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## Poetics of Identity: On Entrepreneurial Selves of Afghan Migrants in Pakistan

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### PROLOGUE

In Peshawar, evenings at tea houses in the “market of storytellers” or Qissa Khawani Bazaar are busy. Located at the doorsteps of the famous Khyber Pass, Peshawar has historically acted as the main gateway between the Indian subcontinent and Central Asia. Qissa Khawani has always been the major market for traders in this geographical region. Indeed, the British Commissioner to Peshawar, Sir Herbert Benjamin Edwards (1853-1862), called it the Piccadilly of Central Asia (Tikekar, 2004). Every evening, tea houses would be buzzing with traders from all over Asia sipping freshly brewed green tea and relaxing. But the highlight of the evening was the storytellers called Qissa Khawans who would narrate many stories of interest to the traders. They used both prose and poetry to tell stories of traders’ expeditions, their valuable items, and of far-away lands of treasures.

Today, the same bazaars continue to be full of activity and their small streets have been transformed into a variety of interconnected specialised markets. There is a market for mobile phones, opening into a flower market adjoined by the sweets market, leading to a market for pet birds. One such narrow street is called Jangi Mohallah, ‘the fighters’ neighbourhood’. Until about three decades ago, the gangsters of Peshawar city used to settle scores there. It was a place for duels which were fought with large handmade folding knives. There is no sign of this today as the ever increasing population has taken over that ground. The u-shaped Jangi Mohallah is the hub of the printing and publishing businesses in the North West Frontier Province (Pakistan) – the home to the Pashtun tribes. In this paper, the stories narrated by the Pashtun traders of Jangi Mohallah provide a window into their entrepreneurial identities. They stem from Afghan Pashtuns of Qissa Khawani speaking the language of Pashtu and upholding the values of the ‘Pashtunwali’- a living and unwritten code of honour that ‘regulates’ everyday life. This paper thus engages with entrepreneurial life history narratives espousing the ways in which the identities of Afghan entrepreneurs adhere to

the main Pashtunwali-tenets, if at all. The latter refer to an ideal self that has been orally transmitted through Pashtu poetry since ancient times. Afghan entrepreneurial identities tend to adhere to the core tenets of Pashtunwali. However, there are multiple uses of poetic tropes expressed in entrepreneurial life history narratives that tell us more about the subtle ambiguity and challenges that might be experienced when relating to the dominant influence of this code of honour. Thus, Pashtunwali values are very much lived and enacted in practice. This paper contends that they are inscribed as poetic tropes in main Afghan poetry shaping the moral compass that becomes central to one's existence and mode of being an entrepreneur.

## **VIEWS OF AN 'ENTREPRENEUR': BETWEEN DOING AND BEING**

Traditionally, entrepreneurship literature is rooted in the positivist paradigm (Chandler and Lyon, 2001). Since the coining of the term 'entrepreneurship' by Richard Cantillon (Van Praag, 1999), it has been seen as an economic phenomenon by those interested in economic growth and its sustainability (Hart, 2003). Today it is widely accepted that economics, on its own, cannot provide a thorough understanding of entrepreneurship which is interdisciplinary in nature (Parker, 2005). The notion of entrepreneurship has been used mainly 'to label' innovations that have successfully brought about changes at the level of society (Landstrom, 2005). Indeed it is described as a fundamental function of human agency, an 'innovative action' entailing risk (Mises, 1949), with broad societal drivers, means, and impacts. Consequently, 'the entrepreneur' – our focus of attention here – has been studied through several approaches over the decades. A review of these approaches is not within the scope of this paper. To give a flavour however, from an economic perspective the entrepreneur is broadly seen as a risk-taking individual concerned with opportunity recognition, profit-making and the search of efficiency under uncertain conditions (e.g. Ricketts, 1989; Hennings, 1980; Schumpeter, 1934; Kirzner, 1973). Sociologists have tried to understand the entrepreneur through cultural categories (Shane, 1993; Weber, Baehr, & Wells, 2002) such as social class and ethnic background (Light & Rosenstein, 1995; Waldinger, Aldrich, & Ward, 1990). Yet the prevailing view of entrepreneurs is still strongly shaped by classic psychological theory emphasising individual traits such as a higher need for achievement (McClelland, (1961), internal locus of control (Rotter(1966) as well a risk taking propensity (Brockhaus, 1980; Brockhaus and Horwitz, (2002). The main notion of an entrepreneur thus continues to be characterised by a rather reductionist approach using pre-determined categories which cannot account for context.

Historically, this was not always the case. In particular, we argue that 'the father' of entrepreneurship offers us a more sophisticated view of the entrepreneur compared to the more recent mainstream literature. Schumpeter (1934) is known for his ground-breaking work successfully introducing the role of the entrepreneur in economic theory. His original use of metaphors in entrepreneurship theory is of significance here. He was the first to posit that there is 'no best way' of describing an entrepreneur – an essential stance supporting a paper such as this looking at entrepreneurial identity. Schumpeter conceptualises an entrepreneur as positioned firmly in an economic system, as a 'creative destructor' who introduces a new (more efficient) order and, in the process, destroys the prevailing one. The use of his metaphor is twofold. Firstly, Schumpeter's 'creative destructor' embodies two opposing roles in one person (or organisation). On the one side, entrepreneurs introduce new and efficient ways of production (creator); on the other, they 'do away' with the older inefficient systems in the process (destructor). Secondly, he makes extensive use of the 'anecdotal' to represent the actual motivations for being an entrepreneur. Entrepreneurs would be motivated by "the will to conquer; the impulse to fight, to prove oneself superior to others, to succeed for the sake, not of the fruits of success, but of success itself" (Schumpeter, 1973, p. 93). This risk-taking dimension is further stressed in analogies such as "the game is not like roulette, it is more like poker" (Schumpeter, 1942, p. 73). These metaphors and analogies clearly communicate – at a level of abstraction and with a universal language – that an entrepreneur's 'ways of being' is crucial to his/her action, and that these ways cannot easily be captured through simplistic categorisations.

Schumpeter's contribution to understanding 'the entrepreneur' thus represents an excellent starting point for justifying art-based methods such as poetry in the study of entrepreneurial life and identity construction. To date, the poetic approach as advocated in this paper is almost absent from studies on entrepreneurship whilst only recently scholars have used poetry to shed light on management (e.g. Darmer, 2006; Grisoni and Kirk, 2006). Moreover, this paper contributes to our understanding of entrepreneurial identities in developing countries when entrepreneurship research is heavily skewed in favour of technological sectors in the Western World. The privileging of certain locations, languages and communities over others has been partly acknowledged within the discipline of entrepreneurship studies in at least two important ways. Firstly, research should focus on less 'trendy sites' such as communities, neighbourhoods, and families harbouring and nurturing entrepreneurship because there is no self-evident geography of entrepreneurship, and spatial preferences are political choices (Steyaert and Katz (2004). Secondly, new languages should be conceived for exploring entrepreneurship (Hjorth, 2003). Cultural processes draw upon locally developed discourses residing in a specific community's framework which renders its economic discourse diverse (ibid.). Such call is consistent with the proposal in this paper of using the poetic approach.

Perhaps the most explicit message for a review of approaches from within the mainstream stems from an ‘unsuspected’ and prolific American writer on entrepreneurship. Gartner opened his keynote speech at the International Council for Small Business Conference in 2007 announcing that he would like to read poetry rather than delivering the ‘usual’ keynote speech (Hjorth and Johannisson, 2008). He followed this up by reciting Haikus in the book by Hjorth and Steyaert (2009), to provide a summary of articles from different authors on entrepreneurship. Indeed, it would be “the words we use to talk about entrepreneurship [that] influence our ability to think about this phenomenon...” (Gartner, 1993, p. 231). Looking at the entrepreneurs poetically can enrich our views of what it means and feels to be an entrepreneur in a universal language whilst respecting the contextual and constructed nature of entrepreneurial life. In this spirit, in the next section we explain our use of poetry and the specific poetic approach developed for studying entrepreneurial identity construction.

## LOOKING AT ENTREPRENEURS POETICALLY

Poetry can be seen as an arts-based approach within the areas of management development and that of management and organisation studies. Regarding the former, there are numerous examples where arts-based approaches are being used as a management development tool. For example, it has been pointed out that poetic language can open up new avenues for thinking of organizational design that are not based merely on pragmatic concerns (Zandee, 2007). Poetry and storytelling can create trust and empathy by leaders in cross-cultural settings (Grisham, 2006). It is thus a form of management inquiry allowing us to explore “everyday, imaginative ways of talking, for example, metaphors, storytelling, and gestural statements” (Cunliffe, 2002, p. 128). These are generated and mediated by specific cultures. Culture cannot be understood through rationalisation and abstraction because, to a large extent, it is unconscious and intuitive (Schein, 1985). Poetry, however, communicates culture at a higher level of abstraction as poetic language is imaginative, ambiguous, touching, and holistic (Zandee, 2007).

Taylor and Ladkin’s (2009) review of art-based methods espouses underlying philosophies for managerial development. Poetry and storytelling are, at the same time, both a projective technique and a vehicle for expressing an essence that can be applied universally through the mediation of culture and tradition (*ibid.*). Our paper is a specific example of such characterisation when using the poetic approach in research. In particular, it combines life history narratives and poetry to shed light on entrepreneurial identities. This allows us to attend both to the individual and the collective level of identity construction. The use of life history narratives falls in the domain of the projective technique. They are extemporaneous illustrations of vivid images and moments of one’s life which the entrepreneur wishes to identify with. It is argued that narratives “do not reveal an essential self as much as a preferred one selected from the multiplicity of selves” (Kohler-Riessman, 2003, p. 8). In addition the “production of chosen identities takes place... through a series of performances, or occasions in which identity processes are played out” (Hetherington, 1998, p. 19). “Even if there are limits to how selves can be intentionally placed because of unconscious processes” (Nocker, 2006; 2009, p. 151), the performance of self-narratives “becomes part of an ongoing negotiation in a particular context of interaction, both with oneself and with others” (*ibid.*, p. 77). The life history is important as a subjective document. Conventionally, it is used to provide a finely detailed account of an informant’s life, to study connections between personality and culture, and to document a “slice of life” as experienced by a member of another culture” (Luborsky, 1987, p. 367). Thus life histories can reveal both the negotiable as well as the less negotiable elements in one’s individual identity construction. Here we offer a view of how the life history narratives of Afghan entrepreneurs tend to portray an essential identity, that is of how an entrepreneur ‘should be’ in ideal terms.

In this paper, cultural reference points are mainly inscribed in poetry from which individuals draw conspicuously to construct their narrative of identity. It is crucial to point out that the extent of cultural poetic heritage, penetration and dissemination of Afghan poetry as a blueprint for everyday life and action is dissimilar from most Western countries. In this sense, poems can be seen as ‘the essence’ which is applied more universally by a certain cultural group. As we shall see, the actual way of life of Pashtuns adheres or refers largely to unwritten rules and values which are implicit but lived. In this paper, they are conceptualised as poetic tropes expressing the fundamental tenets in society. They are both the product of a lived history and an aspiration which is partly imagined. Indeed, poetry has the power to reveal the unspoken and the hidden aspects of life, being on the juncture of dreams and reality and drawing on both (Grisoni and Kirk, 2006).

Within the realm of organisational and management research, Gabriel (2000) contrasts rhetorical tropes (e.g. irony or metaphor) from poetic tropes. These “are used to support particular interpretations” (*ibid.*, p. 41), for instance “attribution of motive; attribution of causal connection; of responsibility, namely blame and credit; of unity; of fixed qualities, especially opposition; attribution of emotion” (*ibid.*, p. 36). Here, poetic tropes resonate with those described by Gabriel. However, there is a threefold distinction to be made between poetic tropes in this paper. Firstly, tenets here are explicitly named and to date, are being communicated mainly via poetry to portray the dominant discourse of the self in a specific (Pashtun) culture. This poetry is also widely known and respected in the contemporary world (i.e. of Pakistan and Afghanistan). As poetic tropes, these societal tenets are thus not signifiers that we need to reconstruct. They are labelled in great detail and individually endowed with a highly

specific meaning. Secondly, poetic tropes are inscribed in a particular social code (of honour) which is unique to the culture expressing them (the Afghan Pashtuns). Last but not least, these tenets dictate action in highly prescribed and complex ways for individuals and groups, and are thus far more than just reflection, memory, or nostalgic imaginations. To date, they may substitute either the law or religious commandments in particular circumstances. On a continuum between gentle suggestion and explicit pressure, they can become violent rules for decision-making (e.g. killing people for revenge may be accepted entirely and count more than any law). Yet it would be difficult, if not impossible, to understand these tenets without knowing more of the tribal culture that has expressed them. The next section introduces the reader to its history and context.

## **THE PASTHUNS: A TRIBAL CULTURE**

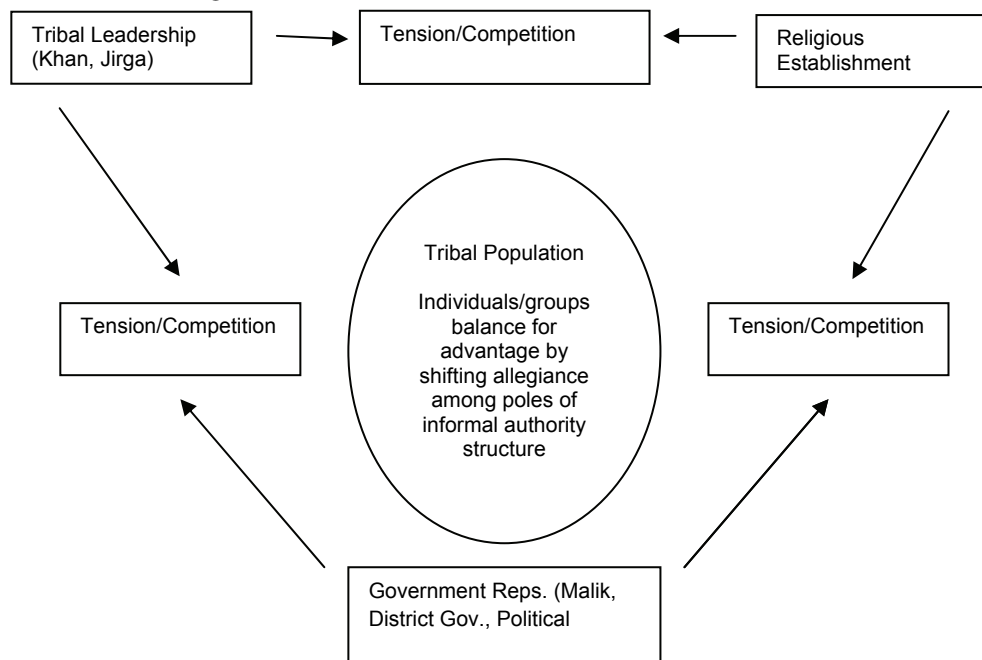
According to encyclopaedia Britannica, Pashtuns are comprised of Pashto speaking inhabitants of Pakistan (North Western) and Afghanistan (South-Eastern) where they are in majority. The Pashtuns are a tribe with a paternal line of descent where all the male children of a Pashtun father carry forward their tribal affiliation. Women can be married outside the tribe and decedents are not considered Pashtuns. In Afghanistan, Pashtuns were exclusively called Afghans. However, today they share this label with other minority ethnicities. Several opinions exist about the origins of Pashtuns. The most popular one, which is accepted by both Pashtuns and non-Pashtuns, claims that they are the decedents of one of ten tribes of Jews (Ferrier, 1858). Pashtuns have played an important role, over the two millennia, in the social and political make-up of the area.

Although Afghanistan is less than 300 years old as a country, it enters recorded history around 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. (Clammer, 2007). Geographically it borders Central Asia, Persia and the Indian subcontinent, and has been affected by the interaction of these regions. This geography very much dictated the fate of Pashtuns. They were in the midst of the famous rivalry between Persians and Greeks when Alexander the Great attacked Persia, and made his way to the Indian subcontinent through Afghanistan. In 1219, the Mongol hordes from the steppes first destroyed a large part of Afghanistan, and later took the ruins into their empire to build it anew. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, it witnessed two great ‘games’. It became a buffer ground between the British, colonising the whole subcontinent, and the Russians (Rizwan, 2005). Not before the British were compelled to withdraw their military from Afghanistan in 1919 (Borer, 1999). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it led to the conclusion of the Cold War between the United States of America and the former USSR. The USSR attempted to capture Afghanistan and run it as a communist country, but they failed as they encountered tough resistance from the Afghans, led by Pashtuns and supported by the international community. The withdrawal was followed by a civil war as relative peace in some Afghan areas was achieved during the time of the Taliban (Rashid, 2000). The US and NATO forces attacked the Taliban and ousted them from power. Nine years on, a guerrilla war is being fought in Afghanistan and Pashtuns are in turmoil as ever. Currently, more than 3 million Afghan refugees live on both sides of the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan – the Durand Line. It has never been recognized as an international border by any Afghan government. The division only exists on the map; it could not divide the Pashtuns or erase their ancient common history.

Pashtuns are an ethno-linguistic group with a tribal social system of living. They “probably constitute the largest tribal society on earth” (Christensen, 1995, p. 46). A typical tribal system or society is one “...with a high degree of self sufficiency at a near subsistence level, based on relatively simple technology without writing or literature, politically autonomous and with its own distinctive language, culture and sense of identity, tribal religion being co-terminus with tribal society” (Southall, 1997: 28). The Pashtun tribe, though, has advanced, and its cultural richness has given rise to much classical literature and poetry. As a tribe, the Pashtun way of life and governance is distinct. Kilcullen (2009) conceptualizes the tribal governance system as a triad as shown below.

## Tribal Governance Triad Diagram

Pashtun tribes of Eastern Afghanistan and Frontier



Source (Kilcullen, 2009)

According to this framework, Pashtuns are governed by government representatives, together with a tribal and religious leadership which they would follow. This paper takes a (radical) alternative view by arguing that peoples' 'alignment' in everyday life does not depend upon these structures. Rather, it is mediated and created more subtly by a specific code of honour which is deeply embedded in society – the 'Pashtunwali'. In this sense, we next attempt to 'decipher' Pashtunwali tenets as poetic tropes constituting the way of life and 'ideal self' which are inscribed in Afghan poetry.

### CODES OF HONOUR AND POETRY: THE 'PASHTUNWALI'

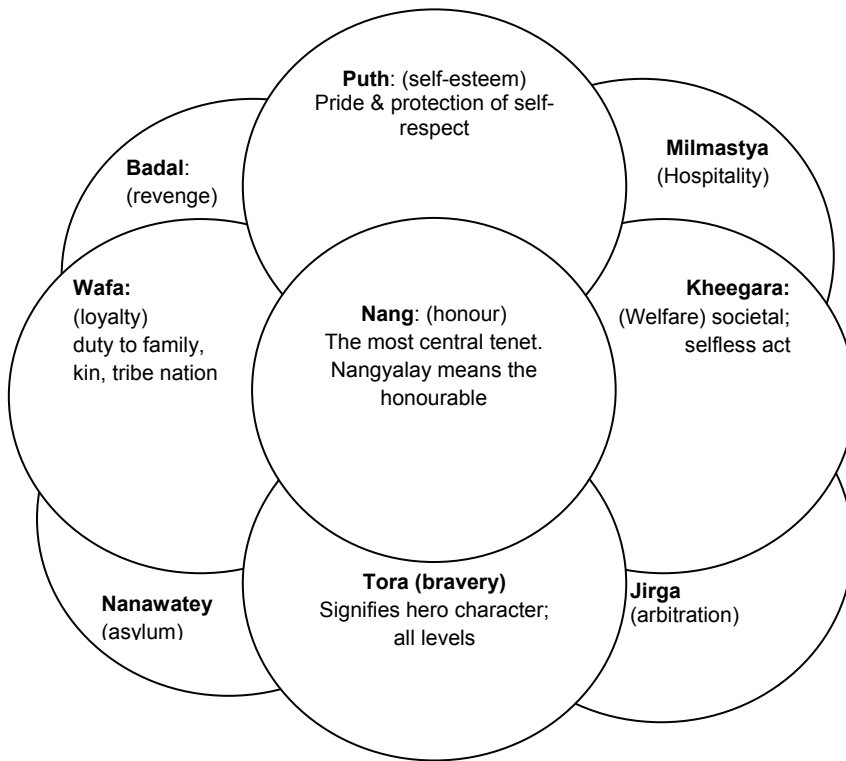
Pashtuns speak Pashto and live by their tribal code of honour 'Pashtunwali' (Moghadam, 2003). Their aim is to be proven honourable, both to society and to oneself. Although the majority of religious (Islamic) commandments are highly compatible with 'Pashtunwali', sometimes they are disregarded if they are seen to conflict with this code. "The central term of Pashtunwali is 'nang': honour and shame, dignity, courage and bravery" (Glatzer, 1998, p. 4). A Pashtun who is considered honourable is called 'Nangyaley' and to be called one is highly fulfilling for any Pashtun. Although there is no exact number of Pashtunwali tenets there are many. They are embedded into each other like a 'rainbow' (i.e. main tenets can include several sub-tenets). For example, the tenet 'Puth' stands for both pride and self-respect but also refers to 'Nang', the most central definition of honour.

Pashtunwali is thus a very comprehensive code of honour, allowing for different tenets to interact dynamically. This often causes tension when trying to adhere to it. For example "Milmatiya" means 'honouring the guest'. In Pashtun tradition, a guest is considered as 'God-sent' and has to be taken care of, even if one is risking his/her own life by doing so. We might ask to what extent these kinds of Pashtun values and traditions are upheld today. Many would say that the kind of behaviour described above belongs to the past – a kind of 'backwardness', characteristic of an 'undeveloped' tribal system in a globalized world. Thus, Pashtun traditions have emerged 'out of the shadow' of their past. The co-author, himself a Pashtun, was raised with those tribal tenets and lived in his native society for more than 25 years. He agrees that developments have affected traditions. 'Pashtunwali' today is lived in a somewhat different manifestation, but is certainly not disregarded. This goes far beyond subjective experience.

The most recent exhibition of 'Pashtunwali' in action could be observed recently when more than three million people from the beautiful Valley of Swat had to leave their home because of an army operation against the local Taliban. The internally displaced people left their green orchids with nothing in their hands. In the footsteps of the hills of Swat lay major cities like Mardan which is surrounded by numerous small villages and hamlets. The people in those villages live in poverty and struggle to make ends meet. However, to the amazement of the whole world, they opened the doors of their homes for the internally displaced people and welcomed them as guests, thus fulfilling the tenet of 'Milmasty'. The event was widely reported in the media (e.g. see Bile and Hafeez, 2009; WFP, 2009; Rashid and Adnan, 2009). Pashtunwali – as a way of life – has thus expressed itself in multiple contexts. Poets through the ages have chronicled it, praising the people who have followed the code



to become honourable, and rejecting those who have not. Khushal Khan Khattak (Khushal henceforth) is a poet whose writings are part of the classical Pashtun literature. He was crucial in setting the scene for an ‘ideal self’ to be staged and projected into the future. We will take a selection of couplets from his poems to highlight the main tenets and consider how they relate to the construction of entrepreneurial identity through individual life stories.



**Figure 1:** Tenets (poetic tropes) of the “Pashtunwali” code of honour

But where and how can we see the ‘ideal self’ portrayed in poetry that has still not ceased to inspire Pashtuns? First and foremost, we can observe it in Khushal’s life and through his conduct. Khushal was a visionary poet and chieftain of the Pashtun’s Khattak tribe. Born in 1622, he was made tribal leader in 1664 A.D., after his father’s death from the wounds he received in battle against another Pashtun tribe (the Youasfzais). Khushal’s loyalty and friendship made him an historical figure and role model. He and the Khattaks were loyal to the Mughals (kings) who ruled the Indian subcontinent. Yet a Pashtun rebellion started in 1672 – the causes of which are not widely agreed upon – ended this loyalty. We know from history that Khushal was imprisoned for seven years by Mughals for no specific reason. Devastated by this kind of ‘return’ for his loyalty and friendship to the king, he chose to take up an armed conflict. There was heavy inter-tribal rivalry and thus, not all Pashtun tribes were united in fighting. Khushal became dismayed by the treachery of many of his friends and chose to retire leaving his leadership to his son, which evolved into a further dispute between sons. In the end, Khushal sought refuge in the Kohe-Suffed (the White Mountain), an extension of the Hindu Kush range. This was the moment when he turned to writing. He produced an unknown number of poems and prose, some of which have survived the test of time. Khushal’s poetry chronicles the events of his time, the way he and the Pashtuns responded to them, and how things could have been better. The dates and times of many poems and couplets remain unknown. The actual context of his poems have been identified largely through the life history of the poet himself. Most of his poems are sung by Pashtuns as a “*tappa*” (popular local folklore) since four centuries.

## POETRY AND ENTREPRENEURIAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

The present analysis originates from the identification of poetic tropes in poems’ couplets expressing the main Pashtunwali tenets. It is striking and fascinating to see their ‘mirrored existence’ in the present-day life history narratives told by entrepreneurs in Peshawar. This emphasises the strong and on-going interweaving of Afghan poetry and Pashtun tribal society. We start by explaining in detail the context for each poem’s couplet. This is relevant in order to both understand the poem’s meaning itself; and to subsequently locate or ‘find’ it reflected in individual life stories. For each story, we have chosen between one to three couplets from Khushal’s poems to stress the emerging ‘morals’, or the ideal self to which individual life stories refer in different ways. They certainly invoke the main tenet as a moral imperative for conducting one’s life. But the entrepreneur’s life stories may not fully adhere to ‘prescribed’ values, if at all. This is the reason why we combine the analysis of the collective or universal aspects of poetic tropes (tenets) with snapshots of individual life stories in order to gain a rich picture for

understanding entrepreneurial identity construction. Table 1 gives an overview of the main poetic tropes for entrepreneurial identity construction to be found both in the poems' couplets and in three different life history narratives. The three stories were narrated to the co-author by male Afghan entrepreneurs at the Qissa Khawani Bazaar in Peshawar in 2009. There are very few female entrepreneurs in Peshawar and, as far as we are aware, none that trade at Qissa Khawani Bazaar. The poetic trope of bravery stands out in the first story to characterise ideal behaviour in difficult situations (i.e. forced migration). This has been frequently referred to in Khushal's poetry by his use of the image of an eagle; an eagle flies high and never loses 'perspective'. The second story focuses on maintaining self-esteem under any conditions (even the threat for death), which the same poetry compares to the most precious (material) possessions of a Pashtun. Loyalty is the focus in the third story. Khushal's poetry conveys this as a virtue and an essential trait of the ideal Pashtun character: promises being made should be truthful in matter and style as one should always be aware of belonging to a wider community.

**Table 1:** Poetic tropes and couplets in three entrepreneurial life stories

<i>Pashtunwali/ poetic tropes</i>	<i>Meaning of tenets</i>	<i>Poems' couplets</i>	<i>Life history narratives</i>
<i>Thora</i> (bravery)	Heroic courage; individual and collective	<i>"You are an eagle, fly high over the mountains"</i>	"Death and food is your weakness"
<i>Puth</i> (self-esteem)	Achievable only through pride and self-respect at any cost, and integrity in front of others.	<i>"The loss of life and wealth should not matter, what matters is respect"</i>	"I can make it work again"
<i>Wafa</i> (loyalty)	Being gentle and approachable; being truthful; keeping promises; having nothing to hide	<i>"A man is he, who is courageous, ... Who is gentle and affable, unto all people, ... His face, his real face—his word, his word—his promise, his promise: With no falsehood ..."</i>	"I introduced a new product into the market"

**"Death and food is your weakness"**

*"You are an eagle, fly high over the mountains"  
"Don't waste your life in searching for filling your stomach only, like a hamlet crow" (Khushal Khan Khattak, unknown poem)*

This first couplet comes out of an unknown poem when the Mughal emperor tried hard to 'buy out' Pashtun loyalties to create inter and intra tribal rifts to defeat the uprising of Pashtun tribes. Khushal was fond of hunting with eagles and has described his experience with keeping an eagle through poetry in 919 verses. In this couplet, he is arousing the Pashtun youth to look further (like an eagle) rather than searching for food in order only to fill one's own stomach (like a hamlet crow). The simile of the eagle and hamlet crow acts in two ways. Firstly, it contrasts the sought-after image of an eagle with an undesirable image of the hamlet crow. Secondly, it points to the eating habits of the hamlet crow, which is a scavenger feeding from the leftovers of other birds; it is lazy and does not want to work hard for its food; it saves the leftovers for the next meal. Eagles only eat the food which they hunt while it is fresh and tender; they do not store it and work very hard for finding it. They will remain hungry and will not eat leftovers and rotten food. Thus Khushal preaches to Pashtuns to take up the role of an eagle rather than a hamlet crow, and not to sell their loyalties to Mughals for their leftovers. The tenet expressed in the couplet and subsequent life story is that of 'bravery', when one is not afraid of death and the shortage of food.

In the following snapshot of life history narrative, the entrepreneur Suleman Keil identifies himself with the eagle (see the couplet) as he migrated over the mountains from Kabul to Peshawar, never losing heart, re-establishing himself in life, taking care of his family, and living as part of a tribe (the Dosto-Kiehl). This sense of belonging pushes him to take risks. He contrasts himself with the local (Pakistani) Pashtuns which would guard their lifestyles and thus be weak, feeling highly insecure and threatened. Suleman, in contrast, sees his own lifestyle as a strength; he is not afraid of losing it, and is confident of regaining it at any time (as he once did, after the trauma of migration).

*If you were in Kabul and had gone through a rain of rockets there, you would have fled across many countries.” They were afraid and asked: “What will we do and what will we eat?”*

*I told them: “We came in one pair of clothes and God took care of us. We have houses, cars and money, better than in Kabul; do not take stress, God is gracious. He will take care.” ... So, you natives are very fearful of death and also worry too much about what you will eat. Death and food is your weakness.*

### **“I can make it work again”**

*“The loss of life and wealth should not matter, what matters is respect”  
“All the goodness of a man is in self esteem” (KKK, 1982, in Baznama)*

This couplet comes from Khushal’s “Baznama” (Naseem, 1982) as he describes the core traits to be held by an individual. Hard times had taken their toll on the Pashtuns. As they had taken up weapons against the Mughals, they had lost their limited wealth, their dear ones, and their habitual social lives. Khushal gives Pashtuns the hope that their core is still intact as they did not compromise their honour and respect. He gives them the confidence that they still possess all the goodness of men. They should keep their self-esteem while working hard towards a good life once again. The tenet referred to is ‘Puth’. It implicitly preaches not to become dependent but have self-sufficiency.

An extract from Abdullah’s life story expresses this poetic trope. As an entrepreneur, he has endured tough times and ‘near shaves with death’. However, he did not give up as he ventured into several businesses. He is not able to live comfortably and his economic situation constantly fluctuates. Yet he keeps faith in his self-esteem, working hard, and using his skills creatively to earn the necessary money.

*But I need capital to get hold of good equipment from foreign countries. I do not have any capital but, still, I am able to run the business...*

*When you will come to my shop, you will be able to see my condition there. I have a huge variety of faulty equipment. I can make it work again; I know how to repair it. In the last ten-twenty years I got good expertise from it.*

### **“I introduced a new product”**

*“A man is he, who is courageous, and whom success attendeth—  
Who is gentle and affable, unto all people, as long as life lasteth.  
His face, his real face—his word, his word—his promise, his promise:  
With no falsehood in him, no deception, not witless and lewd”*

*(Source: Raverty G.H., 1860 (poem no. 39)*

What does a courageous and successful man look like? Which characteristics would that person have? Khushal Khan Khattak continues drawing the virtues of an ideal person. He ought to be gentle and approachable in all personal circumstances and throughout his life. Such a person does not hide his real self, does not tell lies, and has no hidden agendas. Such a man stands by his promise and his word, living the tenet of ‘Wafa’.

Abdur Rahman is a young entrepreneur whose father is a well educated. He projects his identity as a successful man who could have chosen to continue education, going abroad and leading a more enjoyable and perhaps individualistic life. But he remains loyal to his family and leaves his education midway to help out his older brothers who have sacrificed many years for the family, him included. He does not go abroad as his father is old and needs support. Conforming to these moral boundaries does not prevent Abdur’s business success as he was able to introduce a new product in the local market which now is in high demand.

*In Peshawar our economic situation was not stable... So [my older brother] went to Kuwait and worked as a labourer... Now he has his own business there... I also wanted to*



*go ... but there is no one else here to take care of the home... [and] my father is old... so I had to stay behind...*

*I opened my shop three years ago... this item was not available before. I launched it. I brought it to Peshawar for the first time from Kabul; it was very hard to bring it here... It has a 50 years warranty.*

## REGULATION AND INSPIRATION: POEMS AS MORAL COMPASS

In this paper we have engaged in exploring the codification of an ideal self in poetry through the *Pashtunwali* – a code of honour for Pashtuns, to which entrepreneurs belong. For centuries, that code has been inscribed in Afghan poetry and kept alive both in Pakistan and Afghanistan. We have thus used the words of the most renowned Pashtun poet, Khushal, to make sense of the tenets invoked for entrepreneurial identity construction. In first instance, Khushal’s poetry illustrates his own identity as he defines the “‘right’ and ‘wrong’, desirable/undesirable from his personal perspective. However, in addressing the Pashtuns at large, from a position of leadership and strength, he is prescribing a system of *moral regulation* which is *central to collective existence*” (Schöpflin, 2001, p. 2, Italics in original). Its meaning is locally constructed and adopted, but is perceived to be universally applicable by the locals (ibid.). Afghan poetry thus becomes the most powerful vehicle for collective identity construction in the midst of a fragmented tribal order and various historical moments of anarchy. It is poetry that ‘units’ a myriad of rivalries and tribal realities into a more coherent sense of self to which individuals can aspire, providing a shared code of behaviour in everyday life and the ‘moral path’ to honour.

But in that codification, we may “overemphasise the more spectacular or violent aspects of *pashtunwali*... and neglect the more subtle points which complete the image of person without which we cannot understand complex sequences of actions” (Glatzer, 1998, p. 4; Italics in original). This paper avoids such risk by looking at the code’s poetic tropes in poems *and* in life history narratives. These ground societal values and high-order prescriptions in the everyday life and business of entrepreneurs as ‘common people’ who may or may not fulfil projected aspirations. Yet, poetic tropes are powerful ‘anchors’ used for constructing self-narratives. These clearly express poetic tropes of *Pashtunwali*, but their connotation varies in the three narratives. Entrepreneurial identity is both fluid and stable due to how it is fixed or rendered more malleable in stories through those tropes.

In particular, the first story emphasises ‘the tribe’ in which ethnicity plays a crucial role. This is the only story that stresses collective identity through a strong sense of belonging, achieved through invoking the heroic courage of individuals and the tribe (‘thora’). Suleman does not question his identity, enacting a narrative that completely adheres to the trope in the poem. This does not feature as strongly in the other two stories which are more individualistic in nature. Still, the own experience remains connected to the shared social space of either a family or beliefs. For Abdullah, the ‘others’ became a source of struggle between his own economic conditions and his self-esteem (‘puth’) while for Abdur, choices in life are a matter of positive redemption from a difficult past (‘wafa’). These last two stories particularly invite empathy from readers/the audience, to sympathise with the storytellers’ existence. In story two, tensions within the individual are never resolved, faith is not an issue, and the collective anchoring is marginal. This self-positioning resonates somewhat more with conventional Western views of entrepreneurship where one acts individually and may not be able to rely on a network of support.

In sum, the stories in this paper highlight the relevance of poems and narratives for accessing lived experience (Bruner, 1990) but also the dynamic constitution of a social space of difference (Hetherington, 1998). The twofold analysis carried out here, via the use of both the poetic and the narrative approach, yields a rich picture of entrepreneurial selves. The poetic tropes and the poem’s couplets help us to better understand how an ideal self is dynamically shaped for a specific society and how it resonates within the lives of individuals. As such, the paper attempts to explore the experience of ‘being’, beyond that of ‘being an entrepreneur’, in a troubled and developing country like that of today’s Pakistan.

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