

Newsletter, January 24, 2023

Dear Friends,

Last week Anne Marie and I shared in our community about Afghanistan under the Taliban and OFARIN's prospects. The event "Afghanistan - Now What?" was well attended.

We first tried to introduce Afghans living in rural areas. Anne Marie had described how carefully families in the countryside treat each other and how farsightedly they pursue marriage policies. Then I described in detail the life of the people in the countryside. I reproduce that here quite literally.

Why am I interested in rural people? If we hear anything at all about Afghanistan in our media, it is statements by government representatives or complaints by girls who want to go to school or study but are not allowed to. The pronouncements of leading Taliban often cause head-shaking. The girls who want to learn are pitied. We understand them. They want what their peers in our country can do. We are outraged that Afghan girls should not learn anything.

But Anne Marie and I know of very many Afghans who do not appear in our media. They tick differently. But when you see the conditions under which they live, you understand that they tick the way they do.

These people live in villages and tents, in the mountains and on the steppe. They are farmers or nomads or even craftsmen (millers, bakers, blacksmiths, motor vehicle craftsmen, well diggers).

In the rural areas where they live, women and girls may only be seen totally veiled by men who do not belong to the immediate family circle. In some rural areas, if women have a child, they must do it alone in a cubbyhole. In other rural areas, women are at least allowed to help with births. Afghan women have many children. Woe betide them if they don't have children! Or almost as bad: Woe if they only give birth to girls!

How did this disregard for women come about?

In our sense, Afghanistan was never a developed state. For the population - especially in the countryside - there was no state justice, no courts, no police. But what does an individual do when someone else steals from him? If another insults him publicly? Yes, if the other wants to kill him - and there are no police? Then this individual must defend himself, even with violence. He must fight for his property, for his life and for that of his family. In the past, there really were no state courts and no police. Today there are. But the police and the judiciary are corrupt. It is better not to turn to them. So even today you have to be determined to fight yourself.

The thinking of people in the mountains and steppes is very much about fighting. Fighting is a very central, dramatic event. It's a matter of life or death. Everything depends on whether a man holds his own in battle. That determines a man's value to his family. Fighting is a man's business. Women with their flocks of children are only a nuisance in the fight. Women

do not take part in this event, which is so decisive for their family. A woman, with all she does, can never be as valuable to her family as a good fighter - a man.

It is also not enough for a man to be a good fighter. Other people must know that he is. You don't mess with the family of a good fighter. A family must have the reputation of being defensible. Now this is where something comes into play that other people from the Orient often bug us about: the reputation of the family - the "honor of the family."

But this does not only refer to defensibility. No one can take an insult lying down. It can also lead to fighting and manslaughter. But insults of families that have an impeccable reputation often miss the mark. The other people know: What is being said is not true. No one in that family is doing such a bad thing. The offended person can make the hostile allegation go nowhere with an appropriate retort, and the offending person has damaged his own reputation. But if his family's reputation is questionable, the insulted person can hardly defend himself with words. Then he must strike back - yes, strike. So it is important that only good things can be said about a family, that all family members live in accordance with the norms of rural society.

Yes, one must not even suspect that a member of the family is behaving dissolutely. For example, if a girl has a long way to school, nasty neighbors might claim that the girl is seeing strange boys. The girl's family can hardly refute the allegation. After all, she doesn't know exactly what happens on the long walk to school. So the family's honor is best served if the girl does not go to school.

This understanding of the law among rural Afghans is thousands of years old, much older than Islam. It is not only a matter of families, but also of the larger ethnic structures, the clans, the clans, and the tribes. They, too, can clash in wars, for example over land ownership or water rights.

Tribal elders - these are respected men - try to limit bloodshed and make peace in disputes between families as well as between clans or tribes. After insults, they try to get the insulter to apologize publicly. If they succeed, the case is settled. If a murder has occurred, they urge the family of the murdered person to accept blood money from the family of the murderer as compensation. If more people have been killed, escalation must be avoided. If three people were murdered, the other side must take blood revenge. It must also kill three men - no more and no less. It is precisely then that the settlement of the enmity by the tribal elders is possible.

Only when both parties accept the tribal elders' settlement proposal is a dispute settled. That is all that is possible. After all, the tribal elders have no police force that could enforce legal peace. A tribal society cannot provide more "justice" than this right to arbitration.

For Afghans living in the countryside, this has always been the case. All have internalized the rules of their coexistence. All are convinced that these rules are the only possible and correct ones. Without hiding women from the public, without the honor of the family and without the duty of blood vengeance, they cannot imagine living together. This is part of their identity. For Afghans from the countryside, all this is as important as human rights are for us.

So that was my attempt at the event to explain the society of rural Afghanistan. We had personal experiences of the life of rural people. You can find some of them on our homepage ofarin.org and there under the "Ethnokrimis". You can read them section by section or print them out.

Last fall we met Khazan Gul, an old friend in Afghanistan. With him I experienced a lot together. We also had heated arguments with each other. Above all, I learned a lot from him about the people among whom he lives. Khazan Gul studied in Germany, then returned to his village in Afghanistan because he felt it was his duty to work for the development of his country. He has thought a lot about the possibilities of this development. He differs from other Afghans in that he is not ashamed of the state of development in his homeland, but talks about it openly and willingly. A young couple, Monika Koch and Heiner Tettenborn, visited Khazan Gul in his home country in 2004 and decided with him to write down his life. This happened during meetings in Afghanistan, Switzerland and Germany. In 2013 it was published as a book under the title "Der Unbeugsame" by Kahl-Verlag, Dresden (ISBN 978-3-938916-21-6).

One does not have to agree with all the ideas developed in this book, but one gets a very honest insight into life in rural Pashtun Afghanistan, where tribal traditions have remained particularly pure. One learns about the rules that must be followed in a blood feud and how carefully and farsightedly many things must be decided - for example, the choice of partners for a marriage - to make later disputes unlikely.

The Taliban come from this remote Afghanistan. The rules described are self-evident to them. Islam originated as a religion of the tribes in Arabia. Since then, people in rural Afghanistan have even considered the rules of their coexistence to be divine commandments, even though some tribal laws do not conform to Islamic Sharia law.

For a good hundred years, Afghan governments have been trying to make Afghanistan a "modern" country. They have introduced compulsory education and military service and tried to establish a judicial system similar to that in European countries. Specialized ministries have been created and armies of civil servants. These measures were not explained to the population, but ordered from above. The Islamic clergy lost influence on school education and jurisprudence, and pushed back the innovations. At about the same time, Kamal Atatürk began to modernize Turkey in a similar way.

This modernization policy of the government threatened the traditional rules of coexistence of the people in the steppes and mountains and made them fear that their religion was under threat. The Taliban movement eventually took military action to defend traditional ways and held its ground. Certainly the Taliban were sponsored by Pakistan, but that should not detract from the fact that they fought for the traditional rules of their coexistence. They did not crawl out of an Islamist hellmouth. They represent a large percentage of the Afghan population.

The theme of the event was "Afghanistan - Now What?" The participants had come because they had also asked themselves this question. But we at OFARIN could not and would not answer this question that we had asked. The West had just tried to organize a democratic

statehood in Afghanistan and had failed. The West can only do democracy based on the rule of law, and Afghan society is far too far from that. "Democracy light" does not exist. Even if the West had avoided many of the mistakes it undoubtedly made in Afghanistan, it could not. We now know that afterwards. Then we always know many things better than before.

So we - the West and also we at OFARIN - should stand back and not tell Afghanistan again what their state must look like. We can be clear about who the actors are. That was attempted at the beginning of our event. It is now obvious that the Taliban, with their ideas of how people should live together, are not capable of creating a functioning state.

On the other hand, we can add that the rural tribal society has some prerequisites for a prosperous coexistence. The clans and tribes often hold long meetings. Common problems are discussed there. In the process, everyone gets to know the interests of the other families. Everyone can make his own decisions in such a way that, if possible, all the others can cope with them. However, this takes place under the threat that in the event that the one who grossly violates the interests of another is forced to fight and blood revenge.

Moreover, assemblies, of tribes, clans and clans aim at unanimous decisions. Majority decisions are not binding for a remaining minority, because there is no police of the tribe or clan that could force the minority to follow the decision of the majority. But unanimous decisions rarely come to pass. As a rule, the interests are too different for that.

Nevertheless, the Afghans must take their future into their own hands. It is probably helpful if other countries help with benevolent advice. But then you would have to recognize the Taliban government and could also support Afghanistan better economically.

OFARIN's lessons are certainly right for the future of the country. It is readily accepted by the population. In some rural areas, you would have to have some patience in introducing education for girls. But in many rural areas, the desire for girls to be taught is rather strong. The man in charge of all the mosques in Logar province, a senior Taliban official, asked us in the fall if we could open another class for girls and women in his home. He would be happy if his wife learned to read and write. We were able to. In the countryside, the desire for education for girls as well should far exceed OFARIN's economic possibilities in the foreseeable future.

It would make a lot of sense to provide all Taliban warriors with a basic education in reading, writing and arithmetic, such as that offered by OFARIN. These men need prospects for a life without their Kalashnikovs. Otherwise, they remain a dangerous potential source of unrest for peaceful development. Such a task, however, is far beyond OFARIN's capabilities.

Now something else: The sending of the newsletters is done by the American company Wix.com, where we also have our homepage. That offered itself, because the structure of the homepage as it is possible with Wix.com is relatively simple. Sending the newsletters as attachments to e-mails is not possible because of the high number. The Telekom does not allow mass mailings of 700 e-mails. So our newsletters now arrive with the sender ofarin.org - most of the time. However, some providers, especially t-online, classify our newsletters as spam and send them back. This was not the case for the November newsletters. But the December newsletters were spammed again by t-online. Sebastian Dietrich, who does the

mailings, only noticed this later - because it had gone well in November. We apologize for this. We are thinking about how we can make this safer in the future and hope to find a workable solution. This time, we just want to be more careful. We have spoken to t-online about this. They can't help. Bureaucracy is a worldwide evil. Only digital bureaucracy is worse.

Best regards,

Peter Schwittek.

Translated with www.DeepL.com/Translator (free version)