AFGHANISTAN: THE ETHNIC DIMENSION
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Introduction

Afghanistan literally means "Land of the Afghans." In fact, "Afghan" and "Pushtun" were used synonymously by all the peoples and tribes of Afghanistan, at least until 1980, and particularly since the 1950s when Mohammad Daoud's "Pushtunistan" policy strengthened this usage. Once during my periods of field work in Afghanistan (at various instances between 1958 and 1975) I was reprimanded by a nationalist mamur (bureaucrat) for using the term "Afghan" in referring to Pashto-speakers: "All citizens of the country are Afghans!" he said. I shall return to this point.

The term "Afghanistan" is as old as the Afghan-Pushtun, 240-year rule over the country, which in the early decades of the empire extended over major parts of what is now Pakistan: Baluchistan, parts of Sindh, the North-West Frontier Province, and the Northern Areas. Even typically Sindhi flintlocks of the 18th and early 19th centuries, according to English sources, had an "Afghan" stock.

Pushtun, attracted by the labour market in Sindh, had flocked to this province, especially to Karachi, even before the partition of British India, as did many Baluch. After the
partition in 1947 muhajerin (refugees) from India immigrated to the same areas, and after 1980 the refugee community of some suburban areas of Karachi was again enlarged mainly by Pashto-speaking refugees from Afghanistan.

Refugees from South Asia and from Central Asia were forced to compete at the lowest occupational level in Karachi. Clashes were the unavoidable result—Muslims versus Muslims—in order to earn a living.

But let me try first to analyse some of the important Afghan cultural aspects before coming back to the refugee problem.

Geographical Dimension

Afghanistan has been called the "crossroads of Asia." Its spine, running from northeast to southwest, is the Hindukush; the flatlands in the north are part of Turkestan; but the whole of it is also Aryana—the land of Aryans. Theories on the early history of this area agree that Indo-Aryan migrations from Central Asia across Afghanistan's mountains to the Indian subcontinent occurred about the middle of the second millennium B.C.

The river Oxus, now the Amu Darya, is Afghanistan's border with the Soviet Union today, but historically it was never a rigid line which divided peoples or cultures. There always were close relationships between Cisoxiania and
The Hindukush was a much clearer dividing line, not only between Central and South Asia but also, for instance, between yurt-dwelling and black-tent-dwelling nomads. The Hindukush also diverted the first onslaught of Islam to central Turkestan in the north and to Sindh in the south. The last Kafirs ("unbelievers") of Afghanistan, in the remote eastern mountains of the country, were forcibly converted to Islam only in 1896 (Robertson, 1896; Edelberg and Jones, 1979).

Some passes of the Hindukush, nevertheless, have made possible a considerable trade between South and Central Asia and regions farther to the Far East, not only during the periods of the flourishing Silk Roads. Buddhism had spread along these lines of traffic from India to China long before it reached Tibet. But, as is clearly shown by ethnic and linguistic maps, on the whole the Hindukush was a major dividing line.

**Historical Dimension**

(Gregorian, 1969; Dupree, 1980)

According to what we know, the land of Afghanistan was part of ancient Iran, as opposed to Turan and Hindustan. A full millennium elapsed between the firm establishment of Iranian culture under the Achaemenians (ca. 500 B.C.) and the
arrival of the first Turkic-speaking groups. The Greek interlude did not leave important traces bearing on the contemporary situation. It is the Mongol invasion that is still very much alive in the consciousness of all of Afghanistan's peoples: "If it were not for Chinghiz Khan, it would have been us, the Afghans, to land on the moon first," an educated Afghan stated in 1969. The ethnic map, as I will show later, has been changed considerably as a consequence of the raids of Chinghiz Khan and Timur, between the early 13th and late 14th centuries.

My statement about the Hindukush as a dividing line between Central Asia and the subcontinent to the south is supported best by Afghanistan's history from about 1500 to 1747 A.D.: the north, under the rule of the Turkic Uzbaks, was a part of Central Asia; the west, with the ancient city of Herat, was an integral part of the Iranian empire under the Safawids; whereas the south and the east belonged to the Moghul empire of India.

From my anthropological point of view, the most important changes in Afghanistan under Pushtun rule (since 1747) occurred during the reign of Amir Abdurrahman Khan, during the last fifteen years of the 19th century (Kakar, 1979):

- the settlement of Pushtun in Northern Afghanistan, regarded as "Pushtun colonialism" by the local, non-
Pushtun peoples;

- the suppression of Hazara tribalism in Central Afghanistan, together with the granting of pasture rights to Pushtun nomads in this area;

- the conversion of Kafiristan into Nuristan— the "Land of Light"— by Islamization.

These events were major steps in the general scheme of centralizing the dynasty's rule over Afghanistan and its unruly population.

In my view, international policy up to the end of the Second World War and the following period of "Competitive Coexistence" (Franck, 1960) did not affect the peoples of Afghanistan, except for the milestone of victories over British armies east of Kabul (1842) and at Maiwand near Kandahar (1880): they greatly added to the national self-image, especially of the Pushtun and, to a certain degree, they are the foundation of modern Afghan nationalism. The first effort towards modernizing—Westerners are inclined to speak of "civilizing"—Afghanistan ended in disaster. King Amanullah, "liberal" by our standards, was forced into exile in 1929. The short "revolutionary" interlude under non-Pushtun rule was ended in the same year by Nadir Khan, the father of Afghanistan's last king. He reconquered Kabul for a Pushtun dynasty with the help of tribal levies, mainly from
the southeast, including Mahsud and Wazir of the present Tribal Areas of Pakistan. Old privileges for Pushtun were renewed, and new ones were granted.

The Pushtun grip in the north remained fast, despite tens of thousands of muhajerin, mainly Uzbak and Turkoman, who fled Soviet Central Asia during the first decade of Stalin's rule and were generally well received by their brethren in adjacent Afghanistan.

A quarter of a century later the prime minister, Mohammad Daoud Khan, saw his only chance to counter the tribalism of non-Pushtun peoples in the north and west through his "Pushtunistan" policy, already mentioned. Later, in the 1960s, under "liberal bourgeois" governments, whenever economic problems became virulent, both houses of parliament started discussing the privileges of Pushtun as the root of all evils. The voices of the minority speakers were submerged in the majority of Pushtun representatives.

Meanwhile, unnoticed in the flatlands of the north and south and in the mountain valleys, Russian advisors had gained ground, especially in Kabul but also in Herat and Jalalabad, as well as in the gas- and oil-producing areas in the north. To the average Afghan, even in remote mountain recesses, all the Russians were unbelievers and, as such, shayatins--"devils." To many of the educated young people, Marx or Mao appeared as the only possible saviour. Marxists
and Maoists were divided very much along traditional ethnic and religious lines.

**Economic Dimension**

All the efforts towards developing the economy of the country since the 1920s and following Five-Year Plans instituted after the Second World War hardly affected the majority of Afghanistan's population. Regional development programmes were failures (Hilmand) or brought but little improvement (Paktya). The basic problems of the rural population, which numbered eighty percent, and of the national economy remained unsolved.

The majority of the farmers were deeply indebted: to their landlords, to wealthy merchants, rich nomads, or corrupt magistrates. A high percentage of rural men either had to till the soil of landlords for a maximum of twenty percent of its yield, or at least one--more often two--of the male family members had to earn an income outside their village. This was shared with the extended family back home.

During the winter months, eighty percent of the male population of southern Paktya province earned an additional income in British India; and since 1947, in independent Pakistan. A tribal leader of the Kharuti in 1972 put it into a simple formula: "Our life is through Pakistan."

In Northern Afghanistan many of the Pushtun settlers of
the late 19th century had been granted huge, fertile landed properties. Their heirs, until recent changes, still exploited local Turkic and Tajik farmers. Pushtun nomad traders acquired some of the best lands in the Hazarajat in Central Afghanistan, and practiced lucrative commercial schemes, charging one hundred percent interest a year, which is immoral according to Western as well as Islamic standards.

Ill feelings toward the Pushtun, toward the local government supporting their cases, and the central government were a common feature among most of the non-Pushtun ethnic groups of Afghanistan.

Mullah Rahman, for instance, was the most distinguished elder of the Aimaq tribe of Jamshidi. He was reelected as a member of parliament in 1969 as the representative of his district of Kushk, to the north of Herat. Among the government functionaries in the provincial headquarters, he was called "representative of the parliament to Kushk," because he paid more attention to the welfare of his tribe at home than he cared for the welfare of the nation in Kabul, quarreling with the Pushtun-dominated administration on all levels.

Nomads have been mentioned only as usurers, which is unjust to the majority of herders, nearly all of whom are Pushtun. They have attracted considerable attention mainly because of their exotic lifestyle, including their attractive
black tents, and their seeming omnipresence. Every traveller, foreign or Afghan, unavoidably came across one or another group of them. Thus the opinion arose that they were flocking by the millions. As a consequence their number has been excessively overestimated, as Afghan government data and scientific publications show (Glatzer, 1977; Jentsch, 1973). My personal estimate, based on field work in Paktya province during the spring migrations of 1972 and on numbers of pastures available, is about 1,000,000. A UN-sponsored census in 1978 lowered even this number by more than 50%: there are less than 500,000 full nomads in Afghanistan, which makes up a trifling 3% of the total population of 15,000,000 (Balland, 1983). We have counted, at five "bottlenecks" in Paktya, the nomads on their way from winter camps in Pakistan to summer pastures in Afghanistan. From our results it is also clear that less than 100,000 nomads annually crossed the international border (Janata, 1972). While there were already more than 2,000,000 refugees in Pakistan in 1983, Afghan government spokesmen still denied their existence: "As usual, there are many Afghan nomads in Pakistan."

Another comment in the socioeconomic context: there was, and still is, no working class worth mentioning in Afghanistan. A maximum of 50,000 workers in the poorly developed industrial sector were, in the majority, sons of farmers still deeply rooted in their village communities. Even as a term, "class consciousness" was alien to them.

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Linguistic and Ethnic Dimensions

These can be best explained along with the most recent and very accurate ethnic map of Afghanistan (Verbreitungskarte der ethnischen Gruppen Afghanistans, 1983). None of the earlier maps, including mine (Janata, 1981), took into consideration the "empty quarters," the vast areas not permanently inhabited, especially in the southwest. A first glance at the old maps seemed to confirm the official Afghan statistics, telling us that Pushtun make up 60% of the population. The new map supports my earlier arguments that Pushtun are numerically the strongest group in Afghanistan, about 40% of the total population, but definitely not the absolute majority. Included in my estimate are even those Pushtun who have settled since the 18th century in Farsi-Dari-speaking areas, who have adopted not only local Tajik habits but also their language. "By ancestry Afghan, by language Persian," a speaker of the Nurzai community in Obeh, west of Herat, explained to me in 1969.

Pashto and Farsi-Dari, spoken by Tajik, but also by Hazara, Aimak, Arabs of the northeast, and other minorities, are the two official languages of Afghanistan. Other Iranian languages of the country are those of the Baluch in the southwest and the Pamir languages in the far northeast. The languages of Nuristan are classified as belonging to an ancient Indo-Iranian stratum, and Indian languages of
Afghanistan are mainly Pashai, Gujri, Hindi, and Punjabi, the last two of which are spoken by the urban communities of Hindus and Sikhs.

The major Turkic languages of Afghanistan are Uzbaki and Turkmani. Most members of the very small Kirghiz community of the Wakhan have left their traditional grazing grounds in the Pamir highlands. After an interlude in Pakistan they have been accepted as immigrants to Turkey and granted homesteads in Eastern Anatolia (Shahrani, 1984).

Other minorities, much discussed by linguists and anthropologists, to my knowledge have not been registered as refugees in Pakistan. Therefore I only briefly mention the Arab-speaking community in the center of Northern Afghanistan, the widely scattered Moghuls, the Berawi (Brahui) among the Baluch, whose language belongs to the Dravidian group of Southern India, and the many peripatetic occupational groups of nomads, generally summarized as Jat (Rao, 1982).

Also relevant to the refugee situation is the concept of ethnic identity among the major groups.

All the Pushtun of Afghanistan and Pakistan believe in a common descent from Qais Abdurrashid, a contemporary of the Prophet Mohammad. They speak the same language, and they all adhere to the basic elements of their code of behavior, the Pushtunwali. Thus, Pushtun on both sides of the border are
brothers and sisters, notwithstanding intra- and inter-family, -clan, and -tribal feuds. They were and are prepared, according to their tribal traditions, to stand by each other when threatened by outsiders.

Pushtun tribal society has been described as segmentary, egalitarian, and acephalous--characteristics which are in accord with only a minority of contemporary Pushtun in Afghanistan and in the Tribal Areas of Pakistan (Sigrist, 1979). Many Pushtun are detribalized, and even more have adapted themselves, over the past 2½ centuries to aristocratic institutions of the Persian type with hereditary Khans (Barth, 1959; Ahmed, 1976).

Wherever tribal and clan structures have survived fully intact to the present time, it is the jirga (tribal assembly of adult males) that makes all the decisions. The jirga has the power to call into action the arbaki (tribal militia) and to elect its amir (leader). It not only negotiates the peaceful settlement of conflicts, whenever possible; it also has the power to fine and even punish offenders, to the extent of destroying the property of a culprit and banning the offender from the territory of his clan and tribe (Janata, 1975).

Unlike Afghanistan's Pushtun, who in the majority are small-scale landholders, most of the Tajik (Dupree, 1984a; Kussmaul, 1965) are sharecroppers, artisans, and, in the
cities, government officials. In urban areas in the large oases, close social contacts hardly reach beyond the extended family. In mountain areas the network of affiliations may cover the full length of a densely populated valley. Uzbak (Centlivres, 1975; Dupree, 1984b), Hazara (Canfield, 1984), Aimak (Janata, 1984), Turkoman (Franz, 1972), Pashai (Wutt, 1981), and other minorities in this respect compare with Tajik, although most of them have preserved some rudimentary tribal structure, group-consciousness, and solidarity. Remembrances of a common history or specific religious links may also strongly contribute toward feelings of ethnic identity.

Religious Dimension

Afghanistan, except for its small Sikh and Hindu communities, is a purely Islamic country. About 90% of the population follow the Hanafite school of Sunnism. Besides the Shiite Hazara, Farsiwan, and Qizilbash, approximately 10,000 Ismailis make up the remaining 10%.

There is no organized clergy in Sunni Islam. Every village mosque has its Mulla, who in the vast majority of cases has learned his profession from a Mulla in the same or, more often, another village. He serves the community at Friday prayers, at all the annual Muslim festivals, and throughout the life cycle. He is virtually a servant, and his social status is not much higher than that of the village barber.
In cases of religious dispute the rural population refers to the nearest Sayid or Pir. The Sayid, descendants of the prophet, are highly esteemed, and they, as well as members of the families of local Pirs, Myans, and other persons endowed with baraka, are also consulted as mediators in worldly affairs. Members of the Ulema, educated in Madrassas, are mostly found in urban communities, whereas the heads of the leading families of Sufi brotherhoods, although mainly city-based, have close connections with rural communities in various parts of the country.

All these religious functionaries, servants of a mosque community or recognized authorities and mediators, have but little bearing on daily life in periods of order and peace. In times of conflict in Afghanistan's history, as many examples clearly show, Ulema, Sadat, Piran, and other persons of religious standing have greatly influenced not only local but also national politics.

During the past eight years of Afghan strife for national independence, cultural identity, and Islamic values, the Sunnite clergy was fully active, calling for jihad. The ideology of the fundamentalist faction of the Ulema is strongly influencing the politics of the mujahedin inside Afghanistan and within the muhajerin community in Pakistan. A recent study by Olivier Roy analyzes these various impacts on exile party politics and on warfare inside Afghanistan (Roy,
The Shiite clergy, traditionally, has an institutionalised pattern of organisation. Among the Hazara who make up most of Afghanistan's Shiite population, the Sadat community and its Piran had been subjugated under Amir Abdurrahman's orders in the last century (Kopecky, 1986). The place of local Piran has been taken over by spiritual leaders in Iran and Iraq. This is the main reason for the hostilities of the past few years inside the Hazarajat as well as among Shiite communities with their political parties in Pakistan, mainly in and around Quetta, Baluchistan.

Social and Political Dimensions

There was no class structure in Afghanistan which fit into any Marxist theories and categories. I am not going to discuss the theories of an "Asian mode of production," "Oriental Feudalism," or, on the other hand, "Oriental Despotism" and "Hydraulic Cultures" (Tökei, 1966; Wittfogel, 1962; Rodinson, 1966). I will just briefly sum up some of the basic facts already mentioned which are relevant to understanding the situation of Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

Pushtun, economically and politically, dominated Afghan society, although there are exceptions to this generalization, especially in Kabul and in Herat, where some Tajik of considerable wealth also influenced politics. But, generally
speaking, Pushtun political organization on the village level followed one of three main schemes:

- the egalitarian type of Pushtun villages, mainly in the southeast with their jirga, as described above;

- "democratic" villages with elected headmen and little or no influence of landlords and/or Khans;

- "autocratic" villages, where the headmen represented the landlord and/or Khan.

The first type has a homogeneous population where all the male members of the community belong to the same subclan. In the second type, traditional local groups accepted and sometimes even integrated nonmembers. In the third case the composition could vary from Pushtun or Baluch or Uzbak landlord and Tajik serfs, as for instance in Baluchistan (Orywal, 1982), to a highly mixed population dependent on a landlord. As examples for the many variations possible, I mention a village of the first type with a Pir family living on extended waqf-land, which is either leased out or operated with labourers. In another village of the same type a small potter's community might have been granted ground on which to build their houses. They have no arable lands and are, accordingly, of lower social status, although possibly of higher economic standard. These differences of social and political status do not necessarily imply differences on the
economic level, where Islamic law of inheritance has also brought about the impoverishment of once independent, small-scale landholders in egalitarian village societies.

These are but a few, although major, facts which paved the ground for the "Saur Revolution" of 1978 which, together with the occupation of Afghanistan by Soviet troops in late December of the following year, was the cause for the largest movement of refugees since the years following World II.

Afghan Refugees in Pakistan

Before going into detail, it must be stated that nowhere in the world have refugees been received as well as Afghans in Pakistan, notwithstanding their sheer number of over 3,000,000—the largest single concentration of refugees in any country.

Two main reasons account for this unusual welcome:

- the close historical and blood ties of the population on both sides of the border and, most important, the basic values of Pushtunwali: merana (magnanimity) and melmapalana (hospitality), in addition to a common language and religion;

- the spontaneous actions of the Pakistani government, whose efforts to help the refugees stand out singularly in the entire world community.
Measures taken in order to cope with the situation, supported by international organizations (UNHCR, World Food Program, and others) and voluntary agencies, prevented famine and epidemics. Some of the refugees, encouraged by this extraordinary welcome, immediately showed a high degree of self-organizational skills. In the early "Refugee Tented Villages" (RTVs), under Pakistani administration, refugee jirgas immediately started to operate along traditional patterns, partly influenced by the activities of the political parties. Mosques and, frequently enough, party offices were the first mudbuildings in the tented villages. Bazaars sprang up almost immediately, and transport to the nearest town was organized by refugees who had brought vehicles along with them.

A great number of refugees from the border areas were familiar with the surroundings, which were not at all new to them, as I have explained above. Many of them successfully took up the same occupations their grandfathers had previously engaged in during winter months, mainly as labourers in all sorts of construction work. Because of the sudden excessive supply of unskilled labour, not only were wages lowered but also thousands—more likely tens of thousands—of local workers lost their jobs. Pashtun entrepreneurs employed Afghan refugees, especially their Pashtun brethren, rather than local, low-class "Hindki." Nevertheless, their sound economic sense did not prevent them from paying lower wages.
Only a dwindling minority of Afghans were able to establish themselves as dealers and craftsmen on local markets or in the carrying trade, where they were undoubtedly competing with their respective Pakistani rivals. Still this competition did not give rise to ill feelings among the vast majority of the Pakistani population during the first three or four years of "Afghan occupancy," primarily in the Tribal Areas and the North-West Frontier Province but also in Baluchistan. No clashes occurred, and, according to my inquiries in 1982 and 1983, only petty lawsuits involving refugees were dealt with by the Pakistani authorities.

The Refugee Tented Villages developed within an amazingly short period into stable settlements with walled enclosures around the mud houses of extended families. A demand for a wider range of professionals developed, and remarkable amounts of cash were circulated in the refugee villages, as the flourishing bazaars most obviously demonstrated. Infrastructure—such as supply of drinking water, latrines, and drainage, as well as health care and schooling—was quite satisfactory in most of the refugee villages of the administered area of the NWFP in late 1986.

But even in these "well-to-do" villages, I encountered families of small groups of Tajik, Uzbek, or other minorities who led a marginal life. Their compounds, some still with tents, were located on the outer fringes of overwhelmingly
Pushtun villages. Some of them were not even registered; others were always late in collecting their rations, although registered and properly equipped with ration cards. As an ethnic and/or religious minority (Hazara), they were also not given the chance to articulate their concerns in the jirga. These situations mirror a Pushtun-dominated village in Afghanistan with a small community of hamsaya.

But there are marked differences. In many of the Pushtun villages back home there were landlords and Khans, either from the same clan or belonging to one of the prestigious religious groups. Members of these groups who chose exile could not be found in the refugee settlements. They had secured sufficient funds to finance their lives in urban surroundings in Pakistan. This social class, often described as "feudal," thus is markedly absent from refugee villages.

Opinion leaders among the refugees are the maleks, or traditional village headmen, who are often recruited by the political parties as local representatives. To a certain degree the position of the Khans has been taken over by the political parties.

According to my rough estimates, more than 80% of the refugees are Pushtun; in the Tribal Areas, nearly 100%. During the past three years there has been a greater influx of refugees from Northern Afghanistan. The Turkoman alone, due to their women's skills in carpet weaving, have reached a
high degree of economic independence. Some Hazara refugees have found shelter with their kinsmen who had fled Afghanistan on various occasions since Abdurrahman's time and who now reside in Quetta. Most of the non-Pushtun lead the most miserable lives among the refugees in Pakistan.

Summary

Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic country which, prior to the events of April 1978 and December 1979, had made but little progress toward becoming a nation state. Only a minority of educated people thought and spoke in terms of Afghan nationality. Tribalism and regionalism prevailed.

Inside Afghanistan, after eight years of fighting, a high degree of inter-ethnic solidarity has evolved in some of the provinces and in even larger areas, partly in spite of intrigues instigated by the political parties. Tajik, Hazara, Nuristani, and other "warlords" have seemingly established petty kingdoms. Their position is undisputed by their sometime multi-ethnic mujahidin following and by whatever has remained behind of the civil population.* They never again will accept Pushtun hegemony.

*The civil population—in this context—consists mainly of women and children, since practically all the able-bodied men in the "liberated areas" are at least part-time mujahidin.
Ethnic prejudices are still vital among the refugee population. The dominating Pushtun, in camps and in party offices, still continue their condescending attitude towards non-Pushtun. The strongest, or at least loudest, exile parties are not only promulgating an Islamic but—sometimes quite openly—a Pushtun-governed Afghanistan after the withdrawal of the Soviet army and the fall of the Kabul regime.

Under these premises there will be neither a prompt nor a smooth return of refugees. In 1983 Afghan intellectuals optimistically predicted: "What our kings could not achieve in 240 years of rule the Russians have achieved: they made a nation out of all the Afghans." This dream has not come true. There are still years to go until muhajidin and muhajerin will merge into an Afghan nation.
[Alfred Janata, Bellagio Paper]

REFERENCES


Gregorian, Vartan. 1969. As an introduction to Afghan history, see The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan. Stanford University Press.


