

Tracing Change: On the Positionality of Traditionally Mobile Groups in Kabul's Camps

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Abstract

This article explores the positionalities of two traditionally mobile groups of people in Afghanistan, former pastoralists and peripatetics, who are currently living in several urban camps in Kabul. Starting from the assumption of their immobilization in-between places, the research shows their current self-positioning in the process of seeking belonging can be traced in locality-generating practices. At the same time, both groups are subject to context-producing effects through external events and forces linked not only to government (non-)policies but also to the global war on terror and exposure to neoliberal capitalism. The incapacity of the state to meet camp dwellers' expectations to provide shelter and income opportunities exacerbates their social immobility, which is both a cause for and effect of forced spatial immobilization. In light of the tension between efforts to belong and the increasing cementation of the status quo, the locality-generating practices of camp residents in Kabul reveal ambivalence.

Keywords

Positionality, peripatetic groups, nomads, displacement, refugees, Afghanistan

1. Introduction

Afghanistan's capital Kabul is currently housing more than 50 so-called camps (*kamp/-hā*), unauthorized settlements on government and private land, comprising irregular makeshift housing arrangements such as tents and basic mud shelters. More than 40.000 people inhabited these dwellings in 2015. Throughout 2016, the camp populations increased because of new arrivals from the most conflict-ridden areas of Afghanistan, for example Kunduz Province. The residents hail from various ethnic groups (Pashtuns, Tajiks) and other social groups; many of them belong to minorities and low-social status groups, such as peripatetics, former nomads, impoverished economic

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ic migrants from other provinces and the urban poor. They feature complex backgrounds of displacement, and secondary and tertiary displacement experiences are common. For example, as initially voluntary repatriates most were unable to return to the place of origin of their family before the war and subsequently found themselves displaced after return, settled temporarily in one place only to be forced to leave again and seek new shelter elsewhere. The resurgence of violent conflict inside Afghanistan and narrowing options for refuge in Pakistan and Iran mean that the camp residents find themselves in forced spatial immobility: They are neither able to “return” nor to flee again abroad in large numbers, thus remaining with no other place to go. At the same time, they cannot afford to buy or rent regular houses, and they face large-scale neglect from national, international and municipal authorities, because they elude conventional categories of refugee camp residents and are not part of the so-called refugee regime (Turner 2016).¹

By 2016, many of the camp residents had been localized in these types of shelters for twelve to fourteen years. They had repatriated after the Afghan conflict was officially declared “over” and President Karzai called on all Afghans in exile to return and join in rebuilding their home country. He promised land, shelter and economic prospects after the toppling of the Taliban government in late 2001. The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) assisted the voluntary repatriation from Pakistan and Iran, envisaging sustainable return as the end of a cycle and less as a new start, full of challenges for reintegration. However, the establishment and existence of the camps since at least 2002 is an indicator of protracted situations of forced displacement in Afghanistan, and of the reality that return has not been sustainable because local reintegration of voluntary repatriates was not successful and in situ integration for internally displaced is not aided. This raises the question of how the displaced deal with their situation as Kabuli camp residents. The challenges they face are at least threefold: Besides being physically “stuck” in the camps, they are extremely poor and economically marginalized without obvious prospects for social mobility to move out of the camp setting. Moreover, given their long-term exile experience abroad, and the fact that, as time passes, the majority of the Afghan refugee population was born and brought up in exile without knowing their putative “home country” Afghanistan at all, the question of belonging and home-making – local integration not only in the physical but also ideational-cognitive and social sense – poses a major challenge. The prospect of dealing with these chal-

¹ The emic label “camp” (*kamp*) is misleading in so far as these so-called camps are neither refugee camps in the narrow sense – although the settlement pattern is similar – nor are they institutionalized or enjoying systematic support by external actors (Turner 2016).

enges is captured with the notion of “change” that can be traced in either direction – for the better, that is, successful integration and belonging or for the worse, possibly manifest in further exclusion, expulsion, discrimination, denial of citizenship rights, etc.

This article investigates the prospects and strategies of two particular groups of camp residents – former nomadic pastoralists and peripatetics (non-food producing nomads) with itinerant livelihoods – for dealing with this triple challenge. Positionality serves as the analytical lens that reveals prospects of change (inclusion vs. exclusion in overall “post-2001 Afghanistan”), tracing the group members’ self-positioning, that is, how they situate themselves in the current socio-spatial and political context as recently displaced and de facto urban poor, and their social position as deriving from situations of protracted forced displacement

The two types of groups have been selected for analysis because their identity and position is particularly challenged, given that both have traditionally relied on high spatial mobility for making their livelihoods. In addition the peripatetic groups were historically marginalized and considered low-status and socially peripheral in Afghan society. Thus, the hypothesis guiding this research was that these two formerly nomadic groups among the camp residents are likely to make the most pronounced efforts in dealing with spatial immobilization, economic marginalization and in their overall struggle to belong to and integrate into current Afghan mainstream society. To operationalize the investigation of the self-positioning of the groups in question, liminality is used as an auxiliary concept.

While the status of liminality has been a significant lens for looking at non-food producing nomads (peripatetics) in earlier academic publications (Rao 2004), it is argued here that the analytical focus on the direction of liminality allows an understanding of the locality-generating practices that the group members employ in their struggle to belong. Locality is understood here as the “phenomenological property of social life” and “structure of feeling” that goes beyond the immediate physical neighbourhood (Appadurai 1996); as such it reinforces the focus of this article on the socio-cognitive dimension of (im)mobility and belonging. Locality-production takes place through everyday practices of doing, saying and thinking by local subjects in specific neighbourhoods, while it is simultaneously context-driven by structural limitations.

The analysis will advance in four steps: In the second part, I introduce the trajectory of Afghanistan’s peripatetic and pastoral groups and recount how they came to be localized in Kabul’s camps. Starting from the assumption that these groups are currently in some type of transformation that set in with the spatial shift to one of Kabul’s camps where they face tenure insecure

rity and are vulnerable to renewed prospective displacement, I introduce the concept of liminality in the third section to assist in detecting the self-positioning of the groups in question. In the fourth part, I illustrate empirical insights regarding the degree and direction of liminality among both types of groups. Reflections on the findings on positionalities are summarized in the fifth part, before I conclude with an outlook on the group members' prospects for change and belonging in Afghanistan.²

2. The trajectory of Afghanistan's former pastoralists and peripatetic groups

The point of departure for the research reflected in this paper was the observation that Kabul's camps house – along with others – different groups of people who had traditionally been highly mobile through their migratory and itinerant modes of living. They can be broadly subdivided into former food-producing (pastoral) nomads (Kuchi) and peripatetics, often described as non-food producing nomads because of their itinerant livelihoods. Of the different types of peripatetics that exist in Afghan society, four groups in particular have been encountered in the course of this research: the Jogi, Chori Frush, Ghorbat and Sheikh Mohammadi. The following paragraphs briefly introduce the Kuchi and the four peripatetic groups. It is important to note, however, that none of the groups is homogeneous.

Kuchi camp residents are Pashtun, former pastoralists who have moved to Kabul from refugee camps in Pakistan or who have been displaced by violent conflicts in other parts of Afghanistan.³ Here they had either settled or – in cases where they still tended animals after 2001 – they lost their animal herds relatively recently due to fighting or droughts or a combination of factors, crucial among which is usually the denial of access to traditional

² The article uses ethnographic interviews and other data from field research conducted in Kabul between 2012 and 2015. The research was conducted as part of a work package in the Crossroads Asia research network, financed by the German Federal Ministry for Science and Education (BMBF) (2011–16).

³ A 2003 government survey established the number of Kuchi in Afghanistan as approximately 2.4 million, of whom 1.5 million were reported to be still migrating with livestock (De Weijer 2007: 12). Comparing these numbers with the estimates for the overall population of Afghanistan the same year, it turns out that 10.5 per cent of the entire Afghan population are Kuchi and that 6.3 per cent of the population are migratory pastoralists. The camp population in the focus of this paper makes up only a tiny part of the one million non-migratory former pastoralists (*ibid.*: 13). The overall number of Kuchi residing in individual camps or across all urban camps is unknown because this type of data is not compiled by any organisation.

pastures. This denial is based on assertions made by local communities that the Kuchi support the Taliban.

In general, the term *kuchi* in Afghanistan denotes a migratory lifestyle; as an exonym, the term has come to be used to signify all pastoral nomads, Pashtuns and non-Pashtuns.⁴ Pastoral nomadism in Afghanistan has been undergoing change since at least the 1950s (Pedersen 1994). The war that ensued from the late 1970s constituted only one reason why livestock was abandoned at some point by individual families. Droughts and road constructions constitute two other, though contrasting types of events, that triggered change resulting in settlement and engagement in non-livestock professions before the 1980s. Investments in land, trucks and houses enabled rich pastoralists to transform their way of life and become settled (*deshin*); while poor pastoralists who had already been more engaged in harvesting, petty trade and shepherding for settled people during their seasonal migrations, took up all kinds of unskilled labouring jobs.

However, settlement processes were not irreversible; processes of re-nomadisation took place at times. Frauke de Weijer (2007) argues that many of the former pastoralists and settled Kuchi share a kind of cultural identity that is signified by their usage of the term “Kuchi” as an autonym. The identity-framing has taken on political clout with the political concession of the government in allocating “Kuchi” ten seats in parliament since the election in 2005 and with the establishment of an Independent Department for Kuchi Affairs under the President’s office in 2006.

The non-pastoralist, traditionally nomadic groups currently residing in camps include the Sheikh Mohammadi, Ghorbat, Jogi, and Chori Frush. In the literature, they are categorized as peripatetics (Rao 1983).⁵ They are sometimes called non-food producing nomads (Rao 1982) because, like pastoralists, they are spatially mobile and offer their skills or niche-products to customers during migratory peddling. The Sheikh Mohammadi and Ghorbat are classified as itinerant craftsmen and occupational specialists (Olesen 1994, 2000). Chori Frush (Pashto: Bangriwala) women are known to sell bangles; the Jogi engage in different types of activities, most commonly the men take on labouring jobs and in addition often rear birds, while the women engage in fortune-telling, trinket selling and begging. In particular female

⁴ For a discussion on the self-designation of pastoral nomads such as the Kuchi see Tapper 2008 and De Weijer 2007; for the role and trajectory of pastoralists as a major population group in Afghanistan see Pedersen 1994 and Foschini 2013.

⁵ According to Rao 1987, peripateticism denotes a strategy or mode of subsistence that combines spatial mobility, non-subsistent commerce, and group endogamy; peripatetics are part of the wider economic system (Berland / Salo 1986).

labour and the appearance of women in public but also the deviation from other mainstream norms of Afghan society has resulted in the stigmatisation of many peripatetic groups as gypsy-like and the subsuming of all kinds of itinerant people under the pejorative term “Jat” (Rao 1986). The groups are heterogeneous, differ among themselves on their origins and insist on differentiated emic concepts (autonyms) to signify their group identity.

A case in point is “Jogi” as an external category for several groups of people who reportedly fled the Soviet political expansion and incorporation of the Emirate of Bukhara in the early 20th century, across the Amu Darya River. “Jogi” is described as an ethnonym by Aparna Rao (1986: 273). He states that in the 1970s the Jogi consisted of four sub-groups who relied on particular migratory circuits in north Afghanistan. However, these Jogi groups – two of whom claim a place of origin north of the Amu Darya River (Kulabi, Bukharai) and two a location to the south of it (Balkhigi, Tashqurghani) – have usually rejected the exonym “Jogi” in an attempt to escape its pejorative connotation. Interviews showed that individuals use the name of origin for themselves. Furthermore, narrated accounts are consistent about the constant wandering of the groups and engagement in itinerant occupations before the outbreak of war, followed often by short-term emigration to Pakistan and relocation into long-term exile in Iran.

When the immigration policy of the Iranian government tightened in the mid-2000s, many of them were forced to return to Afghanistan although they had never been able to obtain Afghan citizenship. Their statelessness is one reason why Jogi groups have received more attention by researchers, comparatively speaking, in the post-2001 period than other itinerant groups (Hennion / Hervé 2011). No data has been collected for most of these other groups since the 1980s.

In comparison to Kuchi, the peripatetic groups constitute a smaller and more destitute part of the Afghan population and they have no political platform. While Kuchi might have been romanticized by external observers as “wild outcasts with unlimited freedom”, peripatetics are often viewed as outcasts and socially marginalized because of their occupations (Rao 1982, 1986). They have always had to adapt themselves to the majority community and circumstances surrounding them, whereas nomadic pastoralists had often enjoyed the patronage of Afghan rulers. In some larger camps, both former pastoralists and peripatetic groups have put up mud hut shelters, but otherwise Kuchi dwell separately. Given the experience of recent displacement with hardly any option for movement elsewhere, but also without any tenure security in the current camp places, the groups can be viewed as stranded in the Afghan capital and at the social margins of Afghan society.

3. Investigating positionality

Put simply, positionality encompasses the relational situatedness of individuals or groups in a physical but also a social and cognitive sense, that is, how different social entities are positioned with respect to one another in space, time, and imagination. As such, notions of positionality are capable of providing information about subjects' outlook on the world, and about belonging and related prospects of locality-(non)production (see below). However, a processual subjective positioning of the actors concerned has to be distinguished from their social position as the result of structural (context) forces. In this analysis, I understand positionality as encompassing both social position as the outcome of a set of structure-induced effectivities and social positioning as a set of practices, actions and meanings (Anthias 2006: 27). As the relational disposition of individuals or groups, positionality is contingent on power constellations in the respective temporal, spatial, social and geographic contexts that shape and potentially modify it (Sheppard 2002: 318).

The previous section introduced the particular context of renewed displacement for the Kuchi and peripatetic groups. Against this background, I argue that they are currently in a state of liminality, yet to be defined. In spatial terms they shifted their place of residence to highly contested urban land without tenure security. With regard to their social mobility, representatives of the once highly mobile groups seem to be immobilized in the status of camp residents, not least because they lost former income-generating activities and abandoned their homes when they moved to Kabul. Both types of groups arrived in the capital with hopes and aspirations but without any assurance of what would become of them. However, this is not to pre-empt the analysis of the groups' positionality by saying that they are in a liminal position. Instead, I aim to employ the concept of liminality to aid the specification of positionality. For this purpose, I draw on the subtleties of liminality as an analytical lens, in particular on the distinction between the degree and direction of liminality (Szokolczai 2015: 30).⁶

Following Harald Wydra, Bjørn Thomassen and Agnes Horvath (2015), I employ liminality as an analytical concept to understand the formative and transformative situation that I assume both groups studied in this article find themselves in currently. First defined in anthropology, liminality originally described the importance of in-between periods in the example of rituals

⁶ Arpad Szokolczai (2015: 30) did not actually distinguish factors to determine degree *versus* direction of liminality but conflated them. Below, I take his ideas as a point of departure to conceptualize the distinction.

(*rites de passage*) in small-scale societies (van Gennep 1960 [1909]). However, the concept has been extended for understanding other types of transitions. Broadly, liminality refers to the “experience of finding oneself at a boundary or in an in-between position” (Thomassen 2015: 40); it “is about how human beings, in their various social and cultural contexts, deal with change” (ibid.). In contrast to its usage in classical anthropology, this extended concept of liminality is not conceived of as linear. Instead, the outcome of a liminal process is uncertain and contingent upon the formative impact of the experience/s as such, thus potentially leading in different directions (ibid.: 42). It can even evolve into a fixed state and become permanent (ibid.: 54).

Inspired by Arpad Szakolczai (2015) and Bjørn Thomassen (2015), I propose to look at current positionalities of the groups in question via the distinction of degree vs. direction of liminality. The degree of change is contingent upon “surviving fragments of previous identities, the existence of external reference points that remain more or less intact”, and the “presence or absence of new models, forms, and measures” (Szakolczai 2015: 30). The latter point is also indicative of the direction (not to be confused with the final destination, which remains uncertain). I hypothesize that a direction of change can be traced in locality-producing practices (Appadurai 1996: 178ff) in the respective social and spatial contexts. According to Arjun Appadurai, locality-generation takes place in neighbourhoods that both constitute and require contexts. Local subjects are “in a position to generate contexts as they produce and reproduce their own neighbourhoods” but are also subject to the context-producing effects of structural forces such as the nation-state (ibid.: 186). Locality-producing practices comprise, for example, physical actions like building a house or a village, social efforts like participation in communal activities, formal registration and school enrolment, but also mental-cognitive practices articulated in discourses, such as expressing loyalty to the government (policies) or local powerholders. Besides such locality-generating practices of inclusion (emplacement), exclusionary (boundary-making) practices point to a different direction of locality production, for example, keeping children out of school, avoiding identity registration for fear of forceful conscription, etc. Both boundary-drawing and boundary-mitigating practices of locality-production mirror individuals’ and collectives’ transformative experiences.

The direction of liminality and change can thus be traced in different dimensions that manifest themselves in in-between positions in a process of locality-generation or of seeking belonging. The camp populations in this study returned and settled down in Kabul, presumably because they identified with Afghanistan, but their experience has been that they do not belong and are not accepted as full members of society. I establish that belonging is the

motivation for and aim of all their activities. Belonging marks the emotion-laden process of situating oneself as an individual or a group (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2012: 12); it encompasses practices of locality generation, which produce “a structure of feeling” by “particular forms of intentional activity and yielding particular sorts of material effects” (Appadurai 1996: 182). Locality is thus also to be seen as a process, not an outcome. According to Floya Anthias (2006: 21), it is “through practices and experiences of social inclusion that a sense of a stake and acceptance in a society is created and maintained”. If the creation of belonging is understood as a laborious act that, along with emplacement practices, also always encompasses boundary-making practices, it is obvious that the outcome will be uncertain and dependent on multiple factors, not least structural (context) conditions. The notion of seeking belonging through locality-generating practices (including both emplacement and boundary-making practices) emphasizes the role of making meaning and the cognitive-emotional dimension, including imagining and aspirations. Taken further, the processes of locality generation and seeking belonging are closely interlinked with normative ideas related to the multi-dimensional quality of life (*ibid.*: 20) – including the state-subject relationship, mitigation of inequalities, and questions of governance. Such processes are distinct from merely establishing cultural identity.

The assumption in this article is that a specification of the experiences and locality-generating practices will provide information about the direction of change and thereby facilitate a better understanding of positionalities. Arjun Appadurai has pointed out how locality is always an “inherently fragile achievement” (1996: 179) because its creative generation is potentially confronted with more effective structural context-producing forces. In his writings, he focuses on the nation-state as a powerful context-producing frame; however, in the context of this research it became evident that the absence of the state’s manifestations can invoke an increase in fragility. Against this background, the subsequent analysis of positionalities deals largely with phenomena of ambivalence (Giesen 2015: 62).

4. Tracing change

The empirical analysis in the following two sections is guided by the question: How do the Kuchi and peripatetic groups, in particular the Jogi, Chori Frush, Sheikh Mohammadi, and Ghorbat, experience and navigate the modalities and effects of the spatial immobility they are subject to and how do they situate themselves in the current socio-spatial and political context as displaced and de facto urban poor?

4.1 Kuchi – from nomadic pastoralists to urban proletariat

The Kuchi population in various urban camps is in a situation where their recent or much earlier loss of traditional lifestyle, livelihood-making and identity as erstwhile pastoral nomads has come under renewed scrutiny. While there is ample evidence that the transformation experience in terms of livelihood change (pauperism, impoverishment, sedentarisation trends) has been in progress since as early as the 1950s (Pedersen 1994), I contend that the recent settlement in any of the urban camps nevertheless signifies a marked rupture with the past. Because of the political developments in Afghanistan after 2001 and the related narratives of state building and prosperity, the Kuchi, maybe for the first time, reflected on their experiences in comparison to this imagined future. They connected aspirations with it, ranging for example from either getting assistance to re-establish their herds, or alternatively receiving a plot of land with a robust title deed to settle down with the entire family.

The model of a bright future was embodied in the prospect of state provisions for a better life, entertained for example by Hamid Karzai who as interim President in 2002 called upon all Afghans in the neighbouring countries to return to Afghanistan, promising them land and peace. The newly crafted constitution of 2004 included the government's commitment to facilitate the settlement of all the Kuchi (1.5 million of whom were still migrating with their livestock at this point of time), which is a commonly shared ambition among policy makers and pastoralists in Afghanistan alike, even if for somewhat different reasons. In practice, the settlement was to be realized through the distribution and allocation of public land by the government to Kuchi interest groups and for Kuchi townships.

The newly created image of the future, against which the Kuchi started to reflect on their own existence and situation, frames their transitory subjectivities. Asked who they are today given that the term *kuchi* traditionally denotes nomadic pastoralists with large herds of livestock, the interviewees gave mixed responses. Some insisted that they are nevertheless Kuchi because this is the group they belong to (*qawm*)⁷ and the Kuchi status is recorded even in the identity document. In contrast, others stated that they feel they are no longer actually Kuchi because the defining feature of Kuchi identity used to be the herding of livestock and nomadic pastoral way of life. For example, one respondent raised the question:

⁷ In the tribal context of the Kuchi respondents, *qawm* can refer to a tribe or (sub)lineage; here reference is made to the overall descent group that generates a common identity (Rzehak 2011: 9). For the usage of *qawm* in a more general sense see Orywal 1983.

What kind of Kuchi are we? We don't own thousands of sheep, goats, and dozens of camels these days. We cannot say Kuchi anymore.⁸

Other arguments brought up in the discussions referred to the lack of pasture areas or denied access indicating inhibited spatial mobility; yet several interviewees ascertained also the absence of *nang-namuz-ghairat*⁹, pointing towards the loss of cognitive status dispositions connected with the idea of "Kuchiness" or being Kuchi.

Two things deserve mentioning when analysing the degree of change in terms of surviving fragments of previous identities and the existence of external reference points that have remained intact. First, it is striking that many of the Kuchi communities in Kabul's urban camps are still engaged with livestock in considerable numbers. Many families tend sheep and goats for butchers for certain remuneration, especially leading up to the annual Muslim feast of sacrifice (Eid-e qurbān). It is a familiar sight throughout Kabul to see old men and young boys tending larger stocks of livestock in the streets and open spaces in the urban area, whereby the herders are recognisable through what locals assert to be "Kuchi appearance", referring to features and dress. The animals are fed on waste dumps and spilled-over waste containers mostly outside the camps; within the camps, they are provided with leftovers from the vegetable markets where many Kuchi males work as porters.

Second, the most obvious external reference point is the entry on the identity card of former and current nomadic pastoralists and their offspring as Kuchi. If someone is registered as belonging to the Kuchi category (no matter what his own identity), his identity document gives his summer and winter place of residence, which traditionally differ. However, the current non-movement of many Kuchi seems sometimes to be evidenced in entries that give the same place for winter and summer residence.

Another external reference point undergoing a change of significance is the pattern of representation among the Kuchi or – more to the point – the legitimacy of the Kuchi political leaders. Several Kuchi respondents articulated their disappointment with their elders, some of whom they voted for during the parliamentary and provincial council elections. The complaints ranged from the feeling of having been used as a vote bank by candidates who did not fulfil their promises, to the assessment that the Kuchi leaders

⁸ Interview with Kuchi elder in Sarak-e Do Proja Taimani, Kabul, 8 November 2015.

⁹ For example, interview with former Kuchi elder in Parwan-e Seh, Kabul, 23 November 2015. The concepts *nang*, *namuz* and *ghairat* signify honour, pride, dignity, and reputation that constitute the core values of Pashtunwali, the code of conduct for ideal honourable behaviour among Pashtuns. See Rzehak 2011.

only act in self-interest and do not represent all *qawm* members. Those holding the latter view also see the Kuchi Members of Parliament as corrupt, selfish and profit-seeking, thereby ignoring their destitute constituency with respect to interest representation and dispute resolution. Urban Kuchi camp populations, who are the poorest among all Kuchi, are in need of support to gain access to land, secure tenure and employment. Their only hope is that some Kuchi leaders will one day remember them and allocate them land because in their self-perception they do not have the ability to lobby on their own behalf through lack of money, contacts, relationships and power. This was generally described with the formula *wasm narasigi*.¹⁰ Moreover, their traditional skills do not qualify them for the urban labour markets. Available options do not go beyond carrying out the simplest unskilled tasks as porters in the big wholesale markets for vegetables and herding livestock on waste-dumps.

To summarize the degree of change, the status description is ambivalent and fairly constant. The examples show that despite the large-scale loss of livestock and herds, the Kuchi identity and respective ID-card entries are still considered precious by most Kuchi as they provide a frame of reference and symbolically link them to a powerful group with political influence at the national level. They hope that this link could yield material or status benefits if Kuchi politicians are so minded and consider it favourable. This prospect keeps many Kuchi in a waiting position and hesitant to leave their Kuchi identity behind, even if they never intend to return to a pastoral nomadic lifestyle. Thus, for example, previous land allocation schemes for several townships that benefited particular tribes who could establish links with Kuchi Members of Parliament (Mullah Tarakhel, Allah Gul Mujahed) have evoked envy, admiration, and hope at the same time.¹¹

Practices of emplacement and boundary-making, that is acts of locality production, count in assessing the direction of change. While there is no uniform picture and generalizations should be avoided, the fieldwork in the camps showed evidence of certain emplacement experiences, for example, in the school education of Kuchi children. In one camp, boy and girls were attending 11th grade at the time of fieldwork, causing one elder and father to note its transformative implications:

You see, there is my daughter coming home from school. She is in 12th grade now; all kids are enrolled in the local school. They will have a better

¹⁰ Interview with Kuchi elder in Sarak-e Do Proja Taimani, Kabul, 8 November 2015.

¹¹ Interviews in Kabul camps, e.g. with former Kuchi in Pul-e Shina, Bagrami, 17 November 2015; in Sarak-e Do Proja Taimani, 8 November 2015; in Parwan-e Seh, 23 November 2015; with Kuchi elder in Tajwar Sultana camp, 18 October 2013, etc.

future, nobody will go back to herd livestock and climb up pastures. They will be living in the cities.¹²

His account shows how education is linked to hopes and aspirations involving vertical mobility, a decent job in Kabul, and a better life in the future. The irreversibility was further expanded on when he explained that the nomadic lifestyle was particularly hard for women and now that women had lived in the city, none would desire to lead a rural pastoralist life ever again.

In the 20th century, the tension between tribe and state and, more particularly, between nomadic communities and governmental rule and administration was often used to characterize the political system as fragile and the Afghan state as weak. The interviews held in 2015 with Kuchi camp residents evidenced narratives of inclusion rather than exclusion from the state and territory of Afghanistan. When asked about their expectations from government authorities and experiences with government support, several interviewees stressed how the state is their “father and mother”. Further, they emphasized that Afghanistan is the homeland (*mulk*) and earth (*khāk*) they are connected with, adding that Pakistan would always remain the place of refuge in contrast to home. For example, in response to the question about their most pressing needs, one elder said:

We need a place to live [*jāy*], education, and peace [*ārāmi*]. Neither our elders nor our youth have seen peace. Afghanistan is our homeland, our soil, our life and livelihood. Pakistan in contrast was refuge.¹³

To substantiate their emotional sense of belonging and loyalty to Afghanistan, several interviewees expressed how they had fought in the jihad to defend their country. In various interviews, respondents reported that family members were enrolled in the Afghan National Security Forces, thus “truly” serving their country. Such statements were almost always followed up by statements that expressed how they could thus rightfully articulate demands towards the state. For example, one Kuchi elder stated:

We have people in the Afghan National Army, the National Police and the security organs. We are ready to serve with women and men. We are serving this country but do not receive reciprocal returns. We expect the government to provide us with plots. We serve and fight. The government has so much vacant land (*dash*) and space. It is the father and mother and should take care of its people. Nevertheless, we will always support the government, even if only one tent is left with us. We won't take any action against the government.¹⁴

¹² Interview with Kuchi elder in Chahrai Hotel-e Gul-e Surkh, Kabul, 15 November 2015.

¹³ Interview with former Kuchi elder in Parwan-e Seh, Kabul, 23 November 2015.

¹⁴ Interview with Kuchi elder in Sarak-e Do Proja Taimani, Kabul, 8 November 2015.

As the quote exemplifies, several interviews respondents felt the need to stress that they were not acting against the government. While this might have been a function of my presence as a foreign interviewer, the account could equally be indicative of their awareness of being categorized by others as anti-government “elements” or supporters of insurgency groups, such as the Taliban. Trying to counter this notion is clearly a strategy to achieve “inclusion” and establish belonging. The same intention is manifest in individuals’ increased seeking of identity documents from the Afghan state, even if they have to be obtained for money informally. In the past, only few Kuchi leaders assigned them any value or actually needed the ID-cards. In the rare cases when they obtained identity documents, they often used to have these documents from both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The previous examples give evidence of locality-generating practices aimed at belonging; they show the ways, both practical and cognitive, in which the Kuchi strategize to become part of the context they returned to or find themselves in. These practices are situated in neighbourhoods as the immediate locale of actions and statements (Schatzki 1996). Neighbourhoods (in contrast to the broader concept of locality) are the immediate contexts where livelihood strategies are pursued, for example the above-mentioned tending of livestock for butchers, the daily labouring in the city’s wholesale markets, and use of education and health treatment for family members. The menial jobs that the Kuchi mostly qualify for are despite tangible aspirations for a better future not complained about, but instead seen as a chance and real source of income one is glad to have because of the lack of alternatives at the moment.

Some respondents admitted to being forced to beg at times or in the past, an activity that is perceived as deeply degrading, in particular because nomadic life had usually involved exchange instead of unilateral dependence on the goodwill and the charity of others. The immediate context also includes neighbourhood relations, such as the contact and maintenance of relations with the local police district officials and the neighbourhood representatives of the area surrounding the unauthorized settlement.

The reverse side of locality-generating practices is constituted by practices of exclusion, dissociation or boundary-drawing. The narrative accounts that were encountered during fieldwork represented above all reactions to outside influences that force conditions of severe social deprivation and marginalisation on Kuchi in the urban irregular settlements. Disappointment with the government is commonly articulated, especially when people refer to the inadequate government performance in providing security and necessities such as a place to live and dignified income opportunities. As one elder put it:

We are deprived of our honour, pride and dignity [*nang, namuz, ghairat*; see footnote 8]; we have become little children. Even our educated peers have to go sit on the street corner [*chawk*] and hope for menial daily labouring jobs to feed their kids. And all of this after we have fought in the jihad for 10 to 12 years.¹⁵

A further move from the current place of residence is only deemed justified if the government provides full tenure security at the new place in an environment that offers prospects for employment. If this is not accepted by the government, several Kuchi representatives in different camps stated that the government would have to kill them if they wanted them to move (again) without such prospects. In addition, the frequently heard phrase that “there is no government” (*a'slan dawlat nadārēm*) indicates the degree of alienation of ordinary people from the state. At the same time it corroborates the attraction of the most frustrated camp residents to the Taliban, with its rival locality-producing frame. This was most markedly emphasized by an elder of fifty families who lived in dire conditions next to the sidewalk and main road in Parwan-e Seh. He stated:

The government is also hungry. I as the representative of 50 families cannot do much; I cannot bring peace, not even arrange for a school. The other day twenty youngsters left our camp without telling their parents or the elders; they want to escape to Turkey and Europe. The government officials are corrupt; there is no solidarity here among the people. There is no place we can go to, and Pakistan won't accept us anymore. We are left with no choice and forced to go to the mountains and join the Taliban.¹⁶

4.2 Jogi, Chori Frush, Sheik Mohammadi, and Ghorbat

Because of their marginal, outsider status in society, Afghanistan's peripatetic groups have been categorized as liminal in the past (Rao 2004). However, drawing on empirical insights from fieldwork I argue that even if the degree of liminality seems unchanged, examining the locality-generating strategies gives a more differentiated picture. When the degree of liminality is reflected upon with respect to surviving fragments of previous identities, the shifts in livelihoods and occupational orientation is noteworthy. The modes of income generation have changed significantly but not radically. For the Sheikh Mohammadi and Chori Frush I was able to interview, only the place of occupation has changed; otherwise they have maintained their crafts and customers from the past. The Ghorbat and Jogi have adapted their

¹⁵ Interview with Kuchi elder in Parwan-e Seh, Kabul, 23 November 2015.

¹⁶ Interview with Kuchi elder in Parwan-e Seh, Kabul, 23 November 2015.

occupational activities to the changing context, i.e. to different or new demands, available material, and so on.¹⁷

At the same time, stable external points of reference exist. The different groups known as Jogi trace their origin and identity to being Bukharai Sharif, Kulabi, etc. They have preserved their own language and special vocabulary; some have followed the same Sufi order over generations of displacement from the historic Emirate of Bukhara. Their awareness of their origin and history, their knowledge of (and connection with) *qawm*-members and relatives in what is today Tajikistan, and their anchor-place in northern Afghanistan where they started their administrative trail after moving south of the Amu Darya River – none of these have changed or been replaced by alternative reference points. From biographical interviews with Jogi respondents in five different camps, it seems that the older generation and only comparatively few younger individuals can substantiate the claims and identity markers. In contrast, most young Jogi are not able to make connections or elaborate in depth beyond using labels as to who they are, what distinguishes them from other groups, and where they came from. Similarly, the Chori Frush I met in four camps traced their origin to ancestors in Jalalabad and Kabul, used their own language called Enkee (Inku) and linked their identity strongly to the occupation of bangle-selling and petty trade throughout Kabul.

In the case of the Sheikh Mohammadi respondents who were interviewed in one closed settlement cluster in Qala-i Barqi area, the main identity marker of the past and the present is the occupation with petty trade. During seasonal itinerant migration they repair sewing machines throughout the countryside in Afghanistan and (north-)western Pakistan. The respondents suggested that several different groups of the larger Sheikh Mohammadi *qawm* had settled throughout Kabul in regular urban quarters; and they insisted that these non-camp residing families likewise derived their livelihoods from male family members' itinerant occupations. However, while in 2015 the respondents of one family (father and son) reported still pursuing their itinerant business, by 2016 they had given it up due to the increased insecurity along the roads. An additional reference point for their *qawm*

¹⁷ The adaptation capacity of peripatetics that falls together with sharp boundary-drawing to maintain their in-group identity has been emphasized by scholars (e.g. Günther 2015), who tend to categorize itinerant groups as gypsies. Accordingly, they exploit “social pastures”, identify and occupy economic niches, and orient their income generation according to opportunities as they arise (*kairos* economy). See Gmelch (1986) for a discussion on categorizations of nomadic people.

identity as Sheikh Mohammadi comprises their origin, traced to ancestors and the shrine of Sheikh Ruhani Baba in Zurmat (Paktiya).¹⁸

For the fourth group, the Ghorbat, their identity marker is their artisanship in making birdcages (*qafa*) from a certain type of reed. It evolved from their past specialization in sieve-making. Furthermore, the Ghorbat are experts in rearing different types of singing and fighting birds. They also make traditional hand drums (*dāira*), depending on the availability of other income activities in the urban environment. It is pertinent to note the Ghorbat's particular self-conception as poor and positioned at the margins of society. Some Ghorbat respondents claimed that the name "Ghorbat" stems from the Persian/Dari word root *gharib*, thus denoting "poor". In contrast, one respondent gave an account of the *qawm* history by tracing the main ancestors back to the alleged progenitor Qayam. In the course of doing this, he offered a narrative on *qawm*-subdivisions among the larger category of Ghorbat and how it came about that the destiny of his particular sub-group, Qosimkhel, was to always "be behind the food", that is, in permanent state of precariousness and at the edge of society if not inferior altogether.¹⁹ This narrative can be interpreted as a constant external reference point and, at the same time, it constitutes a locality-generating practice that helps the members of this particular Ghorbat community to make sense of and cope with their current existence.

So far, these elaborations on peripatetic groups have illustrated that the degree of liminality varies among the four groups investigated for this article. However, within each group it has largely remained constant over time and in comparison to the pre-war situation in the 1970s. As a means of tracing change, I have argued that the direction of liminality can be investigated in locality-generating practices. In terms of place-making in immediate neighbourhoods, all four groups seek strategies that are also employed by other groups in the camps, for example establishing relations with the local police district unit and the neighbouring permanent settlers. The latter can entail using the same mosque or arranging access to water; in few cases, camp inhabitants were also able to connect an electricity line. Needless to say, those making such arrangements have to rely on mutual acceptance or patronage, especially that of the established community for the new camp settlers.

In cases of camps established on private land, the residents sought good relations with the landowner. In practice, this ranged from paying rent (e.g. by two of four Chori Frush communities and the Sheikh Mohammadi)

¹⁸ Interviews with Sheikh Mohammadi family in District 8, Kabul, 15 November 2015 and 28 October 2016.

¹⁹ Interview with Ghorbat elders in walled compound of District 8, Kabul, 15 November 2015.

to contributing manpower for the landlord's different small repair and building projects near the allocated compound of residence in the case of the Ghorbat. One community of Chori Frush also felt the need to invest in close relations with other camp groups for protection and representation, as the end of "tenure" was looming because of plans to house a government hospital in the current camp area. In the case of one large Ghorbat community that resided in nine walled compounds in one Kabuli neighbourhood, I observed that they also sublet space to families who did not belong to their own group. This was possible because of their good knowledge about housing space and their established relations with several property owners in the same neighbourhood. Sub-letting was an opportunity to gain a modest income from the tenants' rent.

Besides these rather ordinary examples of place-making, I want to mention one rare occasion of public protests and attempts to gain a legal follow-up after the killing of two camp residents (among them one Jogi) on 18 June 2015, the first day of Ramadan that year. They make up a set of rather outstanding examples of emplacement practices. The victims had been present when the entourage of an influential public figure – including three police ranger cars staffed with policemen – arrived in the camp, claiming ownership of the land. After the gang of the strongman had started to destroy several houses and intimidated the local residents into vacating the place, the camp inhabitants sent an elder to negotiate on their behalf, but he was beaten with guns. This caused bystanders to intervene and the situation escalated, leaving two camp dwellers dead and ten injured. In the immediate aftermath of the confrontation, the families of the deceased addressed the local police and placed the dead bodies in front of the parliament building to protest and demand prosecution of the strongman and his armed personnel. They tried to get local media coverage, but had only limited success.²⁰ After realizing that nobody was responding to their cause of complaint, they appealed to several government departments, including the High Court of Afghanistan, asking for justice and prosecution. Despite the fact that dozens of people had witnessed the event and coincidental video-coverage of the encounter from the top of a building nearby appeared several weeks later, the case has not been addressed legally at the time of writing, more than one year later. In follow-up interviews during October 2016, Jogi respondents were of the opinion that they had tried everything possible in their power and despite the failure to gain formal justice, they were confident that divine justice would be meted out to the murderers and their backers. The active

²⁰ Interviews in Chaman-e Babrak, District 4, Kabul, 10 November 2015 / 28 October 2016 / 10 November 2016.

resistance against forced displacement at the arbitrary will of a powerbroker and the subsequent protests go beyond spatial claim making and point towards a larger attempt at locality-production entailing multiple dimensions of belonging. However, this larger attempt failed because the murders were not followed up and the land ownership question was not addressed.

Further examples of locality-generating practices that go beyond mere place making are connected to the active seeking of identity documents, a more recent development given that several peripatetic groups did not see any value in personal identification cards in the past.²¹ Some groups, for example the Jogi, were even denied citizenship, a practice that the current government recently revoked. At the time of field research in fall 2015 and 2016, the Jogi were directed to the Northern provinces of Kunduz and Balkh to apply for identity documents. The reason why the government wants the Jogi to establish their administrative record in these northern provinces is not entirely clear. One explanation is that it has to do with the initial settlement areas of Jogis at the time when they immigrated from north of the Amu Darya to Afghanistan after they fled Soviet expansion and influence in the first decades of the 20th century.

At the same time, it is likely that the government wants to keep restrictions of movement for people in place, in order to prevent everybody registering in Kabul in the expectation that access to services and resources is better in the capital. Jogi camp residents had been actively lobbying for the option to be registered in Kabul for the last nine years and despite the new regulation confining them to the north continued to do so, not least because of their lack of financial resources to travel to Kunduz and Mazar-e Sharif for paperwork. However, as a result of their demands directed to the government, evidenced in petitions and other types of documents addressed to the population registration department in Kabul since 2006, they have established an administrative legibility of the Jogi as a group in official records for Kabul. This collective representation has gone hand in hand with the subsequent crafting of "Jogi" as an autonym.

This act of active lobbying for registration as "Jogi" in Kabul was initiated by few individuals out of a group of youngsters in one particular

²¹ It is important to note that an estimated 50 per cent of the population of Afghanistan does not have identity documents; at the same time there are many cases where individuals possess several ID-cards (Interview with Population Registration Department Official, Kabul, 25 November 2015). If necessary, any individual is able to obtain forged identity documents anywhere and anytime in Afghanistan as long as he can pay. In view of the limited dissemination of ID-cards, it is somewhat remarkable that the Jogi should seek ID-cards with such zeal. It points to a strong secondary interest in having documents in case of renewed movement and possibly emigration.

camp in District 4 of Kabul. However because of the sharp drawing of boundaries that it signified, all those who are externally referred to as Jogi in other camps did not share in this development. In particular the elders had never referred to themselves as Jogi and rejected the term outright because of its pejorative connotation. Instead, they called themselves after their place of origin or after the trajectory of their movement, that is, as Bukharai, Kulabi, Qataghani, Farari, etc. Most commonly, they insist they are Tajik. Even this can equally be interpreted as an emplacement practice, because claiming to belong to the Tajiks means linking up to one of the largest population groups in Afghanistan and one of the two groups constituting the government, thus suggesting strong political networks, patronage, and power. At the same time, claims are just that and do not mean, for example, that these supposedly Tajik camp residents also vote on an ethnic basis. All respondents stated they would vote for whoever promised them most.

In the 2014 presidential election, many camp residents, including some of the traditionally highly mobile itinerant groups, voted for Ashraf Ghani because he had promised to provide all camp residents with a plot of land and secure tenure.²² The interviews with the Jogi, Chori Frush, and Ghorbat showed that they have maintained what could be called a flexible understanding of dwelling place and indicated the different communities' readiness to move anywhere if necessary. The undertone in several interviews with these groups echoes the group members' hope that the government will offer them a place with tenure security that also has facilities, above all water and employment. At the same time, it reflects their awareness of their powerlessness. As one Jogi musician said in reply to the question of why they would not resist eviction:

We avoid conflicts because we cannot get through to the government. We do not have our own representatives, not in the government, neither in the Provincial Council nor in parliament. Here in this place there are 80 to 100 families. We are all illiterate; we don't have the necessary comprehension.²³

However, differentiation is important when analyzing these accounts; the data collected so far do not allow generalizations. As illustrated in the quote, several Jogi communities clearly expressed that their relationship with a certain dwelling place and neighbourhood is indeed flexible and constituted a transit space rather than a permanent place of residence. The poorer and less-established the respondent Jogi communities were, the more Jogi camp

²² Camp representatives from all unauthorized settlements as well as government representatives (e.g. from the Ministry of Repatriation and Refugees, MoRR) reported that Ashraf Ghani made this promise during his election campaign.

²³ Interview with Jogi musician, Bagrami, 17 October 2015.

residents insisted that the government should provide them with a place for living with secure tenure.²⁴ Similarly, the Chori Frush indicated flexibility regarding the current place of residence but also stressed their desire to have a permanent place and to improve their socio-economic status. One Chori Frush elder said:

The government does something for the rich but not for the poor. Unfortunately, we don't have literate elders who could confront the government and request the allocation of plots. A plot of two *biswa* [200 square meters; KM] is all I want. My children should become teachers.²⁵

The aspiration to improve their socio-economic status was also shared by the Sheikh Mohammadi respondents. They complained about the deterioration of solidarity among *qawm* members, saying:

In the past we had visiting and exchange relationships with our *qawm* members, but now, since the revolution, if you are poor you don't visit and nobody comes to you.²⁶

Only in the case of one particular Ghorbat community did intended belonging and practices potentially aimed at emplacement shift into the announcement of ex negativo action: the respondents stated that they would kill themselves in the event of yet another forced displacement. The gravity of this claim and the degree of despair connected to it become clear when one considers that suicide is hardly ever accepted in Islam. Other groups interviewed claimed they were prepared to die resisting such a move. Actually announcing suicide is largely unprecedented.

The examples of emplacement practices have to be placed in context with boundary-making practices that point towards a tendency of some of the groups – in particular the Jogi and the Ghorbat – to remain outside mainstream society. The different Jogi and Ghorbat communities among whom interviews were conducted showed an ambivalent attitude towards education and careers in the formal job market. Some viewed education as essential for their future while others were not eager to permit their children to acquire school education, despite formal access. In contrast, the Chori Frush and Sheikh Mohammadi expressed a clear desire for education and accepted all kinds of hardships such as high fees, purchasing of fake identity documents,

²⁴ The destitute situation of many Jogi groups was also evidenced by the fact that they had stopped migrating to Jalalabad (in East Afghanistan) for the winter months because of the costs involved. In addition, they reported that they were no longer able to find a place near Jalalabad city center where they could have easy access to making a livelihood because of the rapid urbanization and scarcity of space there.

²⁵ Interview with head of household in Dewan Begi, District 5, Kabul, 18 November 2015.

²⁶ Interview with Sheikh Mohammadi family elder, District 8, Kabul, 15 November 2015.

avoiding child labour, in order to send their children to school. This indicates a desire for emplacement.

Boundary-drawing was further visible in reported practices; for example Ghorbat and Jogi groups (see above) stated that they prevented conflict escalations – both among themselves and with other groups (*qawm*) – in order to avoid government interference in their affairs. The prospect and fear of conflict with other groups at potential new residence sites caused the Ghorbat to stay in a particular place, although the end of the tenure period was approaching. The Ghorbat's justification narrative of why they occupy a marginal status in society (see above) can be read as a locality-generating practice but also as another example of boundary-drawing and self-exclusion. Related to this kind of dissociation, those sub-groups of the Jogi who are responsible for their legibility and self-conception as “Jogi” entertain the vague idea of “returning” to Tajikistan, which they consider their homeland as part of the former Emirate of Bukhara. However, this idea is contrasted with the efforts of the majority of those who are labelled Jogi externally as they claim to be Tajik and thus to belong to one of the most powerful groups in Afghanistan (see above).

5. Reflections on position and positioning, emplacement and boundary-making

What does all this mean for the positionality of the groups studied in their pursuit to belong? I have set out defining positionality as the reference points and processes of locality production undertaken by camp residents (positioning) and the context-producing influences by “outside forces” they are simultaneously exposed to (position). Drawing on the degree and direction of liminality to understand how the Kuchi and the members of the different peripatetic groups situate themselves as urban camp residents, I have established that the experiences of change in the different groups illustrate ambivalence. While the degree of liminality is most obviously characterized by the adjustment in livelihood-making practices due to the spatial shift to Kabul, identity markers such as the group's consciousness of ancestral origin and identification with their own reference group have remained largely unchanged since the pre-war situation. The analysis of experiences and locality-generating practices showed that, in comparison, several Kuchi respondents seem to pursue education and identification with what could be called their aspired community of emplacement (or “the project Afghanistan” as a society and state) more proactively and consciously than interviewees representing the peripatetic groups. Among the latter, the relationship between emplace-

ment practices and boundary-making practices points in rather divergent directions.

While no generalizations can be made at this point, the empirical data illustrate that the various groups pursue different emplacement strategies. The Sheikh Mohammadi and Chori Frush seem to be more oriented towards emplacement, whereas the record of Jogi groups and the Ghorbat is rather mixed. As the conflict over identity-crafting as “Jogi” versus “Tajik” showed, the interviews among Jogi respondents highlight how different strategies of emplacement and boundary-making are pursued even within groups. This was also indicated in the extent to which group members took advantage of education opportunities, their relation to the current place of camp dwelling and their self-conception as outsiders (example of Ghorbat above) and inferior human beings.²⁷ The following quote of an elder of 50 families sheds light on the self-conception of the most destitute Kuchi:

People call us *mikrob* [microbe], we are collecting dirt, they say we are spreading microbes [...] sometimes I wish a powerful earthquake would happen and as a result all people would be in the same condition under the debris, including the neighbours living in the surrounding apartment houses. We would all be equal [again].²⁸

Overall, the empirical evidence cautions against any assumption of linear directions of change in liminal settings. In particular the finding of boundary-making practices within groups related to individual families' economic status points to the fact that the degree of liminality of particular group sections – especially those in the camps – seems to be increasing. Several interviewees indicated that inter-*qawm* relations have worsened over the last few years; when previously people had supported each other with mutual borrowing, visits and moral assistance, this had recently ceased. Most obviously, money lending in cases of emergency was not possible anymore. Respondents of all groups, including the Kuchi, traced this to their socio-economic status as poor and powerless in contrast to their regularly settled and better-off *qawm* members throughout the country. These findings on the increasing precariousness of camp residents point to the broader influence of structural economic and political forces.

In terms of their “position”, both groups – Kuchi and peripatetics – can be described as subject to a set of context-producing forces. These forces

²⁷ The case of the Ghorbat and Jogi communities raises the question of how far the boundary-making practices are intentional, even pointing towards self-exclusion, and thus fixed marginality as a matter of choice. In this reading, the most marginalized possess a degree of agency – which they clearly use to opt out – and seek only selective belonging.

²⁸ Interview with former Kuchi elder in Parwan-e Seh, Kabul, 23 November 2015.

are responsible above all for the establishment of the camps as the result of forced return or settlement after the loss of place or livelihood, either in the neighbouring countries or in other regions of Afghanistan. However, in contrast to Arjun Appadurai (1996) and David Turton (2005), who proposed that the state is the most significant context-producing framework, I assert that in the case of Afghanistan the role of the state is ambiguous at best; the government itself is subject to wider context-production effects in the global war on terror and the unchecked exposure to neoliberal economic frameworks. The latter is evident in the donor-driven development agenda, the lack of pro-poor policies (manifest for example in the non-issuance of a Land Management Law from 2001 to this date), and the high aid dependency of the Afghan government. Dynamics related to the war on terror have, for example, caused Iran and Pakistan to expel Afghan refugees and illegal migrants. As a result, the options of movement for the groups have narrowed.

After spending decades in exile or taking advantage of open borders and opportunities for livelihood-making in Pakistan and Iran, Afghan refugees have been affected by restrictions from both states, set in motion by the political climate after 2001. In the most recent concrete case, the Peshawar army-school attack in December 2014 led to a marked increase in xenophobia directed at Afghans in Pakistan; it added to the already widely existing discrimination of Afghans by Pakistani authorities and police, and brought about their subsequent departure. The political conflict within Afghanistan over the establishment of legitimate rule between government and anti-government forces in the context of international military intervention and connected polarizations in the domestic political landscape has affected, for example, many Kuchi members who were the target of blanket condemnations as Taliban supporters. As a result of such accusations, the Kuchi were denied access to pastures and were consequently unable to maintain their herds and sources of livelihoods as when drought incurred in addition.

The incapacity of the government to mitigate these effects through social and land policies (Kohistani 2011), and more broadly their inability to provide security and the impasse (not to say failure) of development and reconstruction in Afghanistan has resulted in large-scale social immobility. The creation of belonging has been further complicated by the fact that the context-producing effects were accompanied by the omnipresent discourse over state-building and the prosperous peaceful future Afghanistan was to have. The boundary-making practices of the camp residents, which were pointed out in the empirical section, appear plausible when one considers that the camp residents compared their situation with the promises in these narratives, in the course of attempts to create belonging. The increase in inequalities has exacerbated social immobility, which is both a cause and

effect of forced spatial immobilization. The absence of models that provide conditions for facilitating social mobility have induced one of the main challenges to belonging and social inclusion, and the government's vision of Afghanistan now risks broad popular rejection.

6. Outlook

Since 2014, the camps in Kabul have been undergoing a re-interpretation by urban planners and humanitarian organizations that now designate them as slums of the type that exist in every other world capital because aid agencies have concluded that the conditions of prevailing poverty are chronic.²⁹ This relabelling suggests that the inhabitants can be uniformly targeted with urban development and planning measures at any (as of yet undetermined) point in the future.

However, the idea that urban planning measures can resolve the camp "problem" not only depoliticizes the existence of the camps, but also – and more importantly – ignores the lives and positionalities of the different camp dwellers and how these are contingent upon Afghanistan's conflict trajectory. This trajectory is evident even today in context-producing effects outside the realm of camp residents' influence. The data showed various efforts that both groups, the Kuchi and peripatetics, employ in their longing to belong and to develop a stake and gain acceptance as members of Afghan society. Most urgently, they seek a piece of land and opportunities for employment. Beyond that, they aspire for social inclusion, meaningful political representation, rights and justice. To the extent that their expectations remain unfulfilled, their feeling of belonging is inhibited and the positioning of various groups means they are increasingly at risk of turning openly against the government. Such a development would be the result of the government's negligence of the plight of camp inhabitants. The current large-scale social immobility constitutes a major impediment to belonging for the groups in question. In light of the friction between efforts to belong and increasing cementation of the status quo, characterized by ever-increasing socio-economic inequalities, the outcome of the locality-generating practices of camp residents in Kabul is uncertain.

²⁹ Interviews with NGO-workers in Kabul, 20 October 2013, 5 and 11 November 2015. The shift came in 2014 after the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) stopped all humanitarian aid for the Kabul Informal Settlements (KIS), as the camps are referred to among donors and non-governmental organizations.

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