

NO WORDS IN AFGHAN WORLD. CASE STUDY OF AFGHANS' NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: *The knowledge and application of certain skills related to nonverbal communication have become very important for the military environment nowadays, especially due to the increasing number of troops deployed in unfamiliar cultural environments such as the Afghan theater of operations. Therefore, knowing how to interact with the local, prideful and conservative population can be an indisputable advantage. The paper approaches certain aspects of nonverbal behavior as a way of transmitting messages or attitudes within the Afghan culture. After defining specific subdivisions and concepts of the nonverbal communication (such as proxemics, kinesics, oculosics, haptics, vocalics, olfactics, chronemics etc.) the paper also includes a case study, relevant for any combatant or civilian that may further be deployed to the untamed Afghanistan.*

Keywords: *nonverbal communication, military, Afghan culture, theater of operations*

1. INTRODUCTION

The international environment changes that occurred during the last decades meant involvement of unprecedentedly large number of personnel in missions outside their comfort zones, outside their cultural environments where they've been raised and forced not simply to accomplish their tasks, but to perform at high standards in new and unfamiliar environments. From former Yugoslavia to the, so called, Third World countries in Africa and from the war on drugs in South America to the war on terror in Iraq and Afghanistan, military and civilian personnel are faced with new challenges by interacting with the local populations and often find themselves in awkward, unwanted, not to mention dangerous situations because of their lack of training and knowledge from the locals' culture and customs point of view.

Being immersed into an unfamiliar context, where everything from travelling, attitudes towards women and time to dress code, food, accommodation and ideas about hygiene are something one is unacquainted to and if you add, above all these, the feeling of loneliness and the fear of being hurt, you may understand why someone may feel confused about the cultural shock he needs to face out. In many cases, another one may find himself in the situation of not

knowing how to interact with the local population and, sometimes just respectfully bowing your head to an elder means "I don't know your language or your culture, but I respect you and I want to learn". By getting to know more about a certain culture peels away the unknown. The hesitancy in approaching inhabitants who are very dissimilar will be diminished. If you're not trained to face the new environment, the only chance for survival is adaptation or, in other words, learning on the way as fast as possible.

This paper aims to provide a brief analysis of the nonverbal interactions within the Afghan culture and its contrasts with Western cultures as it is of critical importance to understand that Afghan cultural background influences their view of the world. A complete understanding of the Afghan national culture is fundamental for performing in an effective manner in this area. The final goal is to provide a useful guide that can be used by both military and civilian personnel that may be deployed and work in this unfamiliar, yet amazingly rich culture. We'll explore the cultural differences, from the nonverbal behavior point of view, that affect all personnel deployed in Afghanistan in the way they think, act and relate to each other. However, do not look this paper as covering all issues in this field. It is intended only as an introduction to the topic. It provides a basic understanding of a rich culture with a powerful and

living history. A further, more extended, research on this subject will prove itself more than useful in training personnel for facing the cultural challenges, because only when

shows full acceptance and enjoyment of the host culture [...] the individual has passed through culture shock, to become truly intercultural (McLaren, 1998:12).

2. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF AFGHANISTAN

Ahmad Shah Durrani (1722 - 1772), that in 1747 unified all Pashtun tribes is considered the founding father of the state of Afghanistan. During the shadow fights between the Russian and the Britain empires in the 19th century, fearing the expansionist tactics of the first one, Afghanistan was occupied by the British in the late 1830s. They regain their independence on 19th of August 1919, when the British Empire recognized the independent state of Afghanistan; therefore this day is now celebrated as the National Day.

The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979 in order to support the unstable Afghan communist regime and withdrew in 1989 under the ruthless pressure of the Mujahidin rebels. A series of civil wars occurred, that finally ended up with an install of a Taliban regime in 1996 to end the country's civil war. After the 11th of September 2001 terrorist attacks, Northern Alliance took action and toppled over the Taliban regime for sheltering Osama bin Laden. In December 2004, Hamid Karzai became the first democratically elected president of Afghanistan and the National Assembly was inaugurated the following December. Karzai was re-elected in August 2009 for a second term. Since the 29th of September 2014 Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai is the President of Afghanistan.

The landlocked country of Afghanistan is situated in the Southern Asia, it has an area of approximately 650.000 sq km and neighbors with Pakistan (2.430 km border) in east and south, Iran (936 km border) in west, Turkmenistan (744 km border) and Uzbekistan (for 137 km) in the north and in the far north-east with China (76 km border). Climate is arid to semiarid, with cold winters and very hot summers. The total population is approximately 32 million (in July 2014). Official languages are Dari (spoken by 50% of population) and Pashto (spoken by 35% of the population). Capital of the country is the city of Kabul, situated at 1.800 m altitude, with a population of approximately 4.436.000 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2015). Time difference is

UTC + 4,5 hours (Bucharest + 2,5 hours – daylight saving time). From the religion point of view, Afghans are 99% Muslims and they follow the five pillars of Islam: (1) The testimony of faith (*Shahada*): the declaration of faith that “there is no god, but Allah and Mohammed is Allah’s messenger”, that every Muslim has to say it with conviction during his prayers; (2) Prayer (*Salat*) – Muslims are expected to pray five times a day; (3) Support of the needy (*Zakat*) – Muslims are expected to share the wealth they have received from Allah. Sharing 2,5% off all assets is customary; (4) Fasting the month of Ramadan (*Sawm*) – Ramadan is a time for physical discipline and spiritual reflection. Muslims fast from dawn until sunset, abstaining from food, drink, smoking and sexual relations; (5) The pilgrimage to Makkah (*Hajj*) - is an obligation once in a lifetime for all Muslims who are physically and financially able to perform it. An individual who completed the pilgrimage may be called *Hajji*. A person who has not completed the *Hajj* should never be called *Hajji*, as this way of calling may be understood as sarcasm and is a deep humiliation and shame to the man who has been unable to fulfill this sacred obligation due to poverty.

Implementing the six dimensions of culture laid down by Hofstede in 2010, on to the Afghan culture, the results are far from unexpected. Afghan society is a high power society as members do not seem themselves as equals, but followers of the judgements of the decision makers in power. It is vital to determine the power agent of a community whether this is the local *mullah*, tribal elder, politician or businessman. The overall meetings and negotiations’ efficiency will be improved by frontally dealing with those in power. From the second dimension perspective, Afghanistan is a collective society where supreme fidelity is given to one’s family above all other social groups. Family is the main source of an Afghan’s identity and the primary factor in decision-making. The next Afghans identity levels are embodied by their affiliation to their village, tribe and nation/ethnicity. The individual himself is the least important link in such a collective society. Touching down the third dimension we conclude that Afghan society is a masculine one, where women play a subordinate role. Even if in big cities women have a job and work outside the house, men are in control of the financial affairs of the house. On the other hand, in the rural area the women’s duty is to stay home, raise the children, cook and clean. It’s a matter of honor for an Afghan male to be the sole financial support for his

family, to provide them food, clothes and fulfill any other needs. Concerning the fourth dimension, Afghan society prefers high uncertainty avoidance. They promote tribal rules and religious values to standardize their day by day life. Also superstitions play an important role. Such examples are: when someone in the family dies, women do not wash their clothes for three days or sweeping the house at night is a sin. The fifth dimension reveals that Afghan society is a short term orientated one, where respect for tradition and immediate stability are important. Indulgent versus restraint dimension of a culture brings to light that in Afghanistan individual happiness and individual control are not important. Being a restraint culture, positive emotions are less freely expressed and freedom and leisure are not given the same importance as in indulgent societies.

From cultural perspective, Afghans, especially those in the rural areas, will appear rearwards and uncivilized. But their rich culture can be tracked back for thousands of years. Nobody will be able to change these ancient cultural values. So it's needed to understand their culture, accept it without laying down judgments, and work out how to handle it so as to accomplish one's tasks. A tribal moral fundament originated by their inimitable social code is called *Pashtunwali* (literally, "the Way of the Pashtun"). Afghan society, particularly the rural one, is highlighted by *Pashtunwali*. The leading components are honor (*Nang*) and revenge (*Badal*) for dishonor. A man who misplaces his honor is a castaway. Several circumstances could bring about dishonor, from the trivial to the criminal. Leader amongst others are seeing or talking to one's women, violating his home, or interfering with his property. Honor must be regained by revenge. There are no temporal restrictions in *Pashtunwali* and no feeling that time heals all wounds. One famous Pashtun proverb says that "I took my revenge after 100 years, and I only regret that I acted in haste". *Pashtunwali* is neither a drafted code, nor something that can be comfortably laid down into a written message even by the Afghans. It is best illustrated as a mixture of rules, conventionally apprehended social values and behavioral prototypes. But it would be a dangerous blunder to brush it off as it links up to an overestimated sense of honor, belief in tribal governance and tribal law and greatly recognized guidelines for admissible conduct. Traditionally, Afghans consider loyalty, dignity, rivalry, generosity, courage, pride, revenge, collectivism, hospitality and honor among their most valued national features.

3. AFGHAN NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION PATTERNS

Communication may adopt two configurations: verbal, when information is transmitted using the articulate language (oral or written), that is characteristic to human beings and nonverbal achieved through "individual's behavior components and physical appearance, but also through cognition and exploitation of space and time" (Lesenciuc, 2010:28). First studies using the term of nonverbal communication were issued around the middle years of the past century. Psychiatrist Jurgen Ruesch and photographer Weldon Kees came first in using this term in a book title (*Nonverbal Communication: Notes on the Visual Perception of Human Relations*, 1956).

In any type of meeting, especially like those occurring in Afghanistan, that are intercultural or interethnic, the appropriate interpretation of the interlocutor's verbal and nonverbal behavior is the foundation of all negotiations. But, "nonverbal communication must always be read in context" (Hall, 1976:81). Without a context it is impossible to decode the message and find out its true meaning. This brings us to the point where it is possible to discuss about the afghan culture as a high context one, where

message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is [...] explicit, transmitted part of the message (Hall, 1976:91).

3.1 Kinesics or the study of body movements. The term of kinesics comes from the Greek word *kínēs (is)* that indicated movement and it was used for the first time by the American anthropologist Ray L. Birdwhistell (1918 - 1994) in his book *Introduction to Kinesics* (1952). The term acceptance was of

body movements study related to nonverbal aspects of the interpersonal communication" (Jolly, 2000:133, *apud* Chelcea *et al.*, 2008:47).

Another researcher that mentions the term was Adam Kenton in *International Encyclopedia of Communications* (vol. 2, 1989:380, *apud* Chelcea, 2008:47) with the meaning of "body movements study in face-to-face interactions". Body movement is a complex phenomenon that encodes many messages in Afghan culture. From greeting someone to dining etiquettes and to moving around an Afghan while praying, they all prove to be kinesics characteristics that one must take into

account. Greeting someone placing the right hand over the heart is a sign of respect and it means that the greeting is sincere and comes from the heart. Big mistakes can occur from Westerners part if they are not aware of the importance of the head and the feet movements in Afghan culture. Pointing the soles of the feet towards someone is a sign of disrespect because Afghans consider that the soles of the feet or shoes are dirty, nearest to the ground, nearer to the devil and the farthest part of the body from Allah. In the presence of Afghans one must be carefully not to raise or cross the legs in such way that the sole of his feet faces others in the room. It is an offence for an Afghan person to come in touch with the sole of your foot or shoe.

Taking into account that Muslims touch the ground with their head only when they are praying, forcing an Afghan to touch the ground with his head (when making him a prisoner for an example) is an insult and one will find a certain enemy in that individual in the future. You'll often see Afghans holding their hands in front of their faces in order to ask for divine support. In Afghan culture, always use the right hand for hand shake, drinking, passing something to another person, eating and, generally speaking, for activities performed in public spaces. Using the left hand can throw shame onto an Afghan since they consider the left hand being dirty, used only for hygiene after using the toilet. Also, during discussions, Afghans are quite permissive with hand gestures. Vulgar Western gestures are recognized and everyone must avoid using them. On the other hand, the Western sign of OK with a thumb up is considered an offense and it is equivalent to the use of the middle finger in the Western cultures. Also, the OK-sign that shapes a circle by using the thumb and the index finger, usually has the meaning that the person you are addressing to is worthless and of no value at all. Many Afghans have learned the significance of these gestures and accept their meanings given by the Western countries, but some interpret them in the traditional manner. Since you don't know to whom you are talking to it is advisable to avoid using these gestures at all.

3.2 Proxemics or perception and using of personal space. The concept of space is used by social and human sciences to mark both a physical reality and to highlight some psychic and social features. The term of *proxemics* is associated to Edward T. Hall that used it for the first time in his study *Proxemics - the study of man's spatial relations and boundaries* (1963).

Locals will usually interfere in the normal conversational comfort zone of an Westerner since they are accustomed to talk to each other at close distances, if the discussion does not occur during an official meeting where places are already set around a negotiations table. Related to the four distance zones framed by E. T. Hall, we can get to the conclusion that conversations in the Afghan culture occur within the *intimate distance-far phase* (fifteen to forty five centimeters).

At intimate distance, the presence of the other person is unmistakable and may at times be overwhelming because of the greatly stepped-up sensory inputs. Sight (often distorted), olfaction, heat from the other person's body, sound, smell, and feel of the breath all combine to signal unmistakable involvement with another body. (Hall, 1966:116)

Being deployed, or should I say plunged, into that unfamiliar culture I often found myself in the situation of instinctively moving one step back, in a defensive position being uncomfortably dragged into discussions by an Afghan local. But, as a collective society, it's not uncommon for them to act in that manner and avoiding the approaching may transmit them the message that you fear them or that they smell bad. However, personal space should be taken into account when talking to an Afghan woman in order for the Westerner's behavior not to be interpreted as dishonoring that woman.

3.3 Facial expressions. The well-known book, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) by Charles Darwin, marked the research beginning on facial expressions. In 1938, the American psychiatrist Otto Klineberg denied the theory of universality for emotions' facial expressions advancing the assumption of cultural distinctiveness. Twenty three years later, Paul Ekman brings back into picture the theory of facial expressions universality founding its idea on his experimental researches. Multiple facial expressions are universal and their meaning is the same in Afghanistan as well as in Western cultures. For an example a genuine or a fake smile or the grimace on the face of an individual in pain or in anger it's the same in Afghanistan as it is in Romania or anywhere else. However, it is a terrible weakness among the Afghans not to control your emotions. If you ever show anger or other emotions in Afghanistan, your effectiveness in that culture is over. They will never respect you anymore, because they will consider that you are weak, therefore you can no longer be trusted or

respected. Thus, emotions must be kept for oneself at all times.

3.4 Oculistics or eye contact. Eye contact is critical in personal interrelations because of the feedback provided to communication partner. Eye contact brings up reciprocity in human relations. Georg Siemmel considered that an individual

reveal himself in the look that he offers to other. [...] Through our eyes we cannot receive without offering at the same time (*apud* Chelcea, 2008:75).

D.K. Orban advocates that

through eyes [...] we offer the feeling of deep thinking, confusion or lack of attention. We reveal our emotions of fear, anger and sadness. We cannot realize how many concealed messages are revealed through eye contact (*apud* Chelcea, 2008:79).

In the Afghan society eye contact between men of the same age is acceptable. Talking to an Afghan male and staring at his woman is a deep offense to that man. It may look difficult, for Westerners avoiding this blunder, especially if the woman is wearing the traditional costume (*burka*) that covers her from head to toe, because it's something new to him that stirs his curiosity.

Still, he must abstain himself to bring such a shame to his Afghan male interlocutor. In the Islamic faith, while eye contact between males is allowed, when it comes to members of the opposite sex, the situation changes unless the parties are legitimate spouses or family members. After the initial eye contact, men lower their gaze when speaking with women. Any prolonged eye contact with the opposite sex is considered highly inappropriate and a sign of disrespect.

Eye contact with an elder is permitted as long as it is not extended for a long period of time. It is best to look an elder in the eyes only occasionally so as not to make him feel challenged. When greeting an elder or a woman, the best option is to respectfully bow your head and avoid eye contact as a sign of respect.

3.5 Haptics or epidermal touching

Our skin layer is critical showing to what race or culture do we belong, what is our social status, self esteem, health, age etc. (Chelcea, 2008:75).

Being a collective society, Afghanistan is also a contact culture where body touch is allowed both in private and public areas. It is not unusual to see two Afghan males walking on the street hand in hand as this gesture is a sign of deep friendship and not a sign of homosexuality as may be interpreted

in Western countries. However, these public touches are allowed for men only. Any signs of affection between a woman and a man will be avoided in public. Traditionally, you will not see Afghan males and females walking on the street hand in hand or kissing each other in public spaces. Such behavior is considered unacceptable in Muslim societies.

The handshake is an everyday gesture especially when arriving and leaving. Handshake is used to greet Afghan males. As mentioned above, it's also common to place your hand over the heart after the handshake and bow your head as a sign of respect. Males do not shake hands with women as it's not allowed to touch a woman. However, during meetings women expect to shake hands with other women. Beside the hand shake, kissing on both cheeks or making mock gestures symbolizing kissing, is widely spread among Afghans males, especially if they are or pretend to be friends. As a matter of fact, this kissing on both cheeks gesture was the foundation for planning the assassination of the former President of Afghanistan, Burhanuddin Rabbani. While hosting a peace meeting in his house in Kabul, he welcomed a Taliban delegate, that was, in fact, a suicide bomber with explosive concealed in his turban. He triggered the bomb when kissing Mr. Rabbani, apparently as a greeting gesture.

3.6 Vocalics or paralinguistic (voice characteristics). The first American linguist and anthropologist who published a study concerning the personality characteristics by studying the way of speaking was Edward Sapir (1884-1939) in his study *Speech as a personality trait* (1927). In the vocalics area of interest there may be included: a) voice's phonic characteristic: tone, intensity, accent, quality; b) laugh, crying, respiration; c) instinctively repeating sound, often proving anxiety or agitation; d) articulating words and voice's tone; e) speech rhythm, speed and time structuring (Chelcea, 2008:91). Inner equilibrium, calm and a peaceful heart are highly appreciated in Afghan culture. Being impertinent or raising your voice, as well as showing anger, especially in the presence of others, is considered rude and impolite. Being blamed or rebuked in front of others is considered dishonoring and shameful. And bringing shame to an Afghan is dangerous and sometimes has led to deadly consequences. Furthermore, being too emotional is considered a sign of weakness. Afghans value an individual that speaks in a clear, moderate voice.

Since there is no privacy, as we know it, in the Afghan society it's easy to understand why they're

using other means. Their way to be alone is to stop talking. An Afghan who shuts himself off in this manner is not insinuating that something is wrong, only that he wants to be alone with his own thoughts and does not want to be interrupted.

Some Afghan may be uneducated, proving insufficient understanding for different matters. Nevertheless, where Afghans are inadequately prepared in formal education, they compensate for in sensitivity and perception. Afghans are piercing observers and highly aware. Remember that they have survived for centuries through their intelligence, wisdom, sharp eyes and local knowledge. Humility, good posture and a conversational tone of voice are all important in dealing with Afghans.

3.7 Olfactics or olfactory signals. Olfaction is a signal used since time immemorial. Chemical signals, in E.O. Wilson opinion have both advantages - increased energetic efficiency, bypassing obstacles, may be transmitted in total darkness - and disadvantages - slow transmission, intensity fade out (*apud* Chelcea, 2008:97). Olfactory communication has a critical role in choosing the partner, as well as setting in place the relation between mother and child.

Olfaction takes up an important role in the Afghan life. It's an adjusting instrument for distances between people as Afghans usually and knowingly smell people when they discuss to each other, considering that good smells bring a good state for the entire inner being and admitting that smell and a good spirit are associated. For an Afghan, to smell a friend is a suitable gesture as they judge that it is critical to smell nice in order to build or preserve a human relationship. They will not behave in a blushful manner about telling other when they don't like the way other smells. For an Afghan male it is important how his future wife smells. If he is not yet convinced about the girl he may get married with, he may ask to smell her and she may be dismissed unless she smells nice.

In Afghan culture, olfaction may also help one distinguish among the ones that want to relate and those who don't. Therefore, bad smell may also suggest one's consciously decision of not willing to relate with others.

3.8 Chronemics or the perception and significance of using time. "Time talks. It speaks more plainly than words" (Hall, 1959:23). Understanding that human impressions and attitudes concerning the time factor are culturally influenced, we must pay attention to chronemics - the study of time across cultures. *Chronemics* is a linguistic notion framed by Edward T. Hall and it

refers to the study of how one is referring to time (the way is apprehended, structured and used).

Time is the foundation of every culture and all activities are structured around it. Understanding the difference between monochronic and polichronic time is critical. (*apud* Chelcea, 2008:101).

I often witnessed other coalition colleagues that were striving to change and to adapt their behavior to people who kept them waiting. They did not understand that the way of perceiving time differs from culture to culture.

Afghans are in that landscape for centuries. They have time on their part. In Afghan culture personal relations and the effort spent to build them play a more important role than time. They view time as something flexible and concentrate more on people and relationships. For an example, at the beginning of a meeting greetings are important and can go on for some time. Afghans think the Westerners way of "getting right down to business" is impolite. "Time is money" it's a saying that doesn't fit in at all in Afghan culture. If we're playing with sayings for a little amusement, a more fitted one would be "what's with the rush", because while the coalition members feel controlled by the clock and constrained to be on time, the Afghans feel that the clock is conceived for their comfort and should be used as an indication of general and not specific time. An Afghan might simply say, "I will meet you after the sunset".

While Western cultures perceive time as linear, moving inevitably forward from the past to the future and behavior of their members may be described as formal and precise, Afghans, generally, place far less emphasis on an exact adherence to precise timing. So, taking into account all above stated, one must be flexible and quickly adjust his schedule when dealing with Afghans, because they are usually behind the clock or not show up at all.

3.9 Artifacts. Affiliation of an individual to a specific gender (male/female), age class, social or economic category, to a specific profession is also given by artifacts: clothes, jewelries, hair cut etc. In Afghan culture the way they dress is one of the most significant elements. Wool and cotton are commonly used to fabric clothing.

Common throughout the country is the *peerhan-toonban*, worn by men and women. *Peerhan* refers to a loose-fitting, slipover shirt that extends to the knees; the *toonban* is a pair of baggy pants tied with

a drawstring. [...] Afghans, will wear vests, sweaters, and overcoats over a *peerhan* (Hafizullah, 2005:145).

Religious leaders wear turbans on regular basis. Even if in the cities, women changed their dress code into a modern one, they must follow the traditional way of having their entire body covered. In the rural area women, especially the young and the married ones, wear very colorful clothes to be more attractive for their future or actual husbands. On the other hand, the old women and the widows, wear very modest clothing in dark colors. Many women wear *burka*, a veil that covers the entire body and face, with a mesh window or grille across the eyes so as to see out. It is common in Afghan villages for women to buy the dress material and sew their own clothes, but also to take it to the local female tailor. Sometimes the same material is used for the children's clothes so that it's easy to recognize whom they belong to. The most expensive fabrics are worn by the women of high status and newly married women.

One of the most wide-spread piece of clothing among both Afghan males and members of the coalition is the *shemagh* scarf, even if it's not a component of the usual military equipment. Worn by men of all ages, whether on the head or around the shoulders the *shemagh* gained its popularity due to its plethora of uses. It may be used either for protection from sunburn during summer or cold during winter or as face cover to defend one's skin and breath from dust, sand, bugs, dust storms. It may be used even for first aid in some cases to stop bleedings. An overall characteristic of the Afghan clothing is the emphasis on utility/feasibility.

3.10 Territory and personal space

Literally thousands of experiences teach us unconsciously that space communicates. Yet this fact would probably never have been brought to the level of consciousness if it had not been realized that space is organized differently in each culture (Hall, 1959:190).

Even if many Afghans cannot afford big houses while living in this vast, open space environment, they still dream of having plenty of space within their homes. The feeling of overwhelming is experienced by Westerners entering an Afghan house belonging to people in the upper middle class that can afford spacious buildings. This is also because being a collective culture with people profoundly engaged with each other, Afghans avoid as much as possible partitioning a house. Organizing their houses in such a manner, the

entire family lives with the feeling of protection from the outside world.

As a guest in an Afghan house one must wait to be told where to sit, as positioning is not randomly done. The highest important guest in the room is typically placed as far as possible from the door. Placing a guest as far away from the door as possible is a way of honoring him. Children, who are at the lowest level in the Afghan society, are usually placed closer to the door and the elders, who are the most respected people in a group, are always seated farther from the door.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Being a cross-culture territory, Afghanistan is defined by a mixture of traditions where the emphasis is on hierarchy, paternalism and mastery. In today's challenging world, understanding and responding to culturally justified behaviors are critically important to be successful in this territory. In Afghan culture skepticism is the most common feeling that becomes perceptible in local population's attitude when interacting with a non-native due to many years of war. First and foremost, human connections are of paramount significance. Afghans have been a part of that landscape and ruled that harsh corner of the world for more than a thousand years and they will not change during a lifetime. Setting human relations is the only way anything gets done. One must put in a lot of effort in order to build them. No Afghan is going to be touched by military ranks or by physical size. They will either cooperate or not, particularly taking into account whether they see you as a respectful and trustworthy man.

It will take time and effort, but shaping a long-term relationship with the locals, good neighborly references with the Afghans within a specific area could mean an increased security for you and for those who come after you. Little has changed over the centuries for Afghans living in homes of mud and straw, without electricity, running water, schools, clinics or roads. Suspicious with outsiders, the majority remain not simply resistant to outside influence and societal change, but violently opposed to it. Cross-cultural experiences continue to teach lessons long after they happened. While finding oneself within an intercultural context, things happen so fast and in an overwhelming way, that basically there is little or no time to internalize and to reflect upon what you see, hear or think. When everything is back to normal, you're back to a familiar context and think back over the experience, undoubtedly covered signals will be

revealed or assessments and assumptions will prove incorrect.

The authors don't claim that this paper exhausts the approached subject of matter. It's more like a starting point for a further, more intimate research in order to provide a complete image, a guide of good practices useful for those who are to be deployed or for those that feel a call for looking deeper into the culture of a collectivity with many hidden messages transmitted mostly when they use no words. As any other high context cultures, Afghans encode an abundance of meanings that pass them through nonverbal communication. Decoding and correctly interpreting them prove to be an irrefutable advantage because what other better way to approach a stranger rather than confirming him that you are, more or less, familiar with his culture?

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