

EVE KULBERG

Mataluna: 151 Afghan Pashto Proverbs. Collected, edited, and translated by Edward Zelle. Edited by Hares Ahmadzai. Illustrations by Marefat High School in Kabul, Afghanistan. Tampa, Florida: Cultures Direct Press, 2014. Pp. 182.

“*One flower doesn’t bring spring alone,*” nor does a proverb collector working alone bring flourishing community involvement that crowdsourcing cultivates. American military officer and Dari speaker Captain Edward Zelle used crowdsourcing methods—gathering content through the involvement of individuals in online communities—to gather Pashto proverbs and bring Pashto speakers together. The resultant publication, *Mataluna*, demonstrates that crowdsourcing can both create a valuable cultural, linguistic book and also a transformative community project. The proverbs included in *Mataluna* grew in Pashto homes, were offered up on social networking sites, and arranged into a bouquet that displays Pashto linguistic and cultural flourishing.

Dari and Pashto speakers in Afghanistan value equality for the two languages: what exists in one language should also exist in the other. Therefore, after Zelle gathered one hundred and fifty-one Dari proverbs while living in Afghanistan and published an award-winning, illustrated book, *Zarbul Masalha* (2011), Pashto speakers asked him (in essence); “where is our book of Pashto proverbs?” Zelle met the challenge innovatively while living in America. He compiled *Mataluna: 151 Afghan Pashto Proverbs* by tapping into his online network of Pashto-speaking contacts and requesting submissions of Pashto proverbs. After eliciting proverbs through multiple forms of social media, particularly Twitter, he sorted and checked the submissions to discover which proverbs his online contacts considered to be most appropriate for a bound publication. He explains the process in detail on his website, *Afghan Proverbs*. He selected only proverbs that do not promote revenge, violence, or values inconsistent with a general desire for sustainable peace in Af-

ghanistan. After selecting one hundred and fifty-one violence- and revenge-free Pashto proverbs with a Pashto scholar, ZelleM asked the illustrators of his earlier book of Dari proverbs (high school students at Marefat High School in Kabul) to create images to accompany the Pashto sayings. The result? An illustrated book *and* a process well worth replicating *with* (rather than *for*) other language communities.

After a preface describing the process of the book's creation and a brief foreword, ZelleM offers a simplified guide to the Pashto alphabet. Each page in the text's body presents one proverb in Pashto, a Roman script transliteration below, a "literal" translation into English below that, (usually) an explanation, other comment, and/or an informative, explanatory note. The transcriptions simplify the Pashto vowels and attempt to distinguish retroflex consonants by doubling a letter. The transcriptions may not always accurately represent proper pronunciation. A visual illustration of the proverb or an ornamental leaf graces each page.

The first proverb in *Mataluna* speaks of self-reliance and the importance of work. Setting this proverb first provides an artful touch of irony, since this work is primarily valuable because it is a uniquely cooperative work. By my estimation, at least twenty-one of the one hundred and fifty-one proverbs underscore the value of hard work. About sixteen proverbs champion the value of honesty, and around fourteen treat wisdom or general advice on how to live. About eleven proverbs emphasize the value of acting in a careful manner. The book seems not to categorize the proverbs in any readily discernable manner, but some portions lump together general topics, such as four consecutive proverbs on pride/humility (pp. 53-56). Other topics include friendship (nine proverbs), human nature (eight), patience (eight), enemies (six), persistence, power, money, time (five each).

To a reader familiar with Pashto language and culture, proverbs concerning violence and revenge appear conspicuous by their absence. One proverb reflects the Pashtun code of honor known as *Pashtunwali*: "*Better killed by a sword than defiled by an enemy.*" ZelleM comments on this proverb that this unwritten code of honor also includes values of "hospitality, asylum, re-

venge, loyalty, bravery, justice, love of God and nation, and protecting the honor of women” (p. 60).

Thirteen proverbs provide particular insight into practice or expressions of Islam in Pashto culture. These include statements on how God works in relationship to peoples' actions (pp. 4, 33, 36, 77, 105, 122, and 135), perception of alcohol consumption (p. 115), Muslim clothing (p. 38), and the festival time of *Eid* (p. 130). Zelleem provides an understanding of a few proverbs that reflect a Muslim perspective. For instance, he explains the proverb, “*Here the steps and the moment are being counted*” with, “Everything you do or say matters, even when you think no one is watching. God sees everything, and holds people accountable for their words, thoughts and actions” (p. 26). Similarly, he comments that “all people ultimately will be held accountable in this life or the next” in part of his explanation of the proverb, “*Even if the night is dark, the apples have been counted*” (p. 57). Zelleem seems to avoid citing Galatians 6:7, even though his “Literal” translation of the proverb, “*As you sow, so shall you reap*” (p. 121) is identical to multiple English translations of the New Testament passage.

For most of the proverbs, Zelleem includes a proverb in English which conveys a similar sense and/or could be used in similar context. He labels each one “*English equivalent.*” For a few Pashto proverbs, Zelleem includes a brief comment, such as a suggestion for the proverb’s origination, an explanation of when Pashto may use the proverb, or other comment. In a few instances, his wording in English lacks some clarity and explanations of at least two proverbs left me still scratching my head. The description, “An ironic Matal [proverb] that means a person should not be greedy or selfish” seems to fail at fully elucidating, “*When things come to me, they are all mine*” (p. 68). Zelleem explains the proverb, “*First eat your own meat, then eat hunted meat,*” with, “Try to learn things, develop expertise, and become skilled and self-reliant...” (p. 62). Without an understanding of Pashto hunting culture, I wonder why hunted meat would not be considered one’s “own” meat.

Arguably, proverbs often reflect a language community’s culture. So may illustrations. *Mataluna* might provide another level of cultural insights through its pairing of illustrations and proverbs. The pictures the Afghani high school students chose to

draw for at least some of the proverbs may surprise and interest a non-Pashto. For instance, to illustrate, “*A weighing scale does not favor anyone*” the picture shows a beautiful woman, in a flowing head scarf and long shawl, considering her reflection in a mirror (p. 49). For the illustrator to choose to represent a woman’s internal struggle provides an intimate, valuable glimpse into the female experience within Pashto culture. Where women usually keep from showing their faces, let alone their hair, to unrelated men, for the illustrator to choose to represent the women with a bit of hair showing causes me to want to look deeper into the little illustration’s possible intentions.

The picture accompanying “*Mountains do not draw nearer to each other, but people do*” shows an imprisoned man looking sorrowfully through the bars of his cell, and a prison guard standing nearby. In a second frame, the prison guard sits huddled up on the floor, looking sad. The prisoner stands by his cell bars, looking with compassion on the guard. Zelle explains the proverb with the words, “It is important to recognize that all people are fellow humans...” (p. 25). Interestingly, at least two pictures included elements which are not typical of Pashto culture. A man in the illustration to the proverb on page 61 wears a hat perhaps only slightly similar to the Afghani *pacol*. The illustration of one man bowing at the waist, apparently greeting the other man, reflects a greeting not at all common in Pashto culture (p. 61).

About six of the Pashto proverbs in *Mataluna* appear very similar to proverbs in Zelle’s Dari collection. Versions of at least fourteen of the 151 proverbs in Zelle’s collection also appear in Tair and Edward’s collection of 1,350 Pashto proverbs, *Rohi Mataluna: Pashto Proverbs* (2006). Unlike Zelle’s work, *Rohi Mataluna* contains an index and organizes the proverbs alphabetically by the first word in the original Pashto proverbs.

Because of *Mataluna*’s illustrations, limited scope, relatively simple explanations, and “friendly” layout, the book holds great value for English speakers wishing to gain an introduction to Pashto culture. Any outsiders seeking to understand a Muslim culture have much to gain by reading this collection of proverbs. This book should find its way into the hands of any troops who have (or will) put their boots on the ground in Afghanistan.

As well as capturing a sliver of insight into a culture vitally valuable for contemporary international interest, *Mataluna* suggests how well a scholar may create a valuable work out of material gathered online and from high school students. While Zelle's work lacks some refinement and scholarly qualities that academic readers may seek, his work may inspire paremiologists to use the idea of crowdsourcing to attempt more scholarly methods to use the internet for collecting and analyzing proverbs. Perhaps Zelle's work provides a solution to the age-old challenge of the observer's paradox, which hinders effectively gathering proverbs in context. By crowdsourcing, a paremiologist may potentially accomplish volumes more collections than could ever be possible through traveling or library research. Paremiologists should add this book to their shelves and consider following its trailblazing collecting method. Time to open a Twitter account and start collecting proverbs online!

References:

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Eve Kulberg
SIL International
7500 West Camp Wisdom Road
Dallas, Texas 75236
USA
Email: eve_kulberg@sil.org