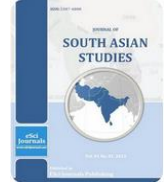




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## CONCOCTING A FROLICKING “PASHTUN COUPLE” IN AFGHANISTAN

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### ABSTRACT

The validity, truth and truth value of the text and context of Euro-American, especially postmodern Anglo-American, ethnographies of Afghanistan, are rarely interrogated. A systematic scrutiny of these ethnographies reveals how prolonged blind acceptance of faulty, distorted, misinterpreted, and cooked-up information buttressed by the authority of “fieldwork” has been produced and reproduced in widely circulated packages of pseudo-knowledge about the peoples and cultures of Afghanistan. Various degrees and forms of this tradition of production and reproduction are available in virtually all postmodern Anglo-American ethnographies of Afghanistan. Some instances of pseudo-knowledge about Afghanistan have been interrogated elsewhere (Hanifi, 2000, 2004, 2005, 2011). This essay offers a culturally informed scrutiny of a concocted “Pashtun couple” stored in photographs embedded in a postmodern Anglo-American ethnography of Afghanistan.

**Keywords:** Anthropology of Afghanistan, Deconstruction, Ethnographic Imperialism, Misrepresentation.

### INTRODUCTION

Modern anthropological ethnography had been widely proclaimed by its guild leaders as a bastion of truth housing truthful packages of knowledge about the cultural and social realities of its Other objects. Starting in the middle of the twentieth century and gaining momentum through the four decades of the Cold War (the postcolonial era) anthropology experienced a rapid decline of its modern tradition and the “reinvention” of its disciplinary identity through reflexivity (the “reflexive turn” or “critical anthropology”) during the late 1960s and 1970s. Viewed broadly, the reflexive turn insisted on bursting open the gates of the bastion of positivist anthropology in order to expose the real flesh and blood of the built-in subjectivities (that constituted) of the theories and methods of the so called “Science of Man”. Reflexive anthropology argued for the acknowledgement and exposure of the cultural biases of Western ethnographers and the hitherto tabooed critique of the hierarchical and exploitative structure of the relationship between the Western ethnographer and the ethnographized (native/primitive/savage) Other. A

major objective of reflexivity was to unveil the historical complicity of anthropology in European colonialism and the continued collaboration of the disciple with the Euro-American imperial domination of the Other. The feminist consciousness of the reflexive turn underscored the historical domination of women by men in the construction of anthropological theories and practices in all locations of the ethnographer-ethnographized relations of power and domination.

In early 1980s reflexivity merged with the postmodern literary twist in anthropology converting “scientific” ethnographic epistemology” (Spencer, 1989) into an art gallery in which how to paint the Other object became more important than its empirical cultural and social realities. Ethnography moved from empirically verifiable fieldwork experience to imaginary texts and poetic prose that frequently overlapped with literary fiction. Empirical verifiability of fieldwork data and accountability for fieldwork experience became moot issues. The combined political and academic effect of reflexivity and postmodernism produced the “crisis of representation” in which “ethnographic authority” shifted from objectivity—the solitary ethnographer’s verifiable fieldwork experience—to subjectivity—the art of “writing culture”, production of texts (including

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photographs) in which the ethnographer, as artist, had a free hand in imposing her/his own whims, imaginings, interpretations, poetics, politics, allegories and tropes on the ethnographized "Other". Modernist verifiable fieldwork experience lost its positivist weight and was replaced by unverifiable claims about "being there", and "[y]ou are there, because I was there" (Clifford, 1983a). The emphasis on the art of writing culture ushered in the free for all, "anything goes" (Feyerabend, 1988), "Yuppie Anthropology" (Silverstein, 1985). Not surprisingly, the new ethnographic anarchy promoted hyper-cultural relativism and micro-localization and encouraged—some say required and rewarded—cooked-up "facts", experimentation, interpretation, and obsessive preoccupation with symbols and systems of meanings (symbolic anthropology) of the unverifiable Other. In theory postmodern reflexive ethnography advocated a "multi-vocal" triangle of inter-subjective dialogue between the Western observer (researcher), the observed (researched) "Other", and the audience for ethnographic texts. However, in practice, like its positivist predecessor—but with more ideological authority—particularistic postmodern reflexivity continued to invoke strategies of "confidentiality" and "anonymity" (much like espionage and intelligence gathering) for shielding from the audience the empirical Other, the source of the information from which ethnographic knowledge is purportedly constructed, with pseudonyms and fictive labels in order to protect her/his "privacy" and "safety". Thus, in Euro-American ethnography, the cultural and social identity of the Other person in place and time was and continues to be the trade secret (trademark) and copy-righted (patented) private property of the writers of ethnographic texts. Perhaps an unintended (but unavoidable) consequence of the self-reflexive gaze of anthropologists was to engage in an epistemological critique of their discipline by scrutinizing the ethnographic writings and research practices of prominent (and a few not so prominent) figures in the genealogy of the discipline. My sense of irony in this disinterring exercise is grounded in the fact that within the guild of anthropology—"amongst us" so to speak—"public questioning of the empirical contents of ethnography is extremely rare, and, tellingly, almost always confined to cases where an ostensibly anthropological text has won a wide public audience—*Coming of Age in Samoa, The Mountain People, the teachings of Don Juan, Shabono*. Such questioning seems

as much a product of the patrolling of disciplinary boundaries as of anything high-minded" (Spencer, 1989). The cases noted here became the subjects of major "anthropological scandals" (Spencer 1996). Marcel Griaule's ethnographic imaginings about the Dogon (Clifford, 1983b; Van Beek, 1991), the controversial writings about the Tasaday (Headland 1992) and other (not so widely circulated) cases that qualify for "scandal" could be added to Spencer's list (Needham, 1985; Robin, 2004). These public scandals (and others that have remained unexposed to public view) and the fear of becoming involved in scandals of their own have strengthened the anthropologists' resolve to refrain from questioning and scrutinizing the validity and truth value of claims about "being there" doing "fieldwork", interacting with "informants", and gathering "data" at the (often fictive and unspecified) location of the anonymous Other. Moving the authority of ethnography from objective and verifiable fieldwork to subjective writing and privileging the ethnographic writer with the right to invoke and manipulate the strategies and tactics of "confidentiality" for protecting the "privacy" and "safety" of the "Other" are at the heart of the construction of this taboo and the institutional reluctance of anthropology to insist on truth, truth value and the empirical validity of information from which ethnographic knowledge is constructed.

Real or potential scandals that are of interest only to areal (regional [e.g. Central Asia] or country [e. g. Afghanistan, Iran]) specialists are often kept isolated by "the small circle of scholars who know each other's work well" (Canfield, 2004). Canfield was referring to the authors of Anglo-American postmodern ethnographies of Afghanistan produced during the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. So protective and supportive of each other are the authors of this genre of ethnographies of Afghanistan that when a question was raised about the integrity of one of its products, the questioner received a harsh scolding and a threat from one of its authors (Canfield, 2004). Withstanding the potential of such a threat and in its defiance if issued, this essay interrogates the validity of a specific ethnographic sliver claiming to be the "Other" in Afghanistan. As mentioned above, polemical engagement of ethnography is strongly frowned upon in Western anthropology. In reviewing a book by Ernest Gellner, Paul Rabinow (quoting Michel Foucault) angrily asks "[h]as anyone ever seen a new idea come out of a polemic?" (Rabinow, 1994). This

essay answers a firm “yes” to Rabinow’s snide interrogative and proceeds to offer a polemical essay that contains “new ideas” for the ethnography of Afghanistan and implicit suggestions for upgraded ethical standards for the guild of Western anthropology. It is beyond the scope of this article to develop these implicit suggestions into a comprehensive discussion about new ethical standards for the production of anthropological ethnography.

#### **ENCOUNTER WITH A “PASHTUN COUPLE” IN AFGHANISTAN**

In “Gender for the 99 percent”(AT 29[5], 2013a) Nancy Lindisfarne, a well-known British “feminist” and Jonathan Neale, a British “anti-capitalist activist” provide a critique of neoliberalism and an alternative proposal for emphasis on the “elite control” of ideologies and practices of inequality at the intersection of class and gender hierarchies with focus on the United States. Situated in the article, in an ethnographic vacuum and without any cultural context, are five photographs (Figs. 1-5). Figs. 3-5 consist of three pictures under the title “a Pashtun couple asks to have their picture taken. The sober version was their favorite of the three. Afghanistan 1971” (Lindisfarne& Neale, 2013a). Perhaps these three photographs are offered as generic illustrations of Marilyn Strathern’s theoretical views about “sexual imagery” as a device for class-based conceptualization of gender (Lindisfarne& Neale, 2013a). But the cultural and physical content of these photographs are positioned not only to stand for the “Pashtun couple” imagined by the authors but also to represent inter-gender physical and symbolic body interaction among Pashtuns and other cultural communities in Afghanistan, the Middle East, Central and South Asia. Nothing is said about the real class and cultural, spatial, and temporal locations of this “Pashtun couple”. A culturally informed reading of these photographs does not support the argument for the primacy of class in relations of power. The “sexual imagery” in Nancy Lindisfarne’s photographs of a “Pashtun couple” who “enjoyed being modern” (Gustaaf Houtman, personal communication, March 13, 2014 [quoting Nancy Lindisfarne]) punctuates the power of gender, not class.

I first noticed these three photographs more than two decades ago under the title “A married couple ask to have their picture taken” in a widely circulated 1991 book titled *Bartered Brides: Politics, gender and marriage in an Afghan tribal society* (Cambridge University Press,

p. 135) authored by Nancy Tapper. (I wonder if the title of this book and its narratives about negotiations that precede and accompany arranged marriages is inspired by or has any ideological, symbolic, literary, or ethnographic relationship to the popular Czech opera “*The Bartered Bride*”, a story about “how....true love prevails over the combined efforts of ambitious parents and a scheming marriage broker” (STAG: Community Arts Centre, Cinema and Theatre, May 2015). The English language version of this 19<sup>th</sup> century opera has been regularly staged in London and New York during post-WWII decades). To my knowledge Nancy Tapper’s *Bartered Brides* is one of the most popular and widely reviewed books about the purported domination of women by men in Afghanistan. Vended with the authority of anthropological “fieldwork” and “research” by the author in Afghanistan, the book has received rave reviews in academic journals in most of which it is acclaimed as a highly authoritative ethnographic work about marriage and women’s life in Afghanistan. One reader considers it “the essential book for understanding gender in Afghan society” (Neale 2008b, n. 3). It is quite likely that the feminist ideological tint in the title and narratives of *Bartered Brides* has exerted considerable influence over the policies and practices of current Euro-American military occupation of Afghanistan. The propaganda leading to this imperial venture was heavily driven by Western feminist rhetoric arguing for the liberation of Afghan women from domination by men and the yoke of dreaded “Muslim fundamentalists”. With its liberal feminist ideological orientation, the book has probably served as a major source of information for the Euro-American imperial civil and military policies and practices aimed at the “liberation” of Afghan women and the imposition of the Western model of “human rights” on Afghanistan.

Ever since I first encountered these photographs during 1991 I have been curious and puzzled about the Western European-looking face of the man in the photographs and the glaring contradictions radiating from the interactive bodies of this “Pashtun couple” sitting intimately side by side, flirting and frolicking in public view inside a pre-modern and pre-industrial nomadic black tent in Afghanistan. These images of a “Pashtun couple” have nowhere been situated in an empirically verifiable social, spatial and temporal ethnographic context. For reasons that have to do with Western academic conventions of refrain from critically engaging

the empirical validity of Western ethnographic claims about the Other and the politics and standards of Euro-American ethnographies of Afghanistan, these (and eight other) photographs in Nancy Tapper's 1991 book have not generated any critical engagement or commentary in anthropological (and social science or popular) discourse. Given this and because of the stark contrast between the contents of the three photographs of a "Pashtun couple" and the cultural, social, and demographic realities of Afghanistan I had concluded that the placement of these pictures in Nancy Tapper's 1991 tome may have been a postmodern experiment. The thought of a gaffe or a "printing error" had also crossed my mind. Nevertheless, over the years, I continued to be curious and puzzled about the flirting and frolicking "Pashtun couple" in public view inside a pre-industrial nomadic black tent in Afghanistan. In addition, until recently, I was unaware of the demographic survey conducted jointly by Nancy Tapper and Jonathan Neale (2013b) among the tent dwelling nomads in the outskirts of Kabul during the early 1970s. Nor had I seen any co-authored writings by these two individuals. Now, twenty three years later, these three photographs have been re-cycled in their original stacked format with a revised title in a co-authored article by Lindisfarne and Neale (2013a). This time the photographs are individually marked as the work (and property) of Nancy Lindisfarne (2013a). Like the 1991 publication, the photographs in AT 29(5) are published without a cultural and historical context.

During 2013 Nancy Lindisfarne and Jonathan Neale co-authored two essays (2013a and 2013b). The 2013a essay is grounded in the more comprehensive 2013b article. To my knowledge these are Lindisfarne's and Neale's first (and only) co-authored published writings. In the (2013b) essay they discuss the results of their joint fieldwork in the outskirts of Kabul during the early 1970s. My earlier curiosity and the appearance of these two co-authored articles (Lindisfarne & Neale, 2013a and 2013b) in one of which the three photographs reappear together with my recent first encounter with the images of Jonathan Neal's face prompts me as an anthropologist with ethnographic "fieldwork" experience during 1970 in a village and nomadic camps surrounding Kabul and as a cultural product of Afghanistan (a "native" Pashtun)—in a way, the "Other" subject in Lindisfarne and Neale's writings about Afghanistan—to undertake this unavoidably polemical

scrutiny of the representations of a "Pashtun couple". On behalf of the "Pashtun couple" subordinated in these photographs, this exercise produces a forceful "yes" to Gayatri Spivak's classic question "Can the Subaltern Speak"? Yes, the imaginary Western feminist modernity concocted by Nancy Lindisfarne (Tapper) and Jonathan Neale inside a nomadic black canvas tent is out of place in pre-industrial Afghanistan. A brief historical backdrop for the presence of Nancy Tapper (Lindisfarne) and Jonathan Neale in Afghanistan and a general ethnographic overview of nomadic camps around urban areas in the country are provided as the framework for speaking to the contents of these photographs.

#### **ETHNOGRAPHIZING THE "PASHTUN COUPLE" IN AFGHANISTAN**

Nancy Lindisfarne (Tapper) and Jonathan Neale claim to have travelled and conducted "fieldwork" among Pashtun pastoral nomads in Afghanistan. During the "early 1970s" Nancy Lindisfarne (2008) conducted fieldwork "among people (she) knew best—rural Pashtuns like those who later supported the Taliban". Jonathan Neal "did two years of fieldwork as an anthropologist from 1971 to 1973, and the people (he) knew best were poor pastoralists who had lost their flocks and now" (2008b) "peddled yoghurt in the city" (2008a: 218). These peddlers were "proud of their nomad and Pushtun heritage" (Neale, 2008a). During her travels in Afghanistan Nancy Tapper (Lindisfarne) visited Kabul for various lengths of time during 1968, 1970, 1971, and 1972. Foreign scholars were required to visit Kabul in order to obtain official government clearance, permission and bureaucratic and cultural facilitation (e. g. assistants, translators) for their research projects. The process required several weeks of residence in the city. While conducting research, Neale (2008a and 2002) lived in a "rented house" somewhere in Kabul during "summer 1972". Nancy Tapper acknowledges her presence in Kabul during the summer months of 1971 and 1972 but I cannot find information about the specific time and location of her residency in the city.

Nancy Lindisfarne (Tapper) and Jonathan Neale claim to have conducted a joint demographic survey in villages and/or nomadic camps somewhere in the "outskirts of Kabul" (Neale, 2002) during the summer months of early 1970s. Here is what they write about the results of their joint demographic survey:

"When many people talk of the family they also assume

that in most class societies, throughout most of history, there was a sharp division of labour between men who were responsible for the work of production, and women who were responsible for the work of reproduction and the care of the workforce. This assumption is simply mistaken. Let us take an example in anticipation of our discussion of Afghanistan in Part Three. In the early 1970s each of us lived in Afghanistan. The gendered division of labor we saw there was typical of peasant societies and many rural class societies. In the several villages we knew well, perhaps one out of 50 households was rich enough to protect women and men from heavy laboring work by hiring servants and sharecroppers. In such households women were pleased to be able to dress discreetly and wear long veils. In the other households, women worked both indoors and outdoors, as did most men. Among these poorer families women wore less cumbersome head scarves, and they and their men folk felt cruelly oppressed.

Childrearing too was shared work, and not necessarily done at home. When babies were very small, they stayed with their mothers as the women worked. But in the villages we knew, infant and maternal mortality was shockingly high, and it was not unusual for infants to be fostered and grow up with their "milk siblings". When a little older, babies went everywhere with an older brother or sister or cousin who looked after them. Pashtun fathers spent far more time with their children than British fathers do now. Childcare was collective and kindly. Children played everywhere because all adults always had an eye on them, and would intervene if trouble looked likely.

For the Pashtun women and men we knew, surviving as a household was the collective concern. Women and men pulled together to provide clean water, food and warmth for themselves and their children. For the poor, women's work and men's work were not strongly marked, apart from some conventional tasks—women milked and men ploughed. But even that division of labour would be altered in the face of necessity.

In a Pashtun village it was only the relatively wealthy who could afford a stronger gendered division of labor. But this came at a price. Rich women were far more tightly controlled in the name of family privilege, or "honour". The dominant ideology included the idea that if a man could not control the women of his household, he lacked "honour" and "ate shame". Then a

powerful household might take advantage of another household's weakness, and steal their animals and land, or seduce the household's daughter. That sexual shame made everyone in the weaker household even more vulnerable to violence and hunger. A system of class inequality was experienced as weakness and a loss of personal gendered honour. That's what gender did. This particular pattern of gendered inequality is also found in other countries. But the more general point we are making is that Afghanistan was a class society, but there was no separate sphere of reproduction and childcare. This is true far more widely" (Lindisfarne & Neale, 2013b).

Based on their researches about the family, Lindisfarne and Neale (2013a) state, "Most commonly, people talk about the family as if it resembles their family. This is understandable. Yet consider the range of things individuals in different countries have said to us at one time or another". They identify eight "things" stated by "people who were living in families in capitalist societies, and all of them were talking about sentiments they considered completely normal" (Lindisfarne & Neale, 2013b). The exception was "*the Afghan man who loved his father*" and who had apparently stated "a man always loves his father more than anyone else" (Lindisfarne & Neale, 2013b). (Could this man be Shin Gul, Jonathan Neale's friend? See below). According to Lindisfarne and Neale this man apparently lived during the "1970 (when) Afghan politics and economics were dominated by big landlords who lived in forts in the countryside" (Lindisfarne & Neale, 2013b). "[F]orts in the countryside" were common in southern and eastern Afghanistan, not in northern Afghanistan, the region where Nancy Lindisfarne (Tapper) claims to have conducted research.

Based on their demographic survey Lindisfarne and Neale collectively conclude that "[i]n the several villages (including 'a Pashtun village' and the Pashtun women and men) we knew well, perhaps one out of 50 households was rich enough to protect women and men from heavy laboring work by hiring servants and sharecroppers" (Lindisfarne & Neale, 2013b). Although information about the specific location and economy (pastoral, agricultural or mixed) of these "households" is not provided, Neale's reference (Lindisfarne & Neale, 2008a) to "yoghurt peddlers in the city" living in a "camp by the animal market on the edge of town", and reference to his visit to the "TB sanatorium in Kabul"

(Lindisfarne & Neale, 2002) and “TB hospital” (Lindisfarne & Neale, 2008a) with the nomads situates their research site in nomadic camps in an area adjacent to *nakhas* (local reference for the animal market in Kabul), south of *Khaer Khana* pass, and north of *‘Ali Abad*—site of Kabul University and the TB sanatorium—the only such facility in Afghanistan during the 1970s.

The joint demographic survey by Lindisfarne and Neale in Afghanistan was focused on inter-gender relations of power, especially those surrounding and embedded in marriage among Pashtun pastoral nomads. On the basis of their fieldwork they have individually produced an extensive volume of ethnographic and political texts about Afghanistan. Neale (1981, 1988, 2002 and 2008a) narrates the results of his research in several compact essays. His “forthcoming book, *Poverty and Sexual Politics in Afghanistan*” (Neale, 2001) is yet to be published. Lindisfarne’s findings and generalizations about relations of power surrounding marriage among Pashtuns are narrated in her 1979 doctoral thesis (“Marriage and social organization among Durrani Pashtuns in northern Afghanistan”) converted to the 1991 *Bartered Brides: Politics, gender and marriage in an Afghan tribal society* and several subsidiary journal articles and book chapters. The ideological orientation and the substance of the published writings of Lindisfarne and Neale on the subject of inter-gender relations among Pashtun nomads in Afghanistan are strikingly similar. Both authors (especially Lindisfarne) rely heavily on quantitative and metric data in support of their common understandings and conclusions about marriage and gender inequality among Pashtun pastoral nomads in Afghanistan. In reviewing Nancy Tapper’s 1991 book, a prominent Western woman ethnographer of Pashtun women observes that it “reads like a grammar of rules, a myriad of general cultural facts charted onto tables and figures” (Grima, 1992)—much like what a demographic survey might generate.

During the fieldwork of Nancy Lindisfarne (Tapper) and Jonathan Neale in Afghanistan, the rural outskirts of towns and cities of the country were dotted with clusters of nomadic camps and agricultural villages. Adjacent to and mixed with these camps and villages were settlements of a variety of tent-dwelling peripatetic and itinerant communities, locally called “*Jat*” (gypsy). The *Jat* communities “subsisted primarily from the sale of more or less specialized goods and services to villagers, townspeople and sometimes pastoral nomads” (Rao,

1986). One such service was prostitution. In these settings it was not uncommon to find individuals, households or other social networks engaged in pimping and prostitution (Rao, 1981, 1982 and 1986; Olesen, 1994). Asta Olesen (1994) provides photographs of a “camp of itinerant prostitutes north of Pul-i Khumri”, a city in northern Afghanistan. Although concentrated in gypsy communities, pimping and prostitution were also available in some non-gypsy households. Nancy Tapper (1991) notes the presence of “male and female prostitutes” in the “camps of gypsies” as well as other ethnic groups where she claims to have conducted research. (In Afghanistan camps of gypsies were located near large urban areas like Kabul or Pul-iKhumri. Nancy Tapper claims to have conducted research in a small rural village more than ten miles north of the city of Saripul). She has published the English translation of a claimed tape-recorded local narrative of pimping, prostitution and extramarital sex among the pastoral nomads in the area where she claims to have conducted research (Tapper, 1991). However, the recorder, narrator, language, spatial and temporal location of this recording are not specified).

In discussing marriage, Neale states that among the poor nomads he studied near Kabul “the bride price for a pretty young woman remained as high as among rich nomads because a family’s vending income was now enhanced by a wife attracting customers by flirting with truck drivers and other men on the street” (Neale, 2008a). For the women of the camps studied by Neale, “[t]here are infinite opportunities for flirting at the well, or for rumors that a woman was flirting at the well. There are opportunities for the landlord’s son to look boldly at peasant girls as they work in the fields, opportunities for lewd remarks on city streets” (Neale, 1981). Elsewhere he states: “...men often have affairs with other men’s wives and daughters. It is wrong: it is also daring, romantic, exciting and a poke in the eye for the other man. Women pursue these affairs for the same reasons, and because it is a poke in the eye for their husbands” (Neale, 2001). Jonathan Neale (2008a) vividly narrates his intimate interactions with members of these groups living in the outskirts of the city of Kabul during his fieldwork in Afghanistan. He describes his friendly, somewhat intimate, relationship with a young boy named Shin Gul, a member of one of these tent dwelling households (Neale, 2008a). Shin Gul was “a teenage boy, so proud to have his picture taken astride his father’s

bicycle” (Neale, 2008a). Neale must have been the photographer of this scene. Shin Gul, whom Neal “liked a lot” (2008a: 219), shared with Neale a “secret picture” of his “beautiful” prospective wife named “Pkhe”, a woman who was “old enough to marry” (Neale, 2008a). (Who took this picture; for what purpose?; perhaps for vending Pkhe as a prostitute?! The nomads did not have cameras!) The likely Pashtu phonetic rendition of Pkhe is *Pakha* which stands for the feminine version of the masculine adjective *Pokh* meaning ripe, mature, ready, cooked—an implausible proper name (or nickname) for a girl or woman in Afghanistan. The label was probably invented by a pimp for marketing Pkhe, as a ripe body or mature woman, for sexual or erotic interaction with men. Pkhe must have been on intimate terms with Jonathan Neale. She had once “confided” in him that she “did not fancy Shin Gul at all and spoke of him (Shin Gul) dismissively” because he was “poor and gauche” (Neale, 2008a). Neale also knew about Shin Gul’s “younger sister of about eleven, a beautiful, laughing child, a desirable future wife” (Neale, 2008a). One of Shin Gul’s uncles “would crawl through the alleys of the camp at night on his belly, sneaking towards his lovers” (Neale, 2008a). Neal and his wife, Liz, were once invited by Shin Gul and his father to visit their tent where they were served tea (Neale, 2008a). Neale (2008a) “managed to get one of Shin Gul’s cousins into the TB hospital” in Kabul. Neal (2002) also “went to visit a friend from a poor nomad family in the TB sanatorium in Kabul”.

The account of prostitution among pastoral nomads by Nancy Tapper has a number of structural and behavioral features in common with Jonathan Neale’s description and analysis of prostitution and pimping in nomadic camps near Kabul (Tapper, 1991). Both accounts portray prostitution as a practical and pragmatic alternative for poor nomads. Jonathan Neale’s friends Shin Gul (as pimp) and Pkhe (his future wife as prostitute) have their close counterparts among the people described in Nancy Tapper’s narrative of prostitution. “Majid” and his wife “Tajbibibi” are the recruiters and peddlers of prostitutes and facilitators of prostitution (Nancy, 1991). It is likely that Nancy Tapper’s and Jonathan Neale’s accounts of prostitution are derived from their joint demographic survey in villages and nomadic (and gypsy) camps near the city of Kabul.

Nancy Tapper claims to have conducted research during the early 1970s in a fictive rural Pashtun village (“Sinjit” [Farsi, jujube])—an implausible morphemic construct for

domestic space—neighborhood, village, district, town or city) in northern Afghanistan located (in a map drawn by her) about 20 kilometers north of the town of Saripul and approximately 30 miles south of the city of Sheberghan. Forty years ago—during the time of Nancy Tapper’s visits to Afghanistan—this was a very isolated and thinly populated rural area at a significant distance from a town or a large urban environment. The presence of a publicly known brothel in such a remote rural area would have been highly unlikely. The brothel and prostitution activity discussed by Nancy Tapper (1991: 236-239) is likely to have been located in or near the site of the demographic survey she and Jonathan Neale conducted near the city of Kabul. Throughout her book *Bartered Brides*, including the story about the brothel, Nancy Tapper regularly refers to “us”—objective case of the first person plural pronoun. It may be that the second person in this dyad is Jonathan Neale, Nancy Tapper’s research partner during their demographic research near Kabul. If the reference to “Saripul” in Jozjan province in northern Afghanistan were overlooked in Nancy Tapper’s *Bartered Brides* the largely quantitative narratives in the book could easily be situated in the Pashtun nomadic camps around Kabul in the context of the Tapper-Neale joint demographic survey. However, in both accounts prostitution is portrayed as a track for liberated and powerful women and the rejection of male domination. Nancy Tapper (1991) and Jonathan Neale (2001) depict prostitutes as powerful and aggressive women and poor men, especially their pimps, as “weak” and socially despised.

#### **SIMULATING PORNOGRAPHY BY THE “OTHER” IN AFGHANISTAN**

It is by now clear that the location near the city of Kabul where Nancy Lindisfarne (Tapper) and Jonathan Neale conducted their demographic survey among poor nomads and peripatetic groups who, like other such communities trapped in the lower tiers of class hierarchies, exploited every opportunity to acquire means with which to address their basic survival needs. One such opportunity required the rejection of traditional upper-class standards for inter-gender and sexual relations. This rejection must have been reinforced when the poor nomads and *Jats* found themselves on a supportive, intimate, and informal social and political page with an Anglo-American “feminist” and an “anti-capitalist activist” of those days. To the poor nomads and *Jats* in the outskirts of Kabul,

Nancy Tapper and Jonathan Neale were a bundle of contradictions—on the one hand they were *kharijis* and *kafers* (foreigners and non-believers); on the other, they were influential, rich, admired, envied, and sympathetic enablers who approved of and probably participated in their rejection of bourgeoisie “goody two shoes” standards for traditional inter-gender behavior. It is very probable that it is in this pseudo-modern, liberal, and sexually charged atmosphere, somewhere near Kabul, in which a “Pashtun couple” had posed to “have their picture taken” by an Anglo-American ethnographer.

The man and woman posing to be photographed are sitting during daylight inside a black canvas tent which probably belonged to the households of Shin Gul, Pkhe, or one of the “50 households” surveyed by Nancy Tapper and Jonathan Neale during summer 1971 or 1972 in the outskirts of Kabul. The survey must have included the households of Shin Gul and Pkhe with whom Jonathan Neale had friendly and intimate relations. The subjects of the photographs, the photographic process, and the photographer (Nancy Tapper) are in the public view—they are being watched intensely by three local men whose images can clearly be seen in the background of the 1991 version of these staged photographs. In the 2013 AT version the image of the third onlooker is clipped; only two local observers can be seen in the background.

The “Pashtun” man in the photographs is dressed in unruffled *shalwar-kamees* (local shirt and bloomers), white turban, and a loose fitting jacket the collar of which is ruffled by the woman’s left hand around the man’s neck. It was not unusual for Western researchers in Afghanistan to wear local dress. Nancy Tapper and her husband claim to have worn local clothes when they were travelling in Afghanistan (Nancy, 1979 and 1991) during the early 1970s. The woman in the photographs is dressed in, what was considered in the 1970s, the “national” (*meli*) dress for upper class urban women in Afghanistan. The outfit consisted of a heavily embroidered (with gold-color thread) and, occasionally bejeweled, one piece black dress, red bloomers, and green scarf. The colors of this outfit represented the colors of the flag of Afghanistan. The *meli* outfit for women was first introduced and popularized in Afghanistan by the Kabuli political elite during the late 1950s in conjunction with the “Pashtunistan” affair. In the context of the mythical Pashtun domination of Afghanistan, the tri-colors of its flag worn by women was

constructed into a symbol of Afghan nationalism especially among well to do urban Pashtuns and non-Pashtuns in the country. (Ironically, this expensive garment was mass produced in Peshawar, Pakistan). Under ordinary conditions this costly three-piece dress would not be found among the poor farmers and nomads of Afghanistan unless they had the means with which to acquire this expensive garment and were interacting, for material gain, with an urban or urbanized social environment. Thus, based on their clothes alone, the “Pashtun couple” in these photographs is situated in the higher tiers of the local social class hierarchy making their presence starkly out of place inside a nomadic black canvas tent containing visible material and symbolic effects of poverty and other lower class features.

The rings on the fingers of the “Pashtun couple” in these photographs contradict the rules and customs for wearing jewelry on the hands of men and women in Afghanistan. Specifically, the ring on the right little (pinky) finger of the man in these photographs blatantly contradict rules of wearing jewelry on hands in Afghanistan. In the popular and elite cultures of Afghanistan, one will not find a woman wearing rings on her right index finger and on her left thumb and index finger. For ethnographic illustrations of these customs and rules for wearing rings on fingers in Afghanistan, see the profusely illustrated ethnographies produced by the Danish Nomad Research project in Afghanistan (Olesen, 1994; Pedersen, 1994; Frederiksen, 1996; Ferdinand, 2006;) and representations of Afghan men and women in numerous other ethnographic and popular sources which cannot be listed in this limited space.

The man and woman in these photographs are bare footed. A woman in Afghanistan exposing her uncovered feet to public view is violating several important rules for the proper presentation of self. These rules are grounded in various Islamic protocols and local culture. Except for some locations in its modern urban population, married woman in Afghanistan part their hair in the middle of the front part of the head. The woman in these photographs has bangs hanging over her forehead. She is an unmarried woman. For ethnographic illustrations of this rule (Ferdinand, 2006). This symbolic marker of status is also noted in a colonial historical source (MacKenzie, 1850).

A modicum of informed familiarity with the proxemics (Hall, 1969) of the popular culture of Afghanistan—that



is the local “common sense” (Herzfeld, 2001)—renders the overall disposition, demeanor, and the interaction in space of the “married...Pashtun couple” captured in these photographs implausible and out of place. A reflexive interaction by the producers of these photographs with “the locally dominant version of common sense (or) local hegemony” (Herzfeld, 2001) would make them think and “feel foolish”. The articulation of “intimate distance” (Hall, 1969) in public view by the man and woman in these photographs bluntly violate local standards for social interaction between an Afghan man and a woman, married or unmarried. The relaxed and confident disposition of the man, his closed-mouth smile and open mouth laughter, directed at the woman, are forms of the presentation of self that are unavailable in the popular culture of Afghanistan. The smooth and smoothly shaved face of the man in these photographs is out of place in Afghanistan, especially in rural Afghanistan.

The erotic touching, flirting, frolicking, and aggressive demeanor of the woman in two of these photographs—wide open mouth exposing all her teeth, raised knees (risking exposure of her crotch), her left arm stretched out and wrapped around the neck of the man, and tightly holding his right hand pressing it over her right shoulder with her right hand are profound contradictions of public inter-gender tactile interaction in Afghanistan. The woman’s left hand resting near the crotch of the man and the man’s right hand gripping the left thigh of the woman are forms of pornographic tactile behavior (especially in public view) that are starkly out of place in Afghanistan and the surrounding regions and even in Euro-America. The right hand of the man gripping the right shoulder of the woman, in a hugging posture, contradicts conventions of inter-gender tactile behavior in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan (and the surrounding culture areas) these forms of interactive tactility between a man and a woman in public view produce the symbolic effect of pornography, pollution and “dirt as a matter of out of place” (Douglas, 1966). This defiling symbolic effect of touch would be intensified if the “Pashtun couple” is unmarried, if the woman is having her menstrual cycle, and if the body of the participants is not ritually clean. The hysterical laughter on the face of this “Pashtun” woman in public view would be locally judged as an indicator of moral corruption, insanity or madness.

The articulation of the staring eyes on the face of the

man (bottom photograph in the stack) is out of place in Afghanistan. A local onlooker would find strange, abnormal, and alarming, the radical shift (apparently in the span of a few seconds) in the woman’s disposition from hysterical laughter (in the top photograph) to a scolded, subdued, and pacified demeanor in the bottom photograph. The inter-gender proxemics contained in these photographs produce the social effect of dishonor and shame on the “Pashtun couple” individually and collectively and on the larger kinship and other social groups to which they belong. In the photograph on the top of the stack, the man appears to be intoxicated. Local common sense would assign this facial configuration to a *charsi*, *bangi*, or *nesha*, a person who is respectively intoxicated with marijuana, opium, or alcohol.

It is beyond the scope of this article to produce a somatological analysis of the morphology of the two faces in these three photographs. I am not an expert in the study of the human face but am familiar with some of the academic literature dealing with the effect of aging on the morphology of the human face (Coleman & Grover, 2006; Ramanathan & Chellappa, 2009). Familiarity with the physical anthropology of Afghanistan (Debets 1970 [including facial photographs of 97 men by Louis Dupree]), thousands of photographs of faces in ethnographic and popular literature, and knowledge about the physiognomy of the population of Afghanistan and Euro-America, produces a convincing argument in support of situating the face of the man in these photographs in Western European population. The man’s face also offers a stark contrast to the face of a Pashtun man photographed by Nancy Tapper in Afghanistan during the early 1970s and published, not in her 1991 book, but in three editions of a popular textbook about the cultural anthropology of the Middle East and Central Asia (Eickelman, 1989, 1998 and 2002). Who is this liberated and feminized couple facing Nancy Tapper’s camera in these photographs inside a nomadic black canvas tent near Kabul? Given the numerous cultural and physical contradictions outlined above, the man and woman in these photographs (Lindisfarne & Neale, 2013a) are not a “married...Pashtun couple” in Afghanistan. There are several moving and still photographs of Jonathan Neale, including his full face, available on the internet (Jonathan Neale, “Stop Global Warming: Change the World”, Conterfire.org, September 18, 2009). In my view, without doubt, the man in the photographs (Lindisfarne & Neale, 2013a) is Jonathan

Neale. The morphology of Neale's face in the 2009 photographs—overall shape, cheeks, mouth, nose, eyes, eyebrows, forehead, ears, skin color (and how these parts are collectively configured)—bears a stark likeness to the face of the man in Nancy Lindisfarne's photographs taken in a nomadic camp near Kabul during the early 1970s. We have European "imperial eyes" at both ends of Nancy Lindisfarne's camera lens.

If the two tattoo-like marks—one on the forehead and one on the chin—of the woman in these photographs and the jewelry affixed to her right nostril are removed, the physical format of her face would be quite "normal" in a European Caucasian population. It is possible that the woman is Jonathan Neale's wife. But given the apparent permanency of these marks on her face and the ethnographic notes by Jonathan Neale referred to in this essay, it is plausible to assume that the woman sitting next to the man in these photographs is "Pkhe", Shin Gul's future wife, who at one time had shared intimate personal information about her future husband with Jonathan Neale. Pkhe, a member of a poor nomadic household, had experience in posing for the camera (as noted above) so that her photograph could be vended by her pimp to find customers for her sexual services in exchange for needed resources. As the prospective wife of Shin Gul, a poor Pashtun nomad, Pkhe was well served by participating in these flirting and frolicking proxemics so that when she got married, her husband's family's "vending income....would be enhanced by a wife attracting customers by flirting with truck drivers and other men on the street" (Neale, 2008a). Pkhe's erotic tactile interactions with Jonathan Neale reflect their declared intimacy and may have been meant as "a poke in the eye" of Shin Gul (her fiancé) whom she had once dismissed as "poor and gauche" in Neale's ear. Being poor, it is unlikely that Pkhe's wardrobe included the national dress of Afghanistan and the expensive rings placed on her fingers. Somehow, she must have been induced to put these upper class cultural artifacts on her body and be photographed while participating in flirting and frolicking proxemics with a powerful outsider in exchange for some material reward. But Pkhe had no idea her picture would be converted to ethnographic, academic and political capital and vended as the wife of Jonathan Neale, a *Khariji Kafer*, simulating a "Pashtun" man. Moreover, the image of Pkhe, the girl engaged to Shin Gul, stored in these photographs bears a strong resemblance to the face of "an engaged girl" printed on

the cover of the paperback edition of Nancy Tapper's 1991 *Bartered Brides*.

#### CONCLUSION

The photographs of what appears to be Pkhe and the Anglo-American ethnographer flirting with her inside a nomadic black canvas tent near Kabul capture an instance of hegemonic intervention in which the cultural and physical identities of the Other in Afghanistan are imperially imposed and marketed as the copy-righted private property of Nancy Lindisfarne (Lindisfarne & Neale, 2013a). The energy for speaking to this violent imperial imposition of Western feminist pseudo-modernity on pre-industrial Muslim Afghanistan by a pair of Anglo-American ethnographers is drawn from the emergent academic, political and moral consciousness in which "Other-fucking in its vulgar forms is drawing to a close" (Sanjek 1990) in anthropology including, hopefully, the anthropology of Afghanistan. Whether the concocting of a "Pashtun couple" by Nancy Tapper (1991) and Nancy Lindusfare and Jonathan Neale (2013a) qualifies as a "scandal" is not for this writer to decide. The central objective of this essay is to stimulate a renewed anthropological consciousness and discourse about the moral standards and professional ethical protocols governing the link between the audience of ethnographic texts and the true empirically verifiable cultural, political, and social location(s) of the information from which knowledge about the Other is constructed in ethnographic texts. To my knowledge, in the only critical review of Nancy Tapper's popular *Bartered Brides*, Benedicte Grima (1992) may have been thinking about the need for such a link when she wrote: "More disturbing is the lack of mention of informants. It seems that a work dealing with gender would at least specify whether the voice behind quoted statements and opinions is male or female....the book's greatest shortcoming (is) the lack of any feminine voice". The cooked up representations of a "Pashtun couple" discussed in this essay are an example of a disturbing fictitious ethnography in which not only is the true voice of the Other subject absent but where the border between the observer and observed is violently removed by the power of the camera and pen of the Anglo-American ethnographer.

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