



DID SERVANT-LEADERSHIP SAVE THE LONE SURVIVOR?

The Pashtunwali Ethos as a Foundation for the Practice of Servant-Leadership

— X. JASMINE BORDERE AND FRANKLIN G. MIXON, JR.

Servant-leadership is a unique leadership philosophy that, according to Greenleaf (1970, 1977), asserts that an effective leader must first be a servant whose primary goal is to serve the needs and interests of others. Stated differently, a servant-leader supports and develops those among his or her followership (Northouse, 2013). In fact, Stone, Russell, and Patterson (2004) suggest that its central focus on serving followers is what differentiates servant-leadership from other leadership styles. Additionally, servant-leaders express humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance and stewardship, and provide directions and empower followers, all of which ultimately leads to organizational success (Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011; Northouse, 2013).

The practice of servant-leadership has a long history. As evident in *The Holy Bible*, Jesus Christ first introduced the concept of servant-leadership to human endeavor over two thousand years ago (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). However, it was not until the 1970s that Greenleaf (1970, 1977) conceptualized the notion of servant-leadership and revitalized the practice of servant-leadership in modern organizations (Gandolfi, Stone, & Deno, 2017). Based on



Greenleaf's (1970, 1977) view of servant-leadership, Spears (1995) identifies 10 critical characteristics of servant-leadership. These include listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Spears, 1995).

Most, if not all, of Spears' (1995) 10 critical characteristics are embodied in *Pashtunwali*, a centuries-old unwritten Pashtun moral code that governs all activities of Pashtun life, from early childhood to death, including activities related to collective decision-making, dispute resolution, communal interaction and various other obligations. One of these guidelines commits the followers (practitioners) of *Pashtunwali* to protect and provide asylum to any guest seeking the Afghan community's assistance. It is this very moral code, as our essay explains, that is personified through the choices and actions of Mohammad Gulab, the Afghan village leader who in 2005 saved the life of U.S. Navy Seal Marcus Luttrell, the lone survivor of a doomed U.S. military mission in northeastern Afghanistan during *Operation Enduring Freedom*.¹

Before turning to our exploration of the servant-leadership aspects embodied by the various participants in the military operation mentioned above, we first provide a brief review of the academic literature on servant-leadership, with particular focus on studies on servant-leadership in the cultures of the Middle and Near East countries. That review is followed by a historical primer on the mission involving Luttrell and the other U.S. Navy Seals.

¹ Operation Enduring Freedom is the name given to the 2001 U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan that followed the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York. For an investigation into the international public choice aspects of that conflict, see Mixon (2013). For the movie adaptation — titled *Lone Survivor* — of the story recounted in this essay, see Berg (2013). Lastly, for a discussion of the international game theory elements of that film, see Ahlstrom and Mixon (2020).



PRIOR LITERATURE: A BRIEF REVIEW

As pointed out in the introduction, Greenleaf (1970, 1977) was the first to conceptualize the ages-old notion of servant-leadership, leading to a foundation that invigorated the practice of servant-leadership in modern organizations (Gandolfi et al., 2017). Twenty years later, Spears (1995) translated Greenleaf's (1970, 1977) conceptualization of servant-leadership into 10 critical characteristics of servant-leadership. Since that time, a number of academic studies have both refined Spears' (1995) model and modeled their own instruments of his 10 characteristics in order to measure servant-leadership (e.g., Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Laub, 1999; Patterson, 2003; Russell & Stone, 2002; Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora, 2008; Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008). Thus, the research focus in the area of servant-leadership turned, at least for a time, toward empirical explorations of the foundational models of Greenleaf (1970, 1977) and Spears (1995).

Extending this line of research, Van Dierendonck (2011) points out that the measurement instruments put forth in many of these newer servant-leadership studies either lack dimensional validity or focus mainly on the "servant" aspect of servant-leadership, thus sacrificing any focus on the "leadership" aspect of the servant-leadership concept. Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) address these shortcomings through a combined explanatory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis approach. In doing so, they are able to reconcile existing servant-leadership characteristics models and measurement instruments through development of a multi-dimensional instrument that captures the complexity of the servant-leadership concept. Using data collected from 1,571 participants across two countries, they further provide empirical evidence supporting the reliability and validity of their measurement instruments (Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). The final multi-



dimensional instrument in Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) consists of 30 items measuring eight *core* features of servant-leadership—empowerment, accountability, standing back, humility, authenticity, courage, interpersonal acceptance (forgiveness) and stewardship.

An additional stream of academic research on servant-leadership suggests that leadership practices vary by culture (e.g., see Hofstede, 1980). There is some evidence indicating that the notion of servant-leadership is moderated by culture (Pekerti & Sendjaya, 2010; Winston & Ryan, 2008). For example, Hale and Fields (2007) find that Ghanaians report experiencing servant-leadership behaviors in work situations significantly less than do North Americans. However, this not is not supported in a recent study by Carroll and Patterson (2014) that is based on Patterson's (2003) seven characteristics of servant-leadership—love, altruism, humility, trust, vision, empowerment and service. In their recent investigation of cross-cultural differences in attitudes toward servant-leadership, Carroll and Patterson (2014) fail to find any differences in perceptions of servant-leadership between survey respondents in the U.S. and India for six of Patterson's (2003) seven servant-leadership constructs. A contemporaneous study by Mittal and Dorfman (2014) finds a strong endorsement for the servant-leadership characteristic of empowerment in European/Nordic cultures, while empathy and humility are strongly endorsed in Asian cultures. Relatedly, Han, Kakabadse, and Kakabadse (2010) conclude that the concept of servant-leadership holds a parallel meaning in China and the U.S. Lastly, even the study by Hales and Fields (2007) reports that Ghanaians and North Americans relate service and humility with leader effectiveness similarly.

Winston and Ryan (2008) demonstrate that the core values of



various cultures (e.g., Ubuntu, Harambee, Taoist, Confucianism, Jewish, and Hindu) actually align with various characteristics of servant-leadership. As such, they argue that servant-leadership is global, rather than Western, in nature (Winston & Ryan, 2008). Lastly, a new study by Gandolfi et al. (2017) indicates that the traditional tribal leadership of the Bedouin-Arab culture is also consistent with the notion of servant-leadership, given that leaders in the Bedouin-Arab culture are expected to prioritize the needs of family and guests above their own. Thus, servant-leadership has both influenced and been influenced by cultures around the world, such as those of the Middle East (Gandolfi et al., 2017).

Our exploration builds upon the recent extension of Greenleaf's (1970, 1977) seminal work by Gandolfi et al. (2017) in that we analyze a feature of the Pashtun (or, northeastern Afghani) ethos known as *Pashtunwali*, which encompasses the tenets of *Melmastia*, *Badragha* and *Lokhay*, that commits its followers (practitioners) to protect and provide asylum to any guest seeking the Afghan community's assistance. In fact, as explained in the following sections of this essay, it is that ethos that saved the life of U.S. Navy Seal Marcus Luttrell, the lone survivor of a covert U.S. military mission in 2005 during *Operation Enduring Freedom*. This mission is discussed in the next section.

OPERATION REDWING: A PRIMER

Following the work of Luttrell (2007) and Zimmerman and Gresham (2011), on June 28, 2005, a four-man team of U.S. Navy Seals disembarked from a Chinook helicopter in the mountains of the Kunar Province of northeastern Afghanistan. Their mission, known as Operation Redwing (also referred to as Operation Redwings or Operation Red Wings), was to provide reconnaissance on the leader of a Taliban militia that was responsible for the deaths of numerous



U.S. Marines during the early months of *Operation Enduring Freedom*. The Seal team consisted of Michael Murphy, a 29 year-old lieutenant from New York, Matthew Axelson, a 29 year-old Petty Officer Second Class from California, Danny Dietz, a 25 year-old Petty Officer Second Class from Colorado, and Marcus Luttrell, a 29 year-old Petty Officer First Class from Texas (Luttrell, 2007; Zimmerman & Gresham, 2011). After passing successfully through a series of checkpoints named for popular brands of beer (e.g., Budweiser, Miller and Corona), the four-man Seal team established a position on a mountain ridge from which to observe the enemy militia in a Pashtun village below.

After spotting the sought-after militia and its leader, the team experienced difficulties establishing radio communications with the quick reaction force that was awaiting further details from the team in order to assist in dealing with the threat. While working on establishing communications with higher command, Murphy directed the team to move to a more conducive location for radio communication. After relocating, the team encountered a group of Pashtun goat herders, who were briefly detained but later released. Realizing their classified mission had been compromised by the accidental encounter, and anticipating an engagement with Taliban soldiers, Murphy ordered the Seals to relocate to a more defensible position. Shortly thereafter, the four-man Seal team found themselves surrounded by a large Taliban militia, officially estimated to number about 80 soldiers (Zimmerman & Gresham, 2011), with some first-hand accounts placing that number much higher (Luttrell, 2007), and a battle lasting several hours ensued. The battle was characterized by several heroic actions, including a perilous attempt by Murphy to move into an exposed position in order to reach the higher command by satellite phone—a choice that ultimately cost



him his life. Dietz and Axelson were also killed during the engagement along with 16 other Special Operations Forces who later flew into the fight in an ungarded Chinook helicopter and were killed by a rocket-propelled grenade, resulting in the costliest single day of fighting in U.S. Special Operations Forces history.

Remarkably, despite multiple gunshot wounds and broken bones, Luttrell survived and spent that night crawling (for miles) over the mountainous terrain. He was later discovered by a group of Pashtun villagers, who carried him to their nearby village. By this time Luttrell and the three other Seals had become the object of one of the single largest search-and-rescue operations by the U.S. military since the Vietnam War (Zimmerman & Gresham, 2011). Luttrell and his rescuers ultimately arrived at the village of Sabray, home to about 300 households (Luttrell, 2007). Upon arrival, shrapnel was extracted from Luttrell's body and his wounds were cleaned. He was provided clean clothes, water to drink, and flatbread to eat.

Luttrell was protected and cared for by the villagers of Sabray, who on occasion met incursions by Taliban fighters in search of Luttrell with enough determination to coax them away from the village. Finally, after about one week in this perilous situation, Luttrell was located by U.S. Army Rangers sent out to search for him and his teammates and flown back to the U.S. base in Bagram, Afghanistan. The bodies of Luttrell's three fallen teammates were found and recovered by U.S. Navy Seals and their Afghan guides in the days that followed (Luttrell, 2007). As a testament to their bravery, Murphy was awarded (posthumously) the Medal of Honor (upgraded from the Silver Star) and the Purple Heart, while Axelson, Dietz, and Luttrell were awarded (in some cases posthumously) the Navy Cross, the Purple Heart, and the Navy's Good Conduct Medal.



THE LINKS BETWEEN *PASHTUNWALI* AND SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

The principle that guided the actions of Pashtun villagers in the history told above is the centuries-old unwritten honor code of the Pashtun people known as *Pashtunwali*, which literally means “the way of the Pashtuns” (Benson & Siddiqui, 2014). What Zimmerman and Gresham (2011) describe as a generations-old blood code of hospitality, Benson and Siddiqui (2014) describe as the customary law that provides the mechanism for tribal governance and daily affairs for the ethnic *Pashtun* tribes that straddle the mountainous region between Afghanistan and Pakistan. As indicated in Ahlstrom and Mixon (2020), the code of *Pashtunwali* governs and regulates nearly all aspects of Pashtun life, ranging from tribal affairs to individual honor and behavior. According to Benson and Siddiqui (2014),

Pashtunwali guides all activities of individual tribesmen from early childhood to death, while also providing guidelines for collective decision-making, dispute resolution, communal interaction and various other obligations. It is recognized throughout the *Pashtun* tribes . . . [and] there are a number of rules that apply throughout the *Pashtun* tribes. (p. 112)

Next, the various major tenets of *Pashtunwali* are, according to Yousaf (2019), based on peace, conciliation, and protection of guests. *Melmastya*, one of the major rules or tenets of *Pashtunwali*, is built upon the notion of providing hospitality and asylum to all guests seeking help.² As Benson and Siddiqui (2014) point out,

Pashtuns take great pride in their *Melamastya* tradition, which insures respect, care and hospitality for any visitor. Any

² See <http://afghanland.com/culture/pashtunwali.html>, where *Melmastya* is also referred to as *Melmastia*.



person, whether from the same tribe but different village, another clan or tribe, or even a stranger, and whether known to the inhabitants of a village or not, will be received as a guest if he travels to the village. (p. 114)

According to the *Pashtunwali* tenet of *Melmastya*, if a stranger stops at a Pashtun village for the night, he is treated as a guest of all of the villagers, and, therefore, is invited to stay in the village guesthouse, known as the *hujra*, where he is served meals by a tribal elder, or *Khan* (Benson & Siddiqui, 2014, p. 115). If, on the other hand, the traveler is known to a villager, that villager hosts the traveler in his own home. The richness of the *Melmastya* tradition in this regard is further illuminated by Benson and Siddiqui (2014), who indicate,

The host is expected to offer as much as he possibly can, in preparing meals for the guest, as *Melamastya* obliges a tribesman to go well beyond what his household would generally consume. After the meal, all the male members of the community gather in the *hujra* to entertain the guest. The guest is the focus of this event, as the tribesmen listen to folklore about his tribe and stories about his experiences. Musical entertainment may also be provided. (p. 115)

The related, yet even more forceful, *Pashtunwali* tenet known as *Badragha* offers a guarantee for the safety and protection of a stranger (traveler) for whom there is some apprehension of being killed on his way home (Ahlstrom & Mixon, 2020).³ According to this tenet or rule of *Pashtunwali*, an armed party of local tribesmen, referred to as *Badragha* or “escort,” are to remain close to and even accompany such a traveler in order to ensure his safe return to the

³ See also <http://afghanland.com/culture/pashtunwali.html>.



place of his abode (Ahlstrom & Mixon, 2020).⁴

Next, the *Pashtunwali* tenet of *Lokhay* represents an extension of *Badragha*. Luttrell (2007) describe *Lokhay* as “an unbending section of historic *Pashtunwali* tribal law as laid out in the hospitality section . . . [whose] literal translation . . . is ‘giving of a pot’” (p. 285). To U.S. Navy Seal Marcus Luttrell, whose life was saved by Pashtun villagers, the tenet of *Lokhay* was a matter of life and death (Luttrell, 2007),

To an American, especially one in such terrible shape as I was, the concept of helping out a wounded, possibly dying man is pretty routine . . . For these guys [i.e., the Pashtun villagers], the concept carried many onerous responsibilities. *Lokhay* means not only providing care and shelter, it means an unbreakable commitment to defend that wounded man to the death. And not just the death of the principal tribesman or family who made the original commitment for the giving of a pot. It means the whole damned village. *Lokhay* means the population of that village will fight to the last man, honor-bound to protect the individual they have invited in to share their hospitality . . . It’s not a point of renegotiation. This is strictly nonnegotiable. (p. 285)

Lastly, *Panah*, which is related to *Lokhay*, is a component of *Badragha* that obligates a Pashtun villager to provide a traveler with shelter and protection from enemies. As Benson and Siddiqui (2014) point out, “failure to live up to the obligation [of *Panah*] results in extreme disgrace for the person, family, clan or even an entire tribe” (p. 116).

A comparison of *Pashtunwali* and its major tenets to the key

⁴ See also <http://afghanland.com/culture/pashtunwali.html>.



characteristics of servant-leadership reveals that the former is a foundation for the practice of the latter. The tenets of *Pashtunwali* are, for example, clearly linked to several of the instruments of servant-leadership identified by Spears (1995). For example, the *Melmastya* concept of hospitality for strangers, particularly seriously wounded travelers such as Luttrell, are easily viewed as representations of two of Spears' (1995) instruments, "empathy" and "healing." The post-meal ceremony included in *Melmastya*, which occurs in the village *hujra* and focuses on the traveler's folklore and stories about his experiences, are relevant examples of another two of Spears' (1995) instruments, "listening" and "awareness."

The tenets of *Pashtunwali* are also clearly linked to various critical characteristics of servant-leadership listed by Patterson (2003), and also to several core features of servant-leadership discussed in Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011). In the case of Patterson (2003), the *Pashtunwali* principles encompassed by *Melmastya* and *Badragha* are representations of "service," "altruism," and, arguably, "love." A new study by Ullah and Kalil (2019) emphasizes the last of these representations in asserting that an important thing counted in *Melmastya* is "the warmth with which the guest [i]s received and not the foodstuff served" (pp. 129-130). Lastly, a contemporaneous study by Yousaf (2019) suggests that the *Pashtunwali* tenet of *Melmastya* plays a major role in maintaining peace among the Pashtuns.

In the terms used by Van Dierendonck & Nuijten (2011), at the core of *Pashtunwali* is a representation of "authenticity." The involvement of tribal elders and village leaders in the provision of the "service" aspects of *Pashtunwali* provide exhibitions of "humility" (Patterson, 2003; Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011) and "interpersonal acceptance" (Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). Lastly, whether exhibited by the willingness to provide hospitality to

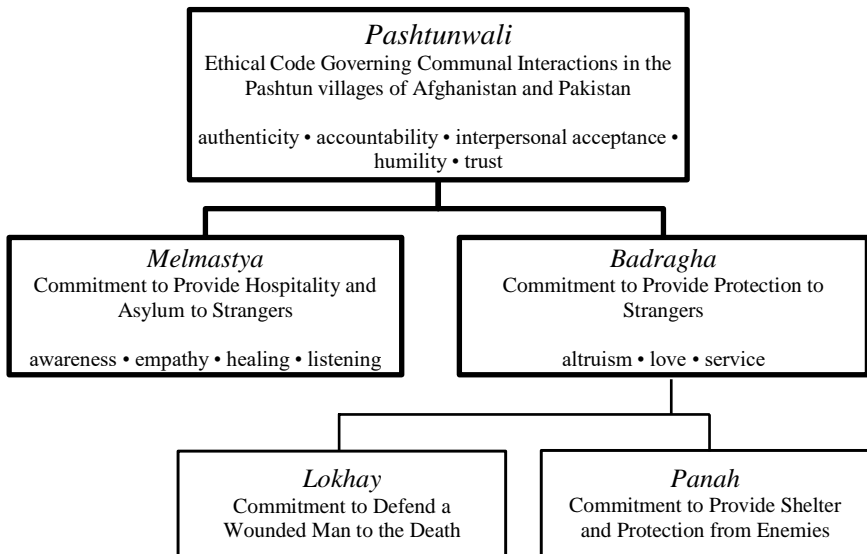


a stranger, or in the types of relationships defined in the informal bureaucratic structure represented by the *Pashtunwali* ethos, a nontrivial degree of “trust” (Patterson, 2003), “accountability,” and “courage” (Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011) are important to the ethical code governing activities and relations in Pashtun society.

The connections between elements of the *Pashtunwali* code and the instruments of servant-leadership described in Spears (1995), Patterson (2003), and Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) suggest, that at the core of the *Pashtunwali* ethos is a form of servant-leadership. This is evident in Figure 1, wherein the bulleted points associated with *Pashtunwali*, and its two major tenets of *Melmastya* and *Badragha*, are the servant-leadership principles discussed in Spears (1995), Patterson (2003), and Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011). That these principles are nurtured from “childhood to death” is, to list another of Spears’ (1995) critical characteristics of servant-leadership, evidence of *Pashtunwali*’s “commitment to the growth of people.”



Figure 1: *The Pashtunwali Ethos as a Form of Servant-Leadership*



Next, the rules for collective decision-making and dispute resolution entail the minor *Pashtunwali* concepts of *Thega* and *Nanawatey* (Benson & Siddiqui, 2014), and other communal interactions are the definition of “building community” in Spears’ (1995) nomenclature. *Thega*, which literally means “putting down a stone,” refers to the Pashtun process of declaring a truce between feuding tribesmen (Benson & Siddiqui, 2014, p. 114), which may involve the participation of village elders. *Nanawatey*, which literally means “coming in,” refers to the process of establishing peace between feuding parties by building up *Melmastya* (i.e., the Pashtun obligation to be hospitable) and appealing for one’s forgiveness (Benson & Siddiqui, 2014, p. 116).

According to Naz, Khan, Chaudhry, Daraz, and Hussain (2012), *Nanawatey*, which they indicate literally means “to enter into the



security of a house” (p. 65), sometimes directs Afghan women to visit the house of their family’s feuding enemy and ask for the conflict to stop. Upon receipt of this request, the feuding enemy is obligated by *Pashtunwali* to accept (Ismati, 1987). This element supports Yousaf’s (2019) contention that *Nanawatey* plays a major role in maintaining peace among the Pashtuns. Lastly, not only does the involvement of tribal elders and village leaders in the provision of these “service” aspects of *Pashtunwali* represent an exhibition of “humility” (Patterson, 2003; Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011) and “interpersonal acceptance” (Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011), so does the action of any Pashtun villager who seeks *Nanawatey* for the most serious types of offenses or transgressions (Benson & Siddiqui, 2014). How many of these principles of *Pashtunwali* played a role in saving the life of U.S. Navy Seal Marcus Luttrell is discussed in the next section.

HOW *PASHTUNWALI*, OR SERVANT-LEADERSHIP, SAVED THE LONE SURVIVOR

Any endeavor to connect *Pashtunwali*, or servant-leadership, to the survival and rescue of U.S. Navy Seal Marcus Luttrell begins at the moment Luttrell, barely clinging to life, was discovered by a small group of Pashtun villagers. Among them was an Afghani named Sarawa, who spoke enough English to explain to Luttrell that he was the village doctor. Sarawa conferenced with other villagers who accompanied him and they decided, as Luttrell would only later learn, to extend *Lokhay* to Luttrell in his time of need (Luttrell, 2007). That meant carrying Luttrell back to their village, cleaning his wounds, providing him with water, food and clothing, and offering him shelter for as long as he would require. It also meant putting themselves, and the lives of the other villagers, in jeopardy. Thus, theirs was clearly an act of service or altruism (Patterson, 2003).



During the first night, a group of Taliban fighters entered the village and made their way to the guest house that Luttrell occupied. Once there, they interrogated and tortured him for about six hours, after which a small man—recognized by Luttrell as the village elder—entered the room, knelt beside Luttrell and offered water and bread. The elder then turned to the Taliban soldiers, forbade them from taking Luttrell, and ordered them to leave the village. After the elder exited the room, the Taliban fighters complied with the elder's orders (Luttrell, 2007).

The next day Luttrell met Mohamad Gulab, the 33-year old son of the village elder. Gulab held a strong position in the village, and Luttrell would come to view him as a “real friend” over the course of the harrowing ordeal (Luttrell, 2007). Through communications with Gulab and others, Luttrell would come to learn that the village had been embarrassed by the Taliban's incursion into the village, as it threatened Luttrell's safety and, therefore, almost led to the ultimate retribution under the principles of *Lokhay*.

Under Gulab's attentive eye, the children of the village paid many visits to Luttrell, which often ended in hugs all around (Luttrell, 2007), thus providing an indication that the *Pashtunwali* ethos encompasses efforts to build community and is committed to the growth of people (Spears, 1995). After one such occasion, the village elder joined Luttrell, bringing water and food, for a three-hour conversation about how to reach an American military base with word of Luttrell's condition. With Luttrell in no shape to travel, the village elder decided to journey, alone and on foot across mountainous terrain populated by Taliban militia, to the U.S. base at Asadabad.

The U.S. base stood between 30 and 40 miles from the village of Sabray, and the village elder would be carrying a note written and signed by Luttrell that read, “This man gave me shelter and food, and



must be helped at all costs” (Luttrell, 2007, pp. 309-310), thus putting him in grave danger should he encounter and be interrogated by Taliban forces. Clearly, the village elder’s actions in this regard were grounded in empathy (Spears, 1995; Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011), altruism, humility and service (Patterson, 2003). Given the danger inherent in the journey, his actions also involved courage (Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). In his biography, Luttrell (2007) would write, “I never saw him again, to thank him for his kindness” (pp. 309-310).

Near the end of Luttrell’s ordeal in the village, U.S. forces dropped, by parachute, a supply cache that they hoped would be found by any surviving members of Luttrell’s team. Unfortunately, only the village’s kids had seen the drop and knew where the cache was likely located. On their own they journeyed up into the mountains and retrieved several items, including an MRE (meal ready to eat), a radio battery, and a cellphone pamphlet. Excited to see them return, Luttrell (2007) was shaken by their condition,

Almost every one of the kids had been battered. They had bruises on their faces, cut lips, and bloody noses. Those [Taliban fighters] out there had beaten up my kids, punched them in their faces, to stop them from getting the stuff from the drop . . . I’ll never forget what they did to the kids of Sabray . . . Whenever I hear the word *Taliban*, I think of that day first. (p. 324)

Again, the “cradle to grave” adherence to the principles of *Pashtunwali* is evident in the way the young citizens of Sabray put the safety and health of Luttrell above their own, thus providing an additional example of the elements of community building and a commitment to the growth of people described in the servant-leadership model in Spears (1995).

One final example of the servant-leadership aspects of Luttrell’s



ordeal in Sabray, which occurred just before his rescue by U.S. Army Rangers, is provided by the Taliban militia's last attempt to force Luttrell out of the village and into their hands. After the Taliban entered Sabray from its highest point, Gulab retrieved Luttrell and hurried him down the village, to the first house (at the lowest point). Once there, Gulab returned Luttrell's rifle and brandished his own in an effort to make a last stand with his new American friend should the militiamen engage in a battle. As Luttrell (2007) recounts,

He looked more serious than I had ever seen him. Not afraid, just full of determination. He was doing it not for personal gain but out of a sense of honor that reached back down the generations, two thousand years of *Pashtunwali* tradition: You will defend your guest to the death. I watched Gulab carefully as he rammed a new magazine into his [rifle]. This was a man preparing to step right up to the plate. And I saw that light of goodness in his dark eyes, the way you always do when someone is making a brave and selfless action. (p. 337)

The other villagers stood firm with Gulab and Luttrell, and, in the end, they all called the bluff of the Taliban militiamen, who once again left the village without Luttrell. In the middle of his ordeal in the village, Luttrell (2007) would reflect on the ethos of *Pashtunwali*, noting that "there's just something unbreakable about them all, a grim determination to follow the ancient laws of the Pashtuns—laws which may yet prove too strong even for the Taliban and al Qaeda" (p. 312). Luttrell's reflection is perhaps best embodied in this particular episode of the ordeal. As in the prior examples, this one emphasizes the elements of building community (Spears, 1995), and of altruism, authenticity, service, humility, trust, accountability and courage (Patterson, 2003; Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011)



inherent to both *Pashtunwali* and servant-leadership. Given Luttrell's memory of his good friend Gulab that is recorded in the last line of the prior quote, it also represents the important servant-leadership characteristic of love (Patterson, 2003).

The narrative in Luttrell (2007) offers a compelling story that, following the presentation in Table 1, links the central tenets of *Pashtunwali* to the core features of servant-leadership. For example, the initial extension of *Lokhay*, an element of *Badragha*, to Luttrell by Sarawa that removed Luttrell from the battlefield was an act of altruism, service and love. Once inside the Pashtun village, the visits to the wounded Luttrell by the village children provide examples of the general *Pashtunwali* tenets of personal growth and the building of community. Gulab's father's journey to the American outpost with news of Luttrell's survival is a quintessential display of altruism, courage, empathy, humility and service—each an element of either *Melmastya* or *Badragha*. Finally, all of the care and protection provided to Luttrell by Gulab are displays of accountability, altruism, authenticity, courage, humility, service, trust, and love.



Table 1. *The Central Tenets of Pashtunwali and the Core Features of Servant-Leadership*

Central Tenets of <i>Pashtunwali</i>	Core Features of Servant-Leadership		
	Spears (1995)	Patterson (2003)	Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011)
<i>Melmastya</i>	empathy, healing, listening, awareness	service, altruism, love, humility, trust	authenticity, humility, interpersonal acceptance, accountability
<i>Badragha</i>		service, altruism, love, humility	authenticity, humility, interpersonal acceptance, accountability, courage

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This essay examines the similarities between the core features of servant-leadership and the central elements of *Pashtunwali*, the ages-old Pashtun moral code that requires its followers to protect and provide asylum to any guest seeking the Afghan community's assistance. These similarities are demonstrated using the story of U.S. Navy Seal Marcus Luttrell, the only surviving member of a four-man team sent on a covert mission into the Hindu Kush during *Operation Enduring Freedom*, the U.S. war with Afghanistan (2001-present). As we explain, the leadership principles of both managerial concepts (i.e., servant-leadership and *Pashtunwali*) were personified through the choices and actions of Mohammad Gulab, the Afghan village leader who provided Luttrell with shelter, food, water, clothing and even sanctuary—at great personal risk—during the week-long ordeal. Fortunately for Luttrell, adherence by the Afghan villagers to the



servant-leadership principles of *Pashtunwali* represented a “cradle to grave” ethos that stood firm in the face of substantial peril posed by Taliban forces that sought Luttrell’s capture.

References

- Ahlstrom, L. J. & Mixon, F. G., Jr. (2020). *War movies and economics: Lessons from Hollywood's adaptations of military conflicts*. Routledge.
- Barbuto, J. E., & Wheeler, D. W. (2006). Scale development and construct clarification of servant leadership. *Group & Organization Management*, 31(3), 300–326.
- Benson, B. L., & Siddiqui, Z. R. (2014). Pashtunwali — Law for the lawless, defense for the stateless. *International Review of Law and Economics*, 37(1), 108–120.
- Berg, P. (2013). *Lone Survivor*. Film 44.
- Carroll, B. C., & Patterson, K. (2014). Servant leadership: A cross cultural study between India and the United States. *Servant Leadership: Theory & Practice*, 1(1), 16–45.
- Gandolfi, F., Stone, S., & Deno, F. (2017). Servant leadership: An ancient style with 21st century relevance. *Review of International Comparative Management*, 18(4), 350–361.
- Greenleaf, R. K. (1970). *The servant as leader*. Robert K. Greenleaf Center.
- Greenleaf, R. K. (1977). *Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*. Paulist Press.
- Hale, J. R., & Fields, D. L. (2007). Exploring servant leadership across cultures: A study of followers in Ghana and the U.S.A. *Leadership*, 3(4), 397–417.
- Han, Y., Kakabadse, N. K., & Kakabadse, A. (2010). Servant leadership in the People’s Republic of China: A case study of the public sector. *Journal of Management Development*, 29(3), 265–281.
- Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture’s consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Sage.
- Ismati, M. M. (1987). *The position and role of Afghan women in Afghanistan*. Center of Social Science DRA.
- Laub, J. A. (1999). *Assessing the servant organization: Development of the organizational leadership assessment (OLA) instrument* [Doctoral dissertation, Florida Atlantic University].
- Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Zhao, H., & Henderson, D. (2008). Servant leadership: development of a multidimensional measure and multi-level



- assessment. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 19(2), 161–177.
- Luttrell, M. (2007). *Lone survivor: The eyewitness account of Operation Redwing and the lost heroes of Seal Team 10*. Little, Brown & Company.
- Mittal, R., & Dorfman, P. W. (2014). Servant leadership across cultures. *Journal of World Business*, 47(4), 555–570.
- Mixon, F. G. (2013). The allocation of death in the Afghanistan War: an international public choice perspective. *Journal of Public Finance and Public Choice*, 31(1-3), 21–41.
- Naz, A., Khan, W., Chaudhry, H. R., Daraz, U., & Hussain, M. (2012). The relational analyses of Pakhtun social organization (Pakhtunwali) and women's Islamic rights relegation in Malakand division, KPK Pakistan. *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 4(3), 63–73.
- Northouse, P. (2013). *Leadership: Theory and practice*. Sage.
- Patterson, K. (2003). Servant leadership: A theoretical model. Servant Leadership Research Roundtable, Virginia Beach, VA.
- Pekerti, A. A., & Sendjaya, S. (2010). Exploring servant leadership across cultures: Comparative study in Australia and Indonesia. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 21(5), 754–780.
- Russell, R. F., & Stone, A. G. (2002). A review of servant-leadership attributes: Developing a practical model. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 23(3), 145–157.
- Sendjaya, S., & Sarros, J. C. (2002). Servant leadership: Its origin, development, and application in organizations. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 9(2), 57–64.
- Sendjaya, S., Sarros, J. C., & Santora, J. C. (2008). Defining and measuring servant leadership behaviour in organizations. *Journal of Management Studies*, 45(2), 402–424.
- Spears, L. C. (1995). Introduction: Servant-leadership and Greenleaf legacy. In L. C. Spears (Ed.), *Reflections on leadership: How Robert K. Greenleaf's theory of servant-leadership influenced today's top management thinkers* (pp. 1-16). Wiley.
- Stone, G. A., Russell, R. F., & Patterson, K. (2004). Transformational versus servant leadership: A difference in leader focus. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 25(4), 349–361.
- Ullah, H., & Kalil, M. H. (2019). The impact of U.S. invasion in Afghanistan on the tribal culture of Waziristan. *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture*, 40(1), 123–142.
- Winston, B. E., & Ryan, B. (2008). Servant leadership as a humane orientation: using the GLOBE study construct of humane orientation to show that servant leadership is more global than western. *International Journal of Leadership Studies*, 3(2), 212–222.



- Van Dierendonck, D. (2011). Servant leadership: A review and synthesis. *Journal of Management*, 37(4), 1228–1261.
- Van Dierendonck, D., & Nuijten, I. (2011). The servant leadership survey: development and validation of a multidimensional measure. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 26(3), 249–267.
- Yousaf, F. (2019). Pakistan's 'tribal' Pashtuns, their 'violent' representation, and the Pashtun Tahafuz movement. *SAGE Open*, 9(1), 1–10.
- Zimmerman, D. J. & Gresham, J. D. (2011, June 27). June 28, 2005: One of the worst days in U.S. Special Operations history. *The History Reader*. <https://www.thehistoryreader.com/military-history/june-28-2005-one-worst-days-u-s-special-operations-history-2/>

X. Jasmine Bordere is Assistant Professor of Accounting at Columbus State University. She earned a PhD in accounting from the University of Alabama. Her research interests include corporate social responsibility, and her prior work has appeared in *Current Issues in Auditing* and *Internal Auditing*.

Franklin G. Mixon, Jr. is the Thomas Bryant Buck Jr. Professor of Economics at Columbus State University. He earned a PhD in economics from Auburn University. His research interests include game theory and human capital, and his prior work has appeared in *Journal of Management*, *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* and *Rationality & Society*, among others.

Corresponding Author: Franklin G. Mixon, Jr., D. Abbott Turner College of Business, Columbus State University, Columbus, GA 31907, mixon_franklin@columbusstate.edu