ICWA
LETTERS

Institute of Current World Affairs
The Crane-Rogers Foundation
4545 42nd Street NW, Suite 311
Washington, DC 20016

NES-13
PAKISTAN

Nicholas Schmidle is a Phillips Talbot Fellow of the Institute studying identity and politics in Pakistan.

Double Edged

Poverty, illiteracy and sectarianism flourish in southern Punjab, one of the last places on earth where feudalism still exists. Are the landlords part of the problem — or the solution?

By Nicholas Schmidle

April 2007

WALI KHAN MAZARI STOOD IN THE DRIVEWAY of his country estate on a recent spring afternoon in southern Punjab, fidgeting with his mobile phone, while two of his servants trimmed the sprawling front lawn. The male servants stood atop a rusty sled, with a blade affixed underneath, pulled by two white, speckled oxen with big humps on their necks. The men occasionally spanked the animals and hollered at them to speed up. Mazari, who wore a Rolex watch, an olive-green shalwar kameez, and white Nike sneakers, told me that he'd once contemplated buying a modern, gas-powered lawnmower. But he decided that local people needed the jobs. Just one man could operate the tractor, while this method required at least four.

Mazari, who is in his mid-50s, is a *sardar*, or tribal chief, ruling over the roughly 50,000 Baluchis who live on his land and consider him their king, banker, judge, and police chief. Servants scurry around his estate holding trays of tea and scissors for snipping the hedges. They, along with the tenants who live on Mazari's land, tucked in the southernmost corner of Punjab, bow their heads in his presence. Instead of a firm and reciprocated handshake, they capture and pat Mazari's limp right hand with both of theirs. Mazari governs his lands in line with age-old feudal traditions, which means that he makes the law, decides its implementation, and the appropriate punishments for someone breaking it. Similarly, he declares whether outsiders are welcome on his 4,000 acres of land, which abut the Indus River, adjacent to Sindh and Baluchistan. When a troupe of bearded, fundamen-

Wali Khan Mazari, chief of a Baluchi tribe in southern Punjab, takes a tour of his land one evening.

talist Muslim missionaries recently asked his permission to preach about Islam, Mazari rejected them outright. "I don't need someone to tell me what is and isn't Islam," he said. "I know how to pray."

Mazari looks less like a tribal chief, and more like a stock broker on early retirement, golfing his days away in Key West. He has a chock of longish, graying, wavy hair, a slightly pear-shaped waistline, and wears flat, thin eyeglasses that are tinted purple. About his weight, he said to me, tugging at his baggy, knee-length tunic and similarly roomy pants, "That is the disadvantage of these things. You don't even notice when you are getting fat." Mazari describes himself as an avid tennis player, and plans to build a floodlit court on his estate soon. Maybe then, his Syrian wife, who lives and practices law in Vancouver (his first wife lives in Karachi), will come and visit more often.

In the meantime, to keep himself entertained, Mazari renovated a wing of the family's sprawling plantation home into a chic bachelor pad. His mother lives in another wing. In his marble-floored library and living room, where two of the walls were lined with books, I browsed titles by Chekhov, Hemingway, and Martin Heidegger. Jimi Hendrix albums stood among a stack of old LPs. On a third wall, a poster-sized Samsung, flat-screen television hung. Mazari poured himself a tumbler of Ballantine's scotch. He apologized as he poured mine. While living in Boston during his college years, as a Sloan fellow at MIT during the 1980s, he apparently cultivated an appreciation for fine scotch. He despaired that, these days in Pakistan, he had to drive twelve hours to Islamabad just to get a bottle of Ballantine's.

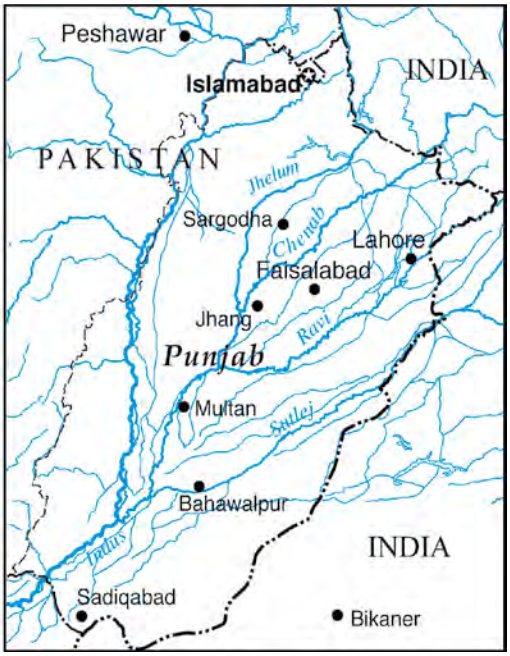
When I asked him if he ever felt out of place, lording over a tribe of people whom he had seemingly little in common, Mazari shook his head like the question had never crossed his mind. His father had been the sardar before him. When his dad died, Mazari naturally took over. It wasn't a matter of having anything in common with the tribesmen or not. The tribe was rightfully his. His ancestry proved it.

Educated urbanites and civil society activists are deeply critical of people like Mazari and the feudal and tribal traditions they represent. They say feudalism has perpetuated social inequalities, and that, as a result, many poor and disillusioned young men have embraced militant Islam. Several jihadi organizations, including Sipah-e-Sahaba, an anti-Shia outfit, and Jaish-e-Mohammad, suspected in the assassination attempts on President Pervez Musharraf in December 2003, are based in southern Punjab. Moreover, civil society activists attribute southern Punjab's soaring rates of illiteracy and, in their words, overall "backwardness," to the oppressive social conditions created by the landlords. (Mazari estimates that less than 10 percent of his tribesmen can read a newspaper, and only about 3 percent of tribeswomen.) Wajadan, a skinny cameraman for Reuters in his early-20s and a resident of Multan, described one of the feudals as "Hitler." "We should break the feudal lords," said Mohammad Abdul Saboor, the national field coordinator for Pattan, a Multan-based NGO working to improve human rights and women's rights in southern Punjab.

Saboor believes that the two most deleterious customs plaguing society in southern Punjab are honor killing and gang rapes. Honor killing is when male members of a family kill a female relative — sometimes a mom, sister or daughter — in order to amend family honor in light of a woman's dishonorable act. Gang-rape is often employed as a form of punishment. Mukhtaran Mai, the woman gang-raped in 2002, whose case attracted international attention, comes from a village an hour's drive from Multan. "Mukhtaran Mai is not only the story of a rape victim. It is about a landowner and a landless lady," Saboor said. "The landlords are only maneuvering for their own benefit. So many problems could be solved by land reforms."

The strip of markets and tea-stalls on Mazari's property.

The government enacted land reform twice before, once in the late 1950s and again in the early 1970s. The reforms succeeded in breaking up the largest holdings. The Mazari family, for instance, owned more than 600,000 acres when Pakistan was formed in 1947; today, they have only about 4,000 acres. But the reforms failed to curb the landowners' power. The feudals' wealth may have suffered, but they still had more than



anyone else. Whoever happened to be ruling Pakistan at the time still needed their support.

Big, powerful landlords dominate the rural areas throughout Pakistan. Many of them trace their legitimacy to an auspicious religious background, and assert themselves as *pirs*, or spiritual guides. Or, like Mazari, they resort to tribal bonds. What sets landowners in Punjab apart from those in the other provinces is the soil. While the other provinces suffer severe water shortages, Punjab, fed by five rivers ("PANJ" or Five, "AB" or Water) is extremely fertile, making the land — and its owners — especially rich.

Between sips of scotch, Mazari's phone rang throughout the evening with people asking for favors. An old friend called because his son, who hadn't yet finished college, had seen an opening for a mid-level position at an oil and gas company based in a nearby city. The boy, though utterly unqualified, thought it sounded like a fun job. His dad was calling in hopes that Mazari would make a phone call on his behalf. When Mazari hung up, he let out an incredulous, exasperated sigh. "This kid doesn't know the first thing about oil and gas," he said. It was an absurd request. Mazari tipped another splash of scotch into his drink and leaned back in his black leather chair. He chuckled, "These people think I can do miracles."

MULTAN, BY PAKISTANI STANDARDS, is a relatively free-wheeling city. Renowned for its handicrafts, especially its blue stenciled vases, the city has a thriving music and drama scene. One evening in late March, Wajadan, the Reuters journalist, insisted we go to Majeed Theater. He was a regular there. He guaranteed that the theatrical experience would be unlike any other I'd seen. A true cultural activity, he said.

Majeed, the owner of the theater, sat in an office filled with cigarette smoke, behind a desk covered with old show fliers. He handed Wajadan a few front-row tickets, and we hurried to take our seats.

The performance had already started. A fat, middle-aged man, a slender, attractive young woman, and a couple of 20-something men acted on stage. The fat man, who fashioned his mustache in the shape of a handlebar, played the role of the landlord. Every member of the cast, of which there were at least a dozen, mocked and ridiculed the landlord behind his back, while they kissed his feet and praised him to his face. Occasionally, the landlord smacked someone with the sole of a rubber flip-flop, causing the all-male audience to erupt into laughter. "People enjoy this kind of theme," said Wajadan.

The young, attractive woman played the role of the landlord's daughter-in-law. She wore heavy makeup that dulled the reflection of stage lights, and a spandex-tight, hip-hugging shalwar kameez. She walked off the stage at one point, after being hit by the landlord's son. When she returned a few minutes later, two speakers crackled and boomed to life. An electronic drumbeat rolled, a piercing, pre-recorded female voice sang out, and with ONE-and-TWO hip thrusts to the left and right, the woman started to dance.

A smile washed over Wajadan's face. Now I understood. People enjoyed *this* theme. The daughter-in-law, alone on stage, slid her hands down her upper torso and pushed her breasts together. She mimicked the moves of a pole dancer and glared into the eyes of a man wearing a suit in the front row. He was in his early 30s. When the dancer set her gaze on him, he promptly loosened his tie. The audience, most of whom frequent Majeed Theater and knew the racy dance was coming, fell into a blissful silence.

Eventually, the musical interlude came to an end,

and the plotline resumed. Shortly after that, the power went out. A lanky actor in his mid-20s, with a drawn-on mustache, lit a candle, sat cross-legged on the stage, and recited poetry in Seraiki, the language spoken by most people in southern Punjab.

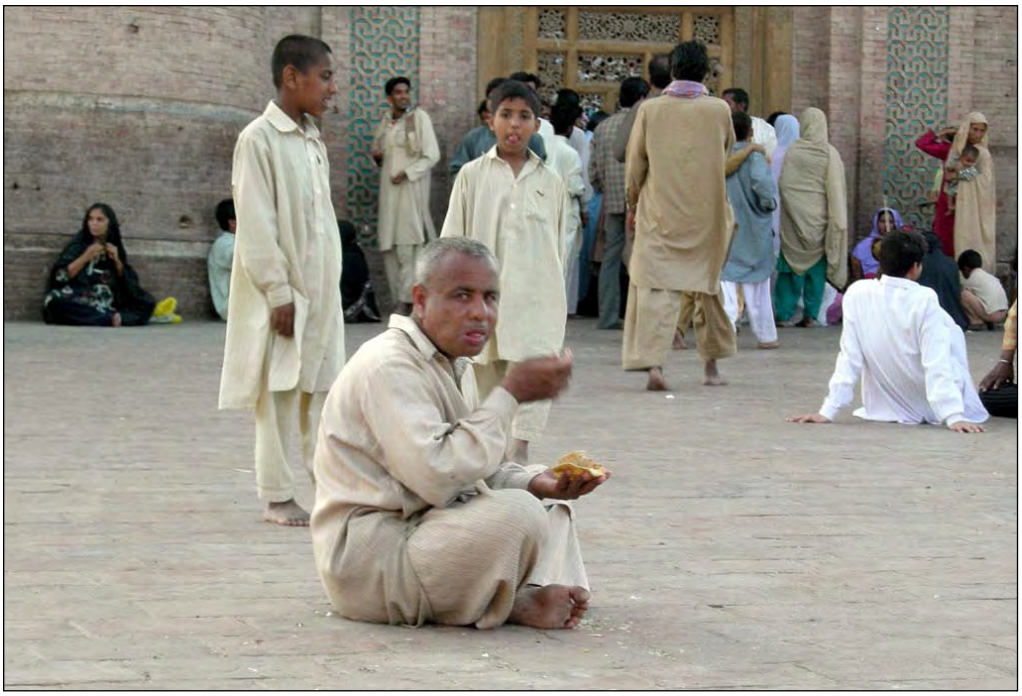
Thirty minutes later, with the lights still out and the actor's catalogue of memorized poems dwindling fast, Wajadan begrudgingly conceded that we should probably go. We planned to leave town early the next morning and it was almost 1 a.m. "You sure you don't want to stay for another dance?" he asked. On the way home, he told me that, if you stay until the end, the dancers are all for sale.

ON TOP OF A HILL IN THE CENTER of Multan, two Sufi saints — a grandfather and his grandson — rest in tombs that smell of rosewater and pilgrim sweat. Historians credit the elder of the two with bringing Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam, to the Indian subcontinent in the 12th century. Every year, on the anniversary of men's deaths, pilgrims flock to the shrines carrying whatever they can afford to sacrifice. A few rich men might slaughter a goat. The rest drop a few rupees worth of change into the padlocked donation boxes, while some shoulder vats of rice which they spoon out to needier pilgrims. Everyone comes with a prayer; some for long life, some for wealth, many for a male child. Inside the shrine of the younger saint, Shah Rukn-e-Alam, a portly man in his 50s took tender hold of my hand. Pigeons flew overhead and perched on the edges of bricks in the high, domed ceiling. Tea lamps burned and rose petals floated in shallow bowls of water. The man asked where I came from and I said America. You have come all that way? "It is by the grace of Allah that I have seen you," he said.

Most residents of southern Punjab follow this mystical, at times superstitious, version on Islam. Hundreds of dead saints are entombed in Multan alone, and during the annual celebrations to commemorate them, known as *urs*, worshippers throng to their shrines to sing and dance and play music. The convergence of masses and myths manifests in the wide, entranced eyes of exhausted pilgrims staring off into space, while the quick, opportunistic hands of profiteers try to sell boxes of useless, Chinese-made trinkets. But no one mentions politics, nor carries any spirit of confrontation. Only common, mostly poor, people, begging for miracles from a dead saint.

Mufti Abdul Qavi comes from a family of dead saints. Though he is not yet officially a pir, or spiritual guide, (his elderly father is alive and, thus, possesses the *gadi*, or "sainthood") people still seek his advice on spiritual matters. He pointed to a stack of letters, bundled with a rubber band, that had arrived that morning from people, inside Pakistan and out, requesting proper Islamic answers to life's problems, including how to patch up a bad marriage, whether prayer is necessary on airline flights, and the exact direction that one's feet should be pointing while they pray. Qavi had an air of sincerity and a long, silver-and-grey-streaked beard. On the afternoon Wajadan and I visited him in his madrassa in Multan, he wore a lambskin cap, a tweed waistcoat fitted over his shalwar kameez, and collegiate, rimless spectacles. He passed around a bowl of *sohan halwa*, a sweet, sticky Multan delicacy, made from almonds, pistachio, cardamom seeds, and tubs of butter. He first pinched a wad for himself. "Sohan halwa plays the role of pir in our society," he said, smacking his lips on the gooey dessert and rooting his tongue around the inside of his mouth to dislodge stuck pieces. "The pir connects people, while halwa connect your teeth."

Qavi said that, from the 11th through the middle of the 19th century, everyone on the Indian subcontinent simply followed pirs. There were no sects, and Sunnis and Shias didn't fight. "Then the mullah established himself," he said. Qavi blames the rise of sects, madrassas and mullahs over the past 150 years on "British mischief." (The British ruled the subcontinent from 1858 to 1947.) He says that Britain's strategy for subduing Muslims in what is now India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, followed a policy



A man eats a free meal of bread and rice in front of the Baha-ud-Din Zakaria shrine in Multan.

of divide and rule. "The British gave the mullah money and land to build their madrassas," he told me. "Since then, the status of the pir has gone down."

Naeem, a resident of Multan in his early 20s and the youngest of nine siblings, later explained to me that the "problem with mullahs is that they stand between man and Allah." Doesn't the pir do the same thing? I said that, in both cases, common people deem themselves unfit to decide on Islamic matters, and so they turn to either pirs or mullahs to decide for them. He conceded the point with a slight shoulder shrug and "maybe," but added that the main difference was one of doctrine. The culture surrounding Sufism, pirs and saints, he added, relished in the lack of rigid rules. "The mullah is there to create tension amongst Muslims while the pir does his work out of love for Allah and his creation," Naeem said. I must have worn an unsatisfied expression on my face, because he snatched the remote control from the coffee table in my hotel room, and spun it around as if he was about to perform a magic trick with it. "Look, a pir hands you this remote and says, 'Turn on whatever channel you want.' But a mullah hands you the same remote and says, 'This button is broken,' 'Don't press this button,' and 'This button is bad.'"

If the ascent of the mullah and downfall of the pir first began under the conniving eyes of the British, as Qavi says, the trend accelerated rapidly during the 1980s, this time under the gaze of the Americans and the motley alliance they formed to drive the Soviet army out of Afghanistan. Pakistan's slick, mustachioed military ruler, General Zia-ul-Haq, himself a fervent Islamist, eagerly channeled crates of Kalashnikovs and suitcases of cash from donors in Washington and Riyadh to his network of mosques, madrassas and mujahideen, some of them based in Afghanistan, but most in Pakistan. Gradually, the previously pervasive spirit of tolerance was replaced with a militant one. In their Friday sermons, mullahs demanded that families send their fit and able sons to Afghanistan, where the noble cause of jihad awaited them. Towns were renamed in honor of the holy warriors. On the road leading from Multan to Bahawalpur, another city in southern Punjab, a street sign notifies motorists of a nearby village named Mujahidabad, or "Town of the Mujahideen."

But even before the war in Afghanistan ended, some of the mujahideen from Pakistan were returning home and turning their Kalashnikovs on fellow countrymen of the opposite sect, usually Shi'ites. In 1986, a firebrand mullah from the city of Jhang, located at the point where the Jhelum and Chenab rivers intersect, transformed his mosque into a fountainhead of sectarian hatred. Eventually, that hatred spread to all corners of the country. Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, the firebrand, formed an organization called Sipah-e-Sahaba, or "Army of the Companions of the Prophet." Jhangvi led processions through the streets of Jhang chanting, "*Kafir, Kafir, Shia, Kafir*" — a *kafir* is an infidel, or non-believer — and once his new militia was sufficiently trained, he unleashed them on Pakistan's Shia community in a rash of bombings and assassinations. Sipah-e-Sahaba enjoyed great success at attracting members in and around Jhang. This was largely because of the social and economic situation; most of the wealthy landowners were Shia, while the masses, whether impoverished tenants in rural areas or poor urbanites, were Sunni. Over the past two decades, more than 2,000 people have died in Pakistan's sectarian war.

"All these groups developed in ignorant areas," said Mufti Abdul Qavi. "These people are so poor and desperate that when they receive donations from abroad they act." Qavi claimed that Shia Iran and the Sunni Arab states waged a proxy war in Pakistan, by funding militant groups of their same sect.

"But people all over Pakistan are poor," I said. "Why aren't these jihadi groups forming in interior Baluchistan or interior Sindh?"

"The Sindhi and Baluchi tribal system is very strong," Qavi answered. Powerful tribal chieftains, like Wali Khan Mazari, govern their areas like strict, mini-dictatorships. But in most of southern Punjab, he said, "the landlords are smaller. The mullah gets anything he wants when tribal customs are not strong."

A HERD OF SHEEP RUMMAGED THROUGH a pile of trash on a recent Tuesday at lunchtime, at the main intersection in Jhang, while Wajadan got directions from a gas-pump attendant. We left Multan that morning at around 8 a.m., and after driving for three hours past crusty villages made of baked mud and groves of mango trees, we arrived in the dusty, congested center of Jhang. The pump attendant pointed south, then shook his head and pointed north, then shook his head again and pointed west. Wajadan, detecting the boy's confusion, turned to a policeman in a blue uniform who was standing and watching nearby, and asked him for directions to the mayor's office.

Mahmood Nazar Hayat Khan, the *nazim*, or mayor, of Jhang, is a hefty man with big hands. He spoke softly and moved with the slow, deliberate pace of someone who cherishes the sight of other people hurrying around him. Twenty people raced around his office, scribbling an "x" on documents to indicate where he should sign and sliding notes under his forearms, which rested on the top of his desk. He wore a powder-blue shalwar kameez and tugged at the fine, straight hairs of his mustache. After a few minutes of small talk, I mentioned the name Sipah-e-Sahaba. Hayat Khan abruptly raised his hand and nodded in the direction of a back room, where we shifted with a handful of his aides. The aides locked the door. Hayat Khan and I sank into the cushions of a low couch. "This is a better environment for talking," he said.

In January 2002, Musharraf banned Sipah-e-Sahaba

and a handful of other sectarian militias from holding public meetings or printing hate literature. Nevertheless, the head of Sipah-e-Sahaba, running as an "independent," won election to the National Assembly in the October 2002 general elections from his home constituency of Jhang. (Assassins killed him and his bodyguards a year later.) Over the past year, the government relaxed some of the restrictions on Sipah-e-Sahaba, even allowing them to hold a rally in Islamabad last spring. Attendees chanted "Kafir, Kafir, Shia, Kafir" and distributed DVDs showing Taliban and al-Qaeda attacks on American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. I suspected that Sipah-e-Sahaba was making a quiet comeback.

"What role did they play in Jhang's politics?" I asked Hayat Khan.

To be a politician in urban Jhang, the mayor said, "You need nothing else besides their support." Out of 13 administrative divisions in the city, known as unions, Sipah-e-Sahaba supporters run 11 of them. "Unofficially," Hayat Khan stressed. Although the government ban means that registered party members, which one of Hayat Khan's aides estimated at 500,000 nationwide, are prohibited from running for office, plenty of surrogate politicians are willing to serve the organization. The mayor added: "The public is with them."

Mazari takes a look at a plot of land that two sides are arguing over….As the tribesmen make their argument.

After drinking a cup of milky tea in his office, Hayat Khan and I got into his white Toyota Corolla and headed to the mosque where it all began, Jamia Haq Nawaz Jhangvi. Trailing our car, a half dozen of the mayor's aides and fellow politicians had packed into two other sedans. Our caravan snaked through the maze of single-lane dirt roads that connect the old part of Jhang, until a construction site blocked the way. We got out and walked. The midday sun baked the empty, narrow, dusty alleys.

The mosque sat at the corner of a three-way intersection. It was small, hardly able to hold more than a few hundred worshippers. I imagined the overflow pouring onto the dusty streets when, before he was killed in 1990, Jhangvi used to inveigh against the Shia. On this day, only a few men were praying inside the mosque, colored toothpaste-green, orange, and fire-truck red. A perverse welcome sign had been hammered above the entrance. It read: "It is forbidden for Shia to enter or for Shia to be mentioned inside this place."

We stayed only a few minutes. On the walk back to the cars, Hayat Khan's phone rang. While the mayor was talking, one of his aide's phone rang. Another one jingled. The intelligence agencies were calling and demanding information about me. When we arrived at a friend's house for lunch, a couple of Military Intelligence agents were waiting outside the main gate, while a couple of agents from the Special Branch stood just inside. Wajadan recommended we skip lunch and get out of the city immediately. He feared that someone from the agencies would stop us and harass us on the way home. Better to be in Multan and off the road before nightfall. We scarfed down a plate of lightly-fried chicken and rice with green peas. By the end of the hour, we were speeding back to Multan.

NEAR THE ENTRANCE TO THE TOWN OF SADIQABAD, where Wali Khan Mazari's driver was waiting to take me from the bus station to Mazari's estate

in a brand-new black Suzuki Grand Vitara SUV, the Sipah-e-Sahaba flag fluttered in a stiff breeze atop a billboard advertising fertilizer. Three days later, a 39-year-old employee of Pakistan National Bank who lived on Mazari's land told me, "There aren't any problems with Sunni-Shia violence here because there aren't many Shia." But Mazari's two sisters are Shia (they converted when they married Shia husbands), and I was sure that Sipah-e-Sahaba had canvassed these villages and distributed its venomous pamphlets sometime or another during its 20-year-existence. Moreover, I thought how bigotry often festers in isolation. The fact that there were only a few Shia families living nearby didn't guarantee that there weren't any sectarian tensions. All it takes is one incendiary mullah in the pulpit. The next Friday, Mazari stood, leaning back slightly with his hands on his hips, in a dirt parking lot facing a small, open-air mosque near the short strip of shops and markets on his property. Worshippers milled about, waiting for the sermon to begin. When I asked Mazari where the mullah who leads the prayers and delivers the sermon came from, he flashed a self-satisfied, almost devious smile. "He is always just a local guy," he said. "I appoint the mullah."

The clan chief who was arrested and held on bail pleads his case to Mazari during the hearing with him and Barkat Khan.

Earlier that morning, Mazari summoned three dozen tribesmen from two dueling clans to a spacious room with tall ceilings, where he sat in a chair made of soft, maroon leather and heard their case. The dispute revolved around the theft of an air-conditioning unit. When Barkat Khan, the small, graying head of one clan, realized the unit was gone, his son fetched two policemen, drove straight to the village of the rival clan, and fingered the rival chief as the guilty one. After hearing both sides' version of the story, Mazari explained that the first problem was Barkat's going to the police. In the future, he said, come to me. The second problem involved the dishonor done to the rival chief who, after being arrested, was obliged to spend the whole afternoon at the station waiting for bail. A scribe recorded Mazari's words onto a legal pad. When Mazari finished adjudicating, he ordered Barkat to pay a fine of 70,000 Rupees (US$1,100) to the rival chief. "This is affordable justice," Mazari leaned over to me and said. To make the decision final, the scribe went around the circle and had each of the observers sign their name. Since many of them were illiterate and couldn't write, the scribe carried an inkpad. The illiterate ones pressed their thumb into the ink, and then onto the document.

Mazari says his tribe is "probably the most backwards Baluchi tribe." Most of the cases he decides, like the one with the stolen air-conditioner, involve someone blaming someone else for offending their honor. (Barkat's rival chief immediately waived 10,000 Rupees (US$170) from Barkat's fine, saying that the issue "was about honor, not money.") Four or five years ago (Mazari couldn't remember the exact date), one of his middle-aged male servants was caught having sex with an unmarried woman in the bushes edging the front yard of the family estate. The woman's family rushed to the scene and declared the two people *kala-kali*, or "black." Following tribal customs, both lovers were shot and killed at close range. Once someone has been declared kala (masculine) or kali (feminine), their families' honor is considered damaged until the guilty ones are killed.

Most often, the family of the woman, who "had" to be killed to preserve the rest of the families' honor, seeks compensation. As in the case of Mukhtaran Mai, the man's family sometimes hands over a sister or daughter to be gang-raped. In other cases, the guilty man gives one of his own daughters to replace the woman that the family killed. Pre-pubescent girls are the most desirable. "I put an end to all that," Mazari said, referring to the practice of bartering young girls. Unfortunately, he added, the one who loses out in those situations isn't the man caught frolicking in the sugarcane fields, but his innocent daughter.

A couple of years ago, Mazari set a new precedent with a unique ruling on a case involving a man who murdered his wife and then escaped. The wife's family demanded 150,000 Rupees (US$2,500) in compensation from the husband's family, but, the husband having fled, his family no longer had any income. They had only the husband's 12-year-old daughter to offer. So Mazari convinced the wife's family to lower their expected reward, while still obliging the husband's family to come up with the full amount (which they eventually did). He took

On Mazari's property, the setting sun resembles a flaming Creamcicle.

the difference and established a special fund for the orphaned child. When she came of proper age, 17- or 18-years-old, she would have her own dowry and have some control in deciding who she married. Mazari conceded the difficulty of trying to reform regressive, age-old customs. But, in all, he is pleased with his work. He said, "I am keeping some traditions alive and easing others out, while still giving justice to the people."

ON THE SAME DAY THAT MAZARI ruled against Barkat in the air-conditioner dispute, one of Barkat's sons told me that, "The youth are totally unsatisfied with the decision against Barkat, but in our minds" — in other words, those old enough to understand tribal culture — "it is just." He added, "We dislike this sardari system, but out sardar" — Mazari — "is a very, very good person."

A few kilometers away, at a tea stall among the row of shops that comprise the commercial section of Mazari's land, an unemployed 27-year-old totally disagreed. He told me that Mazari is out of touch with the people on his land. "We are poor people and there are no jobs here!" he said. He pointed in the direction of Mazari's estate. "They keep saying 'next year, next year,' but there are no jobs."

"Whose responsibility is it to provide jobs?" I asked. "Mazari's or Musharraf's?"

"Musharraf doesn't visit here," the man said. "But the sardar is here every day. He knows the situation. It's his problem. He needs to tell the government to help us." His anger was escalating, while night was falling quickly.

The next morning, Juma, Mazari's driver, drove me back to the bus station in Sadiqabad. Juma is in his late 30s or early 40s, tall and good-looking. He has two wives, who sleep along with Juma in one bed. I asked him whether he thought the tribal system could endure the criticisms coming from so-called "progressive" civil-society activists in Multan, Lahore and other cities.

He tightened his face muscles and considered the question. The free access to media, he said, was already causing massive social changes. People in the villages listen to BBC radio and watch Urdu news channels, some of which are broadcast from Dubai. The schools remained substandard, but more and more children — including, for the first time, young girls — were attending. Juma said, slowly, people were becoming educated. He added, "As this ignorance disappears, so will this sardari system." ❑

Institute Fellows are chosen on the basis of character, previous experience and promise. They are young professionals funded to spend a minimum of two years carrying out self-designed programs of study and writing outside the United States. The Fellows are required to report their findings and experiences from the field once a month. They can write on any subject, as formally or informally as they wish. The result is a unique form of reporting, analysis and periodic assessment of international events and issues.

ICWA Letters (ISSN 1083-4257) are published by the Institute of Current World Affairs Inc., a 501(c)(3) exempt operating foundation incorporated in New York State with offices located at 4545 42nd Street NW, Suite 311, Washington, D.C. 20016. The letters are provided free of charge to members of ICWA and are available to libraries and professional researchers on our web site.

Phone: (202) 364-4068
Fax: (202) 364-0498
E-mail: icwa@icwa.org
Web site: www.icwa.org