

Mapping nomad-farmer conflict in Afghanistan

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Introduction: traditional views of conflict involving nomads¹

In December 2016, the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) launched a European Union-funded project, ‘A three-pronged research effort into essential areas of Natural Resource Management (NRM), Food Zone policy, ground water, and the shifting interests of stakeholders in the conflict opposing sedentary and nomad populations,’ that includes a component about nomad-farmer conflict. The project will unfold over a period of three years and is organised in stages. Project fieldwork involves a total of 16 case studies spread around Afghanistan, of which seven saw a first wave of fieldwork carried out during the first stage. It also includes interviews with government officials, community leaders and other conflict observers, both in Kabul and in the provinces. This brief summarises the preliminary findings of stage one, drawn from the seven case studies. Follow-up work will include not only nine more cases studies and the bulk of interviews with conflict observers, but also additional interviews in the seven case studies that feed into this preliminary briefing.

This AREU project started in December 2016 and involves carrying out interviews with community leaders in eight different conflict locations as well as with external observers and participants in the conflict. The first wave of interviews was completed in mid-April 2017 and this brief is meant to outline the preliminary findings of this project.

¹ Throughout the paper the term ‘nomad’ is used to refer to all type of nomads, whereas the term ‘Kuchi’ is used only to refer to Pashtun nomads.



Figure 1

A total of 40 interviews were conducted in seven locations (see Figure 1) where conflict between nomads and farmers occurred at one point or another. Equal numbers of nomads and farmers were interviewed. Seven additional interviews were carried out in Kabul with individuals working in the ministries or with the Kuchi Commission and knowledgeable about nomad-farmer conflict. The conflict between nomads and farmers is not something new in Afghanistan, nor is it something that did not attract scholarly attention before. However, in previous studies the focus of attention was the conflict between Hazaras and Pashtun Kuchis, which is the conflict that attracted most (in fact, almost all) media attention. Because of the attention and the past history of political and ethnic conflict between the two communities, at various stages sponsored by the state and/or political groups, Hazara/Kuchi conflict makes it difficult to insulate the social, agricultural, economic and demographic sources of conflict. Case studies of Hazara/Kuchi conflict have been included in this study because they represent an important part of the wider nomad-sedentarist conflict, but several case studies of conflict between nomads and other communities have been included as well, as shown in Figure 2.

Malistan (Ghazni)	Hazaras vs Kuchis
Behsud (Wardak)	Hazaras vs Kuchis
Azra (Logar)	Pashtuns vs Kuchis
Derai (Matoon District, Khost)	Pashtuns vs Kuchis
DehSabz (Kabul)	Tajiks vs Kuchis
Bagram (Parwan)	Tajiks vs Kuchis
Khaki Jabbar (Kabul)	Tajiks and Pashtun vs Kuchis
Imam Sahib (Kunduz)	Uzbek nomads vs Pashtun farmers

Figure 2

This range of case studies is not exhaustive of all types of nomad/sedentarist conflict in Afghanistan. There are cases of conflicts reported between Pashais and Pashtuns, for example.² However, overall the eight case studies are representative of the large majority of nomad-sedentarist conflicts, not least because they are distributed around many of the areas of Afghanistan where nomads migrate.

² Communication with Kuchi Shura member, March 2016.

Grassland and Hazara assertiveness

The best studied source of nomad-farmer conflict in Afghanistan is the rivalry over nomad access to pasturelands in the Hindu Kush Mountains, populated by Hazara farmers. The conflict has deep historical origins in the use made by the nascent Afghan state in the late nineteenth century of the Kuchis to subjugate the Hazaras.³ The preliminary findings of the new research carried out by this project indicate that little has changed in this conflict. Many interviewees insisted in alleging that the source of the conflict between Kuchis and farmers is a political one: political parties and factions mobilise support by supporting their constituencies and even encouraging them to challenge other communities over land and access issues. Says an official of the MAIL:

*This dispute is more a political dispute than a grassland problem. This problem will not be solved by the land law regarding usage of grasslands. The commission for resolving these disputes didn't come to us even once and didn't ask about the law on pastures. This is a political issue, very high-ranking officials and even foreign countries are interfering in this dispute.*⁴

The officials and other interviewees in Kabul automatically focused their attention on the Hazaras-Kuchis conflict, alleging that the Hazaras, motivated by a desire for revenge, were blocking the Kuchis' migration routes towards the central highlands in Daymirdad, Hesa Awwal and other locations. Undoubtedly, as long as the authorities rely on the 1971 law, by blocking the access routes to the pasturelands of central Afghanistan, the Hazara communities prevent the Kuchis from using most of the pastures.

*As far as I know, the Kuchis are not using the grasslands in the central provinces of Afghanistan because Hazara armed people blocked the entrance gates of central provinces like Bamyan, Daikundi and Ghor. The Hazara people all came together in Daymordad and Hesa Awal districts of Wardak province, which are the main gates for the Hazara provinces, and don't let the Kuchis move forward. That's the reason why every year the fighting is happening in Daymordad and Hesa Awal districts.*⁵

3 S.A. Mousavi, *The Hazaras Of Afghanistan*, London: Curzon, 1998; Hassan Kakar, *A Political And Diplomatic History Of Afghanistan 1863-1901*, Leiden: Brill, 2012.

4 Interview with staff member of Grassland Department of Agriculture Ministry, 2 January 2017.

5 Interview with staff member of Grassland Department of Agriculture Ministry.

The blocking of the migration routes at the gates of Hazarajat is taken by critics as evidence of political interference, but local farmers explain instead that it is exactly in these areas that pressure on grassland is higher:⁶

*It was in 1388 (2009/2010), that Kuchis for the first time during the Karzai period again tried to come to the central provinces of Afghanistan with their thousands of animals. It was very hard for us because their thousands of animals pass over our agricultural lands. The fighting started in Dan Barak village of Kajab area belonging to Hesa Dowom of Behsud district. When the Kuchis were passing from Dan Barak village with their thousands of animals over the agricultural lands and wanted to continue their journey till Bamyan Province, they were stopped by a farmer who did not want them to cross his land, but they fired at him and killed him. Then the fighting started between the Hazara people and Kuchis. [...] Because Wardak Province is the gate for Kuchis to enter Bamyan Province and Ghor Province, but they are passing with their thousands of animals over our lands and destroying our cultivations.*⁷

Hazara demands that Kuchis move their livestock by truck are not very realistic, as few Kuchis would be able to rent trucks for that purpose.⁸

At present, therefore, the conflict is limited to a few passages on the Kuchis' migration route that block access to the pasturelands of the Hazarajat. These passages are controlled by local Hazara militias. Whether or not these militias are supported by Hazara politicians and strongmen, if these blocks were removed the conflict would spread around the highlands. Interviewees in Malistan, for example, had not seen Kuchis turning up since the blockades were put in place, but asserted their readiness to fight if the Kuchis were to arrive.⁹

While many Kuchis deny causing damage to the crops and to the pastureland near the villages,¹⁰ some Kuchi elders implicitly acknowledge the problem when asking for state intervention to prevent abuses from both sides:

6 Interview with farmer and community elder of Kajab area, Hesa 2 Behsud District, Gandab village, February 2017.

7 Interview with farmer community elder from Lata Band village of Kajab area in Behsud District, February 2017.

8 Interview with farmer community elder from Kar-e-wani village of Sarchashma area, Daimordad District, 15 February 2017.

9 Three Hazara farmers were interviewed in Malistan and all expressed similar views.

10 Interview with Kuchi elder of Kharokhel Tribe in Midan Wardak Province, 22 November 2016.

*The government must collect weapons from these commanders and Hazaras and also from us and tell them to leave Kuchis in the mountains and tell Kuchis also not to encroach on the crop fields of the Hazaras, but unfortunately the government and Hazaras do not want the problem to be solved.*¹¹

Another less state-dependent, alternative way of handling conflicting interests would be scheduling the arrival of the Kuchis in such a way as to give the time to the farmers along their route to cut their grass and harvest, as it is sometimes claimed happened before the war:

*For our district, the schedule was when the Kuchis were coming at the end of April every year, first they had to wait until the Hazara farmers in every district cut and collected their grass from the hills and mountains and stored it for the winter. Then the Kuchis could come with their animals and let their animals on those mountains and hills. The plan was first the Kuchis coming to Behsud district and stay in Behsud for 10 or 15 days and use the remaining grassland in the mountains till that time when farmer in Nawur district would finish their harvest, and store grass for winter. Then let the Kuchis enter Nawor district and stay there for 10 or 15 days and use the remain grass in the hills and mountains, till Malistan farmers finished their harvesting and cutting off their grasses and let the Kuchis take their animals over there.*¹²

Even if such a schedule could be agreed upon at the community level, however, enforcing it would require some role for the state. The schedule was rarely respected before the war, when the Afghan government had greater power and influence than now. Realistically, therefore, such a schedule could only potentially be applied in a post-conflict context, if the power of the Afghan state were consolidated.

‘Ineffective’ state intervention: the impact of institutional multiplicity

In part, the conflict between nomads and sedentarists is just discussed above the result of property and usage rights being enforced weakly or not at all by the authorities, and of what Wily described as the ‘opaque’ status of rangelands.¹³ Pastureland is thus seen by nomads and farmers sometimes as ‘theirs’ (as opposed to the state’s) and they have been settling there illegally in a number of locations, kicking off conflicts. It is common to have two sides in a dispute both argue that they legally own the land. There is also a problem of illegal sales of land by government officials, but it is remarkable that some of these disputes might have been going on for years without the rightful owner being identified.¹⁴

Among the Hazaras at least, a position has emerged that demands (somewhat paradoxically) the return to the Taliban law of 2000, which recognised and defined private pastures:

*Regarding the grassland, our people are not agreeing to give their grassland to the Kuchis. They are saying the grasslands are the limits or frontage of their villages and it’s not belonging to the government to give them to anyone. According to Jafari law and to Hanafi law every village has its own borders or frontage and these limits or frontage are grasslands. The limit or frontage of the villages belong to villagers not to government for it to give them to tribes coming from the other end of Afghanistan.*¹⁵

In fact, even after 2001, communities (including Hazara ones) have sometimes relied on Taliban mediation to reach agreements, although apparently not very successfully:

*On 14 April 2015, Taliban commander Mustafa negotiated one agreement between Hazaras and us. Again, three months later, Hazaras came and attacked our families and animals. They did not even abide by that agreement.*¹⁶

The post-2001 Afghan Government itself has sometimes flirted with the idea of distinguishing between private, community and public pastures. For example, in the

11 Interview with Kuchi elder of Kharokhel Tribe in Midan Wardak Province, 22 November 2016.

12 Interview with Hazara elder of Bokhra village of Maalistan District, 14 March 2017.

13 Liz Alden Wily, ‘The Battle over Pastures: The Hidden War in Afghanistan’, *Revue des Mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*: 133, June 2013.

14 Interview with elder of Adramzai community in Awbazak village, 20 December 2016.

15 Interview with member of Commission for Resolving Disputes between Kochi and Hazara Commission, 1 December 2016.

16 Interview with Kuchi elder, Hesarak District of Nangarhar Province, 22 November 2016.

2008 - 2009 draft of the new Rangeland Law, Kuchi access would have been limited to the latter. However, by the 2011-12 draft, the category of community pastures had been taken out and public pastures had, in practice, to be managed jointly by farmers and Kuchis. This development was seen as a result of Kuchi lobbying the authorities.¹⁷

The debate between supporters of state management and community management of grasslands is, in a sense, a false debate.¹⁸ The various laws approved by the Afghan state were often ignored by both local authorities and communities already before the war. Not only were customary practices at odds with national laws, but it was not uncommon to have agreements and concessions registered by the local authorities, which were obviously at odds with national laws. This institutional multiplicity got much worse after 2001. The status of grassland and pastureland has remained poorly defined after 2001. The laws of the 1960s and 1970s defined pastureland and 'public property.' Pastureland was only defined 'state land' in the 1987 and 1990 constitutions, both repelled since. The Taliban acknowledged two different types of pastureland in their Law on Pasture and Public Land (2000): public and private, with the latter being for the exclusive use of the adjacent communities. Private pasturelands were defined as 'the area from where the loud voice of someone standing at the edge of the village can still be heard.'¹⁹ After 2001, on the one hand, the central government produced legislation that favoured the Kuchis on paper and used it to secure their political support. On the other hand, it allowed Kuchis' and farmers' rights to be infringed upon and pastures to be seized. It does not seem credible that this consistent pattern happened by accident.²⁰

Even when the government intervenes to identify settlement areas for the nomads, such as the Bari Kaw area in Deh Sabz, it was, in fact, unable to enforce its decision.²¹ At the MAIL, government officials seem to consider the Pasture Law of 1971 as the basis for their operations. According to an official, through 'the law of the grasslands, the grasslands are belonging to

government and every citizen of the Afghan who have sheep can use the grassland.'²²

Another dimension of state ineffectiveness is the failure to provide nomads and some of the remote farming communities in conflict with them with services comparable to what the rest of the population receives. This is an issue that might be relevant to the formulation of the new Citizens' Charter.

Urban and agricultural expansion

Conflict between nomads and farmers affects not only Hazara farming communities, but also Tajiks and Pashtuns. Also in these cases, the involvement of political parties and politicians is reported. Interviewees tend to describe such involvement in negative terms, when it is to the advantage of the opposing community, but this seems to be a natural development in a country that opened up to competitive politics in 2001. Whatever the actual role of politicians and strongmen, there are clearly deep causes underpinning the rise in conflicts over pastureland. The expansion of urban and peri-urban settlements has, in some cases, pushed up the value of grassland previously used by the nomads causing local villagers, returnees from Pakistan and powerbrokers to try and seize control over pastureland for the purpose of building on it or of selling it. Areas neighbouring big cities were inevitably affected to a greater extent, such as Deh Sabz:

In the last 15 years a lot of changes took place. For example, before our population was less and there was also no fighting in other provinces, so there were free areas for Kuchis to bring herds for feeding. But now the population increased a lot and a lot of people also came to Kabul from other provinces due to fighting there. So those pastures are also becoming towns and houses and now the Kuchis also want to find places for their living and they know the worth of land. This is the reason why the relationship between Kuchis and farmers and resident everywhere get worst.²³

17 Liz Alden Wily, 'The Battle over Pastures: The Hidden War in Afghanistan', *Revue des Mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*: 133, June 2013.

18 J. David Stanfield et al., 'Rangeland Administration in (Post) Conflict Conditions: The Case of Afghanistan', *Innovations in Land Rights Recognition, Administration, and Governance*, ed by Klaus Deininger et al., World Bank, 2010.

19 Conor Foley, *A Guide to property law in Afghanistan*, NRC/UNHCR, 2005.

20 Liz Alden Wily, 'The Battle over Pastures: The Hidden War in Afghanistan', *Revue des Mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*: 133, June 2013.

21 Interview with Kuchi elder of Tarakhel Tribe in Dehsaz District of Kabul Province, 13 January 2017.

22 Interview with staff of Grassland Department of Agriculture Ministry.

23 Interview with elder and farmer in Deh Sabz of Kabul Province, 1 January 2017.

The same applies to Khaki Jabbar (Kabul Province):

In the last 15 years a lot of changes took place in our village. Reconstruction took place, our population increased and the road connections from Kabul City to our village were rebuilt. Yes these changes affected our relations with the Kuchis. Before we did not use Charbazgi Desert, but now we need to use it, so this is the cause of conflict between Kuchis and our community.²⁴

Demographic growth and the availability of greater resources for bringing dry land to exploitation pushed village communities towards trying to deny Kuchis access to pastures, where they wanted to build new houses and install water pumps:

We do not give permission to Kuchis, whether they they want to graze or make houses because we want to make this land ready for cultivation. We want to make water pumps in these deserts and grow things here because the number of our people is increasing day by day. We also want to make houses in these areas. [...] It is not necessary for these areas to be the place of Kuchis forever and for them to use them as pastures and build houses on it.²⁵

This is a type of conflict over shrinking resources to be divided among an ever increasing population, which would be difficult to avoid even if the communities were empowered to decide among themselves how to exploit the pastures.

Nomad sedentarisation accelerates

The Afghan Government has shifted back and forth between two main approaches towards nomadism. The modernists have tended to view nomadic life as anachronistic and have argued for the settlement of the nomads as the only possible long-term solution to the problem.²⁶ Settlement would also result in greater government control over the population, reduced smuggling and the expansion of the tax base. Others, however, have seen in the nomads and, in particular, in the Pashtun Kuchis, useful allies of the ruling elites for expanding the power of a weak central government towards the provinces. Since the Afghan Government, for over a half-century, has hardly been raising any taxes from the rural population, worrying about the ability of the nomads to evade taxation seems quite out of place.

Regardless of the whims of Afghan politicians and leaders, a process of nomad sedentarisation has been going on for some time due to social, economic, environmental and demographic change. In fact, sedentarisation and nomadisation have been going on in Afghanistan for centuries, depending on a number of factors. After 2001, no examples of nomadisation were reported, but sedentarisation certainly occurred on a significant scale. In part, this might be the result of economic, political and environmental conditions. Demographic growth, the shrinking of grassland areas and limited access to those are undoubtedly important factors. More areas were brought under cultivation once mechanised agriculture started spreading, and as a result of expanding poppy cultivation and of urban expansion. De facto, the Afghan state accepted and endorsed the process of fast and ruthless accumulation by the elites at the expense of the poorest part of the rural population, including nomads.²⁷ Indeed, it would appear that sedentary Kuchis tend to be poorer than nomadic Kuchis and that most settled Kuchis become daily workers. It is rarer for settled Kuchis than for nomadic Kuchis to be traders.²⁸

The impact of these factors in driving the Kuchis towards sedentarisation should not be overestimated, however. In some cases, it has also been the result of Kuchis learning new skills and discovering new opportunities as a result of the dislocation caused by long years of conflict.

24 Interview with elder and farmer of Malang village, 28 February 2017.

25 Interview with Kuchi elder, Adramzai community, Awbazak village, 20 December 2016.

26 Hermann Kreutzmann and Stefan Schütte, 'Contested Commons – Multiple Insecurities Of Pastoralists In North-Eastern Afghanistan', *Erdkunde*, Vol. 65 · No. 2 · 99–119, 2011.

27 Liz Alden Wily, 'The Battle over Pastures: The Hidden War in Afghanistan', *Revue des Mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*: 133, June 2013.

28 'A study of the Kuchi population in the Kabul New City area', Kabul: Samuel Hall, 2012, Table 3.1.

These nomads who settled in the cities, they are also telling us to stop nomadic life and come to cities. Because there are a lot of problems in this nomad's life.²⁹

Some Kuchis have also managed to accumulate significant capital, which they have then turned into properties and businesses. In other cases, it was migration to the Arab Gulf that allowed some of them to make money and invest at least a portion of it back in Afghanistan.³⁰ In a Samuel Hall survey among Kuchis in the Kabul area, 45 percent mentioned being tired of nomadic life as a reason for settling, one of the main reasons alongside danger (probably deriving from the state of conflict of the country) and economic reasons. Access to pasturelands issues were mentioned by 22.9 percent of the survey interviewees.³¹ As one interviewee said:

They left nomadic life and bought properties in the towns of Logar, Nangarhar, Balkh, Kandahar and other provinces. We told you that nomadic life became difficult for Kuchis and there are a lot of problems, so they are opting for city life. Kuchis also like living in the cities if government provides facilities for them, like give them property and lands to them to build houses on it and create employment, etc.³²

The study by Samuel Hall found that after 2001 the process of sedentarisation among the nomads of Kabul Province accelerated dramatically. Of those interviewed, only 0.7 percent had settled in 1971-1980, and just 2.1 percent in 1981-1990. In the 1990s the first serious acceleration occurred: 11.4 percent sedentarised during this decade. However, the real acceleration was from 2001 onwards: 44.3 percent settled in 2001-2006 and 41.4 percent in 2007-11.³³ The 2005 survey found that 15 percent of the Kuchis were permanently settled.³⁴ The interviewees of the ongoing AREU project confirmed that the trend towards settlement appears to have accelerated (see Table 1).

Table 1: Settled Kuchis by tribe, according to tribal elders³⁵

Tribe	Estimated percent settled as of 2017
Nasar	30
Karokhels	55
Ahmadzai	30
Suleimankhel	45
Mullahkhel	5 - 20
Niazi	65-70
Sultan Khel	80
Babar	55
Akbar Khel	20-25
Masu Khel	60
Taghar	40
Babakar	40
Tarakhel	80

29 Interview with Kuchi elder of Babkarkhel Tribe, Deh Sabz District of Kabul Province, 28 January 2017.

30 Interview with Kuchi Elder of Niazi Tribe, Derai of Khost Province, 8 April 2017.

31 'A study of the Kuchi population in the Kabul New City area', Kabul: Samuel Hall, 2012, Table 3.1.

32 Interview with Kuchi elder of Kharokhel Tribe, Midan Wardak Province, 22 November 2016.

33 'A study of the Kuchi population in the Kabul New City area', Kabul: Samuel Hall, 2012, Table 3.1.

34 Frauke de Weijer, 'National Multi Sectoral Assessment On Kuchi', May 2005.

35 Interview with Kuchi elder of Nasar Tribe, Sarchushma area between Jalriz and Behsud Districts of Midan Wardak Province, 22 November 2016; Interview with Kuchi elder of Kharokhel Tribe, Midan Wardak Province, 22 November 2016; Interview with Kuchi elder in Behsud Awal of Midan Wardak Province, 19 November 2016; Interview with Kuchi elder of Sulaimankhel Tribe, 27 March 2017; Interview with Kuchi elder of Mullah Khel tribe, 9 April 2017; Interview Kuchi elder of Mullah Khel Tribe, 8 April 2017; Interview with Kuchi elder of Marak-khel Tribe, Derai of Khost Province, 7 April 2017; Interview with Kuchi elder of the Sultan Khel Tribe in Logar Province, 23 November 2016; Interview with Kuchi elder of Babar Tribe of Azra District of Logar, 28 January 2017; Interview with Kuchi elder of Akbar Khel Tribe, 20 March 2017; Interview with Kuchi elder, Kuchihi Abad of Botkhak, Kabul, 9 March 2017; Interview with Kuchi elder of Taghar Kuchi Tribe in Deh Sabz District of Kabul Province, 18 January 2017; Interview with Kuchi elder of Babkarkhel Tribe, in Deh Sabz District of Kabul Province, 28 January 2017; Interview with Kuchi elder of Tarakhel Tribe for Dehsaz District of Kabul Province, 13 January 2017.

Nomad sedentarisation: a new source of conflict

The sedentarisation of the nomads might end one source of conflict, but is simultaneously starting new conflicts as the nomads have to settle somewhere. In the absence of a government programme to settle the nomads in specific areas, they either end up in the cities or grab whatever piece of land they find. Few nomads have the resources to buy land, so one of the options they have is to occupy pastureland where they can. Both nomad and farmer interviewees confirm that this is happening, for example:

*Before Kuchis were doing nomadic life and they were going from one place to another place. They stopped that life. They are capturing the whole land of Afghanistan, if it is in north, south, east or west. Now they want to settle. Therefore, they need land and they are occupying land.*³⁶

Before we were going to northern provinces, but now they stop us from going to those areas and those pastures areas where we built our houses. These people do not give us permission. Then they brought bulldozers and demolished our houses. In one house two children were also killed. A lot of fighting took place between these Tajik and our Tarakhels.³⁷

As a result of competition for the exploitation of pastureland, communities that never before objected to Kuchis accessing the pastures turned against them:

*Before Kuchis were coming for a short time and then they were going back. They did not want to capture our land. The conflict did not take place, but now Kuchis come here and they capture our land. They build houses on it.*³⁸

The Kuchis feel discriminated because as nomadic life becomes difficult to practice, they have no easily viable option to settle down somewhere, except as cheap labour in the cities:

*We want to build houses in Deh Yahia, Bari Kaw, Bakhtarian, Qadar khel, Bandi Khana, Qala-e-Zaren, Baba Khushra and Aziz Hotak. Yes, in some areas there are problems, but in some areas there are no problems. Some people are thinking that 'Kuchis are from Afghanistan, leave them,' but some people are thinking 'They do not have the right to live here, they must live in the mountains'.*³⁹

A good example of 'farmer selfishness' comes from Azra of Logar, where the pastures are contested between the formerly nomadic tribes that settled a couple of years earlier and divided the areas with the best agricultural potential among themselves and the Kuchi tribes that are trying to settle only now and claim the same land:

*It is more than 2,000 hectares land and all villages and tribes have shares in it such as Esakhel Tribe, Adrimzai Tribe, Afzal Khel Tribe and Stanikzai Tribe. All of these tribes have rights on this land. As it is the pastures of Kuchis, it is also our pastures because before we were also Kuchis and we carried animals there, but now we stopped nomadic life.*⁴⁰

The total absence of policing in rural areas like this results in relatively minor incidents escalating rapidly into violence. In one case recounted by an interviewee, in 2003 the Kuchis killed the son of a local landholder who was complaining to them about their planting wheat on his land. The Kuchis claim to own that land, which they bought in the past. Afterwards, the colonel stormed the Kuchi settlement, killing seven. The blood feud which started in this way is still going on and resists all attempts by the elders of the two communities to end it, even if the elders agreed that the Kuchis would withdraw from the occupied land.⁴¹ The conflict spread as the local villagers started attacking Kuchis indiscriminately, not just the Niazi.⁴²

The lack of policing, justice and, in many areas, even service delivery shows how there are still large portions of Afghan society beyond the reach of the state. Perhaps this is an area that the new Citizens' Charter should consider, although in many cases it is a matter of remote areas where the state will always struggle to assert its authority.

36 Interview with farmer elder of Malang village, 28 February 17.
37 Interview with Kuchi elder of Tarakhel Tribe in Dehsaz District of Kabul Province, 13 January 2017.
38 Interview with farmer elder of Pay Menar village of Deh Sabz District of Kabul Province, 4 January 2017.
39 Interview with Kuchi elder of Tarakhel Tribe for Dehsaz District of

Kabul Province, 13 January 2017.

40 Interview with settled Kuchi elder of Esakhel community in Poli Kandahar village, 20 Dec 2016.
41 Interview with elder of Perai Tribe in Shamal area of Derai of Khost Province, 10 April 2017; Interview with elder of the Marakhel Tribe in Derai of Khost Province, 7 April 2017; Interview with elder of the Teron Tribe in Derai of Khost Province, 6 April 2017.
42 Interview with Kuchi elder of Dawlatzai Tribe in Derai of Khost Province, 9 April 2017; Interview with Kuchi elder of Niazi Tribe in Derai of Khost Province, 8 April 2017.

Social differentiation among Kuchis

Another preliminary finding of the project is the fact that the growing social differentiation among the nomads and the rise of Kuchi strongmen is playing an important role in fostering conflict, as suggested by previous research as well. Undoubtedly, there have been processes of class formation among Kuchis from the 1950s onwards, but they accelerated after 2001. The wealthier stock-owners from both pastoral and settled communities seek to own, access or control pastures that they themselves do not visit. Instead, they send hired herdsmen to these remote areas, even trucking animals into the highland spring and summer pastures. [...] Kuchi leaders also invested in valley farming lands, including for speculation, selling these on to other Kuchis at a profit.⁴³ Starting from the 1990s onwards, Kuchi leaders were able to encroach on state land to the benefit of their family or of their allies. Kuchi families who had lost their herds and were desperate to settle somewhere became very dependent on these leaders and their ability to offer a solution to their problems and political protection, which is necessary because usually the land has been grabbed illegally by the Kuchi leaders and could easily be taken away without that protection.⁴⁴

Our conflict started in Khalilabad because when the Stanikzai Tribe captured our pastures in Khalilabad. Before these conflicts did not start because the worth of land was not high, but now when the land becomes expensive these powerful people captured all the areas and they also attacked our pastures as well. Another reason is population growth because a lot of people came back from Pakistan, these [NAME WITHHELD] who is member of Parliament and [NAME WITHHELD] are giving land to every family and take payment from them.⁴⁵

A complaint sometimes heard from the nomads is that their fellow Kuchis who settled are not taking much part in the tribe's activities, nor supporting the tribe in times of trouble. In reality, most of the settled former nomads continue to support their tribes through the tribal shuras who collect contributions. This also applies to land and pasture conflict; with the help of the settled nomads, the tribes could buy weapons and ammunition and other supplies to be used in their

confrontation with farmers, for example.⁴⁶ What it is not clear at this stage is whether tribal cohesiveness is still maintained through the old tribal solidarity mechanisms or through newly developed patronage networks. This is a topic that will be followed up in future project fieldwork.

Often in the interviews, the role of Kuchi strongmen could be seen in the distance. In Derai of Khost, for example, Niazi and Marak-khel Kuchis bought some pastureland and turned it into agricultural land near some local Pashtun villages. The Kuchis claim that the villagers objected to them growing crops on the pastureland they bought, while the villagers claim the Kuchis encroached on their land, growing crops and building houses there. It is not clear how the Kuchis could legally buy pastureland, which is not supposed to be for sale as it is public land.⁴⁷

Conflict resolution

Where conflict originates from local friction between nomads and farmers, because of failures to abide by rules and boundaries, local settlements could be reached and problems settled. Indeed, the interviewees identified several instances where, through mediation by other communities, agreements could be found and conflicts ended.

Where nomad-farmer conflict is driven by demographic growth or environmental degradation, finding local solutions is going to be much harder. The conundrum is well-illustrated by the fact that typically the two sides in these disputes accuse each other of having the protection of the 'mafias' that rotate around the government. In Derai, for example, the Kuchis accuse their rivals of being favoured by the authorities:

We are trying to solve the other problems also, but there is this Colonel family in Khost. They have power in the government and do not want to solve the problems. [...] These powerful people are committing crimes and the government is supporting them. [...] The solution is finishing these powerful groups and mafias. If we solved the problems through the tribal Shura, again these powerful people would take land because government officials are helping them.⁴⁸

43 Liz Alden Wily, 'The Battle over Pastures: The Hidden War in Afghanistan', *Revue des Mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*: 133, June 2013.

44 Fabrizio Foschini, 'The social wandering of the Afghan Kuchis', Berlin: AAN, 2013.

45 Interview with Kuchi elder of Naeemkhel Community in Khalil Abad area of Logar Province, 24 November 2016.

46 Interview with Kuchi elder of Akbar KhelK Tribe, 20 March 2017.

47 Interview with elder of Perai Tribe in Shama area of Derai of Khost Province, 10 April 2017; Interview with elder of the Marak-khel Tribe in Derai of Khost Province, 7 Apr 2017; Interview with elder of Teron Tribe of Khost in Derai, 6 April 2017.

48 Interview with Kuchi elder of Marak-khel Tribe in Derai of Khost Province, 7 April 2017.

The villagers throw exactly the same accusation at the Kuchis:

Not only Kuchis, but in every province, the powerful people are capturing lands. [...] These are mafia groups. Like behind Niazi there is [NAME WITHHELD] and he is telling them that he supports them.⁴⁹

The accusation of the involvement of powerbrokers and parties is so pervasive that one cannot help wonder whether it has become a scapegoat for what is, in effect, an impossible situation, particularly in a context of rapid demographic growth and negative economic growth. It is obvious at the same time that, if not always, powerbrokers and political groups do play a role in a number of these conflicts. In the follow-up research, the research team will look into the issue of whether this could be an area where conflict mitigation might work.

Conclusion

The ongoing project largely confirms the previous findings of other researchers who have looked into nomad-farmer relations in Afghanistan, and strengthens some of those findings. In particular, the research team found:

- The acceleration of the process of sedentarisation of the nomads;
- The growing importance of sedentarisation as a source of conflict;
- The growing role of Kuchi strongmen in driving conflict and sedentarisation;
- The nature of social relations among the Kuchis appears to be changing faster.

Some findings are not new, but are important confirmations of trends already identified by other research projects:

- The Afghan state continues being a spectator of the ongoing conflicts and does not play an active role in their resolution;
- To the extent conflict resolution occurs, is mostly through the mediation of third parties picked from among other community leaderships;
- Demographic pressure remains high, not least due to the return of hundreds of thousands from Pakistan;

- Conflict over pasturelands has been contained by the blockade of access routes to the highlands, at the cost of making conflict worse in the areas where the blocks occur;
- Institutional multiplicity makes conflict resolution more difficult, but allows fast track accumulation for actors who enjoy political protection at the top of the state.

The project will now switch to following up on specific findings, which appear to deserve further investigation and which will allow us to formulate policy recommendations as well. These are:

- The role of Kuchi strongmen in driving sedentarisation and conflict;
- The nature of the processes of accumulation that underpin the emergence of the strongmen, and whether/how they could be channelled to benefit the rural population more widely;
- Options for the regulation of the transformation of parts of the pasturelands into urban and agricultural ground;
- Options for conflict resolution.

⁴⁹ Interview with farmer elder of the Matoonwal in Derai of Khost Province, 8 April 2017.

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