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Review by Stephen M. Lyon

*The Closed Valley* is a vivid personal account of fieldwork that will earn the ire of professional academic anthropologists while helping to draw the next generation to anthropology. Like Barley's, *Innocent Anthropologist*, Frembgen isn't speaking to the professional debates that advance careers or shift intellectual paradigms. He's speaking to a host of people who may never do fieldwork and or experience that realisation that research 'subjects' have real power over you. Frembgen reminds us that while the populations in the Tribal areas of Pakistan may not wield much power globally, in their own domains, they have both authority and power. This book reveals much about Frembgen and he's refreshingly candid about his own motivations for going to one of the more remote parts of Pakistan. He sought epiphanic moments in which he might discover pristine truths of faith and human existence. He speaks guiltily of his weakness at not rising in the middle of the night to join his host, Sher Ghazi, for the extra prayer recommended by the Prophet (36). The self criticism implicit in such comments is endearing and provokes both sympathy and smiles. Frembgen has written an honest account of fieldwork that courageously embraces the frailty, naivety and ignorance of even well prepared anthropologists.

Prior to Frembgen's arrival in Harban Valley, Kohistan, the local people had made clear their lack of patience with outside researchers. The few European researchers who had ventured into the area were escorted out of the village after outstaying a short welcome. Local relations in the area appear not to have been better. Local lineage groups were very suspicious and exhibited persistent animosity for one another. Sher Ghazi, for example, in explaining why he won't give his own sons guns, following local custom, tells a very sad story of being mistreated by his stepfather, his father's younger brother (32-33). Such snippets of ethnographic information reveal much about the tensions inherent in the area. Brothers, Sher Ghazi tells Frembgen, must present a united front to the outside world, yet internally, they may not provide the care for one another's widows and offspring in the protective manner one expects.

Frembgen provides no grand theoretical analysis to draw together the rich accounts provided in this book. Indeed, he provides only a cursory attempt at analysing his experiences. Instead, offers a more visceral experience of living and working with men, who live with the daily threat of violence. The sectarian tensions that permeate the region are brought up repeatedly as Frembgen describes the somewhat strict Sunni Deoband Islam that dominates Harban. Sher Ghazi's carpenter, Qalandar Shah, tells a harrowing tale of growing up as an Ismaili, a group regularly grouped with Shia, who converted to Sunni Islam and fled his home village to find himself as a skilled tradesman. Frembgen narrates his own conversion to Islam carefully because it took place in the company of followers of a sufi order in Karachi. To his Harban hosts, sufi worship is tantamount to idol worship and risked undermining his legitimacy as a Muslim (78). Most anthropologists who conduct fieldwork in Pakistan know the delicacy with which one must discuss Islam. Casual comments about the nature of God or religion that would be entirely acceptable in a European context take on potential for offence there. This book provides a number of rich illustrative examples of how careful one must be.

The violence described is casual and normalised. Beating people to the point where they have difficulty walking, accidentally shooting relatives, killing a rival's animals are all ordinary events which colour the background experiences of everyone in this remote valley. The tenacity of blood feuds is stark and poses real challenges to ordinary functions. Hanifullah, a local man, had lived for

10 years in a fortified tower as a consequence of a blood feud when Frembgen met him (94-95). Although he might have sought an easier life had he fled the valley, he garnered respect and prestige for his willingness to stay put. Sadly, he was chopped to death by rivals two years after Frembgen met and interviewed him. He had negotiated a truce to the blood feud, but this was apparently not accepted by all.

Frembgen ends his account with a harrowing adventure of a gun battle and having to flee with bullets flying past his head. A local woman had been killed in the cross fire of an earlier gun battle. Her son had been shot and rushed off to the nearest doctor. His friends explained their concerns about being drawn into a blood feud as a consequence. They accepted the fate of those who can no longer exit the safety of their houses and fortified towers without fear of violent death (96-102). Frembgen's host, Sher Ghazi, laments the fact that Tablighi, the Deoband Islamic organisation that preaches adherence to more orthodox, Islamic doctrine, has had next to no impact on what he sees as the damaging un-Islamic relations of blood feud.

The book raises a host of questions, but refrains from providing comprehensive answers. Its goal is to share the individual experiences of fieldwork and leave readers the space to interpret and assign meaning appropriately. Frembgen intentionally set out to construct a richer, more nuanced representation of Kohistan and the misunderstood 'Tribal Other' that has appeared in countless adventure stories from the 19th century onwards. He tries to challenge the trope of the ferocious martial Pukhtun through a relatively balanced account of men who laugh, joke and tell stories. These men aren't simply killing machines who enter into blood feuds with the mindless zeal of Bollywood (or even Hollywood) baddies. The men who are drawn into the blood feud as a result of the unintended killing of the local woman, Frembgen tells us, are visibly frightened. This is not the world they would choose if they had the power to change things. It is the world in which they live and they respond as any of us would in such circumstances.

For those of us who have worked with groups who espouse the virtue of blood feuds and honour and protecting one's lineage and dependents, the diversity and contradictions of such a representation are easy to see. I am persuaded that the Kohistani Tribals befriended by Frembgen are complex characters who cannot be reduced to violent social relations. Sadly, I worry that this may not be the case with those who have no experience of rhetorically violent societies or have had no anthropological training. This is a book I will happily include on my readings lists in the future, but it will come with an advisory warning. I will draw my students' attention to the mundane descriptions of daily life and urge them not to allow the sexy blood feuds and gun battles to dominate their understanding of who these men are. It is *part* of who they are, but it is far from *all* of who they are. I believe this is the message that Jürgen Waseem Frembgen wants us to get from his brave, personal account, and I for one, am very pleased that he's taken the time to try and deliver it.