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THE STAMP OF SWAT: A BRIEF ETHNOGRAPHY OF SOME OF THE WRITINGS OF FREDRIK BARTH

ROBERT PAINE

Memorial University of Newfoundland

Selected Essays of Fredrik Barth: Volume 1, Process and Form in Social Life; Volume 2, Features of Person and Society in Swat—Collected Essays on Pathans. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981 (pp. 243 and pp. 190). Volume I, £13.95; vol. II, £12.99.

As the job of social anthropology is to interpret cultures, so my intention in this review of two volumes of selected essays by Fredrik Barth is to offer an interpretation and not a critique. Instead of arguing that he misleads us in his handling of the factor of power in social relations or that he is vulgarly instrumental in his treatment of values or that he fails to take account of the macro (global) setting in which the social encounters he describes actually take place, I shall try to show how, from his point of view, it is his critics (Ahmed 1976; Asad 1972; Evens 1977; Kapferer 1976; Paine 1974; 1976) who (i) have failed to grasp the theoretical premisses of his argument and (ii) have themselves advanced arguments with flawed premisses. Accordingly, I restrict discussion of the difficulties I find to a brief last section.

New for both volumes is a retrospective essay, and the present piece is constructed around issues they each raise.

The first point to be stressed is that Barth the theoretician and architect of elegant models emerges out of the anthropological fieldworker; fieldwork with the Swat Pathans has exercised and maintained a kind of experiential primacy over him.[1] This is demonstrated time and again in these two volumes where the developmental flow is *from* volume 2 ('Collected essays on Pathans') to the general essays of volume 1.

Barth himself says: 'the experience of Swat Pathans has at times unduly dominated my general understanding of Man, and thus my theoretically intended formulations. Their remarkable vitality and individualism proved both easy to recognize and subjectively compelling. . . . it may not have been till the 1970s that my generally intended statements were given a form where the stamp of Swat had been reduced to appropriate dimensions' (vol. 2: 1–2). Of course Ahmed and Asad may say that Barth has misunderstood Pathan culture, that he has observed Swat society through his own prejudiced lens. Such controversy calls for its own essay(s); it will only be named in passing

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here. Rather, the point for us is that Swat-as-perceived (and documented)-by-Barth becomes the forge and anvil of (with little exaggeration) all his anthropological thinking and writing; and this has meant that *Political leadership among Swat Pathans* (1959) joins the company of the very select among anthropological monographs. Thus the stamp of Swat came to mark not only Barth but a vigorous segment of contemporary anthropological thinking.

Yet it would be naive to suppose that Barth arrived in Swat *tabula rasa*. The theoretical approach he was to develop owed a good deal to the writings of Firth, Leach and Nadel—to mention three obvious and immediate influences—as well as Neumann and Morgenstern on game-theory (vol. 2: ch. 3). He also came to Swat after Kurdistan, and we find the rudiments of the conceptual scheme that was to be so fully demonstrated in Swat already there in his 1954 article, which is not reprinted in this collection.[2] But whatever the early intellectual influences (cf. Paine 1974: 1–4), they served to strengthen his own exceptional awareness of the anthropological enterprise. This disposed him to constructive scepticism concerning much in current modes of analysis, and to quick acceptance of the challenge to conceptualise Swat society in terms true to his own experience of it: 'data from Swat also gain theoretical potential precisely because of their capacity to surprise, and falsify generalizations based on other areas' (vol. 2: 2).

Barth in Swat thus stands on the shoulders of Evans-Pritchard in the Sudan at the same time as he explores new turns in the logic of segmentary opposition (see below). But Barth in Swat is also influential in the dismantling of the structural-functionalist view of how 'society' is constituted, and in the shifting of concern to process; his own contribution is what he came to call the generative mode of analysis. Here 'the thrust of analysis is *not to show that it [society] must be like this, but to show what must be since it is like this*' (vol. 2: 129, my emphasis). He explains in one of the restrospective essays:

> 'Society' in this perspective is not a thing, of which you tell a history or for which you show the fitness of design in how each part functions to support the other; it is, on the contrary, an epiphenomenon (and no less interesting for that!), i.e. 'society' is how things happen to be as a result of all manner of activities and circumstances (vol. 2: 129; cf. vol. 1: 108).

This bold step was his response to the problems of conceptualisation presented by Swat. 'My ambition was to depict major features of a whole large-scale, complex society, not just a village community within it'—and 'from the very beginning, my material revealed major differences between villages' (vol. 2: 124, 125). Whereas the probable structural-functionalist response to differences is to construct a representative form, Barth's strategy was 'to *seek out* variation . . . and thereby test the steps in one's construction of a generative model of society for the whole region' (vol. 2: 125). On the one hand, he was convinced that diversity of form is an essential feature of life and society in Swat: 'any close demarcation of my object of study in space and time seemed only to cut me off from interesting and illuminating data' (vol. 2: 124). On the other hand, he believed that 'such differences would probably derive from variations in relatively few determining factors' (vol. 2: 125).

So the crux of generative analysis is careful observation of co-variation in a

few key factors. How these key variables are identified is a question that immediately raises itself, and the best way of finding the answer is by trying to observe Barth observing Swat.

The view from Swat[3]

His first impressions were those of the historical isolation of Swat, its high density population, the ecological and social heterogeneity of the population, and of the complex political life associated with traditions of acephalous organisation and autonomy:

> Swat is a secluded, inter-mountain valley of great fertility, densely settled by a predominantly agricultural population of perhaps 300,000 in 1900, half a million in 1950 and one million today.
>
> Within the last century neighbours within a radius of 100 miles have variously paid taxes to Peking, Bokhara, Kabul, and Delhi, but Swat has probably never paid tax to any external government. . . . and despite British penetration on all sides it was never so much as seen by European eyes till 1895–7.
>
> This isolation and autonomy was the result, not of a centralized policy of closed borders . . . but a combination of the justly reputed bellicose anarchy of the area, which mostly kept outsiders away, and successful collective resistance to invading armies. . . . At the time of my fieldwork, most of the valley had been organized as a centralized state for about [only] thirty years (vol. 2: 19, 122).

Such data lead quickly to identifying 'the issue of *security* as a major key' (vol. 2: 123: my emphasis)—namely, the bellicosity and anarchy of Swat. This is developed notably as a political problem in his monograph (1959). However, an earlier article can be seen as addressing the issue of security (though without naming it) through applying the notion of ecological *niche* to the broad lines of ethnic segmentation and economic interdependence in the Swat valley. The Pathans, sedentary agriculturalists, the Kohistanis who combine some agriculture and transhumant herding, and the Gujars, nomadic herders, each have their niche (vol. 2: ch. 1). Seemingly remarkable today, the conclusion that 'the distribution of ethnic groups is controlled not by objective and fixed "natural areas" but by the distribution of . . . specific ecologic niches' (vol. 2: 14) was an important gloss on Kroeber's culture area concept; and it endures. However, in the development of Barth's view of the dynamics of Swat society and culture, the notion of niche is, I think, significant particularly for its implications of *allocation* and *management* by which the issue of security is tackled in a rudimentary and preliminary way:

> Thus the 'environment' of any one ethnic group is not only defined by natural conditions, but also by the presence and activities of the other ethnic groups on which it depends. Each group exploits only a section of the total environment, and leaves a large part of it open for other groups to exploit (vol. 2: 3).

Niche, then, is here an ecological metaphor for 'a quiet corner . . . beyond competition'.

Changing the level of analysis to relations among Pathans (within a niche), a model of life in Swat is developed in terms of *opportunity*: a political metaphor

replaces the ecological. The salient ethnographic datum is that 'practically all land is owned by a dominant aristocracy of Pakhtuns, numbering, in different areas, from one half to one tenth of the population' (vol. 2: 59). The remainder of the population in the valley bottom are Pakhtun tenants and clients. Barth recognises this as a situation of agrarian exploitation but notes that it did not produce the kinds of riots and uprisings that were a recurring accompaniment of agrarian exploitation elsewhere in the world. 'Why? Not because of an absence of discontent. My answer in the Swat monograph was in terms of the tenant's opportunity situation' (vol. 2: 148). Here we arrive at the core of Barth's sociology of Swat, and it will take us later into the storm-centre of his general theory of transactionalism.

Tenancy and clientship appear to imply subordination only. But, rather than speaking about opportunity in situations of subordination, Barth calls attention to the limiting case of situations of opportunity in a formal subordinate status (as in tenancy, clientship). Tenants in Swat, *pace* Barth (vol. 2: 134–7), have had a wide range of alternative choices for obtaining a tolerable 'opportunity situation'. He directs our attention to contracts. A tenant may enhance his independence at the cost of his security by contracting plots from several landowners (none of whom has a major interest in the tenant's crop and so none can be expected to care particularly about either his work or his welfare). Alternatively, a tenant may pay the price of his independence to enhance his security by contracting exclusively with a large landowner. Possibly he could obtain employment in crafts or in transport, with one or several landowners. Next Barth discusses the availability of alternative social circles. The main options, separately or in combination, are the men's house, the mosque and the neighbourhood. Once again, choices range from the enjoyment of independence with a modicum of security ('visit men's houses rarely and the mosque sparingly while cultivating neighbourhood relations') to being an acknowledged member of a powerful chief's faction ('sitting in a men's house meant deferring to the chief'). Neighbourhood relations are between familiars and equals of long-standing, but it is only in villages where both men's house and mosque are absent that a neighbourhood grouping can count for much politically. Whereas a men's house is 'an arena for manly relations and manly virtues', the atmosphere of a mosque is of piety, calm and righteousness. A mosque provides little incentive and few political advantages but 'it did give those who frequented it membership in a moral community of undeniable weight, and thus some protection against arbitrary injustice'.

This account of the tenant's lot is based upon the assertion that a tenant is not bound to enter a contract with any particular landowner, that he may even be able to choose between—or combine—several available contracts. The political reality of this assertion is manifested in the prevalent rivalry between landowners for influence. In the last resort, this can be played out through physical force. This means that each landowner needs to build up a following; tenants and clients are available as 'followers' and it is *as such* that they are a scarce resource over which chiefs (politically influential landowners) compete. Thus men's houses, in 1954 when Barth was in the field, were the 'scenes of quite large-scale conversion of wealth into influence by local chiefs'. In other

words, men's houses are competing loci for the distribution of largesse, and individuals are 'driven to sit in a men's house mainly to obtain the material benefits of feasts etc., and thereby reduce the pressure of poverty'. Others will be found there because they enjoy 'the excitement and self-assertion' of being among the chief's companions. But these benefits have to be balanced by each person, according to his 'interests, skills, assets and foresight', against the risk of becoming embroiled in a chief's own struggles and even of becoming 'his front-line men in case of conflicts'. Security is never gilt-edged in Swat. Nor is it without ambivalence, for running contrary to the interests of security is the desire for autonomy; and as autonomy is a male value associated with self-expression and aggressiveness (vol. 2: 106), so danger—or rather its rewards—has its attractions.

In sum, landowners have to make a worthwhile proposition in order to keep a following:

> A leader's following was volatile and liable to shrink or swell in response to what he could provide, or what promises followers could judge for his career in the close future, while at the same time this following represented the physical force on which his ownership of land depended. Thus the freedom—or, if one prefers, the individual necessity—for non-landowners to make their own individual arrangements with patrons also had the effect of counteracting gross abuses of authority (vol. 2: 137).

It is the differentials of success, from one landowner to the next, in keeping and expanding a following that are so important politically; and it is through attending to Swat political logic in this kind of power game that Barth enters the discussion about the role of unilineal descent groups in politics (vol. 2: 3). Among the Pakhtuns (a unilineal descent group that conquered the area in the sixteenth century), lineage membership and the right to utilise resources are transmitted, as among the Nuer, in the male line. But whereas Nuer segmentary opposition means A1 and A2 are rivals until either of them is in conflict with a segment of lineage B, at which point A jointly opposes B, in the Pathan situation, A1 and B1 tend to form a stable coalition against A2 and B2.

> A Pakhtun's political activities are directed at gaining an advantage over his agnatic rivals, as only through their defeat can he achieve his own aggrandizement. He is not limited, as in many lineage systems, to them as his potential supporters—his clients constitute the main body of his supporters. Any loss of his collaterals means a gain for him—he wrests control of the councils from them, he encroaches on their fields, and he inherits their shares in land if they are exterminated. His political strength . . . he assures by political alliances, and *in the pattern of these alliances the architecture of the unilineal descent system can be recognized, as if by its very negation.* Alliances are sought with small, distant collateral groups against one's close collaterals, while the latter reciprocate by allying themselves with the rivals of one's allies (vol. 2: 67, my emphasis).

Repeated confrontations between opposing alliances produce a consistent pressure for the expansion of alliances, culminating in the emergence and maintenance of two large dispersed political blocs. In this manner, political life is dominated throughout Swat, at all levels, by a two-bloc system (cf. vol. 1: 21–2).

I have spent this much time on Swat not only because of its cardinal importance as an inspirational source to Barth's anthropological thinking, but

also in the hope of illustrating his generative mode of analysis whereby 'more complex features are aggregated from simple elements' (vol. 1: 129). It is assumed that 'this aggregation is, in real life, effected by the process of social interaction' (vol. 1: 129). In the Swat case the blatant issue of security of life and property drew the anthropologist's attention to native principles of allocation and management of these precious resources: in terms of ethnic segmentation and economic interdependence, using the ecological metaphor of niche; and in terms of landowner-tenant differentiation and interdependencies, using the political metaphor of opportunity.[4]

What emerges from considering the politics of Swat life in the context of opportunity situations is, first, the dependence of both landowner and the landless upon contracts in land and service. The contract gives the landless the opportunity of a crop; and increases the landowner's chances of holding on to the land he inherited, or even adding to it at the expense of his rivals. Secondly, there is the aggregated effect of the contracts (in combination with the principle of Paktun patrilineal inheritance): the two-bloc political segmentation across the whole of Swat with landowners and their tenants in each bloc. All parties, landowners no less than the landless, are seen by Barth as 'trying to make the best of a situation' (vol. 2: 147) that is always open to changes in the bloc power balance (changes that can dash the political and economic fortunes of the landowners just as they can impoverish the landless).

It is essential to understand that what emerges at the macro-level of Swat social relations (the two-bloc system) is, indeed, an 'aggregated' product of actions by chiefs and landowners, village councils and landless tenants. Each has acted according to his or their particular situation; it is not simply something 'handed down' to them by history or ideology. At least as Barth sees it, this is the issue at the heart of his quarrel with Asad. Asad would reinterpret Swat social relations in terms of class domination (vol. 2: 171) but this is to obfuscate the Swat data (vol. 2: 148) and to assume 'the primacy of ideological differences as a premise' (vol. 2: 160). Certainly there has been widespread and clearly expressed discontent in Swat; but—argues Barth—'We grasp the form of this discontent truly only if we see it in local cultural terms, not by renaming it class exploitation and class consciousness' (vol. 2: 147). Thus, he directs us to 'the values of pride, autonomy and assertion which are *embraced by the whole Pathan population*, not just by the landowning Pakhtuns or the privileged leaders among them' (my emphasis). He adds: 'In a life situation where such modes of expression were frustrated or could only rarely and imperfectly be realized, yet where others were given the opportunity to excel, one has no reason to doubt the strength of discontent, or the intensity of awareness of it' (vol. 2: 147).

Thus we begin to see how Barth's claims from Swat (cf. vol. 2: 122–3) are, in fact, a claim for empirical anthropology with strong inductive procedures. 'It will not do to impose . . . the assumptions and generalizations which have proved appropriate elsewhere, but for which there is no local basis' (vol. 2: 121). He sees the unity of 'the whole' that we call society as being of 'an existential kind only', arising from the life situations of a collectivity of people (vol. 2: 179). The answer to the question as to how the key variables of a

generative analysis are identified is highly traditional: by fieldwork. For 'it is as fieldworker rather than as analyst that the anthropologist . . . find[s] the cognitive twist that unlocks and makes sense of the codes of an exotic culture' (vol. 1: 20). This is always a somewhat unnerving claim to make on behalf of the discipline, and Barth (addressing the Royal Society at the time) finds himself bound to add that it 'does not mean that the discipline is unscientific. . . . The critical requirement is that the constructs and models of the discipline are confronted with reality in the form of independently ascertained empirical data' (vol. 2: 179). The 'independently' should be considered in the context of our present discussion; it is a hallmark of generative analysis.

From the armchair[5]

Between fieldwork on four continents (see note 1) and production of the ensuing monographs, Barth has also written anthropology from the armchair. This part of his work is reprinted in the first of the volumes under review. (The key and controversial *Models of social organization*, first delivered as lectures at the L.S.E. in 1963 and published by the R.A.I. in 1966, is included as three separate chapters.) Whether it is the nature of sociological models that is under discussion, social change, ethnicity or transaction, there is the same concern with 'actors' strategies of instrumentality and the aggregate social consequences' (vol. 1: 3). So part of the value of the compact volume 1 is in the way it integrates Barth's view of the social and cultural world. And with the twin volumes, it is easier to see how the epistemology of the *Models* is 'generated' by—and so generalised from—his intellectual experience with the Swat materials (but does not the evidence suggest that anthropologists generally find their 'epistemologies' in this way?).

Let us, then, look at Barth in the armchair on *value*, *utility*, *choice* and *aggregation*.

The early focus upon 'opportunity situations' of persons leads ineluctably to 'the model . . . of utilities . . . of choice under constraints' (vol. 1: 21). It has definite (limiting) implications for the notion of 'value', and, as Barth says, 'if this is recognized I think considerable confusion can be avoided' (vol. 1: 91). In my interpretation it means that 'strategy' is superordinate over 'value'. Certainly, 'values . . . held by actors . . . *affect* . . . their choices between alternatives' (my emphasis); but explicitly excluded from consideration is moral value—that is 'how things should be or should have been (but admittedly are not): the ideals that man should strive towards' (vol. 1: 91). I think the point to be pressed home here is that in Barthian analyses one is looking for what people *do* (and what determines their actions) so values are admissible data only when they are transferred into action (cf. vol. 1: 97; vol. 2: 154). Hence to distinguish between extrinsic and intrinsic values (Paine 1974: 11–15) is 'confusing and infertile', says Barth (vol. 1: 93).

This stance brings its rewards. First, values are not afforded any place of privilege (in the sense of being *sui generis*) in his analyses; their validity or what we might call their 'bearing capacity' is always being examined. Accordingly,

Models addresses the question: 'what happens to values *as the result* of transactions' (vol. 1: 91, original emphasis). Secondly, it helped develop his contextual approach to ethnicity: 'the features that are taken into account are not the sum of "objective" differences [between groups], but only those which actors themselves regard as significant. . . . By concentrating on what is socially *effective*, ethnic groups are seen as a form of social organization' (vol. 1: 203, 202; original emphasis). Thirdly, it informs his understanding of social and cultural change, and here the Pathan case is particularly illuminating.

Pathan culture emphasises 'male autonomy and egality, self-expression and aggressiveness' (vol. 2: 106): it is just about the nearest one can get to a value system whose existence is predicated not only on action but action that is successful. Pathans are greatly exercised in the business of being Pathans, and yet in certain circumstances will relinquish their Pathan-ness (they stop '"doing" Pashto'). The situations in which this is likely to occur are carefully described in Volume 2, chapter 6. They are those in which to maintain a claim to Pathan identity 'is to condemn oneself in advance to utter failure in performance' (vol. 1: 214). So even being a Pathan can boil down to 'a practical self-image . . . moderately consistent with the sanctions that are experienced in social interaction' (vol. 2: 107). So much, apparently, for the intrinsic and the inviolable . . . Similarly, membership of a mosque while characterised by Barth as a moral community is measured in terms of its instrumentality—in this case the political protection it offers.

Another 'reward', as Barth would see it, of his stance on value is that it means our analyses can be concerned with 'objective circumstances' rather than 'ideological' imperatives (e.g., vol. 2: 162). His approach to value is part of his stand for inductive procedures. Perhaps the most useful summarising statement would be that his anthropology is concerned not with intellectualised native 'models of' but rather with actors' 'models for' behaviour (vol. 2: 152). An interesting and rather unexpected yet perfectly consistent consequence is that we should shift our attention, in analysis, 'from *innovation* to *institutionalization* as the critical phase of change. . . . [For] whatever ideas people may have, only those that constitute a practicable allocation in a concrete situation will be effected' (vol. 1: 117; original emphases).

Turning now to his treatment of choice: the key assertion (as I deduce it to be) is that everyone is in a position to act. This obviously colours his approach to the question of *power* too, and it is worth reflecting on the paradox that of all the things for which Barth—the ethnographer of the Pathans among whom power had such forceful expressions—should be the most criticised is his neglect of the power factor. It is such an unlikely situation that it is especially here that premisses (his critics' as well as his own) should be re-examined.

I think he would be justified in saying of his critics that they see no further than the drama of power in Swat, especially its physical expressions, whereas his analysis is concerned, more subtly, with 'the transactional qualifier' of Hobbesian power. Even in Swat, power has less to do with physical force—or even with its threat—than with making good bargains; and in Swat this matter is considerably more complicated than that of Khans forcing 'bargains' on peasants. In terms of premisses, then, Barth replies to his critics along these

lines: it is 'entirely erroneous . . . that choice depends on equality and that a clear disadvantage of power precludes choice for the weaker party' (vol. 1: 89), and 'trying to make the best of a situation (in exercising choice) does not entail cherishing the situational constraints under which one is choosing' (vol. 2: 147). (An important text for the general argument, not mentioned by Barth, is Schelling 1956.)

Once again, as it seems to me, strategy is superordinate, this time over choice. Hence this definition of choice:

> My own short definition of the term would rather be the situation where, after the act, others can tell you, or you can tell yourself: 'That was stupid.' I fear that many a slave has regretted some particular act in precisely those terms (vol. 1: 89).

In other words, when we have 'blown' our options we should not then complain that we did not have any. This is also an argument that says there is little utility in any 'homogenized and abstract' notion of power, but rather that its analysis must be tied to contexts and tasks: 'It could be said, but it would not be illuminating to say, that the skipper 'has' power because he hires and fires netboss and fishermen. For some purposes this is decisive, for others not at all' (vol. 1: 88). The argument is applied to the controversy, with Asad mainly, over Swat landlords and peasants (vol. 2: ch. 7).

What, finally, of the aggregate of choices made by a population? Barth delivers some of his most insistent strictures against the methodology of functionalism in respect to this question. What we see as a social form is, he says (e.g., vol. 1: 141), the aggregated choices of many actors, and this means it is an outcome—though much-abstracted and mutilated—of these choices and not, as functionalism is prone to have it (vol. 1: 7), their cause:

> social form is . . . an epiphenomenon of a great variety of processes in combination . . . it is unfruitful to explain a social form, a pattern, directly by hypothesizing a purpose for it. Individual actors and individual management units have purposes and make allocations accordingly (vol. 1: 108).

He places the emphasis throughout upon the flow from actors to social form or from the micro- to the macro-level, and he raises the relationship between behaviour (as micro-) and culture (as macro-) in these terms (vol. 1: 141). Yet transformations across these two levels can leave the investigator beset by difficulties. For one thing 'it is not useful to assume that [the] empirical pattern [of any particular social form] is a sought-for condition, which all members of the community equally value and wilfully maintain' (vol. 1: 108). But the very difficulties make the investigation of 'interconnections between aggregate social forms and the construction of social persons on the micro-level' (vol. 1: 119) a principal challenge of anthropology today (cf. Barth 1978, and Grönhaug 1977). This is something that Radcliffe-Brown, and many after him, took to be relatively unproblematic. The 'this' pertains to process.

The effort now given to the understanding of process encompasses approaches other than Barth's. But to sum up his position: value, utility, choice and aggregation are the tools that Barth has in hand as he chips away at the problems of process.

This has taken us back to Barth's view of society. One is struck by his dismissive brevity—excepting his persistent criticism of 'functionalism'—in regard to 'structuralist' and 'historical' modes of explanation in anthropology. The one has developed in directions 'which ever reduce our universe of observation', and as for the other: 'a method that seeks to explain that which one can know much about (the present) by means of that which one must be content to know less about (the past) is topsy-turvy' (vol. 1: 4–6). We find these judgements in the Introduction for volume 1 of these collected essays. Yet in his 1965 address to the Royal Society there was a more tempered (and necessarily diplomatic?) appreciation of '"structural" models of societies . . . both as jural rules and cognitive strategies' (vol. 1: 19); even so, such models cannot show how social form and order is generated—'the model most readily available for this is one of utilities' (vol. 1: 21).

I think it important not to forget that what we get from Barth, even as an epistemologist,[6] is a political anthropology. In politics it is the result that counts. Furthermore, along with the conceptualisation of social life in political terms goes a predilection to allocate 'results' to identifiable actors. In his Swat writings one recognises a 'Pathan-ised' view of politics as 'concerned with . . . the defence of rights to culturally valued goods in situations of conflict' (vol. 2: 57), but from the armchair this becomes more a politics of ways and means, with an insistence upon 'integration and institutionalization' spawned from transactions (vol. 1: 52).

Difficulties

Of course ethnographers may be baffled by the material they have to interpret, and there are some intractable paradoxes for me in the *oeuvre* of Fredrik Barth. Concentrating, then, upon his two retrospective chapters (vol. 1: ch. 5; vol. 2: ch. 7), and without falling back to criticisms of *Models* made elsewhere (Paine 1974), I note briefly the following difficulties.

'The mere existence of a pattern in a culture other than our own is proof of its functional fit, which again serves as the explanation of its existence' (vol. 1: 7) is Barth's criticism of functionalism in its vulgar form, yet, after all, how different is his own theory of maximisation? Is not a choice taken as evidence of its maximisation? True, an actor may find out that he has been mistaken ('"That was stupid",' see above) but this does not seem to resolve the difficulty; and 'being mistaken' has to be reconciled with the suggestion that apparently many Pathans do not believe that they have any choices:

> If they spoke in the idiom of everyday English, many would no doubt say: 'I have no choice'—meaning that as they see it, the risks and costs of their doing anything different from what they are doing, i.e., changing their circumstances, are greater than the benefits they expect from such change. But this seems to me to reflect nothing but their own calculus in attempting to maximize their advantages, since it does not deny that their position has come about and persists through a series of decisions that might have been different (vol. 2: 131).

This deliberate play on paradox (regarding choice and maximisation) remains problematic. Is Barth now saying that since people maximise their opportunity

situation there is unlikely to be any choices available other than those already taken (that is, utilised)?[7]

It is difficult, too, to accept that (i) self-interested actors maximise the values inherent in their decisions, in the face of (ii) the always-present possibility that their decisions will be undone at the macro-level (vol. 1: 5, 108). Nor is it sensible to attribute 'maximisation' to actors' behaviour if this behaviour is not intentional and the actors are unable to recognise its implications, yet Barth's reassurances in this matter are, at best, weak (vol. 1: 90, 102; vol. 2: 79, 164, 178).

Our difficulties here are probably connected with, on the one hand, Barth's emphasis upon the flow of social events from the micro- to the macro-level (where they become 'aggregated'), and on the other hand, his neglect of flow from the macro- down to the micro-level. Seemingly, this has to do with his disdain for ideology. But the imposition of ideology on ethnographic material by the investigator is one thing; quite another is ideology brought to people by people. His problematic of micro-macro relations takes scant account of this last, and most important, eventuality, even though he observed in Swat, in 1954, 'ready-made ideology . . . being fed in from external sources' (vol. 2: 123).

As for values, insistence upon values as action or in action seems to make it all the more difficult to move beyond *post facto* studies of social change: one is kept waiting for the action to begin, as it were. Surely a broader acceptance of values than this essentialist one is necessary? So I disagree with his explicit exclusion of moral or intrinsic value. For one thing, it means loss of attention to an important source of criteria for choice;[8] but I have stated my argument earlier (Paine 1974: 11–14).

All these difficulties relate, I think, to an inadequacy both in Barth's critique of functionalism and in the theoretical underpinnings of his generative analysis. We need to get beyond simply faulting functionalism as teleology, says Salzman (pers. comm.):[9] what would be helpful but is not offered by either functionalism or Barth, is a causal epistemology. Why does social form X rest upon constraints n–m rather than p–q? Barth asks this kind of question but his answers remain—as the price of his inductive approach—limited to describing how n–m prevail over p–q in a particular time/place context. There are no general hypotheses about the nature and hence value of n–ms and p–qs. To put it point-blank: Barth rests so much of his sociological theorising on constraints without yet having a theory *of* constraints. In like manner his generative procedure becomes less an exercise in rigorous co-variation (above) but more a matter of identifying a few key factors and adducing their 'outcomes' (namely, aggregated patterns of behaviour). This is a procedure that leads his critics to complain of his parsimony in the presentation of data and in the ensuing analysis: a situation that makes it difficult (runs the criticism) to challenge the premisses of the analysis.

But it is fitting to return the last word to Barth. He despairs (sometimes) of the problems of falsification (vol. 1: 8), and it is surely in part for this reason that he shies away from 'grand theorising': 'my own basic ideal', he says, is to construct tight and simple models on limited premises' (vol. 1: 5). Invariably,

the models and premisses are imaginative and provocative; many times they are compelling too, bearing the stamp of a Khan of contemporary anthropology.

NOTES

My thanks to Philip Gulliver, George Park and Philip Salzman for their critical reading of this article in draft.

[1] Though it was not his first fieldwork, which was in Kurdistan; of course there followed fieldwork in Iran (Basseri nomads), Africa (Darfur), New Guinea (Baktaman) and, most recently, in Oman. He has also done shorter periods of field study in his native Norway (hill farmers, gypsies, herring fishermen). Articles from New Guinea, Oman and Norway are not included in the present collections and among the Marri Baluch in Pakistan (Pehrson 1966).

[2] I owe this observation to Salzman (pers. comm.).

[3] Particularly as recounted by Barth in 'Swat Pathans reconsidered' first published as Ch. 7 in Vol. 2 (pp. 121–81).

[4] Where, indeed, the concept of niche is still helpful. For example, it is implicit in the analysis of the Swat system of social stratification based on *quoum* or caste-like groupings (cf. vol. 2: ch. 2).

[5] Paying particular attention to '"Models" reconsidered' first published as Ch. 5 in Vol. 1 (pp. 76–104).

[6] His recent work on ritual and native exegesis in Papua New Guinea excepted.

[7] In this connexion a curious omission from Vol. 1 is his (1963) piece on entrepreneurs.

[8] This was impressed upon me by Gulliver (pers. comm.).

[9] To whom I am indebted for the thrust of this paragraph.

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