

POLYGyny IN ISLAMIC LAW AND PUKHTUN PRACTICE

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The Pukhtun of Swat in Northern Pakistan refer to Islam to justify their practice of polygamy and female subordination. However, Islamic law is far more egalitarian than Pukhtun practice. Using case studies and statistical evidence, this article argues that husbands in Swat take second wives mainly in a spirit of revenge, reflecting the endemic hostility between spouses that exists within this strongly patriarchal segmentary lineage organization in which romantic love is ideally reserved for chaste extramarital relationships. An ideology of the primacy of paternal blood underlies the misogynistic attitudes characteristic of Swat, and prevalent elsewhere in the Middle East and the Circum-Mediterranean region. (Polygyny, Islamic law, patriarchy, misogyny)

In 1969, when I first visited the Pukhtun people of Swat, in the Northwest Frontier of Pakistan,¹ some men had more than one wife. Polygyny was explained as permitted, and even favored, in Islam. But it soon became apparent that there was much more to polygyny than a religious injunction. A local proverb which goes, "I may be a fool, but not such a fool as a man who has two wives," indicates that marrying more than one woman is the self-destructive act of a fool. Yet a substantial portion of Swati men, especially the wealthier and more powerful, were nonetheless polygynous. This essay explores the disjuncture between Islamic law and Pukhtun practice, and considers why Pukhtun men want to be polygynous even when they realize the practice is not only foolish, but can also be dangerous. It concludes with some speculations about the possible sources of Swati polygyny.

Swat is a beautiful valley surrounded by the jagged snowy peaks of the Hindu Kush Range. The rushing cold waters of the Swat River bisect the valley, and round grey river stones are used to build the tightly packed villages and the houses where extended families share cramped space. In the late 1970s the population density here was high, and it is higher today. Despite the fertility of the soil, famine is always a threat, so that struggles for land and power are literally a matter of life and death. No police force or government authority controls these struggles. Rather, the area is organized politically and spatially on the basis of a segmentary lineage system that divides land among patrilineal relatives, and so pits them against one another. The term of reference for the father's brother's son (a man's closest neighbor, nearest relative, and major rival) is *tarbur*, which also translates as enemy. The term of address is the much friendlier *vror* (brother). Political relationships of alliance and antagonism in this tightly packed system are flexible and adaptive, based upon a combination of two basic and well-known principles: "I against my brothers, my

brothers and I against our cousins, my cousins, my brothers, and I against the world” and “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.”

In this contentious setting, marriage would seem to be primarily a political act, an effort to secure alliances in a world of potential enemies. Therefore, a simple way to account for polygyny would be that men maximize their power by maximizing their marriage relationships. But this does not fit with the reality of polygynous marriage, which, as I will demonstrate, usually creates enmity, not solidarity, between in-laws. Nor does this explanation account for the ambivalence the Pukhtun feel about polygyny. To better understand the nature of polygyny in Swat, it must first be contextualized in the Quran and Islamic traditions (*hadith*), since these are the texts to which the Pukhtun refer when explaining their marital practices and attitudes.

MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIPS IN ISLAM

It is true that the Prophet Muhammad, who was an enthusiastic polygynist, practiced plural marriage for political reasons. He eventually contracted 12 official marriages, using his marital alliances to cement his relationships with rival groups and with his own followers (the first five caliphs were his in-laws). In so doing, Muhammad exceeded his own revelation, as expressed in the Quran, that a man may marry four wives. However, although many of the Prophet's marriages were purely political, it is often forgotten that he was steadfastly monogamous for 25 years, remaining faithful to his much older first wife, Khadija, who used her money and position to support her husband's prophetic mission. Muhammad's ambivalence toward polygyny is indicated as well in his stipulation that the marriage between his favorite daughter Fatima and his cousin Ali (the fourth Caliph) had to be strictly monogamous. The Pukhtun too do not want their daughters to enter into polygynous unions, even though they may be keen to take plural wives themselves.²

Despite the complexity of Muhammad's example, many commentators have seen the Islamic legal permission for plural marriage as misogynist (e.g., Mernissi 1991, 1975). Mernissi (1975:14) writes: “The whole Muslim social structure can be seen as an attack on, and a defense against the disruptive power of female sexuality.” Yet, a closer look reveals that the family law and marriage practices ordained in the Quran and enforced by Islamic jurisprudence very often directly challenge traditional male prerogatives and affirm the humanity and equality of women, who had previously been oppressed in pre-Islamic patriarchies (Kandiyoti 1991, 1992; Tillion 1966). Islam proclaims that both men and women have eternal souls and are destined to fill their God-given complementary roles in the universe: men in the public sphere, women in the private. The Quran also explicitly repudiates the previously normative practice of female infanticide and profoundly alters the pre-Islamic legal status of women who had been regarded as chattel owned by men, to be inherited and disposed of at will. Under Islam, women are legal shareholders in the decedent's

estate, with rights of inheritance that cannot be abrogated by their own kin or their husbands' family.

Many other aspects of Islamic law that may seem misogynistic when viewed in isolation are less so when understood in context. For example, the legal rule that a woman is entitled to only half of the amount inherited by her male relatives is more than balanced by the dowry of goods, money, and sometimes land that a girl is legally entitled to receive from her family when she marries. According to Muslim legal codes, this dowry, augmented by a substantial bride price (*mahar*) from her husband's household, becomes her own property to use as she pleases, though both are usually integrated into the common household resource base.

Women's rights to property are derived in part from the way marriage was conceptualized in Islamic law. In contrast to the sacramental bond of Christian family law, Muslim marriage is viewed as a witnessed legal contract between equals, transacted, bargained over, signed, sealed, and reversible, in which the woman (or her guardian) exchanges her sexuality and her reproductive capacities for a bride price and for a guarantee of permanent protection and maintenance. If the agreed upon terms are not met, the contract can be legally annulled and the bride price returned to the spurned or estranged wife. The Muslim wife's jural and personal independence is graphically symbolized in her retention of her own family name after marriage, and expressed concretely in her legal capacity to earn and keep her own money and run her own financial affairs.

However, while Islamic law gave women rights and privileges, it also took away some freedoms. Polyandry was abolished, while polygyny is permitted. A Muslim man is allowed four wives at any given time, but under Islam only those with enough economic resources to provide adequately for all the wives can marry polygynously. Furthermore, a polygynous husband is religiously obligated to care for all his wives equally and pay equal attention to each. Inheritance is divided equally among all a man's children, including the children of slaves. In these ways, *Shari'a* law balances male power in plural marriage and guarantees women's rights. It should also be noted that in contrast to the polygynous Mormons depicted in this volume, in Islam, polygyny is only permitted, not enjoined.

CULTURE AND MARRIAGE IN SWAT, NORTHERN PAKISTAN

The Pukhtun believe that their religious faith and traditions are seamlessly united. They assume themselves to be devout Sunni Muslims, following the precepts of the Quran,³ but this assumption is incorrect. A number of local practices enjoined by *Pukhtunwali* (the custom of the Pukhtun) fly in the face of orthodox Islamic law, particularly in regard to women's rights. For example, Pukhtun custom denies inheritance to women, enforces strict female seclusion, appropriates women's bride-wealth, and absolutely prohibits divorce, regardless of circumstances.⁴ Many Islamic rules for the protection of women are overturned in practice. This coincides with the general male outlook toward women which holds that they are naturally ignorant,

treacherous, and likely to be promiscuous (except for a man's mother, who is unstintingly honored and loved). Pithy local proverbs convey the masculine perspective. "Women belong in the house, or in the grave." "Women have no noses. They will eat shit."

The negative and fearful attitude toward women correlates with the patrilineal segmentary system in which first marriages are arranged in order to maintain the solidarity of the lineage. Men from elite landholding warrior lineages (*khans*) very rarely marry into inferior landless clans, and only reluctantly exchange their women with other elite lineages. The favored wedding is with the father's brother's daughter (FBD)—the sister of the *tarbur*, the "close enemy." Failing that, marriage is with distant groups that can, ideally, provide backing in cases of conflict. Female seclusion (*pardah*) is strict among the *khans*, who must take blood revenge in cases of seduction or infidelity or else lose their honor. Murder of women suspected of breaking *pardah* is celebrated in song and legend, and does sometimes occur.

Within this androcentric system, there are distinct gender differences in attitudes toward marriage. For women, marriage is the sole possible route to success and prestige. It is in marriage that all a woman's hopes are invested, and it is in marriage that those hopes can be realized. While the woman's road to success is narrow and hard, it is not impassible. If a woman can produce many strong sons, if she can outlast her mother-in-law and become dominant in her extended family household, controlling her sons and their wives, then she has lived an ideal life. At the same time, girls are quite realistically fearful that marriage will lead to a lifetime of subservience to a cruel husband and his demanding mother in an alien compound. But the greatest fear of a *khana* is that her husband will humiliate her by marrying a second wife (*ban*).

While girls place all their hopes in marriage, a boy's status rests primarily on his abilities to gain allies and defeat enemies in the contentious masculine rivalries of the public sphere. Marriage is only one part of his strategy. Its purpose is to tie families together and to produce sons who can carry on the lineage name as well as daughters who can be married off to create new relationships between men. But the marriage relationship itself is regarded as a trap for a man, binding him forever to a woman from a rival family. The wife is an enemy within the husband's household, gaining the loyalty and love of his sons and plotting with them against him for her own ends. In this setting, men generally avoid their homes, where women rule, and spend the majority of their time gossiping in the all-male environment of the men's house (*hujera*). For them, marriage is a necessary evil, not an end in itself.

Although over time a degree of companionship, respect, and conjugal love may develop between marriage partners, affection between them can never be shown or admitted in public. Men must always refer to their wives and the wives of others as "the house." Even in private, it is considered improper and dangerous for a man to share his thoughts with his wife, since she cannot understand his thoughts or sympathize with his feelings, but instead will exploit whatever she hears to gain advantage. In the same vein, it is believed that a man who is kind to his wife will grow old

before his time; and both marriage partners are quick to point out any weaknesses or signs of aging in their spouses. Both combatants in the marital battle say—partly in jest, partly in earnest—that they hope for the early death of the other, and both sincerely fear that the survivor will "laugh over my grave." Though there are notable exceptions, marriage in Swat is a fraught relationship in which each partner struggles to maintain power and gain the upper hand. It is more a kind of warfare than a love match. But each spouse's strategies are different. Her heart's desire is to move from a position of weakness to one of authority within the household, while a husband's hope is to free himself entirely from his wife's power. She wants to control him, he wishes to escape (Lindholm and Lindholm 1979).

POLYGyny IN SWAT

Pukhtun khans who have the wherewithal often marry a second wife. Their stated aim is not overwhelming attraction to another woman (because of purdah they will rarely have seen or spoken to the woman they seek to marry), nor is it a desire for alliances with other lineages (although a second marriage forges a bond with the new wife's family, it irremediably strains the tie with the family of the first) but rather the desire to defeat and mortify an aggressive and demanding first wife by taking a second one. "Women, as incoming wives, seek to retain their lineage honor and to gain a position of dominance in their new home. For men, the task is to subdue the wife or, failing that, to humiliate her. The husband has the trump card in this battle, since he can take a second wife, thereby shaming the first and all her lineage" (Lindholm 1982:60).

In Swat, voluntary polygyny (as opposed to the compulsory polygyny resulting from the levirate) is more or less confined to the elite khan class, whose first marriages are arranged to cement alliances, and who can afford the expense and tribulation of arranging a second. When I traced the marriages of the leading clan in the village, the *Malik khel*, over the five previous generations, 115 Malik khel men married 150 times; 21 had two wives and 7 had three. These were by far the majority of polygynous unions in the village. In contrast, the poor and landless do not have the same political ambitions as the elite, and can barely support even one wife. Polygyny among them is rare and almost always due to the levirate. An exception is poor widowers who may marry a widow with sons, to add some helping hands to the family. A khan would never enter into such a marriage, as it would mean bringing a rival bloodline into his household. For the same reason, adoption does not occur among the khans.

As the proverb cited at the beginning of this paper indicates, the Pukhtun khans clearly recognize the potentially destructive consequences of polygyny. They know that a second wife is a financial burden (a strict moral prohibition on divorce means a deposed first wife must be cared for as long as she lives), that polygyny causes animosity from his first wife's family, and, worst, creates a never ending uproar in the household (since in the cramped environment of Swat, the jealous and

quarrelsome co-wives usually share compound space and the cooking facilities). The answer, according to conventional wisdom, is for a man to marry once more. "This is because the two wives will make his life so miserable that he hopes to drive them both from his home by bringing in yet a third woman, and starting all over again with just one wife. In this, he will be encouraged by his first wife, who wishes nothing more than to shame her rival as she has been shamed" (Lindholm 1982:146).

That solution worked only in the past, if at all. Today men cannot afford to maintain three wives. Instead, the problem of internal fighting is dealt with by having one of the wives (usually the first) return to her natal household, either voluntarily or because her husband does not invite her back after one of her visits to her parents. (The husband must give his wife permission to leave and to return to his compound.) In the village, nine women had suffered this humiliating dismissal, five among the khans and four within the more numerous servant groups. These disgraced women lost their status and became *de facto* servants in their own families. One mother who never re-entered her husband's compound after he took a ban raised her children in her own father's house. Her sons returned to their natal village when they reached puberty, where they were treated with respect and eventually inherited their share of their patrimony. Their father also arranged good marriages for the daughters of his exiled wife. In this way, he fulfilled all his obligations toward his first wife's children.

This is not always the case. Children of less favored co-wives often have difficulty claiming their rightful inheritance from their fathers and, if they remain home, are thought to be in danger of being "accidentally" killed by their vengeful stepmothers. (Young orphans generally stay with the families of their maternal uncles until they are old enough to defend themselves against paternal relatives who want to be rid of them.) I know of no actual cases where children were killed or so endangered, but I do know that the sons of repudiated first wives are resentful of their fathers, and tales of the ban's hatred of her stepchildren are the common stuff of folktales and gossip. Nonetheless, custom and self interest demand that exiled boys return to their natal household when they reach puberty. Resentful or not, it is to their advantage to support their father in any struggle with lineage rivals. Furthermore, the father retains authority to arrange marriages for all his daughters. These marriages establish important alliances, and also bring money as bride price. So even in marriages where a co-wife has returned to her own family, there are still instrumental ties between the spouses over their children. Although fathers might dislike the children of repudiated wives (usually reciprocated), the relationship is still one of mutual advantage. Similarly, a mother's status derives in large part from the successes of her children, which can only be achieved through the father's intercession. The same uneasy combination of antagonism with allegiance, so characteristic of the segmentary system, pertains for the children of co-wives as well. Real brothers are emotionally closer than stepbrothers, who often squabble, fight, and sometimes even kill each other. But all unite in defending family honor, from which they gain their own.

In this context, antagonism inside a polygynous family is increased by the sense of honor that is characteristic not only of Pukhtun men, but of Pukhtun women as well. For a khana, the greatest insult possible to her and her lineage is the arrival of a second wife, and she will do anything to redeem her own reputation, while the incoming ban will battle with equal vigor to achieve domination. Overt fighting, as well as the covert use of magical spells against rivals, are women's weapons. Because the incoming wife is bound to be attacked, mahar is sometimes larger for a second marriage than for the first, further increasing the fury of the first wife. Also, second wives are usually from a lower social order than the first, since fathers are reluctant to send their daughters into a situation bound to have conflict. This is in contrast to the situation described by Slonim-Nevo et. al. (in this issue), where second wives are often of a higher status than the first. Only the promise of a higher social status or a high bride price can overcome paternal reluctance. But any disjuncture in status also is deeply felt as an affront to the first wife and her lineage. Finally, incoming ban are usually much younger than the first wife (another slur in this age-graded society where elders are due deference). In revenge for all these insults, the first wife may sometimes attempt to reclaim her mahar, a legal action that is in accord with Islamic law but disgraceful within Pukhtunwali. In other instances, the enraged first wife flatly refuses to return to her parents and causes so much strife that the man may be the one obliged to flee his village, leaving his rejected wife and her children under the uncertain care of his father and brothers.

This was so in another instance of polygyny. The husband, a charming but prodigal son of a powerful clan, had arranged to marry a woman from a very prestigious lineage. His wife was a strong figure in her own right, intelligent, intransigent, and quite capable of returning his blows with her own. The marriage was full of insults and tension, with the wife often gaining the upper hand. The furious husband gained his revenge when he surreptitiously married a girl from an inferior non-khan group, whose parents were willing to take the risk of putting their daughter into a contentious situation for the sake of gaining some of her suitor's high status. But the first wife refused to allow the new girl into her home and was supported by her husband's family, who were ashamed of the lowly background of the ban and angered by the husband's irresponsible behavior, which threatened a strategic marriage alliance. The embittered first wife kept her house and raised her children in the village of her in-laws, while the husband moved away, living first with his new wife in reduced circumstances, and later migrating to find work outside the valley.

In other cases, taking a co-wife may actually be physically dangerous for the husband, since a repudiated woman can be tempted to revenge her honor by means of poison. For this reason, polygynous men who die of cholera are often thought to have been poisoned by their first wives. This is what was said about the death of my close friend. Unlike the case of the reprobate recounted above, his prestige, character, and authority made him a good catch, even for a second wife, and he married a ban from a respectable lineage. Soon thereafter, he died rapidly with cholera-like symptoms (also the symptoms of arsenic poisoning) without having any children by

the second wife. Rumors spread, but nothing was done because of a lack of proof (cholera is common in Swat, and people die of it regularly) and because no one wished to arouse the enmity of the first wife's family. She continued to live in her husband's village, raising her only son to be his sole inheritor.

Of course, a woman prefers not to take such extreme measures. Her best hope to avoid being dispossessed by a co-wife is to bind her husband to her emotionally, so he will have no desire to bring another woman into the household. Women have magical means they can employ to accomplish this. For instance, a Pukhtun girl is taught by her mother to always speak first to her husband when he arrives home and to sleep with her hand behind his head. Such commonplace acts, women believe, will make him accustomed to her presence, keep him attached to her, and allow her to have authority over him. There are other magical measures, such as putting the water used to wash the body of a dead leatherworker in a husband's tea. A man who drinks this concoction falls helplessly in love with the woman who administered it, and she can then render him *begherata* (without honor). Besotted by love, he will not restrain her natural inclinations to promiscuity and may even become a *bedagh* (passive homosexual). In these narratives, a woman triumphs over her husband and defeats her rival ban, but by her behavior and their father's emasculation she also destroys her own heritage, as her sons are disgraced (Lindholm 1981).

Ironically, the same conditions that are said to cause male impotence can also lead to a high birth rate, as the rival wives enter into a competition to see who can produce the most sons. By having more children, one wife can dominate the household and perhaps eventually drive the other wife to her natal home in shame. As a result, polygynous households in the village are said to be more prolific than monogamous households. My census records confirm this belief.

In the Swat village I know best, there are several possible trajectories that may occur in a polygynous marriage, which I believe are quite typical of the region and of the rural Pukhtun generally. A man may force his humiliated first wife into exile or, if she is strong enough, he may be forced into exile himself. If the co-wives stay within his compound, the whole family will suffer from their constant bickering. Children of different wives are at odds with each other and are maltreated by their stepmothers. In the worst cases, the outraged first wife may even poison her husband. A polygynous marriage is generally miserable for all parties, and the outcome is sometimes tragic. I only know of one man with two wives who was, if not happy, at least peaceful. When he was obliged by the levirate to marry his dead brother's wife, he coped with his new responsibility by treating both women absolutely equally, as Islam requires. He accomplished this by spending all his time in the refuge of the local men's house, and his wives, abandoned to their own devices in their shared compound, became good friends.

Despite the perils of polygyny (which are only the amplified perils of monogamy), my informants claim that men take the risk because of their dislike of and desire to dishonor their first wives. Attraction to a younger, more pliable woman is certainly a factor, but it is not given as a major cause. The political reason (to

increase a man's alliances) is nonsensical, since polygyny alienates the first wife's family and the second marriage is usually to a woman from an inferior clan. Evidence for revenge as a motive for polygyny is mostly anecdotal, but it is borne out by one empirical finding. The Swati khans favor parallel cousin marriage to the actual FBD. Patrilineal parallel cousin marriage, common throughout the Middle East, "has the effect of diversifying the agnatic group, and creates small nuclei within" (Peters 1967:274). In FBD marriage, agnates are turned into affines, and lines for fission are drawn between the closest patrilineal relatives. As a result, it becomes "almost impossible to isolate a solidary in-group, and groupings are continually being activated or redefined through struggles that may even pit members of the nuclear family against each other" (Murphy and Kasdan 1959:20). The animosity of these intermarrying tarburan is heightened due to their rivalry over rights to the abutting plots of land they farm. It is precisely this endemic conflict that FBD marriage is supposed to mute. Instead, the result is usually the opposite, increasing the rivalry and jealousy among the cousins.

According to local discourse, FBD marriage is notoriously prone to polygyny since both partners are from families of equal status and are also inherently in conflict with one another. This combination is said to lead to virulent hatred within the household, which drives the husband to seek a second wife in order to humiliate the first and shame her lineage. Tracing FBD marriages suggests that this folk wisdom is correct. Among the 115 Malik khel marriages in the previous five generations, four of the eight men who had FBD marriage took second wives, while 19 of 107 who did not marry their FBD took a second wife. In the present generation, two of the three men marrying FBD married another wife, while only two of 39 who did not marry FBD became polygynous, one involuntarily by the levirate. As these polygynous marriages are within the same khan group, who all have relatively equal access to resources, it seems that it is the contentious marital relationship that drives these men to seek second marriages, despite the unhappy consequences.⁵

ROMANCE AND PATRIARCHY

Of course, there are gradations in the attraction and affection a polygynist feels for his wives. People recognize that a man will be drawn toward a younger, less prestigious and more pliable one, a woman who was not forced on him by his parents. But a young woman's subservience is hardly eternal. As her husband ages and weakens, she is likely to assert herself more and more. So, even in polygynous marriages with younger, more dependent women, romantic idealization erodes as the conflicting interests of wives and husbands inevitably drive them to battle with one another. Another factor undermining the potential for romance in marriage is the fact that men can gain honor by pursuing sexual affairs with women in rival lineages. Such affairs are celebrated much like victories in war, and, if discovered, can result in death for both partners. Usually it is the woman who suffers. Less dangerous, but

much more common for the khans, are sexual affairs with girls belonging to dependent groups in the neighborhood, who have little power to resist. A woman may try to coerce her lover into marriage by arriving at his compound gate carrying his infant child in her arms. This strategy, while compelling, is so shameful for the girl that it is practiced only by the most humble and desperate. More likely is maintenance of the affair clandestinely, although everybody knows that such and such a boy or girl is the bastard child of the local khan.

The absence of romance in marriage does not mean that idealized love does not exist among the Pukhtun. Quite the contrary. Romantic love is highly elaborated in the Pukhtun belief. But it must be for a mysterious stranger or for a woman who is betrothed elsewhere and so unavailable as a marriage partner, or even for a boy.⁶ As elsewhere in the Middle East, Pukhtun lovers fall in love from a distance. In general, sexuality is downplayed and the emphasis is on the spiritual qualities of the beloved and the deep yearning of the lover. As the great warrior poet Khushal Khan Khattack wrote to his beloved:

Your curls are a swing,
 Your forelock a snare,
 Your face a lamp
 That draws the moth
 If the world asks about my sickness
 And the one who has stricken me asks not,
 Then what use are all the others? (Khattack 1965, in Lindholm 1982:223)

The ideal romance in Pukhtun verse and myth cannot be consummated, for consummation means the end of the quest and the loss of the ideal. This is because in sexual union the Pukhtun see domination and subordination. Sexual penetration is an act of power; submission is acceptance of inferiority. This unequal duality destroys the essence of the hoped-for relation; that is, complete reciprocal mutuality and fusion. Since sexuality affirms separateness and hierarchy, romantic lovers cannot truly reach the ideal because that role can only be filled by someone who is not sexually available, but who offers a higher form of relationship (Lindholm 1982). Therefore, true love must end in the death of the chaste lovers, following the plot of the classic Persian story of Layla and Majnun, where the lovers are only united when the roses growing on their graves intertwine.

In real life, such chaste relationships are rare indeed. Yet, the ideal is dreamt of nonetheless, even though it cannot be sought or even imagined in marriage, since the marriage relationship is so intrinsically contentious and since sexual intercourse is so tainted by the imagery of domination. For these reasons, polygynous marriage also does not meet the ideal. The best men can hope for is the forlorn fantasy of an affectionate and subservient co-wife who will replace his assertive first wife, and who will never become assertive herself. Women have the more plausible dream of becoming matriarchs in their own homes. But this hope is offset by fear of the humiliation that would result if a vengeful husband brings a co-wife into the house.

Swat Pukhtun patriarchal attitudes and social structures tend to negate Muslim legal protections for women. Polygyny is pursued by khan men primarily as a way to punish and humiliate their proud first wives who, as Pukhtun khana themselves, refuse to submit meekly to their husbands. Only secondarily is polygyny a quest for a younger, more attractive, and more pliable partner. Even then it is bound to fail, since the interests of husband and wife are inevitably at odds. As the insightful Pukhtun author and aphorist Ghani Khan writes, "Every Pukhtun thinks he is as good as anyone and his father rolled into one. He is stupid enough to try this sort of thing even with his own wife. She pays for it in youth, he in old age" (Khan 1958:47).⁷

CONCLUSION: SOURCES OF MISOGYNY

As polygyny and the subordination of women go hand in hand in Swat, how is it possible to account for the causes of the patriarchal attitudes that prevail not only there, but also throughout the Middle East and the Mediterranean region, despite Muslim and Christian legal restraints against the oppression of women? As shown in this essay, the analysis of Islamic texts and jurisprudence confirms that women's oppression is not the message of Islam, which is mostly positive about women's rights. The causes for the marked disparity between law and practice appear to be historical and cultural.

The negative orientations toward women and marriage in the Middle East are possibly a result of the transformations that occurred when Islam grew from its original tribal base and became an imperial venture, expanding governmental authoritarianism, eroding Bedouin egalitarianism, and undermining the rights and powers of women. The Persianized Abbasids, who vastly expanded the authority of the central government in the early Islamic centuries, also interpreted the edicts of their religion in a way that radically compromised women's independence, as symbolized by the terms for woman, slave, and sexual object becoming synonymous. Crucial in the development of this attitude was the widespread practice of taking concubines by the conquering Muslim armies, which undercut the authority and autonomy of their wives. For these new Muslim elite "acquiring a wife was a much more serious undertaking than stocking up on concubines who could be discarded, given away, or even killed" (Abbott 1946:67), while a wife had property rights and could depend on family. Under these circumstances, slave women were increasingly preferred as consorts while their independent freeborn sisters were relegated to seclusion and marginality. Contemporary Middle Eastern attitudes toward women, revisionist critics say, reflect the spread of this imperial patriarchal history of enslavement and denigration (see, e.g., Ahmed 1992; Kandiyoti 1991, 1992). Muslim legal rules protecting the legal status of women were trumped by a culture of female inequality that emerged from conquest.

This historical change is undergirded by a negative attitude toward women derived from a cultural notion of patrilineality founded on blood inheritance and enhanced by Islamic precepts. Many aspects of matrilineality embedded within

pre-Islamic Bedouin culture were eliminated by Muhammad's Islamic revolution. For example, the Quran allowed men to divorce their wives with ease, but prevented women from doing the same. This was a change from pre-Islamic practice in Arabia, where Bedouin women had the freedom to change mates as they pleased. Under Islam, fornication was redefined to include formerly accepted patterns of temporary, female-initiated sexual relations or wife "leasing" that were cited by al-Bukhari as common in pre-Islamic Arabia. (Mernissi 1991:183–84). In these relationships, the mother of a child could have some freedom in choosing the man she wished to designate as its father, so pater was distinguished from genitor. With the patrilineal blood ideology of Islam, these practices became capital crimes. Fundamental to the worldview promoted by nascent Islam was the ideology that the pater and genitor must be the same man: inheritance, honor, and lineage identity are all derived from the actual transmission of a father's blood to his offspring. This belief entails a "structural contradiction between a patriarchal system and the [women's] physical reproduction of lineages" (Hammoudi 1993:8).

Across the Middle East and the circum-Mediterranean area, men have tried to overcome this contradiction by portraying women as weak, stupid, and useless. At the same time, the danger of women is recognized and feared; her sexuality engenders the lineage, but her promiscuity can destroy it. Veiling, isolating, and denigrating women are defensive reactions to women's hidden structural and erotic power. It is ironic that Islam, while ratifying women's rights, also ratified a patriarchal blood ideology that inevitably undermines those rights, even though in principle the latter is separable from the former.

NOTES

1. I revisited the Valley in the early 1970s, and did anthropological fieldwork there in 1977. Most of my account is from the male perspective since I did not have direct access to women, due to female seclusions. However, my wife, Cherry Lindholm, who accompanied me in 1977 and spent time in the women's quarters, taught me about their lives. I am grateful for the openness and honesty of my Pukhtun friends, who were kind enough to treat us as their guests.
2. For similar attitudes among Palestinian Bedouin, see Slonim-Nevo et al. (this issue), who conclude that men, women, and children in polygynous families prefer monogamy.
3. Rustic innocence about religious precepts has recently been challenged by a new generation of madrasa-educated mullahs and other religious figures (often lumped together as Taliban). When I did my fieldwork, the confrontation between theology and practice was far in the future.
4. In the village where I worked there were only two legal divorces in a population of nearly 2,000.
5. It is true that these marriages are mostly among the relatively wealthy khans who can afford a second wife. Still, it is significant that even in this group, those who marry FBD have a much higher rate of polygyny than their lineage mates.
6. For homosexuality and romantic love in Middle Eastern classical literature, see Lindholm 2005:251–55.
7. For some classic studies on women's conditions in the Middle East, see Papps 1993, Al-Khayyat 1990, Friedl 1991, Grima 1992, and Dorsky 1986.

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