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Translocal Lives

Patterns of Migration in Afghanistan

Conrad Schetter

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Translocal Lives

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Conrad Schetter*

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Abstract

We generally associate civil wars with flows of refugees. We tend to give much less consideration to the way in which patterns of migration that arise as a result of violent conflicts, especially long-lasting ones, take on their own dynamics. Using the conflict in Afghanistan as a case-study, different forms of migration and their significance for an on-going conflict will be examined here. As different factors driving migration are closely interrelated, modern and pre-modern ways of life overlap; this is starkly at variance with the portrait of the “medieval” character of Afghan society so often painted by politicians and the media. Continuous translocal migration of Afghans into neighbouring states and the Gulf states means that nation-state border control regimes are scarcely workable in this case.

1. Introduction

Waves of refugees and labour migrants determine the social reality of life in Afghanistan - perhaps more so than anywhere else. The intervention which has been on-going since 2001 has barely considered this high spatial mobility in its conceptual planning. Where it has been noted, it tends to be perceived as disruptive. This article intends to demonstrate the extent to which forms of migration affect the lives of Afghans and should be taken account of in plans for the future of the country that go beyond the dominant state-building model.

2. Violent Conflicts and Migration

Migration flows in regions experiencing persistent violent conflicts tend to be seen as a logical consequence of armed hostilities. Refugee camps in crisis regions or at their edges are spatial representations of these waves of migration triggered by violent conflict (Zolberg et al. 1993). It follows that the way migrants are dealt with forms a very significant part of attempts to resolve conflicts peacefully. International organisations such as UNHCR tend to take the view that refugees should be given the chance to return to their homes when conflicts end. Such an approach looks backwards in time and envisages a return to the *status quo ante* before the outbreak of violence. The implementation of such repatriation measures is fraught with difficulties, as time does not stand still during wars; land and property may have changed hands several times while conflicts were on-going. The repatriation of refugees can sow the seeds for new disputes over property and land which are often then interpreted along the fault-lines of existent conflicts.

Repatriation is also problematic for another reason. Such an approach assumes that refugees have homelands that can be localised in particular places which they could return to. This conception draws on an idea which plays a central role in the classic conception of territorial nation states: the assumption that people are generally rooted and settled in particular places. Such an understanding throws up particular problems when translocal patterns of action dominate the thinking of those involved or have been strengthened as a result of war. Moreover, different forms of migration – which can scarcely be identified discretely and may be interwoven with one other in different contexts – emerge during persistent violent conflicts. Categories such as 'refugee', 'labour migrant', or 'settled way of life' thus prove to be shaky and incapable of reflecting social realities on the ground adequately. At times, translocal networks which cannot be confined within localized containers or state territories dominate. Spatial mobility across borders is interpreted as the preferred way of life.

As such, the interpretation of patterns of mobility presented here goes beyond an understanding of transnational networks often found in the literature, one that is based only

on the social ties between networked individuals located in two separate and discrete spaces (see, for example: Appadurai 1996; Pries 2008). This sense of being anchored in one particular place may, at times, be cast aside in favour of maintaining a high degree of spatial mobility. Societies which never experienced state building processes which pervaded all levels of society, and the territorialization which accompanies such processes, are highly likely to have dominant translocal network structures which – by definition – attach more importance to spatial mobility than to local identities.

The significance of translocal migration for war-torn regions will be demonstrated using the example of Afghan society, which is characterized by a high degree of mobility and by dynamic network structures. The emphasis placed on these characteristics is linked to a fundamental criticism of the reconstruction strategy that has been deployed up to now in Afghanistan. The fluid nature of Afghan networks and the correspondingly high degree of spatial mobility has barely been afforded consideration in the current intervention. The thinking of those involved in the intervention has remained state-centred; migration and translocal networks are automatically perceived as a problem, or even as a threat. More specifically, the drugs economy and violent resistance – the latter is generally seen (somewhat reductively) as the work of the 'Taliban' or the 'insurgents' – are associated with high spatial mobility and with porous territorial borders. With that, the construction of statehood and the accompanying territorialization of the population (cf. Mielke & Schetter 2007) emerge as aims which are strongly at variance with the high mobility which is typical for the everyday existence of the population.

3. Afghans – A Mobile Society

Afghanistan's population has historically been moulded by a high degree of spatial mobility. The country was criss-crossed by important caravan routes on the Silk Road until the early 19th century, and it has always been dominated by nomadism and other forms of moving from place to place (including peripatetic groups). Large caravan cities such as Kandahar, Herat and Kabul also had Greek, Armenian or Jewish communities which served as bases in transcontinental ethno-religious trade networks until well into the 20th century (Hutter 2009). Even today, hundreds of thousands of nomads people the country and migrate seasonally. In the course of the 20th century, this high degree of mobility has adapted to modern innovations. This is exemplified by the fact that many nomads have moved into the transport sector and become truck or bus drivers. Today, practically the entire transport sector in Afghanistan and Pakistan is in the hands of former nomads (Titus 1995). Journeys undertaken for religious reasons are also significant: in addition to pilgrims, many *malangs* (hermits) and *tablighis* (itinerant preachers) also move about the country. Afghanistan also has a long tradition of migration to outside the country for work. Hundreds of thousands of Afghans worked in Iran's oilfields as far back as the 1970s. The modern intellectual elite have

been going to Moscow, Europe or the US to study since the 1930s, while the religious elite have travelled to Attock, Qom, Kerbela or Cairo.

A second important point is that statehood in Afghanistan never fully pervaded society. Governmentality – in the form of the territorialization of society, for example – never reached a level of intensity that allowed it to become firmly established in the ideas about society held by the population, and the territorialisation of the population did not take place. In contrast, network structures based on family ties or patronage were a constant feature. It was commensurate with this embryonic development of statehood that the borders with Pakistan and Iran remained largely uncontrolled. Consider that the winter grazing grounds of many nomads lie in the Indus plain, and influential *medrassas* can be found in the valley of Peshawar, in the Punjab and in Karachi. Also the Pashtun tribes on either side of the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan were largely (and consciously) excluded from state building processes (Schetter 2010a). Apart from occasional brief confrontations between both states, neither state sought to deploy its monopoly on violence at the border. The actual course of the border remained unclear in places, and large segments of the population were able to avail of both Afghan and Pakistani passports. This meant that tribal and family loyalties straddling the border could be honoured. It also meant that the border scarcely restricted the population's freedom of movement (Glatzer 2001). Quite the contrary was the case: the border represented a favourable area which could be exploited in confrontations with the government. Numerous examples from the 1940s to the 1970s demonstrate how the tribes avoided punitive action on the part of the Afghan or the Pakistani government by retreating to join their clanspeople on the far side of the border.

4. Refugee Camps

Communist rule in Afghanistan (1978-79) and the Soviet intervention in the winter of 1979 triggered one of the greatest exodus of migrants since World War II. According to the UNHCR, practically every Afghan found it necessary to leave his or her homeland at least once (ICG 2009: 11); over four million Afghans lived in Pakistan for some time, and a further three million in Iran. Many Afghans still reside in one or the other of these countries. About one million Afghans in Iran and two million in Pakistan are officially registered as refugees, but the true figures for their presence in both countries are likely to be much higher. It is reductive to refer to these migrants simply as refugees, though; invoking such a specific semantic field imposes a specific ontology which is less than adequate for describing the situation of Afghan transmigrants. To put this slightly differently: the idea that Afghans live permanently enclosed in refugee camps, behaving as one might expect of refugees, does not do justice to the complex reality of their lives.

Many of the Afghans who moved over the border to Pakistan did not see themselves as refugees, but as guests of their fellow tribe members. They viewed their own migration as

one more deployment of the historically-proven strategy of migration as a way to evade punitive state action. Many Afghans saw migration as a *normal* course of action, not as one which automatically gave them the social status of refugees. It must also be considered that the use of the word 'refugee' had strong ideological connotations in the dominant discourse of the Cold War; to use the word was to underline the illegitimate nature of the Soviet intervention.

The establishment of more than 300 refugee camps in the Afghan-Pakistan border region contrasted with the self-image of many migrants. Afghans were now subjected to the administrative logic of the UN and NGOs: they were registered as refugees, categorized and given ID-cards so that they could be furnished with food and household goods and be assigned specific spaces in the refugee camps (Edwards 1986). They were concentrated territorially in refugee camps, and their freedom of movement was restricted. The apparatus of this humanitarian intervention resulted in Afghans acquiring a new social status that went hand in hand with the establishment of new, dependent relationships that sat awkwardly with many Afghans. Solidarity networks imposing a duty of mutual assistance based on family, tribal and religious ties were reshaped in refugee camps and replaced by dependent relationships. People found themselves trapped in a social status which was barely compatible with their longstanding cultural identities, dependent on charity and on assistance from anonymous organisations. The Afghan refugee camps are places where a state of exception – as defined by Giorgio Agamben (2005) – obtains. This is not because of abuses of state power, but because of the exact opposite, the attempt to implement the powers of the state here (Agier 2011).

The refugee camps also became centres of resistance against the Soviet occupation. Each refugee camp was controlled by one *mujahidin* party. Pakistan's official Islamization policies ensured that particularly large numbers of *medrassas* came into existence in the camps, so that children would be schooled for a life of Jihad from an early age (Malik 1989). As such, the camps represented *hot spots* in the politics of militant Islamization. Traditional social structures which had evolved over time – particularly with regard to gender relations – could no longer be preserved and were radicalized (Kreile 1997; Schetter 2002).

In that respect, refugee camps served as the locus of diverse migration strategies from as early as the 1980s on. They were not only places of refuge, but also centres from which the *mujahidin* went to war. In this way, high levels of mobility developed. Initially, this was concentrated on two locales, the refugee camps and family farms. While families were safe in the camps, the farms they had left behind had to be defended. They also had to be cultivated, and rent needed to be collected. Young men, in particular, moved constantly between the camps and their homes. Finally, the militant Islamists who came to Afghanistan from all over the world – particularly in the 1980s – to wage Jihad against the Soviets also came via the refugee camps in Pakistan. In that sense, the war did not only trigger migration by displacing people; it also acted as a magnet.

5. From Refugee to Family Business

Right up to the present day, refugee camps are important territorial nodes in Afghans' networked society. The camps have, however, developed physically as they have been adapted to new social realities. Tents have been replaced by houses; people have generated extra income through subsistence farming (involving small herds, for example), through the establishment of small businesses, and through work outside the camps. In many places, refugee camps have merged with urban centres; this has resulted in territorial boundaries becoming blurred and the state of exception being dissolved.

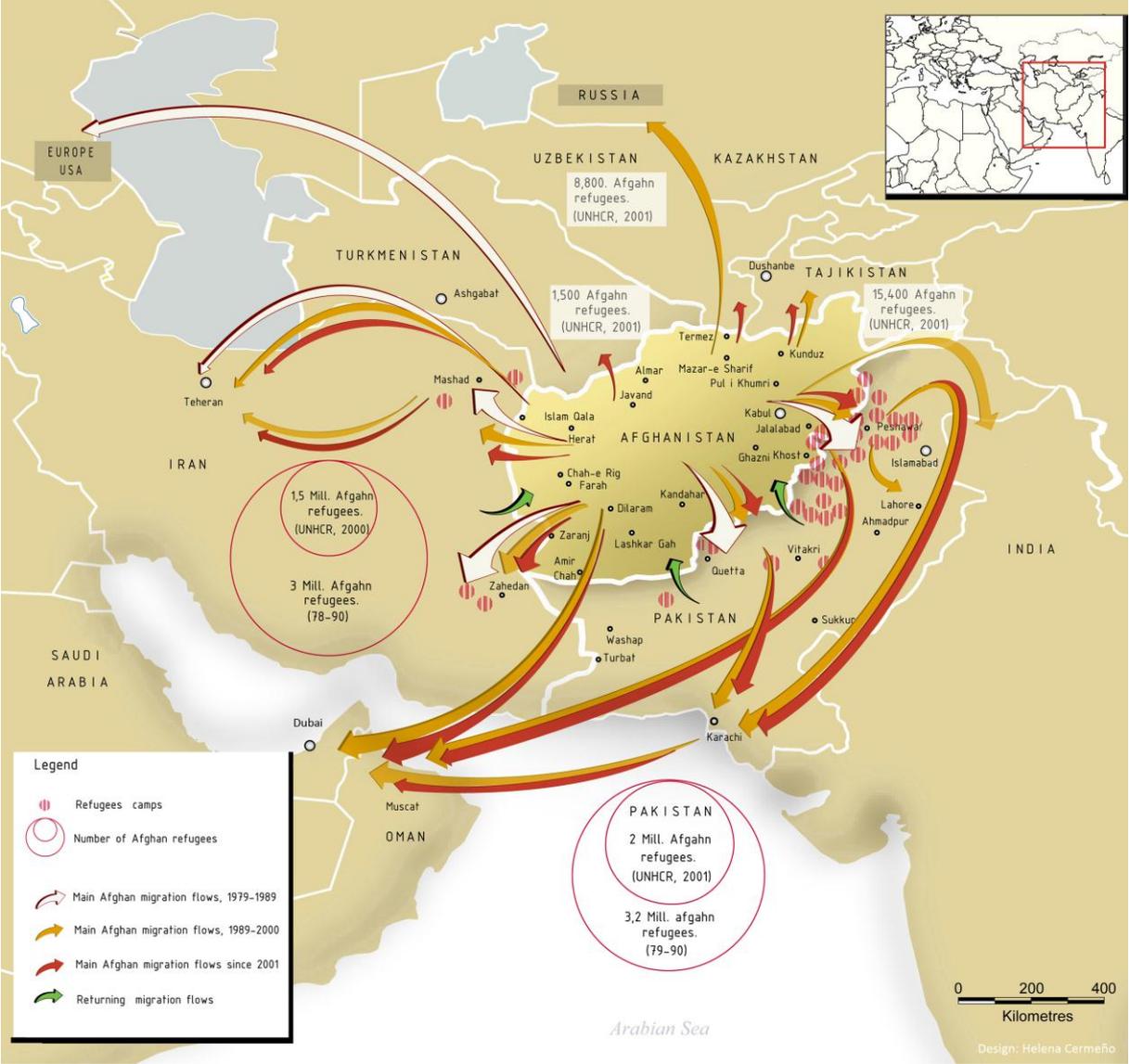
From the end of the 1980s on, the camps became transit points, places characterized by continuous comings and goings (Map 1). Many Afghans moved from the camps to nearby towns such as Quetta, Peshawar, Mashhad and Zahidan as soon as they could afford to do so. But migration to areas not bordering Afghanistan directly has also been widespread, particularly in Iran and Pakistan. Teheran boasts a large Afghan community, and it has been estimated that over 500 000 Afghans live in Karachi. Finally, Afghans have increasingly also moved to the Gulf region. It has been estimated that several million Pashtuns have moved from the tribal areas to the Persian Gulf since the 1980s (Gazdar 2003). In addition, many Afghans have sought to claim political asylum in Europe, the US and Australia. After the withdrawal of the Red Army from Afghanistan in 1989, thousands of Afghans moved to India and to different states in the former Eastern bloc. Finally, the continuous cycle of armed hostilities breaking out and truces being declared during the 1990s caused people to flee the country and return in successive waves. The US-military intervention of 2001 alone resulted in over 300 000 people being made refugees; around two million Afghans have since returned to Afghanistan. Many of these returnees have been accommodated in camps for returnees such as those close to Kabul and Herat.

Together with these new migration routes, refugee status has become increasingly bound up with other types of migration, with labour migration predominating. Many Afghans work in unskilled occupations and provide cheap labour – in Teheran, for example, they dominate the construction industry. It has been estimated that a scant 2% of Iran's working population are Afghans (ICG 2009: 15). In Dubai, Afghans are deployed as support staff in the bazaars, and as taxi drivers and in other transport sector roles (Nichols 2008: 179). Robert Nichols (2008) estimates that most taxi-drivers in Dubai are Afghans. In the Gulf states, Afghans also work in the construction industry and in oilfields in places such as al-Ain.

Some Afghans have also established businesses. Afghan trading families have exploited differences in customs tariffs to establish themselves successfully as pivotal points in the trade of groceries, cars and consumer goods circulating between Europe, the Gulf States, Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asia, Pakistan and India. 500 to 700 Afghan firms are based in the United Arab Emirates; about 60% of Afghan trade is handled by companies in Dubai. The basis of this trade are the family networks which make it possible to have family members stationed in different locations keeping goods flowing. One prominent example of such a

family company, the Alokozay Group based in Jebel Ali in the United Arab Emirates, is one of the most important regional wholesalers for consumer goods.

Map 1: Migrations of Afghans



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Moreover, legal and illegal forms of migration overlap and can often scarcely be separated (Bilecen 2009). For example, the number of Afghans flying to Mecca for the Haji pilgrimage is much higher than the number embarking on the return journey; many pilgrims go underground and remain in Saudi Arabia to work (Nichols 2008: 158). As a result of the unclear border regime between Afghanistan and Pakistan, many Afghans are also able to secure employment in the Gulf States using Pakistani passports.

Finally, these translocal networks are also exploited for criminal purposes. The drugs economy is based on these fluid networks, which allow opium to be exported via the most

diverse routes. Migration also encompasses areas such as the illegal trade in children – for organ donation, for example. Many young Afghans can be found among the prostitutes of Iran and Pakistan, and Afghan boys are sold to the Gulf as camel jockeys (Nichols 2008: 162). Here, once again, networks and migration routes overlap with those of labour migrants, traders and pilgrims.

These translocal networks are highly dynamic and adapt readily to developments in market structures or in the security situation. In the initial years after the intervention in 2001, Afghanistan's internal labour market became more attractive as a result of the internationally-financed reconstruction of the country. Many Afghans returned to Afghanistan to work as wage labourers, translators or drivers, or to found NGOs or private companies. For a while, Afghanistan was so economically attractive that up to 20 000 Pakistani workers moved to Afghanistan to work on road construction projects. Many Afghan families also shifted the focus of their livelihoods back to Afghanistan; the security situation was initially acceptable. However, as the country became increasingly dangerous, and a lack of earning opportunities led to the emergence of new refugee settlements around Kabul, many Afghans moved to Pakistan and Iran once more (ICG 2009: 9-10).

6. The Afghans' Translocal Networks

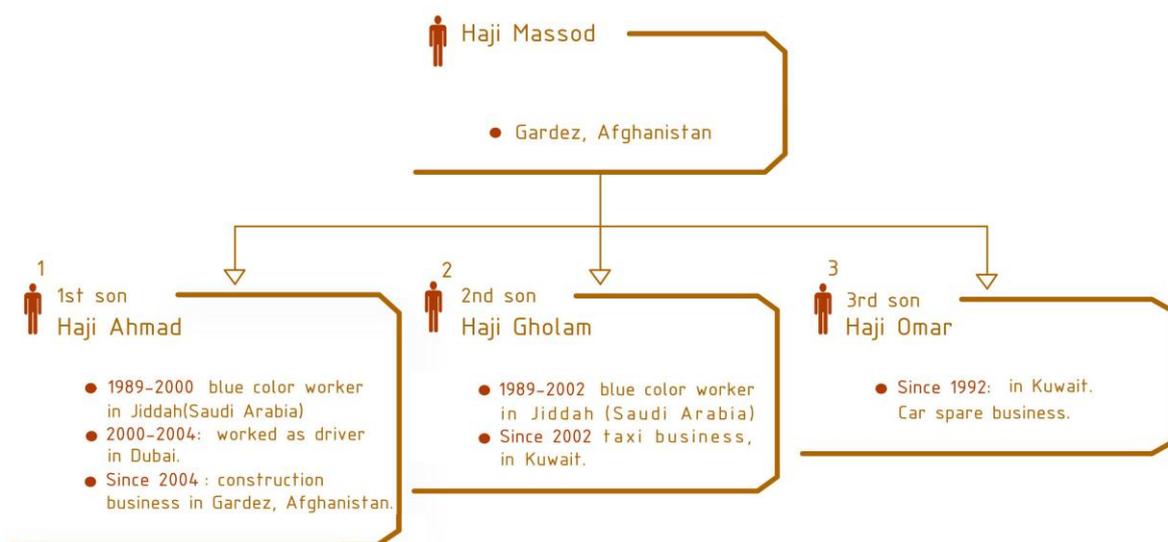
As is typical for many transmigrants, Afghan translocal networks are both founded on and separated from one another by kinship ties and patronage. The Sulaiman Khel tribe, for example, dominates the trade in herbs and spices between Afghanistan and India. Afghans whose families know each other from the same village or the same refugee camp share apartments in the Gulf states (Nichols 2008: 196). Nichols (2008: 154) also mentions one Pashtun who has enabled forty members of his relations to migrate to San Francisco through marriages over the past thirty years. In Afghanistan itself, families can live in close proximity to one other as neighbours, yet be connected to very different translocal networks.

In this way, a translocal society founded on extensive and very dynamic relationships has emerged in recent decades. This network has numerous local poles and is now already reproducing itself across multiple generations. The connections between different network nodes in the West, the Gulf states, Iran, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan are highly dynamic, since people migrate to and fro between these poles. Contact is also maintained continually by means of telephone calls, Skype and visits. Marriage arrangements play a particularly important role. Having a large number of children is the most important form of social capital in Afghan society, and the average family size stands at eight children. Different network structures can be identified, and I would like to sketch some of them here:

- a) Families who possess land in Afghanistan pursue the strategy of leaving at least one family member in Afghanistan. This is not just important as a fall-back option; it also contributes to the income of the family. I would like to describe a case from the

southeastern Afghan province of Paktia (Graph 1). The head of the family remained living near the provincial capital of Gardez. His sons were sent to work in the Gulf for years and sent remittances to their father every month via intermediaries or the *hawala* system for informal money transfers. The sons returned to Paktia, where they were married and had their families, for several months in each year. In cases like this, the *qala*, or family fort, was the spatial focus of the family. In ideal cases, the head of the family would receive enough money from his sons to enable him to devote all his time to the politics of the tribe without having to work himself. In this way, externally generated resources form the basis for renegotiation of social hierarchies and dependent relationships at local level. Our research in Paktia showed that two thirds of the most important personalities in the province derived their net income largely from the Gulf states, and that all ten of the most important people locally had economic ties leading to the Gulf states.

Graph 1: Network of a Family in Paktia

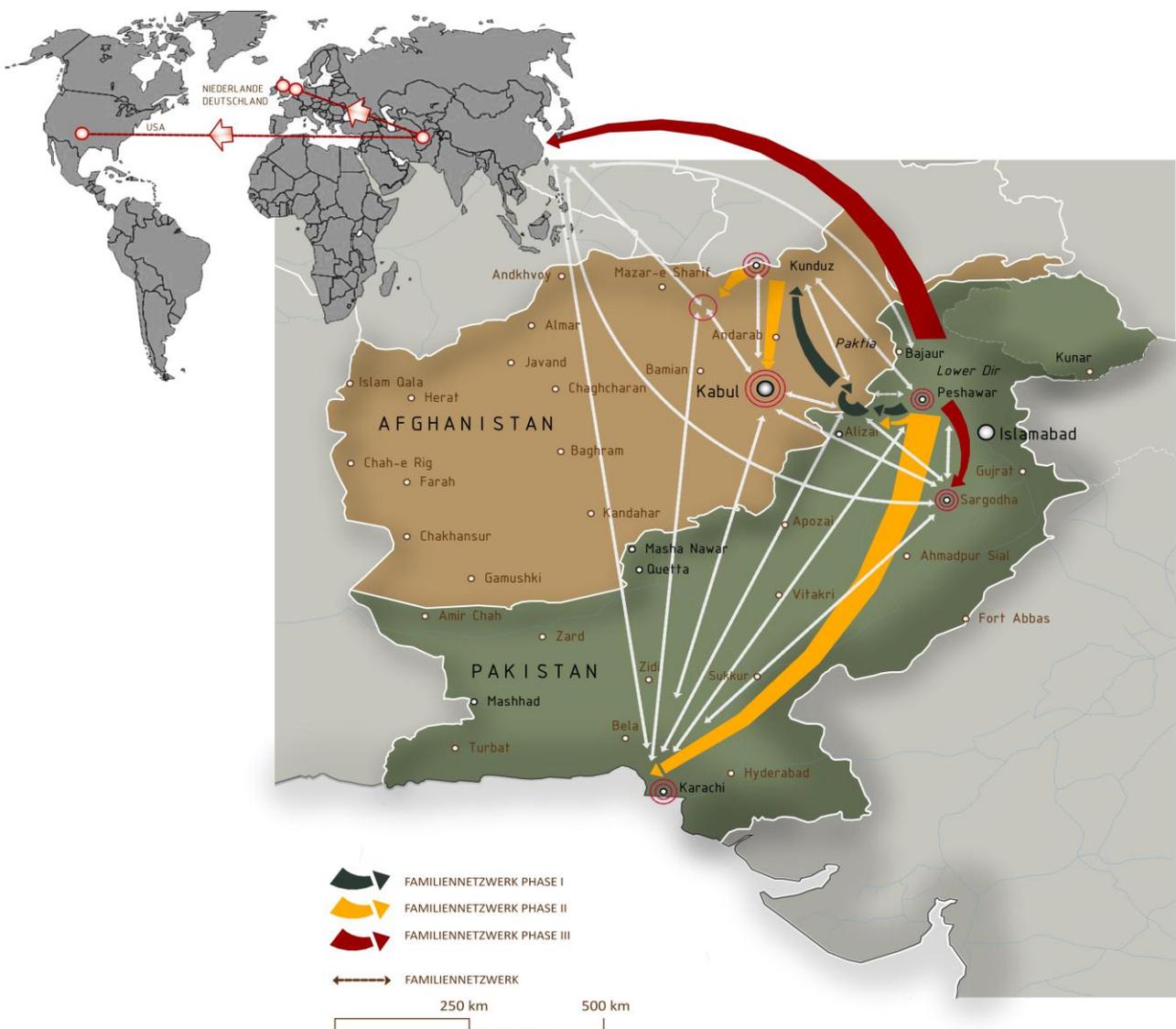


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b) Another example, that of a family from Lower Dir in north Pakistan, shows the migration strategy of a family that can be reckoned to the educated middle classes (Map 2). Part of the family moved from Lower Dir to the neighbouring district of Bajaur at the beginning of the 20th century. Several members of the family subsequently moved from there to Kunar in east Afghanistan. In the late 1940s, part of the family moved to Archi, on the Afghan-Tajik border, when they were offered land there. Today, the network has expanded further, so that family members can also be found in Kunduz, in Kabul and close to Karachi. The sons of the family all

studied in Faizalabad. An uncle of our informant studied in Peshawar and subsequently in the US, and two brothers studied in the Netherlands and Germany. All the women in this extended family live in Lower Dir. When violence escalated in the Swat valley in the spring 2009, the female members of the family were all brought to Kunduz, but they are now already back in Lower Dir; this shows, yet again, that the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan is not seen as a barrier to spatial mobility. This case, moreover, illustrates nicely the concept of the competence network *Crossroads Asia*.

Map 2: Family Network in *Crossroads Asia*



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- c) Strategies change drastically when male family members succeed in accumulating a certain amount of wealth and acquiring permanent residence permits. Then families attempt to bring as many family members as possible to the country in question, particularly through marriage. Afghans who have established themselves in Karachi or the West rarely return to Afghanistan permanently, but contact is kept up intensively. As the Gulf States issue very few permanent residence permits, more emigrants return from there – but often to major cities such as Kabul, Peshawar, Quetta or Karachi, rather than to the returnees' original home villages.

The cases mentioned here illustrate only a selection of the strategies deployed (see Monsutti 2005). In many cases, it is not possible to identify a single location that the life of families centres around. The purpose of migration is no longer necessarily the one-sided generation of resources for family members that have remained at home; it is distributed throughout translocal networks. The influence of migration varies from place to place, be that place a refugee camp, an Afghan village or Dubai. Thus, in my estimation, it is fundamental to the nature of these networks that they generally rest on different local poles and are not clearly concentrated in any single area.

However, it is difficult to assess the impact of migration on those left at home. The obvious impulses for change generated by migration can be found particularly in the area of consumer goods and technology: mobile phones, DVD players and other electronic goods are now ubiquitous. In terms of culture, the influence of Arab values such as orthodox interpretations of Islam or *purdah* imported by migrants coming from the Gulf region has been significant. Wahhabi traditions have been strengthened in Afghanistan and in Pakistan. Migrants living in the West have been more likely to bring back ideas about state order and modern civil society. This latter group could be seen, against the background of the current development paradigm, as “agents of change”.

Dedicated infrastructure and economic structures have developed in parallel with the emergence of these translocal networks in recent decades. As new migration routes have developed, the facilities to support them have also appeared: travel agencies, bus companies, restaurants and accommodation (Klimburg 2002; Monsutti 2005). The sale of invitations to the Gulf states and work permits is of particular economic importance. One of the people I spoke to in Afghanistan had good and very long-standing contacts to an Arab entrepreneur (*kafeel*) in Saudi-Arabia, and sold about twenty work permits per year at a price of US \$1000 each. A lively trade is also conducted in Pakistani passports (Nichols 2008: 166). Finally, illegal immigration must also be mentioned. It has been estimated that 20 000 people cross the Afghan-Pakistani border every day. In the UK, Afghans are now reckoned to form the largest group of illegal immigrants.

While labour migration dominates the migration strategies, other factors are also influential. People use their considerable spatial mobility to satisfy the social needs which are acute at any given time. For example, an Afghan contending with a serious illness will naturally opt to make his way from north Afghanistan to family members in Pakistan. If he is wealthy, his

journey will take him to Dubai, Delhi or into the West. Similarly, the middle classes send their children to Pakistan to attend secondary school, and – where possible – also to the West for third-level education. Finally, traditional forms of migration still persist: itinerant preachers and traders, pilgrims, and hundreds of thousands of nomads continue to roam the country. War-related migration is also still prevalent: when I caught a bus from Jalalabad to Kabul in 1997, it was full of Punjabi students heading off to fight at the front in Northern Afghanistan during their semester break. Similarly, militant Islamists continue to make their way to Afghanistan in order to take part in Jihad against the infidels today. This makes it clear that, above and beyond Afghanistan itself, the entire region has a highly mobile society which does not see nation-state borders as obstacles.

7. The Military Intervention and Migration

The intervention in Afghanistan since October 2001 has had difficulty understanding and taking account of these network structures since its inception. This becomes especially clear when we look at the military intervention, which has persistently made use of classic territorial thinking. The military strategy has been dominated by the search for a clearly identifiable enemy who can be isolated and whose radius of influence can be limited by controlling units of space. The counterinsurgency strategy (COIN) of “shape, clear, hold, build” is geared to gaining territorialized containers from the enemy and establishing state order within these; territory outside this order is regarded as “ungoverned territory” (Schetter 2010b). However, a clearly recognizable enemy who engages in open combat or can readily be identified in the field does not exist.

Moreover, militants in north east Afghanistan often come from refugee camps in Pakistan and have been able to advance to their locations of deployment by exploiting family and tribal ties and the imperative to offer hospitality. The open border with Pakistan allows insurgents to retreat and regroup again and again. In addition, militant Islamists from all over the world use these networks – just as they were used in the 1980s – to struggle against NATO forces in Afghanistan. Thus the militants use the high spatial mobility, which – as already outlined – is typically for the region; people cannot be concentrated in territorial containers. The networks are so dynamic, highly complex and opaque that it is often virtually impossible for an outside observer to identify what relationships are maintained via which channels. The networks are, moreover, also flexible; if one node fails, the network adapts immediately to the new situation – making use of the extensive family ties which exist – by opening up new channels. This high degree of dynamism and these hybrid states are particularly likely to attract the attention of the interventionists: it is not coincidental that migrants returning from Pakistan to Kunduz have been held responsible for the escalation of violence and essentialized in so-called “Pashtun pockets.”

What is seen – in this view – as fragile statehood often simply reflects a structuring of society along different lines to what is expected by the interventionists, with their assumptions that people can conventionally be identified as belonging to specific locations, categories and structures:

- The lack of a border regime between Afghanistan and Pakistan is seen, from a state-centred perspective, as symptomatic for an inability to control the Afghan borders to Pakistan and Iran. From the perspective of the translocal society, however, these open borders appear to be a fundamental precondition for the maintenance of the high degree of mobility which allows individuals and groups to adapt to social change flexibly.
- Similarly, the repatriation of Afghans with refugee status from Iran and Pakistan is problematic, as those affected have little interest in being repatriated, but state-centered thinking assumes that a population should live on its own territory.

In the past, Afghans could secure their livelihoods (and their lives) through relative freedom of movement across permeable borders and through opportunities to trade in goods without the state having any part in their transactions. Statehood imposed no restrictions on people's radius of action. In contrast to the actions of the interventionists, violent resistance is organised through these fluid network structures and generates its potential to threaten the interventionists from them. The escalation of violence in the region has also meant that these translocal networks, which so frustrate the approach of the military, have now grown even more important. Hostilities in south Afghanistan or in Pakistan's Swat valley, for instance, triggered new flows of migration which have largely been absorbed by family networks.

8. Conclusion

Media coverage frequently resorts to depicting Afghanistan as a pre-modern country which is stuck in the 'middle ages' or even in the 'stone age'. It is suggested that the Afghans have missed out on all the developments of the past hundred years and live in an ossified, pre-modern society that has barely been affected by external influences. This perspective fails to take account of the manner in which the translocality of Afghans has strengthened over the last 30 years – precisely because of the long period of war. As a result, Afghans do not belong to an "inward looking society" (Dupree 1973) – on the contrary, they are strongly bound up with globalized contexts.

Migration in Afghanistan is not only a problematic consequence of persistent violent conflicts; high spatial mobility is a factor that structures society and impedes both state structuring processes and classical military thinking. How these translocal structures tie in with local structures has barely been investigated. Alejandro Portes' (1999) hypothesis that

the establishment of transnational networks leads to migrants developing “dual lives” must be tested further. The example of Afghanistan points in a different direction. In the instances sketched here, I do not see the nation state being transcended or overcome. So the concept of transnationalism depends too closely on the nation-state framework as a reference point, which is why I prefer to speak of translocality. The actions and identities of Afghans have always been only loosely determined by methodological nationalism; a high degree of spatial mobility, which was virtually unaffected by nation-state constructions, has always been dominant. It follows that I do not believe that “dual lives” emerge, lives that are partially anchored in the local situation and partially in the translocal network. Instead, I see translocal mobility as the dominant “way of life” (Lüthi 2005) which makes anchor points in particular localities interchangeable. Ludger Pries (2008: 196) has defined this as the circular movement of a settled-nomadic lifestyle.

At the moment, though – particularly because of the financial crisis which began in 2009 – it seems that there is a general trend everywhere to restrict and destroy translocal networks. Pakistan, Iran and the Gulf states are all attempting to register and deport Afghan immigrants. In Iran, in particular, there have been successive waves of deportations. It is estimated that 400 000 Afghans were deported in 2008 alone (ICG 2009: 14). However, these deportations represent tilting at windmills; they may drive Afghans into illegality, but they will have little influence on migration patterns. Translocal Afghan networks can scarcely be restricted by nation-state container thinking while Afghanistan has so little to offer economically and other states in the region remain highly dependent on a supply of cheap labour. In this context, it has recently been suggested that Afghans could be permitted to migrate freely to Iran and Pakistan (ICG 2009). The opposing argument, – which the military, in particular, tend to advance – advocates that the borders to Pakistan and Iran should be sealed. This latter suggestion is, however, widely seen as impractical, especially as its implementation could lead to a further escalation of violence. Perhaps Afghanistan – so often seen as a prime example of a *failed state* – is actually a prime example of how modern national states have outlived their usefulness, and of how translocal network societies that can barely be contained within the borders of state territory thinking have formed.

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Information on the competence network *Crossroads Asia*

The competence network *Crossroads Asia* derives its name from the geographical area extending from eastern Iran to western China and from the Aral Sea to northern India. The scholars collaborating in the competence network pursue a novel, 'post-area studies' approach, making thematic figurations and mobility the overarching perspectives of their research in *Crossroads Asia*. The concept of figuration implies that changes, minor or major, within one element of a constellation always affect the constellation as a whole; the network will test the value of this concept for understanding the complex structures framed by the cultural, political and socio-economic contexts in *Crossroads Asia*. Mobility is the other key concept for studying *Crossroads Asia*, which has always been a space of entangled interaction and communication, with human beings, ideas and commodities on the move across and beyond cultural, social and political borders. Figurations and mobility thus form the analytical frame of all three main thematic foci of our research: conflict, migration, and development.

- Five sub-projects in the working group **"Conflict"** will focus upon specific localized conflict-figurations and their relation to structural changes, from the interplay of global politics, the erosion of statehood, and globalization effects from above and below, to local struggles for autonomy, urban-rural dynamics and phenomena of diaspora. To gain a deeper understanding of the rationales and dynamics of conflict in *Crossroads Asia*, the sub-projects aim to analyze the logics of the genesis and transformation of conflictual figurations, and to investigate autochthonous conceptions of, and modes of dealing with conflicts. Particular attention will be given to the interdependence of conflict(s) and mobility.
- Six sub-projects in the working group **"Migration"** aim to map out trans-local figurations (networks and flows) within *Crossroads Asia* as well as figurations extending into both neighboring and distant areas (Arabian Peninsula, Russia, Europe, Australia, America). The main research question addresses how basic organizational and functional networks are structured, and how these structures affect what is on the move (people, commodities, ideas etc.). Conceptualizing empirical methods for mapping mobility and complex connectivities in trans-local spaces is a genuine desideratum. The aim of the working group is to refine the method of qualitative network analysis, which includes flows as well as their structures of operation, and to map mobility and explain mobility patterns.
- In the **"Development"**-working group four sub-projects are focusing on the effects of spatial movements (flows) and interwoven networks at the micro level with regard to processes of long-term social change, and with a special focus on locally perceived livelihood opportunities and their potential for implementation. The four sub-projects focus on two fundamental aspects: first, on structural changes in processes of transformation of patterns of allocation and distribution of resources, which are contested both at the household level and between individual and government agents; secondly, on forms of social mobility, which may create new opportunities, but may also cause the persistence of social inequality.

The competence network understands itself as a mediator between the academic study of *Crossroads Asia* and efforts to meet the high demand for information on this area in politics and the public. Findings of the project will feed back into academic teaching, research outside the limits of the competence network, and public relations efforts. Further information on *Crossroads Asia* is available at www.crossroads-asia.de.

Publications in the *Crossroads Asia* Working Paper Series

- Marsden, Magnus (2011): Mobile Life on the Frontiers of *Crossroads Asia*. In: *Crossroads Asia* Working Paper Series, No. 1.
- Schetter, Conrad (2012): Translocal Lives. Patterns of Migration in Afghanistan. In: *Crossroads Asia* Working Paper Series, No. 2.

Upcoming *Crossroads Asia* Working Papers

- Hill, Joe & Mollinga, Peter (2012): Community-managed Hill and Mountain Irrigation across *Crossroads Asia*: Between Autonomy and State Control. In: *Crossroads Asia* Working Paper Series, No. 3.
- Working Group Conflict (2012): Conflict Research on *Crossroads Asia* – A Conceptual Approach. In: *Crossroads Asia* Working Paper Series, No. 4.
- Working Group Migration (2012): *Crossroads Asia* through the Lens of Mobility and Migration: A Conceptual Approach. In: *Crossroads Asia* Working Paper Series, No. 5.
- Working Group Development (2012): Development at the Crossroads. Development Research on *Crossroads Asia* – a conceptual approach. In: *Crossroads Asia* Working Paper Series, No. 6.