



Hospitality codes and Social Exchange Theory: The Pashtunwali and tourism in Afghanistan



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Codes of hospitality in the Afghan tribal tradition of the Pashtunwali are explored.
- We offer insight into unknown territory through empirical data from the armed forces.
- A hybrid of Social Exchange Theory amalgamates reciprocal and negotiated exchange.
- We note potential for post-conflict development by harnessing embedded social codes.

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ABSTRACT

The Afghan people are shrouded in rumour, myth and superstition. Drawing upon insights from military personnel, intelligence operatives, journalists and others, this study uses Social Exchange Theory (SET) to frame our understanding of their underpinning cultural code, the *Pashtunwali*. The study contributes both theoretically and empirically: The nature of the *Pashtunwali* highlights that SET cannot adequately frame some cultural exchange practices and a hybrid framework for negotiated and reciprocal exchange is presented. Furthermore, contextually, this is the first study that explores a code of hospitality through a social exchange lens to explore potential tourism development. A framework exists upon which commercial activity can be built without altering beliefs, social dynamics or day to day pursuits. For commercial development to be successful, it must yield similar or greater levels of income to those that currently exist, more importantly, traditions of autonomy and self-dependence will affect employment and training within an emergent tourism industry.

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1. Social exchange and the Pashtuns of Afghanistan

Drawing upon insights from military personnel, intelligence operatives, journalists and other aid workers, we apply Social Exchange Theory (SET) to explore problems with tourism development. The customs and practices of the Pashtun tribe of Afghanistan are enshrined in their cultural code: the *Pashtunwali*. The *Pashtunwali* contains an implicit exchange based on three tenets: honour (*nang*), revenge (*badal*) and hospitality (*melmastia*), none of which is economically driven. Codes of hospitality (O'Gorman, 2009, 2010b) highlight both possibilities and problems for tourism development as part of the regeneration of war-torn regions. In Nepal, for example McMillan, O'Gorman and MacLaren

(2011) consider how embedded cultural practices can be commercially orientated. Intermeshed with stereotypes of insurgent terrorism, and either an inhibition or lack of opportunity to improve education and knowledge of Islam and its practice, the perceptions of social and cultural dynamics in the Middle East are somewhat shrouded in rumour and superstition. Understanding cultural practices of hospitality provide opportunities, both theoretically and practically, for tourism development, therefore the potential for the region following conflict is improved.

SET cannot adequately frame some cultural exchange practices thus our theoretical contribution is to offer a hybrid framework for negotiated and reciprocal exchange. The study considers two key research questions, namely: how is social exchange characterised through the *Pashtunwali*? And, does the code preclude the commercialization of Pashtun culture for tourism development? In addressing these the study attempts to extend SET and its framing of cultural practices through the developed hybrid model. Further,

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the consideration of hospitality codes from a more deeply rooted theoretical perspective seeks to extend previous research. Contextually, this is the first study that employs a code of hospitality as its unit of analysis, studied through a social exchange lens to explore potential tourism development.

This paper now divides into four sections. In section one we review the origins and developments of SET in order to articulate a theoretical gap whilst also summarizing previous studies exploring codes of hospitality exchange. There follows a section on data collection methods and analysis. The next section is empirical, where the results espouse the research subjects' difficulty in learning and engaging with the code as it neither appeared to govern a strictly negotiated exchange nor an implicit social phenomenon. In the final section of the paper we draw together the threads of our argument, consider the theoretical limitations of our approach and point to avenues for future research.

1.1. Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory is rooted in sociology and anthropology (Cook & Rice, 2003; Firth, 1967) and has been applied widely in a business context. Frémeaux and Michelson (2011) state that social and business experience has surpassed what they term as the dominant logic of exchange – 'the existential gift' – highlighting that not all giving behaviour is based exclusively on the rationality and logic of reciprocity. Whereas Goss (2008), exploring emotional dynamics within entrepreneurial behaviour, suggests a more emotionally informed understanding could improve business. Finally, Ballinger and Rockman (2010) show how relationships can change between reciprocity-based and non-reciprocity-based forms through the course of one or a short sequence of exchanges.

SET offers a framework which may illustrate how individuals are contingent upon rewarding actions from others (Emerson, 1976). At its theoretical core is an assumption that all social life can be treated as an exchange of tangible and intangible rewards and resources between actors (Homans, 1961; Zafirovski, 2005); based on the premise that "all relationships have give and take" (Kaynak & Marandu, 2006, p. 229). Though different perspectives on SET have emerged, the approach primarily involves a series of interactions that engender social obligations (Emerson, 1976).

The most apparent distinction within social exchange is between reciprocal and negotiated exchange (Blau, 1964; Levi-Strauss, 1969). Through reciprocal exchange actors' contributions are separately performed, non-negotiated and initiated by performing beneficial acts for another (such as giving assistance or hospitality) for example, without knowing whether or to what extent others will reciprocate (Frémeaux & Michelson, 2011; Molm, Peterson, & Takahashi, 2003); even though such exchanges may carry social obligations and expectations. Reciprocal exchange is understood as devoid of explicit bargaining (Molm, 2003) and actors' actions are contingent upon other actors' behaviour; this process is likely to be continuous and once in motion each consequence can create self-reinforcing cycles of behaviour (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Reciprocal exchange is considered to be the dominant theoretical lens in the analysis of social relations (Frémeaux & Michelson, 2011) and a range of studies have empirically examined it. Blau (1964) proposed the very objective of exchange theory was to explain social life through analysing the reciprocal processes composing exchange. Mauss' early concern was to show that social exchange in tribal societies took the form of reciprocal gifts, rather than economic transactions (Heath, 1976).

Negotiated exchange is different, however, as exchange aligns with joint arrangements in which both parties seek explicit agreement on the terms of the exchange (Molm et al., 2003) and thus each partner's benefits and costs are of measured value. Most

exchange theorists maintain that exchange takes place if actors believe social exchange(s) provides them with greater utility than other current options as people establish and continue social exchange on the basis of mutual advantage (Zafirovski, 2005, p. 3). However, actors need not necessarily be better off than they were before as alternatives open to exchangers will determine how the rate of exchange falls (Uehara, 1990). Flynn (2005) suggests the goals for actors involved in negotiated exchange are different from those involved in other forms as they focus on the tangible benefits they may gain from participating, rather than the social rewards that may arise. Here, terms of exchange are often explicit as the exchange of benefits can be both immediate and direct (Malhotra & Murnighan, 2002). Furthermore, Flynn (2005) provides an example of generalised exchange, where reciprocity is indirect and generalised where exchange stipulates repayment of kind deeds, but not necessarily by the original recipient or to the original giver (Yamagishi & Cook, 1993; as cited in Flynn, 2005, p.740).

SET is established in tourism research. Wang and Pfister (2008) studied a small rural village examining residents' perceptions of the benefits from tourism. They suggest researchers interested in personal benefits through social exchange have focused on personal income and tax revenue, amongst other areas, whilst research concerning non-economic value domains alternatively may be anchored in social, aesthetic, and less tangible matters. Kwon and Vogt (2010) on the other hand, analyse attitudes and opinions of local residents in relation to place marketing and incorporate a number of theories including social exchange in their study. They note how a range of authors have developed models focussing on residents' perceptions and attitudes relating to tourism by using social exchange as a theoretical basis, including that of Long, Perdue, & Allen (1990), whose work may be regarded as amongst the most important in the field in terms of reference and attempts at development (e.g. Ap & Crompton, 1993; McGehee & Andereck, 2004).

SET has been commonly used to consider the attitudes and perceptions towards tourism, for example, the effects of tourism impacts on local support (Yoon, Gursoy, & Chen, 2001) and attitude (Getz, 1994), feelings about casino development (Lee, Kim, & Kang, 2003) and even attitudes to sex workers (Ryan & Kinder, 1996). Analysing several rural areas, Látková and Vogt (in press) argue for the suitability of SET in gleaning perceptions and attitudes towards tourism development, particularly in its ability to suggest that individuals are likely to participate in exchange if the perceived benefits exceed the costs. In effect, it supports the presumption that a person will seek to maximise profit in social situations (Chadwick-Jones, 1976) whilst guided by cost-benefit considerations (Molm, 1990).

1.2. Codes of hospitality

Hospitality codes are an ancient phenomenon dating back to at least Hammurabi of Mesopotamia (circa 1850 BC) (O'Gorman, 2010a). However, they are more commonly recorded in the Homeric writings and in Classical Greece and Rome (O'Gorman, 2009, 2010b), for example, Odysseus constantly searches for a hospitable reception. Similarly, Latin poetry is also underpinned by strong codes of hospitality. These however are not exclusive to Classical Antiquity, as Kant (1780/1998) advocates the individual right to shelter in any country for a limited period of time. This was codified in French national hospitality during the revolution when Saint-Just in the *Essai de Constitution* stated:

"The French people declares itself to be the friend of all peoples; it will religiously respect treaties and flags; it offers asylum in its harbours to ships from all over the world; it offers asylum to

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