PASHTUN

PASHTUN PEOPLE CLUSTER - PROLEGOMENA

A. Pashtun, Northern.

- 1. There should be a division within JP's "Pashtun, Northern" category between "Afghan" dialect Pashto (referred to as "Pashto, Eastern Afghan" or "Eastern Jalalabad Pashto"), and "Pakistani" dialect Pashto (referred to as "Yusufzai", also known as "Peshawari Pashto").
 - a. Pashto, Yusufzai (centered in Peshawar, Pak.)
 - b. Pashto, Eastern Afghan (centered in Jalalabad, Afg.)
- 2. The differences are partly lexical and dialectical, but increasingly (over the last 25 years) have been heightened by political and prejudice barriers between the two countries. Two separate Bible translations are in progress. The geographical "center" for the dialects are Jalalabad (Nangarhar Province, eastern Afghanistan) and Peshawar (northwest Khyber Pakhtunkhwa [KP] Province). Eastern Afghan Pashto is becoming a prestige dialect and is associated with "Standard" Pashto, legitimized in the capital of Kabul, and spoken on radio, TV and in schools.
- 3. From a CPM perspective, a "movement" flow will likely be affected by the border. From a media perspective, resources developed in one dialect freely flow to the others: there is no barrier to understanding, and this affects strategies used by all media producers in the region. So, again, the distinctions are only significant depending on the particular "lens" used, and the strategies and objectives one is pursuing.

B. Pashtun, Southern

- 1. The Pashto spoken in the south of Afghanistan, and cross-border in Baluchistan Province, is sometimes called "soft Pashto", in contrast with so-called "hard Pakhto" spoken in the north. The distinction involves several phonemes; most prominently, the "kh" becomes "sh" in the south, viz. "Pakhto" becomes "Pashto."
 - a. Pashto, Southern (centered in Kandahar, Afghanistan)
- 2. Geographically, Pashtun, Southern can be viewed as centered in Kandahar, Afghanistan. The language region extends cross-border to northwestern Baluchistan province in Pakistan, with its capital Quetta. There is significant lexical overlap between the Pashto spoken on both

- sides of the border, though political and prejudice barriers between the countries still apply.
- 3. A separate Bible translation in Southern Pashto is envisioned, but not yet in progress.

C. Pashto, Middle Afghan

- 1. Another regional type of Pashto spoken in the central provinces of Paktia, Wardak, and Paktika has been labeled "Pashto, Middle Afghan / Ghilzay."
- 2. This dialect is so different as to comprise a fourth major Pashto dialect, according to some linguists and a recent linguistic survey. It is sometimes called "Ghilzay" (Ghilji) Pashto, as it is associated with the semi-nomadic Ghilzay tribal groups and confederacy, sometimes derisively referred to as "Kuchis."
 - a. Pashto, Middle Afghan / Ghilzay (central provinces of Paktia, Wardak, Paktika)
- D. Linguistic Summary: Four Major Types of Pashto (Language)
 - a. Pashto, Eastern Afghan (centered in Jalalabad, Afg.)
 - b. Pashto, Yusufzai (centered in Peshawar, Pak.)
 - c. Pashto, Southern (centered in Kandahar, Afghanistan)
 - d. Pashto, Middle Afghan / Ghilzay (central provinces of Paktia, Wardak, Paktika)

E. Summary: Major Pashtun Peoples

- 1. From an emic cultural (insider), one Afghan Pashtun summarized the "general/popular impression of Afghan Pashtuns about what are the 'big' groups (not tribal) and how they perceive themselves." (NB: This is from an Afghan perspective; Pakistani Pashtuns may use different terms, but these categories are likely valid and most useful for an introduction.)
- 2. In Afghanistan there are 3 main Pashto groups:
 - a. **Eastern Afghan Pashtuns**, centered in Nangahar province, includes provinces from Baghlan to Paktika. (That includes some of the more unique dialects found in Khost along the Eastern border with Pakistan).
 - b. **Southern Afghan Pashtuns**, centered in Kandahar, includes all the provinces from Nimroz Daykondi to Zabol; Ghazni province is divided between Southern and Central Pashtuns.
 - c. **Central / Mixed Pashtuns,** centered in Kabul and where Standard/ Educated Afghan Pashto is becoming used in print and media. Central Afghan Pashto would include the provinces around Kabul, including Parwan, Kapisa, Logar, Wardak.
- 3. In Pakistan, there are at least main Pashto groups:

- a. **Northern Pakistani Pashtuns**, centered in Peshawar in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, includes Swat in the north. Northern Pashtuns are similar to, but distinct from, Eastern Afghan Pashtuns, the more so due to socio-political, geographical and cultural barriers.
- b. **Southern Pakistani Pashtuns**, centered in the city of Quetta, and Baluchistan province. Southern Pakistani Pashtuns have greater similarity in language with Southern Afghan Pashtuns, than Northern Pakistani Pashtuns have with either Eastern or Central Afghan Pashtuns.
- c. **Central Pakistani Pashtuns,** centered in Waziristan, among the Wazir, Mahsud, and other tribes in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) along the mountainous central border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- 4. Expert workers suggest these are the minimum groups that are necessary. Note that for this reason the "Jesus" Film was done for 3 main groups: Eastern Afghan Pashto, Southern Pashto [covering both Southern Afghan and Southern Pakistani], Northern Pakistani Pashto. (To date the film is not available in Central Pashto, though one or another of the other versions is understandable to them.)

1. INTRODUCTION

The 50 million Pashtun (also spelled Pushtun, Pashtun, Pashtoon, and Pathan) have been called the largest Muslim tribal society in the world. There are an estimated 350 separate Pashtun tribes, which can be divided into four major confederacies or groups of tribes with a common ancestry or location. Some tribes, like the Shinwari and Mohmand, are cross-border tribes. Affiliated tribes may share similar dialects. Each Pashtun, then, is a member of a tribe, which is a part of a confederacy, within the larger Pashtun ethnic group.

Pashtuns live primarily in Afghanistan (13 million) and Pakistan (29 million), including at least 2 million in Peshawar, the provincial capital of KP, and 5 million in the mega-city of Karachi, Pakistan—the largest concentration. There is also a significant Pashtun diaspora (Afghan and Pakistani) in the Arab Gulf (UAE) and many Western countries.

Spread over a vast geographical area and riven by socio-economic, political, tribal and linguistic (dialectical) differences, Pashtuns nevertheless share a unique sense of ethnic identity. Pashtun identity is based on four core elements: Heritage (descent from a common ancestor); Islam (99.9% Muslim); the Pashtunwali Code of Honor ("The Way of the Pashtun"); and to some extent, Language (Pakhtu or Pashto). Taken together, their common lineage, Islamic faith and honor code provide Pashtuns with a strong sense of identity and ethnic loyalty.

Pashtuns often feature in news bulletins because of their links with the Taliban, militancy and conservative Islam. Popular literature abounds with stories of oppressed, veiled women, restricted to their homes. The Pashtuns have been stereotyped by outsiders and other people groups as fierce warriors, unruly, uncouth, whose lack of education is expressed in their treatment of women and their and violence to anyone who insults their honor and their faith. Pashtuns are proud of their independence and their fame as skilled fighters. However, many would consider themselves to be peacemakers, as their *jirga* (council of elders) system and other customs facilitate peace between warring factions on a local, as well as national, level. A Pashtun will describe himself as a protector of women and "a man of peace, until my honor is touched."

Among the Pashtun, personal and corporate honor is held in the highest esteem. The Pashtuns' honor is enshrined in a code of conduct called *Pashtunwali* ("the way of the Pashtuns"). The honor code covers every area of social behavior for men, women, and children.

The core value of *Pashtunwali* is *ghairat*, a notion of "honor" in which autonomy, pride, zeal, courage, manliness, self-definition, and self-determination are all wrapped up together—the ethos or spirit of a true Pashtun! Women are the holders of honor, which they express through loyalty and modesty. This strong sense of identity leads many Pashtuns to say that they are Pashtun first and Muslims second. This is especially true when there is a conflict between what religion requires and what they need to do as a Pashtun when honor is challenged. In the wisdom of their own Pashto proverbs, "A true

Pashtun says, May I lose my faith, but may I never lose my honor!" "A Pashtun will throw himself in the fire (even the fire of hell!) for the sake of his honor!" Thus, both Islam and honor are moral authorities for behavior, decision-making, and daily life.

There have been efforts to reach the Pashtun since 1818, when William Carey translated parts of the Old Testament into Pakhto, based on interaction with Pashtun traders who caravanned (and settled) across north India and beyond. In South Asia, the name "Pashtun/Pakhtun" was anglicized to "Pathan"—as immortalized in Rudyard Kipling's novels and British colonial history. Today, the 11 million Pashtun in India, Bangladesh, and throughout South Asia are often referred to as "Pathan."

The first intentional mission to the Pashtun was launched by the Church Missionary Society in Peshawar, Pakistan (then North West India) in 1853. This was followed by over 150 years of faithful witness, through mission hospitals, schools, colleges, literature, friendship evangelism, and other forms of witness by national Pakistani (Punjabi) Christians and expatriate missionaries. Despite this record, and the slow but growing number of scattered Pashtun believers, a vibrant, indigenous, disciple-making movement has yet to take root and spread.

The blood of martyrs, their sacrifice, prayers and tears, cry out, "How long, O Lord?" Pray for Pashtun from every tribe to sit at table with Christ in His Kingdom!

2. WHAT ARE THEIR LIVES LIKE?

A. **Honor**. Honor (and conversely, shame) refers not to personal feelings or a psychological state, but to one's public *reputation* in the eyes of others. In a collectivistic society like the Pashtun, where community is emphasized over individualism, a person's identity is defined by his/her group. All relationships are interpreted in terms of honor. The idiomatic phrase, *"What will/might people say?"* is not a trivial question, but a powerful influence on behavior! All behaviors are structured to avoid shame and to maintain/increase honor. This is because individual actions can affect not only one's own honor, but that of the group, family or tribe! It also shapes decisions at local and pr

Everything one does is a matter of honor. Where you sit at a meal, who you marry, where you work, how you make decisions or spend money, all are affected by social expectations, and in turn affect one's reputation (honor). Depending on the local context (village or urban, regional or western diaspora), idiomatic Pashtun values and lifestyles may vary. Although the practice of *Pashtunwali* may be decreasing among urban Pashtuns, it remains a unifying theme in the society.

Honor can *ascribed* (by birth or ancestry), *achieved* (by virtuous acts, e.g. of strength or oratory), and *won or lost* (by responses to challenge). Honor can be gained through *the honorable use of goods* (acts of generosity, hospitality, refuge); *the honorable conduct of public affairs* (council of elders; acts of violence, courage,

- strength); the honorable conduct of domestic affairs (by men through the protection of the family's women; marrying within the group; and by women in their submission within a patriarchal family structure).
- B. Language. Pashto is a complex language. Traditionally, linguists have listed two Pashto languages: Northern Pashto and Southern Pashto, based mainly on differences in pronunciation of certain groups of sounds. Actually, there are many varieties of the one language Pashto. These multiple dialects differ according to tribe and geographical region, urban and rural. Even women, who have less interaction with outsiders and other language groups, are said to speak a distinctive variety of Pashto!
- C. **Education**. In Afghanistan, the overall literacy rate is 31%—2/3 are uneducated (43% of adult males are literate). Pashtuns, however, have a lower literacy rate than other ethnic groups. Urbanized Pashtuns (e.g. living in cities like Kabul or Mazar-i-Sharif) are often literate in the other official language Dari (an Afghan dialect of Persian). The same is true in Pakistan, where Pashtuns in cities like Peshawar or Karachi are literate in the national language Urdu, which is the primary language of education. Illiteracy among women is significantly higher. Girls education, especially in rural areas, is a contested and volatile social issue. However, the overall literacy rate for the whole of Pakistan is declining; from 60% to 58% in 2018. Much of the education occurs in madras schools; and the traditional resistance to female education continues.

Pashto has a rich literary history stretching back four centuries. The warrior-philosopher-poet Khushal Khan Khattak (1613-1689) and Sufi (mystic) poet Abdur Rahman Baba (1653-1715) are loved, learned, and quoted today. Modern and contemporary poets (e.g. Ghani Khan) are likewise celebrated. Pashto is also rich in oral literature and folkloric forms, including proverbs, folk songs/poetry, stories, dance, and music.

- D. **Media**. Over 93% of the homes in Pashtun-majority provinces have radios, and they are a chief source of information and entertainment. At least 34% of homes have televisions. Cellular technology and mobile phones are increasing access to information and transforming the countries. Pakistan is one of the fastest growing Asian markets for smartphones, especially for youth, who comprise over half of the population, and in urban areas.
- E. **Women**. The lives of Pashtun women differ significantly from those of men, especially in rural areas. For a woman, honor is equated with *modesty*. The notion of modesty involves far more than dress and includes the total demeanor of a woman and her submission to the men (father, husband, brothers) in her family. In rural areas, women are restricted to the home, a domestic joint-family compound that includes sons and their families. Women's rights are restricted, as is their access to healthcare, education, and opportunities outside the home and family. In urban areas, Pashtun women have greater freedom and opportunities for education,

professions (doctors, teachers), service (government and NGO), and are exploring new opportunities as engineers, journalists, and politicians. However, in any and all contexts, women are constrained by the deeply held values of the code of conduct centered around honor. Women are both the weakest link, and most important symbol, of the honor of any Pashtun man, family, and tribe.

3. WHAT ARE THEIR BELIEFS?

- A. Most Pashtuns are Sunni Muslims. They affirm the 6 core beliefs common to all Muslims, viz. the Oneness of God, the Angels of God, the Prophets of God, the Books of God, the Decrees of God, and the Judgment of God. Children learn to memorize the Qur'an in Arabic in schools, with or without comprehension, since like 80% of the Muslim world, Pashtuns are not native Arabic speakers.
- B. Right religious practice (orthopraxy) tends to be more important than right belief (orthodoxy). Pashtuns are expected to follow the five "pillars" or acts of worship required of a devout Muslim: Confession of faith (*shahada*, "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah"); Ritual prayer (*salat*) five times a day; Fasting (*saum*, during the month of Ramadan); Almsgiving (*zakat*); and Pilgrimage (*hajj*, once in the lifetime of an able Muslim).
- C. Actual religious practice and piety vary according to context. As in other parts of the Muslim world, some Pashtuns are cultural Muslims; others are secular, or non-practicing; still others identify with the mystical tradition of Islam. Pashtuns vary in the way they negotiate the moral authority of Islam, the expectations of family and community, and the demands and challenges of life as a person of faith and honor.

4. WHAT ARE THEIR NEEDS?

- A. Pashtuns aspire to have their voices heard amidst the multitude of voices within multiethnic nation-states like Afghanistan and Pakistan. Honor, expressed as Pashtun nationalism, at times finds a voice in civil protest that brings both men and women onto the streets (e.g. the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement led by Mansoor Pashteen in Pakistan).
- B. Many Pashtun in Afghanistan and tribal borderlands of Pakistan have been traumatized by over four decades of war and death, political instability, internal displacement, and on-going violence.
- C. Education and literacy, particularly in rural areas and among women, are critical needs, as is access to healthcare, clean water, and employment.
- D. Spiritually, Pashtuns fear the influence of demons and evil spirits (*jinn*), and seek protection by visiting the shrines of Muslim saints (*pirs*), through amulets and charms, astrology, and fortune telling. Driven by felt needs—healing, desire for a

son, relief from an abusive spouse—women especially turn to folk practices to ward off evil and seek God's favor.

5. PRAYER POINTS

- A. *Media*. Pray for the on-going production and distribution of all forms of media in the Pashto language, including radio, literature, videos, music, movies, websites, and social media. The demand and response have increased!
- B. *Scripture*. Pray for Bible translations in progress in different Pashto dialects!
- C. *Laborers*. Ask God to anoint, and grant wisdom, favor and fruitfulness to workers and agencies focused on the Pashtun! Pray for more international and national workers—in education, business, healthcare, development, and other professional areas—to serve among the Pashtun people wherever they are found.
- D. *Believers*. No one knows how many Pashtuns are following Jesus. Most believers are scattered and in danger. Ask God to encourage and protect new believers and to empower their lives and witness!
- E. *Fruit*. Seeds of the Gospel have been sown widely. Ask God's Spirit to soften hearts to the truth of the Gospel, to confirm the Word with signs following, and to reveal Christ to the minds and hearts of Pashtun!
- F. *Women*. Most Pashtun women are troubled by fears and have deep needs. Ask God to touch their hearts, especially through radio and television, and to reveal the love of Christ to them.
- G. *Diaspora*. Pray for Pashtun immigrants and asylum seekers in Europe and North America, that God would sovereignly open their hearts—through the Word, the miraculous, and the lives of Christians—to the love and truth of Jesus Christ!

6. AFGHANISTAN

- A. The Pashtun are the largest people group among Afghanistan's 76 peoples (14 government recognized ethnicities) and 33.4 million population (2016). Afghan Pashtun can be divided into two major dialects: Pashtun, Northern (6.47 million), and Pashtun, Southern (6.82 million); some analysts include a third "middle" dialect spoken in central eastern provinces like Paktia and Khost. More significant than dialectical differences, however, a Pashtun's primary loyalty is to his particular social group (tribe or sub-tribe).
- B. Many Pashtuns of all regions and tribes live as transplanted minorities mixed among the Tajiks throughout the capital city and other parts of Afghanistan. These majority Dari (Afghan Persian) speakers influence their tribal and regional Pashto varieties, and urban Pashtun men tend to be fluent (educated and literate) in Dari as well.

- There are also Pashtun who, in the last 100+ years, who were forcibly moved to Balkh and Herat (northern and western Afghanistan), though these are not traditional Pashtun lands.
- C. The Pashtun were the traditional rulers of Afghanistan for over 250 years; from founding of the country in 1747 to 1973, Pashtun kings and emirs ruled. Since the overthrow of the Afghan king, communist coup, and Soviet invasion in the 1970s, Afghanistan has been in a state of constant conflict. In the 1970's and 1980's, the Pakistan-Afghanistan borderlands were the launchpad for *mujahideen* ("freedom fighters") who, with Western, Saudi, and global support, resisted and overthrew the communist regime. The cost was high: Over 3.5 million refugees (at that time, the largest refugee population in the world) settled into hundreds of refugee camps in border provinces of Iran and Pakistan; one-third of the population was displaced.
- D. During the 1990's, Pashtun tribal areas and thousands of Arab-funded *madrassas* (religious schools) throughout Pakistan, became the seedbed for the rise of the Taliban movement. Driven by a combination of religious zeal and Pashtun nationalism, and fueled by Arab money, the "Taliban" (a term for "religious students") imposed a harsh, hyper-conservative (Wahabi) version of Islam on the country. The Taliban relationship with Al Qaeda and its militant, anti-western ideology led to the tragedy of the 9/11 attacks on New York City and Washington, DC. The subsequent US and NATO invasion in 2001 overthrew the Taliban and began a process of reconstruction and development under an elected government.
- E. Unfortunately, attempts toward a peace accord and durable central government have, to date, been unsuccessful. Armed opposition continues, especially from Pashtun groups in the east and south of the country. Instability, endemic corruption, and on-going violence have led to widespread disillusionment—and the migration of tens of thousands of Afghans (mainly young men) seeking jobs and opportunity in Europe and the West. Despite rebuilding and some outward signs of economic development, life is difficult for the average Afghan. As one writer puts it, "Frustration has replaced hope."
- F. Afghanistan is considered one of the most hostile countries in the world to Christian activity, freedom of belief, worship, and expression. Among the Pashtun in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, conservative Islam, tribal traditions, state and social opposition, and the hostility of family, combine to resist the growth of Christian faith. Even among Pashtun in the Diaspora, fear—of family, other Afghans, rejection, loss of honor, and reprisal—inhibits response. Nevertheless, this disillusionment and dispersal represents a *kairos* moment—a Divinely ordained time of opportunity for Pashtun to hear and respond to a message of hope, forgiveness, healing and love, found only in Jesus Christ.

7. PAKISTAN

- A. The majority of Pashtun (70%) live in Pakistan, where they constitute 13% of that country's population. They are concentrated mainly in the northern and western provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan. The Durand Line (the border established under British colonial rule) divides traditional Pashtun homelands in Afghanistan and present-day Pakistan. However, due to tribal, linguistic, social and economic ties, the border is porous, and volatile—fertile ground for the drug trade (over 90% of the world's opium comes from Afghanistan), smuggling, and cross-border militancy.
- B. The largest concentrations of Pashtuns live in the cities of Peshawar (2 million) and Karachi (5 million), Pakistan's largest city (est. pop. 18 million). Pashtun, and members of every ethnic group in Pakistan (and Afghanistan), are attracted to these cities by the prospect of jobs, and/or transit to and employment in the nearby Arab Gulf.
- C. As in Afghanistan, many Pakistani Pashtuns of all regions and tribes live as transplanted minorities mixed among Punjabis and other groups throughout Pakistan, including the capital city of Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Karachi. Here the national language of Urdu influences their tribal and regional Pashto varieties, as Urdu words are borrowed and incorporated in local Pashto. Pakistani Pashtuns tend to be fluent in Urdu as well and educated Pashtun (especially among the younger generation) may be more literate in Urdu than Pashto.
- D. While Pashtun may live and work in the city or abroad, connections to "home" are maintained. There is a steady flow of communication (phone, text, social media), money, and travel back to their families in the villages and provinces. These social and economic ties are also potential bridges for Good News to travel to peoples and places unreachable through other means.
- E. The social makeup of Pakistan provides another source of hope. Due to its colonial past under the British, post-independence (1947) Pakistan has enjoyed a more diverse and relatively open society compared to Afghanistan, however the past decade has brought anti-Western sentiments to the fore, resulting in attacks on perceived Western targets, be they Mala Yusufzai and her schoolgirl friends, or Christians meeting in a park on Easter Sunday. Pakistan's colonial past gives a place for Christians (approx. 2% of the population) and churches. Although most Pakistani Christians are ethnically Punjabi, and from a former low-caste background, some have overcome social, language and prejudice barriers to reach out in love to their Muslim neighbors.
- F. Foreigners are welcome in Pakistan. Although anti-Western and anti-American sentiment has increased over the last 20 years, doors are still open for those who aspire to serve and work for the betterment of the country and its peoples. there are increasing numbers of Korean, Chinese, and other Asians. Pakistan offers many

opportunities for investment, learning, business and service. Many expatriates have enjoyed the renowned hospitality and friendship of Pashtuns and other Pakistani peoples.

8. DIASPORA—UAE, EUROPE, NORTH AMERICA

- A. Tens of thousands of Pashtun from Pakistan and Afghanistan have emigrated, sought asylum, or found employment in the Arab Gulf, countries throughout Europe, and in North America.
- B. The Arab states of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Oman primarily have attracted Pashtuns seeking employment. In the seven "emirates" or city-states of the UAE along the eastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula (Abu Dhabi [the largest], Dubai, Sharjah, Umm al-Qaiwain, Fujairah, Ajman and Ra's al-Khaimah), for example, Pashtuns work as drivers, security guards, and laborers in construction and the oil fields. Earning far more than they could in their villages, these "guest workers" send home much-needed funds to support their families—whom they may visit for only a couple weeks each year. Other Pashtun, including those in Al Ain, a city on the border with Oman, have established families and now live year-round in the UAE.
- C. Due to instability and lack of economic opportunity in Afghanistan, many Afghans, including Pashtun, have joined the migrant trail to Europe. The difficult journey takes them through Iran to Turkey, across the Mediterranean Sea to Greece or Italy, or by land through southeastern Europe, then on to Germany, France, the UK, or Scandinavia. At the height of the European migrant crisis that began in 2015, about 20% of these asylum seekers and economic migrants were from Afghanistan. The vast majority were adult males traveling alone (58%) or unaccompanied minors (25%, under 18 years old).

9. PATHAN, PASHTUN OF INDIA, BANGLADESH, SOUTH ASIA [**TO BE CONTINUED]

10. SOURCES

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- G. [See also PAN Reading and Resource List]