Maryam's Story: An Ethnographic Memoir

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In the early 1970s we made more than 100 hours of tape recordings, as part of ethnographic fieldwork among the Piruzai, Pashtun farmers and semi-nomadic pastoralists in northern Afghanistan. These village voices create a remarkable community self-portrait of a social world now lost and irretrievable. Maryam's story is the perfect exemplar of an unconventional form of auto-ethnography. Maryam was married some thirty years before, as part of a series of marriage exchanges intended to settle a feud between two main Piruzai families. Her husband, Tumân, became village headman, a Haji, and in 1971 our host. Later, Pâkiza, Tumân's second wife and Maryam's co-wife, became the bane of her life. Her account captures something of the depth and colour of people's lives. It gives voice to the ensuing silence over the past nearly fifty years and offers a radical challenge to the gendered stereotypes which have dominated the global and Afghan media during the past forty years of war and occupation.

We did our research in Afghanistan in a time of peace, before the country was swept up in the seemingly endless cycle of disasters and war. In 1968 we toured the north, particularly the provinces of Jawzjan and Faryab, exploring possible locations for anthropological research. Then in 1971 and 1972, we did fieldwork with the Piruzai, a sub-tribe of the Es'hâqzai tribe of Durrani Pashtuns.

The Piruzai, some 200 families, wintered and farmed in two villages (Konjek and Khârkash) about ten miles north of Sar-e-pol town. Many of the Piruzai owned substantial flocks of sheep. In winter and early spring, they grazed the sheep in the nearby steppe. In late spring they took the flocks on the trek up to mountain pastures in the Lâl-o-Sarjangal district of Ghor in the Hazârajât, before returning to Sar-e-pol in August.

Sar-e-pol was then the centre of a sub-province (*woleswâli*), and the largest town in the southern half of of Jawzjan province (*welayat*). The Sar-e-pol region was ethnically very mixed and members of many different tribal and language groups were competed for scarce resources, particularly in the harsh conditions brought by the drought of 1970-71. In the 1960s and 1970s, ethnic and tribal identities provided the basic framework for social and political interaction. At the same time, there were extreme and increasing differences of wealth, with notable class solidarities beginning to form, often across ethnic and tribal boundaries.

From 1880 onwards, Amir Abd al-Rahman sought to unify an Afghan state. In this process, he enlisted his own Pashtun

tribespeople as border guards in the newly conquered north of the country, while the conquest of the Hazârajât afforded Pashtuns access to the central mountain pastures. Pashtun immigration followed on a large scale. In both regions, and throughout the country, a system of land and grazing rights backed by state violence rested on a political hierarchy of competing ethnic groups.

The Es'hâqzai tribe of Durrani Pashtuns arrived in the Saripul area around 1900. They were led by a small subtribe, the Nazarzai, whose members seized control of all the vacant productive lands in the area and, by 1910, had acquired tax-farming and other lucrative government posts. With the Nazarzai ascendance there followed a major division between Pashtuns (known locally as 'Afghans') and the rest, seen as 'Awghaniyya' versus 'Uzbekiyya'.

Seyyeds, descendants of the Prophet who were also Pashtu-speaking southerners, were at the top of the hierarchy. Then came the Durrani. The Durrani saw themselves as 'real Afghans', superior to non-Durrani Pashtuns whom they scorned as 'Pârsiwân' or 'Farsibân', literally, 'Persian speakers'. Next came all Sunni non-Pashtuns; the Durrani often referred to all of them as 'Uzbeks' – though they included Persian-speaking Tajiks, Aymaks, Arabs as well as Turkic-speaking Uzbeks and Türkmens. Bottom of the ethnic heap, in Durrani eyes, were the Shi'i Hazaras.

Over the twentieth century, the population increased. Irrigated agriculture and the cash cropping of wheat, barley, maize, cotton, sesame became ever more important, karakul lambskins fetched ever

higher prices, and economic competition between farmers and pastoralists grew. As this competition intensified, so did the political importance of marriage and affinal relations.

Durrani explained their ethnic and tribal identity in terms of their adherence to Sunni Islam, their Pashtu language, and a patrilineal pedigree linking them to widely recognized Pashtun ancestors; furthermore, a Durrani woman should never marry a non-Durrani man. However, these various criteria of identity typically operated retrospectively, to rationalize changes of identity that were recognized through marriage. Thus, soon after their arrival in the north, Piruzai leaders sought to increase their numbers by intermarriage with newcomers whose ethnic origins were uncertain. Later on, as the economic competition increased, the irregularity of some of those earlier marriages became reasons to stigmatize the descendants of those newcomers and usurp their land and animals.

Beyond the fundamental rule that Durrani women marry other Durrani, Durrani marriages took two forms: marriages for brideprice and those that involved the direct exchange of women between families.

Most Durrani marriages were marriages for brideprice: a girl would be married into another Durrani family in return for a large sum of money, animals and other goods. But what at first hearing sounds like the brutal commodification of a woman's (and her husband's) labour and sexual services, most often involved arrangements between families of equals, much love on the part of

parents and guardians to ensure the well-being of the young couple, and a fine romance between the principals. As there was no divorce among Piruzai, marriages were for life and it was in everyone's interest to see them work.

Occasionally however, Durrani men married non-Durrani wives. The reasons for such inter-ethnic marriages for brideprice were various. Sometimes they involved a love match. Sometimes they were made for political or economic gain, and sometimes, on the contrary, they stemmed from family poverty and an inability to find an appropriate Durrani bride.

Direct exchange marriages were of a different order from those for brideprice. Among themselves, Durrani used exchange marriages as way of resolving serious disputes and confirming social equality and tribal identity. As the Piruzai put it, 'We are Durrani, one people between whom women are exchanged.'

Some exchange marriages were between heads of families: men, and sometimes senior women, promised young sons and daughters between families in unions to be celebrated and consummated when the children came of age. Much rarer were exchanges between wealthy men who promised their daughters, when grown, to each other as second wives. Such exchange marriages did a political job. They were a public testament that members of the families involved, and others of their kin, felt themselves to be people of equal standing who sought to remain allies in the future. Importantly, in almost all cases, no brideprice was paid.

Exchange marriages arranged to settle a feud (*badi*) illustrate these principles in an extreme and dramatic form. Maryam's marriage to Tumân is one such tragic story. As we shall learn, Maryam's own youthful innocence, and that of her even younger husband, were lost forever after a feud broke out between the two main Piruzai lineages jockeying for position.

After the injunction that Durrani women marry Durrani men, a second explicit value declared the autonomy of a household. To the Piruzai, a household head should be well able to manage all household resources and the behaviour of all men, women and children of the household. Among the most salient indicators of family standing were the marriages householders made. Both prosperity and incipient poverty and vulnerability could be gauged by the marriage choices made by household members, the amounts paid or received as brideprice and the scale of the wedding festivities they hosted.

In short, both equality and competition were expressed through the complex idiom of marriage. Durrani used the language of honour and shame to describe a man's, and less often, a woman's, control of human and material resources. Because households and the standing of a household head – that is, his honour – were dependent on the comportment of women as well as men, women had a subversive power to undermine male ambition and damage household prestige. Yet in the absence of divorce, men and women had a keen shared interest in household success. Most often a woman's efforts to

express and defend her own interests were hidden from public view, as we shall see from Maryam's story.

A third key value was a code of community responsibility and non-competitive honour. This alternative ideology of religious and tribal equality was a brake on political and economic competition. At any one time there was an interplay between these contradictory values. Viewed over time, however, the status and ethnic identity of both individuals and groups could change.

Exchange marriages confirmed Durrani identity, and their own understanding of their tribal and ethnic superiority. On the one hand, the honourable head of a strong household could control and protect land and animals from predation and make good marriages for household members, all without interference from others. Such a man would likely attract a following of weaker households, such a relationship could well turn into exploitation and oppression. Householders who demonstrated weakness by failing to control their household resources or to demonstrate their independence in marriage arrangements, could, all too easily, find themselves on a downward spiral, vulnerable to further exploitation. Avoiding the 'shame' associated with a weak household was important to both men and women. Theft, thuggery and even pimping became remedies for a few men, while love affairs and elopement offered the desperate possibility of escape for a few bold women. As economic competition increased over the twentieth century, some failing and then oppressed Durrani households became landless clients of Durrani

landowners or were forced to leave the area, and their privileged identity, behind.

Storytelling with a difference

Nancy's monograph (N. Tapper, *Bartered Brides*) – which discusses the foregoing analysis of Piruzai society in detail, with multiple case studies – has so far been the most substantial publication from our fieldwork.[1] In style and intended audience *Bartered Brides* is a fine but conventional ethnographic monograph. But even while we were in the field, we considered other writing genres that would more accurately represent the vibrant, engaging people we knew. We understood from the outset that formal ethnography and history were important, but, against a scholarly foil, stories often did the job better.

In the 1960s and 1970s, early 'experimental ethnographies' focused on 'ethnographic conversations', multi-vocal representations, and made a greater use of recorded texts. From the Middle East, the ones then best known were from the Arab world, notably Morocco. As for Afghanistan and Afghans or Pashtuns, while there are numerous excellent, but more conventional ethnographies based on fieldwork before the Soviet invasion, early forays into other writing styles and voices include: Veronica Doubleday's *Three Women of Herat*, Margaret Mills' study of story-telling in Herat (*Rhetorics and*

Politics) and Benedicte Grima's account of Pakhtun women's life-stories from Pakistan (*Performance of Emotion*).[2]

From the outset we had hoped to make tape recordings to complement our notes and photographs, and the maps and genealogies we drew. In winter 1971, in the first days of our stay with the Piruzai, we heard several dramatic stories of scandals, violence and intrigue. At first, we did not believe our hosts; we were sure they were pulling our legs. Only later did we learn that these events had happened and that Piruzai friends were not merely sharing public knowledge but keen to tell their version of events to pre-empt other accounts we might be told. Maryam's story of her relations with her co-wife, Pâkiza, is a good example of how this worked. And of course, their husband Haji Tumân, Pâkiza herself, and virtually every other adult in the village had decided opinions and stories to tell about Tumân's family.

When it came to making tape recordings, we had a stroke of luck early in our time with the Piruzai. Nancy had just recorded a spirited argument among women at a wedding, and when, that evening, Haji Tumân got wind of it, he demanded to listen to the tape himself, for his amusement. Nancy, however, refused and he was furious with her and with us as his guests. As the confrontation played out, we were afraid that we had compromised our chance to stay with Haji's family and that he would certainly ask us to leave. But after a few extremely tense days, he let the matter of Nancy's defiance and the recording drop.

This saga established that we were making tapes for ourselves and we would not replay a tape for other members of the community without the express permission of those whose voices were recorded. From then on, people appeared to be convinced that we would not betray their trust, and they became keen competitors to make tapes for us.[3]

The Piruzai were open and eloquent, and we recorded stories on subjects both public and private. Women and men actively encouraged us to make recordings whenever we could. They wanted to help us 'write a book' and they wanted their words to be heard and written down. They also talked of 'filling tapes' as entertainment – of 'passing the time' (*sâ'at-tiri*). It was perhaps this contribution to their social life that they appreciated most.

We translated most of the tapes during 1972-3, right after leaving the field. We soon realized their richness, and we later drew on them in our writing. The taped stories are both intimate and wide ranging. Some are memories of the Piruzai migration in the early 20th century from Nawzâd and Musâ-qala in today's Helmand province northwards to Sar-e-pol. Some are accounts of the doings of powerful khans, and feuds and ethnic strife. Others are about falling in love, elopements and marriages, childbirth and the world of spirits. Still others are of pastoral and agricultural life, and the skills and skulduggery people need to survive.

We left Afghanistan in autumn 1972 expecting to return soon for further fieldwork, but this was not to be. In 1973 a palace coup

brought the Afghan monarchy to an end. In April, following a more violent coup, a communist regime gained power 1978, and at the end of 1979 Soviet forces invaded the country. All the horrors of foreign occupation and civil war have followed. The Piruzai fled south during the 1980s, some of them returning, it seems, to the Helmand area of their ancestors, others fleeing to refugee camps in Pakistan, but none, so far as we know, remained in the Sar-e-pol region, now (in 2019) for some years the location of continuous fighting between Taliban, other local militias and Afghan government forces.

Early on, Richard, inspired by Blythe's *Akenfield*, planned to edit a collection of the recordings into a kind of self-portrait of the Piruzai. But as revolution, invasion and occupation overtook our friends, the plan was postponed. However, his retranslation, compilation and editing of the recorded stories is now complete and soon to appear as *Afghan Village Voices* (R. Tapper, *Afghan Village Voices*), from which Maryam's sotry is drawn. Although readers familiar with Afghanistan may well recognize much that is in the stories, it is sadly the case that narrators such as Maryam, and the way of life they described, have gone for ever.

Maryam's Marriage to Tumân

Haji Tumân, headman of Konjek village – and our host – had two wives. He received the first, Maryam, in 1936 or 1937, to settle a deadly feud between the two main lineages of the Piruzai, based in

Konjek and Khârkash villages respectively. The feud began with a quarrel between young shepherds whose flocks had become mixed in a narrow river gorge. A fight broke out between the brothers Pordel and Khoshdel from Khârkash, and Kamaroddin, from Kunjek. Kamaroddin was slightly injured, but the brothers quickly recovered themselves and carried him back to camp.

That might have been the end of it. Kamaroddin's father, Haji Afzal, the lineage leader, had stayed in Sar-e-pol; his uncle Zabtu was away on pilgrimage to Mecca, together with Pordel and Khoshdel's father Jabbar. Kamaroddin's other relatives wanted the matter settled peacefully, but his mother, whom many described as a 'short-sighted woman of Fârsibân descent', egged on her nephew Rowzoddin, crying, 'My son has been beaten, only a women would not retaliate'. Shamed by her cry, the hot-tempered Rowzoddin took his father's horse and gun, rode straight to where the brothers were setting up camp, and shot Khoshdel, wounding him. The brothers soon recovered from the shock and wrested Rowzoddin's gun from him; they clubbed him down, and as he fell Pordel shot him dead.

One of the Es'hâqzai khans arrived a few days after the shooting. He arranged for Pordel's sister, Maryam, to be given in marriage to Rowzoddin's eldest son Tumân, and for Karâr, daughter of Rowzoddin's brother Ghâfur, to go to the wounded Khoshdel's other brother Kohandel. Maryam was married that same night. Pordel took her, with a few pieces of bedding, to Ghâfur and Rowzoddin's tent and the nikah marriage ceremony was performed for both

girls, though Karâr was only a small child and she continued to live in her father's house. Maryam and Tumân were both eleven or twelve years old.

The feud did not end there, but continued the following autumn and winter with further killings. The story is complicated, and is described in detail in both Bartered Brides *and Afghan Village Voices. In the end, eight marriages were arranged between the two groups. In theory, one woman was given for each man wounded and two for each man killed. But it was not quite that straightforward, because the closeness of the kinship ties between the principals and the dead and wounded men, the age of the principals and how attractive and able they seemed, all these factors mattered. Consequently, the exchange marriage arrangements themselves were politically nuanced.*

Now in her mid-forties, Maryam is past childbearing, but she has borne seven sons (all alive) and three daughters (one married, alive; one married and one unmarried, both dead). This is how Maryam likes to remember the early days of her marriage.

My father Haji Jabbâr died in Mecca. Haji Zabtu [*Tumân's paternal grandfather*], who'd been with him, called me, 'Maryam, come sit by me and I'll tell you about your father. I took good care of him; I brought doctors, they cut him open and took several buckets of water out of his stomach. They sat by his sickbed and gave him a little

milk, and he drank it and got better; but he died of hunger. He said to me, “My daughter”’ – he meant me – ‘“has seen a lot of trouble, I’ll give her to [*your son*] Ghâfur.”’ That’s what my father Haji Jabbâr said; but it wasn’t to be, and I was given to Tumân [*son of Rowzoddin, Ghâfur’s younger brother*].

Poor Zabtu himself died when we were about to start the spring trek [to the mountains]. He was such a good man. I haven’t seen anyone like him, apart from Afzal [*Zabtu’s brother*] and Ghâfur. He was so sick, and he suffered so much from his illness. People gave him every kind of medicine they could think of; we gave him some baby swallows to eat – the black ones that fly around – but he didn’t get better. We held his funeral and buried him in the graveyard here; you’ve seen it. Many people gathered for the funeral distribution. His daughters and wives wept. After that I worked for them, I put up their tent for them. His widow Mamadzi was on her own, so I went and looked after her, cleaned and swept her house. His daughter Bibikuh and I did; and I cleaned my own house and cooked.

When Tumân married me, he always stayed by my side. He’d follow me wherever I went. His uncle Haji Mahmad and a servant put me on a camel and took me to my brothers’ house. I spent ten days there, then they fetched me back. When Tumân saw me coming, he cried, ‘Ah, my wife’s back,’ and rushed to meet me, and very soon he was sitting beside me again. I looked at him and laughed and asked what he thought he was doing, sitting by my side. All the women gathered round me. My mothers-in-law were all there, Dur-khân’s

mother Mâku, Tumân's mother Nâzu, Jân-Mahmad's mother Mamadzi, and Haji Mahmad's wife Durkhâni. Then Ghâfur's wives Moshkendi, Tamâm and Keshmir, and his sisters Bakhtâwar and Bibikuh and Belanis, all these women gathered round when I returned. Moshkendi was my uncle Haji Khalifa-Lulak's daughter [*from Khârkash*]; what a woman she was – like a flower! She was a big woman. She sat down with me and we laughed and laughed.

We had a really good get-together. My brother slaughtered a sheep and I brought the meat with me, wrapped in pieces of bread. That's our custom. When we bring a bride home, we slaughter a sheep and bake bread and wrap each joint separately in bread. We also take the head, tie up the mouth, cook it nicely, wrap it in bread, and put it on top of the stack. That was what I'd brought. They give the head to the grandfather. Haji Zabtu had died, so it went to Haji Ghâfur. There were several houses: Haji Mahmad, Ghâfur, Tumân, and Allah-dâd – he was our guest at the time. We gave each house one piece of meat and one joint.

In those times, rice was plentiful and very cheap. Zabtu's wife Mamadzi kept our rice. One day shortly after my wedding I went to get some from her. She was a nasty woman! Being newly married, I was very shy. As I opened the rice sack, I looked round and saw people sitting there, and I was embarrassed as I got the rice out, so I didn't notice that some grains got into the huge bracelets I was wearing. As I lifted the bowl up to my shoulder, a few grains fell out. I

picked up a few that spilled, but I didn't bother about the rest; I didn't think it mattered.

I went home, cooked the rice and made rice pudding. When I'd gone, Mamadzi asked her husband, 'Haji, did you see the bride?' 'What's she done?' 'Didn't you see, she took some rice and didn't look what she was doing, so the rice spilled, and now the ants have taken it all away. She's such a stupid woman, she doesn't know anything.'

In the morning Ghâfur's wife Moshkendi came and told us what Mamadzi had said. She asked me, 'Cousin, weren't you looking?' I said, 'Why, what happened?' She said, 'When you fetched the rice, some got into your bangles, then it fell out and the ants took it and hid it in their nests.' I said, 'I saw it; just two or three grains fell; show me the ants!' She said, 'How silly Mamadzi is!' Haji Zabtu was such a good man, God rest him. He said, 'Hey Mâmuk, don't be silly, don't talk that way, she's just a girl, she doesn't understand. What is it, after all? It isn't gold!'

Two years after my wedding God gave me my first son, Khâni-âghâ, three days after we had Bibiwor's wedding to Ghâfur. We were in their tent eating supper; I had mine, then Khâni-âghâ was born. Moshkendi got up with a gun and fired it into the night all by herself, again and again! Haji Mahmad also fired his gun; everybody came from all around, Haji Afzal and the rest, and fired their guns. Everyone was happy, their hearts were full. For two or three days we had such a party, so many guns, such a *nashra*.[4] It was like a wedding

party, when Khâni-âghâ was born. He was so dear to everyone, they said, 'May he survive!'

Then my daughter Mesru was born, then after her, Pâdshâh; then my sons Darwiza, Baya-khân, Nasib, Kala-khân, Kayum, and my daughters Zeytun and Jawâher. God has given me these sons and daughters. Thank God, we've been free of poverty and worry. Thank God, they've grown up and they all work hard, and every year there's plenty of ghee and meat, enough even for the dogs.

Maryam and her Co-wife Pâkiza

*Tumân married his second and favourite wife, Pâkiza, in the late 1950s. It was a love match, propelled by personal ambition. His rival Nâder-shâh, the headman of the other Piruzai village, Khârkash, had also wanted Pâkiza, but Tumân beat him by agreeing to pay her father Mullah Jabbâr one lac (100,000 rupees), by far the highest brideprice (*wëlwar*) paid in the area at the time.*

During their engagement Tumân went to bâzi *with Pâkiza.* Bâzi *is a courtship ritual the Piruzai greatly enjoy. If the two families get on well, the groom is expected to visit his bride at night in her father's home, supposedly by stealth. Then they can whisper, pet and sleep together well before the marriage ceremonies are completed and the bride is brought to her husband's home.*

Pâkiza and Tumân have been married now for fifteen years; they are demonstrative, loving and clearly fond of each other.

Pâkiza lost her first three children, but now has two healthy young sons and three daughters.

Since Pâkiza's marriage, Maryam, despite her many sons, has had little influence in the family or the community. Her closest relationship – one of constant bickering – is with her second son Pâdshâh's wife, Pâkhâl – who is also present this evening.

It is August 1972 – none of the Piruzai have gone to the mountains this year as only a few animals have survived the terrible winter. One evening Maryam talks to Nancy at length about her co-wife. She speaks reasonable Persian, larded with Pashtu words and phrases. She has much to say and the words tumble out of her, so her stories are not always easy to follow, and Pâkhâl frequently corrects or contradicts her on facts and dates. Though she understandably resents Pâkiza, Maryam's humanity and sympathy show through.

When we got back from the mountains, I was pregnant with my [*fifth*] son Kala-khân. My husband was engaged to Pâkiza and was about to fetch her.

Tumân said, 'Everyone take their own stuff and move out, we won't be all together any more.' This wasn't because of a quarrel. He said there were too many of us together; we should divide the household, do *wêsh*, as we say. 'If we separate, it'll be more comfortable for everyone when Pâkiza comes.'

Kala-khân was born. Then Tumân held Pâkiza's wedding and brought her home, and we divided the household. For a year after we left Tumân's house, his mother Nâzu and I lived with her stepson Dur-khân and her brother-in-law Jân-Mahmad. There were only Dur-khân and his wife Koreysh, Jân-Mahmad and his wife Shekar; Dur-khân's brother Akhtar wasn't yet married. I went with Nâzu; we drove one camel, and Shekar and Koreysh drove another. I took a huge skin full of ghee with me. There was a large sack of *krut* [*dried whey-balls*], we divided it and took half each.

Before their wedding, Tumân would go to *bâzi* with Pâkiza every night. Nâzu was very fond of me, and she said, 'Tumân, dear, you shouldn't go every night, you're hurting poor Maryam. You have one beautiful wife, what do you want with another? Don't go there.'

But he said, 'Why shouldn't I go? Maryam is at home now, you come and sit with her.'

His mother answered, 'Then I won't stay in your house; how can you talk like this, before you've even brought your new wife? Why are you so mean to Maryam? How dare you talk that way about a woman who's dear to me? Why do you go there every night? Don't you already have a fine wife? Sleep with her, don't go to the other one!'

I said nothing myself, not a word; I thought, 'Let him go, it doesn't matter.'

She said, 'Why should he go, he's bringing you a co-wife, it'll be so hard on you.' She told him, 'Don't you know how upset Maryam will be when you go and sleep with that woman?'

So it was for my sake that his mother left his house and went to Jân-Mahmad's. She owned ten ewes, so she took them with her. She also had a large saddlebag, two big black felts, two big bolsters, a sack, a donkey saddlebag; she collected all her clothes and things and took them with her.

Nâzu and I lived with Jân-Mahmad for two years, in that compound by the mill at Kal-qeshlâq; it's Haji Ghâfur [*Tumân's uncle*]'s house now, but it was ours first. That was before Pâkhâl's wedding, but my daughter, dear Zeytun, God rest her, was married. My sons were still small. [5]

When Pâkiza was about to have her first baby, she was in her father's house. They sent her back to have the baby; they mounted Khawânin [*her half-brother*] behind her on the horse, and she held another boy in front of her. We were watching for her.

When I saw her, riding the horse so awkwardly, an arm and a leg on each side, I couldn't help laughing, 'Why are you riding like that?' She said nothing, she was so embarrassed, and she was ready to give birth! We dismounted her and all the boys asked what was up.

I said, 'Your stepmother's ill! Come on out, leave room for the girls.'

So the boys came out, and I took Pâkiza in. I held her here, like this, as we hold a woman in childbirth. After an hour or so, the baby still hadn't come, so I told her, 'Pâkiza, I've done this for an hour, just hang on, I'm going to fetch some cloths and water and things.' I got up and went to fetch some cloths.

My [*sixth*] son Nasib – he was still as small as little Pastuk here – said, ‘Mum, you must be tired, get up, I’ll hold her!’

As I went to fetch the water I couldn’t help laughing, that Nasib offered to hold his stepmother! She laughed herself and said, ‘Dear boy, what are you thinking of?’ Pâkiza had brought Sija’s wife with her – from Kal-qeshlâq, where we lived then, you know. I fetched water, washed out the cloths and things and brought them; and the baby was born.

It was a boy. I said, ‘There’s another one.’

She cried, ‘Another one? Where is it then?’

I said, ‘Honestly, there’s another baby still inside you.’ Lots of people were sitting there; the women were on one side with me and Sija’s wife, and the men on the other, with Sija and Tumân.

After an hour she gave birth to the twin, a fine big baby. I’d thought, ‘It can’t be twins, it must be triplets!’ Pâkiza was crying, ‘Where is it? Why did you say there was another one?’ I said, ‘It’s come, you’ve done it!’ Sija’s wife said, ‘In God’s name, what a huge baby!’ The baby was born, it grew, but it cried all night long.

Ten days later, Tumân brought home two or three *chambarkash* melons – you know, the big ones – that Sija’s household had given us. Sija was there, and Pâkhâl’s father Mahd-Amin, and Tumân, and my sons. I spread the cloth, and everyone gathered round. We were one household again – me and Pâkiza – inside our large tent. I cut up the melons.

Pâkiza was rather tired. I melted some sesame butter – I'd never seen such fine sesame – and gave it to her with some bread. Suddenly she said, 'I don't want bread, give me some melon.'

I said, 'Don't eat it, it'll kill you!'

Tumân, who'd brought the melons, cut off a tiny slice for one of the babies. He said, 'What's the matter? I gave the morsel to the child, do you want to eat the lot?'

Pâkiza ate the melon; why, what got into her? Nancy, she absolutely refused to eat the bread and butter, but she ate the whole melon, such a large one. If only she were sitting here while I tell the story! She wouldn't listen to anybody. She's a very silly woman.

I laid beds for Mahd-Amin and Tumân, then I put the children to bed. Only my sons Baya-khân and Nasib were there; Kayum wasn't yet born, nor was my daughter Jawâher. I told Pâkiza, 'Come and sleep next to me; I'll look after one baby, you do the other.'

She said, 'I'm not coming near you, I'll sleep by myself, and I'll look after both babies.' She was in a temper, and she was fed up with her husband Tumân, who was asleep over there. That night, they slept apart.

When everybody was fast asleep, Pâkiza suddenly cried out. 'O God, I'm dying!'

I said, 'What's up?'

'My stomach aches, it feels like it's split in two!'

I said, 'I told you not to eat all that melon.' Well, all night long, while her stomach was performing, I was up cuddling both crying

babies, right through till morning. Tumân stayed fast asleep, dead to the world.

At dawn, at first prayer, Pâkiza vomited. All that melon and stuff came up – by God, I swear it was a whole bowl full. Such a foul, sour smell it made, you had to hold your nose. I took the bowl with everything in it out and threw it to the dogs.

She cried out, 'O God, fetch my parents, Maryam's killed me!' Her mother died long ago, the year after my own mother died. But I rubbed her stomach for her, like this. I've been really good to my co-wife! She's not been good to me, though.

Pâkhâl's father Mahd-Amin – he'd spent the night there – was awake; he asked, 'Maryam, what's up?'

I said, 'She's got a really bad stomach.'

Then Tumân woke and called, 'Hey girl!' – he used to call me 'girl' – 'what's up?'

I told him, 'Pâkiza's got a belly-ache. I told her, "Don't eat melon, it's bad for you."'

He swore at her, 'You stupid woman! She told you not to eat it, but you went ahead.' He sent a boy – 'Quick, my wife's dying' – who brought a huge goat and they quickly slaughtered it and skinned it. I put the intestines on her stomach.

When I'd done that, she got better. You could feel that her stomach had split, it had made another stomach; a sort of lump, like a baby's head; a swelling like a stone. She said, 'O God, what a

mistake I made! O my father and my mother, I nearly died!' But once Tumân had slaughtered that goat, her stomach settled down.

She might have died! I was thinking, 'What shall I do with the babies? God, don't put this burden on me!' The babies were crying; she hadn't fed them or attended to them at all.

Tumân said, 'This won't do, she can't manage these babies unless my mother comes to help.' So he sent Pâdshâh to fetch Nâzu from Jân-Mahmad's house where she was living.

So Nâzu came back and looked after one baby, and Pâkiza the other. A year went by, the twins grew; they were sitting up. Then whooping-cough came. It was spring, lambing time … Pâkiza went off to her brother Khawânin's, and there one of the twins caught whooping cough, and he died.

She and Nâzu had cared for it; it was such a fine baby – both twins were so beautiful. She cried so much; so did I, and Nâzu, we all cried. The second baby escaped the whooping cough, but a few months later he died of smallpox. Pâkiza's twins died, one after the other.

Then she had another baby; it was born, but it had died in her stomach. It had arms and legs, but no proper head; just a little nose, and ears, and places for eyes. A jinn had struck it over and over again in the womb, and broken it.

The night Pâkiza gave birth, Nâzu called out, 'Maryam, come and see, she's borne a monster!' Nâzu was frightened: after the twins died, this is what Pâkiza produced.

When I saw it, I said, ‘There’s no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Prophet – what is this monster? It’s like a puppy-dog!’

Pâkiza was upset: ‘Why do you say such things?’ I said, ‘We were afraid; thank God it’s dead.’ I covered it in a cloth and put it aside – it was night, you can’t go to the graveyard at night. I made a fire for Pâkiza. At dawn, we gave it a proper funeral. Pâkiza took the baby to the graveyard to bury it; it had a little shroud and everything.

We went to the mountains. Poor Pâkiza was left desolate, alone; she had nothing left, no son, no daughter, all her children had died. When we got back, she was pregnant with Abdul-Manân, while I was expecting Kayum. It was winter, and raining, when Manân was born. I was her midwife. She said, ‘You sit with me, I don’t want anybody else.’ I sat with her, and held her waist, and Manân was born. Everybody gathered, they fired their guns; we had a *nashra* ceremony, distributed sweets; I made some nice clothes and gave them to Manân.

Five months after Manân, my youngest son Kayum was born; and a couple of years later, as winter came, Pâkiza’s second son Ridigol was born. Again his mother said, ‘I don’t want anyone else, you come and sit with me, OK?’ Ridigol Khân was born: I called his father, and they all had a party, fired the guns, and Pâkiza was finally happy. We bore these two sons together. Pâkiza’s two boys grew up well. She’s also had three daughters, one after the other. First, her daughter Khorak was born. I wasn’t there for that birth, Nâzu was the midwife, with Koreysh and another woman.

When Khorak was a couple of years old, Pâkiza went to the mountains with Tumân – I stayed in this house with Koreysh and Shekar [*her sisters-in-law*]. Right at the foot of the Dangak pass, Pâkiza gave birth to her second daughter, Golpeydâ.

When the twins died, Tumân cried so much. Poor Nâzu went back to Jân-Mahmad's; I said, 'Tumân, call your mother back.' So a few days later Tumân fetched her back: 'Mother, your home is here.' I begged her to stay, so did Pâkiza – all her children dead and gone, she melted Nâzu's heart. She came back, and cried again when she saw Pâkiza. Then Pâkiza had those two sons, one after the other; they brought her happiness at last. We looked after them so well.

Nâzu saw Pâkiza's two new sons before she died. Her own daughter Sherâp died. She hadn't been so upset when her brother Ghaws died. I asked her, 'Nâzu, do you miss your brother most, or your daughter?'

She said, 'My daughter! My own blonde girl!' – Sherâp had blonde hair. When she died, Nâzu fell ill again, and died herself; her heart was broken. It was in the autumn, when we let the rams among the ewes, that's when Nâzu died. She was such a good woman. I was very close to her, unlike Pâkiza.

We'd all go to the mountains; but after Manân was born, Pâkiza stayed in the village in summer. I said, 'Why don't you go with Tumân? Thank God, you're newly married, while I'm an old woman.'

She said, 'Let him go, I'm staying.' She wouldn't go, so I went. She stayed at home, either with her father, or in Haji Ghâfur's house.

After we got Pâdshâh [*her second son*] married, for several years Pâkhâl and I went; we churned the butter, made the ghee and *krut*, pressed the felts. You know that big black felt? Pâkhâl and I made that, and I gave it to Pâkiza.

She wouldn't go, even though she was now recovered. Now she hardly does any work; she wants more children. She doesn't make felt, her husband provides. Pâkhâl or I do the work, we can never get Pâkiza to do anything.

When she first came, Pâkiza had nothing; no camels, no cows, no sheep. She was so poor. My house had everything; I collected so much ghee, I filled many bowls for her. I cooked a small lamb in ghee; I put the raw carcass into the pot, cooked the meat, and my eldest Khâni-âghâ – he was small then – took it to Pâkiza, and they ate it there.

Then Tumân said, 'She hasn't got any wool; give her some.' He didn't tell his mother or Koreysh; he did it by stealth. He said, 'Pick out some really good wool, I'll take it to Pâkiza so she can make some bags, sacks and things for her own place.' So I got out some wool, and he filled a huge sack with it and took it over at night.

(*Pâkhâl*) – We went to the mountains, otherwise we wouldn't have had it to give. Now see what Pâkiza does; when she goes to the mountains she brings us nothing! [*Pâkiza came with us on the trek in 1971*]

(*Maryam*) – Now she's the favourite. I used to be so dear to Tumân, but now I'm used up, and she's number one. Now she collects

lots of wool, but she doesn't spin it herself; she's got plenty of money, so she pays women to spin it for her.

(*Pâkhâl*) – She simply gets Haji to bring her wool and pays other women to spin it. She has money. If my nails should fall off, do you think Pâdshâh would give me any money?

(*Maryam*) – Pâdshâh would give it to you, he has brothers, he can get anything. But Tumân's the headman, everybody gives him things. I could pay for spinning too, but I don't want to, so I do it myself. Pâkiza says, 'I have sons, I have to find them wives, pay for their weddings, and have a good time.' But she has no money worries; she just goes and spends it, getting people to make her clothes and things.

(*Pâkhâl*) – She doesn't make clothes herself. She bought a sewing-machine, then she gave it to Golapruz [*Tumân's niece*] to make clothes for her; she pays for it, and Haji helps her.

(*Maryam*) – Now Pâkiza's in control. Wherever I went with Tumân, he used to say, 'Don't bother to get up, Awâs [*Tumân's sister*] and Mesru [*Maryam's eldest daughter*] will do the work.' Now every day he says, 'Pâkiza's my favourite. You were once, but now you're worn out and she's young.'

And I say, 'When did I suddenly get worn out? How can you say I'm worn out and she's young? A young woman can never do what an older woman does; older women do things their way, younger women do it differently. In what way is she better than me? Nothing! All our community are my relatives, but Pâkiza's a stranger, her people are

barely two or three families – we don't even know where they're from, by God.'

Pâkiza's father Mullah Jabbâr was born without relatives. They say a woman left him in a mosque when he was a baby as small as Spin here. Another woman nursed him, and he grew up, became a youth and married. Pâkiza's from his seed.

Now you know. If Pâkhâl hadn't mentioned it, I wouldn't have told you. She's what our people call *armûni*, born the wrong side of the blanket. Everyone calls them *masjedi*, 'mosque-children'. But now they've exchanged women with this house and that. Now she's Tumân's favourite, and he tells me, 'I don't need you any more.' In effect he's turned me out. Now they've gone up to [*Tumân's vineyards in*] Chenâr, and there he is, nicely settled with his wife.

I've seen so much in my life. We got my brother Kohandel married to Haji Ghâfur's daughter Karâr. She was a good woman. Kohandel came to *bâzi* with Karâr, and two or three years later we had their wedding, out in the steppe. There were drums and pipes, we brought lots of sheep, and they served so much rice that everybody ate like dogs and the cauldrons were still full. My mother brought one skin container full of ghee, at least a maund – I'll bet no one ever brought so much ghee.

Then Kohandel took another wife. They all slept in one place. Those two poor women had such a hard time, and for some years they had terrible quarrels.

Pâkiza and I have never quarrelled, I can't be bothered; I never raise my voice against her. I don't care if he sleeps with her. But Karâr was in trouble all her life; she drove my brother mad, threatening to kill herself. She scolded her husband, threw her co-wife's things around, and when her stepson wanted to go to sleep she'd pick him up and throw him around. They all slept in one place, and when a man takes a second wife, he shouldn't do such a thing. When a man takes a second wife, that's what he can expect.

Postscript

The politics of marriage are best explained in processual terms, as a series of on-going social dramas in which the cultural repertoire available to individuals, and the choices they make, have structural consequences. Quite simply, from generation to generation, people's lives, and the communities in which they live, change. Maryam's story reflects such a transformation over a period of fifty years.

As the population of Turkestan grew and competition for resources, particularly for control of irrigated land, increased, Durrani began to understand inter-ethnic relations, and equality among themselves, in new ways. And with these changes, the cost of marriage and control over the transfer of women in marriage also changed. Meanwhile, the Es'hâqzai khans became wealthier and more ruthless, and they and the leading men of other ethnic groups

dominated local government affairs. The increasing importance of the control of farmland further blurred ethnic divisions and sharpened those of class, while the expansion of the local government bureaucracy, and the increasing influence of an elite over the peasant farmers and pastoralists alike made political inequality a fact of life. Among the Piruzai, the earlier egalitarian ethic was transformed into an ideal of household independence and self-sufficiency, as expressed through marriage and in a highly competitive form of *laissez-faire* capitalist political economy.

And then came the coup, Soviet invasion and all that has followed. We know almost nothing about what happened to the Piruzai after 1973. They almost certainly left Sar-e-pol in the 1980s, during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. What little we know of their history since we left is set out in detail in *Afghan Village Voices*.

There is little information or sociological analysis available on rural Afghan communities for the last forty years of war. What we can be sure of, however, is that the marriage, family life, and gender relations have changed. Certainly, the complexity and emotional truths of Maryam's story are utterly absent from most of our news of Afghanistan. In this respect, the story is a sharp reminder of how stereotypes work and what is missing.

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Captions for the photographs, all taken by Nancy Lindisfarne-Tapper

Maryam. Summer, 1972.

Maryam, making bread. Summer, 1972.

Maryam's sons. Spring, 1971. From left to right, Baya-khân, Nasib, Kala-khân, Dawizah, Ridigol. Missing from the photo are Khâni-âghâ, who was away on military service, while Pâdshâh was busy elsewhere that day.

Haji Tumân, with his youngest daughter, Maygul. Summer, 1971.

Haji Tumân, with his three young daughters whose mother is Pâkiza. Summer, 1971.

Mamadzi. Spring, 1971.

Pâkiza, with her youngest daughter, Maygul. Summer, 1971.

Pâkiza making bread, in the Hazârajât. Summer, 1971.

Pâkhâl with her three sons; Pastuk is the oldest. Summer, 1972.

NOTES

[1] We used the pseudonym Madozai/Maduzai in earlier publications. The late Daniel Balland, without consulting us, 'outed' the Maduzai/Madozai as 'Pirozi' in a 1998 article in *Encyclopedia Iranica* (Balland, '*Eshaqzi*'). Here we use the proper name of the sub-tribe as well as the proper names of the protagonists of Maryam's story. In the first chapter of *Bartered Brides*, Nancy has written at length about the circumstances of our fieldwork; see also N. Tapper and R. Tapper, 'A Marriage'.

[2] Among recent innovative studies is Klaits and Gulmamadov-Klaits' *Love and War in Afghanistan*, as well as several sharply observed autobiographical accounts including those by Ann Jones (*Kabul in Winter*) and Deborah Rodriguez (*Kabul Beauty School*).

[3] The Piruzai spoke the Kandahari dialect of Pashtu, with some Persian and occasional Turkish vocabulary drawn from their neighbours: Arabs, Aymâqs, Hazâras, Uzbeks and others. All men and boys and most women and girls spoke fluent Persian, the local lingua franca, in which we ourselves were more fluent than Pashtu, and we and they soon decided that it was easier and more intimate to record the tapes in this shared language. In *Afghan Village Voices*, Richard describes the considerations that have informed his new translation.

[4] A ceremony performed three days after the birth of a first son.

5 Kal-qeshlâq was a village inhabited by members of the Alizai, another Durrani tribe. Nearby, on one of the canals leading ultimately to Konjek, was a mill owned by Tumân and Ghâfur, who had built a house beside it. The site had also the advantage of being close to the track leading from Konjek and Khârkash to the main road to Sar-e-pol town.