to distinguish themselves as warriors. Disputes within the tribe exist. But they are undesirable. Therefore, they do not provide enough opportunities for men to prove themselves. One could become a warrior professionally, as a rich man's bodyguard, as a mercenary or even in the state military. But Afghans don't like the dependence and incalculable heteronomy that this entails.

Think of the war of the Mujahedin against the communists and the Soviets or the war of the Taliban against NATO and the Afghan government! Such guerrilla wars ideally fulfill the need of Afghans to show themselves as warriors. Afghan guerrillas fight closer to home. If they have to, they can cultivate their fields in between. Their relatives and friends hear about their deeds. A guerrilla war is so attractive that its justification – defense of Islam, expulsion of invaders – is hardly necessary. A guerrilla war is almost a self-runner.

The U.S. harassed Afghan Pashtuns after driving the Taliban out of Afghanistan with what was initially an almost all-American contingent of troops called "Enduring Freedom." Its soldiers kicked in the doors of homesteads and residential buildings, entered all chambers, searched women for weapons, shot residents if they resisted, and bombed away entire farms if they thought a terrorist might be hiding there. No meaningful military objective was discernible. It was about revenge for the attacks of September 11, 2001, because the Pashtuns were the carriers of the Taliban movement, and the Taliban had given shelter to Osama bin Laden, the organizer of the attacks, and had not extradited him to the United States.

This heavy-handed "letting the hammer down," which the U.S. government under Bush Jr. at the time thought was the right thing to do, was bottomless stupidity. The people fought back and the Taliban movement, which had actually already been defeated, was revived.

The British in India had already taken advantage of the Afghans' need for warlike self-affirmation. They sent out agents who intensified the latent friction between the various tribes on either side of the border with Afghanistan and also ensured that those willing to fight did not run out of weapons. Thus, the inhabitants of the border regions of Afghanistan were preoccupied with internal disputes and did not think of joining forces against British India.

Pakistan, inherited the border between British India and Afghanistan. Pakistan thought it wise to continue the Afghanistan policy of the British in a big way, because the said border dividing the Pashtun people between the two countries was always disputed and was not recognized by Afghanistan. In order not to be threatened by Afghanistan, Pakistan wants to install a government dependent on it in Afghanistan. As long as this is not possible, Pakistan is trying to keep Afghanistan weak in the manner of the British through internal fighting. Like the British once did, the Pakistanis provide weapons and other material supplies to fighters against the Afghan government and the foreign soldiers who support that government. Such fighters are currently primarily the Taliban. But those who call themselves Islamic State soldiers are also controlled by Pakistan.

The means are there. Pakistan possesses the nuclear bomb. There is a danger that the bomb will fall into the hands of radical Islamists. The U.S. believes it can prevent this by cooperating Pakistan and its military in particular with huge amounts of money. This protection-money relationship is called a "strategic partnership." So on the one hand, the U.S. is paying its own soldiers to fight the Taliban and the Islamic State in Afghanistan, and on the other hand, through Pakistan, it is also funding these radical Islamists. It should be added that there are not only Taliban in Afghanistan supported by Pakistan, but also Iranian Taliban. Yes, even the U.S. maintains Taliban-contingents dependent on them. But Pakistan's effort on behalf of its Taliban is by far the most significant. All these Taliban godfathers could do nothing with their money if they did not encounter with it the great willingness of many Afghans to distinguish themselves as warriors.

An Afghan friend summed it up in one short sentence, "They want to fight." He explained that he was referring not only to the men's desire to be seen as great fighters, but also to the desire of these fighters for pay and equipment and, in particular, the greed of their masterminds and commanders for lavish allowances.