

CONTESTED COMMONS – MULTIPLE INSECURITIES OF PASTORALISTS IN NORTH-EASTERN AFGHANISTAN

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With 6 figures and 5 photos

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Summary: Pastoralists in North-Eastern Afghanistan are exposed to a multitude of contemporary challenges and threats while practising mobile animal husbandry in differing locations and within the spheres of varying power constellations. In this article a historical perspective is adopted to explore the challenges and multiple insecurities of Pashtun and Uzbek pastoral communities who seasonally engage in long-distance migration from the lowlands in Northern Afghanistan to the high pastures of Badakhshan. The same pasture area is regularly utilised by Shughni mountain farmers who practise combined mountain agriculture in the high mountain settlements close to Lake Shewa. Debates about nomadism's place in transforming societies, the drama of the commons, human security, and vulnerability issues frame the discussion of pastoralism in contested commons. Based on empirical evidence derived from open interviews with migrating pastoralists and sedentary groups on the Shewa plateau in Badakhshan, interpretations of pastoralism are presented, embedded in the context of contemporary Afghanistan. Pastoralism as a valuable survival and adaptive strategy is challenged by multiple environmental, social and political insecurities, by militancy and weak state authorities, and it unfolds in contested commons and along dangerous routes. The nexus of legal pluralism, tenure insecurity and changing control of space is identified as an important determining factor for the shape of mobile pastoralism in present-day Afghanistan.

Zusammenfassung: Mobile Viehzüchter in Nordost-Afghanistan sind gegenwärtig mit einer Vielzahl von Bedrohungen, Herausforderungen und Risiken in der Ausübung einer multilokalen Tierhaltung unter wechselnden Machtkonstellationen konfrontiert. In diesem Beitrag wird eine historische Perspektive zur Erforschung der Herausforderungen und vieldimensionalen Unsicherheiten verfolgt, denen paschtunische und usbekische Pastoralisten ausgesetzt sind, die im Norden Afghanistans zwischen den tiefgelegenen Gebieten des Kundus-Beckens und den sommerlichen Hochweiden in Badakhshan wandern. Dasselbe Weidegebiet wird von Shughni-Bergbauern aufgesucht, die in der Umgebung des Shewa-Sees eine kombinierte Hochgebirgsländwirtschaft praktizieren. Die Bedeutung und Funktion von Pastoralismus wird in Debatten über die Stellung und Funktion von Nomadismus im gesellschaftlichen Wandel, über bedrohte Verfügungsrechte auf Allmendweiden, über Dimensionen menschlicher Sicherheit und Verwundbarkeit eingebettet und für das heutige Afghanistan im Rahmen der von einer Vielzahl von Akteuren beanspruchten natürlichen Weideressourcen ausgelotet. Die Untersuchungen fußen auf empirischen Arbeiten in Nordafghanistan, das Material wurde in Interviews mit mobilen und ansässigen Gruppen in Chahar Dara und auf dem Shewa-Plateau gesammelt. Pastoralismus repräsentiert heute eine wertvolle Anpassungs- und Überlebensstrategie entlang gefährlicher Routen und in einem unsicheren Umfeld, das durch vielfältige ökologische, soziale und politische Unsicherheiten sowie durch angelegene Gewalt machtvoller Akteure und einen schwachen Staat gekennzeichnet ist. Die Verflechtung von Rechtspluralismus, unsicheren Pacht- und Nutzungsverhältnissen und wechselnden Machtkonstellationen in den pastoralen Arenen ist ein zentrales Charakteristikum mobiler Viehwirtschaft im heutigen Afghanistan.

Keywords: Pastoralism, resources, human security, Afghanistan, mobility

“As long as pastures are abundant the old traditions of Afghanistan are justified, with growing population and continuously decreasing pastures, free rights to pastures will no longer be possible. The heavy overgrazing prevalent at present will destroy the pastures in a short time.

The only way to improve the situation is to implement legislation dividing the pastures among local villages. In the beginning it will, of course, be

necessary to allocate land to migrant animals, but the areas should be strictly determined in advance.

As far as Badakhshan is concerned it seems necessary to cut down the number of animals entering the province each summer. This might be possible by making entrance dependent upon written permission determining the number of animals and strictly restricting the areas allowed for foreign animals” (FINNCONSULT 1976, 35).

1 Introduction

The observations leading to the above statement are 35 years old and were part of the recommendations to the Republic of Afghanistan's Ministry of Planning by foreign consultants assessing the socio-economic potential of Badakhshan. The report was written in the true spirit of modernisation theory and aimed to improve local and regional economies by introducing binding rules and regulations, among other measures. The projection of demographic growth and related herd size growth made the authors suggest the need for regulated and restricted access to pastures. Shortly afterwards, military interventions and changes of power structures significantly affected pasture management and pastoralists' strategies. The effects of the Saur Revolution in 1978, of the subsequent Soviet intervention, and the politics of the different governments and related warlord rule were turning familiar development strategies and packages upside down.

Since then, the discourse about development has significantly changed. In the Afghan case, one generation's traumatic experiences of conflict and war, of power struggles and changes of authority, of insecurity and threats to survival frame the context of perception and challenges for rural development. To quite some extent, farmers and pastoralists have adjusted to the fluid and changing local and regional power structures that are characterised by friction and often the exercise of violence. Rural populations are faced with constant change and the need to make a living based on short-term economic returns. During the violent upheavals in recent Afghan history, pastoralism as a livelihood strategy underwent major changes and demonstrated a flexibility that enabled mobile pastoralists to cope with adverse power structures, to avoid loss of lives in violent encounters and afflicted by landmines, and to balance necessary investments with economic gains in an insecure environment.

2 Research perspectives and methodology

To identify and address the potential and obvious risks of pastoralists to make a living, emphasis needs to be put on their adaptive strategies to utilise natural resources, on their striving for human security, and on their quest for durable and reliable rules that permit them to practise their profession. The analytical framework applied here to analyse these risks and potentials draws on three sources:

The nomadism controversy, the commons and property rights debate, and development discourses about risks to human security.

The debate about the "processes of nomadization" (BARFIELD 1981, 1993; DAVIES and HATFIELD 2008; GLATZER 1981, 2001; ROE et al. 1998; SALZMAN 2004; TAPPER 2008) is approached from the perspective of adapting pastoral practices in order to approach valuable pasture resources over long distances in seasonally favourable settings. In contrast to conventional wisdom that treats nomadism as an 'endism' debate (HUMPHREY and SNEATH 1999; SCHOLZ 2008), the dynamic and flexible aspects of pastoral strategies are seen as a reflection of societal pressure, changing power structures and economic opportunities. In a strict sense, the major challenge for pastoralists devoid of land titles lies in the application of legal pluralism and in changing rules and rulers. The meaning of legal pluralism is used here in a wider sense. It is related to the multitude of stakeholders that exercise power in order to extract dues from pasture users. Legal pluralism is at the same time adopted by pastoral actors as an argument to legitimate their pasture access through a variety of documents issued by former rulers and strongmen. As these not necessarily became statutory entitlements, a form of legal pluralism prevails. The debate on the "drama of the commons" (OSTROM et al. 2002; COPELAND and TAYLOR 2009) draws attention to exploitative occupation and usage of common pasture grounds that are open to property rights challenges.

The nexus of legal pluralism and control of space – either on the pastures or on the long march between them – leads to the human security aspect of the discussion. Pastoralists are faced with multiple insecurities and exposure to risk: drought, snowfall, hazards, diseases, theft, expropriation, denial of access and/or passage, economic crises etc. Accordingly, pastoralism is discussed as a survival and adaptive strategy challenged by multiple insecurities, militancy and weak state authorities.¹⁾ The perception of these insecurities leads to development practice as recommended in the above quote.

This tripartite analytical approach is illustrated by a case study from a Pashtun village community in Chahar Dara District, Kunduz, from which pastoralists move with their herds towards Badakhshan Province (Photo 1) and spend the summer grazing period in the environs of Lake Shewa, an area that provides vast valuable and contested pasturage

¹⁾ The debate on warlordism in a failed state setting is referred to; cf. GIUSTOZZI and ORSINI 2009.



Photo 1: Pashtun pastoralists on the road between Faizabad and Keshem. In September the flocks are driven down towards Kunduz (Photo © HERMANN KREUTZMANN, September 1, 2006)

(Fig. 1). The case study aims to track the challenges and changes in livestock production systems among Pashtun and Uzbek pastoralists and Shughni combined mountain farmers, and to assess consequences and effects for the human security of Afghan pastoralists.²⁾ Special focus is therefore directed towards the social, economic and spatial organisation of present-day pastoralism in Afghanistan and the changing position of pastoralists in local power and exchange structures. Findings are based on four field visits to the residential village of herders in Chahar Dara between 2007 and 2009, a brief visit to Shewa in 2006, and further extended fieldwork on the Shewa plateau in summer 2009. During these field visits open interviews were conducted, both with migrating Pashtun and Uzbek pastoralists from Kunduz and Takhar and with Shughni mountain farmers settled in the vicinity of Lake Shewa. Archival research has provided glimpses of historical depth based on the circumstantial and scanty evidence available on the previous utilisation of Shewa pastures.

3 Competing communities: mountain pastoralists and combined mountain farmers

The case study focuses on pastoralists who partially reside in one specific village in the District of Chahar Dara, Kunduz Province (Fig. 1). Today, this district represents a major stronghold of anti-government insurgency in Northern Afghanistan.

²⁾ For the distinctive features and adaptation strategies of mobile mountain pastoralism and combined mountain agriculture cf. EHLERS and KREUTZMANN 2000; KREUTZMANN 2009.

It has become the regular venue of military clashes, insurgency attacks and NATO aerial bombings. Chahar Dara district consists of various village clusters in the Kunduz River oasis, inhabited by people claiming different ethnicities, with a Pashtun majority. Many of these Pashtun inhabitants are engaged in pastoralism and irrigated agriculture in the fertile river oasis, signifying an agro-pastoral continuum amongst well-defined social groups. The study settlement is inhabited by two distinct Pashtun tribes stressing descent from the *Durrani* lineage: the *Achekzai*, originating from Spin Boldak in Kandahar Province, and the *Baluch*, originating from Helmand Province (BALLAND 1996; BALLAND and DE BENOIST 1982; GLATZER 1977, 114–118, 1983, GRÖTZBACH 1972, 94).

Senior informants reported that out-migration from Southern Afghanistan was stimulated by severe drought conditions at the time, though it seems to have happened at the same time as the Afghan ruler Amir Abdur Rahman Khan (reigning 1880–1901) implemented his resettlement policies. During his rule Pashtuns were given land in Northern Afghanistan in preference to other groups with the aim of changing the ethnic composition of the North in an attempt at state-regulated ‘Pashtunization’ (BARFIELD 1978) and sedentarisation.

Consequently, in the year 1933 CE (or 1312 in the Afghan calendar) both tribes jointly built an irrigation canal and subsequently gave up their mobile lifestyle. Those who participated in the construction were allocated twenty-four *jerib* of land (about five hectares), which was later expanded upon by individual households through additional land purchases from Uzbek neighbours.

The immigrant settlers profited at the same time from what has been termed the “most successful development project in recent Afghan history” (BARFIELD 1978, 29), when the malaria-infested swamp lands of Kunduz were drained and transformed into fertile and highly productive agricultural lands. The base of agro-pastoralism was significantly enhanced by a higher productivity in crop and fodder farming while good and fertile pastures could be accessed as well. In winter and spring, pastures in proximity to the residential village in Chahar Dara were accessible with only short-distance movement involved. These areas are still used today for livestock keeping and animal breeding, with clear and agreed upon demarcations between the pasture parcels used by *Achekzai* and *Baluch* (cf. Fig. 1). In summer larger distances of about 300 km had to be covered to migrate to the high mountain

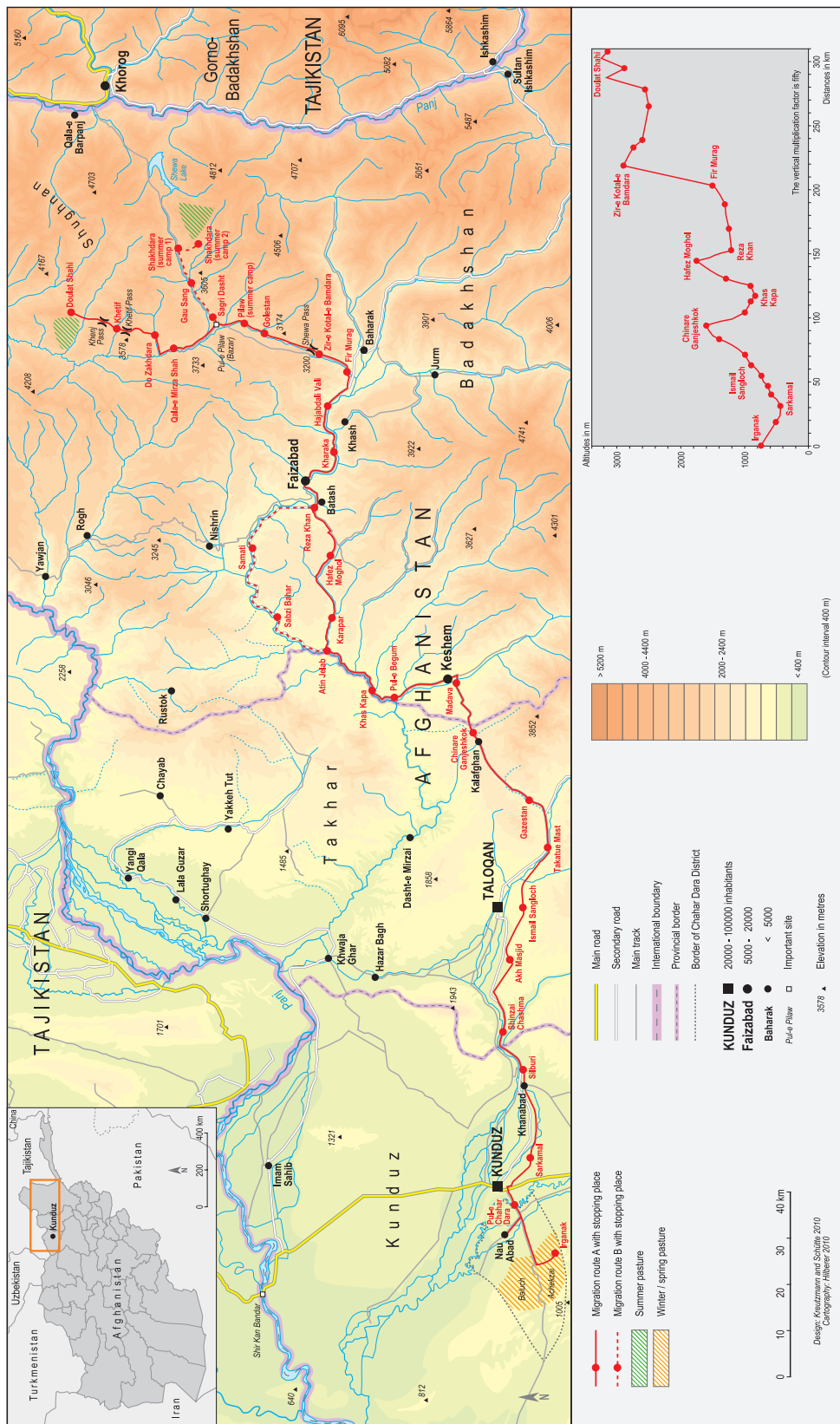


Fig. 1: Migration routes of Pashtun pastoralists between Chahar Dara and Lake Shewa

pastures of Badakhshan, crossing the provinces of Kunduz and Takhar (Fig. 1). The link between two highly fertile regions made the keeping of larger numbers of sheep feasible.

With their newly-established bases around Kunduz, both the *Baluch* and *Achekzai* were able to further invest in the husbandry of large fat-tailed sheep and quickly matured to an economically thriving community. This outcome, however, was only possible through supportive policies stemming from the central authority in Kabul, where the Pashtun King Zahir Shah (reigning from 1933 to 1973) issued land titles that guaranteed grazing rights for summer pastures to both the *Baluch* (in the mountain pastures above Keshem) and the *Achekzai* (in Shewa) in 1951 (cf. Fig. 2 below). The original documents acted as passes and safeguarded access to this critical resource from that time onwards.

Today, about fifty percent of the 1,201 households in the study village still engage in far-reaching mobile livestock herding, and a majority of these households do so exclusively, with no access to agricultural lands. This is in spite of the changes stemming from the different phases of Afghan warfare that have significantly altered the mobility strategies of the study communities since 1978 and that continue to threaten the security of their pastoral livelihood systems today.

The settlements and migrations of the Pashtun pastoralists are embedded in a wider societal set-up. Their permanent abodes were established in a predominantly Uzbek-inhabited area of the Kunduz Basin. Along the route of their migration they pass through Uzbek settlement areas in Kunduz and Takhar provinces (GRÖTZBACH 1972, 91–92; SCHURMANN 1962, 96–99). From there, some Uzbek groups annually move their flocks to Shewa pastures as well. Their practices range from combined mountain agriculture to mountain pastoralism, in which landowners from the fertile oases of Kunduz and Takhar send their flocks with household members and/or hired shepherds to the high summer pastures around Lake Shewa.

On the Shewa plateau both groups meet with Shughni mountain farmers who practise crop-farming with barley, peas and beans at comparatively high altitudes with meagre yields at the upper limit of cultivation. Their practice of combined mountain agriculture incorporates crop and fodder cultivation juxtaposed with animal husbandry in high pasture summer settlements (KUSSMAUL 1965). Shughni, belonging to the Ismaili faith (cf. EMADI 1993, 2005; HOLZWARTH 1990), Pashtuns and Uzbeks compete

for access to the same resources. Shughni are determined to convert a significant share of available land into cultivated land, thus reducing the availability of low-lying pastures and restricting the access of mobile pastoralists to their “traditional” campsites. Shughni stress the factor that this territory used to be part of the principality of Shughnan that existed in competition with the rulers of Badakhshan. At the end of the 19th century, Shughnan’s population was estimated at about 15,000 to 20,000 inhabitants (HOLZWARTH 1980, 203). Their claims to the locality are in stark contrast to those of Pashtuns and Uzbeks from far-flung settlements.

During the mission of Mawlawi Borhân al-din Khân Koshkaki, who was sent by King Nadir Shah to inspect Qataghan³⁾ and Badakhshan in 1922, the Shewa pastures were mainly attributed to the Shughni combined mountain farmers and their established hamlets, accounting for 59 households (KOSHKAKI 1979, 218). The proximity of Shughnan and Shewa was the strongest factor for acknowledging inherited access rights. Nevertheless, the Kandahari [Pashtuns], the Central Asian Arabs, the Ghoris of Khanabad [Uzbeks] and Atrandji [Badakhshani] are all mentioned as regular visitors with their flocks from the months of “sawr” (April 21) up to “sombola” (September 23) when they brought close to an estimated 1.2 million heads of cattle, sheep, horses and camels to feed them on the fertile pastures (KOSHKAKI 1979, 220). After centuries of turmoil (GREVEMEYER 1982; HOLZWARTH 1980, 1990) prior to the Afghan domination of Badakhshan, the growing competition over fertile pastures required those administrative interventions and measures by Afghan authorities that characterised the 20th century. In the 1970s, development actors occupied the arena, designing development plans for the amendment of regional practices in utilising the pastures.⁴⁾ To change the lifestyles and livelihoods of pastoralists in a feat of modernisation was the aim of all development plans. Whether the Afghan kings with their strong affiliation to Pashtun “nomadic tribes” refrained from these modernisation strategies or whether they promoted them in tune with mainstream development needs to be confronted with evidence from fieldwork.

³⁾ Qataghan and Badakhshan in Koshkaki’s time resembled the provinces of Kunduz, Takhar and Badakhshan today.

⁴⁾ Cf. the initial quote taken from a consultant’s report (FINNCONSULT 1976, 35).

4 Pastoral practices in transition

Pastoralism research and policies for rangeland management in high mountain environments such as the Hindukush-Pamir region have undergone significant changes in recent years (cf. KREUTZMANN 2003, 2009; KREUTZMANN et al. 2011; TAPPER 2008; ALDEN WILY 2009). Policy perspectives and research objectives have been adjusted to abridged perceptions about pastoral lifestyles and economic strategies in peripheral regions. We observe a shift from traditional perspectives to modern approaches that embed pastoralism and rangeland management into human-environmental relations and flexible and market-oriented economic strategies.

In the conventional views of development actors, policy- and decision-makers, pastoralism was classified as a pre-modern stage of civilisation that needed to be abolished and transcended in order to reach a higher level of development. In this context, global approaches to modernise rural societies have been ubiquitous phenomena all over the world and functioned rather independently of ideological contexts. The 20th century experienced a variety of concepts that were epitomised in programmes to sedentarise nomads and to transform their lifestyles in tune with modern perceptions of division of labour and social organisation.

Permanent settlements are the vivid expression of a modernisation approach that has aimed at reducing flexibility in favour of concentration and rootedness. Modernisation theory translated into development practice captured all elements of pastoral life and tried to optimise breeding techniques, pasture utilisation, transport of animals and products, and related processing concepts to increase the value of livestock products. The 21st century now sees another attempt to optimise resource management by resettlement schemes that enhance the availability and concentration of infrastructure assets in combination with significant subsidies and integration of pastoral communities into mainstream society.⁵⁾ At the same time, these policies are rationalised as prerequisite to promote sustainable development. They claim to reduce environmental degradation and the loss of biological diversity, to maintain security of water resources and to enhance nature protection by creating exclaves of non-pastoral interference in which all animal husbandry-directed activities are prohibited. Exclaves are created by concentrating

pastoral communities in townships and by reducing pasture-related mobility. Whether such an approach that aims to increase sustainability and to reduce degradation is feasible might be open to debate. Critics will be challenged to develop alternative scenarios in which stakeholder participation and community co-management feature prominently, and where sound strategies are conceived for payment for environmental services and for maintaining cultural landscapes. While these developments chiefly occur in maturing and affluent societies such as the PR of China, their neighbouring countries are facing different sets of challenges. For instance, the post-Soviet and now independent Central Asian republics are organising a transition from “plan to market” and pastoralists are striving to make a meagre living in the remote high mountain pastures of the Pamirs and the Tien Shan Mountains. New insights into other aspects of pastoralism – such as being an adaptive strategy to use marginal resources in remote locations with difficult access or to protect nature by pastoralists as landscape managers – came up as a critique of capitalist and communist concepts of modernisation (BROWER and JOHNSTON 2007; KREUTZMANN et al. 2011; SAMIMI et al. 2009). The rejection of input-dominated theories that triggered enhancement of outputs but neglected ecological considerations regarding sustainability opened up a new field for research combining ecology, economy and society. Pastoralism is now increasingly perceived as a flexible and dynamic strategy to adapt to changing conditions of survival and livelihood security. Pastoralism seems not to be a transitory stage on the path to modern development; rather, it has been adopted by people when opportunities were given, when it was economically sound and when the challenges posed by ecological and socio-political environments could be managed. These strategies are chiefly to be found in less regulated societies where the state and its institutions seem to be largely absent or are not able to fulfil the expectations in setting and implementing the rules for resource utilisation and rangeland management. The Hindukush mountain regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan are important cases in point for such a situation where pastoral practices are not judged as part of a transition from one development paradigm to another (cf. KREUTZMANN 2009; KREUTZMANN et al. 2011). Here, pastoral practices act as one important survival strategy in a set of limited options for rural populations. Consequently, the abilities of vulnerable groups to adapt to such a socio-political environment need to be assessed in relation to their options for making a living in risk and disaster-prone arenas.

⁵⁾ Cf. for Western China and the Tibetan Plateau BANKS et al. 2003; GOLDSTEIN and BEALL 2002; HO 2000; SHEEHY et al. 2006.

5 Vulnerability, risk, disaster management and adaptive strategies

The concept of vulnerability is strongly related to the central theme of peoples' capacity to cope with disasters and their management. A precondition for an understanding of coping strategies is the perception of different dimensions of vulnerability (CHAMBERS 1989). Vulnerability can be distinguished as different risk factors – composed of social, economic, physical and environmental properties – and as the human and social capabilities to handle crises and catastrophes. Vulnerability and natural hazards represent the social and natural science aspects of disasters, respectively (UN ISDR 2005, 15). SUSAN CUTTER (2003, 6) proposes: "Vulnerability science helps us understand those circumstances that put people and places at risk and those conditions that reduce the ability of people and places to respond to environmental threats. Vulnerability science provides a basis for risk, hazard, and disaster reduction policies. It integrates the constructs of risk (exposure), hazard resilience, differential susceptibility, and recovery/mitigation."

From a vulnerability point of view there are certain properties of a disaster which are evenly distributed among society at large. As such, physical vulnerability addresses the consequences of physical hazards effecting property damage, environmen-

tal degradation and devastation. Social vulnerability focuses on the socio-economic susceptibility of affected people and their ability or disposition to cope with the outcome of disasters and takes into account different assets and access options of people. There might be certain groups who are better prepared to cope with disasters than others.

When disasters are approached from this perspective, the natural science dimension provides a framework for assessing the probability and strength of an event, and the social science dimension looks at the individuals and groups and their capabilities to cope with the disaster and their unequally distributed land entitlements to access required and available resources. Effects of disasters are therefore to be investigated along four spatial dimensions: natural space, socio-economic space, socio-cultural space and political-institutional space.

Vulnerability and coping strategies are central foci of inquiry when assessing pastoral livelihood systems which are potentially threatened by natural disasters. Risk is a central category which is a part of the human decision-making process, an affirmative action on the way to daily-life decisions in a given natural, economic, political-institutional and socio-cultural environment. Perception and experience are guiding principles for taking risks and making decisions.

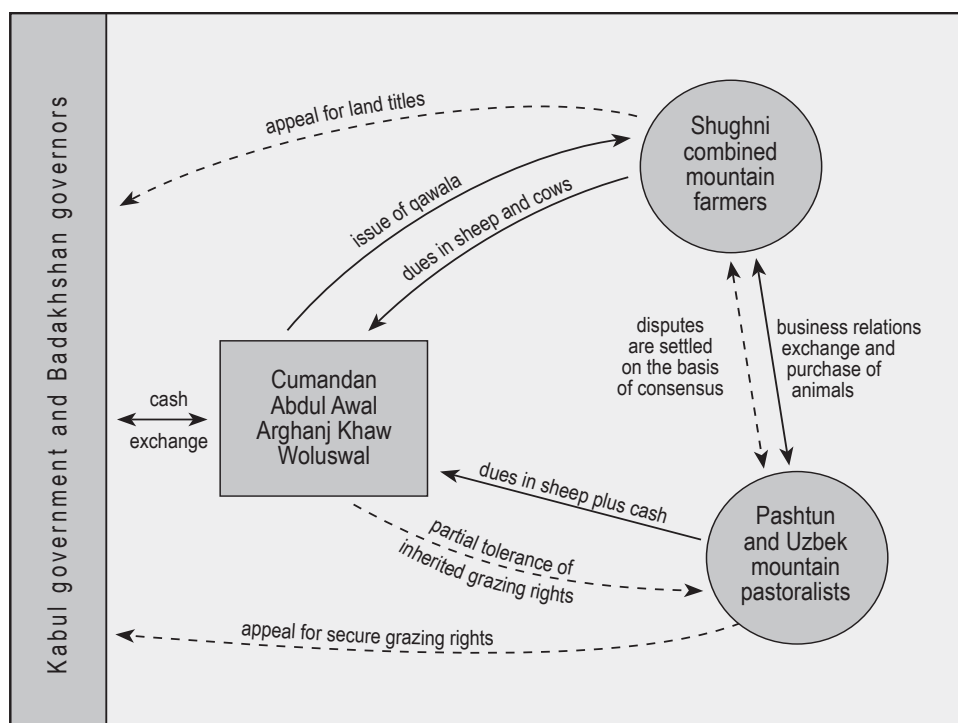


Fig. 2: Shewa – power structure and flow of dues

In contrast to probabilistic risk measurements of certain factors determining the advent of disasters, the social science approach aims at understanding and interpreting cultural and societal processes. Therefore perception, communication, social action and decision-making are central categories for which different methodological approaches are required. Aspects that need to be considered in assessing any situation in pastoral settings incorporate the legal framework surrounding land relations, pasture laws in theory and practice, political and military power and social domination, economic profitability and market links, intergroup relations, and competition for access to rangelands.

6 Pastoralism – chances and constraints in search of security

One futile assessment of pastoralism is that it is a traditional strategy and that pastoralists refrain from giving it up because they are bound to its lifestyle. Empirical evidence from a number of cases supports another thesis: a certain wealth is required in order to be able to sustain a pastoral adaptive strategy. SCHLEE (2005, 28) formulates: "... there is no population group which, in case of impoverishment, is able to become or stay nomadic. For nomadism requires a certain wealth. If no extra income demanding a sedentary lifestyle is to be earned, then the size of the herds must not fall below a certain minimum. Also, dwellings are needed which are much more costly than a peasant clay hut ...". Pastoralists are entrepreneurs; they invest in livestock and utilise a natural resource that is available at different prices. Flexibility and mobility are a kind of market response to production costs that are composed of pasture fees for fodder access, land entitlement and security costs in maintaining access strategies, transport costs between pastures and markets, and all other costs that regulate the relationship between the state, other pasture stakeholders and pastoralists covering long distances.

Consequently, mountain pastoralism in the Hindukush-Pamirian Mountains can be interpreted as an adaptation to existing rules and regulations. Applying the above-mentioned four spatial dimensions – natural space, socio-economic space, socio-cultural space and political-institutional space – to the pastoralism sphere in high mountain regions, some preliminary conclusions can be inferred:

- the natural risk exposure especially in terms of drought, rain, and snow, is quite high and involves a considerable degree of vulnerability.

- the socio-economic space appears to be extremely risky as it is associated with remoteness and periphery. At the same time, it could be a valuable niche that offers opportunities.
- the socio-cultural space is under threat from development and modernisation. Both are concepts that are brought to pastoral communities from outside and that are developed in other contexts.
- the shrinking degrees of freedom in the socio-cultural sphere are strongly linked to interferences in the political-institutional space. Under the disguise of development, strong interventions are executed that are directed towards changing institutional set-ups within prevalent political structures. Pastoralists, like other minority communities, have always been a prominent target for such experiments.

The Afghan case presented here is an exception to the conventional scenario as – surprisingly or not – comprehensive development packages are rarely available to pastoralists and mountain farmers in Kunduz and Badakhshan (Fig. 1). Rather, their participation in development is an indirect feature. Pashtun pastoralists enjoy some amenities that are derived from the National Solidarity Programme's activities in their permanent settlements, where drinking water supply and some infrastructure were improved. In recent years, Shughni combined mountain farmers have enjoyed support from the Aga Khan Foundation's rural support programmes and some food-for-work activities in times of crop failure and severe food shortages. Both examples underpin the observation that livestock-keeping as a profit-making activity – at least for certain groups – has not yet come to the attention of development practice in Northern Afghanistan. A study of their practices might provide enhanced insights into the options provided by a political environment in which state control is absent to a high degree. This vacuum is filled by powerful local and regional strongmen who impose their rules and regulations by demanding significant dues for protection and pasture security (cf. Fig. 2). The increasing number of actors and stakeholders inhabiting the vacuum widens the demand structure for tributes and coerces the pastoralists to be submissive on the summer pastures (Photo 2) and along the route of migration from their homesteads to the summer pastures around Lake Shewa in Badakhshan. The dependence of pastoralists on strongmen is amply significant when it comes to their right of utilising these fertile pastures around Lake Shewa for the summer period. The access route from their villages in Chahar Dara to Shewa is no less



Photo 2: The Pashtun camp in the foreground was moved to this location in 2009 after the access rights to their “traditional” camping ground had changed. In the background a hamlet of Shughni farmers practising combined mountain agriculture in Shakhdarra is visible (Photo © HERMANN KREUTZMANN, July 18, 2009)

dangerous, as the pastoralists depend day and night on being tolerated in order to enjoy free passage and the right to camp, to purchase fodder and to graze their animals en route. How do pastoralists cope with these challenges and how do they manage to persist on inherited rights of pasture usage?

7 Legal pluralism and pasture entitlements on the Shewa plateau in Badakhshan – who owns the commons?

Changing power structures, the emergence of new strongmen, and war-like situations have one effect in common that detrimentally affects the livelihoods of rural populations: everyday life becomes a costly affair. Sometimes people who had used the Shewa pastures lost everything, including their lives, as the British spy-cum-explorer Mukhtar Shah disguised as a pilgrim reported at the beginning of Amir Abdur Rahman’s rule (1880–1901): “[...] The history of Shiva, and of the causes which caused its depopulation, cannot be given in this place; but it may be stated that the country has four times been ruined and the inhabitants forced to seek homes elsewhere. [...] The last attack on Shiva was made by Murád Beg of Kataghan, who extinguished the population altogether, and the entire region has ever since been uninhabited. In Badakhshán, Koláb, and Shighnán there are still found the remnants of the refugees from Shiva, who go under the appellation of ‘Shivaki?’” (TANNER 1883, 11). Unstable conditions prevailed although some enterprising Uzbeks seem to have endeavoured in approaching Shewa again: “[...] The once populous Shiva is now quite unoccupied. In summer,

a few Turks come with their flocks; but in the entire region, measuring perhaps 50 miles north, and south by about 40 east and west, there is not a single permanently inhabited spot. It is difficult to account for the complete abandonment of a country which seems to have so many points in its favour. Its good climate, its extensive culturable valleys, and its strong position amidst the vastness of its mountains, one might suppose would be sufficient to maintain a population for all time to come; but those great deserted wastes, with their temptingly cool valleys, seem to be doomed to lie vacant for ever, and the descendants of the former inhabitants appear content to remain in exile far away from their ancient home” (TANNER 1883, 10).

In the aftermath of highly exploitative and threatening policies by Badakhshani rulers during the 19th century, the comparatively peaceful decades of later Afghan monarchic rule enabled Pashtun and Uzbek pastoralists as well as Shughni combined mountain farmers to utilise the summer pastures close to Lake Shewa on a regular basis (Photo 3). Their land entitlements were documented and fixed in written *qawala* (land titles) issued by the King that were paid for, but gave some security of access rights for generations. The first group to engage in long distance migration were the Central Asian Arabs who avoided the malaria-infested swamps of Kunduz during the summers by taking their flocks on a 300 km-long journey to the fertile Shewa pastures (BARFIELD 1978, 28). Reports from the 19th century provide evidence of these migration strategies. Amir Abdur Rahman made a strong point with his British counterparts that Shewa was esteemed as a major asset to his revenue. When the first map of a future Northern boundary of Afghanistan was drawn the Afghan King insisted and claimed that Shewa would definitely remain part of his territory (Fig. 3).



Photo 3: Flocks of fat-tailed sheep on the high pastures close to Lake Shewa (Photo © HERMANN KREUTZMANN, July 22, 2009).

Pashtun immigration to Northern Afghanistan was fostered by Amir Abdur Rahman. Only in the late 1920s did Pashtun pastoralists adopt the long distance migration pattern from Kunduz River to Lake Shewa (SCHURMANN 1962, 405–408), and it became more prominent only three generations ago (BARFIELD 1978, 31). The process of legalisation is connected with immigration and political affiliation. It is important to note that households were receiving legal titles for pasture usage that could be commodified. TOM BARFIELD commented: “Pasture land is not state, tribal or lineage property, but is owned and inherited in single families. It was Nadir Shah in 1921 who created this situation by giving rights to Arabs who first claimed the pasture. His *firman* gave them legal title as exclusive users of particular pastures. This was extremely important because nomads did not wander in Qatagan. Both the steppe

in spring and the summer pasture in Badakhshan [Shewa] were so rich and dependable that once nomads moved to their new pasture they stayed put for three months. ... Arab and Pashtun now both had their own areas with the same kind of *firman*. ... Each nomad family that acquired property rights to a pasture found it highly advantageous to maintain the status quo” (BARFIELD 1978, 32).

The observation that the written land titles issued by the King to extended families or clans resemble inheritable private property deeds that could be commodified, however, contradicts the official Pasture Law from 1970, which states that all non-agricultural land belongs to the state (GOVERNMENT OF AFGHANISTAN 1970). The law was last amended under the Taliban in 2000 and is currently being re-drafted under the leadership of international agencies to incorporate community-based pasture man-

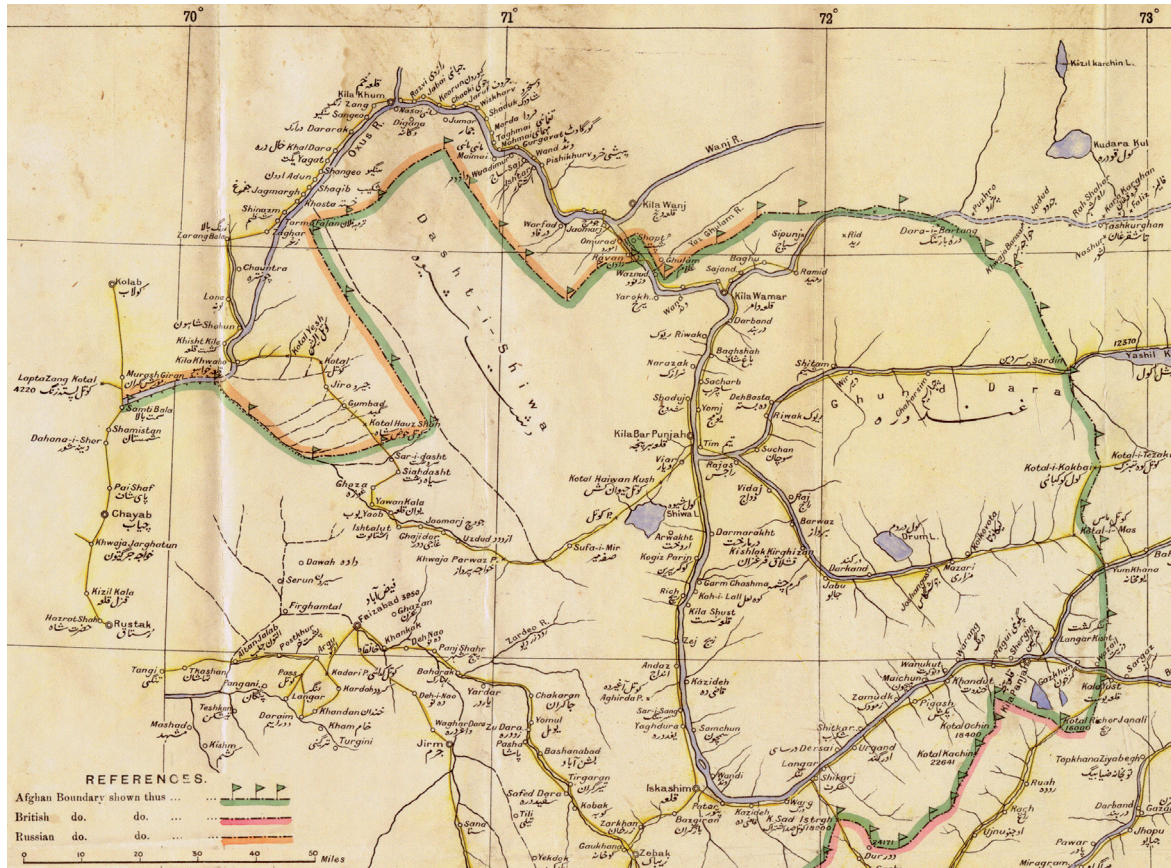


Fig. 3: Evidence of claiming the Shewa Plateau by Amir Abdur Rahman. The section of the map presented here clearly shows the territories that Amir Abdur Rahman perceives as vital to Afghanistan’s interests when he furnished this map in 1892. It is obvious that the northernmost section seems to be the Shewa Plateau – identified as Dasht-i-Shiwa on the map – where a wide rectangular space is marked by a tentative boundary line. The border is not touching the riverine boundary of the Amu Darya – here named Oxus River. Nevertheless the territorial claims by Amir Abdur Rahman well cross the Amu Darya into territory that in the final agreement of 1895 was ceased to Russia and is to date part of Gorno-Badakhshan in present-day Tajikistan. Source: Map of the Pamirs, furnished by H. H. the Amir of Afghanistan, showing the territory claimed by him. Confidential 1892 from Public Record Office in London (PRO/FO 925/2096)

agement systems, but the provisions of 1970 remain the official policy to date. However, it can be stated that the social practice around these titles resembled property relations.

When pastoralists from the study village first came to the area five generations ago, parts of the Shewa Plateau were already inhabited. From the beginning, there was some competition over the use of natural resources both amongst pastoralist groups from different ethnicities and with the high plateau's permanent sedentary population. The latter is completely made up of people from the Ismaili faith whose forefathers migrated to Shewa from the District of Shughnan, today belonging to Badakhshan. The competition between the pastoralists and the sedentary Shughni people grew in scope as the size of the settled Shughni population increased. It today consists of fourteen villages made up of multiple hamlets dispersed all over the plateau. The Shughni population in Shewa comprises about 700 houses distributed among those 14 villages, thereby accommodating nearly 1900 households and 9000 individuals. These households together cultivate about 12000 *jerib* (approx. 2400 ha) of rainfed and irrigated land, of which 73 percent is rain-fed (data collected by AGA KHAN FOUNDATION in 2006).

By the mid-1970s pasture accessibility became constrained as competition for a valuable resource grew. "At present the most critical resource is an *ailoq* [summer camp] in the mountains for summer pasture. Nomads who do not own pasture must obtain pasture from those who do if they wish to remain nomadic pastoralists. This can be obtained in three ways: purchase, rental or theft" (BARFIELD 1978, 33). Even then different strategies for maintaining pasture access were employed. The state intervened by maintaining the rule of law: "... until recently troops were posted in Dasht-i-Ish and Dasht-i-Shiwa [Shewa plains] to keep the peace ... ultimately the guarantee of land rights creates a peaceful atmosphere in an area remote from centers of population" (BARFIELD 1978, 33). At the time, the state was in a position to create an environment where different communities could make use of the pastures without significant preference for one or the other group: "... the state defined the arena of competition so that households rather than corporate tribal groups were the competitive units. By encapsulating tribal groups the central government effectively reduced their independence of action. Pashtun in the north are as effectively dominated by the Afghan state as any other ethnic group" (BARFIELD 1978, 34). This is the period pastoralists of today refer to when they highlight a reliable situation with reasonably priced pasture usage fees.

Pastoralism on the Shewa pastures became costly for the pastoralists after the Saur Revolution in 1978 and especially after Mujaheddin groups established themselves in the Northern Alliances. Leaders and local commanders took a share from local resources, issued their own *qamala* and expected dues on a regular basis. During the almost continuous power struggles of the ongoing Afghan wars, new elites took over and demanded their shares too. Consequently, pastoralists are suffering from a distinct form of legal pluralism as they have to provide dues to an increasing number of expectant leaders. The expansion of the number of strongmen is aggravated by the timeline. With changing political leaderships, shifting military alliances and modified support structures, extra costs are inflicted on pastoralists. During our interviews with pastoral groups a number of *qamala* (Photo 4) from different periods and issued by different rulers were documented. The land titles issued in 1951 by the Afghan King Zaher Shah clearly specified the area of grazing land belonging to a certain clan or extended family by reference to major landmarks. These were the times when 'nomads were free', as one respondent remarked. In spite of all pastoralists carrying their land title with them at all times, access to these distant grazing lands has become insecure today. It is now governed by different legal rules and systems, in which the King's land title still defines the grazing area where pastoralists travel, but not the means and costs necessary to gain access and use it. This process of change in territoriality as a contested social product was a gradual one. It commenced in 1979 with the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, and continued through the various shifts and drifts occurring in the wake of the civil war and Taliban rule, and is still ongoing after the US-led invasion and installation of the current Karzai Government. Every change of rule involves additional costs for the pastoralists as they try to document their claims on paper. Getting an endorsement from new powerful actors is a costly affair, especially when in contested commons competition over pastures increases the fees. For local and regional strongmen the extraction of fees and livestock is a significant contribution to the upkeep of their followership.

Other documents preserved by the pastoralists show as well that on certain occasions in the violent Afghan past powerful "visitors" to the pastures have expropriated their livestock in significant numbers (Photo 5). The case documented here is no exception and refers to a specific household who lost as many as 900 sheep in 1994 when the militias of the notorious warlord Rashid Dostum



Photo 4: Text of *qawala* reading: “06.04.1330 (i.e. 26.06.1951). The boundaries of the pasture land belonging to Mullah Amir s/o Haji Nazar, Ghaws Khan s/o Haji Abdul Wasi, and Habibullah s/o Dawraan. The boundaries of the pasture land is registered after the proper legal processes. The aforesaid pasture area is given to the persons named above. Their owned area shall not be occupied and they are responsible to manage it in the future. In case of any aggression from any person, it shall be referred to the village/district authorities.” Translated by Faraidoon Shariq from the original document (Photo © STEFAN SCHÜTTE, July 20, 2009)

– today in an official position in the Karzai administration – raided the spring pastures and left pastoralists bereft of the basis of their livelihoods. At the time of research in Shewa, fifteen years later, this household had only managed to restock 100 sheep, showing how difficult it is to rebuild a herd once it is lost. The raid was documented and signed by the “Jihadi Council of Kunduz Province”, which also included the recent presidential candidate and former Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Abdullah from the Northern Alliance, who endorsed the paper and vetted it too.

Conflicting interests between Pashtun and Uzbek pastoralists, on the one hand, who are interested in solely using the area for livestock-keeping, and Shughni households, on the other, who as combined mountain farmers are increasingly converting pastures into rain-fed cultivated field parcels,

lead to confrontations and contests when it comes to demanding inherited camp sites and/or hamlets for cultivation. Affiliations of one group or the other with local strongmen inflict high costs on either party or lead to expulsion from habitual campsites.

The case of trilateral competition between Shughni, Pashtun and Uzbek⁶⁾ pastoralists illustrates some major conflicting issues that are relevant for most pasture areas in present-day Afghanistan. As the residential Shughni population grew, they increasingly started to convert areas formerly utilised as pastures into cultivated village lands, thereby seeking the support of official titles from different administrations and contributing to significant changes in land tenure relations on the plateau (PATTERSON 2004). The Shughni eventually succeeded in establishing a much needed greater agricultural basis by obtaining official title documents from the Government of President Rabbani (1992–2001)⁷⁾, and in so doing also established ownership of land that formerly belonged to pastoralists. The expansion of village lands broadened their crop base and enabled them to cope better with natural risks due to the very short agricultural season on the plateau. However, competing legal documents over the same land issued at different times by different rulers caused some violent conflicts in the past between Shughni and various pastoralist groups, as documented by PATTERSON (2004). Today, however, such violent clashes seem to have ceased, as both Pashtun and Shughni informants confirmed. Instead, the frequent disputes concerning trespassing of herds over agricultural lands and the exact location of pasture boundaries are usually settled by consensus between the different groups.

The specific and conflict-laden feature of the tenure landscape in Shewa is characterised by competition between sedentary and mobile groups over socio-economic space. It is facilitated through competing written titles for identical patches of land and manifests itself physically, for instance, through the now very common occurrence of rainfed agricultural fields on slopes and former pastures, by encroachment of villages on pasture lands, or by Pashtun pastoralist encampments with

⁶⁾ Uzbeks are represented only in small numbers here. Therefore the main argument follows fieldwork-based evidence from Shughni-Pashtun contests.

⁷⁾ Burhanuddin Rabbani formally remained Afghan president also during the reign of the Taliban. From 1996 on, he established his headquarters in Faizabad, the provincial capital of Badakhshan.

their characteristic black tents overseeing and controlling a grazing area.⁸⁾ They define socio-cultural risk spaces controlled by Shughni and Pashtun pastoralists without guns. In contrast, the powerful actors execute their violent rule by ordinance.

This mountain farmer-mobile pastoralist competition, however, is not the main determinant of pasture access today, as local strongmen were able to take control of the Shewa Plateau (Fig. 2). This increasingly started happening in 2001, with the advent of the Karzai administration in Afghanistan. These strongmen, locally referred to as commanders (*cumandan*), benefit from a “culture of impunity” that prevails in Afghanistan and they have been able to newly determine pasture access rights by intimidation and physical power, putting the entire area under the law of the gun. What has occurred here, as was the case in many other areas of Afghanistan after the US-led invasion, was a particularly extensive incidence of land grabbing, where armed power holders forcibly assumed control over land and defined the rules of access (GEBREMEDHIN 2007; GIUSTOZZI 2007, 2009; MANI 2003). This exploitative process, in fact, is being supported through the redrawing of district borders and the formation of new districts in Badakhshan (Fig. 4) by the central government, in order to accommodate the interests of local strongmen and military leaders allying with Karzai and to (re)establish a self-serving patrimonial system in Badakhshan, where official positions such as District Governors became an attractive resource to be exploited (GIUSTOZZI and ORSINI 2009; GOODHAND 2009). The case of land grabbing in Shewa is an important example of how Afghan institutions have been supplanted through power-sharing deals by abusive stakeholders, who exert their control through violence, patronage, and corruption, and who often enjoy external backing (GIUSTOZZI 2009; GRONO and RONDEAUX 2010).

This shift towards the “law of the gun” in Shewa is the most recent and oppressive trend of a changing tenure-scape in Badakhshan, illustrating how pasture access is positioned in the context of varying political-institutional spaces that are shaped by limited statehood and corrupted institutions. The process has had severe consequences

⁸⁾ The black square tents (*kigday*) of the Pashtun pastoralists are made from thickly-woven goat hair and differ significantly from the Uzbek round white huts made of rush mats (*kappa*) and yurts (*xirgo*) or mud huts of Badakhshani pastoralists, cf. FERDINAND 2006; GRÖTZBACH 1972; KREUTZMANN 2009.



Photo 5: “In 6/1/1373 Hijri Shamsi (26/03/1994) a herd of our sheep was grazing on the pastures of Irganak. On that day, in the late afternoon Dostom’s militia threatened the shepherd and stole 900 sheep from him. It seems that some of Dostom’s supporters from Chahar Dara were also involved. We don’t know the robbers. By writing this letter to you, we want to let you know about this incident so that you can assist us with finding the people who committed the theft and help us to get back our property.” Translated by Faraidoon Shariq from the original document (Photo © STEFAN SCHÜTTE, July 20, 2009)

for both Shughni mountain farmers and migrating Pashtun pastoralists. Dues for land access have to be submitted to commanders, now holding official positions in a new district named Arghanj Khaw (cf. Fig. 4) that contains the Shewa area. For the Shughni mountain farmers, these dues comprise taxes for pasture usage rights as well as payments for land title deeds for their agricultural plots and are usually delivered in kind. Pashtun and Uzbek pastoralists, however, are forced to pay large amounts in cash for access to pastures in addition to donating livestock to the strongmen in power. Paying dues in cash is a new phenomenon for pastoralists that only commenced under the Karzai administration. This exposure to arbitrary rent-seeking behaviour of local strongmen in their ancestral summer grazing grounds puts the already risky practice of animal husbandry under severe economic strain. As a respondent put it: “From the time of the Saur Revolution [i.e. 1978] everybody raised taxes from us for using the pas-



Fig. 4: Badakhshan – present administrative set-up

tures for which we already have a title from the King. Baraki, Rabbani, Najibullah, all did so, but under Karzai it is the worst” (Achezkai pastoralist, September 04, 2008). These revenues are forcefully extracted, often at gunpoint, and are used to maintain the power bases of commanders, and are by no means used to improve the welfare of local communities: “Throughout 2001–2008, there was little or no sign of the revenue collected by local actors in Badakhshan being reinvested in the local economy and even less so in the provision of services to the population” (GIUSTOZZI and ORSINI 2009, 14).

While such economic strain creates hardship for pastoral groups, the risk of eviction from pastures poses another critical threat that severely endangers pastoral livelihoods. During our fieldwork several groups that attempted to return to their habitual sites were expelled and forced to settle in higher and/or more remote locations. Presently, there are no options to purchase and/or secure property and user rights for land and pastures that

provide some security of tenure for the future. This was not always the case, as during the time of King Zaher Shah Pashtun nomads were represented as a group that enjoyed protection from the centre and that substantially profited over other communities, ensuring unconditional mobility and access to pastures.⁹⁾ This was exemplified through issuing the *qawala* that in the King’s time served as a valid and uncontested title document. However, with shifting power relations and war conditions holding sway over the country, a gradual decline in this protection altered the social and spatial practices of pastoralists and has posed new and unprecedented threats to the community. In addition to insecurity

⁹⁾ Lobbying has not ceased since, but nowadays the influence of the ‘nomadic lobby’ seems to be an urban phenomenon in the capital Kabul (cf. TAPPER 2008). However, the recent violent conflicts over pasture access between Pashtun and Hazara led to agitated debates in Parliament, and to the establishment of new policy initiatives aimed at regulating pasture access rights of different communities (ALDEN WILY 2009; ADB/DFID 2008).

of tenure, the recurrent drought conditions that are prevalent in Northern Afghanistan have potentially disastrous effects on the practice of pastoralism. Informants reported that in the drought year of 2007/2008, up to forty percent of their herds perished due to lack of water and grazing land. Also in the summer of 2008, armed bandits on horses from the neighbouring district of Ragh raided parts of the Shewa Plateau and took away large numbers of sheep, leaving affected nomads in distress and diminishing the basis of their livelihoods.

8 Road of insecurity – migration between winter and summer camps

The case of Pashtun pastoralists from Kunduz on their way to Shewa highlights the challenges faced en route. As renowned specialists in sheep-breeding, and as the major suppliers of meat for the domestic economy in Afghanistan (BARFIELD 2008), pastoralists are required to traverse huge distances with their flocks to cope with seasonal shortages of pasture resources. This combination of animal husbandry and mobility produces challenging complexities resulting regularly in hardships and insecurities. During migration, herd management is delegated to appropriately sized groups with manageable flocks (*rama*) that aim to choose a secure approach route (cf. Fig. 1). Usually four herdsmen are required to manage one flock, i.e., a *rama* of 650 to 700 sheep and goats. During migration across difficult terrain even more supporting persons take part in shifting the animals from Kunduz to Shewa and vice versa. A single flock of sheep raised and kept by *Achekzai* and *Baluch* pastoralists is often maintained by various herd owners and their hired shepherds, and easily numbers between 500 and 1000 fat-tailed sheep. When migrating, this large flock is usually accompanied by a smaller number of goats, and as many as seventy camels, donkeys and horses to transport household materials and food. A single migration unit might consist of up to fifty people. This venture is often organised through separate mobility groups, with part of the food supplies, household utensils and all female migrants and children normally being transported by hired car, whereas herd owners ride on horses, accompanying their flocks that are taken care of by hired shepherds from the same community. Specific groups use the same routes every year, often engaging in symbiotic relationships with sedentary populations that can be characterised by both cooperation and

antagonism (FERDINAND 1969, 2006). The journey takes up to 31 stages; thus more than four weeks are spent along the route in daily changing locations. At each stage, fodder and water supplies for the animals have to be provided, the spacious tent dwellings for the migrating parties have to be erected, and special care has to be taken to prevent the animals from feeding on the agricultural fields of their hosts. Customary arrangements are made with resident communities along the route to ensure that these necessities are available.

At each location, local farmers grow animal fodder crops for sale to pastoralists passing through in the spring season. This diminishes pastoralists' dependence on meagre and scant commons, while at the same time providing a secure income source for farmers. Animals are kept each night in designated spaces by permission of the sentinel of the village grasslands, who is paid a grazing fee by the visiting herd owners.

Outbound, the stays at certain points en route usually last longer, depending on the agro-ecological conditions in a given year and the availability of fodder and water. On the return trip from Badakhshan in late summer or early autumn, when pastoralists bring the animals down from the mountain pastures, the stays can easily extend to a week or even longer, so the sheep are not overstrained and are able to maintain the weight gained during their three months on the copious summer pastures. Encampments are usually erected on already harvested fields, no payments are due, and animals are allowed to roam freely to feed on crop residues. This practice also benefits settled farmers because the animal droppings fertilise their lands. Marketing of animals also takes place on the return trip, and both the *Achekzai* and *Baluch* sell about one quarter of their fattened animals to farmers, butchers, and in the livestock markets en route to the larger urban areas of Faizabad, Keshem, Taloqan and Kunduz (Fig. 5).

The continued prevalence of this long-distance pastoralism in Northern Afghanistan indicates that it is still an economically viable undertaking, in spite of the detrimental conditions of heightened tenure insecurity and the oppressive legal pluralisms that disadvantage and hamper pastoralists in the summer areas on the Shewa Plateau. In spite of all these detrimental conditions pastoralists keep coming back to Shewa. The investments for fodder, for shifting entire households, for bribing officials, the arbitrary thefts of animals, and paying large amounts of cash to those who control the Shewa

pastures apparently are still adequately countered by the returns that can be realised through marketing sheep. An example of how the economics of pastoralism worked for a specific herd of 800 sheep assembled by five pastoral households from Chahar Dara in the season of 2009 is provided in the diagram (Fig. 6). The high costs incurred during mi-

gration and the three-month stay on the summer pastures are very likely compensated for through the high and non-diminishing demand for fat-tailed sheep on Afghan livestock markets. It has to be noted, however, that this particular season was exceptionally favourable and no drought-induced animal losses occurred, as was the case in 2008.

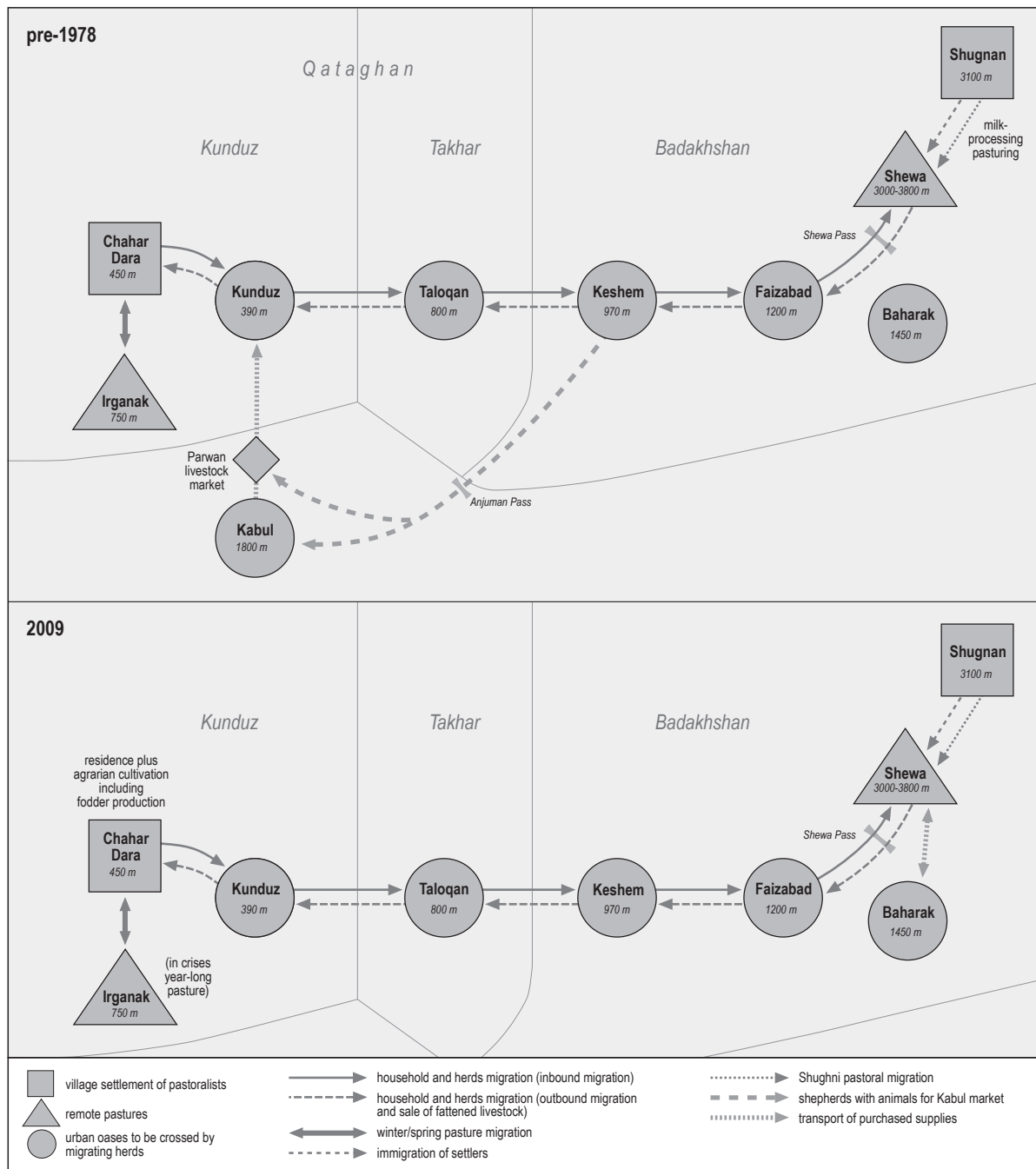


Fig. 5: Comparison of mobility patterns between 1978 and 2009

In historical perspective, phases of sedentarisation and re-nomadisation as complementary practices may alternate, depending on political, socio-economic, and environmental conditions at a given time (cf. GLATZER 1981). To recap, four phases of distinct pastoral practices and their attendant mobility strategies have characterised the experience of Pashtun and other mobile pastoralists from Kunduz Province.

(i) A phase of comparatively less burdened mobility refers to the times prior to the Saur Revolution of 1978. The “times of freedom” are remembered in the collective memory of the *Achekzai* as periods with abundant pastures on the Shewa plateau. Mobility strategies were much more extended than today, and the annual migration period lasted up to eight months. Following the summer period on the high mountain pastures, a special group of the *Achekzai* pastoralists used to go directly from the Shewa Plateau to the

Afghan capital Kabul to market their fat animals and obtain the best prices for rams at Charikar, the capital city of Parwan Province.¹⁰ This entailed another one-month journey across the Anjuman Pass. Also the return journey to the residential village near Kunduz was made on foot, after which the group was united during the winter and spring in Chahar Dara.

(ii) A phase of disrupted mobility occurred between 1978 and 1996 – the times of actual foreign occupation and the subsequent disastrous civil war – when landmines on pastures, aerial bombardments, forced revenue extraction in kind, or outright livestock theft by different factions of the resistance for the first time endangered the practice of mobile pastoralism.

¹⁰ Even today, as in the past, Charikar is the most important market for breeding sires in Afghanistan.

Size of the herd (800 sheep equalling about 80,000 US \$)	Herd reduction in sheep equivalents		Reason for reduction
800 sheep belonging to five households forming one <i>rama</i>	remaining herd animals for breeding purposes		
	8 sheep	loss	randomly taken by local strongmen
	200 sheep	sale of sheep	expected to be sold to butchers at urban markets on return
	62 sheep	payment to local strongmen (<i>cumandan</i>)	dues for seasonal grazing rights on the habitual areas codified in the <i>qawala</i>
	32 sheep	salaries for eight shepherds	on monthly basis (plus food, clothes)
	30 sheep	animal fodder	payment to village sentinels
	20 sheep	transport cost	for household members and goods
44 sheep	loss	perished: heavy rains and in traffic	

Source: Data gathered in interviews conducted in Shewa on 19.07.2009

Fig. 6: Pastoral economics for the combined herds of five pastoral households from Chahar Dara in the season of 2009

(iii) A phase of involuntary sedentarisation entailing the collapse of migration characterised the reign of the Taliban between 1996 and 2001, when the route to Shewa was not passable due to heavy fighting. During this time the tenure relations on the plateau changed significantly, and Tajik commanders established their power bases in Badakhshan, putting them in a position to grab vast pasturelands in order to forcefully extract revenues from pastoralists and other pasture users, so as to further secure their positions.

(iv) The current and prevailing phase of renomadisation and restricted mobility started in 2001, when the route was free again, but pastoralists discovered that their ancestral pastures were now under armed control and access was possible only via cash payments. Also on the plateau itself, herd and shepherd mobility remains significant, as summer camps where most household members reside are often located at considerable distance from the actual grazing lands. In the case of one particular pastoral household, the base is four days away from the pastures (located near the Shughni village of Doulat Shahi, cf. Fig. 1) when moving with the herd, and two days still when shepherds and herd owners commute between these locations for control and fetching supplies.

The sequence of changing mobility patterns shows that pastoral strategies that are characterised by flexibility, dynamic coping mechanisms and adaptive properties are instrumental when confronted with livelihood risks and vulnerability conditions.

9 Discussion and conclusions – pastoralism as a valuable survival strategy in contested commons and along dangerous routes

Changes in the living conditions of Pashtun pastoralists and Shughni combined mountain farmers have been significant in the course of the last century. Political and social transformations have had a far greater impact on livelihood assets than can be expected from climate change-related environmental variations in the near future. For the prospects of pasture users, the unreliability of pasture entitlements, the untrustworthy actors and their arbitrariness as well as the absent state-controlled rule of law are major challenges whose future outcomes cannot be projected. Nevertheless, the natural risk is part of the above-mentioned

four-fold risk spaces that contribute to insecurity and vulnerability of the stakeholders. Pastoralists and combined mountain farmers are confronted with the vagaries of nature and society. The natural risk of late frosts and shortened vegetation periods contributed to a high degree of vulnerability in 2009 when Shughni mountain farmers were unable to grow a single maturing food crop.¹¹⁾ The socio-economic space is strongly influenced by the arbitrariness of local and regional strongmen. In 2008, the extraction of dues and the theft of livestock were such high burdens that a number of pastoralists did not return to Shewa the following year. In turn, their absence meant ample fodder and less competition over pastures for the Pashtun, Uzbek and Shughni who brought their flocks in spite of high demands and pressure. The strongmen had to adjust their demand strategy to limited opportunities. Remoteness and periphery provide a valuable niche that offers opportunities for all actors and stakeholders. The absence of the state is in tune with the exclusion from development and modernisation. In times of severe food crises – as in the case when no crop can mature – international NGOs provide food supplies. In 2009, the Aga Khan Foundation started early to fill depots with basic food items to safeguard the survival of the Shughni combined mountain farmers who are the only ones to remain in the high pastures in winter. In the socio-cultural and political-institutional space, mobile pastoralists fare better as they have invested in a risky, but profitable endeavour. They have returned to mobile pastoral activities in spite of multiple insecurities as they seem to find a workable solution for all challenges en route. High dues for local strongmen, camping fees and costly fodder purchases, detrimental marketing structures and restricted access to profitable markets: All these constraints are obviously overcome by their pastoral practices that still provide higher returns to them than to any other pasture users on the Shewa Plateau. Legal pluralisms are costly in themselves, but some niches seem to be present as well. The socio-political conditions in a remote periphery can only be sustained if no actor is losing out completely or being replaced by another one. Therefore, it seems that pastoral practices could be adjusted and adapted to the changing social environment of North-Eastern Afghanistan.

¹¹⁾ For a discussion of nutritional issues and aspects of resilience among Shughni combined mountain farmers on the Shewa Plateau, cf. KASSAM 2009, 2010.

At present, the most dangerous part of the migratory route appears to be the Kunduz-Chahar Dara section where armed clashes between NATO troops and insurgents are frequent.

In Afghanistan, new policies on pastures and pasture relations aim to incorporate methods of community-based conflict resolution (ALDEN WILY 2009) in order to deal with competing claims to rangeland that mostly refer to Pashtun/non-Pashtun competition and are most volatile in the central highlands (ALDEN WILY 2004). Other methodologies propose to reach shared and certified community agreements about the legitimate users of a given parcel of pasture land (ADB/DFID 2008). The need to engage in such methodologies has also been recognized by the Afghan Government in its official Land Policy that has been formally approved in 2007 (GOVERNMENT OF AFGHANISTAN 2007). However, while the Land Policy of Afghanistan states the needs for action on paper, in practice little has happened to date. Conflicts over pasture access still break out every year in Central Afghanistan, and in the North nomadic pastoralists have to continue to deal with powerful land grabbers without support of the Government. The initially suggested land regulation by FINNCONSULT in the 1970s addressed the issue of permits and equitable access rights for actors practising pastoralism and combined mountain agriculture. If pressure on pastures grows the need to act becomes urgent. Present insecurities have contributed to a reduction of enterprising pastoralists and thus reduced the stocking numbers.

The discussion of the interrelationship of pastoral practices and legal pluralism in a pastoral time-space continuum has opened the perspective on vulnerability and multiple insecurities issues. In conclusion, the example of the Pashtun pastoralists in relation to their competitors over contested commons has provided insights into the constraints and chances for pastoral practices adapted to changing contexts. The conventional developmental and terminological perspective on pastoralism as a time-space related transitional phenomenon was replaced by fieldwork evidence suggesting that pastoral practices can be adopted whenever opportunities with prospective chances are prevalent. The observation of BERNT GLATZER (1981) that survival strategies adopted in periods of stress and insecurity include mobile pastoralism is sound and valid in the context of North-Eastern Afghanistan.

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