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**Repatriation and State Reconstruction:
Tracing the Agency of Afghan Returnees in the Face of Human Insecurity**

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by

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Dedication

Für Mama und Papa.

Danke für eure Inspiration, Unterstützung und Freundschaft.

Abstract

Repatriation and State Reconstruction: Tracing the Agency of Afghan Returnees in the Face of Human Insecurity

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

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Since the beginnings of the Afghan refugee crisis, aid agencies have provided consistent and substantial relief to Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran. However, the response was framed by the assumption that mostly short-term humanitarian aid is required because refugees will return to Afghanistan once the conflict ends. This report challenges the “conflict-refugee” concept by focusing on refugee agency in the face of human insecurity and the complexity of Afghan population movements, which include transnational networks, mixed migration, and hybrid identities.

The discussion concentrates on the period from 2002 to 2005, when UNHCR facilitated sizable surges of voluntary returns while the Afghan state was still in the initial reconstruction phase. Regardless of UNHCR’s repatriation program, the refugee crisis persisted as a significant number of repatriates decided to return to Pakistan and Iran or cross the border repeatedly. To explain the causes and consequences of this phenomenon of refugee backflows, I offer the following argument: The backflow of repatriated refu-

gees consisted of both voluntary and forced migrants. Voluntary migrants continued existing practices of circular migration to pursue their preferred livelihood strategies. Forced migrants, however, responded to human insecurity in Afghanistan with migratory coping strategies as their only available form of agency.

This distinction has several implications for future reconstruction and repatriation efforts: On the one hand, reconstruction plans should integrate the potential constructive effects of voluntary migration. These effects include remittances, the transfer of human capital, as well as the reduction of pressures on the labor market, infrastructures and social services in the transitional state. On the other hand, UNHCR should only facilitate repatriation once a minimum level of human security on all levels is guaranteed to ensure safe and dignified returns and prevent continued forced migration.

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1. Introduction

1.1. RESEARCH QUESTION

Since 1978, Afghanistan has experienced a series of complex emergencies, fueled by armed conflict, ethnic persecution, and humanitarian crises. To escape chronic violence and insecurity, large waves of Afghan refugees repeatedly fled to the neighboring states Pakistan and Iran where they have been living in refugee camps, settlements, and urban areas. Until today, the Afghan refugee crisis remains one of the largest protracted refugee situations (PRS) worldwide.

Since the beginnings of the Afghan PRS, aid agencies have provided consistent and substantial relief to Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran. However, the response was framed by the assumption that mostly short-term humanitarian aid is required because refugees will return to Afghanistan once the conflict ends. This report challenges the “conflict-refugee” concept by focusing on refugee agency in the face of human insecurity and the complexity of Afghan population flows, which include transnational networks, mixed migration, and hybrid identities.

The discussion concentrates on the period from 2002–2005, when the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) facilitated sizable surges of voluntary returns while the Afghan state was still in the initial reconstruction phase. Regardless of the repatriation program, the refugee crisis persisted as a significant number of Afghan refugees decided to return to Pakistan and Iran or cross the border repeatedly. While some scholars have argued that UNHCR’s repatriation program was premature,¹ others maintained that the backflow of returnees “is merely an indication that Afghans are con-

¹ Turton, David, and Peter Marsden. *Taking Refugees for a Ride? The Politics of Refugee Return to Afghanistan*. Issue Paper Series, Islamabad: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2002, 20.

tinuing to do what they have always done.”² While both perspectives deserve merit, this report emphasizes that it is crucial to acknowledge the thin line between voluntary and forced migration.

To explain the causes and consequences of the phenomenon of refugee backflows, I offer the following argument: The backflow of repatriated refugees consisted of both voluntary and forced migrants. Voluntary migrants continued existing practices of circular migration to pursue their preferred livelihood strategies. Forced migrants, however, responded to human insecurity in Afghanistan with migratory coping strategies as their only available form of agency.

The distinction between voluntary and forced migrants has several implications for future reconstruction and repatriation efforts: On the one hand, reconstruction plans should integrate the potential constructive effects of voluntary migration. These effects include remittances, the transfer of human capital, as well as the reduction of pressures on the labor market, infrastructures and social services in the transitional state. On the other hand, UNHCR should only facilitate repatriation once a minimum level of human security on all levels is guaranteed to ensure safe and dignified returns and prevent continued forced migration.

To support this argument, the report addresses the following research questions: 1) To which extent did the transitional state and external actors meet the human security needs of Afghan returnees? 2) How did UNHCR manage the repatriation and reintegration

² Kronenfeld, Daniel A. "Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: Not All Refugees, Not Always in Pakistan, Not Necessarily Afghan?" *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21, no. 1 (2008), 56; Monsutti, Alessandro. "Afghan Migratory Strategies and the Three Solutions to the Refugee Problem." *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (2008), 59.

³ UNHCR Population Statistic Database

⁴ Klein, Betsy, Laura Koran, and Eric Bradner. *Obama Halts Afghanistan Troop Withdrawal*. March 24,

tion of Afghan refugees? 3) Why did repatriates decide to leave Afghanistan? 4) How sustainable was UNHCR's facilitated voluntary repatriation program?

The report is structured as follows: In chapter 2, I critically discuss the key concepts and issues, which frame the research questions of this report – durable solutions to protracted refugee situations, forms of and opportunities for refugee agency, and the role of human security in post-conflict reconstruction. The chapter discusses the current debates among scholars and practitioners, how these concepts interact with each other, and in which ways this report seeks to contribute to each discussion.

In chapter 3, I discuss how three decades of violence and conflict in Afghanistan created repeated refugee movements. I then examine the progress of the reconstruction of Afghanistan between 2001 and 2005 with an in-depth analysis of human security in this period. In a third step, I investigate Afghan refugees' mixed transnational migration as one form of refugee agency. This section of chapter 3 provides insights into the role of transnational networks, the experience of migration, and issues of access and vulnerability. It is important to provide this context because refugee agency does not take place within a vacuum, but needs to be understood with reference to refugees' broader social-economic and security environments.

Chapter 5 turns to UNHCR's facilitated voluntary repatriation program as I discuss how refugees have used migratory strategies to respond to the limitations of the repatriation program. This chapter brings together the main elements of this report: repatriation, reconstruction, human security, and refugee agency. I seek to find out if there is a relationship between human security and refugees' decision to migrate. Chapter 6 summarizes the main findings and offers policy recommendations.

1.2. RELEVANCE

The main justification for this project lies in the intrinsic importance of the Afghan refugee crisis as one of the world's most complex, most intractable, and largest PRS with a magnitude of human consequences. Even though UNHCR, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and state actors have tirelessly worked on relieving the plight of refugees and providing the Afghan people with livelihood opportunities, traditional humanitarian frameworks and policies have been unsuccessful in resolving the crisis. At any point in time since the beginning of the 1980s there have been at least 1.9 million displaced people living in Pakistan and Iran. In January 2015, there were still 1.47 million Afghans refugees and asylum seekers residing in Pakistan and 950 000 in Iran.³

The current withdrawal of United States (U.S.) troops from Afghanistan – although recently slowed down⁴ – poses additional risks for displaced persons and returnees. As of now, it remains unclear whether the Afghan reconstruction project will be successful enough to provide safe returns for the remaining refugees still residing in Pakistan and Iran. The recent advances of the Taliban in Kunduz also point to the risk that the Taliban might be able to resurge once international forces have left Afghanistan.⁵ A Taliban revival would undoubtedly prompt renewed refugee movements across both borders. Against this background, researching alternative policy solutions to the Afghan refugee crisis remains a crucial endeavor, even as the current situation of Afghan refugees is gradually improving.

³ UNHCR Population Statistic Database

⁴ Klein, Betsy, Laura Koran, and Eric Bradner. *Obama Halts Afghanistan Troop Withdrawal*. March 24, 2015.

⁵ Mashal, Mujib, and Jawad Sukhanyar. "Afghan Troops Rush to Kunduz Amid Taliban Assault." *New York Times*, April 28, 2015.

Although each refugee crisis is unique in many ways and therefore requires individualized policy responses, the Afghan crisis is also indicative of certain dynamics typical of the present humanitarian system, such as: mixed migration, limitations of the current refugee definition, aid fatigue, the militarization of aid, and the relief-development gap. The Afghan case therefore contains important lessons for humanitarian actors and the international community to be able to respond to future refugee crises and complex emergencies more effectively. The report sheds light on the limitations of the three durable solutions and contributes to current debates about state reconstruction.

Finally, this report seeks to negotiate the perspectives, experiences, and agencies of a variety of actors: refugees, migrants, aid workers, policy makers, and members of host communities. It is important to depart from the widespread perception that refugees are merely victims and beneficiaries of aid. As of now, the humanitarian system does not give a strong voice to its main constituents, which can be seen in the limitations and inflexibility of the current durable solutions framework. This report foregrounds the innovative potential of human agency and seeks to navigate both the realities and limitations of policy-making and the inventiveness and resilience of the Afghan people.

1.3. METHODS AND SOURCES OF INFORMATION

I apply an actor-oriented research approach by focusing on human agency, particularly refugees' migratory strategies. The notion of agency conceptualizes refugees as "social actors who process their own experiences and those of others while acting upon these experiences."⁶ While voluntary migration is an obvious expression of choice either

⁶ Essed, Philomena, Georg Frerks, and Joke Schrijvers. "Introduction: Refugees, Agency and Social Transformation." In *Refugees and the Transformation of Societies: Agency, Policies, Ethics and Politics*, edited by Philomena Essed, Georg Frerks and Joke Schrijvers. New York: Berghahn Books, 2004, 2.

on the individual or household level, forced migration indicates a “tension between agency and compulsion.”⁷ Refugees therefore act within the limitation set by conflict and persecution, institutional restrictions imposed by UNHCR and host governments, as well as norms and expectations of their own community as well as the host society. However, as this report will illustrate many Afghan refugees have been able to carve out space for agency both within and beyond these boundaries. Examples of human agency the Afghan refugee communities are formal and informal entrepreneurial activities, shifting roles of female household members, political organization within refugee camps, recruitment of “refugee warriors,” and migratory strategies – the focus of this report.

Afghan refugees have used migratory strategies to escape conflict, access natural resources (water, arable land), pursue seasonal labor, spread risks, maintain land, assets and personal relationships, access higher quality education and health care, send remittances, and receive UNHCR assistance packages. As every refugee experiences flight, encampment and repatriation differently, the actor-oriented approach of this report is a way to dismantle generalizations and stereotypes. In its place, investigating refugee agency highlights the dynamic and transformative nature of social relationships, constructed identities, and livelihood strategies.

Ideally, this project warrants original multi-sited ethnographic research, which unfortunately is beyond the scope of the report. The analysis mainly draws on case studies initiated by the Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), the UNHCR Policy Development and Evaluation Service, as well as surveys sponsored by the UN Development Programme, the World Bank Group and the Asia Foundation. Aware of the potential in-

⁷ Stigter, Elca. "Afghan Migratory Strategies - An Assessment of Repatriation and Sustainable Return in Response to the Convention Plus." *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 25, no. 22 (2006), 110.

stitutional biases inherent to secondary source research, I seek to give refugees and members of host communities a voice wherever I have access to their recorded accounts.

There are several distinct difficulties in working with refugee data. The main challenge lies in the narrow refugee definition, which technically excludes people fleeing environmental and economic instabilities and does not reflect the complex identities of migrants and refugees. Refugee registration numbers are also notoriously unreliable as many families do not register all of their members and there is a lack of data on refugees living in urban areas. Facilitated repatriation programs also brought about a range of data issues, as some refugees repatriated several times to benefit from the financial and material support provided by UNHCR.⁸ In general, it is important to keep in mind that refugee numbers are being politicized by host governments, the Afghan government, humanitarian organizations, and donors – all of which pursue their own political objectives.⁹

⁸ For an in-depth discussion of issues of counting Afghan refugees see Kronenfeld, "Afghan Refugees in Pakistan."

⁹ Loescher, Gil, and James Milner. "Understanding the Problem of Protracted Refugee Situations." In *Protracted Refugee Situations: Political, Human Rights and Security Implications*, edited by Gil Loescher et al. Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2008, 22.

2. Key Concepts

This chapter outlines four key concepts, which frame the research topic of this report: Protracted refugee situations, repatriation as a durable solution, forms of and opportunities for refugee agency, and the role of human security in state reconstruction. The chapter discusses the current debates among scholars and practitioners, how these concepts interact with each other, and in which ways this report seeks to contribute to each discussion.

2.1. PROTRACTED REFUGEE SITUATIONS

According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, refugees are individuals forced to flee their country to escape war, persecution, or severe limitations of their personal freedom. In this sense, the term “refugee” distinctly differs from the term “migrants” or those who choose to leave their home country, not out of fear, but out of hope for a better life for themselves and their families. However, the realities of complex emergencies,¹⁰ where multiple interrelated factors, such as political and physical violence, diseases, hunger, and displacement, lead to large-scale human suffering, blur the lines between migrants and refugees.

In complex emergencies, people move across borders for a variety of humanitarian reasons that fall outside the traditional refugee conception, challenging the narrow perimeters of the conflict-refugee definition. This report uses the term “mixed migrants” to

¹⁰ There is an ongoing scholarly debate about how to define “complex emergencies” as they are characterized by multiple interconnected elements that function as both causes and symptoms. The humanitarian impact of such crises can be further exacerbated by natural disasters and the incapability of the local government to deliver relief. Complex emergencies are therefore often connected to some level of state failure or even collapse. For an in-depth analysis of complex emergencies see Keen, David. *Complex Emergencies*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008. For an overview of definitions see Albala-Bertrand, Jose Miguel. “Complex emergencies versus natural disasters: An analytical comparison of causes and effects.” *Oxford Development Studies* 28, no. 2 (2000): 187-204.

conceptualize these overlapping experiences and identities of migrants and refugees.¹¹ Mixed migration refers to forms of mobility that transgress the binary criteria of regular and irregular as well as forced and voluntary movements. Governments generally seek to “disaggregate and manage” mixed migration flows, and often put pressures on humanitarian actors to do the same.¹²

Today, a vast majority of refugees live in protracted refugee situations, in which refugees exist in a “state of limbo” lasting more than five years. Even though they may no longer fear for their lives, “their basic rights and essential economic, social, and psychological needs remain unfulfilled.”¹³ This state of limbo is most pronounced for asylum seekers who “occupy neither a fully legal nor illegal position of nonbelonging.”¹⁴ In the Afghan PRS, both Pakistan and Iran officially did not accept Afghan refugees based on the Refugee Convention, but as *mohajirin* – those who seek asylum for religious reasons.

Commonly, PRS evoke images of immobile and passive populations, warehoused in large-scale camps or settlements and largely dependent on material aid. However, the reality of PRS is much more complex as refugees identify ways to maintain their livelihoods on their own terms and membership of PRS constantly changes as refugees repatriate, new families arrive, and others move to third countries.¹⁵ In the Afghan case, as in

¹¹ In response to the limitations of the refugee definition Martin et al. introduced the term “crisis migrants,” which the authors define as “all those who move and those who become trapped and are in need or relocation in the context of humanitarian crises.” See Martin, Susan F., Sanjula Weerasinghe, and Abbie Taylor, . *Humanitarian Crisis and Migration: Causes, Consequences and Responses*. New York: Routledge, 2014, 12.

¹² Linde, Thomas. "Mixed Migration - A Humanitarian Counterpoint." *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (2011), 89.

¹³ Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme. "Protracted Refugee Situations." June 10, 2004.

¹⁴ Cabot, Heath. "The Governance of Things: Documenting Limbo in the Greek Asylum Procedure." *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 35, no. 1 (2012), 17.

¹⁵ Loescher & Milner, "Understanding the Problem of Protracted Refugee Situations," 21.

many other PRS, refugees live not only in UNHCR administered camps but also in urban areas and refugee villages. Scholars have shown that the type of settlement not only influences refugees' livelihood strategies, but also their construction of national belonging, identity, and future outlook.¹⁶

As most protracted refugee situations are hosted by developing countries, PRS are easily seen as further complicating already existing development problems. As a result, host countries tend to restrict refugees' movement, employment opportunities, and access to public services, such as health care and education. Pakistan and Iran have been hesitant to provide integration support fearing that "more development-oriented investments would discourage rather than enable repatriation."¹⁷ At the same time, there is a lack of donor involvement with host countries, reinforcing the perception that refugees constitute a burden and security concern for host communities.¹⁸

At the onset of a crisis, donors readily provide resources to help. However, as refugee situations become protracted, donor fatigue sets in and resources begin to dwindle. Donor fatigue occurs because the enduring refugee crisis requires consistent immediate relief that exceeds the budget of emergency funding lines. By providing only what is absolutely necessary, donors frame assistance as a recurring expense rather than an investment in the future. Refugees and returnees therefore often fall into the "relief-

¹⁶ For instance, Malkki discovered that for Hutu refugees living in organized camps in Tanzania their "refugeeness" was a central element of individual and group identity. Hutu refugees living in townships, on the other hand, adopted hybrid, cosmopolitan identities reflecting their connection to both Burundi and Tanzania. See Malkki, Liisa. "National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees." *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (1992), 35-36.

¹⁷ Macleod, Ewen. "Afghan Refugees in Iran and Afghanistan." In *Protracted Refugee Situations: Political, Human Rights and Security Implications*. Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2008, 346.

¹⁸ Loescher & Milner, "Understanding the Problem of Protracted Refugee Situations," 27.

development gap,”¹⁹ a systematic lack of funding for transitional and development-oriented in fragile states. As this report will show, Afghan refugees who took part in UNHCR’s repatriation program were facing human insecurity precisely because they did not receive the necessary transitional aid.

Restricted in their access to employment and receiving insufficient external support for local integration, refugees can become dependent on subsistence-level assistance.²⁰ Refugees in a PRS must therefore often rely on finite external assistance from humanitarian organizations and host governments to meet their basic human needs. The term “aid dependency” has definite shortcomings, as it is often used to blame aid recipients rather than uncover institutional causes. Donors have used the aid dependency argument to justify cuts in humanitarian relief. This report argues that to reduce aid dependency, donors should increase transitional and development-oriented aid *in addition to* relief. The aid dependency discourse also simplifies the complex realities of refugees’ lives and perpetuates the image of refugees as passive victims. It does not take into account non-traditional and informal livelihood strategies, such as transnational migration.

2.2. REPATRIATION – A DURABLE SOLUTION?

UNHCR pursues three durable solutions for refugee crises: local integration, resettlement, and repatriation. The potential for local integration is generally limited because host countries are typically poor and still in the developing stage themselves. If

¹⁹ The two systems of humanitarian and development aid have different historical backgrounds and are still considered separate fields by most donors and implementing organizations. However, contrary to this separation, humanitarian crises do not occur in isolation but rather concurrently with existing development needs. To conceptualize this disconnect between humanitarian and development efforts, researchers and practitioners speak of a “relief-development gap.” See Steets, Julia. "Donor Strategies for Addressing the Assistance Gap and Linking Humanitarian and Development Assistance. A Contribution to the International Debate." Final Report. June 9, 2011.

²⁰ Loescher & Milner, "Understanding the Problem of Protracted Refugee Situations," 31.

local integration is not successful, the PRS can create conflictual situations and insecurity.²¹ On its own, resettlement in third countries is generally considered an impractical solution to mass displacement due to the sheer numbers of refugees that would need to be resettled. In addition, countries of asylum have been increasingly closing their borders over the past decades due to post 9/11 security concerns, the blurring of immigration and asylum, and negative public opinions about foreigners.²²

Since local integration and resettlement are only pursued for less than 1% of the global refugee population,²³ repatriation has been the preferred solution to refugee situations. UNHCR cannot enforce repatriation at any point but can facilitate returns by providing transportation, support kits, and limited financial assistance. UNHCR only actively promotes voluntary repatriation when the situation in the country of origin permits safe and dignified return. Specific pre-conditions to ensure returnees' safety and dignity, are the right to basic livelihood, legal safety, as well as basic economic and social rights, all of which allow the returnees to re-establish themselves.²⁴

In certain post-conflict situations, UNHCR facilitates returns because parts of the origin country are considered safe, while fighting might still be ongoing in other areas. However, repatriation to transitional states comes with significant challenges. According

²¹ UNHCR. *Framework for Durable Solutions for Refugees and Persons of Concern*. May 2003, 4.

²² Troeller, Gary. "Asylum Trends in Industrialized Countries and their Impact on Protracted Refugee Situations." In *Protracted Refugee Situations: Political, Human Rights and Security Implications*. Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2008, 43-44; It is important to note that all three durable solutions are interrelated. Even though the report does not explicitly address this issue, the fact that resettlement numbers are relatively low compared to the high burden shared by developing host countries around the world considerably hinders the overall success of the durable solutions framework.

²³ Chimni, B. S. "Post-conflict Peacebuilding and the Return of Refugees: Concepts, Practices, and Institutions." In *Refugees and Forced Displacement: International Security, Human Vulnerability, and the State*, edited by Edward Newman and Joanne van Selm. Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2003, 195

²⁴ Ziek, Marjoleine. "Voluntary Repatriation: Paradigm, Pitfalls, Progress." *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (2004), 53.

to Koser and Black,²⁵ returnees to post-conflict states face four main challenges: 1) physical problems, such as landmines and destroyed infrastructures, 2) limited access to key resources, such as land and labor, 3) social confrontation with local communities, and 4) marginalization of already vulnerable groups. While most returnees experience these four challenges to some degree, different variables, such as human capital, access to social networks and financial assistance, can facilitate the reintegration process.

The durable nature of the three durable solutions implies that refugees cannot only return, stay, or resettle, but can actually (re-)establish themselves.²⁶ Integration in the host community or origin state requires development assistance in terms of housing, social and religious support, and employment. However, UNHCR is not explicitly mandated to conduct development programs to ensure the long-term establishment of integrating and returning refugees.²⁷ In addition, scholars and practitioners have paid little attention to refugees' experiences after return.²⁸ By studying the livelihood strategies of Afghan refugees before and after repatriation, this report addresses this policy and research vacuum.

Another challenge of repatriation as a durable solution is ensuring that returns are truly voluntary. By initiating the Afghan repatriation program, UNHCR was responding to internal and external pressures from asylum countries, Afghanistan's interim govern-

²⁵ Koser, Khalid, and Richard Black. "The End of the Refugee Cycle?" In *The End of the Refugee Cycle? Refugee Repatriation & Reconstruction*, edited by Richard Black and Khalid Koser. New York: Berghahn Books, 1999, 10-11.

²⁶ Ziek, "Voluntary Repatriation: Paradigm, Pitfalls, Progress," 46.

²⁷ UNHCR attempted to extend its mandate with the 2003 Framework for Durable Solutions that includes: Development Assistance for Refugees (DAR), Repatriation, Reintegration, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction (4Rs), and Development through Local Integration (DLI).

²⁸ For a chronological exploration of research done on repatriation and reconstruction see Preston, Rosemary. "Researching Repatriation and Reconstruction: Who is Researching What and Why?" In *The End of the Refugee Cycle? Refugee Repatriation and Reconstruction*, edited by Khalid Koser and Richard Black, 18-37. New York: Berghahn Books, 1999.

ment, the U.S., and its allies. Refugees are often motivated to return by pressures coming from the host government and society, inaccurate promises of reconstruction assistance, as well as the fear of becoming part of UNHCR's residual caseload and thereby losing protection status.²⁹ Against this background, unsustainable returns illustrate the difficulty of balancing UNHCR's two core mandates of assistance and protection.³⁰

2.3. POST-CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION AND HUMAN SECURITY

Countries emerging from conflict, such as Afghanistan post-2001, face a wide range of political, physical, economic, and social reconstruction challenges. However, the notion of *post*-conflict reconstruction remains an elusive ideal seeing that it takes most transitional states years to reach a *post*-conflict stage. The post-conflict concept does not capture the "gray areas between war and peace," which include ongoing tensions, insecurity and institutional failure. It therefore encourages transitional states to ignore these continuing problems and instead highlight their post-conflict nature so as not to be labeled a failed state.³¹ The concept also invites the assumption that reconstruction and development occur in temporal stages. In this context, scholars have focused on a narrow definition of physical security as the necessary requirement for all other reconstruction and development efforts.³² This approach has proven problematic because emerging states face a complex set of *human* insecurities that cannot all be addressed through military intervention alone.

²⁹ Ziek, "Voluntary Repatriation: Paradigm, Pitfalls, Progress," 43-44.

³⁰ UNHCR. *Global Consultations on International Protection/Third Track: Voluntary Repatriation*. April 25, 2002, 7.

³¹ Shneiderman, Sara, and Amanda Snellinger. *Framing the Issues: The Politics of "Post-conflict"*. March 24, 2014.

³² See for instance Call, Charles T. "Democratisation, War and State-Building: Constructing the Rule of Law in El Salvador." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 35 (2003), 827.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) introduced the term “human security” in its 1994 Human Development Report. The encompassing concept of human security connects security, relief, and development goals (see table 1). Compared to the traditional security concept, which defines security in military terms from a state perspective, human security focuses on individual experiences and vulnerabilities.³³

Table 1: Human security components and indicators

Component	Definition³⁴	Indicators
Economic security	Assured basic income from productive and remunerative work or a publicly financed safety net.	Unemployment rate; population below poverty line; opium economy
Food security	Physical and economic access to basic food.	Food deficit; cereal import dependency ratio; % of children under 5 with malnutrition, stunting, wasting & underweight
Health security	Freedom from disease and infection, as well as access to health services.	Maternal and infant mortality rates; disease burden; % of rural population in coverage area of basic health facilities
Environmental security	Resistance to acute and chronic environmental threats, such as water scarcity, desertification, droughts, and floods, etc.	% of population with access to safe water; % of population with access to adequate sanitation
Personal security	Security from physical violence and threats, such as torture, war, ethnic tensions, crime, rape, etc.	Number of civilian deaths; number of attacks; prevalence of landmines; number of landmine victims
Community security	Security from violence, threats and discrimination based on membership in a community (of ethnicity, gender, religion, etc.).	Qualitative assessment of violence, threats and discrimination against vulnerable groups

³³ UNHCR. "Human Security: A Refugee Perspective" - Keynote Speech by Mrs. Sadako Ogata, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, at the Ministerial Meeting on Human Security Issues of the "Lysoen Process" Group of Governments, Bergen, Norway, 19 May 1999.

³⁴ Definitions are based on UNDP. *Human Development Report*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, 25-33.

Table 1 (continued)

Political security	State's respect for all individuals' basic human rights and freedoms.	Freedom in the World score; Freedom of the Press rank
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While post-conflict reconstruction should ultimately turn into sustainable development, we can measure short-term reconstruction progress based on levels of human security. In the context of refugee crises, human security is a useful indicator to determine whether an emerging state is ready for refugee repatriation. That is because human security is an important first step towards sustainable human development: “People whose conditions of life are above this minimal level [of human security] may live in comparatively undeveloped circumstances, but have a basic level of security that allows them to plan and work for a better future.”³⁵

In a 1999 speech titled “Human Security: A Refugee Perspective” former UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata³⁶ described the link between repatriation, reconstruction, and human security:

The international community must pay much closer attention, and much more coherent support to societies emerging from conflict. Peace-building in the period immediately following the end of conflicts is a very weak link in the international cooperation system, although it is a vital one, since it connects conflict resolution with development efforts. I am very concerned by the gap which currently exists between humanitarian intervention during conflicts, and the beginning of long-term development programmes. We are particularly worried about this gap because very often recently returned refugees are among those who suffer most from the lack of resources available to build peace. This in turn does not help preventing the recurrence of conflict and of refugee flows.

³⁵ Gutlove, Paula, Gordon Thompson, and Jacob Hale Russell. "Health, Human Security, and Social Reconstruction in Afghanistan." In *Beyond Reconstruction in Afghanistan: Lessons from Development Experience*, edited by John D. Montgomery and Dennis A. Rondinelli. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, 197.

³⁶ UNHCR, *Human Security: A Refugee Perspective*.

We can extract several implications from Ogata's speech: 1) Human security lives at the intersection of state and aid responsibilities. On the one hand, ensuring security is the primary obligation of the government, but on the other hand transitional states very much depend on the aid and development community to create *human* security. 2) Issues of human security can fall into the "relief-development gap." 3) Returnees are among the most vulnerable populations to be affected by human insecurity. Even though Ogata indicated in 1999 already that the concept of human security is acutely relevant to refugee situations, UNHCR and other UN agencies have since made little effort to integrate human security into refugee assistance and protection.³⁷ This paper addresses this lack of attention by investigating the connection of human insecurity and refugee backflows.

2.4. REFUGEE AGENCY AND MIGRATION

The durable solutions framework is rooted in the notion of citizenship-restoration through resettlement, repatriation, or local integration, of which repatriation has been largely uncontested as the preferred policy. The modern nation state system demands that any person's main mode of identification is her or his citizenship status. However, the nation-state focus of the refugee regime leaves little space for acknowledging refugees' traditions of regional and internal migration, tribal affiliations, and daily livelihood strategies. These strategies may transgress the borders of the two prevailing authorities in refugees' lives - the nation state and the humanitarian system - as refugees often harness transnational networks and ties with the host community at the local level.³⁸

³⁷ For instance, the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS) was launched in 1999, but it lacked a conceptual framework and was not used for repatriation and reintegration assistance.

³⁸ Mattner, Mark. "Development Actors and Protracted Refugee Situations: Progress, Challenges, Opportunities." In *Protracted Refugee Situations: Political, Human Rights and Security Implications*, edited by Gil Loescher et al. Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2008, 111.

Recognizing refugee agency inevitably means departing from the notion of refugees as dependent victims. That is because in the course of their flight and resettlement, refugees bring with them and acquire skills, assets, and networks. But even if the ideas of complete dependency and victim status are flawed, it is important to acknowledge that “refugees’ new identities, increased capacities, awareness, and assertiveness come with a price: these changes are born in trauma, bereavement, loss, exclusion, and the pain of not belonging, due to attributed ‘otherness.’”³⁹

In refugee situations, socio-spatial forms are not necessarily reproduced but newly established.⁴⁰ The experience of flight does not only produces trauma and vulnerability, it also enables refugees to negotiate social spaces, assert themselves and develop hybrid identities. For instance, in the comparatively open societies of Pakistan and Iran, many Afghan women have been able to take on stronger roles in their families and advocate for their own as well as their children’s education and health care. Risk-taking behavior provides another link between displacement and renewal. Even though security risks in their home country drive refugees to flight, any form of unsettlement is also a form of risk-taking behavior.

Against this background, Laura Hammond rethought the language of repatriation and reconstruction by challenging the “assumption that it is desirable and possible for returnees to regain that which they had before becoming refugees.”⁴¹ Common terms used in the repatriation context, such as *reintegration*, *reconstruction*, and *reestablish-*

³⁹ Essed, Frerks & Schrijvers, "Introduction: Refugees, Agency and Social Transformation," 12.

⁴⁰ Agier, Michel. *Managing the Undesirables: Refugee Camps and Humanitarian Government*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011, 53.

⁴¹ Hammond, Laura. "Examining the Discourse of Repatriation: Towards a More Proactive Theory of Return Migration." In *The End of the Refugee Cycle? Refugee Repatriation & Reconstruction*, edited by Khalid Koser and Richard Black. New York: Berghahn Books, 1999, 225.

ment “imply that by reentering one’s native country a person is necessarily returning to something familiar.”⁴² However, repatriation and reconstruction do not only involve the undoing or redoing of previous structures, but consist mostly of new challenges and processes. Hammond therefore proposes the terms *construction*, *creativity*, and *innovation* to describe the potential for social change engendered in the repatriation process.⁴³

⁴² Ibid., 230.

⁴³ Ibid., 243.

3. Human Insecurity, Reconstruction, and Migratory Strategies

This chapter outlines how three decades of conflict and violence in Afghanistan produced repeated refugee movements to Pakistan and Iran. The chapter then examines the progress of the Afghan reconstruction project and levels of human security in Afghanistan post-2001. Finally, the discussion turns to the phenomenon of Afghans' mixed transnational migration between Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan. It explores the nature and implications of this form of refugee agency as it unpacks why and how Afghan refugees engage in mixed transnational migration.

3.1. LEGACY OF CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE⁴⁴

Since 1978, Afghanistan has experienced a series of armed conflicts, resulting in decades of violence on the hands of Soviet forces, the Mujahedin, local militia, the Taliban, terrorist networks, and foreign military forces. Internal ethnic, religious, and political divisions and Afghanistan's historical role as a "buffer state" between competing empires largely motivated these conflicts.⁴⁵ Over the course of three decades of war, the Afghan people suffered through disappearances, torture, mass executions, ethnic persecution, which led to internal displacement and mass migrations to Pakistan and Iran. Every Afghan has been affected by the protracted conflict in some way. According to a survey by the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), almost 70% of respondents said that they or an immediate family member have been subject to serious human rights abuses during the war.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Some of the key writers on Afghanistan's contemporary history and society not cited in this section include: Louis Dupree, Frédéric Grare, Nancy Hatch-Dupree, Hassan Kakar, Olivier Roy, Amin Saikal, Conrad Schetter, and M. Nazif Shahrani.

⁴⁵ Trueman W. Sharp et al. "Challenges and Opportunities for Humanitarian Relief in Afghanistan." *Clinical Infectious Diseases* 35, no. 5 (2002), 217.

⁴⁶ AIHRC. "A Call for Justice." January 2005, 45.

With every regime change, the new powers to be based their legitimacy on their efforts to defeat the previous abusive regime. Each new regime promised to bring about some sort of societal improvement, be it land reform, restoration of Islamic values, or democracy. However, each new regime wound up undercutting these claims by abusing its power and repressing its opponents. This cycle of violence and oppression began in 1978, when the communist coup in Afghanistan brought the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) to power. Even though the PDPA attempted to promote women's education and redistribute land equitably, the regime also committed some of the worst atrocities in Afghan history, including mass executions. A prominent example of the brutal legacy of PDPA rule is the massacre of 1,170 boys and men in Kerala village in Kunar.⁴⁷

The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979 to counter the imminent collapse of the PDPA regime. Even though mass executions declined under Soviet rule, illegal arrests, torture, and killings of civilians were still common. The indiscriminate violence by the Soviets created mass movements of refugees and internally displaced persons to the extent of "migratory genocide."⁴⁸ The Soviet invasion produced the largest populations displacement in Afghanistan's history with 2.5 million people fleeing to Pakistan and 1.5 million to Iran.

The two states responded to the refugee influx in different ways. Even though Iran had ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention and both Protocols, the government did not base its acceptance of refugees on the requirements of the international refugee regime.

⁴⁷ Goodson, Larry P. *Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001, 57.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

The new government argued that it was not bound by international documents signed by the ousted monarchy. Instead, it granted refugees and guest workers the status of *mohajir*, or one who seeks asylum for religious reasons. Teheran thereby distanced itself from international influence on its refugee and immigration policies. Accepting Afghans as *mohajirin* also provided Teheran with room to change its policies in the future.⁴⁹

Pakistan was never party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and Protocols, but still ended up hosting one of the world's largest refugee populations. Zia became the host of *mohajirin* par excellence as he emphasized the cultural and religious kinship of Afghans and Pakistanis. In this time-frame, Afghan refugees in Pakistan had three coexisting identities: First, to UNHCR and other relief organization they were refugees according to the Convention. Second, they enjoyed Pashtun hospitality (*melmastia*) according to the *pashtunwali* code of honor. Third, their host states considered Afghan refugees *mohajirin* based on the Islamic concept of seeking asylum from religious persecution.⁵⁰

While the second and third identities both imply positive host-refugee relations, they also introduced tensions. The acceptance of refugees based on religious grounds was temporally limited as a *mohajir* can easily turn into an unwelcome guest once a refugee situation becomes protracted. The refugees arriving in Pakistan were not only Pashtuns, but also Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras. So, while Pashtuns were welcomed with *melmastia* as part of *pashtunwali*, members of other ethnic groups enjoyed less hospitality.⁵¹ Fur-

⁴⁹ International Crisis Group. "Afghanistan: What Now for Refugees?" *Asia Report*, no. 175 (August 2009), 3.

⁵⁰ Centlivres, Pierre, and Micheline Centlivres-Dumont. "The Afghan Refugee in Pakistan: An Ambiguous Identity." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 1, no. 2 (1988), 143-145.

⁵¹ So, Yamane. "The Rise of New Madrasas and the Decline of Tribal Leadership within the Federal Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA), Pakistan." In *The Moral Economy of the Madrasa: Islam and Education Today*, edited by Sakurai Keiko and Fariba Adelkhab. Oxon: Routledge, 2011, 23.

thermore, the younger generation of Afghan refugees was very susceptible to Islamic ideologies including the concept of *jihad*. Newly established madrassas in refugee camps became the site of radicalization and religious indoctrination through which many refugees assumed the identity of refugee warriors (*mohajir-mujahed*). Students and *mullahs* from Punjab, Kashmir, as well as Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian countries, came to these madrassas to teach and learn about Islamist ideologies. Many students of these radicalized madrassas were later recruited to join the Mujahedin and Taliban.⁵²

UNHCR and other relief organizations struggled with these complementary and overlapping identities of Afghan refugees. The refugee definition according to *Pashtunwali* is incompatible with fair and equal distribution of aid as it implies ties of dependence. Also, it was difficult for UNHCR to clearly identify fighters from expatriate victims due to the conflation of the *mohajir/mujahed* identity.⁵³ Zia, on the other hand, exploited the conflated identities of *mohajirin* and *mujahedin* to support militant groups fighting Soviet forces in Afghanistan. Under Zia, Islamist factions received financial and military assistance through the government's Afghan Desk, religious parties, and the international community. The groups leading the anti-Soviet insurgency were thus able to increasingly militarize and control Afghan Refugee villages and camps located in Pakistan's North Western Frontier Province (NWFP), Balochistan, and Federal Administrated Tribal Area (FATA).⁵⁴

As the young generation of Mujahedin and mullahs expanded their leadership from madrassas to become increasingly influential in local communities, they started to

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Centlivres & Centlivres-Dumont, "The Afghan Refugee in Pakistan," 143-145.

⁵⁴ International Crisis Group, "Afghanistan: What Now for Refugees?" 4.

clash with the more conservative tribal authorities and local administrations. The newly emerging leaders were heavily armed, controlled aid flows and were perceived to disrespect the tribal code and local traditions.⁵⁵ As a result, the formerly respectful and supportive relations between host communities and refugees became increasingly charged.

From 1988 to 1992, the Soviet-backed Najibullah government defended its rule against the Mujahedin and local militia. After the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 and Russia stopped its financial assistance to the state, the Mujahedin gained control of Kabul in April 1992. With the overthrow of the Najibullah government Afghanistan finally saw its first large scale return of refugees after the Soviet invasion. However, inter-factional fighting between different groups seeking power over the country led to a renewed civil war and left Kabul destroyed.⁵⁶ Each faction had its own ethnic base and systematically targeted civilians of other ethnicities as revenge or extortion.⁵⁷ The fighting – in many ways even bloodier than the Soviet war – caused a new exodus of refugees and IDPs.⁵⁸ One horrific example is the February 11, 1993 massacre of Hazara civilians in the Afshar neighborhood of Kabul, in which Sayyaf's Ittihad-i-Islami troops are reportedly responsible for mass executions, disappearances, and rape.⁵⁹

The radical Taliban movement, backed by the Bhutto government and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI),⁶⁰ took advantage of the infighting, recruited large parts

⁵⁵ So, "The Rise of New Madrasas," 23-24.

⁵⁶ Ruttig, Thomas. *Dossier innerstaatliche Konflikte: Afghanistan*. March 18, 2014.

⁵⁷ Gossman, Patricia. "Truth, Justice and Stability in Afghanistan." In *Transitional Justice in the Twenty-First Century: Beyond Truth versus Justice*, 255-277. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 258.

⁵⁸ Kronenfeld, "Afghan Refugees in Pakistan," 47.

⁵⁹ Gutman, Roy. *How We Missed the Story: Osama bin Laden, the Taliban, and the Hijacking of Afghanistan*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 2008, 222.

⁶⁰ Abbas, Hassan. *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army, and America's War on Terror*. New York: Routledge, 2005, 145-155; Jones, Seth G. *In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009, 240.

of the population, and gradually took over Kabul. By 1996, the Taliban controlled the rest of Afghanistan. The rise of the Taliban had a corroding impact on Afghan society. The regime curtailed women's freedoms in all aspects of their lives. Most prominently, the Taliban deprived women of access to education, health care, clean water, and sanitation. As a result, Afghan girls and women were facing not only significant physical but also mental health problems.⁶¹

The Taliban also gravely discriminated against ethnic minorities to the point of using them as human minesweepers on battlefields north of Kabul. By September 1998, the Taliban were engaging in open ethnic cleansing of Hazara Shia. Compared to the refugee movements during the Soviet invasion, it was mostly members of ethnic minorities and the educated, urban middle-class who fled the Taliban insurgency. The situation in Afghanistan was further exacerbated by drought and economic decline. At the same time, former refugees became an important part of the Taliban movement: "Although the predominantly Pashtun group counted among its ranks a number of Mujahedin commanders from the anti-Soviet jihad, the foot soldiers of the Taliban were mainly young men brought up in exile in Pakistan's refugee camps and educated in madrasas."⁶²

The Taliban regime also embarked on a unique Islamization campaign by forcing the population to adhere to the social norms of Southern Pashtun tribal areas.⁶³ The regime's Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice enforced these social norms. Violators were tried based on *sharia* law and often had to face traditional

⁶¹ Iacopino, Vincent. *The Taliban's War on Women: A Health and Human Rights Crisis in Afghanistan*. Boston: Physicians for Human Rights, 1998, 49-50.

⁶² International Crisis Group, "Afghanistan: What Now for Refugees?" 4.

⁶³ Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War*, 120.

hudud punishments, which include stoning, amputations, live burials, and flogging.⁶⁴ Overall, the human rights abuses and crimes committed by the Taliban regime further exacerbated already deeply entrenched ethnic, religious, and political divisions in Afghan society.

As large numbers of Afghans, mainly Kabulis, sought exile in Iran and Pakistan, the two host countries became increasingly impatient with the situation. Both governments sent clear signals that Afghans had overstayed their welcome. In Pakistan, the government reduced assistance to refugee camps and Iran treated new arrivals as illegal aliens with limited rights.⁶⁵ By then, Iran and Pakistan exhibited “acute asylum fatigue.” Teheran refused to register new arrivals and by 1998 started detaining and deporting Afghans. Having backed the Taliban financially and militarily, Islamabad deemed continued exile unjustified. In both countries, public opinion of Afghan refugees declined and Afghans were often accused of contributing to unemployment and criminality.⁶⁶

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 produced the forth wave of Afghan displacement. Anticipating a U.S. led military retaliation against the Taliban regime for harboring Osama Bin Laden, large numbers of Afghans attempted to flee especially from the main cities. By the end of 2001, 25% of Kabul’s population, 50% of Kandahar, and 65% of Jalalabad had left the cities.⁶⁷ However, by then the two host countries had already restricted their acceptance policies. As a result, those who were not able to cross the border

⁶⁴ Ibid., 123.

⁶⁵ International Crisis Group, "Afghanistan: What Now for Refugees?" 4.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 4-5.

⁶⁷ Auswärtiges Amt. "Bericht der Bundesregierung über die deutsche humanitäre Hilfe im Ausland 2002 bis 2005" 2006, 55.

became part of Afghanistan's 1.2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs).⁶⁸ Once the Northern Alliance, U.S. and allied forces advanced and the interim government took control of Kabul, UNHCR initiated measures to support the return of refugees and IDPs.⁶⁹

3.2. RECONSTRUCTION AND HUMAN SECURITY POST-2001

By 2001, the legacies of incompetent Soviet governance followed by Taliban rule had rendered Afghanistan a failed state par excellence. The Afghan government had grinded to a halt with a budget of less than 1% of its GDP and the economy had collapsed, making Afghanistan one of the poorest countries in the world. Years of civil war and the U.S. invasion devastated Afghanistan's infrastructure, undermined its rule of law and created an almost anarchical security environment. In March 2002, a UN report listed eight areas of reconstruction highlighting the range of Afghanistan's human security needs:

- 1) Improvement of security to expand humanitarian access
- 2) Food and nutrition aid, especially in drought-affected, inaccessible, and rural areas
- 3) Provision of health services, in particular immunization campaigns
- 4) Clearance of landmines and unexploded ordnance
- 5) Rebuilding physical infrastructure
- 6) Assistance to returning refugees and IDPs
- 7) Emergency relief for natural disasters, particularly earthquakes and landslides
- 8) Curbing poppy cultivation⁷⁰

However, actual reconstruction plans were not based on realistic needs-assessments, but were instead supply- and interest-driven. While Afghanistan had been unstable for decades, the U.S. and its allies only became actively involved "when insta-

⁶⁸ UNDP. "Afghanistan National Human Development Report 2004." 2004, 117; Qadeem, Mossarat. "Afghanistan: The Long Way Home." In *Internal Displacement in South Asia: The Relevance of the UN's Guiding Principles*, edited by Paula Bannerjee et al. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005, 39.

⁶⁹ Auswärtiges Amt. "Bericht der Bundesregierung," 55.

⁷⁰ UN Security Council. "The Situation in Afghanistan and its Implications for International Peace and Security." March 18, 2002.

bility in Afghanistan began to bleed into insecurities for the Western world.”⁷¹ This narrow definition of insecurity, which focuses on threats posed by terrorists and the Taliban, guided the international response. Dismantling terrorist networks, removing the Taliban, and installing a new government became the priorities of the intervention, while most other security and development challenges remained secondary. Table 2 illustrates that from 2001-2006, reconstruction efforts did not create the levels of human security necessary for dignified and sustainable refugee returns.

⁷¹ UNDP, "Afghanistan National Human Development Report 2004," 8.

Table 2: Human security in Afghanistan (2001-2006)

Component	Indicator	Qualitative assessment and Afghan's self-perception based on Asia Foundation's Survey of the Afghan People (2006)
Economic security	<p>Unemployment rate (2004) Estimated 25%</p> <p>Population below poverty line (2003) 53%</p> <p>Opium economy (2004) 38.2% of official GDP</p>	<p>After 2001, economic indicators, such as GDP and growth rate significantly improved. Overall, 50% reported their economic fortune was better than under Soviet occupation. However, there are regional disparities in people's perception of economic fortune: More people in urban settings and Northern regions (63%) than in rural areas and Eastern & South Western regions (32-36%) reported being more prosperous.</p> <p>Despite the economic growth and increased prosperity, unemployment and widespread poverty persisted. Across all ethnicities and regions, respondents stated employment as their most important issue. Another source of economic insecurity is the prevalence of Afghanistan's opium economy. Those respondents in favor of poppy cultivation (20%) stated that it is more profitable than other crops, labor rates are higher, and poppy crops need less water.</p>
Food security	<p>Depth of food deficit (kcal/capita/day 2004) 292 kcal</p> <p>Cereal import dependency ratio (2004) 20.8%</p> <p>% of children under 5 with malnutrition (2004) 10% acute, 50% chronic</p> <p>% of stunted, wasted & underweight children under 5 (2004) 59.3% stunted 8.6% wasted 32.9% underweight</p>	<p>One of Afghanistan's major sources of insecurity is insufficient availability, access, stability and utilization of food. The country shows relatively high values in all common indicators of food insecurity. 2003 brought some agricultural improvements with good rain and high harvest, but in 2004 continuous drought, the destruction of irrigation facilities and the spread of plant diseases resulted in low yields. The resulting long-term food insecurity has had a detrimental impact on people's health. Especially in children under 5, under- or malnourishment can have devastating effects on their cognitive and physical development.</p>

Table 2 (continued)

Health security	Maternal mortality rate (2004)	1,600/100,000 live births	Health insecurity of the Afghan people has been a direct function of environmental and food insecurity, most importantly the lack of safe water and stable food supplies. In addition, the emerging Afghan state did not rebuild a functioning health care system. In 2004, a large percentage of Afghanistan's poor and rural population had limited to no access to basic health care. The high infant and maternal mortality rates are a result of a lack of female health professionals as well as limited access to reproductive care. However, positive achievements towards health security can be seen in successful immunization campaigns. For instance, by 2002 measles immunization coverage reached 80%.
Infant mortality rate (2004)	165 deaths/1,000 live births		
Disease burden (number of new cases in 2004)	Tuberculosis: 72,000 Malaria: 2-3 mil.		
% of rural population in coverage area of basic health facilities (2002-03)	Badghis: 33% Herat: 60% Kabul: 87% Kandahar: 63% Nangarhar: 43%		
Environmental security	% of population with access to safe water (2004)	23% (18% rural, 43% urban)	Lack of access to adequate water and sanitation has produced a range of insecurities for Afghans. For instance, in Afghanistan there is a high correlation between the percentage of the population without sanitation and the child mortality rate. Lack of water supply for irrigation also reduces agricultural output and therefore food security. Across all ethnicities and regions, respondents stated access to safe drinking water as their second most important issue. Further sources of environmental insecurity were air pollution, deforestation, unstable energy supply, and insufficient disaster preparedness. In several provinces, forest coverage has been reduced by up to a half since 1977, increasing the likelihood of landslides after earthquakes.
% of population with access to adequate sanitation (2004)	12% (28% rural, 6% urban)		
Personal security	Number of insurgency and terrorist attacks	2001: 13; 2002: 38 2003: 154; 2004: 88; 2005: 155	Afghans have been facing a variety of personal security threats including military and terrorist attacks, landmines, torture, extortion, and kidnapping. While respondents did not list personal insecurity as their most

Table 2 (continued)

	<p>Number of civilian deaths (low and high estimates)</p> <p>% of rural Afghans living among landmines and unexploded ordnance (2003)</p> <p>Number of landmine victims (2003)</p>	<p>2001: 1,181-3,126 2002: 78-114 2003: 43-49 2004: 21-41 2005: 24</p> <p>Badghis: 13% Herat: 17% Kabul: 62% Kandahar: 7% Nangarhar: 24%</p> <p>676 injured 184 killed</p>	<p>important issue, they identified security as the biggest problem facing Afghanistan as a whole. There were some regional and ethnic disparities in the perception of personal security: Respondents from southern and eastern provinces felt more insecure than those from northern and north-western provinces. More Pashtuns (75%) than other ethnicities reported fear for personal or family safety. This may be due to the fact that the majority of fighting happened in the Pashtun belt. Even though military activity by coalition forces and between rival local power holders continued, the number of estimated civilian deaths rapidly decreased after 2002. At the same time, the number of insurgency and terrorist attacks rose from 13 in 2001 to 155 in 2005. People may not have been directly affected by these military and terrorist attacks. However, their unpredictability and resulting constant fear are equally traumatizing sources of personal insecurity.</p>
<p>Community security</p>	<p>Ethnic violence, particularly directed against Pashtuns in areas of northern Afghanistan dominated by Uzbeks and Tajiks, has led to large-scale internal displacement. Connected to ethnic tensions are disputes over land-rights between nomads and IDPs and local authorities. A positive development is that 90% of respondents agreed that everyone should have equal rights under the law regardless of gender, ethnicity, and religion. However, more urban respondents (96%) than rural respondents (89%) agreed to equal rights.</p>		
<p>Political security</p>	<p>Freedom in the World score (2004) (1=best, 7=worst)</p> <p>Freedom of the Press rank (2004)</p>	<p>Not Free Freedom: 6 Civil Liberties: 6 Political Rights: 6</p> <p>Not Free Rank 159 of 193</p>	<p>Despite of the process of democratization, Afghanistan was still one of the least free countries in the world. While people's responses reflected the low Freedom House indicators, they also showed significant regional variations in freedom of political expression. In the southwestern region, only 25% felt free to express political opinions, while 63% felt free in the Central-Kabul region. Men enjoyed more political freedom than women. People did not feel free to express political opinions due to bad security conditions and the presence of warlords and the Taliban.</p>

Sources: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Asia Foundation, World Bank Group, United Nations Development Programme, Global Terrorism Database, *The Nation's* interactive database of civilian casualties in Afghanistan, Freedom House

In order to effectively address Afghanistan's human security needs, international actors would have had to use the period immediately following the U.S. invasion – also termed the “golden hour” – to make extensive investments in the eight reconstruction areas. According to Jones and Rubin, these investments would have had to be on a “Marshall Plan” level, be long-term oriented and focus on building the capacity of the Afghan state and civil society.⁷² However, at the Bonn Conference in December 2001, which initiated the process of Afghanistan's political reconstruction, the UN and the Bush administration instead promised a “light footprint.”⁷³ The goal of this light footprint was to prevent problems of aid dependency, brain drain, and other adverse pressures due to an influx of Western aid workers. Yet, the local population, government officials, as well as aid workers have all shared their frustrations with the insufficient level of foreign aid provided for the reconstruction of Afghanistan.⁷⁴

To boost the Afghan economy, the Western donor states embarked on a large-scale effort of heavily investing in Afghanistan's financial institutions and introducing a new currency. These investments were relatively successful and even led to an economic boom in the country.⁷⁵ To some extent, the aid community also showed progress in their reconstruction efforts.⁷⁶ Even so, growth and improvements in human development were neither sustainable nor did they affect all areas of Afghanistan equally. For instance,

⁷² Jones, Seth G. *In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009, 116-117; Rubin, Barnett R. "Saving Afghanistan." *Foreign Affairs* 86, no. 1 (2007), 65.

⁷³ UNDP, "Afghanistan National Human Development Report 2004," 211.

⁷⁴ Turton & Marsden, *Taking Refugees for a Ride?*, 30.

⁷⁵ According to the Central Statistics Organization (CSO) of the Afghan government, the non-drug GDP rose from US\$2.7 billion in 2000 to US\$4 billion in 2003. The growth rate was estimated at 25-30% in 2002 and 15-20% in 2003.

⁷⁶ For instance, by 2002 measles immunization coverage reached 80% and the “Back to School” campaign returned three million children and 70,000 to school. (UNDP, "Afghanistan National Human Development Report 2004," 39.)

while Herat was prospering, the area surrounding the city remained stagnating with little employment opportunities and no investments in local industries.⁷⁷ This example shows that large amounts of aid and foreign investment do not equal human development, just as economic growth does not necessarily reach all parts of society.

Overall, three factors significantly undermined the reconstruction of Afghanistan: 1) the urgency of short-term relief due to the ongoing complex emergency, 2) insufficient focus on capacity-building of the Afghan state and civil society, and 3) insufficient attention to rebuilding the Afghan security forces. All three factors contributed to the unsustainability of Afghan growth and development as well as persistent security issues. The Afghan government's inability to stabilize the security environment as well as widespread public frustrations with the insufficient progress in rebuilding the country ultimately enabled the Taliban insurgency to regain its strength in 2005.

From 2001 to 2005, frequent natural disasters, including droughts, floods, and earthquakes, and lasting conflict continued to cause substantial humanitarian needs throughout the country.⁷⁸ As reconstruction aid had to be diverted to acute relief, it was lacking in long-term development. This relief-development gap affected a wide range of crucial human security and development areas, such as replacing poppy cultivation with sustainable agriculture, strengthening government institutions, fostering human capital, investing in disaster risk management, and supporting the integration of returning refugees and displaced persons.

⁷⁷ Monsutti, Alessandro. "Afghan Transnational Networks: Looking Beyond Repatriation." *Synthesis Paper Series*, August 2006, 26.

⁷⁸ USAID. "Afghanistan - Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #2." March 30, 2012.

The Bush administration's "light footprint" approach did not only result in limited development aid, it also included what Rashid calls America's "warlord strategy."⁷⁹ According to the author, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Department of Defense (DOD) used U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) programs to patronage warlords by contracting out infrastructure projects worth millions of dollars. Warlords used these cash injections to further mobilize their militia.⁸⁰ While warlords are part of Afghanistan's complex and traditional forms of hierarchy, authority, and patronage, using aid to reinforcing existing power divisions violates the humanitarian principle of neutrality.⁸¹ By coopting USAID programs, the CIA and DOD militarized aid and blurred the lines between legitimate humanitarian action and a military campaign. This militarization of aid and proliferation of a warlord state had grave implications for the reconstruction efforts as militia commanders increased corruption, violated human rights, and spread insecurity.⁸² It also undermined all efforts of the Karzai government to empower civil society and tribal leaders to rebuild their communities.

For many years, Afghanistan has been reliant on relief and development agencies for vital services, such as providing food and health care. While aid agencies have always been facing logistical and financial difficulties in Afghanistan, under the Taliban regime and during the U.S. invasion aid workers were also confronted with problems of limited humanitarian access. After 9/11, over 100 international agencies working in critical reconstruction areas decided to evacuate their foreign staff.⁸³ Their security concerns

⁷⁹ Rashid, Ahmed. *Descent into Chaos. The U.S. and the Disaster in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia*. New York: Penguin Books, 2009, 133.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁸¹ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "OCHA on Message: What are Humanitarian Principles." June 2012.

⁸² Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 130.

⁸³ Sharp et al., "Challenges and Opportunities for Humanitarian Relief in Afghanistan," 220.

ranged from hijacked ambulances, ransacked food warehouses, to the threat of coalition attacks.⁸⁴ For instance, after continued threats, insecurity and the killing of five staff members, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) withdrew from Afghanistan in 2004 with the following statement:

*MSF denounces the coalition's attempts to co-opt humanitarian aid and use it to win hearts and minds. By doing so, providing aid is no longer seen as an impartial and neutral act, endangering the lives of humanitarian volunteers and jeopardizing the aid to people in need.*⁸⁵

Institutional reform was one of the priorities of the Bonn Process, but the progress made in this area was incremental at best. Italy and Germany were designated lead countries in the areas of judicial reform and police reform respectively. However, within the larger reconstruction project both reform efforts trailed far behind. Even five years into the transitional period, the Afghan public had still very little confidence in the judiciary, as judicial corruption seemed widespread. The police force appeared to enjoy impunity as officers frequently resorted to torture and other abusive interrogation methods.⁸⁶

The U.S. and the international community could have mitigated all these limitations. Member states never met the UN's global appeals for funding and even the insufficient funds pledged at the Tokyo conference in 2002 were not paid fully into the Afghanistan Interim Authority Fund. In Turton and Marsden's study,⁸⁷ many Afghan returnees, but also government officials and UN and NGO staff, expressed their disappointment at the level of help being provided for reconstruction in Afghanistan. Moreover, these funds were never earmarked for long-term reconstruction, which made it

⁸⁴ Ibid., 221.

⁸⁵ Médecins Sans Frontières. "MSF Pulls out of Afghanistan." June 28, 2004.

⁸⁶ Gossman, "Truth, Justice and Stability in Afghanistan," 27.

⁸⁷ Turton & Marsden, *Taking Refugees for a Ride?*, 45.

easy to divert the money to acute relief and put development efforts on hold.⁸⁸ Similarly, instead of paying off warlords and perpetuating their rule, the U.S. could have made a long-term investment in rebuilding and empowering the Afghan state, especially its judiciary, security forces, administration and ministries, and its civil society.

3.3. MIXED TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION AS A COPING STRATEGY

In the course of decades of armed conflict, Afghans have become vulnerable to human insecurity on all levels. Most Afghan families have lost loved ones and assets, faced environmental shocks, had to flee violence, and have lived in poverty. However, the Afghan people have demonstrated their resilience through their own agency and coping strategies. They have coped with and survived these crises by adjusting and diversifying their livelihood strategies.

In the past, Afghans have used a variety of coping strategies, including: reducing food consumption, selling assets, moving to urban areas, migrating to neighboring countries, sending family members to work in the Gulf states, Europe or North America, sending and receiving remittances, negotiating with armed forces, diversifying income through subsistence farming or wage labor, and forming strategic family alliances.⁸⁹ Families choose these coping strategies depending on their access to land, markets, infrastructure, and social networks.

A family's initial crisis response focuses on meeting most basic needs, such as food, shelter, clothing, and medicine. Beyond that, Afghan families also pursue "wider indicators of well-being, such as a dignified absence of poverty and social values such as

⁸⁸ Rashid, *Decent into Chaos*, 178.

⁸⁹ UNDP, "Afghanistan National Human Development Report 2004," 113.

freedom, choice and self-esteem.”⁹⁰ Complex emergencies have introduced not only violence but a wide range of vulnerabilities for the Afghan people. Afghans therefore aspire to achieve not only a narrow version of physical security, but also *human* security and development. These aspirations and existing coping skills at the individual, family, and community level can be invaluable assets in Afghanistan’s reconstruction and development efforts.

Migratory Networks

One way Afghans have coped with human insecurity is mixed transnational migration within the region. Transnational migration is not a new phenomenon, but has been part of Afghan traditions for centuries. The long history of migration from and through Afghanistan includes merchants who used the Silk Road between China and the Mediterranean, pilgrims on their way to Indian and Middle Eastern sites of worship, mountain people seeking employment in urban centers, and nomads who annually move their herds and flocks to better grazing land.⁹¹ It is therefore not surprising that many refugees continued to migrate after their initial flight, throughout their time of displacement, and even after their repatriation to Afghanistan.

Over the past decades, Afghan refugees have woven efficient migratory networks based on back and forth movements and the dispersion of members of their kin groups between Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and beyond. In the context of refugee situations, the notion of migratory networks is rooted in the understanding that refugees are not mere victims but agents who respond to human insecurity by using their social and cultural resources. Mixed transnational migration refers to people who can be labeled or identify

⁹⁰ Ibid., 114.

⁹¹ Ewans, Martin. *Afghanistan: A Short History of its People and Politics*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002, 2-3.

themselves as both labor migrants and refugees, and their migratory circuits are often multidirectional.⁹² Monsutti, who has done extensive research on Afghan refugees and transnational migration, defines transnational networks of Afghan refugees as follows:

*Through the continuous circulation of people, money and commodities, as well as information, Afghans who are spread across a range of locations remain linked. These transnational networks, constituted by people interacting and cooperating with each other across international frontiers, can make a crucial contribution to the reconstruction of Afghanistan.*⁹³

Afghans have maintained their transnational networks through remittance systems (*hawala*), which facilitate the transfer of money and goods between family members living in different parts of the world. Beyond material and financial objects, transnational networks also circulate workers and women as brides. Many households in Afghanistan rely on remittances, which makes sending family members abroad one of their most important livelihood strategies. While Afghanistan does not report remittances to the International Monetary Fund, it is estimated that over 31% of all Afghan households receive remittances from Iran or Pakistan and total remittances from abroad accounted for 29.6% of Afghanistan's GDP in 2006.⁹⁴

To send remittances, Muslims across the world use formal and informal *hawala* dealers who transfer money through a "trust-based network of agents."⁹⁵ *Hawala* systems are not only cheaper than other forms of international money transfer, but they are also a long-cultivated Afghan tradition. In recent years, these traditional networks have become even stronger with the emergence of mobile technology that enables remittance senders and receivers to stay in contact with *hawala* agents and track transfers.

⁹² Monsutti, "Afghan Migratory Strategies," 65.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁹⁴ Siegel, Melissa. *Understanding Afghan Migration*. February 13, 2013.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

After 9/11 the transnational *hawala* system has become one of the main objects of suspicion regarding terrorism financing. Muslims living in the West have been using informal *hawala* dealers to channel not only personal funds but also charitable contributions to their native countries, where donations are often needed the most.⁹⁶ With increased anti-terrorism restrictions for the non-profit sector, U.S. and international regulators have charged several Islamic charities of using Islamic banking systems to launder terrorist money.⁹⁷ In the current regulatory environment, mobile Muslims are therefore quickly suspected of using traditional remittance systems for terrorism financing.

Remittance systems – while certainly beneficial for the receiving household – can present a significant burden on migrant workers. Migrants who were sent to live in urban areas in Pakistan, Iran or the Gulf states often live in dire economic situations themselves. As these workers also have to maintain their own families, many find it difficult to meet the high financial expectations of other relatives living in Afghanistan. Often, remittances are not high enough to be used as long-term investments, but instead only suffice to defray the costs of a household's most basic needs, such as food and clothes.⁹⁸ As a result, it would be too optimistic to expect remittances to significantly contribute to Afghanistan's long-term economic development. Monsutti speaks of short-term benefits that reconfirm a "self-perpetuating cycle without cumulative effects."⁹⁹ However, it is important to keep in mind that without remittances many Afghan families would be forced to live in hunger and extreme poverty.

⁹⁶ Crimm, Nina J. "The Moral Hazard of Anti-Terrorism Financing Measures: A Potential to Compromise Civil Societies and National Interests." *Wake Forest Law Review* 43 (2008), 585.

⁹⁷ Jenkins, Garry W. "Soft Power, Strategic Security and International Philanthropy." *North Carolina Law Review* 85 (2006/2007), 815.

⁹⁸ Monsutti, "Afghan Transnational Networks," 30-32.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Through transnational networks, neighboring cities on each side of the Afghan border to Pakistan and Iran have developed close economic and cultural ties. For instance, the two cities Kandahar and Quetta are connected through regular and irregular trade, much of which consists of back-and-forth transactions of small items, such as watches, cooking oil, and blankets. The Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) reports that many traders and smugglers use their regular trips across the border to maintain personal ties by visiting relatives in both countries.¹⁰⁰

Networks based on kinship, tribe and religion do not only facilitate migration and produce economic opportunities, but can also provide physical security for migrants. In the case of Hazara refugees and migrants in Quetta, in the mid-1980s many Shia Hazaras have experienced violence due to tensions with Sunni Pashtun groups. While the tensions between the two groups never completely faded, Afghan Hazaras were able to settle in Hazara Town and Marriabad, where they sought the protection of local Hazaras.¹⁰¹

Interdisciplinary scholarship on transnationalism provides useful frameworks and approaches to further conceptualize the migratory networks of Afghan refugees. Economists and sociologists have approached transnational migration by focusing on questions of incorporation, the impact on the labor market, push and pull factors, and demographic changes.¹⁰² In response to these largely economic arguments, anthropologists and area scholars have expanded the field of transnationalism by exploring migrant narratives, the construction of transnational communities and identities, and the blurring of national and state boundaries.

¹⁰⁰ AREU. "Afghans in Karachi: Migration, Settlement and Social Networks" March 2005, 17.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 11-12.

¹⁰² For a review of theories of international migration see Douglas S. Massey et al. "Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal." In *The Migration Reader: Exploring Politics and Policies*, edited by Anthony M. Messina and Gallya Lahav. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006.

Instead of characterizing Afghans in Pakistan and Iran as “uprooted,” a more fitting description would be “transmigrants [...] whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state.”¹⁰³ Transnational networks therefore suggest that Afghan communities have not exactly formed “diaspora identities,” which would rely on a single motherland as main point of reference. Instead, we can observe the development of “pluri-local” transnational identities through which Afghans produce cultural meaning in relation to multiple socio-spatial points of reference.¹⁰⁴

Refugees’ transnational identities not only affect their crisis response, but also their integration in the host community as well as their reintegration in Afghanistan after return. Especially for second-generation refugees, the notion of “home” is highly ambivalent. Home and homeland have to be understood as more than an “essentialized point on the map,”¹⁰⁵ but rather a place where people feel safe, to which they have not only a connection on paper, but also emotional ties. A 22-year old female home-based teacher who grew up in Teheran but repatriated to Afghanistan describes her complex ties to Iran and Afghanistan as follows:

*It's true that now I'm relaxed and free [in Herat]. Still, I don't forget Iran and want to visit Iran every year. Because my past life and memories are in Iran. [...] I like Afghanistan very much as well. But there is no memory in Afghanistan, because I grew up in Iran. [...] I feel that I'm an Afghan but in real, I feel sometimes that I'm a hybrid.*¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Schiller, Nina Glick, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton Blanc. "From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration." *Anthropological Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (1995), 48.

¹⁰⁴ Pries, Ludger. "Ambiguities of Global and Transnational Collective Identities." *Global Networks* 13, no. 1 (2013), 31.

¹⁰⁵ Malkki, Liisa. "Refugees and Exile: From "Refugee Studies" to the National Order of Things." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995), 509.

¹⁰⁶ Saito, Mamiko. "Searching For My Homeland: Dilemmas Between Borders. Experiences of Young Afghans Returning "Home" from Pakistan and Iran." *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit Synthesis Paper Series*, July 2009, 46.

Motivations and Causes

When refugees use their transnational networks in the face of human insecurity, motivations and causes for migration often overlap. A family may leave Afghanistan to seek protection from persecution and violence, but will choose a particular destination in Pakistan so that working members of the family can seek employment. In this case, the nature of the refugee family's social network may influence the decision to move to Peshawar instead of Islamabad. In this sense, "decisions and considerations of refugees may not be very dissimilar to those of other (migrant) groups in society."¹⁰⁷ Reducing refugees' considerations to traumatic experiences alone oversimplifies the complex realities of their decision-making process.

Mobility may also become more relevant over time as refugees' needs and priorities shift from immediate survival to education, employment, health care, and cultural interests. Refugees may choose to migrate to another city or state in order to access different livelihood strategies and meet these new priorities. These shifts have been especially pronounced when refugees decide to or are forced to leave a UNHCR camp to settle in urban areas.

In interviews conducted by the AREU, Afghan refugees have mentioned various reasons for engaging in transnational migration between Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran ranging from cross-border trade, visiting relatives, seasonal labor, to attempted repatriation. Many refugees use migration as a way of spreading risks within one or between several households. Similar to transnational migration, risk-spreading strategies have long been a coping mechanism in Afghan families. In agrarian societies, households rely on large families with strong kinship bonds to diversify income and prepare for external

¹⁰⁷ Essed, Frerks & Schrijvers, "Introduction: Refugees, Agency and Social Transformation," 15.

shocks, such as the illness of an income-generating family member or crop losses due to droughts.¹⁰⁸

Afghan families pursue similar risk-spreading strategies through mobility. Within one social network, elder and younger members may stay in refugee camps to access social services, while others return to Afghanistan to look after the family's land and assets. A family may send its most mobile members to move further abroad to send remittances, while others will engage in circular migration patterns between Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan to pursue seasonal labor.¹⁰⁹ Mixed transnational migration is therefore part of a larger system of risk-spreading.

Power Relationships and Mobility

Power relationships between members of refugee communities and within refugee households have an effect on their levels and control of mobility. Scholars have conceptualized the distinct relationship between power and mobility highlighting that even for highly transnational communities mobility is not limitless.¹¹⁰ Especially in patriarchal societies, male family members' privilege of mobility may further entrench the immobility of female members. Similarly, older family members may only be able to exercise the decision to stay in Afghanistan by compelling younger members to become migrant workers and send remittances. While power relationships may render a person more or less mobile, they may enable other expressions of individual agency. McNay reminds us

¹⁰⁸ UNDP, "Afghanistan National Human Development Report 2004," 53.

¹⁰⁹ Strurridge, Caitlin. "Mobility and Durable Solutions: A Case Study of Afghan and Somali Refugees." *New Issues in Refugee Research*, March 2011, 9.

¹¹⁰ See Massey, Doreen. "Power Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place." In *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*, edited by J. Bird et al., New York: Routledge, 1993; Hyndman, Jennifer. *Managing Displacement: Refugees and the Politics of Humanitarianism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

that to arrive at a nuanced understanding power and female agency, scholars need to take into account women's creative and productive strengths:

*With regard to gender, a more rounded conception of agency is crucial to explaining both how women have acted autonomously in the past despite constricting social sanctions and also how they may act now in the context of processes of gender restructuring.*¹¹¹

In the Afghan context, gender plays an important role in determining a person's mobility. Only those who have access to migration, which for the most part means young men, can actively use it as a livelihood strategy. However, less mobile family members can benefit from the mobility of others through remittance systems. Also, while women are relatively less mobile, the mobility of male members of a household can open up other forms of female agency that do not involve mobility. In the absence of men, Afghan women have assumed more domestic responsibilities and taken individual action by starting to work, completing errands, and making important family decisions. Especially in Iran, Afghan women have bent gendered hierarchies in their families to reflect the more modernized role of women in Iranian society.¹¹²

Mobile responses may also be less relevant for young children, the elderly, and persons with medical vulnerabilities. Based on families' risk-spreading strategies, mobility is less relevant for an only child or son who is unlikely to be allowed to migrate. In the Afghan context, access to mobility is often determined within the realms of family hierarchies. In these cases, mobility indicates not only agency of the migrant but also of other family members who influenced the decision. The following is a description of the hierarchical kinship relations within a mobile work team in Teheran:

¹¹¹ McNay, Lois. *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000, 5.

¹¹² Strurridge, "Mobility and Durable Solutions," 5-6.

Yusuf, 40, is the foreman and has extensive experience migrating to Iran (he has been involved in the hawala business and in people smuggling in the past); Karim, 20, Yusuf's late brother's son; Hanif, 24, from another lineage but from the same hamlet as Yusuf; Mohammad Jan, 21, Hanif's rother, married to a partenal cousin of Yusuf; Husain Ali, 19 unmarried, from the same lineage of Hanif and Mohammad Jan (their fathers are distant paternal cousins); Habibullah, 19, unmarried, from the same lineage as Yusuf, but originating form another hamlet; Abdullah, 18, unmarried, family originates from the same district as Yusuf (but he was born in Pakistan and had never been to Afghanistan).¹¹³

In this vignette, there is a clear hierarchy between the supervisor, who is not only older but more experienced, and all other members of the work team. While experience and age difference structure the division of labour in this group, the members are brought together through different direct and indirect relations with each other. The fact that one team member has no kinship ties to the rest of the group shows that social networks are fluid and diverse in that they can be based on “different sources of solidarity.”¹¹⁴

Finally, refugees' socioeconomic status and social capital determine whether migration is a possible livelihood strategy. Refugees with the necessary social capital have access to information, logistical support, language skills, and personal connections that make migration a viable livelihood strategy. Since Pakistan and Iran have increasingly restricted cross-border movements, migration has become more expensive. To cross the border in both directions, Afghan refugees need the financial resources to cover a wide range of expenses, such as transport, bribes, smugglers, and identification papers.¹¹⁵ Before migration helps refugees improve their livelihoods, they have to be able to take risks and make significant investments.

¹¹³ Monsutti, "Afghan Transnational Networks," 15

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Strurridge, "Mobility and Durable Solutions," 4-5.

Experiences and Challenges of Migration

Numerous obstacles stand in the way of Afghans intending to go to Iran or Pakistan:¹¹⁶ The governments frequently close official border crossing for long periods of time. Also, for the majority of migrants from rural areas it is almost impossible to obtain the necessary documentation to legally cross the border. Applicants for passports have to travel to major cities and show proof of citizenship, financial support and no criminal record. After decades of war and especially in rural areas, many people have either lost or never received any formal records.

Yet, Afghan refugees have still been able to pursue migratory strategies because the borders between Afghanistan and the two host states are relatively porous. That is because border officials on both sides have never been able to successfully control cross-border traffic.¹¹⁷ Additionally, particularly in Pakistan many Afghans live close to their home provinces in Afghanistan, making informal migration seem more feasible. As a result, many Afghans resort to crossing borders illegally, without formal documentation.

For the majority, this means relying on smuggling networks, particularly to cross the Iranian border. Traveling across the Iranian border is highly risky because of bandits and Iranian police officers, who can arrest and deport undocumented migrants. Smugglers sometimes act as a source of credit for migrants. In these cases, upon arrival migrants are immediately recruited as forced labor to repay their debt. Irregular migrants therefore risk losing their freedom because they can be taken “hostage” by large-scale traffickers. The following narrative of a border-crossing from Afghanistan to Iran in the 1990s illustrates the distressing experience of being smuggled across the border:

¹¹⁶ Monsutti, "Afghan Transnational Networks," 29-30.

¹¹⁷ Kronenfeld, "Afghan Refugees in Pakistan," 54.

The smugglers brought a couple of Toyotas. It was 6am; each Toyota was crammed with 20-25 people. The roads were bad. [...] There are always thieves in those mountains, because the Baluch themselves know that a certain number of people will be passing through that day. [...] There were three or four smugglers in all, surrounding the migrants on all sides, on all four sides, and ahead were the Baluch guides. [...] If the migrants made some noise, they beat them mercilessly, beat them with sticks. So, it was very dangerous.

When we left the mountain we ran a lot. At night, when it was really dark, we slept before starting the journey again. [...] A couple of Toyotas arrived; there were a hundred and fifty of us. Fifty people left, in those two Toyotas; they set off for Zahedan... It was seven in the evening when the first migrants were taken...the rest of us waited and we stayed there until one in the morning. It was cold, there was no water, and we were very hungry. Sometimes people stayed a whole day in the undergrowth, and some died of hunger and thirst.¹¹⁸

However, these stories about the experiences of deportation and trafficking do not seem to deter others from crossing the border. Even those intercepted and arrested often try to cross again. Regardless of the dangers and negative experiences, migrants continue to pursue transnational migration for different reasons: in response to human insecurity, to meet high financial expectations of relatives or because they may have taken on additional debt to enable the first trip.¹¹⁹

In addition to personal insecurity, irregular migration can also endanger refugees' legal status. That is because mobile refugees occupy a legal limbo as authorities can consider them undocumented migrants. However, as both Pakistan and Iran never accepted Afghan refugees under the 1951 Convention, their legal status never fully existed. As a result, compared to other protracted refugee situations, migration is a relatively more viable coping strategy for Afghan refugees.

¹¹⁸ Monsutti, "Afghan Transnational Networks," 29.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

The preceding analysis of Afghan refugees' migratory strategies reveals that mobility enables Afghans to respond to human insecurity in both familiar and new ways. Transnational migration between the three countries not only expanded refugees' livelihood options, but also helped them forge transnational identities that reflect their unique relationship with both their "home" and their "host" states. At the same time, we have to acknowledge that different factors challenge and undermine these constructive aspects of mobility: 1) Not every refugee has access to migratory strategies. 2) Irregular migration often means giving up agency and risking personal security. 3) Expectations to send remittances can put significant economic and emotional pressures on migrant workers.

4. Repatriation, Reconstruction, and Refugee Agency

This chapter analyzes UNHCR's facilitated voluntary repatriation program for Afghan refugees between 2002 and 2005. The program was severely limited both in conceptual and practical terms – UN officials and policymakers did not take into account how the fragility of the Afghan state, the lack of human security, and the prevalence of mixed transnational migration would affect the repatriation program. UNHCR has played a vague role in improving certain elements of human security to support reintegration. At the same time, refugees have used migratory strategies to respond to human insecurity in Afghanistan, which resulted in significant refugee backflows.

4.1. FACILITATED VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION

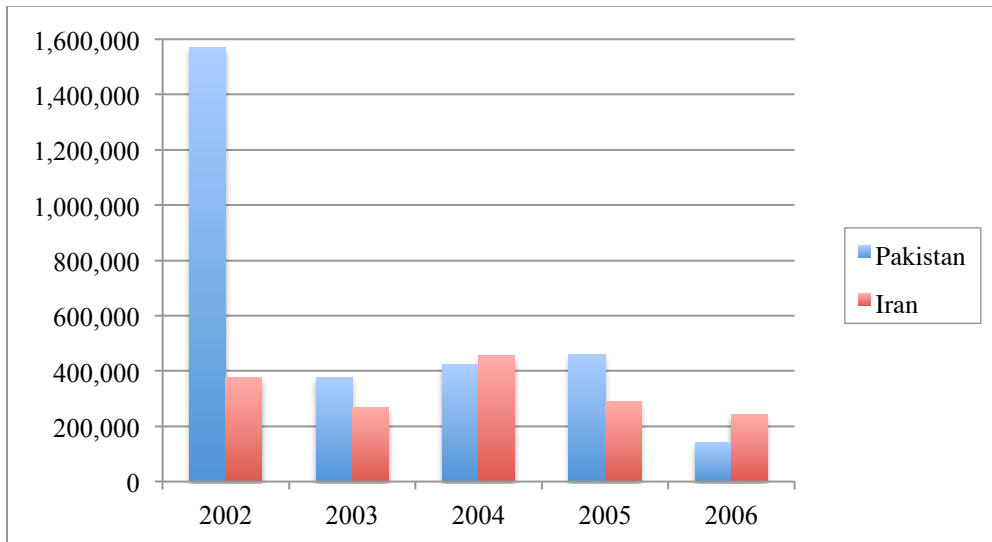
In 2002, UNHCR signed two Tripartite Agreements with Afghanistan and each host state, which emphasize voluntary repatriation as the preferred durable solution. The agency started facilitating repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan on 1 March 2002 and from Iran on 9 April 2002. Beyond the Tripartite Agreements, UNHCR also encouraged non-neighboring states to offer the option of voluntary returns. While UNHCR only anticipated 400,000 returnees within the first year,¹²⁰ in 2002 alone over 1.9 million Afghan refugees took part in the repatriation program. During the first year, most returnees were short-staying refugees who had fled during the Taliban period and the U.S. invasion.¹²¹ After 2002, return numbers decreased significantly, with less than 645,000 returnees from both countries in 2003. However, by then many long-term refugees decided to take part in the repatriation program.¹²²

¹²⁰ UNHCR. *Searching for Solutions: 25 Years of UNHCR-Pakistan Cooperation on Afghan Refugees*. Islamabad: UNHCR, 2005, 23.

¹²¹ Monsutti, "Afghan Transnational Networks," 29.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 24.

Fig. 1: Afghans repatriated by UNHCR from Pakistan and Iran (2002-2006)



Source: UNHCR Population Statistics Reference Database

Three developments illustrate that the agency facilitated voluntary returns to Afghanistan prematurely. First, by July 2002 UNHCR was already struggling to fund its repatriation program with a US\$ 65 million deficit making up almost 30% of the total estimated operation costs. As a result, the agency had to halve the number of shelter kits and reduce financial and material returnee packages.¹²³ Second, UNHCR had to disrupt its return plans several times due to continued violence and insecurity in several areas of Afghanistan.¹²⁴ Third, the fact that UNHCR considerably underestimated how many Afghans would want to repatriate indicates that the agency could also not fully consider the sustainability of such large-scale returns.

Given the lack of funding and continued insecurity in Afghanistan, why did UNHCR facilitate repatriation only few months after the U.S. invasion? It is important to recognize that UNHCR makes decisions regarding refugee returns in highly politicized

¹²³ UNHCR. *Afghanistan: Returns High, Funds Low*. July 19, 2002.

¹²⁴ Amnesty International. "Afghanistan: Continuing Need for Protection and Standards for Return of Afghan Refugees." July 2002, 8.

environments, in which different institutional actors seek to realize their political objectives. For the government of Afghanistan, repatriation was a vote of confidence, validated the success of its state-building and reconstruction efforts, and gave the Transitional Administration political leverage. The U.S. and its allies could use large-scale repatriation as an ex-post justification for the military campaign against the Taliban. For the two host governments, successful repatriation meant responding to domestic pressures by reducing the perceived unfair burden Afghan refugees represented.¹²⁵

In addition, UNHCR decided, “the time is now right for Afghans [...] to be offered the option of repatriation” at a time when several non-neighboring states, such as Australia and the United Arab Emirates, were already returning Afghan asylum seekers. On 10 July 2002, UNHCR stated in a note regarding returns to Afghanistan from non-neighboring states that in many of the claims “related to the rule of the Taleban, [...] international protection is no longer an issue.”¹²⁶ In the case of Australia, the Immigration Minister immediately referred to this statement in order to justify the return of seven Afghan asylum seekers.¹²⁷ Beyond responding to these external pressures, UNHCR was also motivated by the fact that a successful repatriation program would increase the agency’s status in the international community and justify future pleas for funding.¹²⁸

Determining the motivations of returnees is more difficult because the Afghan refugee population is highly diverse. It includes both short-term and long-term refugees who have fled Afghanistan for a variety of reasons over the course of several decades.

¹²⁵ Turton & Marsden, *Taking Refugees for a Ride?*, 3.

¹²⁶ UNHCR. "Note on Basic Considerations Regarding Returns to Afghanistan from Non-Neighbouring States." July 10, 2002.

¹²⁷ Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. *Media Release 26/2002*. July 22, 2002.

¹²⁸ Turton & Marsden, *Taking Refugees for a Ride?*, 3.

Refugees would also repatriate with various forms of social and economic capital ranging from the educated urban elite to the rural poor. We have to acknowledge that different factors may influence the decision to return. Refugees' decision-making process is not only based on cost-benefit analyses, but also driven by a deeper longing to return to the "home" country. Finally, decisions to move are usually made on the household level or even on the level of whole groups of families. This is especially likely in the "old camps" in Pakistan, to which whole villages have moved during the Soviet invasion and the civil war. In these camps, traditional leadership hierarchies still considerable influence household decisions.¹²⁹

Even considering complex decision-making processes, it is still intriguing why so many Afghan refugees decided to repatriate in 2002 even though conflict was still ongoing and human security could not be guaranteed. Based on their interviews with Afghan returnees, Turton and Marsden identify three main factors that contributed to large-scale returns: the UNHCR assistance package, unrealistic expectations of the Afghan reconstruction progress, and increasing pressures from the two host states.¹³⁰

First, even though UNHCR did not promote returns, the fact that it provided an assistance package gave returnees a sense of economic security. The assistance package also had "symbolic significance" as a sign that the protracted refugee situation was now coming to an end.¹³¹ Since this was UNHCR's first facilitated repatriation program for the Afghan refugees since 1992, the agency's support carried much weight. Second, through local and international media, refugees received the message that large amounts

¹²⁹ Ibid., 25.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 33.

¹³¹ Ibid., 2.

of foreign aid were going to accelerate the reconstruction process in Afghanistan.¹³² Third, Afghans in Pakistan and Iran were facing increasing police harassment and difficulties in accessing employment, education and health services. Several camps in Pakistan were being closed and residents received notice to either return to Afghanistan or move to other – as a result overcrowded – camps.¹³³ The following narrative from a woman interviewed by Turton and Marsden near Herat illustrates these motivations and pressures:

The main reason we decided to leave is because of the assistance provided by the UN. The employment situation was not a consideration, nor was the attitude of the authorities. It was, however, difficult that we were always being called names. The children didn't feel able to go outside. [...] There was a lot of abuse on a daily basis.

We also expect the UN will help with accommodation. We have nowhere to live. UNHCR in Teheran gave my husband four papers and told him to contact UNHCR in Mazar-i-Sherif. We don't know what assistance we will get. My husband has relatives in Mazar but they are waiting for us to help them.¹³⁴

To be truly voluntary, repatriation has to be based on an informed decision regarding the conditions in the country of origin and freedom of choice regarding the country of asylum.¹³⁵ The example above fulfills neither of those two requirements. First, the family was not informed about the level of assistance and reintegration support available in Afghanistan. Second, the woman referred to discrimination in Iran as one of the main motivations to repatriate. Contrary to the interviews collected by the AREU, UNHCR stated in its 2002 Operations Plan that refugees are well aware of the conditions in Afghanistan, but recognized that they may feel forced to return:

¹³² For instance BBC News. *Hamid Karzai: Talking Point Special*. May 10, 2002.

¹³³ IRIN News. *Pakistan: Closure of Refugee Village Creates Tough Choices*. March 28, 2003.

¹³⁴ Turton & Marsden, *Taking Refugees for a Ride?*, 30.

¹³⁵ UNHCR. *Handbook Voluntary Repatriation: International Protection*. Geneva, 1996.

*Returnees are normally well aware of the security situation and other conditions in their areas of origin or previous residence. However, many feel they have no option but to return, despite the only relatively improved security conditions and economically difficult circumstances to re-establish their livelihoods.*¹³⁶

Against this background, the lines between facilitated and promoted voluntary repatriation seem to be quite blurry. Using the language of facilitated return, UNHCR and host states have been able to exert pressure on refugees, while appearing to adhere to the standards of voluntary repatriation laid out in the 1951 Refugee Convention. As a result, the responsibility to ensure that a country is safe for dignified returns seems to lie with the refugees themselves and not with UNHCR.

Given these pressures and motivations, who repatriated? According to Monsutti as well as Turton and Marsden,¹³⁷ primarily short-staying refugees and those families who were already struggling to maintain their livelihoods in the host country decided to use UNHCR's facilitated repatriation program. These people had either close ties to Afghanistan or they took the risk of repatriation because they had little to lose. Studies¹³⁸ show that repatriation is most sustainable for refugees with economic and social capital, education or vocational training, and strong social networks. However, UNHCR's repatriation assistance encouraged many families without these forms of capital to repatriate, making them highly vulnerable to human insecurities in Afghanistan. Eventually, returnees responded to these insecurities with migratory strategies resulting in considerable refugee backflows (see section 4.3).

¹³⁶ UNHCR. "UNHCR Country Operations Plan 2002 - Afghanistan." August 1, 2001, 2.

¹³⁷ Monsutti, "Afghan Transnational Networks," 35; Turton & Marsden, *Taking Refugees for a Ride?*, 2.

¹³⁸ Koser & Black, "The End of the Refugee Cycle?" 10-11.

4.2. UNHCR AND STATE-SPONSORED REINTEGRATION EFFORTS

UNHCR and state-sponsored reintegration efforts faced three main challenges: First, the reintegration program was grossly under-budgeted as reconstruction aid had to be diverted to emergency relief. Second, in addition to economic insecurity all other forms of human insecurity persisted as Afghanistan had not reached a post-conflict stage. Third, a lack of livelihood opportunities limited the reintegration process, as many repatriating families were landless and the Afghan labor market could not absorb the large number of returnees.

On the relief-development contiguum, sustainable reintegration support requires both short-term aid to address returnees' most acute needs (food, shelter, medicine, etc.) and long-term development efforts to facilitate employment, education and societal integration. To link relief and development efforts in a sustainable way, aid agencies have been taking a development-oriented approach and are increasingly focusing on early recovery and transitional aid.¹³⁹ In the context of repatriation and reintegration, the goal of early recovery and transitional aid is to give people "prospects for rebuilding and taking back control of their lives."¹⁴⁰ This approach includes facilitating dialogue between returnees and local communities, assisting returnees in developing their livelihoods through employment or farming, and rehabilitating schools, hospitals and other public institutions.

While UNHCR aspires to bridge the relief-development gap with transitional aid, its narrow protection and assistance mandates limit any efforts of ensuring sustainable returns. In the past, the agency has used small, community-based Quick Impact Projects

¹³⁹ For instance, current online consultations for the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit focus on increasing the resilience of conflict-affected communities and integrating humanitarian and development systems.

¹⁴⁰ Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit. *Support for Refugees*.

(QIPs) to include developmental activities in its assistance program. In 2003, UNHCR published a broadened Framework for Durable Solutions, with which it seeks to include “long-term aspects in planning at an early stage in the process.”¹⁴¹ However, the QIPs turned out to be relatively unsustainable¹⁴² and the broadened Framework of Durable Solutions gained little traction in the development community.¹⁴³ Against this background, the repatriation program in Afghanistan further illustrates the challenges UNHCR faces in its attempts to provide development-oriented assistance.

In its “Initial Plan for the Return and Reintegration of Afghan Refugees and Internally Displaced People 2002-2004,”¹⁴⁴ UNHCR planned to focus its reintegration support on providing shelter repair, seed, and water. To link its short-term relief with development efforts, the agency also planned to play a supporting role with other organizations in the health, education and agricultural sectors. The agency’s initial plans even included infrastructure QIPs to give returning refugees access to skills training and microcredit programs. However, UNHCR had to quickly cut these extensive plans for reintegration assistance once it became clear that the repatriation program would far exceed the initial projection of 850.000 returnees in 2002. In addition to a shortage of funds, UNHCR had problems establishing partnerships with NGOs to support implementation. At the time, few NGOs were both willing to operate in insecure areas and had the capacity to manage and dispense large-scale financial and material assistance.¹⁴⁵ In 2002, the

¹⁴¹ Mattner, "Development Actors and Protracted Refugee Situations," 114.

¹⁴² Crisp, Jeffrey. "Mind the Gap! UNHCR, Humanitarian Assistance and the Development Process." *International Migration Review* 35, no. 1 (2001), 183.

¹⁴³ Mattner, "Development Actors and Protracted Refugee Situations," 114.

¹⁴⁴ While the actual document is not publicly available, it has been cited in the German governmental report "Bericht der Bundesregierung über die deutsche humanitäre Hilfe im Ausland 2002 bis 2005," 55 and in Turton & Marsden, *Taking Refugees for a Ride?*, 36.

¹⁴⁵ Turton & Marsden, *Taking Refugees for a Ride?*, 37.

agency only listed nine implementing partner in Afghanistan, all of which were international NGOs or UN agencies.¹⁴⁶

As the Afghan government, aid agencies and donors were struggling to fulfill their promises and pledges,¹⁴⁷ returnees had to cope with the entire range of human insecurities outlined in section 3.2. Returning refugees often found their homes, villages and all physical infrastructures destroyed. They also faced a lack of basic social services, such as health services and schools, and generally insecure living conditions shaped by continued armed conflict. In certain areas, the security situation deteriorated to the point that UNHCR periodically suspended its assistance to returning IDPs.¹⁴⁸ These conflict-induced insecurities were further exacerbated by the humanitarian impact of four years of drought. By 2002, Afghan farmers and nomads had lost 70% of their livestock. Even though rainfalls in 2003 provided some relief, another drought in 2004 affected most areas of Southern and central Afghanistan.¹⁴⁹

Returnees were the first to experience the effects of the relief-development gap caused by this continued complex emergency. In order to address the most acute needs of the Afghan people, such as lack of water, shelter and food insecurity, UNHCR had to redirect funds from its planned long-term reintegration support to immediate relief. The agency's reintegration assistance for the first wave of refugee returns essentially consisted of "transportation from neighboring countries to Afghanistan and [...] the allocation of

¹⁴⁶ UNHCR, "Country Operations Plan 2002 – Afghanistan," 5. The nine partners were: International Assistance Mission, CARE International, United Nations Volunteers, International Rescue Committee, Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees, International Organisation for Migration, Afghan German Basic Education, Mission d'Aide au Developpement des Economies Rurales and BBC Afghan Education Projects

¹⁴⁷ Rashid, Ahmed. *Slow Western Aid Could Undermine Afghan Stability*. July 1, 2002.

¹⁴⁸ Amnesty International. "Afghanistan: Continuing Need for Protection," 9.

¹⁴⁹ Auswärtiges Amt, "Bericht der Bundesregierung," 55.

a basic support package, including blankets, tents, food, water and fuel.”¹⁵⁰ As a result, the agency became the object of criticism from donors, the Afghan government, and refugees:

*Donors were complaining that UNHCR was overreaching itself by getting involved in “development” rather than “relief;” the Afghan government was complaining that precious development funds were being used merely to keep its citizens alive; and many returnees were complaining that they had been encouraged by promises of assistance to return to a situation in which they were worse off than in the country of asylum.*¹⁵¹

Since long-term reintegration support failed to materialize, returnees’ main challenge became a lack of livelihoods both through wage-earning labor and farming. With an estimated unemployment rate of 25% in 2004, the Afghan labor market was already at capacity and could therefore not absorb the large number of returnees. At the same time, returning refugees had high expectation for the Afghan government and international agencies’ support in terms of employment placement. Contrary to these expectations, in a 2006 study of returnees’ integration in the Afghan labor market almost none of the respondents received any assistance in their search for employment:

*Only 3% of interviewed households have been helped through job placement services, while 47% were expecting such a support in returning to Afghanistan. The received support generally does not match expectations of the families, and is considered as insufficient by 89% of surveyed households who insist on the needs for more financial support (67%) and job placement (51%).*¹⁵²

In addition to Afghanistan’s exhausted labor market, a major problem for returnees was the loss of land and resulting land rights disputes that left families with scarce arable land to sustain themselves. The fact that a large proportion of returning families

¹⁵⁰ Altai Consulting, *Integration of Returnees in the Afghan Labor Market: An Empirical Study*. October 2006, 56.

¹⁵¹ Turton & Marsden, *Taking Refugees for a Ride?*, 2-3.

¹⁵² Altai Consulting, *Integration of Returnees*, 64.

were landless also presented a challenge for UNHCR's reintegration assistance. The agency had to adhere to the stipulation that it could only provide shelter assistance to returnees with access to land on which to build their shelter.¹⁵³ The loss of land forced many refugees and IDPs to return to places in Afghanistan, in which their families had never lived before. While the notion of "home" is ambivalent, returning to a place a refugee never considered home before introduces additional problems. In these cases, "return" is actually another form of displacement, which can involve conflicts with local communities, rapid urbanization, lack of livelihoods, and aid dependency.¹⁵⁴

4.3. EXPLAINING REFUGEE BACKFLOWS

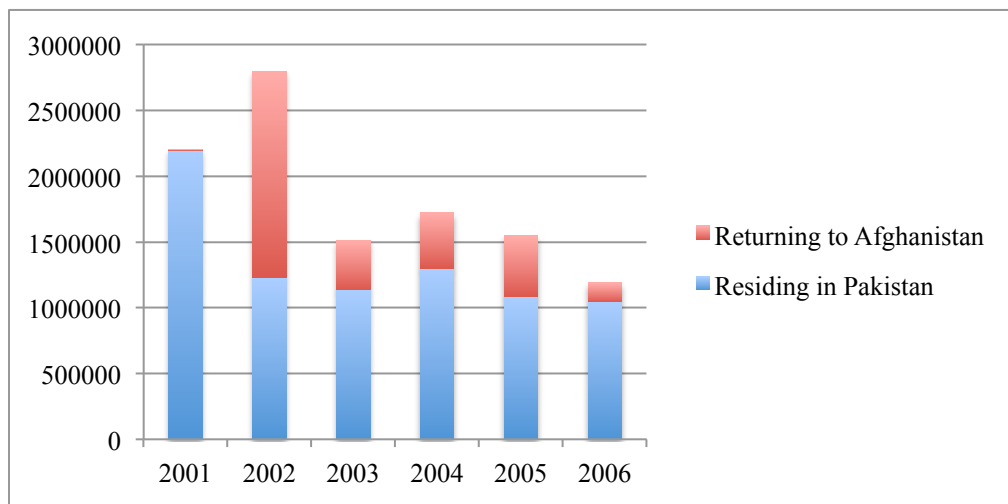
While UNHCR had launched the largest repatriation program in history, the actual number of long-term returns was much lower than population statistics suggest. According to the agency's data, from 2002 to 2005 over 630,000 more refugees returned from Pakistan than were recorded to live there in 2001 (see Fig. 2). As discussed in Chapter 1, refugee numbers are inherently unreliable because they are based on a narrow refugee definition and do not reflect mixed migration. Still, in this case the counting anomaly is quite significant. Kronenfeld advances three explanations for the inconsistency of refugee numbers: First, the number of refugees living in Pakistan increased rapidly due to the high birth rate of Afghans. Second, many refugees living in urban areas "disappeared" from UNHCR's books. Third, UNHCR overcounted returns because refugees crossed the border repeatedly.¹⁵⁵ This section focuses on Kronenfeld's third explanation and explores why so many refugees decided to return to Pakistan and Iran after taking part in UNHCR's repatriation program.

¹⁵³ Turton & Marsden, *Taking Refugees for a Ride?*, 37.

¹⁵⁴ Amnesty International. "Afghanistan: Continuing Need for Protection," 10.

¹⁵⁵ Kronenfeld, "Afghan Refugees in Pakistan," 44.

Fig. 2: Afghan refugees residing in and returning from Pakistan (2001-2006)



Source: UNHCR Population Statistics Reference Database

Repatriation without the Intention to Stay

Part of the population of returnees never had the intention to stay in Afghanistan. A number of individuals as well as whole families engaged in what practitioners call “recycling,” which means that refugees repatriated and returned to the host country multiple times in order to receive the assistance provided by UNHCR. Especially for refugees living in Pakistan, recycling seems to have been a sensible strategy given that they only had to travel a short distance to cross the border and UNHCR was giving out cash grants to cover transportation costs. UNHCR responded to the problem of recycling not by reconsidering using cash grants but by installing “Iris Recognition Technology” at the Takhta Baig Voluntary Repatriation Center near Peshawar.¹⁵⁶

The phenomenon of recycling is not unique to the Afghan case because UNHCR representatives have expressed their difficulties with “cheating” refugees in various con-

¹⁵⁶ IRIN News. *New Technology Helps Track Refugees*. October 2, 2002.

texts.¹⁵⁷ For aid workers, recycling and other forms of working the system undoubtedly present practical problems. Not knowing the correct number of aid recipients leads to ineffective planning and diverts aid from those who need it the most. However, UNHCR's response begs the question how much is really to be gained by "catching" recyclers with surveillance technology.

Worldwide, refugees and asylum seekers are living under the constant threat of being labeled a "false refugee."¹⁵⁸ Refugees experience these suspicions through discrimination in host communities, arbitrary detention, invasive questioning during the process of status determination, and repeated counting and census taking. While monitoring repatriation registrations with Iris Recognition Technology has proven highly effective, it also perpetuates the already existing stereotype of the false refugee and creates an invasive and threatening environment. So far, researchers have paid little attention to the motivations and experiences of recyclers, thus reinforcing the notion that these are "false refugees" outside the realm of refugee studies.

Apart from recyclers, many Afghans who took part in UNHCR's repatriation program were actually seasonal migrants.¹⁵⁹ They sought work in Afghanistan but never intended to stay beyond the summer. For seasonal migrants, UNHCR's assistance package facilitated transportation and covered some short-term needs in Afghanistan. The repatriation program therefore became part of the charted history of migration between Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran.

¹⁵⁷ Agier, *Managing the Undesirables*, 110.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁵⁹ Turton & Marsden, *Taking Refugees for a Ride?*, 22-23.

Response to Human Insecurity

Finally, there was a large backflow of returnees who had difficulties (re)establishing themselves in Afghanistan for a variety of reasons and decided to return to the country of asylum. Since the backflow mostly consists of irregular border-crossings, the exact number of repatriates who returned to Pakistan and Iran is not available. However, cursory evidence suggests that a significant percentage of refugees who took part in the repatriation program did not stay in Afghanistan. Several studies indicate that repatriates' primary reasons for returning to Pakistan and Iran were lack of shelter, lack of livelihood, personal insecurity, and personal enmity. In Kronenfeld's study, the most frequent reasons cited for returning to or remaining in Pakistan were lack of shelter and/or land in Afghanistan.¹⁶⁰

Another approach to explaining refugee backflows is looking at those refugees who did not take part in the repatriation program. In a census of Afghan refugees administered by the Pakistani government, 57% of respondents cited lack of shelter and land as their main reason for not returning to Afghanistan. In comparison, only 18% of decided to stay in Pakistan because of personal insecurity in Afghanistan.¹⁶¹ Several of Kronenfeld's interviewees explained that they had already moved their entire families to Afghanistan, but decided to return to Pakistan because they wanted their children to have access to better quality education.¹⁶²

A different study of Afghans in Karachi suggests that even repatriates who found a job in Afghanistan had to return to Pakistan because they were not paid regularly.¹⁶³ For

¹⁶⁰ Kronenfeld, "Afghan Refugees in Pakistan," 55.

¹⁶¹ Cited in Kronenfeld, "Afghan Refugees in Pakistan," 55.

¹⁶² Kronenfeld, "Afghan Refugees in Pakistan," 56.

¹⁶³ Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU). "Afghans in Karachi: Migration, Settlement and Social Networks." March 2005, 35.

instance, one respondent, Afsar Khan, had found a position at a university in Kabul, but he did not receive his salary for three months. After living off his savings for three months he felt forced to return to Pakistan.¹⁶⁴ Other repatriates who returned to Karachi stated that UNHCR did not provide the level of assistance it promised before facilitating repatriation. In particular, respondents were disappointed that UNHCR did not assist them in accessing land and housing.¹⁶⁵

Returnees with limited emotional and physical ties to Afghanistan experienced human insecurity even stronger. This was especially the case for second-generation refugees and less mobile family members, such as women. Second-generation Afghan refugees experienced particular difficulties in reintegrating because they did “not necessarily share the same intense identification with their ethnic or tribal group.”¹⁶⁶ By 2002, the distinction between Afghans and their hosts in Pakistan and Iran had also eroded to some degree. Younger returnees therefore struggled not only with lower standards of quality of life, but also with identity crises. The emergence of new, hybrid identities is a common function of complex humanitarian disasters, which

*are by definition caused by multiple factors and researchers have documented how protracted crises and other major changes may throw up new groupings and identity categories as populations intermix, new livelihoods emerge and ties to original homelands change.*¹⁶⁷

As discussed in section 3.3, Afghan women have been less mobile and therefore had fewer opportunities to maintain their links with Afghanistan. At the same time, in the absence of mobile men, female members of refugee households were able actively participate in the more modernized societies of Iran and Pakistan. In the two host countries Af-

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 42

¹⁶⁷ Kronenfeld, "Afghan Refugees in Pakistan," 45.

ghan women were also able to access education and higher quality health care. Women who returned to Afghanistan therefore quickly felt the effects of the more traditional Afghan society and the lack of social services. In the following, Hamida, a woman from Bilal Colony in Karachi, explains why she did not want to stay in Afghanistan after repatriation:

I didn't like the country. There was no electricity and the children were always crying. My children became sick and the doctor was quite far from that area. The doctor was also not competent either. I stayed three for seven days and returned to Pakistan.¹⁶⁸

These responses of returnees suggest that not only personal insecurity but human insecurity on all levels challenged repatriation. However, UNHCR's decision to facilitate repatriation was framed by the "conflict-refugee" concept, which for three reasons turned out to be a misleading premise: First, Afghanistan never reached a post-conflict stage, which means that refugees were returning to ongoing conflict situations. Second, returnees are vulnerable to a combination of humanitarian threats and development challenges, which are not only conflict-induced. Third, any attempts of repatriation therefore require critical analyses before, during, and after return that assess how the conflict and levels of human development will affect repatriation.

What is Sustainable Repatriation?

UNHCR's initial repatriation plan envisaged that within only three years the agency would repatriate 5.2 million refugees (1.5 million from Iran and 2.2 million from Pakistan) and 3.5 million IDPs. The pure number of repatriates actually came very close to these projections as 4.5 million Afghan refugees returned between 2002-2005.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ AREU, "Afghans in Karachi," 39.

¹⁶⁹ Auswärtiges Amt, "Bericht der Bundesregierung," 55.

While UNHCR deemed the repatriation program an overwhelming achievement,¹⁷⁰ its true success should be measured based on the program's sustainability and not based on the agency's ability to move large numbers of people across the border. As a result of intended and unintended returns to the two asylum countries, we can assume that in 2002 the real number of sustainable repatriations was at least 200,000 lower than UNHCR statistics indicate.¹⁷¹

In this context, it is important to clarify what we can reasonably expect from "sustainable" returns. It would be misplaced to assume that – even with the necessary levels of human security and assistance – Afghan repatriates will take on sedentary existences in their old or new homes in Afghanistan. While this may be the trajectory of some returning families, it seems likely that others will continue to use their transnational networks to send family members abroad, maintain their businesses in Pakistan and Iran, or seek wage-earning labor. Given the history and culture of transnational migration and the hybrid identities of Afghan refugees, continued cross-border migration would be a natural continuation of Afghan's existing livelihood strategies. The fact that repatriates continue to migrate therefore does not necessarily indicate that UNHCR's repatriation efforts were unsustainable.¹⁷²

So far, this report has acknowledged any type of migration as a coping strategy and therefore a form of refugee agency. However, it is important to recognize the thin line between forced and voluntary migration. On the one hand, the constructive effects of *voluntary* migration can and should be integrated into reconstruction plans. That is because remittances, transfer of human capital, as well as circular labor migration can act as

¹⁷⁰ UNHCR, *Searching for Solutions*, 24.

¹⁷¹ Turton & Marsden, *Taking Refugees for a Ride?*, 1-2.

¹⁷² Kronenfeld, "Afghan Refugees in Pakistan," 56.

a “safety valve”¹⁷³ and release some of the pressure put the Afghan labor market, infrastructure, and social services. On the other hand, repeated *forced* migration in response to human insecurity is a sign that repatriation in its current form does not ensure safe and dignified returns.

So, to determine how sustainable UNHCR’s repatriation program was, we need to ask: Did returnees feel *forced* to pursue migratory strategies as their only form of agency left in an environment of human insecurity? If their returns were forced, refugees did not have a realistic chance of reestablishing themselves in their new environment. From this perspective, for many Afghans who took part in UNHCR’s repatriation program between 2002 and 2005, return was in fact unsustainable because a lack of shelter, arable land, employment, food, water, and basic health care forced them to use migration as their only coping strategy.

¹⁷³ Turton & Marsden, *Taking Refugees for a Ride?*, 39.

5. Conclusion

5.1. MAIN FINDINGS

Three interlacing factors contributed to the unsustainability of UNHCR's facilitated voluntary repatriation program. First, for many refugees the decision to repatriate was not truly voluntary. Returnees were pressured by refugee camp closures, hostilities and discrimination in the host country and the fear of becoming part of UNHCR's residual caseload and therefore losing protection status. It is also questionable whether refugees could make an informed decision about return given the inaccurate promises of reconstruction assistance proliferated in the media. Considering how low the level of human security in Afghanistan was between 2002 and 2005, it seems unlikely that so many refugees would have returned if they were fully informed about the security conditions.

Second, UNHCR's decision to facilitate repatriation was premature because even though by 2002 personal security had improved in some (but certainly not all) areas of Afghanistan, returnees were still confronted with human insecurity on all other levels. Faced with a lack of employment opportunities, arable land, social services, and overall integration support, returning families struggled to meet their most basic needs and to maintain their livelihoods. Even though the refugee agency draws a distinction between facilitating and supporting returns, UNHCR apparently did not take into account that any form of repatriation assistance also has symbolic meaning. So, while the agency was officially not supporting returns it still sent a strong signal that Afghanistan had reached a stage where dignified returns were possible.

Third, UNHCR and the three governments had the misplaced expectation that repatriated refugees would in fact stay in Afghanistan. Contrary to this assumption, many returnees responded to human insecurity with migratory strategies, which for them was a

familiar form of agency. Returnees continued to engage in mixed migration within the region to pursue seasonal labor, run their businesses abroad, maintain social and familial relationships, and seek better social services, such as education and health care. Especially second-generation refugees sought to maintain their transnational identities and their role in the more modern societies of Iran and Pakistan.

Overall, these factors indicate three larger problems inherent to the current approach to the durable solutions of repatriation. The first problem seems to be a disconnect between policy planning in the political and humanitarian domain on the one hand and different forms of agency and coping strategies on the individual and community level on the other hand. A common criticism of the Afghan repatriation program is that the needs of returnees have not been systematically incorporated in larger transition and recovery plans. However, this report showed that the reconstruction plans did not only fail to match returnees' reintegration needs, but also overlooked their existing coping strategies and response mechanisms.

Government officials and aid workers have long been aware of Afghan's mixed transnational migration within the region. However, instead of integrating the value added by existing transnational networks, remittance systems, and highly mobile refugees, the repatriation program imposed a sedentary solution on returnees. The three governments and UNHCR could have supported refugees in their own assessment of and response to human insecurity in Afghanistan by allowing cross-border movements. Instead, repeat crossers were labeled "recyclers" and repatriates who decided to move back to Pakistan or Iran were forced to cross the border illegally. Those refugees who made the decision to stay in the country of asylum faced increasing pressure as refugee camps were closed and aid to refugees remaining in Pakistan and Iran was reduced.

The second problem inherent to the current repatriation approach is UNHCR's narrow protection mandate. In complex emergencies, causes of flight and motivations to migrate overlap, which is why scholars refer to Afghan displacement as crisis migration or mixed migration. However, according to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its Protocols, forced migrants only fall within the refugee definition if they are fleeing war, persecution or severe limitation of their personal freedom. While this was certainly the fact for Afghan refugees, it does not follow that repatriation becomes an option as soon as these conflict-related causes of flight disappear. To the contrary, large-scale repatriation can only be sustainable if refugees return to an environment with a minimum level of human security. Where to set the human security benchmark for repatriation is an important question to be addressed by further scholarship.

Third, similar to UNHCR's narrow protection mandate, its assistance mandate is also limited to short-term relief. This is problematic because returnees have both relief needs and development aspirations. The lack of transitional aid for returnees became even more pronounced as continued humanitarian needs and the sheer scale of returns forced aid agencies to divert limited funds available for reconstruction to emergency assistance. UNHCR attempted to bridge the gap between relief and development by supporting the reintegration of returnees. However, the agency's quick impact projects were more of a band-aid solution than sustainable development-oriented assistance. By providing only minimal development assistance, UNHCR has become part of the problem and perpetuated the lack of development-oriented reintegration support. That is because seeing UNHCR's attempts, there was less urgency for other development actors, such as the UNDP, to include repatriates in their development programs.

5.2. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Four main ideas frame the recommendations of this report: First, solutions should be sought on a regional level since the Afghan PRS exists in several host countries and refugee agency takes place across borders. Second, it is important to go beyond simply administrating human misery by recognizing and harnessing the innovative potential of different forms of refugee agency. Third, protection is still UNHCR's main mandate and should not be sacrificed. Fourth, reductionist categories of "migrants" and "refugees" do not reflect the complexity of identities and decision-making processes of Afghan refugees.

Based on these ideas and the main findings of this report, the aid agencies and states should take the following steps to improve their approach to protracted refugee situations: First, to ensure that repatriation is in fact a *durable* solution, it should only be initiated once *human* security is guaranteed in the origin country. UNHCR should base its decision to facilitate repatriation on extensive needs assessments. Any political interests of host and origin countries should be clearly divorced from the question of repatriation.

Second, the durable solutions framework should be expanded to include more space for refugee agency. Regional regulated labor migration is a viable strategy to create sustainable livelihoods for refugees and should be facilitated. To assist reintegration, UNHCR should assume a facilitating and coordinating role rather than attempting to close the relief-development gap with "development band-aids." Third, the refugee definition should be expanded to include factors of complex emergencies beyond physical violence and persecution that can endanger livelihoods, such as environmental and economic insecurities. The human security concept is a useful tool to expand both UNHCR's protection and assistance mandate.

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