



Nomad Sedentarisation Processes in Afghanistan and Their Impact on Conflict

Dr. Antonio Giustozzi
September 2019



Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

Watching Brief

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The information and views set out in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of AREU and European Union.

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About the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) is an independent research institute based in Kabul that was established in 2002 by the assistance of the international community in Afghanistan. AREU's mission is to inform and influence policy and practice by conducting high-quality, policy-relevant, evidence-based research and actively disseminating the results and promote a culture of research and learning. As the top think-tank in Afghanistan and number five in Central Asia according to the Global Go To Think Tank Index Report at the University of Pennsylvania, AREU achieves its mission by engaging with policy makers, civil society, researchers and academics to promote their use of AREU's research-based publications and its library, strengthening their research capacity and creating opportunities for analysis, reflection and debate. AREU is governed by a Board of Directors comprised of representatives of donor organisations, embassies, the United Nations and other multilateral agencies, Afghan civil society and independent experts.

AREU's core donor is the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). Specific projects in 2019 are being funded by the European Union (EU), Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Institute (CAREC), Institute for Integrated Transitions (IFIT), UN Women and Save the Children.

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In 2018, AREU was awarded Best International Social Think Tank by Prospect Magazine.



About the Author

Dr. Antonio Giustozzi has researched and published extensively on Afghanistan. For AREU he has released ‘Thirty years of conflict’ (2012), ‘The Resilient Oligopoly: A Political Economy of Northern Afghanistan 2001 and Onwards’ (2012), ‘The Afghan National Army: Sustainability Challenges beyond Financial Aspects’ (2014), ‘The Politicisation of Afghanistan’s High Schools’ (2015), ‘Reaching Boiling Point: High School Activism in Afghanistan’ (2015), and ‘The Afghan National Army After ISAF’ (2016). Dr. Giustozzi holds a PhD from the London School of Economics in International Relations and a BA in Contemporary History from the University of Bologna. Since 2017, he has published a series of articles and papers for AREU on the Nomad-farmer conflicts in Afghanistan.

Foreword

AREU is proud to present this “Watching Brief” that was written by Dr Antonio Giustozzi and generously funded by the European Union. The paper is part of the broader EU funded project: Three-pronged research effort into essential areas of Natural Resources Management (NRM).

The paper is based on and complements a series of AREU publications related to nomadism in Afghanistan. These include a paper on the role of the state in managing nomad-settler conflict and a typology of nomad-farmer conflict, as well as a preliminary findings paper issued at the beginning of the project. The reader can refer to the preliminary findings paper for the definition of “nomad” in Afghanistan as adopted by this project and for a discussion of the general landscape of nomadism in Afghanistan. In this “watching brief,” all the case studies cover Pashtun nomad settlements, as they account for the overwhelming majority of nomad settlements in Afghanistan.

The paper first discusses pre-2001 experiences in sedentarisation. It then outlines post-2001 sedentarisation processes before reviewing the four case studies of nomad settlements, which were all affected by conflicts with neighbouring communities. In total, for this “watching brief” we interviewed 16 settled nomads (four per settlement, all community elders and all males) during spring 2019. We deliberately focused exclusively on nomads (ignoring neighbouring settled communities) because we wanted to get a perspective from within the community about the dynamics of sedentarisation. We started from the assumption that settler communities in surrounding areas would have had rather negative views about the nomad settlements.

AREU is grateful for the enormous support of the anonymous peer-reviewers for their contribution to further strengthening the paper by their insight and expertise and Dr Antonio for his painstaking research work in Afghanistan.

Sincerely yours



Dr Orzala Nemat

AREU Director

Introduction

This “watching brief” is part of an AREU project funded by the European Union. It builds on and complements a series of AREU publications related to nomadism in Afghanistan. These include a paper on the role of the state in managing nomad-settler conflict and a typology of nomad-farmer conflict, as well as a preliminary findings paper issued at the beginning of the project.¹ The reader can refer to the preliminary findings paper for the definition of “nomad” in Afghanistan as adopted by this project and for a discussion of the general landscape of nomadism in Afghanistan. In this “watching brief,” all the case studies cover Pashtun nomad settlements, as they account for the overwhelming majority of nomad settlements in Afghanistan.

The sedentarisation of nomads is often seen by policy makers as the way to more fully integrate nomads into Afghan society, make services available to them and eliminate nomad-settler conflict. In fact, many nomads have already settled, sometimes as a result of government-sponsored schemes, but much more often as a result of spontaneous processes.

This “watching brief” focuses on the issue of if and how nomad sedentarisation impacts nomad-settler conflict, in order to establish whether sedentarisation could be a viable policy for reducing nomad-settler conflict. It does so by looking at four case studies of nomad settlements: two state-sponsored cases and two spontaneous cases. The studies provide some background information about the specific settlements, discuss the viability of sedentarisation processes and examine their impact on nomad-settler conflict. The locations were deliberately chosen so as to have two couples of case studies in close proximity to one another: one spontaneous case study and one state-sponsored case study in Kabul province (Haji Jannat Gul and Kuchi Abad) and one of each in Logar province (Wazir Kariz and Dasht-e Khaka). Kabul and Logar were selected because they are the two main areas of nomad settlement.

The paper first discusses pre-2001 experiences in sedentarisation, then outlines post-2001 sedentarisation processes before reviewing the four case studies of nomad settlements, which were all affected by conflicts with neighbouring communities. In total, for this “watching brief” we interviewed 16 settled nomads (four per settlement, all community elders and all males) during spring 2019. We deliberately focused exclusively on nomads (ignoring neighbouring settled communities) because we wanted to get a perspective from within the community about the dynamics of sedentarisation. We started from the assumption that settler communities in surrounding areas would have had rather negative views about the nomad settlements.

1 Antonio Giustozzi, “The Role of the Afghan State in Managing Nomadism and Nomad- Settler Conflict” (Kabul: AREU, January 2019); Antonio Giustozzi, “Typologies of nomad-settler conflict in Afghanistan” (Kabul: AREU), January 2018); Antonio Giustozzi, “Mapping nomad-farmer conflict in Afghanistan” (Kabul: AREU, July 2017).

Past Experiences in Sedentarisation

The idea of settling nomads is not something new in Afghanistan. During the kingdoms of Abdul Rahman and his successor Habibullah II, the settlement of the nomads was, among other things, a political tool to extend the power of the central government towards areas where it had weak control and was, therefore, bound to generate friction. During this period, nomad and semi-nomad communities were mostly offered land in the midst of hostile populations in order to turn the nomads into supporters of the central government. To a large extent, these settlers remained semi-nomadic.²

During the kingdoms of Nadir Shah and Zahir Shah, a new policy emerged about irrigating desert areas and colonising them in order to increase agricultural production. Many of those who settled during schemes such as the one in Helmand Valley from 1946-1979 were nomads. These schemes were, in any case, only partially successful, due to a variety of problems including engineering, soil and insufficient plot sizes.³

Nomads then also benefited from the agrarian reform implemented from 1978 onwards by the leftist regime that came to power with the rise of a coup. Some of them received land during the reform, but—again—this reform was largely unsuccessful and widely challenged.⁴

One of the consequences of the process of general modernisation in Afghanistan was the tendency of policy makers to view nomadism as a pre-modern anachronism that should be abolished or transcended, typically through sedentarisation and the transformation of nomadic lifestyles in line with modern concepts of social organisation and division of labour. Through sedentarisation, infrastructures could be made available enabling the optimisation of animal breeding techniques, pasture utilisation and marketing of livestock products, among others.⁵

Sedentarisation, however, happened independently of the state even before 2001 and especially in the 1990s. A survey of the nomads of Kabul province by Samuel Hall found that while only 0.7 percent had settled in 1971-1980 and just 2.1 percent in 1981-1990, the 1990s already witnessed a significant acceleration of nomad sedentarisation: 11.4 percent sedentarised during this decade.⁶ This sample is surely not representative of a national average, but there is no other data on sedentarisation patterns before 2001. The post-1978 conflict must have been a factor in forcing many nomads to abandon their migrations and settle, at least temporarily, mostly in refugee camps in Pakistan. In the late 1980s and 1990s, parts of the country were already off-limits for the nomads, forcing many to sedentarise.

2 Liz Alden Wily, "Land rights in crisis" (Kabul: AREU, 2003), p. 40.

3 Wily, "Land rights", p. 41.

4 Wily, "Land rights", p. 47-48.

5 Hermann Kreutzmann and Stefan Schütte, "Contested commons - multiple insecurities of pastoralists in north-eastern Afghanistan" *Erdkunde* Vol. 65 · No. 2: 99-119 (2011), p. 104.

6 "A study of the Kuchi population in the Kabul New City area" (Kabul: Samuel Hall, 2012), Table 3.1.

Sedentarisation Post-2001

Although sedentarisation, as explained above, has been going on in Afghanistan for centuries, after 2001 it accelerated. In part, this might be the result of economic, political and environmental conditions. The 2005 “National Multi Sectoral Assessment on Kuchi” found that 15 percent of the nomads were permanently settled.⁷ The Kuchi Directorate, established in 2006, has not yet been able to carry out a new survey of the nomads, but estimates that there might be 4.5-5 million nomads in the country in 2019. Of these, about 150,000-220,000 are believed to be semi-nomads, while full nomadism appears to be substantially extinct nowadays. This suggests a dramatic decline of nomadism post-2001, even if all these figures are taken with a pinch of salt.⁸

A study by Samuel Hall also found that after 2001 the process of sedentarisation among the nomads of Kabul province accelerated dramatically. Whereas only 14.2 percent had sedentarised before 2001, 44.3 percent settled in 2001-2006 and 41.4 percent in 2007-2011.⁹ The interviewees of this AREU project confirmed that the trend towards settlement appears to have accelerated.¹⁰

Drivers of Sedentarisation

The interviewees of our four case studies indicated that these were the causes of the sedentarisation process, without significant distinctions between those who lived in settlements authorised by the authorities and the others: drought, conflict with settlers, rising levels of violence in the country, livestock disease and, of course, war and insecurity.

The Samuel Hall study produced similar findings: drought, lack of access to water and lack of access to pastures were by far the most commonly cited causes for settling.¹¹ The ongoing conflict is also a reason cited by 47 percent of Samuel Hall’s interviewees for sedentarisation, while the attraction of a sedentary lifestyle is cited by 45 percent, with particular reference to education for children and health services.¹²

Driver 1: Economic Necessity / Poverty

In order to make nomadism sustainable, a nomadic family needs at least 40-50 animals (typically sheep). Once the herd falls below this number, it is only a matter of a few years before the family is likely forced to sedentarise. Often, in order to buy land, the nomads have to sell even more animals, therefore becoming more dependent on other types of economic activities for survival.¹³

Driver 2: Improving Access to Education and Health Care

Sedentarisation tends to bring access to health and educational services, previously very hard to access for nomads, as confirmed by our interviewees.^{14,15} While this might not have been a driver of early sedentarisation efforts, once the settled nomads started appreciating these gains, they also began inviting fellow nomads to settle in order to access them. This driver came into play after 2001, as Afghanistan started recovering from the war and education and health systems began to be rebuilt, and it seems to have had a significant impact. Indeed, while re-nomadisation was not uncommon in

7 Frauke de Weijer, “National Multi Sectoral Assessment on Kuchi” (Kabul: MRRD, May 2005).

8 Interview with official of the Kuchi Directorate, Kabul, May 2019.

9 “A study of the Kuchi population”, Table 3.1.

10 Giustozzi, “Mapping nomad-farmer”.

11 “A study of the Kuchi population”, p. 23.

12 “A study of the Kuchi population”, p. 25-26.

13 Hervé Nicolle, “Qu’elle était verte ma vallée L’avenir sans terre des populations Kuchi dans le district de Deh Sabz” (Revue de Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée, 133, 2013), p. 235-236.

14 Nicolle, “Qu’elle était verte ma vallée”, p. 235-236.

15 Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 1 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad, Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar 2, April 2019.

the 1990s, it became rare after 2001. In the 1990s, nomadic life still looked attractive to nomads forced to take refuge in Pakistan from the war and substantial numbers bought herds in the 1990s to try just that.¹⁶¹⁷

Driver 3: Forming a Tighter Community

Living together also means that the settled nomads are better able to help their larger kin group, compared to being spread along migration routes in small familiar nuclei. The nomads can finally have a richer social life and celebrate events and traditions together, as well as support each other.¹⁸

*The benefit of living here in Jannat Gul Town is that here we have a big mass of nomads who are having similar customs and traditions and bonds to each other. Besides, we can stand by each other in hard times.*¹⁹

It should be added that settled nomads have been inviting their kin to join them. Many accepted the invitation as sedentarisation started becoming easier once a critical mass of settled nomads was reached, as relatives could help prospective settling nomads with accommodation, jobs, some financial support and advice or guidance.²⁰

*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.*²¹

Driver 4: Financial Accumulation and Acquisition of New Skills

Some nomads have managed to accumulate significant capital, which they then turned into properties and businesses after the war appeared to have ended in 2001. 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.²² Moreover, by settling, nomads could put recently acquired skills to good use or discover new opportunities as a result of the dislocation caused by long years of conflict.

Sedentarisation, however, has its drawbacks too. The nomads lost their (relative) independence and became subject (like most of the rest of the population of Afghanistan) to the whims of local notables:

*[The elders] are collecting money from us and we are required to pay them because if we do not pay, then they bad-mouth us and try to isolate us in the settlement.*²³

16 Interview with settled nomad in Dasht-e Khaka, Baraki Barak, 4 May 2019.

17 Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 1 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad, Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 2 April 2019.

18 Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 1 February 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 2 February 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 3 March 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 4 March 2019.

19 Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 1 February 2019.

20 Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 1 February 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 2 February 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 3 March 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 4 March 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Kuchi Abad settlement, 1 March 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Kuchi Abad settlement, 3 March 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 1 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad, Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 2 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 3 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 4 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Dasht-e Khaka, Baraki Barak, 1 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Dasht-e Khaka, Baraki Barak, 2 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Dasht-e Khaka, Baraki Barak, 3 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Dasht-e Khaka, Baraki Barak, 4 May 2019.

21 Interview with nomad elder of Babarkhel Tribe, Deh Sabz district of Kabul province, 28 January 2017.

22 Interview with nomad elder of Niazi Tribe, Deraï of Khost province, 8 April 2017.

23 Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 3 April 2019;

Case Studies: The Viability of Sedentarisation and Its Impact on Conflict

Government-authorized Settlements

The Case of Senator Haji Jannat Gul Town

The Haji Jannat Gul settlement west of Kabul city was established on pastures previously used by nomads, with up to 120,000 inhabitants according to one of the elders. Some “spontaneous” settlement processes were going on before, but in 2009, Senator Jannat Gul convinced President Karzai to transfer state land to the nomads in order to establish a town for settled nomads and issue them with official land documents. The town then took Haji Jannat Gul’s name. The settlement has since grown beyond the original land granted by Karzai to the nomads, due to extensive land grabbing by the local power brokers. Nomad tribes from a variety of provinces thus ended up in Jannat Gul town: Khost, Paktia, Paktika, Nangarhar, Laghman, Kabul, Parwan, Kunduz, Baghlan and Logar.²⁴

The settled nomads earn a living by opening shops, starting transport or some other kind of business (typically in the property of car dealing sectors) or getting salaried employment. Still, most of the settled nomads in Jannat Gul town seem happy with their current conditions, compared to the troublesome nomadic life of post-2001. Whether it is because they like their new life or because they do not have the means or the facilities, very few of these settled nomads even consider going back to their old life.²⁵

*When a nomad settles and enjoys the benefits of the settled life, he will never return back to nomadic life because we all know that nomadic life is full of struggles and so much hardship and difficulties.*²⁶

*Even if there was a chance of returning to nomadic life, we would not because we do not have money to buy animals and start a nomadic life again. If I sell my current house, it could not be enough to have herd of 20 animals.*²⁷

The settled nomads of Jannat Gul town do not, as a general rule, keep many animals, as pastures are extremely scarce in the area and the routes to the mountain pastures are unsafe. According to the interviewees, about 80 percent of the nomads settled in the town no longer have any animals or, at most, two to three, which they use to supply the family. About 20 percent still have significant numbers of animals. About 200 families (three percent of the total) have large herds, but mostly deal with trading animals rather than seasonal migrations. Perhaps only 50-90 of these families with large herds (roughly one percent of the total) are still involved with nomadism, with part of the family still travelling with the animals.²⁸

24 Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 1 February 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 2 February 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 3 March 2019;

25 Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 1 February 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 2 February 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 3 March 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 4 March 2019.

26 Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 1 February 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Dasht-e Khaka, Baraki Barak, 2 April 2019.

27 Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 4 March 2019.

28 Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 3 March 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 2 February 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 1 February 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 4 February 2019.

Haji Jannat Gul town is one of the largest settlement schemes started by the Afghan authorities, but in practice its implementation turned out to be very different from what it was supposed to be. Karzai's decree assigned the land exclusively to nomads from tribes who used to migrate to the area (such as the Terakhels) willing to settle down. However, due to the capture of the scheme by a powerful nomad power broker and/or to the inability of many nomad beneficiaries to actually build houses on their plots, much of the land was, in fact, sold to settlers or to nomads who had no title to it (because their communities had not traditionally been using those pastures) or even some (or many, according to certain versions) who should have received it for free. Some respondents even believed that nobody actually received any plot for free. By 2019, perhaps half of the population of Jannat Gul town has no nomadic background. The prices of land plots in Jannat Gul town have been rising from the original 50,000 Afs (per plot of 400 square meters) to about 300,000 Afs today and are now unaffordable to most nomads.

Such "landscapes of power" are not uncommon in Afghanistan.²⁹ One source claims that the major nomad power broker involved with the scheme made US\$35 million from the sale of such land; he and his family have been charging fees on all land transactions taking place in the town, with their armed retinue of 50 men intimidating local dwellers into submission.³⁰ Other sources indicated that the power broker also raises cash for public works and services delivered in the town, and taxes shops and any economic activity. There were allegations that the same plot of land was sold to multiple buyers and of plots previously sold being expropriated and sold again.³¹

The Haji Jannat Gul settlement thus became a tool for the nomad power broker to establish a power base to support his political ambitions, supporting presidential candidates and his own candidacy to parliament. Most importantly, the power broker who controls Jannat Gul town has issued his own "land titles" to those who bought land from him, but the buyers have not received any land deeds from the authorities. Some of them think that it is the power broker who prevents the authorities from issuing regular land deeds, in order to keep them on his leash.³²

In the process, we have met with [name removed] and we demanded him to consider the [name removed] tribe in the distribution of the plots and lands in the mentioned settlement. He accepted and told us that he would give two plots per family to our tribe, but the deal was on condition that the Nasir tribe agreed to support and assist him whenever needed. We accepted [...]. After the settlement was sketched by his men, he gave us about 40 plots for 20 Nasir tribe families, each one covering 400 square meters of land for construction of houses.³³

The power broker of Jannat Gul town tells the local dwellers that he will protect them from any threat and force the Kabul municipality to provide services.³⁴ One of them confirms that the power broker is trying to make the dwellers dependent on his protection, among other things, by controlling the settlement's external relations:

[Name removed] is telling us that he will protect us from any problems. He is often talking about his influence in the government and says that each president who is being elected needs his support and he is also making other claims to us. [...]. In case one day there is no [name removed] anymore, we will be definitely in trouble as he is the one managing all the internal and external affairs of this town.³⁵

29 Nick Miszak and Alessandro Monsutti, "Landscapes of power: local struggles and national stakes at the rural-urban fringe of Kabul, Afghanistan" (The Journal of Peasant Studies, 41:2, 183-198, 2014).

30 Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 1 February 2019.

31 Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 2 February 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 3 March 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 4 March 2019.

32 Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 1 February 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 3 March 2019;

33 Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 4 March 2019.

34 Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 4 March 2019.

35 Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 3 March 2019.

The power broker then uses the leverage he has on them to mobilise them in his support—most recently in February 2019, when he forced them to attend a demonstration he organised against the central government. The power broker is also constantly involved in brawls with other local power brokers and communities, which he is targeting.

During the last presidential elections when there was a dispute with [name removed (another local power broker)], I came and participated in that dispute, but, as you know, that dispute was not on land but among [name removed]'s militiamen and [name removed], who was trying to manipulate the elections...³⁶

Arguably the sedentarisation of nomads in Haji Jannat Gul town has created the power base that made this nomad elder a power broker—able to project his power and influence well beyond this location.³⁷

The Case of Wazir Kariz, Khoshi

The settlement of Wazir Kariz (Khoshi district, Logar) opened in 2013. It is about 5,000 jeribs (10 square kilometres) and currently split between two areas: one of about 2,000 jeribs, populated by about 160-200 families from the Musakhil sub-tribe of the Ahmadzai, and another one of about 3,000 jeribs, populated by a number of families from other tribes (classified as “refugees”). The government scheme featured the distribution of 10 jeribs per nomad family settling in the area and each family was supposed to pay 2,000 Afs per jerib, but the process went astray and land titles were never issued. These nomads had already largely abandoned nomadic life in the 1980s when they moved to Pakistan. In 2001-2005 they relocated to Afghanistan, mostly buying land in Khost, Kabul, Gardiz, Logar and Jalalabad.³⁸

Some well-known nomad leaders, such as Haji Naim Kuchi, his brother Haji Salem Kuchi and others, lobbied the Afghan authorities during the Karzai era to grant the nomads land in this area. President Karzai issued a decree to this effect. In 2017, the area was surveyed by the authorities with an eye to delimit the lots of each family as well as areas dedicated to schools and health facilities.

In Wazir Kariz (Khoshi), the main activities of the settled nomads are agricultural ones and small commercial activities, although many families also have members working in the cities and in the Gulf.³⁹ These settled nomads only keep a few animals for domestic use and none still live a nomadic life. They seem happy with having given up nomad life and tend to see no other option but settlement. Their investment in fruit trees appears to have been rather successful thanks to suitable soil and most families are able to rely on their agricultural output for a living.⁴⁰

Some of our people who had migrated to Pakistan during the Russian invasion and saw the benefits of settled life in Pakistan immediately sold all of their livestock and turned to local businesses.⁴¹

³⁶ Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 3 March 2019;

³⁷ Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 1 February 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 2 February 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 3 March 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Haji Jannat Gul, 4 March 2019;

³⁸ Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 1 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 2 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 3 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 4 April 2019.

³⁹ Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 1 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 2 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 4 April 2019.

⁴⁰ Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 1 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 2 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 3 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 4 April 2019.

⁴¹ Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 2 April 2019.

After the settled nomads started converting the land to agricultural purposes, however, other nomad communities began to be attracted towards the land, in particular the Babar tribe. The rising tension around the settlement was reflected at the level of the authorities and, in 2018, the Logar authorities recognised these other communities as refugees who had come back from Pakistan. The ARAZI (Afghanistan Land Authority) department sided with them and started distributing a sizeable part of the land once allocated to the Musakhils (3,000 jeribs), refusing to issue any land titles to the Musakhils. The settled nomads objected, not least as they had already spent time and energy building houses and preparing the land for agricultural activities. The original settled nomads (Musakhils) allege corruption at the ARAZI and felt they too had to raise contributions within the community for making sure their case had some defenders in the administration of Logar.⁴²

A conflict immediately started between the Babars (supported by the ARAZI) and the Musakhils (who continued to enjoy the support of the Ministry for Urban Development) in a display of intra-bureaucratic conflict. The conflict was compounded by the fact that some of the Musakhils started trespassing the original boundaries allocated by the authorities, grabbing land.⁴³

*There is some land surrounding our settlement, which we tried to grab and add to our settlement. Actually, these lands are state owned. The government does not have any plans for this land; therefore, in consultation with our elders we have tried to grab it.*⁴⁴

The Musakhils appealed to the Kuchi Directorate, which tried to involve the ARAZI department, but without success despite two years of efforts. The Musakhils of Wazir Kariz then placed themselves under the protection of nomad power brokers, who in turn are trying to mobilise their connections within the government. The settled nomads were asked by the power brokers to pay for the cost of getting the support of government officials—essentially, bribing them. They also accepted that they may be called up to support the Kuchi leaders in times of crisis.⁴⁵

The clashes with the “refugees” occurred between 2016 and 2018, often requiring the police to intervene and some people on both sides were left injured during the main clash. The Musakhil won the fight and captured 10 rivals. The police arrested elders from both sides. Haji Naim Kuchi lobbied for the release of the Musakhil elders in exchange for the release of the captured “refugees,” but the issue has not been resolved. The last clash occurred as recently as early 2019 and the conflict remains unresolved.⁴⁶

Key Findings

Wazir Kariz stands out as an example of bureaucratic rivalries turning a sedentarisation scheme into yet another source of conflict. Both case studies of government-authorized settlements appear to have been largely ignored by the authorities after the initial authorisation was granted. The main advantage of sedentarisation—security—was cancelled by the power broker-planned insecurity in Haji Jannat Gul and bureaucratic infighting in Wazir Kariz. The rationale for direct government intervention in nomad sedentarisation appears dubious at the least, given that many of the nomads who benefited from either scheme were already semi-nomads or even settled nomads.

42 Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 1 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 2 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 3 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 4 April 2019.

43 Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 1 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 2 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 3 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 4 April 2019.

44 Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 3 April 2019.

45 Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 1 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 2 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 3 April 2019.

46 Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 3 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Wazir Kariz settlement, Logar, 4 April 2019.

Unauthorised Settlements

The Case of Kuchi Abad, Haji Nabi Town in West Kabul

The Kuchi Abad settlement emerged gradually from the late 1990s onwards, when some nomad families started returning from Pakistan and building houses in this area, mostly living semi-nomadic lives. The stream increased after 2001, stimulated by the example of the families who had, more or less, successfully settled there already. By around 2008, there were around 100 families already settled in the area. As the routes into Hazarajat were blocked in 2009,⁴⁷ the flow accelerated and now about 480 Sahak nomad families are settled on land that an old royal decree assigned to them for temporary residence (next to their customary summer pastures).

*The land is related to our fathers and grandfathers because they have lived and stayed here. The government of the time issued legal documents about such lands and, therefore, the land is still related to us and we are using it for our settlement.*⁴⁸

While the surrounding settler communities were used to having nomads camping there during the summer, seeing them settle in the area permanently was bound to create friction. In fact, the Sahak tribe claims the whole of Haji Nabi town as its own territory, a fact that added to the friction. The settlement is led by a tribal shura of eight elders and is inhabited by a single sub-tribe, the Sahak of the Edokhel tribe: perhaps 6,000 men, women and children, spread over about 500 acres.⁴⁹ Only 15-20 families keep a significant number of animals, fed with hay rather than fresh grass. Of these families, just eight are still taking herds along short migration routes to Sarobi district, with a total of perhaps 1,000 animals.⁵⁰

In Kuchi Abad, settled nomads also engage in activities such as small businesses, driving/transport, manual jobs, menial jobs and construction work, mostly by commuting to Kote Sangi (Kabul). Some family members still based in Pakistan also send remittances to help. This, however, appears to be a much poorer settlement than Haji Jannat Gul and nostalgia for the old days of nomadism is more widespread. None of the interviewees mentioned the education of children as a plus.

*If I found money and resources, I would definitely return back to nomadic life because I was happy as a nomad. If my sons and grandsons were not available to return back to nomadic life, then I'm ready to hire a watchman who could take care of the animals and herds and, in this way, I would be able to manage both settled and nomadic life. [...] All of [the other nomads] are ready to return back to nomadic life*⁵¹

*If the situations again normalised and we have security all over the country, everybody will start nomadic life once again. In fact, now the opportunities have increased for us: like we can use trucks and vehicles for moving animals and materials. Plus, we are able to hire other people to watch our herds. The same animals have higher costs on the market now, so if we raise and keep animals, then it could generate a higher profit for us.*⁵²

Nonetheless, even here the settled nomads accept that there are advantages in living in settled communities, as they are able to help and support each other easily.⁵³ Not living in an official settlement area, however, left them deprived of services such as education.⁵⁴

47 See Giustozzi, "Typologies of nomad-settler conflict" and Giustozzi, "Mapping nomad-farmer conflict".

48 Interview with settled nomad in Kuchi Abad Settlement, 1 March 2019;

49 Interview with settled nomad in Kuchi Abad Settlement, 1 March 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Kuchi Abad settlement, 2 March 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Kuchi Abad settlement, 3 March 2019.

50 Interview with settled nomad in Kuchi Abad Settlement, 1 March 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Kuchi Abad settlement, 2 March 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Kuchi Abad settlement, 3 March 2019; Interview with former settled nomad in Kuchi Abad settlement, 4 March 2019.

51 Interview with settled nomad in Kuchi Abad Settlement, 1 March 2019.

52 Interview with settled nomad in Kuchi Abad settlement, 3 March 2019.

53 Interview with settled nomad in Kuchi Abad Settlement, 1 March 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Kuchi Abad settlement, 2 March 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Kuchi Abad settlement, 3 March 2019.

54 Interview with settled nomad in Kuchi Abad settlement, 3 March 2019.

The settlement of the Sahak clan might have prevented the emergence of a conflict between them and settlers along their old migration routes, but certainly created new conflicts with settled communities of Hazaras in west Kabul and reinvigorated a conflict with other nomads such as the Malakhils and the Kakars (in 2011-12), who also want to settle in the same area. The conflict started under the Taliban's Emirate and the Taliban had adjudicated it in favour of the Sahak.^{55,56}

The Malakhils provided a different account of what happened:

We have come to settle here before and during the Taliban regime mostly because we were using this settlement area as our pastures in the past [...]. We have spent many years here along with the Sahak sub-tribe, but as soon as the Sahaks increased their population and invited more and more of their people in, they started evicting us from the settlement. They came and forcefully set all of our homes and shelters on fire. They have acted very aggressively and even violently. [...] We have fought back and knocked the doors of several Kuchi elders as well as governmental officials, but nobody assisted us. They succeeded in evicting us and, currently, our people are living spread all over Kabul city.⁵⁷

In fact, the Malakhils make the same claims to the land as the Sahaks.

The settlement area was our fathers' and grandfathers' pastures and temporary seasonal settlement area. [...] We have some documents left to us from our fathers and grandfathers, but the government is not confirming those as genuine.⁵⁸

The Sahak reportedly refused to allow the authorities to survey the area. Two dispute cases between the Sahak and the Malakhils have been filed at the Kuchi Directorate and several commissions have been formed in the Karzai era to try to address the dispute, without success.⁵⁹

As this spontaneous and unauthorised settlement created tension around it, the local nomad leaders had to establish relations with nomad power brokers and national politicians in order to seek protection and gradually became involved in wider conflicts.⁶⁰

The Case of Dasht-e Khaka, Baraki Barak District of Logar Province

The settlement of Dasht-e Khaka was established in 2003 by nomads who had taken refuge in Pakistan during the 1980s and then moved to Khost province in the 1990s. The settlement consists of two communities known as Lower and Higher Dasht-e Khaka and extends over 2,400 hectares (12,000 jeribs) of state-owned pastureland and is populated by 400-630 families (depending on the source) of settled nomads, belonging to 22 different Ahmadzai clans. These nomads also settled on their ancestral pastureland. The former nomads, linked to Elder Naim Kuchi, claim that in 1992 President Mojaddidi signed a decree granting them this land. However, the decree is not recognised by the current Afghan authorities, although the Logar administration has surveyed the area relatively recently, a fact that seems to imply a possible future acceptance of the legitimacy of the settlement. The authorities have recently approved the construction of a clinic for this settlement, but work has not started yet.⁶¹

55 Interview with settled nomad in Kuchi Abad settlement, 3 March 2019.

56 Interview with settled nomad in Kuchi Abad Settlement, 1 March 2019.

57 Former settled nomad in Kuchi Abad settlement, 4 March 2019.

58 Former settled nomad in Kuchi Abad settlement, 4 March 2019.

59 Former settled nomad in Kuchi Abad settlement, 4 March 2019.

60 Interview with settled nomad in Kuchi Abad settlement, 2 March 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Kuchi Abad settlement, 3 March 2019; Former settled nomad in Kuchi Abad settlement, 4 March 2019.

61 Interview with settled nomad in Dasht-e Khaka in Baraki Barak, 1 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Dasht-e Khaka, Baraki Barak, 2 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Dasht-e Khaka, Baraki Barak, 3 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Dasht-e Khaka, Baraki Barak, 4 May 2019.

The members of this community have all abandoned nomadism completely and only keep a few animals for the needs of their households. They grow wheat, corn and rice, as well as fruit trees in some cases. They also engage in small business activities, mostly in the transport sector. Remittances from Pakistan contribute significantly to their income. Because the settlement has not been officially recognised yet, there are no well-maintained roads and schools and health facilities have not been built, except for a single community health centre. Still, these former nomads seem happy to have settled, despite complaining about the lack of services. There seems to be little nostalgia for nomadic life.⁶²

The settled nomads soon experienced friction with existing settlers and other nomads, especially as the numbers of settled nomads started growing. As the Ahmadzai nomads occupied state land for settling, they whetted the appetite of surrounding communities who were led to believe they should also have a share of the occupied land. By 2004, relations had gone sour with Tajik settlers of Shah Mazari and the houses of the settled nomads started being raided and even set on fire. Mediation by local government and local mediators seemed to have resolved the issue, but conflict flared up with Stanikzai settlers in 2006. Then conflict emerged again in 2009 in Lower Dasht-e Khaka, involving on the opposite side a coalition of Pashtun (Stanikzai) and Tajik settlers. In 2013, a new conflict erupted with the settler communities of Padwan and Bak Kala. Some 34 people were killed on both sides in these conflicts. A new mediation was successful, but in 2018 conflict over land again flared up with the Ghadai Khel tribe. This dispute over some mountainous land remains unresolved.⁶³

In this case, the settled nomads did not manage to involve any Kuchi power broker on their side, perhaps because they are too poor to afford to pay for their protection. The settled nomads of Dasht-e Khaka, however, pay contributions to nomad elders with connections in government and among the Taliban for their support when disputes and tensions flare up.⁶⁴

Key findings

Neither in Kuchi Abad nor in Dasht-e Khaka the conflict emerged due to some intervention by nomad or other power brokers, even if in Kuchi Abad they were called in later. This seems to suggest that unmanaged, spontaneous sedentarisation processes are highly likely to cause new conflicts per se, even without malign external interventions. The conflict between nomads and settler therefore simply shifts, and might even aggravate, due to this type of sedentarisation.

62 Interview with settled nomad in Dasht-e Khaka, Baraki Barak, 1 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Dasht-e Khaka, Baraki Barak, 2 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Dasht-e Khaka, Baraki Barak, 3 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Dasht-e Khaka, Baraki Barak, 4 May 2019.

63 Interview with settled nomad in Dasht-e Khaka, Baraki Barak, 1 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Dasht-e Khaka, Baraki Barak, 2 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Dasht-e Khaka, Baraki Barak, 3 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Dasht-e Khaka, Baraki Barak, 4 May 2019.

64 Interview with settled nomad in Dasht-e Khaka, Baraki Barak, 2 April 2019; Interview with settled nomad in Dasht-e Khaka, Baraki Barak, 4 May 2019.

Conclusion

Sedentarisation has been happening for a variety of reasons and it has never been planned or designed to end nomad-settler conflict. However, as nomad-settler conflict worsens, this paper has explored the hypothesis that sedentarisation might be part of the solution. Assessing the pros and cons of nomad sedentarisation in this optic is complex. There are several negatives. The sedentarisation of the nomads might end one source of conflict somewhere, but is simultaneously starting new conflicts elsewhere, due to the scarcity of land. Hence, it is in a sense only shifting conflict.

As a result of competition for the exploitation of pastureland, communities that never before objected to nomads accessing the pastures turned against them. 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. Inevitably, nomads who have not settled yet and any settlers also using the same pastures will object, causing new conflicts. The weak, incoherent and slow action of the state in dealing with sedentarisation probably encouraged the emergence of disputes.

However, even in the few cases of government sponsored or authorised settlements, things hardly went more smoothly. The authorities were never able to manage the settlement processes effectively, particularly in the case of Wazir Kariz, where different departments sided with different, competing communities. Government schemes are half-baked at best and poorly executed, as well as marred by corruption and highly vulnerable to elite capture. Support in terms of education, health services, etc. has been slow in coming through.

In other words, government-sponsored sedentarisation schemes make little sense, unless the authorities are able to manage them more effectively or, at least, keep their commitments.

There are, however, positives as well. In terms of their economic viability, overall the four settlements covered in our survey were doing quite well, with the partial exception of Kuchi Abad. Thanks also in part to remittances from abroad and the support from family members working in the cities, all four of the settlements appeared sustainable, even if there were significant differences between them due to the quality of the land and the location relative to main urban centres. Those settled nomads who managed to start profitable agricultural activities (typically fruit trees) were those performing better. Having some form of state endorsement helps in such cases, as fruit trees are long-term investments that require some faith in a long-term future. The large settlements, like Haji Jannat Gul town, were more dependent on the availability of salaried work for sustainability. Because of the size of the settlements surveyed, neither semi-nomadism nor other forms of animal husbandry played a significant role in ensuring the economic sustainability of sedentarisation, but this may be different in smaller settlements. Most nomads who settle seem to have determined that settled life is preferable to nomadic life, at least as it has been practiced during the last 40 years of ongoing war in Afghanistan. This is all the more remarkable as the nomads who settled did so with little or no advice and support and learned new skills relatively successfully.

Although the negatives at present appear to outweigh the positives, sedentarisation has been happening regardless and will probably continue to happen regardless. Given the latest figures from the Kuchi Directorate, showing only relatively small numbers of semi-nomads being active, it could be argued that sedentarisation is almost complete already. The negatives also have to do with the extreme ineffectiveness of the Afghan state enforcing its own sedentarisation plans, rather than with sedentarisation, per se.

Moreover, given the range of demands for support coming from categories in need (such as returning refugees, IDPs, etc.), the settling nomads should not expect extensive direct support from the authorities beyond the gradual extension of public services to them.

However, the Afghan state could contribute greatly to streamline the settlement of nomads by simply making and enforcing clear and consistent decisions regarding the allocation of land. This would essentially legalise and regularise a process that has been happening independently of the authorities. The authorities could also contribute by keeping power brokers away from the settlement process and, instead, establishing direct relations with the nomad communities. This would also have a positive fallout in terms of state legitimacy, without costing large amounts.

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