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„We Are Here to Stay“

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Pashtun Migrants in the Northern Areas of Pakistan

Photographs by Silvia Delogu



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Preface

Economically motivated migration of Pashto speakers from their original areas of settlement – situated on both sides of the present Pakistani-Afghan border (Durand Line) – to other regions of the Indian Subcontinent is an age-old phenomenon.¹ Its historical roots can be traced back to pre-Mughal times, when the loyal services of Pathan warriors were in high demand with the rulers in Delhi and the kingdoms further to the south. Nowadays larger Pakistani cities like Lahore, Quetta and especially Karachi pay host to hundreds of thousands of Pashtuns, working in all conceivable professions and trades. The majority of Pashto speakers came to these places over the last 20 to 30 years, some of them settling with their families, others migrating on a purely temporary basis. But Pashtun migration is far from limited to the big cities alone. With an ever increasing pace it is spreading practically all over the country. In fact, it is so prevalent that it would hardly be an exaggeration to state that there is not a single town left in Pakistan without its own Pathan trader, cobbler or teashop owner.²

What is true for the Pakistani lowlands, more and more also applies for the Karakoram high mountain region known under the name of Northern Areas. Pashtuns are relatively new to these places and represent only a small fraction of the area's total population. But their economic strength and growing social influence has already ensured them their very own, distinctive position within the ethno-linguistic groups present in this remote part of the country.³

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- 1 In 1998 Pashtuns in Pakistan were estimated to comprise over 15% of the population, i.e. ca. 25 million people (Population Census Organisation). For Afghanistan there are no reliable recent numbers; before the beginning of the civil war in 1979 Pashto was the mother tongue of ca. 50% of the country's inhabitants (Skjærvø, p. 384). Detailed general information on Pashtun history and culture can be found in Caroe 1958.
 - 2 According to Pakistan's Population Census Organisation in 1998 more than one million people originating from predominantly Pashto-speaking areas (NWFP and FATA) were living in the Provinces of Punjab, Sindh and Baluchistan.
 - 3 The Pashto speakers living in the Northern Areas during the time of my research belonged to a variety of tribal, ethnic and social backgrounds and did not

The first researcher to recognise and systematically describe Pashtun migrants as an integral part of the Northern Area's population set-up was Hermann Kreutzmann, who also drew my attention to this subject. Later, in the framework of his investigation into the bazaar economies of Gilgit and Baltistan A. Dittmann (1995, 1997a, 1997b, 1998) published data pertaining to the economic role of Pashtun traders in the region. M. Sökefeld dealt with Pashtun migration while looking into the issue of group identity in Northern Pakistan (1997, 1998a), and devoted a separate article to popular stereotypes associated with the Pathans in Gilgit (1998b). And, last but not least, E. Bauer (1998) provided a short analysis of the migrants' language and socio-linguistic environment.

There are also a number of earlier works about the region (e.g. Bidulph 1880, Faggi; Ginestri 1977, Staley 1966, 1969) which contain notes on Pashtun presence in the Karakoram. However, there is no separate publication dealing with this subject in a more comprehensive way. The present book attempts to fill this gap by offering the reader an insight into some characteristic historical, economic and language-related aspects of Pashtun migration in the Northern Areas.⁴ For this purpose the work is divided into four interconnected parts.

Part one gives an introduction into the geographic and socio-linguistic setting, including a short reference to Pashtun presence in Chitral and Kohistan.

Part two looks at the people as such, describing when and for what reason they arrived at their present place of living and what they were doing there in the mid 1990s. The aim of this chapter is to connect Pashtun migration with the socio-economic development of the area. The time-

perceive themselves as a homogeneous community. The only feature linking all of them was their common mother tongue, by the virtue of which most representatives of the area's other ethno-linguistic communities saw them as one group. This language-centred outside perception is also taken as the basis for the present study. Subsequently, the terms 'Pashto speaker(s)', 'Pashtun(s)' and 'Pathan(s)' are used as full synonyms and applied to every person who in the mid 1990s spoke Pashto as his or her mother tongue.

4 The forerunners of this book are two separate articles published by the author (2001, 2005) in Garnik Asatrian's "Iran and Caucasus".

frame under consideration is the last 150 years, which, in accordance with the regional political milestones, is divided into pre-colonial, colonial and post-partition periods. In this overall context special attention is given to the decades following the opening of the Karakoram Highway.

Part three looks into the migrants' language situation, investigating their ways of communicating with each other and with members of their host communities. Besides describing how Pashto speakers in the Northern Areas handled the complexities of cross-dialectal communication, the chapter also covers their attitudes towards Urdu and local languages, and attempts to find an answer to the question why some migrant households were prone to change their original mother tongue while others were not.

Part four proposes a glimpse into the future, trying to define in which way the most characteristic trends linked to Pashtun migration to the area in the mid 1990s could develop over the coming decades.

An annex contains a map of the wider region as well as a table showing the status of Pashto and local languages among permanent Pathan migrants.

The actual study is supplemented by and interwoven with a number of childhood memories and life stories which the people I had the chance to interview in the field chose to share with me. Because all those interviewed were just ordinary people leading ordinary lives – traders, cobblers, tea boys, farmers and porters – one would not expect their reminiscences to include anything of extraordinary importance. Nevertheless, or, maybe exactly because of that, it was felt that quoting these simple stories would not only give a voice to the Pashtun migrants themselves but also involve the reader in the human dimension of the original research. For the same reason the text is accompanied by a series of portraits, photographs taken by my wife, Silvia Delogu, during our years in the Northern Areas.

Besides making use of written accounts the present study draws heavily on oral sources. The material was collected by me from people in the Northern Areas – both Pashtun migrants and representatives of other

ethno-linguistic groups – during field work in the years 1993 to 1997.⁵ Since the bulk of the data was obtained through direct inquiry, it may be helpful to provide an insight into the methodology applied. Most of the field work I conducted directly in Pashto; for Urdu and Shina the help of a local interpreter was employed. My main aim was to interview as many informants as possible looking for answers to sets of predefined questions. All these interviews were held in the form of casual conversations, during which I never used a questionnaire and always attempted to avoid the impression of somebody just interested in short and quick information. This somewhat indirect method was chosen, because previous experience had shown that straightforward inquiry could easily provoke misunderstandings and generate a negative attitude towards my work, thus influencing the reliability of the answers provided. For the same reasons I also very soon gave up my initial attempts to tape the conversations.

For the interviews two different sets of questions were used. The first set, which I employed with both Pashto and (to some extent) non-Pashto speakers, was connected to the personal and family history of the communication partners. Set two, which targeted only Pashtuns – normally the same persons as set one – aimed at finding out about the interviewee's language situation.

Besides looking for basic information regarding name, ethnic and tribal affiliation, religion, occupation, place of living and marital status I was also interested in a number of more complex issues like the origins of the person's forefathers, his level of mother tongue education, his personal linguistic abilities and preferences, the language use patterns within his household, with friends and neighbours, his relationship with representat-

5 From 1993 to 1995 my research was financed by the German Research Council (DFG) and integrated into the framework of the German-Pakistani Culture Area Karakoram (CAK) Project. Herewith I would like to take the opportunity to thank my then project supervisor Prof. Dr. Manfred Lorenz and my colleagues in the field Hermann Kreutzmann, Jens-Peter Jakobsen, Reinhard Fischer, Wolfgang Holzwarth and Erhard Bauer for their valuable help and advice. I would also like to express my gratitude to the German Research Council for its generous support.



Abdul Qayyum, Shaban Ali and the author (right) during an interview

ives of other ethno-linguistic groups. Requesting more than just superficial statements on these topics, which were for many speakers rather sensitive, was preconditioned on a relationship of mutual trust, which, in the given context, could normally only be established through repeated meetings and an open exchange of thoughts. It was mainly through the cultivation of such individual contacts, some of which resulted in personal friendships, that I was enabled to participate in a number of aspects of the migrants' life and substantiate the received statements with my own observations.

But, of course, the applied method also had its disadvantages. First of all, it was very time consuming, a fact which made itself specially felt in situations when a particular interviewee could not be seen on more than one occasion. And second, it did not give space for the collection of uninterrupted Pashto texts, with the consequence that all life stories quoted in this study are post-interview compilations rather than translations from directly recorded material.

An aspect of research, which remained, unfortunately, completely off-limits to me was the work with female informants. The traditional way of

life prevalent among Pashto speakers (not only) in the Northern Areas precludes women from interaction with men not belonging to their family. Therefore, I was in no position to interview them or to confirm statements made on their behalf by male household members. It will, thus, be left to an interested female researcher to augment the present study with the Pashtun women's own perspective.

Finally, I have the pleasant task of extending thanks to those who contributed to the creation of this book.

First of all, I owe enormous gratitude to all my interviewees without whose engagement and goodwill the whole project would have never got off the ground. Besides them, Jelena Charlamowa (Berlin) provided crucial help and great encouragement during the initial stages of the study. Adam Nayyar (Islamabad) shared with me his intimate knowledge of the area and shaped my opinion on many ethnological and socio-linguistic issues. Caroline Taylor (Skopje) and Jason Brown (London) spared valuable time to correct my English, and Darko Jordanov (Geneva) was responsible for a number of helpful editorial comments.

Last, but by no means least, I am deeply indebted to my parents, Paul and Irma Weinreich, my wife, Silvia Delogu, and our daughter, Emily, for supporting me and putting up with me during the seemingly endless time this study was under preparation. I dedicate this book to them.

Part 1