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Review

"We Are Here to Stay": Pashtun Migrants in the Northern Areas of Pakistan

By Matthias Weinreich, with photographs by Silvia Delogu

Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag 2009

Islamkundliche Untersuchungen, 285

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120 pages

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In this study, the author offers a micro-scale documentation of the most recent phases of Pashtun migration and expansion in South Asia, focusing on the areas that are now the autonomous region of Gilgit-Baltistan (formerly Federally Administered Northern Areas) of Pakistan. The book is based on an analysis of data and insights gathered in the course of ethno-linguistic fieldwork in the region during the period 1993 through 1997. The author's methodology was unstructured interviews and conversations, carried out in Pashto. This is a discussion of Pashtun economic and social history told from the personal points of view of Pashtun individuals, with the caveat that there is an important gap in the data. Because of cultural constraints the author was unable to talk with women or girls, so the observations and opinions presented in the book are exclusively from the male point of view. We find here expressions of Pashtun men's own perceptions of their lives in the Northern Areas and interactions with the local populations. These are at points contrasted with the perceptions of members of the local communities.

Part I is an introduction to the geographic and socio-linguistic setting and to Pashto speakers in the region. The 15th and 16th century occupation of the Lower Swat and Dir Valleys and Bajaur, and further movements into Indus Kohistan are briefly mentioned.

Part II connects Pashtun migration with the socio-economic development of the area. Throughout the book runs a contrast between permanent migrants (settlers) and temporary (seasonal) migrants. Their varying reasons for migration, and modes of relation and integration or non-integration with the local populations of the various regions of Gilgit-Baltistan are treated in detail. Another continuous thread is the relation between Pashtun migrations and trade, business and land acquisition opportunities. The author sees the history of Pashtun migrations in four phases: the pre-colonial period (until 1892); the Kashmiri-British colonial period (1892-1947); the post-Partition period (1947 until the completion of the Karakoram Highway (KKH) in 1978); and the post-KKH period. Setting these recent, post-1947 migrations in the historical context of earlier Pashtun migrations and conquests (pp. 16-17), this book offers an almost first-hand--often in the words of the migrants themselves--view of the processes of and motivations for migration and settlement, of a kind that we do not have for the earlier migrations.

Part III discusses sociolinguistic aspects of Pashtun settlement in the predominantly Shina and Burushaski-speaking area. Questions of the reasons for language maintenance and/or shift to local languages—mainly Dardic Shina and Khowar, Burushaski, and Tibeto-Burman Balti—are treated. The relation of the Northern Areas dialect of Pashto with the dialect(s) of the home areas, especially in the Peshawar and Bajaur areas, and the role of Urdu

are also treated. Weinreich does not foresee Pashto becoming a lingua franca in the Northern Areas as has happened in Dir, Lower Swat, and Kohistan.¹

Finally, in Section IV Weinreich presents his own view of likely future developments. He notes that during the colonial and much of the post-Partition period most new Pashtun arrivals established their own permanent households, but that this trend began to reverse after the completion of the KKH (p. 103). Thus, Weinreich sees increasing temporary rather than permanent migration (p. 104), and the continued concentration of Pashtun entrepreneurs in areas dealing with products that require regular outside contacts, especially related to the China and Afghanistan trade (p. 105). Overall, the “bazaar-centered distribution pattern of Pashtun migrants is not expected to change in the future.” (p. 107)

With regard to relations with the local communities, Weinreich has this to say about the present situation: “In the mid 1990s local attitudes towards Pashtun migrants were slowly but surely changing from critical to hostile, as they were increasingly perceived as alien elements whose presence was, if not causing, at least worsening existing social problems.” (p. 109) For instance, he notes that Pashtun businessmen were often perceived as engaging in “shameless abuse of a well-functioning system”, including involvement in smuggling of drugs, antiques and protected animal species (p. 61). In the interview which concludes the book, the author presents a Pashtun man’s awareness of the delicate position in which he and the members of his community find themselves. This man says: “You know, it is obvious that some people here in Gilgit are not happy with our presence. They envy our money and our influence, they despise our habits, they hate our views on religion and who knows what else they are finding fault with. ... They like us, they don’t like us, what should we care: We are here now, and we are here to stay!...” (pp. 112-13)

The observations in this study provide detailed information on a segment of Pashtun migrant communities in Pakistan that has received relatively little attention until recently. Some of the other relevant studies are Barth (1956) on Pathan settlement in Swat, Bauer (1998) on Pashto speakers in the Northern Areas, Allan (1987) on the impact of Afghan refugees in Pakistan’s Hindukush-Himalaya, Nichols (2001) on Pathan settlement of the Peshawar Valley, and the previous works of the present author (Weinreich 2001 and 2005). This book offers a valuable complement to geographically and diachronically wider studies of Pashtun settlement history like Nichols (2008), and points to a need for similar narrowly-focused historical studies of Pashtun settlement in specific areas like Karachi, Quetta, or Lahore.

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¹ Weinreich considers that Pashto has also become a lingua franca in Chitral (p. 107); however this reviewer disagrees with this statement. Khowar holds its place as lingua franca in Chitral firmly, despite the increasing number of Pashto speakers in Lower (southern) Chitral.

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