Chapter 3
Pastoralism, Power and Politics: Access to Pastures in Northern Afghanistan

Stefan Schütte

Abstract This chapter explores the practice of nomadic pastoralism in contemporary Afghanistan and looks at how the geographies of access to pastures are shaped by asymmetric power relations and high degrees of tenure insecurity. The discussion is based on empirical fieldwork amongst Pashtun pastoralists based in the Chahar District of Kunduz Province, who seasonally migrate to the high pastures of Badakhshan. Their social and spatial practices are taken as examples of the constraints and opportunities that constitute pastoralism in Afghanistan today. The pastoral groups studied have shown enormous capacity to continuously adapt their mobility strategies in response to changing power structures, increased societal pressure and fluctuating economic opportunities. However, after 32 years of continuous warfare, the traumatic experiences of conflict and war, of power struggles and changes of authority, of insecurity and threats to survival, pastoralists today still strife for their rights to mobility and secure pasture access. Faced with changing rule systems and legal pluralism governing both the winter and spring pastures in Kunduz and the high pastures of Badakhshan around the environs of Lake Shewa, pastoralism in Afghanistan continues to be a highly insecure endeavour. The current situation of pastoral tenure insecurity is traced by reconstructing pastoral practices and mobility strategies as they are executed today, by looking at the governance structures that shape both mobility and pasture access and by examining the historical geographies of nomadic pastoralism as experienced by the group under study.

Keywords Afghanistan • Human security • Mobility • Pasture Conflict • Resources • Territoriality

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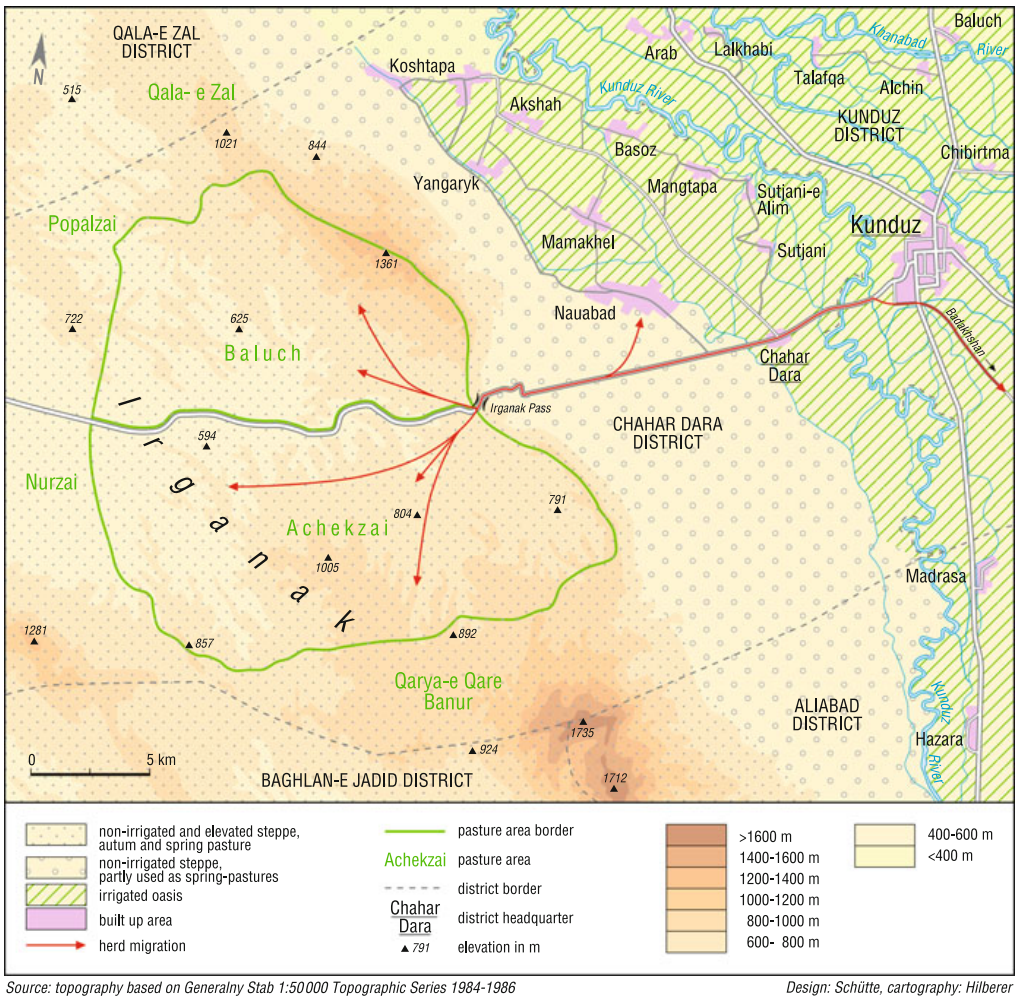
3.1 Introduction: Framing the Issues

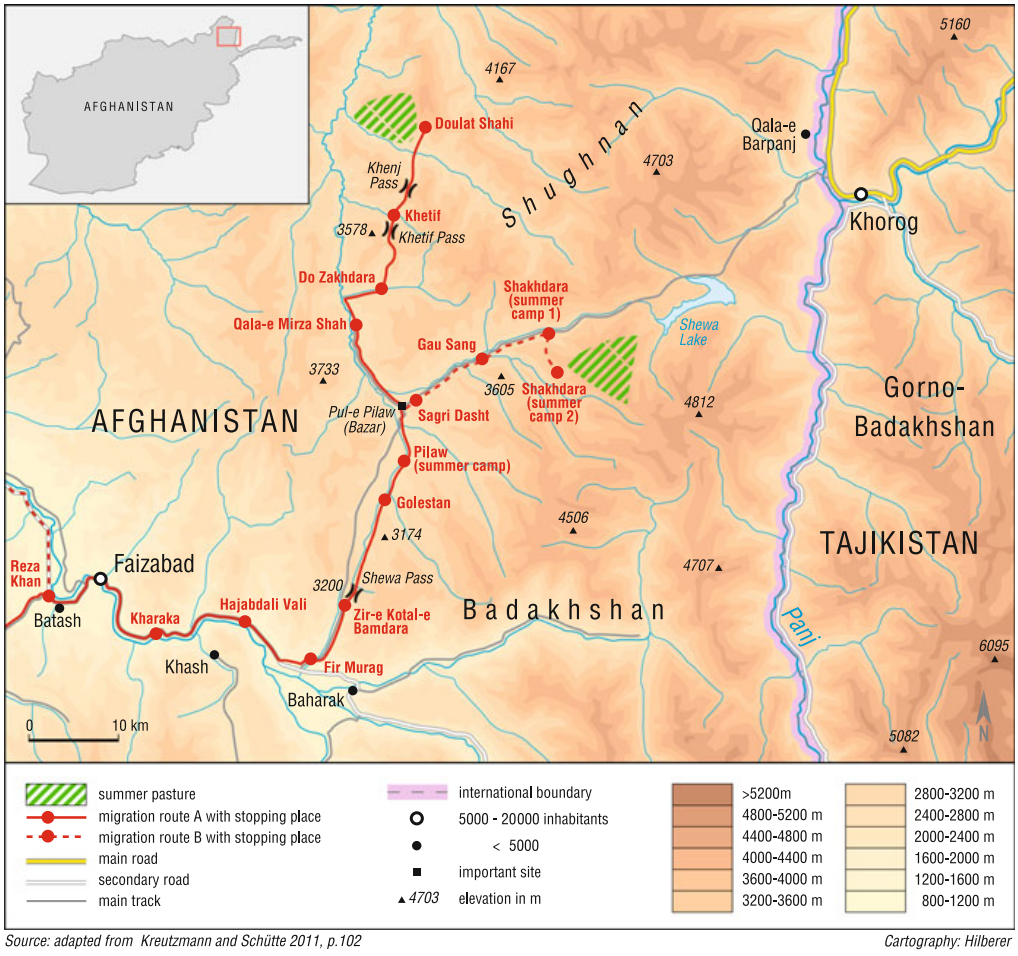
The nexus of pastoralism and mobility has long been a focus of geographic and anthropological enquiry. Pastoralism in its multiple forms and as a livelihood strategy continues to be dynamic and flexible, with changing pastoral strategies reflecting societal pressure, shifting power structures and economic opportunities (Schlee 2005). Nowhere seems this clearer than in Afghanistan, where protracted war conditions forced pastoralists to continuously adapt and change their mobility patterns, and where pastoral livelihood systems are increasingly characterised by heightened insecurity and vulnerability.

In this chapter, the current practice of pastoralism in Afghanistan is examined through a case study of a Pashtun community that seasonally resides in the volatile District of Chahar Dara in Kunduz Province of Northern Afghanistan (Fig. 3.1). In the warm season, this community migrates to the fertile Shewa pastures in



Source: topography based on Generalny Stab 1:50000 Topographic Series 1984-1986 *Design: Schütte, cartography: Hilberer*

Fig. 3.1 The village of Nauabad in the Kunduz oasis and the nearby autumn and spring pastures of Irganak



Source: adapted from Kreutzmann and Schütte 2011, p.102 *Cartography: Hilberer*

Fig. 3.2 Location of Achekzai summer pastures on the contested Shewa Plateau

Badakhshan, the largest and arguably most important mountain grazing area in all of Northern Afghanistan (Fig. 3.2). The case study is indicative for a variety of reasons. First, it shows how mobility and territoriality are organised and negotiated in a war-torn country with limited statehood and hybrid political orders, where power relationships and oppressive legal geographies surround and determine mobile practices. Second, it illustrates the 'power geometries of everyday life' (Massey 1993) that determine access to pastures and the mobility spaces of Afghan pastoralists. Third, the question of representation and the identity-alterity dichotomy characterising relations between nomadic pastoralists and sedentary groups highlight the ways identity is used to legitimate access to resources. Lastly, it provides examples of how people cope with disruptions to their spatial mobility and the partial breakdown of pastoral production and reproduction systems, shedding light on the resilience of Afghan pastoral communities.

This fourfold analytical framework is applied to the situation of Pashtun nomadic pastoralists, examining (1) the production of pastoralist mobility spaces

and territoriality, (2) the power geometries of pasture access in spring and summer areas and the effects of legal pluralism, (3) issues of pastoralist identity formation and representation and (4) pastoralist resilience and coping strategies in the wake of protracted conflict. The analysis is based on data gathered during four field visits to the residential village of Pashtun herders between 2007 and 2009 and a further extended field visit to the Shewa Plateau in the summer of 2009. During these visits, open-ended interviews were conducted, both with migrating pastoralists from Kunduz Province and sedentary populations on the plateau.

3.2 Contexts: Pastoralism, Pastures and Herders in Afghanistan

In-depth studies on various Afghan pastoralist communities were numerous in the 1970s and provide important insights into the historical conditions of mobile livestock herding in the country (e.g. Jentsch 1973; Glatzer 1977; Barfield 1981).

As renowned specialists in sheep breeding, and as major suppliers of meat for the domestic economy in Afghanistan (Barfield 2008), pastoralists are required to traverse huge distances with their flocks to address seasonal shortages of pasture resources. This combination of animal husbandry and mobility produces challenging complexities that result in many hardships and insecurities: herd management has to be delegated, a mobility route has to be chosen, land tenure security has to be established, interaction with other social groups both en route and in the summer pastures has to be facilitated, and dependence on agricultural production for animal fodder purposes requires negotiation (Dyson-Hudson and Dyson-Hudson 1980). Specific groups use the same routes every year, often engaging in exchange relationships with settled populations that can be both characterised by cooperation and antagonism (Ferdinand 1969). However, pastoralists' experience and mobility spaces in Afghanistan have undergone momentous changes over the last two generations, and pastoralists today are faced with many critical challenges.

Pastures are an increasingly threatened resource in Afghanistan. Up to 70% of the country is used for grazing or for the harvesting of bushes for animal fodder or fuel, but access to certain pastures is, today, heavily contested and often the source of volatile conflict (Alden Wily 2004). The truth of this has been exemplified recently by the violent disputes about access to pastures between Pashtun herders and sedentary Hazara people in Wardak and Bamiyan Provinces, resulting in killings and displacements (IRIN 2007; Rassul 2010). In spite of an actually existing nomadic-sedentary continuum with movements in either direction triggered by changing economic and climatic conditions in Afghanistan (Glatzer 1981; Glatzer and Casimir 1983; de Weijer 2007), there exists an exclusionary identity politics that maintains the distinction between pastoralist herder and sedentary farmer. This, in turn, is often used to legitimate access to land resources.

At the same time, and adding to the problem, increasing pasture degradation facilitated by pasture conversion, overgrazing and overcutting poses ecological challenges.

Contested access to and conflicts over pastures along with ecological degradation has resulted in heightened land tenure insecurity (McEwen and Whitty 2006). Tenure insecurity refers to the degree to which land users lack confidence that neither the State nor other people will interfere with their access rights to the land for an extended period of time (Bruce 1998). For Afghan pastures, tenure insecurity has four broad dimensions: first, conflict over rights to pastures amongst groups of village residents and mobile groups; second, differences of opinion about the preservation of pastures between farmers with access to farmland and those without access to farmland, but with a dependence on livestock; third, contradictions between governmental agencies empowered by formal law establishing State ownership of pastureland and local communities which, by custom and necessity, use the pastures; and fourth, land-grabbing by powerful armed commanders who establish control over pastures. These tenure insecurities have distinctive forms and shape mobility spaces of pastoralists, as will be elaborated upon when examining the case of Pashtun herders in Northern Afghanistan.

Who are these mobile herders? This is not an easy question to answer. In Afghanistan, pastoralists are referred to by the generic Persian term 'Kuchi' (i.e. those who migrate), although this very broad label disguises differences between distinct social groups (Tapper 2008). There are, for instance, Persian- and Pashto-speaking pastoralists in Afghanistan, different ethnic groups, and there exist differences in practising pastoralism (i.e. long distance vs. short distance). Tapper answers the question by saying, 'It depends who is asking …, in what circumstances – time, place, audience – and for what perceived purposes. Bilingualism, and multiple and disputed identities, mean that boundaries between ethnic groups are neither precise nor territorial, but contextual and shifting' (Tapper 2008, 101). These shifts and contexts will be made apparent over the following, when looking at pastoral identity constructions and relations to sedentary populations in the frame of pastoralist mobility.

The case study focuses on pastoralists who partially reside in one specific village in the District of Chahar Dara, Kunduz Province (Fig. 3.1). Today, this district represents a stronghold of anti-government insurgency in Northern Afghanistan. It has become the venue of military clashes, insurgency attacks and NATO aerial bombings. Chahar Dara consists of various village clusters in the Kunduz River oasis, inhabited by people claiming different ethnicities, with a Pashtun majority. Many of these Pashtuns are engaged in pastoralism and irrigated agriculture, signifying an agro-pastoral continuum. The study settlement is inhabited by two distinct tribes stressing descent from the Durrani lineage: the Achekzai, originating from Spin Boldak in Kandahar Province and the Baluch, originating from Helmand Province (Balland 1996; Glatzer 1977, 114–118; Grötzbach 1972, 94).

Senior informants reported that outmigration from Southern Afghanistan was stimulated by severe drought conditions at the time, although it seemed to have happened at the same time as the Afghan ruler Amir Abdur Rahman Khan (reigning 1880–1901) implemented his resettlement policies. During his rule, Pashtuns were given land in Northern Afghanistan in preference to other groups with the aim of

changing the ethnic composition of the North in an attempt at state-regulated 'Pashtunisation' (Barfield 1978).

In the year 1933, both tribes jointly built an irrigation canal and established village residency. Those who participated in the construction were allocated 24 *jerib* of land (about 5 ha), which was later expanded upon by individual households through land purchases from Uzbek neighbours.

The immigrant settlers profited from what has been termed the 'most successful development project in recent Afghan history' (Barfield 1978, 29) when the malaria-infested swamp lands of Kunduz were drained and transformed into fertile and productive agricultural lands. The base of agro-pastoralism was significantly enhanced by a higher productivity in crop and fodder farming whilst fertile pastures were accessible at the same time. In winter and spring, pastures in proximity to the residential village were used (cf. Fig. 3.1). These areas are still used today for livestock keeping and animal breeding, with clear and agreed upon demarcations between the pasture parcels used by Achekzai and Baluch. In summer, large distances of about 300 km had to be covered to migrate to the mountain pastures of Badakhshan, crossing the provinces of Kunduz and Takhar. This link between two highly fertile regions made the keeping of larger numbers of sheep viable.

With their newly established bases around Kunduz and access to both spring and summer pastures, both the Baluch and Achekzai were able to further invest in the husbandry of large fat-tailed sheep and matured to a thriving community. This outcome, however, became only possible through supportive policies from the central authority in Kabul, where the Pashtun King Zahir Shah (reigning 1933–1973) issued land titles (qawala) that guaranteed grazing rights for summer pastures to both the Baluch (in the mountain pastures above Kishim) and the Achekzai (in Shewa) in 1951. The documents acted as passes and safeguarded access to this critical resource from that time onwards and today still determine the destinations of pastoral mobilities.

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

3.3 Mobility and Territoriality in the Pastoralist Experience and the Power Geometries of Pasture Access

Territoriality can be understood '… as a social (and political, economic, cultural) process that unfolds not only in place but through time. It thereby allows us to more easily see territories as social products' (Delaney 2005, 2). The social process of territoriality, however, is diverse, contested and fought over and therefore subject to unequal and changing power relations that determine who controls access to pasture

resources and in what ways this control is exercised. In this sense, the power geometries of pasture access refer to the uneven positions of different actors in the agro-pastoral system of Northern Afghanistan in which the changing positionality of pastoralist groups shapes and constrains their mobility and access strategies. This fluid entanglement of mobility, territoriality and power and how it changes over time will be illustrated through the example of Pashtun herdsmen.

In a general sense, territoriality in the experience of the Baluch and Achekzai combines the need to establish secure access to spring and summer pastures and to traverse the spaces in between. In doing so, people classify certain pastures as 'ours'. The basis of this classification of pasture territory is diverse and shifting – contested and conflicting with claims of different groups to the same pastures, oppressive through the exercise of violent control over pastures through strongmen, or resting on shared community agreements establishing clearly demarcated pasture parcels. Whatever the case for the different pastures involved, territoriality in the pastoralist experience is always based on spatial mobility to connect the residence with spring and summer areas. The long March between these moorings on a 'road of insecurity' (Kreutzmann and Schütte 2011, 113) and their specific makeup is another illustration for the ways in which 'places and landscapes are continually practised and performed through the movement and enfolding of … people and things' (Cresswell and Merriman 2010, 7).

3.3.1 Winter and Spring Pastures

Winter and spring pastures used by the Baluch and Achekzai are located in an area called Irganak in proximity of the residential village, where tent camps are erected and selected members of a pastoralist household tend to the animals (cf. Fig. 3.1). The area was the scene of heavy fighting during the resistance against Soviet occupation and heavily mined and to date has not been entirely cleared. It is also reputed to be an area of retreat for insurgent groups today.

Access to Irganak pastures is based on shared community agreements and a clear definition of space and territory based on tribal affiliation. Certain pockets of pastureland are subdivided through a customary concept referred to in Pashto as mena. Literally meaning tent or locale, the term refers to a clearly defined geographic area of pastureland for which the exclusive user rights rest with a specific clan of herdsmen. The shape of mena and the location of their boundaries are orally transferred from generation to generation, with the size of each area originally determined by the size of an individual household or clan's herd. However, in the view of Pashtun pastoralists, a mena represents not only a specified area but also a system of rights. People do not claim ownership of the land in question, although the long duration of usage, stretching over many generations, does resemble something like it.

The shapes and boundaries of these areas have been collectively agreed upon by all pasture user groups residing in the extensive Kunduz oasis. A big meeting of elders from all pastoral groups was summoned in order to reach unanimous

agreement on the location of boundaries demarcating the respective areas used by each tribal group. In doing so, the user communities established clear pasture territories in Irganak. It is, in fact, the tribal group (*khel*) that claims the right of use to a specific parcel to be subdivided into individual mena, illustrating the modes of social organisation prevalent amongst pastoral groups in Afghanistan.

The example shows how customary agreements have created distinct territories and shared rights to pasture areas that are clearly bounded. The practice adheres to the Islamic principle of shared consensus, but the distribution of user rights does not follow the provision of the written Pasture Law (GoA 2000a; Official Gazetteer 795) and is thus not acknowledged by state legislation. In fact, the representation of pasture territories in the official Pasture and Land Management Laws (GoA 2000a, b; Official Gazetteer 795) refers to grazing lands as national property under state control. Accordingly, the perception of government staff that 'all pastures belong to the state' may give rise to conflict. In terms of tenure security, however, the spring pastures and their mena resemble comparatively safe and mostly undisputed grazing resources. In times of abundance, after sufficient rainfall, people trade access rights to their pastures to herdsmen passing through the area. However, the pasture resources can be used for only about 5 months in a year (November–December and March–May). Over cold and snowy winters, the animals are kept near the house, and in the hot and dry summers of Kunduz, Irganak turns into a desert, forcing pastoralists to move with their animals to distant mountain pastures.

3.3.2 Summer Pastures

The summer pastures in Shewa (Fig. 3.2) are located between 2,600 m and 3,200 m a.s.l. and are used by the Achekzai, who utilised pastures on the Shewa Plateau for many generations. The more than 80-year-old Haji Samat remembers going to Shewa with his father during the reign of Amanullah Khan (1919–1929), at a time when access to pastures was undisputed and there was no need for official title. This corresponds with evidence derived from the literature, reporting that at the turn of the twentieth century, as many as 500,000 sheep belonging to mobile groups reached the Shewa Plateau from the plains around Kunduz, a number rising to 1.2 million in 1922 (Adamec 1972, 67; Koshkaki 1979, I, 220). The land title issued in 1951 by the Afghan king formalised this practice and specified the area of grazing land belonging to a certain clan by reference to major landmarks. These were the times when 'Kuchi were free', as one respondent remarked.

Today, things have changed. In spite all pastoralists carrying their land title with them at all times, access to the Shewa grazing lands has become insecure. It is now governed by different rule systems, in which the king's land title still defines the grazing area, but not the costs necessary to gain access. This process of change in territoriality as a contested social product was a gradual one. It commenced in 1978 with the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and continued through the various shifts

and drifts occurring in the wake of the civil war and Taliban rule and is still ongoing after the US-led invasion and installation of the current Karzai Government.

When Achekzai pastoralists first came to the area generations ago, the Shewa Plateau was already partially inhabited. From the beginning, there was some competition over the use of natural resources both amongst different pastoral groups and with the high plateau's permanent population. The latter is completely made up of people whose forefathers migrated to Shewa from Shugnan, today a district of Badakhshan province (Holzwarth 1990). The competition between pastoralists and Shughni grew in scope as the size of the settled population increased. It today consists of 14 villages made up of multiple hamlets dispersed all over the plateau.[1]

Shughni people engage in combined mountain agriculture at the upper limit of cultivation in which mobile pastoralism forms a significant component. Thus, both Achekzai and Shughni compete for the same resources. As the residential population grew, they increasingly started converting areas used as pastures into rainfed cultivation, thereby seeking support of official titles from different administrations and contributing to significant changes in land tenure relations on the plateau (Patterson 2004).

The Shughni as combined mountain farmers depend on fields and eventually succeeded in establishing a much needed greater agricultural basis by obtaining title documents from the Government of Rabbani (1992–2001)[2] and in so doing established ownership of land that formerly belonged to pastoralists. This enabled them to cope better with the harsh climatic conditions and make the most of the very short agricultural season on the plateau. However, competing legal documents over the same land issued at different times by different rulers caused some violent conflicts in the past between Shughni and various pastoralist groups, as documented by Patterson (2004, 17–31). Today, however, such violent clashes seem to have ceased, as both Pashtun and Shughni informants confirmed. Instead, disputes concerning trespassing of herds over agricultural lands and the location of pasture boundaries are usually settled by consensus between the different groups.

Still, in an area where one group resides permanently and others appear for seasonal utilisation, the situation is characterised by competition. It is facilitated through competing written titles for identical patches of land and manifests itself physically, for instance, through the common occurrence of rainfed agricultural fields on slopes and former pastures, by encroachment of villages on pasture lands or by pastoralist encampments overseeing a grazing area.

However, this competition is not the main determinant of pasture access today, as local strongmen were able to take control of the Shewa Plateau in recent times. This started happening in 2001, with the advent of the Karzai administration in Afghanistan. These strongmen, locally referred to as commanders, benefit from a 'culture of impunity' that prevails in Afghanistan (Mani 2003; Giustozzi 2009), and they have been able to newly determine pasture access rights by intimidation and physical power that has put the entire area under the law of the gun. What has occurred here, as was the case in many other areas of Afghanistan after 2001, was a particularly extensive incident of land-grabbing, where armed power holders assumed control over land and defined the rules of access (Gebremedhin 2007;

Giustozzi 2007, 2009). This process was supported through the redrawing of district borders and the formation of new districts in Badakhshan by the central government, in order to accommodate the interests of local strongmen and military leaders allying with Karzai and to (re)establish a self-serving patrimonial system in Badakhshan, where official positions such as district governors became an attractive resource to be exploited (Giustozzi and Orsini 2009; Goodhand 2009). The case of land-grabbing in Shewa is an important example of how Afghan institutions have been supplanted through power sharing deals by abusive stakeholders, who exert control through violence, patronage and corruption, often enjoying external backing (Giustozzi 2009; Grono and Rondeaux 2010).

This shift towards the 'law of the gun' in Shewa is the most recent trend of changing power geometries in Badakhshan, illustrating the ways pasture access is shaped in the context of limited statehood and corrupted institutions. The process has had severe consequences for both sedentary Shughni and migrating pastoralists. Dues for land access have to be submitted to commanders, now holding official positions in a new district named Arghanj Khaw that covers the Shewa area. For the Shughni mountain farmers, these dues comprise of taxes for pasture rights and payments for agricultural land title deeds, usually delivered in-kind. Pastoralists, however, are forced to pay large amounts in cash for pasture access in addition to donating livestock for strongmen in power. Paying in cash is a new phenomenon for pastoralists that commenced under the Karzai administration. This exposure to arbitrary rent-seeking of local strongmen in their ancestral summer grazing areas puts the already risky practice of animal husbandry under economic strain. As a respondent put it: 'From the time of the Saur Revolution [i.e. 1978] everybody raised taxes from us for using the pastures for which we already have a title. Baraki, Rabbani, Najibullah, all did so, but under Karzai it is the worst' (Achekzai pastoralist, September 2008). The revenues are forcefully extracted, often at gunpoint, and are used to maintain the power bases of commanders, and not to improve the welfare of local communities: 'Throughout 2001–2008, there was little or no sign of the revenue collected by local actors in Badakhshan being reinvested in the local economy and even less so in the provision of services to the population' (Giustozzi and Orsini 2009, 14).

Whilst such economic strain creates hardship for pastoral groups, the risk of eviction from pastures poses another threat that endangers pastoral livelihoods. In many cases, pastoralists have already been banned by the new rulers of the Badakhshan pastures, and whilst the Achekzai thus far have only been threatened, the Baluch faction of the study community was already forcefully evicted. For the first time, in 2009, they were not granted access to their ancestral pastures around the town of Keshem. Access rights to new pastures had to be sought elsewhere and paid for, and this lack of tenure security poses new uncertainties for their future.

Changing power geometries translate into changing systems of territorial control over pastures and restrict the mobility strategies of pastoralist. These trends hint quite literally at William Connolly's elaborations about the etymological roots of the word territory: 'To occupy territory … is both to receive sustenance and to exercise violence … Territory is sustaining land occupied and bounded by violence' (Connolly 1995, xxii). This interpretation is undoubtedly true for the Shewa pastures.

3.4 Road of Insecurity: Mobility Between Spring and Summer Pastures

Pastoral mobility is characterised by both conflict and cooperation with settled populations. Whilst contested access to land and water en route and damage to agriculture are obvious points of conflict, especially in drought seasons, mutually beneficial cooperation takes place too.

A flock of sheep raised by the Achekzai and Baluch is often maintained by various herd owners and easily number between 500 and 1,000 fat-tailed sheep. When migrating to Shewa, this large flock is accompanied by goats, camels, donkeys and horses to transport household materials and food. The sheer organisational effort required to engage in such long-distance migration is remarkable, and economic success as the ultimate goal of the entire venture depends on reciprocal relations with settled populations en route.

Entire households and their extended families migrate, carrying supplies for both outwards and return journeys and the entire 3 months stay in Shewa. A single migration unit may easily consist of 50 people. The more than 30 days of travel on the mobility route is punctuated by 26 overnight stops at defined locations (Fig. 3.3). At each of these places, fodder and water for the animals have to be guaranteed, the spacious tent dwellings for the migrating parties have to be erected and special care has to be taken to prevent animals from feeding on the agricultural fields of sedentary hosts. Arrangements are made with farming populations along the way to

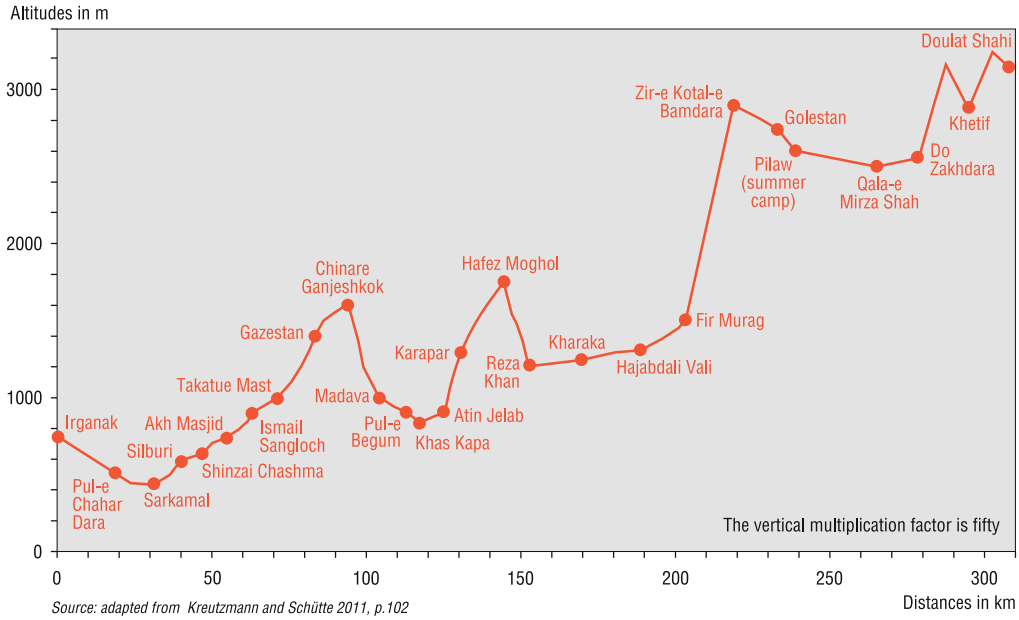


Fig. 3.3 Altitude-distance profile of the migration route of Pashtun pastoralists and the location of overnight stops between Chahar Dara and the Shewa Plateau

ensure that these necessities are available, and collaboration is organised differently on the onwards and return journeys.

At each stopping place, local farmers grow fodder crops for sale to pastoralists passing through in the spring season. This diminishes pastoralists' dependence on fertile and freely accessible grasslands whilst at the same time providing a secure income source for farmers. Animals are kept each night in designated spaces by permission of the sentinel of village grasslands, who is paid a grazing fee by herd owners. This way, lasting socio-economic relations between mobile and settled people have developed over time and can be counted upon when commencing the migration season.

Outbound, the stays at certain points en route usually last one or two nights, depending on the agro-ecological conditions in a given year and the availability of fodder and water. On the return trip from Badakhshan in late summer or early autumn, the stays easily extend to a week or longer so that the sheep maintain the weight gained during their months on the copious summer pastures. Encampments are erected on harvested fields, no payments are due and animals are allowed to roam freely to feed on crop residues. This practice also profits farmers when animal droppings fertilise their lands. Marketing of animals also takes place on return, and both Achekzai and Baluch sell about one-quarter of their fattened animals to farmers, butchers and on livestock markets to the larger urban areas of Faizabad, Kishim, Taloqan and Kunduz.

The continued prevalence of this type of pastoralism covering long distances in Northern Afghanistan indicates that it is still an economically viable undertaking, in spite of the detrimental conditions of heightened tenure insecurity and the oppressive rule systems that disadvantage pastoralists in the summer areas. Despite all this, pastoralists keep coming back to Shewa. Apparently, investments for fodder, for shifting entire households, for bribing officials, the arbitrary theft of animals and paying large amounts of cash to those who control the Shewa pastures are still adequately countered by the returns that can be realised in good years through marketing of sheep.

However, this arithmetic does not take into account the multiple risks to which the profession is exposed. In addition to insecurity of tenure, the recurrent drought conditions prevalent in Northern Afghanistan have potentially disastrous effects on the practice of nomadic pastoralism. Informants reported that in the drought of 2007–2008, up to 40% of their herds perished due to lack of water and grazing land. Also in the summer of 2008, armed bandits on horses from the neighbouring district of Ragh reportedly raided parts of the Shewa Plateau and took away large numbers of sheep, leaving affected nomads in distress and diminishing the basis of their livelihoods.

3.5 Mobility and Identity: Pastoralist and Sedentary Ascriptions

The fact of physical movement to gain and maintain pasture access, the embodied practice of movement, and the meanings that movement is given in their interplay contribute to form pastoral identities. Built, for instance, on tribal affinities and

affiliations, on notions of belonging to a group and location, on commonality of social practice, spatial connectedness and social cohesion, the realities generated out of shared identities and the representation of difference and 'the other' – as in the dichotomy of mobile pastoralist and settler – have significance.

The Achekzai refer to themselves as Kuchi in their summer areas and whilst migrating, and differentiate themselves from others by stressing their practice of mobility. In this sense, mobility quite literally works as a lived relation, 'an orientation to oneself, to others and to the world' (Adey 2010, xvii). In the residential village, however, it is the tribal affiliation that serves as a distinguishing marker of identity and belonging. Being Achekzai, Baluch or Popalzai is literally connected to territoriality, as access to the spring pastures in Irganak is regulated according to such tribal memberships. Additionally, ethnic identities as Pashtuns are cultivated following a regained political salience of ethnicity that appeared to have been overcome during resistance in the 1980s (Tapper 2008). This was obvious during the Taliban reign when the Tajik and Shughni population of Badakhshan suspected the Achekzai and others to be Taliban associates, and it is also evident today when the Pashtun-dominated District of Chahar Dara is uniformly perceived as a Taliban stronghold. Ethnic identities are also employed when Achekzai claim that Pashtuns are universally oppressed by Tajik powerholders that today control the Shewa plateau and demand revenues. The ways different groups are represented are important, as social identities constructed in these ways are instrumental for claiming and establishing access to resources.

Consider the competition in Shewa between pastoralists and residential Shughni; the Achekzai relate to their distant summer areas as integral parts of their lives, livelihoods, their profession as animal breeders and as a group whose distinguishing marker is mobility. The spaces they use for grazing on the Shewa Plateau form an important element of their spatial identity as Kuchi that is employed to claim access to those pastures. Shughni stay in Shewa all year round and depend on mountain agriculture combined with short-distance pastoralism. They have to deal with extremely harsh winters, a very short and restricted agricultural season and distant market access, and are in many respects a disadvantaged group. The opportunity to obtain written title to land on the plateau that formerly belonged to pastoralist groups and has since been converted to rainfed agriculture was thus readily taken, although people were well aware that user rights had previously resided with pastoralists. This happened at a time when pastoral mobility to Shewa was made impossible because of the war that reigned in Kunduz and Takhar during the Taliban expansion in the mid-1990s. The Achekzai inferred from this development their 'obligation to mobility', or otherwise risk losing their pastures. Identity has become politicised in this way, as it has served factional interests resulting in land disputes, with all parties having competing title documents from different times and different rulers. Pastoral self-attributions as a social group that engages in meaningful mobility and social ascriptions from settled people that perceive Kuchi as powerful competitors over identical resources continually reproduce an essentialist dichotomy, which in the case of the study group always incorporated a spatial perspective and conflicts over space and resource access.

3.6 Resilience of Pastoral Livelihood Systems

Today, the mobility strategies of pastoralists are shaped by external restrictions. Seasonal migration to Shewa is perceived as mandatory based upon fears of loosing access to ancestral pastures to opposing groups should the space not be occupied each season. Still, the threat of eviction is always lingering. This was not the case during the time of King Zahir Shah when Achekzai nomads were represented as a group that enjoyed protection from the centre and substantially profited over other communities, ensuring unconditional mobility and access to pastures. With shifting power relations and war conditions holding sway over the country, a gradual decline in this protection altered the mobility spaces of pastoralists and has posed new and unprecedented threats to the community. Four distinct phases can be identified that are marked by alternating phases of sedentarisation and re-nomadisation, depending on political, socio-economic and environmental conditions:

1. A phase of comparatively less burdened mobility refers to the time prior to the Saur Revolution of 1978. The 'times of freedom' are remembered in the collective memory of Achekzai as periods with abundant pastures on the Shewa plateau. Mobility strategies were much more extended than today, and the annual migration period lasted up to 8 months. Following the summer period in Shewa, a delegate group of the Achekzai pastoralists used to go directly from the Shewa Plateau to the Afghan capital Kabul to market their fat animals and obtain the best prices for rams at Charikar, the capital city of Parwan. This entailed another 1-month journey across the Anjuman Pass (cf. Kreutzmann and Schütte 2011, Fig. 5, 114).
2. A phase of disrupted mobility occurred between 1978 and 1996 – the times of Soviet occupation and the subsequent disastrous civil war – when landmines on pastures, aerial bombardments as well as forced revenue extraction in-kind or blunt livestock theft by different factions of the resistance severely endangered the practice of mobile pastoralism.
3. A phase of sedentarisation and complete collapse of mobility characterised the reign of the Taliban between 1996 and 2001 when the route to Shewa was not passable due to heavy fighting. During this time, tenure relations on the plateau changed significantly. Tajik commanders established their power bases in Badakhshan, putting them in a position to grab vast pasturelands and forcefully extract revenues.
4. The current and prevailing phase of re-nomadisation and restricted mobility started in 2001 when the route was open but pastoralists discovered that their ancestral pastures were now under armed control and access possible only via cash payments.

Since 1978, pastoralism to Shewa has become an increasingly insecure venture exposed to many risks. It is characterised by a continuum of changing levels of livelihood insecurity and restrictions. However, pastoralism, as practised by the Achekzai and Baluch, has also proven its dynamism and flexibility. Depending on conditions, phases of sedentarisation and pastoralism may alternate as necessary. This flexibility and their access to irrigation land in the Kunduz oasis has allowed

pastoralists to cope with the disruptions of spatial mobility and the temporal breakdown of pastoral production and reproduction systems that occurred during the previous 30 years. In the context of pastoralism in Afghanistan, the 'politics of mobility' (Cresswell 2010) are central to an understanding of how territorial practices unfold. This is to be understood in terms of changing local and regional power structures that have a bearing on how pastoralism is carried out. Access to those in power, as was the case during the reign of the Afghan king with his supportive policies, ensured that the Achekzai enjoyed undisputed access to fertile pastures. As Badakhshan gradually turned into an important stronghold of the Northern Alliances during the resistance, civil war and Taliban regime, Pashtun pastoralists had to endure growing restrictions in carrying out their pastoral practices. Access to pastures became contested when abounding title documents resulted in a form of legal pluralism facilitated by the multitude of stakeholders that exercise power in Badakhshan in order to extract dues from pasture users. The deeds issued by the king thus compete with various other title documents provided to a multitude of users by different rulers. The changing power relations that govern the pasture territories in Shewa benefitted different and often competing groups and resulted in legal geographies of pasture access that became increasingly determined by the exercise of power and not by state or customary law.

Rules of access are solely determined by strongmen and their militias, and the Afghan state is not included at all in any transfers of rights and resources. Lack of access to the new powerholders emanating from the Northern Alliances exposes pastoralism as practised by the Achekzai to new risks and vagaries that they cannot control. However, the example of the Achekzai also demonstrates the resilience of pastoral communities and their capacity to continuously adapt to changing political, economic and social conditions. Viewed through the lens of their changing mobility practices when striving to access the Shewa pastures, the intricate entanglements of power to which pastoral practices are exposed become visible.

Notes

1. The Shughni population in Shewa comprises about 700 houses distributed amongst those 14 villages, thereby accommodating nearly 1,900 households and 9,000 individuals. These households together cultivate about 12,000 *jerib* (approx. 2,400 ha) of rainfed and irrigated land, of which 73% is rainfed (data collected by Aga Khan Foundation in 2006).
2. Rabbani formally stayed Afghan president also during the reign of the Taliban. From 1996 on, he established his headquarters in Faizabad, the provincial capital of Badakhshan.

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