

2. Afghanistan

2.1 TWO SIDES OF A COIN? STATEBUILDING AND TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME NETWORKS IN AFGHANISTAN

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I. Multi-disciplinary and cross-cultural perspectives

The analysis of state-building in Afghanistan as a political endeavor to end Taliban support for the international terrorist network Al Qaida needs to take into account the political economy of state-building as an international policy. Many books and articles have been written about the cultural and procedural differences that interventionists as well as Afghans have been experiencing since 2001 with Western involvement (Rashid 2008; Bergen 2011). However, many of the intrinsic and – in their own logic – consequential developments during the political stabilization and support missions have been counter-productive, not least because of what Astri Suhrke has termed an “aid-and-war economy” (2011, 233). This perspective focuses on the extensive funds given to the Afghan government – coupled with demands for “good governance” and reforms – as well as on the enormous cost of the synchronous military engagement. What started as a mission to scare off spoilers and win the hearts and minds of the population for supporting the new government, which, in turn, ought to rule Afghanistan in a manner consistent with the norms of the international system (Bliesemann de Guevara and Kühn 2010), over time turned into a full-fledged fighting mission tactically termed “counter-insurgency.” In both approaches, political and kinetic, the outcome of political institution and norm-building has been prescribed; it is merely the way to achieve these ends that has differed (Kilcullen 2009). During this period, Afghanistan slipped into a small war while under Western influence. It is nearly impossible to distinguish between civilians and combatants, sketchy or non-existent frontlines, and what to make of the eroding effects a long-term engagement with the insurgents has on Western constituencies (Daase 1999).

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The aspects this article analyses cover a range of factors: cultural ones that provoke a questioning of established understandings of states as default actors to define what is lawful and what is not; political-economic ones that point to unintended consequences of international policy; security-related ones that raise questions about what the differences are between state-sponsored security agents and private ones; network and social connectivity-related ones that indicate that the social fabric of an intervention society is, if not complicit in, then at least conducive to, transnational organized crime, because it links high-value markets in the West with low-value labor that is involved in the production of illicit but much-demanded goods. In Afghanistan, which is often termed a “global opium monopolist,” several layers of organized crime networks unfold from the *rentier* class and opium traders. Due to the precarious nature of a society in conflict, other fields have become equally important, such as weapons trade, transport of goods of all sorts, as well as smuggling of refugees trying to evade the chaos that is assumed will take hold after Western troops have withdrawn.

II. Causes – history and analysis

The history of state formation is, according to Charles Tilly (1992), one in which violent actors engage in a Janus-faced endeavor to provide cover against assaults that originate from this very actor. In Tilly’s words, war-making and state-making are comparable to organized crime, in that protection rackets have to be paid by citizens for the state to protect them. In this model, the state taxes citizens for services that may serve their interest – for example, providing access to and guaranteeing the endurance of markets – and defends its existence against internal as well as external competitors. In an ambiguous process, this leads to the formation of a state system, as any ruler depends on external recognition for legitimacy. This state formation model, then, explains how the institutionalization of armed forces, including the police, requires funds to support them. This necessitates taxation of economic gains achieved under the cover of protection provided by such forces. Both of these, in turn, lead to the development of a formal administrative apparatus that collects taxes and organizes the means of violence.

While this model goes a long way toward shedding light on European state formation, the already existing state system, which later was exported and expanded on global scale, led to different results in non-European contexts. Most states were formed mimicking the ideal of a state prescribed by the system and its demands for accessibility and interoperability of state institutions (Schlichte 2005). Beginning with diplomatic exchanges such as state representatives in other capitals, to binding rules of trade, human rights, or military relations, it is always the state that is at the ideational center of social relations. Hence, the preconditions of forming states were distinctly different outside what is (roughly) today’s OECD world; the circumstances further deviate if external actors meddle with internal state formation dynamics (Kühn 2012). However, it is worthwhile for analytical purposes

to salvage the connection between the state and organized crime to illustrate the mutual dynamics of trying to establish a state and hybrid economic and political developments that may or may not support the state (Bliesemann de Guevara 2009).

In Afghanistan, this hybridity of state-stabilizing economic connectors, which, at the same time, have kept the state at bay from social figurations in the country to allow free economic conduct, date back very far. After establishing a nominally modern state in the late 18th century (as opposed to dynastic empires, periodically expanding and shrinking by way of conquest and retreat, but only periodically establishing a formalized order), Afghanistan's kings struggled to implement central rule. Until formal independence in 1919, the Afghan state was riddled by internal strife, periodically interrupted by unity against outside invaders like the British, who, in trying to keep the Russian Empire away from the warm seas of the Indian Ocean, sought to establish a buffer state (Ewans 2002, 43). It was, however, internal politics that lead to the consolidation of statehood, partly respecting the social norms of local tribes, partly mimicking the form of statehood now demanded by the evolving international system (Barfield 2010, 110–130).

Even after independence, however, the state was so weak in its normative legitimacy and economic base that whatever state agents had in mind, they needed funding from outside donors. In other word, the economic power of Afghanistan – currently a country with one of the lowest productivity rates worldwide – never warranted the consolidation of rule. Instead, whoever was willing and able to fund groups competing internally for power and influence may have found it easy to acquire access to internal political negotiation processes. As a result, different groups were empowered – or, if funds dried up, disempowered, in cases where social heft may have differed vastly from political influence. A case in point is the political influence of the communists, who – while internally feuding – took over the state in 1978. While public resistance against their policies grew, epitomized by co-educative literacy courses and reforms of land-ownership, the Soviets had to make a decision and risk losing influence and all they had already invested in those “indigenous communists.” Instead of handing Afghanistan to a growing tide of Islamist actors, who, it was feared, would establish a counter-model of a faith-based system on the Soviet Union's southern border (which was the route the Iranian revolution was taking), Soviet leaders decided to become directly involved (Feifer 2009).

The well-established structure of a rent-dependent elite trying to expand state rule and implement policy was thus radicalized, especially when the US administration started to covertly fund opposition Islamist forces through Pakistan's military intelligence branch, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). By deciding which of the insurgent groups should receive aid in money and arms, the ISI decidedly shaped the future political landscape of Afghanistan, which was molded by the empowered mujahedin groups, who consolidated their leading political role by virtue of their military fighting skills and charisma (see Schlichte 2009). The so-

called Peshawar Seven, seven mujahedin groups favored by a large flow of funds, thus became leaders in the fight against the Soviets, whereas other, sometimes politically opposed groups had to get in line with them in order to access funds.

The *rentier* structure thus became divided into two branches – one of the state and one against the state. As Barnett Rubin wrote, “A rentier state produced rentier revolutionaries” (2002, 81). The *rentier* state was mirrored by consolidating political-military figurations, which tried to resist the forced modernization efforts, and both depended on the continuous inflow of foreign funds. Needless to say, external donors tried to influence internal politics by providing these funds. However, they failed to actually determine the course of events. It is in this light that the Afghan wars since 1979 cannot simply be viewed as proxy wars; fighting factions had their own agendas to follow, which were often quite detached from what Cold War opponents assumed them to be fighting for. When the Soviets withdrew their troops in 1989 – subsequently triggering the end of the Soviet empire and diminishing the interests of the United States in the region – funds stopped fueling the war economy. This increased incentives to capture the remaining state structures in order to secure a share of the funds that were still available.

Increased mujahedin infighting – which included the shelling of Kabul, the destruction of some of the main areas of agrarian production such as in the Shomali plains, and massacres against populations of different ethnic affiliation – can be largely explained in such economic terms. That the fighting led to an increased ethnicization of the conflict is clear, therewith establishing firm rifts between members of different groups whose animosities and sometimes open enmities date back a long time. However, Schetter points out the problems of analyzing the war in Afghanistan after 1990 as being ethnically motivated: “Ethnic groups and conflict parties are being viewed as congruent entities [...] Generally, society appears as being dominated in its societal segmentation by monolithic ethnic blocks” (Schetter 2003, 580; paraphrased, FK). This lacks a grasp of the differentiation within Afghan society and reifies ethnic stereotypes to a status of indisputable truths. In buying into these categories, according to Schetter, the UN cemented such ethnic categories by mandating a “multi-ethnic” government after 2001.

Importantly, societal segmentation ran along the lines of economic interests. Of course, what might be viewed as organized crime was virtually in all cases transnational. The economic networks of cooperation only existed due to their transnational component. Most notably, opium production and trade, which dates back several decades and has undergone several accelerating phases, makes Afghanistan the single biggest producer of opium in the 21st century (see below), and it has been useful in supporting elites over the last decades. The same applies to the mostly southern trade syndicates, who have an oligopoly on goods imported from Pakistan into Afghanistan. Since this is the lion’s share of goods consumed in Afghanistan, one may imagine the importance – and, consequently, the power – such a position brings. Similarly, but structurally different, is the position of those local strongmen, often misleadingly called “warlords,” who have established

semi-statehood in provinces by controlling political, military, and economic affairs. Embodying the merging of political activity with what would usually be seen as criminal activity, these actors manage to unite social services and economic activity as well as military power in one hand – thus providing an often welcomed function in an area where the state fails to provide justice and reliable governance (Giustozzi 2009).

The opium economy is the focus of the following section. This is merited by the importance opium has in economic terms – in Afghanistan it amounts to about one-third¹ of gross national product. It is argued that it is precisely its transnationality that makes huge profits possible – and at the same time, profits reach the observed amounts precisely because of the international criminalization of opium products. To get a clear picture of the nature of opium-related transnational crime, one needs to distinguish between opium producers and opium *rentiers*. The international policy to reduce opium production, it is argued, is counterproductive in that it actually provides incentives to get involved. Finally, I attempt to relate the networks of opium trade to other illicit goods trade. However, I argue that drawing a line between licit and illicit goods may be misleading, as it is the same groups from profiteers who gain most from the international military presence in Afghanistan.

III. Forms, cases, and interfaces

During the international presence in Afghanistan over the last 10 years, opium production has been named the most important problem countless times. This section illustrates that this is misleading, mostly politically motivated, and a clear case of focusing on the wrong target. In retrospect, after 2001, the international intervention provided the grounds for a surge in opium production in Afghanistan. The Taliban had stopped opium production (though not its trade!) in 2001, assumedly to strengthen their international reputation, which was tarnished due to their treatment of women (and the Afghan population in general) and for hosting Osama bin Laden. When the Taliban disappeared, the amount of opium produced skyrocketed. What had happened?

Much of the infrastructure was damaged after more than two decades of internal war. Few influential actors had capital to lend to poor farmers. Those who had to rely on loans in winter were forced to grow poppy in order to repay their debts. Poppy is a very useful crop in a country like Afghanistan, as it is relatively robust and may be grown in areas where irrigation is impossible or non-existent. Also,

1 | Opium revenues can hardly be calculated reliably, and different ways to estimate them leads to very different results – for example, taking opium revenue as part of gross national product changes its relative share as opposed to calculating it outside licit economic activity. Also, trade-offs, such as profits from increased consumption of opium producers, may be understood as stemming from the opium economy or analyzed separately.

unlike wheat, it works as a cash crop; farming for subsistence on small fields often fails to produce a surplus, limiting the maneuverability of families dependent on money. In global comparison, poppy farming works in Afghanistan as it is very labor-intensive.

Farmers harvest the sap [...] by scoring the buds with a curved scraping knife and collecting the sticky brown resin that dries on the buds. In rudimentary “laboratories,” often nothing more than a mud hut with metal mixing drums and a brick stove, raw opium is mixed with lime and boiled in water to make morphine base. Once poured into molds and sun-dried into hard bricks, it is reduced in weight and volume by a factor of 10, making it easier to smuggle. (Peters 2009, 30)

Later stages of refining into heroin require cleaner facilities, clean water and charcoal filters, and chemicals such as anhydride or hydrochloric acid. The supply of these base materials is also part of the network of transnational organized crime.

Afghanistan has a history of producing drugs, especially opiates. Because medical treatment was impossible in the remote villages, it used to be consumed against pain and illness. It was, however, the Soviet war that catapulted Afghanistan to the forefront of opium production: On one hand, the revenues paid the mujahedin’s fight against the Red Army, and on the other, the CIA thought it might be a great idea to undermine the morale and health of Soviet soldiers by fostering vast supplies of harmful drugs to them through ISI channels (Napoleoni 2004, 147–148; Feifer 2009, 183). The Taliban, when in power, attempted to enhance their international reputation by stopping the production of poppy – but not the trade. Although this caused social hardships for farmers, the traders – relying on full stocks – compensated for decreased trade with higher prices. This illustrates that market fluctuations do little harm to traders, as the morphine base is durable and can be stored for lengthy periods of time. However, this policy enforced by the Taliban rendered them unreliable in the eyes of traders – namely the few families who traditionally organized exports using far-reaching networks (Buddenberg and Byrd 2006). These structures, predictably, survived the fall of the Taliban and persons involved became active in rebuilding the Afghan state.

The economic edge traders had traditionally had, including lending money to producers (called *salaam*), put them in powerful social and economic positions. While political leadership was shifting, traders remained in their positions – not directly involved in politics but silently able to structure and influence the composition of political arrangements.

In the course of the Western intervention, a significant professionalization and concentration of the opium trade has taken place. What Janet Kursawe has termed “vertical integration” is a consolidation of market relations between the producers, the traders at different levels, and the buyers, all of whom are valves for funneling the opiates onto the world market. According to her assessment, it is this integration that merits talk about organized crime, which has a higher degree

of institutional capacity than the local/regional tribe and kin-based trading relationships that existed in the past. Those loosely organized cells have now become more concentrated, forced to counter repression – resulting in the disappearance from the market of those who are unable to fend off law enforcement – and take advantage of the economies of scale. The ever more influential groups have increasingly managed to gain access to state institutions, either through cooptation of officials or strategically positioning their own straw men. While this results in symbiotic relations between parts of the government and the opium economy, it also serves to keep contenders off the market; the opium business is no longer open for competition (Kursawe 2010, 127–140). This is important, as the ongoing war in Afghanistan – where opium competitors can be turned into targets for the United States and other Western militaries by pointing out their affiliations with the Taliban – has diminished the positions of those traders close to the insurgency, thereby leaving the market to those close to the government. Whether this is a good thing leading to future control and subsequent regulation of the illicit opium sector, or a bad thing resulting in the state of Afghanistan being turned into a full-fledged narco-state, remains to be seen² (Kühn 2011, 121–122).

Thus, in several ways, Western intervention is supportive of – or even complicit in – exacerbating the Afghan drug problem: By fighting on the side of the government, the Western military helps oligopolize the opium market for the benefit of those drug entrepreneurs who are well connected with – or, indeed, part of – the government. Frequent denunciations of the most prominent case of drug involvement (Hamid Karzai's brother Ahmad Wali, who was governor of Kandahar and killed in July 2011) was only intended to pressure the president publicly, but it did little to help tackle the consolidating professionalization of opium politics. Indeed, cooperating with him – and other powerful figures of his kind – seemed more attractive for Western actors as this was calculated to facilitate an orderly exit.

Another way to help the opium traders is to keep resisting Afghan moves to join the pharmaceutical producers of opiates. While regulation is of concern (Which poppy types would be legal? Which ones illegal?), there is also a market being protected by countries like Turkey, Australia, and the Netherlands – countries that, understandably, have little incentive to share the lucrative business of medical opiates demanded by palliative medicine in Western countries.

Finally, as some in the field of development have observed, a “dual use” problem exists: Processing of heroin moves closer to the source of production (poppy), which is a sign of the capital saturation that Afghan traders have now reached. While heroin was formerly processed downstream on trading routes, for example in Pakistan or Iran, it is increasingly processed in Afghanistan. Laboratories profit from more widespread access to clean water – which is often facilitated by Western

2 | Author's phone interview with member of Western intelligence service, March 5, 2011.

development agencies. Mobile laboratories are quick to relocate upon detection, and in many cases they enjoy the support of local strongmen, who, simultaneously, are often commissioned by the military and aid agencies for protection.³ Close cooperation of Western military and local units, who are patrolling side-by-side, fosters the flow of information, wherefore violent encounters that were frequent in the first years, when Western military sometimes stumbled upon drug deals, have ceased to happen: Information about the military's whereabouts allows for avoidance of detection. While roads lower the cost of transporting agricultural goods, they also support the concentration of deliveries of opium; transporting huge bulks rather than small portions of opiates has helped concentrate business in a few hands. Likewise, the crossing of borders has become more dangerous when goods have more value (heroin vs. opium base) and when batches are bigger; this raises the incentive to involve border guards and bribe security agents, thus tightly entwining state agents and the opium economy.

In this light, it is hard to tell who is gaining the most: In a state dependent on rents, which are now mainly supplied by Western donors, elites are likely to secure all sorts of *rentier* income. The numbers supplied by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime over the years indicate that income generated by drugs supports state agencies; in a general mood of war-weariness and dwindling foreign funds, opium income will likely be vital for many state functions. Following the logic of the *rentier* state, Afghanistan may well have found a political-economic equilibrium that secures minimum legitimacy of the state (as a supposed source of order) but that is also highly productive in terms of opiates and, increasingly, hashish (Kühn 2008, 323; 2012). The question is how this could be made legally and socially acceptable within existing structures. At the moment, rather than following a coherent strategy, Western countries are hiding behind the Afghan state, which is officially in charge of drug policy. For example, there are virtually no attempts to implement demand reduction in Western countries (Kühn 2012, 127–128).

Overall, as opium is a cash crop, Afghan producers are unlikely to change to other agrarian produce in the near future. Since the illegality of opium and its derivatives guarantees fluctuating but comparably high returns, and since traders are also involved in other economic sectors, thereby giving them an edge in manipulating markets, the eradication policy based on the fiction that the problem might be solved in Afghanistan has proved to be futile. Traders have secured considerable influence over government institutions, partly funding the state, which ought to enforce opium bans. Many of those involved in the security branch – police, law enforcement, and border guards – are in reality often complicit in its export. Likewise, global networks provide very reliable structures to distribute supply, while demand in Western states remains virtually constant. It is this international dimension and its social and political consequences that the next section covers.

3 | Author's interview, development agency staff, February 25, 2011.

IV. Processes of social transformation, global economic flows, and routes

Drug-exporting networks are the largest profiteers of opium and hashish in Afghanistan. Because of their involvement with the state – either as authorities or tightly connected to those in office for the sake of stability – they are able to adapt to and survive countermeasures for combating the opium trade. These have led to the consolidation of the exporting groups, as traders associated with the Taliban and other insurgent groups have been targeted, whereas those close to the state have not. After some years of dysfunctional anti-drug policies, attempts to tackle the producers have finally ceased. This came after realizing that these measures disenfranchise the population and that volatile structures of production allowed for the growing of poppy to shift from one province to another. The sheer amount of capital that can be accumulated by the domestic traders (numbering about 150–200), but even more so by those exporting the drugs (now down to about 15–20 families, as compared to higher numbers 25–30 years ago) allows for the financing of a policy of specialization and consolidation of the traders:

Coordination (including across ethnic groups); close association between government, business, and criminal operators; exclusion of new entrants especially at upper levels; dynamic responses to law enforcement (including higher levels of secrecy); and development of more systematic and well-organized mechanisms of criminal protection.⁴ (Buddenberg and Byrd 2006, 17)

In terms of social transformation, paradoxically, that may mean that the drug economy may have become more predictable for those involved. Consolidating structures brings a certain level of reliability; the escalating fight against insurgents during the intervention has funneled resources and attention away from eradication and the enforcement of counter-narcotics policy. International capital networks work well and are indistinguishable regarding their “content of criminality”: Afghan elites have tended to remain in contact with diaspora communities, and those able to mobilize capital have profited from imports of everyday commodities such as cars and food; also, the transport of military supplies has been a profitable industry in recent years. The capital gained is often sent from Afghanistan to investment havens like Dubai, from where money is invested in other sectors of the global economy. These economic activities may partly involve money laundering. Also, the mainly trust-based system of *hawala* has been widely used to transfer funds (Napoleoni 2004, 205–207; Kursawe 2010, 139–140), making it impossible to calculate the economic impact of the drug economy. The grey area in which virtually all economic activity takes place is well described by Cockayne:

4 | Author’s phone interview with member of Western intelligence service, March 5, 2011.

Organised crime and corruption are central to the social experience in violent and insecure communities – especially those affected by wholesale armed conflict. What is labelled “organised crime” may at times manifest a deeper politico-economic system that satisfies the survival, dispute-resolution and other basic needs and interests of extensive constituencies straddling the state-society boundary. [...] the lines between legality and illegality, and between legitimacy and illegitimacy, do not run along parallel tracks. State-backed laws may lack popular legitimacy, and state officials – or outside peacemakers – may risk *losing* local legitimacy by enforcing law. Alternatively, state official may engage in activities – such as corruption and bribery – that are illegal but entirely normalised or legitimate in the local context. A similar disconnect can emerge between international norms and local legitimacy. (2010, 201)

For Afghanistan, in its social and local heterogeneity, it is all of the above. This is exacerbated by some historical continuity, in which borderlands – that is, areas of disputed rule such as the mountainous areas around the virtual border to Pakistan – play a role as “spaces of avoidance.” In the example of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, the ethical differences between those Pashtuns under state control (and paying taxes: *qalang*) versus those living according to the ideal of freedom and honor (*nang*) is very important for people’s identities. There, the local economy profits from re-importing tax-free goods into Pakistan brought to Afghanistan under the Afghan Transit Trade Agreement (Goodhand 2008, 234, 241). Violence, as part of the greater economic pattern, depends to a significant extent on the “temporal scope of its rationality and assessments of its expected payoffs” (Scofield 2011, 47).

In addition to being an illustration of the “all politics is local” idea, this indicates what happens with other borders such as those shared with Central Asia or Iran: Select groups cooperating in transnationalizing trade patterns are required as counterparts to organize the export (and import) of goods. While the Iranian influence is distinct for its state-like approach – in which support was given to the comparatively stable province of Herat through substantial economic exchanges – Iran still serves as the main route to export opium products from Afghanistan to Turkey and on to markets in Europe. Despite the Iranian state’s interest to keep hostile Sunni segments of Afghan society at bay and control the drug market, work and refugee migration on the scale of 2.5 million people is of social significance. Such sub-state relations also affect ties with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

In effect, one may identify three layers of politics and political-economic ties: The first is on a local scale, from kinship-based politics in villages and districts or provinces, as in the case of consolidated provinces such as Herat or Balkh. The second is between provinces representing larger, internally connected economic patterns and – as in the case of the opium trade, where goods easily cross Afghan domestic fault lines of conflict (Kursawe 2010, 134) – neighboring countries. Ethnic and linguistic ties as well as kinship and migration contacts may foster these

ties, for example, between Badakhshan and Tajikistan; Herat and Iran; and Kandahar and other predominantly Pashtun areas on Pakistan's side of the border. On a third level, there are global economic connectors, with trade ending downstream on the streets of London or Hamburg (in case of drugs), but also in other centers of the capitalist West in the case of carpets and refugees. Afghanistan, on the other hand, is an importer of chemicals to refine opium into heroin, but also of small weapons from the former Soviet states and Africa. In monetary terms, as already described, Afghanistan is a major recipient of rents, of which there is the economic rent for the illegal goods, a political rent paid mainly by the Western intervention to the state of Afghanistan and its elites (see Kühn 2008) but also to opposition groups by Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and others. Money from Afghanistan, in turn, is being invested on global markets via, for example, Dubai. Finally, and not to be underestimated, there are migration rents, which are transfers between diasporas and Afghan constituencies, with the latter often relying on these payments for survival.

V. Consequences and impacts on the state, the rule of law, and victims' accounts

Ten years and counting into the Western intervention, and with the withdrawal of a significant number of forces looming large, there is little one can predict for the future of transnational organized crime. There are, however, some indicators that need to be considered and that shed some light on the categories that are applied to defining transnational organized crime. Since the Afghan state, and indeed Afghan society, is very dependent on the inflow of money in the form of economic, political, and migration rents, criminal activity – or what might be understood as such – is likely to remain in place. Depending on the economic opportunities opening up for actors, these will be used: In political terms, this means that even though Western donors have pledged huge sums for the funding of state institutions until 2024, opportunities for others who are willing to pay those with domestic political interests are likely to increase. The influence, however, should not be overestimated: Afghan rulers have mostly managed to keep the donors at bay when it comes to the substance of decision-making. To gain legitimacy, however, rulers have to be viewed as independent of foreigners (Barfield 2010, 341–342). Absent the significant internal sources of finance, the legitimacy of an Afghan state is likely to remain weak.

This relates to another, possibly bleak perspective: If security cannot be provided by the state, people – in the case of Afghanistan ethnic factions along tribal and kinship lines – will feel they have to organize militarily. To fund this, they will make use of opportunities that themselves are contingent upon the random distribution of goods and may serve to finance such basic sub-state functions: for example, the smuggling of lapis funded the Panjir resistance against Taliban rule in northern Afghanistan; Aymak copper deposits near Kabul sent along favor-

able trade routes to neighboring markets; or, drugs. Because they are impossible to centralize, migrant rents are politically irrelevant but provide a vital source of income to many. Because they strengthen ties between diasporas and people in Afghanistan, they are also open to external influences.

As long as the ability of the state to define what is legal and illegal in a socially accepted way does not exist, Western policy-makers ought to develop a more realistic evaluation of what drives Afghan politics. The state's weakness is not limited to actually enforcing laws; on a more basic level, it also needs to change social norms in the heads of people. This points to vital characteristics well beyond a state's functional side – and this, in turn, ought to foster recognition of what external meddling may or may not achieve. The functional side of the state may or may not be addressed, but international policy ought to abstain from aiming at the mental re-education of non-Western societies.

It is within this template that organized crime is understood as a menace to societies, neatly defining and demarcating spheres of legality or illegality. This may turn out to be a fiction upon closer look, however. For one, criminal structures are often well-woven into the economic patterns of Western consolidated statehood. The non-Western, post-conflict criminal activity follows logical patterns of economic incentives and barriers of regulation. While, in Afghanistan, corruption and disruptive influences exerted by the one-sided empowerment of certain groups that rely on the heavy influx of funds are still seen as undesirable by many in Afghan society, the occasional bribe and opportunistic use of economic structures are regular features of life for most.

This should not be viewed as cultural flaw, weak character, or backwards mentality, as Johnson convincingly argues at the end of his book: “Afghans are not culturally determined in their actions, but are reactive and adaptive. Their operations are shaped and influenced by a cultural ‘lens’, but they are also pragmatic” (Johnson 2011, 305). Lacking a lens of European statehood (and also many of its flaws), what may look from such a perspective like transnational organized crime may at the same time appear acceptable, if not normal, from a non-Western perspective. In Afghanistan, the newspaper *Cheragh's* assertion that Western efforts to reduce opium production was a failure rang true with many: “[b]ecause the British [as key partner for opium reduction] cannot reduce the 90% demand of its citizens for Afghanistan's opium in their own country [...] they are trying to find a pretext and evade responsibility rather than find a solution” (quoted in Shayer 2008, 8). Rather than pointing fingers, Western actors should carefully balance donor priorities and local pressures rising in the face of the prospective decline in *rentier* income (Suhrke 2011, 232). To do that, it might be worth considering transnational organized crime and transnational disorganized order as parts of one continuum rather than as polar binaries.

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