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**Weak state, strong society? Looking beyond the poverty statistics in Afghanistan**

By

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**Abstract**

The conditions under which Afghan rural households have lived over the last four decades is one in which the state was distant (as in pre 1978), the enemy (as in the 1980s), substituted for by the rule of semi-mobile bandits or subject to authoritarian rule (in the 1990s) and since 2001 dysfunctional when state behaviour and that of other power holders has often been predatory and arbitrary.

Drawing on detailed qualitative research in five Afghan villages across two contrasting provinces, this paper explores household livelihood trajectories since 2003 within a context of longer village histories. An environment of acute risk and uncertainty has characterised most provinces although the causes, dimensions and consequences of this are highly variable. There are important differences between provinces and villages. The concept of village republic is used to explore the variable capacity of villages to provide public goods, the circumstances that have brought this about and argues that it is possible to characterise long term village behaviour. Such variability is rarely captured in programming. Village practices and authority structures sit uncomfortably with donor views of good governance, in some but not all cases with good reason. Often the village and more often the household secures an allegiance for the relative physical and economic security, whatever the costs, because they offer what is unavailable elsewhere in Afghanistan’s institutional landscape. The room for choice or autonomy in such circumstances is limited. But there is a commitment of individuals to these institutions although they are well aware of the costs and compromises associated with them. Rather than seeing the village and Afghan household and the social norms that structure them as exceptional and problematic in their formation and operation, there are grounds for seeing them as something more usual and necessary.

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## Introduction

Much of the comment on Afghanistan has had a tendency to emphasise either the absence of a semi functioning state or the problems facing its construction. These problems or obstacles are seen to be associated with chronic conflict, an insurgency in the south, the workings of an opium economy and a deeply dysfunctional administration in which corruption is rife. As a mirror to these absences and failings, data on poverty outcomes is presented to illustrate the challenges that have to be addressed through state building. Few reports on Afghanistan escape the introductory litany of poverty woes and deprivation to frame the need for what must be done.

At a time when western ambitions for Afghanistan are fast being scaled back from constructing a state in the incarnation of the west to simply securing a state that is not seen to be a danger to the west (and which might also have some very modest developmental functions) the implications of the west's shrinking ambitions for Afghanistan for chronic poverty needs to be considered. A continuation of a context of chronic conflict and instability is more likely than not. But understanding of the linkages, causalities, transmission mechanisms and effects of conflict on chronic poverty, and *vice versa* remain poorly described (Goodhand, 2003; Justino, 2006) although the effects have been assumed to be negative. While there is some evidence (Justino, *op.cit*) of what some of these transmission mechanisms might be, it is limited and inconsistent and largely focused on household practices and choices. But little attention has been paid to the durable institutions in Afghanistan's landscape, notably that of the village and the role that it might play in mediating between households and the outer world.

In part this reflects a lack of attention or even hostility to the informal institutions of Afghanistan (see for example the issue of informal credit, Klijn & Pain, 2007) and the role that they have played in supporting the resilience of households. This neglect of the informal as the basis of resilience has occurred for a variety of reasons. These include the emphasis given to the 'formal' in state building and treating that as the implicit norm, the way in which the simplistic binary of formal/informal has been deployed in labeling institutions and practices and the pervasive treatment of informal as illicit driven by concerns over the opium economy.

Linked to this there has also been a misreading of Afghanistan and the assumption that beyond the model of a developmental state lies a failed state and anarchy. The field evidence points more to North *et al's* (2009) conception of a limited access order where political elites have divided up the territory, control of the economy and distribution of rents and achieved a more localised social order. As they describe it one should not assume that such an order is inherently unstable and they argue that such orders achieve a different equilibrium from that gained by the open access norms of the west. Guistozzi's (2009) account of some of the state like properties of key Afghan warlord's territory and tendencies in their behaviour is consistent with a limited access order model. Thus an attention to the institutional landscape that does exist (rather than the one that does not) and the social order that it achieves must be part of the understanding that is necessary to investigate household trajectories and poverty dynamics.

This paper explores in detail two contrasting political territories in Afghanistan – that of Badakhshan, Kandahar and to a lesser extent Sar-i-Pul, in part because of space – and does so primarily through an exploration of a smaller institutional unit in the landscape, that of the village. It investigates how these territorial units with their membership of households and individuals engage in and are constrained by the wider context within which they find themselves and the implications of this for village and household trajectories. If the central state in Afghanistan has had a bad press, then equally so has the village as a social entity where it has tended to be ignored or just seen as a problem. The emphasis has been on ‘modernising’ Afghanistan’s public sphere of state and markets, with an assumption that these would drag the private sphere of village and family out of their tradition-burdened past. The village has often been seen as an enduring symbol of rural backwardness and tradition, not least for its containment of women. Maletta (2008:175) for example writes of “rural women, in fact living behind a double mud curtain: the metaphorical one surrounding the village and the very real, thick and windowless mud-wall surrounding each homestead from which woman are seldom permitted to venture out”. But as Jones (2009) writes and shows with respect to Uganda, a state centric view of development can blind one to the role of the village as a source of institutional innovation and transformation and the role that the village can play in providing key public goods.

This paper investigates a key institution that is there - that of the village and its purpose and character. It explores the variable role that it fulfils, the goods and services that it can deliver and the extent to which the village can be seen as a loci of cooperation and mutual interest. As with all institutions there are benefits and costs of membership, not least for individual autonomy, given the semi-corporate structure, hierarchical nature and strong patriarchal attributes of the village. This is not an institution in which women have much visible presence but to assume as Maletta does that women are imprisoned both in the village and household is to severely underestimate women’s capacity for action and or to appreciate where and why they might see their best interests lying, given the context (Pain, 2010a). It will be argued that it may be more accurate to view Afghan villages as village republics (Wade, 1988) where to varying degrees collective action has often served to provide the key public good of security, and sometimes more than this, in a context where it has been largely absent. And as with city republics and states some work better than others with different distributional outcomes

This paper draws from a study of livelihood trajectories, building on an initial panel of household data established in 2002-2004 of 390 households across 21 villages in seven districts in seven provinces<sup>3</sup> in Afghanistan. A restudy in four of these sites (in Badakhshan, Faryab, Kandahar and Sar-i-Pul, see Fig.1) – a fifth Herat has to be dropped because of insecurity) was carried out in 2008-09. A subset of the original sample households (8 out of the approximately 20 households per village in the first round) in 3 villages per province (two in Kandahar) was interviewed. This paper draws on the case study reports on three of these studies (Pain, 2010b; Pain 2010c and Shaw, 2010) although presents greater detail on Badakhshan and Kandahar. A fourth on three villages in Faryab is currently being drafted.

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<sup>3</sup> In Badakhshan, Faryab, Ghazni, Herat, Kandahar, Laghman and Saripul.

The core of the evidence collection draws on detailed household interviews seeking to identify specific changes in household circumstances and their context since 2002/03. This approach of draws from research on chronic poverty and emphasises the investigation of household trajectories. It was largely inductive in approach, drawn from a ‘muddy footed’ empiricism (Da Corta, 2010) with no prior assumptions as to what might have caused the identified changes and the benefits or costs of that change.

The research sought not only to understand changes within families but also the ways in which their surrounding context has changed providing constraints and opportunities. It draws on previous research in the provinces and districts and interviews held at district and village level with key informants to build understanding of village history, changes in village economy, changes in village authority structures and engagement with the outer world over the last three decades. This paper firstly briefly explores the different trajectories of change in the provinces before going on to investigate the differences, by site (province) between villages and their long term patterns of change.

### **Provinces Compared**

The three provinces in which the villages discussed in this paper are located – Badakhshan, Kandahar and Sari-i-Pul - are fundamentally different in terms of their geography, political history, social inequalities and economy. Figure 2 schematically draws out some of these contrasts which are further explored below.

#### Provinces compared prior to 2001

Badakhshan in the north east of Afghanistan is essentially a mountain economy characterised by remoteness, historically grain deficit but with a significant livestock economy and a long history of seasonal wage labour movement to other provinces. It has some of the highest proportions of population beneath the poverty line of any Afghan province (Central Statistics Organisation, 2009). It is populated largely by Tajiks and Uzbeks, primarily Sunni Muslims although there are other small linguistic groups, many of whom are Ismaili in the remoter districts. However there was an early investment from the 1950s in education and the early presence of an educated elite in the province is widely reported (Guistozzi & Orsini, 2009). These were to play an important role in the formation of many of the leftist parties during the 1970s and Badakhshan’s position in the conflicts from 1978 onwards and through into post 2001.

The period from Badakhshan 1978 to 2001 can be divided into two phases. The first lasted from 1978 until the fall of President Najibullah and the capture of Kabul by the mujahidin forces in 1992. This period was characterised by conflict between the government and its opposition and amongst the mujahidin and the study villages all reported fighting during this period (Pain, 2010b) although as will be seen with rather different levels of engagement. The second period saw the rise of Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani and Ahmad Shah Massoud (who was killed in 2001) as key players in the government from 1992 to 1996 when the Taliban captured Kabul. These two figures then

established themselves as opposition to the Taliban in Badakhshan and the Panshir holding out until the Taliban fell from power in late 2001. So even through Badakhshan has been economically marginal, it played a central role in the political contention between 1978 and 2001 and beyond because of key political figures..

Figure 2 Provinces Compared

Province	Geography & Economy	Major Ethnic Group	Political History & Actors	Opium Economy	Social Inequalities
Badakhshan	Marginal Mountain economy	Tajik	Opposition to Taliban & Karzai	Significant	Medium
Kandahar	Intensively irrigated plain agriculture	Pashtun	Karzai stronghold & opposition to Taliban	Significant	Large
Sar-i-Pul	Marginal Foothill economy	Mixed	Marginal	Moderate	Small

The southern province of Kandahar with its city (Kandahar) in contrast is largely Pashtun and has been central to the political history of Afghanistan. The city has been a major trading centre both because of its agriculturally rich hinterland of irrigated fruit orchards from the Arghandab River and its proximity to the Pakistan border. Central to the understanding of the politics of Kandahar is the Pashtun tribal structure and its configuration within the province. The dominant tribal alliance has been the Zirak Durrani (Guistozi & Ullah, 2007) comprised of five tribes of which the Popalzai and Barakzai have been the most significant. There has also been a subordinate grouping of the Panjpai Durrani of whom the most significant have been the Noorzai and Alizai tribes. These two tribal alliances have been characterised by internal divisions and rivalry as well as cross-alliance competition and the power play between the Popalzai and the Barakzai has been central to the politics of post 2001 Kandahar.

Prior to 1978, the position of the traditional village and tribal leaders in Pashtun society around Kandahar was strongly hierarchical (Guistozi & Ullah, 2007) with strong patron-clients relations and as will be seen this is a feature of the two study villages in Kandahar. The revolution of 1978 fractured the existing order and led to a reconfiguration of the old tribal social hierarchy and considerable conflict. The mujahidin war led to two specific outcomes. The first was that different tribes aligned with different mujahidin parties, with the Popalzai and Barakzai siding with the royalist opposition while others tended to support either parties in opposition to the royalists or the more radical Islamists, notably Hisb-i-Islami. The second effect was migration and many of the study households either left their village for Kandahar city or migrated to Pakistan for a decade.

After 1992 with the fall of President Najibullah new strongmen, none of whom came from the traditional khan elite, seized control of their respective tribes. Competition for limited resources with the withdrawal of external funding led to an emerging anarchy and generated the conditions for the emergence of the Taliban. The security regime that the

Taliban established resulted in many of the strongmen disappearing into exile and the period between 1994 and 1998 before the long drought (1998 – 2004) took hold was remembered as a time of relative prosperity and security. It also saw the rise of opium poppy cultivation in Kandahar.

While Sar-i-Pul province has much in common with Badakhshan as a hill or mountain economy and politically it has always been and has remained a marginal place (Shaw, 2010). Originally part of other provinces it only gained provincial status in 1988. Rather less well watered than Badakhshan it has had a rainfed grain and livestock economy although in the past there was a significant dried fruit economy although this has now declined. The long drought from 1998 particularly hit the agrarian economy leading to a collapse in the livestock population and it remains one of the most food insecure of provinces. The result is that a long history of seasonal migration to the irrigated economies of the Turkmen plains and urban employment has grown to become the major income source for most households.

The province is ethnically diverse but with distinct spatial patterns of settlement. The Hazara are largely located in the higher altitudes in the south of the province with Tajik, Uzbek and other small groups including Pashtun and Arabs located more in the lower lying north of the province. During the Russian occupation it was a location of considerable resistance but with diverse mujahidin groups largely aligned along ethnic divisions. In the north the conflict led to considerable internal displacement and also migration out of the country. During the time of the Taliban the southern parts of the province remained a location of resistance to their rule.

### The Provinces after 2001

The three provinces have followed very different trajectories since 2001. In the case of Sar-i-Pul its economic and political marginalisation has remained. With no provincial figures of significance either at the provincial or national level, peripheral as a mountain hinterland to any larger economy, without a significant opium economy or insurgency to attract international attention, it has remained 'a forgotten province' (Unama representative, cited in Shaw, 2010 p:8) and almost at the bottom of a list of provinces ranked by international and government funding (Waldman, 2008). A continuing drought has kept many in chronic food insecurity.

Both Badakhshan and Kandahar but in different ways have remained of political significance to President Karzai's: Badakhshan as a location of continuing political opposition through the presence of Rabanni and his political supporters that Karzai has sought to neutralise through the playing of patrimonial politics; Kandahar as the centre of political support for Karzai but also a locus of opposition through the Taliban insurgency.

In Badakhshan the period from 2002-2005 has been characterised (Guistozi & Orsini, 2009:9) as "a system of regulated anarchy ...where a degree of stability was maintained through a balance of power" whereby Rabanni and his party (Jamiat-i-Islami) maintained a weak and decentralised patrimonial system. Disarmament was far from complete as

much of the jostling for power centred on the control of the opium trade and its profits. One source (Kohler, 2004) estimated that at this time between 70-75% of the province was under the control of loose alliance of local military leaders, 10-15% was partially under state control and 10-15% was totally outside state control. From 2005 President Karzai increasingly intervened in Badakhshan “to replace local systems of power and patronage ... with an alternative one dependent on Kabul” (Guistozi & Orsini, 2009, 11) and supported Zalmay Khan a local politician who has had a history of shifting political alliances for reasons of self interest. He is widely seen to be interested in prioritising his own interests (Guistozi & Orsini, 2009) and reported to have intervened to ensure that he maintained control of districts administrators and police chief appointments.

In Kandahar with the fall of the Taliban in 2001 and their loss of Kandahar as their power centre, the US military presence and its campaign against the war al Qaeda and the Taliban leadership rapidly drove the use of external patronage in local politics. The US initially supported Gul Agha Sherzai, the Barakzai’s tribal leader allowing him to gain control of key revenue sources including the Spin Boldaq border post (Guistozi & Ullah, 2007: 172). This provided him with sufficient resource to provide patronage to maintain political support and promoted his tribal followers in the provincial administration. Corruption and administrative incompetence by Gul Agha Sherzai’s administration allowed Ahmad Wali Karzai, President Karzai’s brother to gradually build his political position and Gul Agha Sherzai was ousted. This allowed Wali Karzai to gain power as presidency of the Provincial Council and control the Provincial Politics. With Wali Karzai’s ascendancy, members of the Popalzai tribe gained control of the provincial administration. External patronage from both Kabul and the perceived interests of international players has played a critical role in local level tribal dynamics.

Both Badkahshan and Kandahar have also been centres for the opium economy. In the case of the former its opium area rose after 2001 and led to a period of unprecedented prosperity for its mountain economy and from which the three study villages in this province benefited but to varying degrees. By 2006 it had fallen back driven both by declining terms of trade for the crop and counter-narcotic measures (Pain, 2008). Kandahar has also had a history of opium cultivation and cultivation continues although confined now to more insecure districts; however its role as a national trading centre of the crop has been more significant. A dynamic urban economy has grown fuelled in part by the opium trade but reinforced by a reconstruction economy to which an international presence has contributed. The growth of the city economy has had a significant influence on employment in the two Kandahar study villages (Pain, 2010c).

In summary the conditions under which the study rural households have lived over the last four decades is one in which the state was distant (as in pre 1978), the enemy (as in the 1980s), substituted for by the rule of semi-mobile bandits or subject to authoritarian rule (in the 1990s) and since 2001 dysfunctional when state behaviour and that of other power holders has often been predatory and arbitrary. What role has the village as an institution played between the household and the wider world?

### **Village Republics**

In 2009 during the Presidential election when President Karzai secured a disputed second term, the representatives of Karzai, through the presence of Zalmay Khan and the representatives of Abdullah Abdullah, Karzai's chief opponent came to Badakhshan and visited the districts in which the three study villages are located. In the case of Khilar, the village leaders and local power holders were taken to campaign on behalf of Zalmay Khan in neighbouring valleys and particularly amongst the Ishmaili community. Toghloq largely ignored the election and had little to do with either candidate. Shur Qul, the most prominent village within the district and with good links to Zalmay Khan, was first approached by Abdullah Abdullah's campaign which asked to set up an election office there. The request was declined after discussion in the Community Development Council (CDC) on the grounds that it might contribute to conflict after the election. Zalmay Khan's campaign made the same request to the village but it was also declined. The willingness and ability of the leadership of Shur Qul to maintain relative independence and manage its external relations was characteristic of many other actions it has taken in the past. Equally the behaviour of the other two villages with respect to this specific issue was also in keeping with their past patterns of behaviour.

The evidence from the history of these three villages in Badakhshan which is where the discussion starts, points to three very different patterns of behaviour that can be traced over the longer term. It is argued that over the last three decades or more these three villages have acted in very different ways and there seems to be a degree of path dependence in terms of explaining this behaviour. Actions or decisions taken earlier as well as accidents of location, history and ecology have influenced to some degree in a determinate way the trajectory of change that these villages have followed. These distinct trajectories have had implications for the choices and options of the inhabitants of these villages and in part help explain the trajectories that households within the village have taken and the outcomes that they have gained or stand to gain in the future.

It is argued, drawing on the work of Robert Wade (1988) that each of these villages can be characterised as a corporate entity or "republic" with various internal structures of self management, a recognisable identity and varying degrees of autonomy with respect to external power holders. Wade's study (1988) on conditions for collective action in a group of villages in central India focused on the management of scarce natural resources and the forms of community organisation developed outside the purview of the state to reduce the risk of crop loss and social conflict around resource scarcity.

Here we are interested in the degree to which villages have been able to deliver public goods (for example with respect to physical security as well as education, safe drinking water and so forth, the ways in which this has been achieved and the quality of that provision and the accountability of village leaderships and power holders. As summarised in Fig. 3 for the eight villages under discussion this provision has been highly variable. The discussion first investigates the Badakhshan village.

Figure 3 Key features of study villages\* and summary public goods provided

Province / District	Village	Features	Public Good provision by village
<b>Badakhshan</b>			
Yamgan	Shur Qul	- resource marginal; - long term support for education - well connected	External & internal security; education, health, water supply
Jurm	Toghloq	- resource rich - politically strong - late starter education	External security, internally insecure
Jurm	Khilar	- ethnic minority - resource marginal - poorly connected	Dependent external security, internally secure
<b>Kandahar</b>			
Dand	Lalakai	- resource rich but gross inequalities land holdings - politically connected	Dependent internal security through patron-client relations
Dand	Julan	- self interested landed elite - resource rich	Limited security limited education
<b>Sar-i-Pul</b>			
Sayyad	Gahdy	- resource poor - politically marginal	Dependent external security
Sayyad	Tuty	- relatively resource rich - locally dominant	Externally secure
Sayyad	Sarband	- resource poor - two ethnic groups	Limited security

\* Village names are fictitious

#### The Badakhshan Villages.

Shur Qul is located up a long narrow valley three hours from Jurm in a narrow plain on the Kokcha River. Although it has the largest land area (see Table 1) of the three villages, historically it has been grain deficit and male labour has seasonally migrated to work in the irrigated plains of neighbouring provinces; livestock has provided the balance of its needs. Inequalities in land holdings are modest with the largest landowner owner 20 jeribs [4 ha] of irrigated land with most household owning 5 jeribs or less.

**Table 1** Summary Characteristics of Villages.

	Shur Qul	Toghloq	Khilar
Altitude (m. asl)	1925	1232	1976
No of Families	302	178	44
Households per family	1.07	1.46	1.20
Irrigated Land (jeribs)	800	234	50
Rainfed Land (jeribs)	1200	66	200
Irrigated as % total	40%	78%	20%

Source: AKF Village Databases.

The village used to be at the end of the road, and given its proximity to the lapis lazuli mines in the neighbouring district it was the place where government officials before 1978 used to stop on their supervisory visits to the mines. They stayed with the village leader or *arbab* and according to various informants this opened his eyes to the significance of education for employment (Pain, 2010b). With contacts and awareness, the *arbab* lobbied for the construction of a school in the village in the 1950s and by 1978 some 90% of the district high school graduates came from this one village. By 1978 several cohorts of students had graduated from university and were in government employment, building wider contacts that were to be of value later.

Distance from Jurm, the then district centre, where government and Russian forces were based after 1978 limited direct conflict although various bombing raids were carried out. With the ending of the *arbab* system, the village was reported (Pain, 2010b) to have selected a commander (a process that contrasts with other villages where commanders were self appointed or imposed) to lead the village and handle external relations with the competing mujahidin parties that had emerged. He appears to have been skilful in doing this and protected the interests of the village. There were schisms and conflict within the village and these fracture lines still exist between those more aligned to Jamiat-i-Islami (Rabanni) and those in support of the more radical Hizb-i-Islami (Hekmattayar). However critically, as a former school teacher the commander supported the continuation of education and several of the village's graduates returned and taught in the schools, paid out of a levy raised within the village.

In the early 1990s with the establishment of Rabanni's administration in Badakhshan, the village maintained its relative independence, partly using connections with a key Massoud commander made between one village graduate and the commander at agricultural college. As a result the village was able to negotiate access to the lapis lazuli mines for one month a year, a source of income that ensured the survival of households during the years of drought. In the mid 1990s a school for girls was started with support from Norwegian Church Aid despite the opposition of some mullahs in the village.

After 2001 the educated elite of the village have played a key role in engaging the attention of NGOs expanding its educational facilities, drawing on teachers within the village for both boys and girls and the first generation of girls are about to graduate from grade 12. Funds have been secured for road improvement, the provision of safe water and the construction of a clinic and in combination with a grant obtained from an NGO, which has also provided a significant number of villagers employment in the village, it has been possible to construct under the National Solidarity Scheme<sup>4</sup> a micro-hydel providing electricity to the village. Economically the village has struggled since the decline of the opium economy and loss of access to the mines since they were taken over by Zalmay Khan's brother. Opium poppy brought benefits but the crop was never cultivated on the same scale as in Toghloq and since its decline out migration to other provinces and Iran has increased. The poorer households during a rise in grain prices in 2008 have been rationing consumption.

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<sup>4</sup> National Solidarity Programme

Toghloq is located in a cluster of five villages in a wide-well irrigated lateral valley at lower altitude has the least arable land of the three study villages but the highest proportion of irrigated land. In the past it had a self-sufficient grain economy and extensive landholdings but with a minority of households owning the majority of the land. Many of the landless sharecrop land in neighbouring villages. It is the most resource rich of the three villages with respect to land, water resources and access to markets. Although a school was established in the valley in 1960s few graduates were reported to have moved on to university and government employment. After 1978 the valley appears to have quickly joined the opposition and was a site of intense resistance to government although with no clear leadership given the competing parties of left and right. The mujahidin were responsible for the destruction of the school and for the killing of the teachers in the valley, thus bringing to a halt all education until after 2001.

Although there was considerable armed conflict and destruction in the valley the economy survived. However after the Soviet departure in 1989 the valley came under the orbit of a powerful regional commander allowing various valley commanders to compete for position. Thus while collective action was effective in defending the village against the outside world during the Soviet period, it is less evident that the power of commanders within the villages could be controlled after that date.

Because of more reliable water sources the village was less affected by drought than other and moved early into opium poppy cultivation that brought it unprecedented prosperity with the purchase of cars, television and other luxury goods. After 2001 the major commanders left the valley and moved to Kabul. Nevertheless when there was an attempt to bring an opium eradication team in during 2005 the village as a whole erupted in armed opposition, seizing the team's vehicle, an action that would have been unlikely in the other two villages. With the decline of opium production from 2006 onwards the village economy suffered. For those with sufficient land resource it meant a return to a pre-war economy of self-sufficiency. For those without land it meant a decline in demand for off-farm labour, leading to significant outmigration, often employment in the army and policy using the connections of the former commanders in Kabul.

The third village Khilar is the smallest of the three villages and the households are closely related. Located in the most marginal of locations on a small plateau off the Khustack valley, in itself a lateral of the main river. Only in 2007 was there road access. A significant portion of the village lands were reported to have been sold a long time ago by their local religious leader and there are more recent records of land being sold during the drought years to the Khustacki people in the valley below. During the drought the village lost livestock and mortgaged and sold land and as a result many household were in considerable debt by 2001 and even more dependent on sharecropping and wage labour. About one third of its irrigated land is reported to be now owned by people from outside the village. During the war much of their pasture land was taken by one of the Khustacki commanders. They have not been able to recover this land.

Before the war villagers had limited access to education. There was a school in the valley but only a few men from the village managed to graduate and attend university. Even

before the war the village had a grain deficit and a majority of the household had members who undertook a seasonal migration to Kunduz and Takhar. Relations with the valley people appear to have been cordial with cross marriages taking place between the valley Sunni. During the first phase of the war (1978-92) the village had a perilous existence due to its religious minority status and was subject to considerable discrimination and hostility. These are memories of physical violence used against them with labour and food being commandeered. But the village remained largely outside the conflict between the government and the mujahidin. After 1992 conflict in the Khustak valley and between Khustak valley and villages in Jurm valley escalated. The position of the village became increasingly perilous until a village commander emerged who was better able to defend the village. He achieved security in part by organisation and direct military action against a particularly predatory valley commander, who was later killed in a separate conflict, but he also sought alignment of the village under the protection of a more sympathetic commander who with Ismaili parentage was more protective of them.

After 2001 the fractured and conflictual relations between Khustak valley and Jurm has continued and the village had maintained dependent relations with the Khustak valley commander who authority exceeds that of the village council. The village experience relative prosperity during the years of opium cultivation but largely through the off-farm employment opportunities gained in the main valley rather than through its own cultivation. Since the decline of the opium cultivation the village economy has suffered a severe decline; with its dependence on rainfed lands it suffered particularly during a very dry 2008. Several households have severely reduced their livestock holdings to survive. As a consequence there has been migration to Iran but little recruitment into the army or police, in part because of the death of the son of one of the village leaders in the army. More children are now attending school in the valley but for girls the distance prevents many of them continuing beyond 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

#### Village and households compared

First attention needs to be drawn to the similarities between the villages. All villages and households benefitted from 2000 to 2006 from Badakhshan's opium economy. These were the years of relative prosperity with assured food security for most if not all. The years since then have seen a decline in rural employment and wage rates, poor rainfall years and a significant rise in grain price during 2007-08 – challenging economic conditions especially within the context of an unstable political environment. For a majority of households (see table 2) compared to 2002/03 there has been an overall economic decline despite a period of relative prosperity in the opium years. Many of the poorer households have been rationing food consumption since 2006 with a decline in both the quantity and quality of food consumed. Even in an average year (which most years are not) only one quarter of the 24 households in the three villages meet more than six months of their annual household grain requirements from their own farm production. Nine households (nearly 40%) obtain less than a third of their grain supplies from their own farm production. Thus a majority have to secure more than 50% of their grain supplies from other sources. The imperative for income diversification is acute and opportunities in the village are limited.

Table 2 Summary household trajectories for Badakhshan study villages (Pain 2010b)

WG	No	Overall	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Other Issues
Shur Qul						
I	A38	Maintain	Salary	Land to sell		Son at college
II	A23	Decline	War	HH Division	Age	Son at college
II	A24	Upward	Salary	Wage		
II	A34	Upward	Salary	Wage		Male labour
III	A22	Decline	Loss of wage	Household Separation	Illness	
III	A27	Decline	Age	Death son	No labour	
III	A33	Decline	Health	Death	Land Sale	1 son & 4 daughters
III	A36	Decline	HHld size & composition	Limited land		5 sons & daughter all at school
Toghloq						
I	B70	Upward	Labour Rich	Buying land		Prospered with opium
I	B69	Maintain	Labour rich	Used opium Strategically	Earlier migration	Prospered but now struggling
II	B64	Struggling	HHld size & composition	No-off farm income		
II	B75	Decline	Age	Hhld Division	Sickness	Previously wealthy but 2 educated sons
III	B77	Maintain	Salary	Family Size		Prospered opium economy
III	B66	Struggling	Family size			Sons at school
III	B65	Decline	Health	Household Division		Previously wealthy, sons out
III	B74	Decline	War	Migrate		
Khilar						
I	C57	Decline	Household Size	Livestock Decline		
I	C58	Decline	Death	Livestock Decline		
II	C43	Decline	Death	Livestock Decline	Living on Credit	Debts
II	C49	Struggling	Debts	Death	Livestock increase	
II	C56	Struggling	Deaths	Salary	Sale livestock	Long term prospects good
III	C45	Struggling	Labour			Labour rich
III	C46	Decline	Unmarried	Age	Loss of livestock	V small household
III	C52	Decline	Unmarried	Sick father	Declining Livestock	

But it is to the contrasts between villages and their structural dimensions – pre-existing social structures and the behaviour of the village elite that need to be considered. It has been argued that the three villages differ significantly in these respects and has had implications for household economic trajectories. In the case of Shur Qul its marginal agro-ecological position has limited its agricultural potential and it has long been grain deficit. For whatever reason the village elite over 60 years ago put the village on an educational track which has yielded dividends both by design and accident. While they are unlikely to have predicted the circumstances of 1980 – 2001, the commitment of the educated to their village and the wider connections that they had built, ensured that the village during the war years maintained that educational investment and provided physical and economic security to its inhabitants. Whether or not this built on or contributed to the strengthening of a moral economy in the village, it is clearly the case that the village has had a developmental and welfare agenda and the benefits have not been restricted to the elite. The building of school, roads, health clinic and the provision of drinking water have all provided general benefits and the entitlement of the poor to support have remained. The commitment to education across all households, even for those struggling to achieve food security, is not in doubt and has the potential to provide longer term dividends, and for those educated earlier, the benefits are already clear. The public works programme has provided some employment. But while the provision of public goods has reduced some of the elements of structural poverty, it has not, and cannot address food and economic security in the immediate or near term.

In contrast Toghloq has had the strongest agricultural economy of the three villages but there has been a strong landed elite. There is little evidence of engagement with the wider world prior to 1978, possible due to this. Helped by its defensive location, the response after 1978 was to organise and deliver successful warrior power that through force provided security against the outer world. After the departure of the Russians self interest of the village power holders appears to have been more evident, reflecting perhaps the greater wealth inequalities of this village in contrast with the other two. As a consequence physical security within the village has not been assured and there are, for example, cases of powerful people taking wives through forced marriage (Pain, 2010b).

There does not appear to have been the degree of social concern for the village by the village leadership as evidenced in Shur Qul and there has been limited action to secure other public goods after 2001. While the reaction of the village to the communist government may well have been widely supported, this did not correspond with a concern for internal physical security and the abuse of power seems to have characterised behaviour of the powerful both before and after 2001. The extraordinary wealth generated by the opium economy after 2001 while clearly benefiting everyone, disproportionately benefited those with resources of land or labour. The provision of public goods is less than in Shur Qul although opportunities for agriculturally based employment are greater here than in the other two villages.

Khilar with limited resources, small and politically marginal appears to have limited social differences. The village has achieved protectorate status thus gaining physical

security through external means but its marginal agrarian economy has long meant a dependence on labouring opportunities in the district rural economy. There has been a long term decline in its livestock resources. Public good provision is probably least in this village, in part a factor of location.

The key point is that all three villages have survived although achieved this through different means and with contrasting outcomes. All have internal divisions which should not be underplayed but they all show to varying degrees a persistence of customary institutions – both hierarchical (village elite) and consensual (for example the role of whitebeards in dispute resolution and where position is earned by reputation particularly in Shur Qul). The greatest evidence of action for the village good and its consequences is to be found with respect to the educational outcomes which are best among household respondents in Shur Qul (table 3), both for men and women although the differences between female and male literacy rates should not be ignored.

In summary the effects of long term education are evident in Shur Qul. Although this has led to employment within the village of educated people by an NGO, this is unlikely to be replicable across many villages. However the social action of the village leadership in Shur Qul has, through infrastructure projects, created significant opportunities for non-farm wage labour that have been limited in the other two villages.

Table 3 Contrasts on literacy rates and attendance at school by age and sex for the respondent households

	Shur Qul	Toghloq	Khilar
Literate Male Head	4	1	2
Literate Head Female	0	0	0
No. Male >=18	19	24	25
% Male >=18 Literate	47%	17%	24%
No. Female >=18	16	23	15
% Female >=18 Literate	12.5 %	8.7	7%
No. Male 5-17	17	14	11
% Male 5-17 at school	94 %	71%	100%
No. Female 5-17	13	11	9
% Female 5-17 at school	100%	73%	78%

### Household and Idiosyncratic Factors

Household trajectories have to be understood within the context of the particular stage of a household in its lifecycle. Thus older households with married sons living in the household (e.g. B69, see table 2) or working elsewhere need to be contrasted with younger households where the majority of children may be dependents (as in B66 or A36).

What individual factors have contributed to household's prospering economically? Inherited social position is one element whereby significant landholdings are inherited; in the case of B64 & 75 inherited land secured their livelihood although as these households

have aged and divided their security has declined. Household A46 was in a similar position. But for all three their household life cycle has been characterised by declining agricultural resources. Many households reported that their parents have more land than they did indicating a long term decline in agriculture as a source of livelihood.

Against this the rise of household B69 through an agriculturally based livelihood should be noted, although this was only found among the study households in Toghloq. The households that have prospered in Shur Qul (note none were found in Khilar) had not done it through agriculture but through employment based on education. Household A38, with land and a salary on account of education, because of his large number of dependents is slowly selling land but his long term prospects are likely to be good.

The case of B69 is an example of how individual action – his conscious building of assets – is possible and can lead to the desired outcomes but he has been lucky with both his family composition (the number of sons), their joining the labour market at the boom of the opium economy and his ability to hold his family together. There are other examples of such action although the long term outcomes are less clear. For example the son in A24 through gaining experience of driving managed to secure a salaried position as a driver in his village and on this basis was able to incur debt to get married. Equally there are households that are keeping their children in education despite the short term costs and this was particularly evident in Shur Qul.

But against these factors that have contributed to individuals finding ways to prosper, and these have primarily been the wealthier households, there are many events that can conspire to lead to a decline in economic fortunes. Sometimes as in the case of A23 a series of events over time, through a combination of bad luck or misjudgement can lead to economic decline. In his case conflict within his household contributed to the decline. Injury or illhealth of the main household labour where there is no other male labour can also precipitate a rapid decline in the household economy as happened in A27 & 33. Death or a series of deaths, as most notably seen in C58, and particularly if these are associated with health costs, can have a long term negative effect. The consequences of economic decline are increased food insecurity, leading into food rationing practices.

For most households the account is more of shocks – deaths, injury or conflict for examples – that can easily precipitate a household into decline whether it is rich or poor and it is the precariousness of household economies in these three villages that stands out. One of the direct consequences of this economic decline is the effect it has had on severely restricting the ability of men to finance marriage (Pain, 2010b), affecting their ability to secure their future. Equally the ability to hold a family together can be a key to household survival but with costs for individual autonomy.

### The Kandahar Villages

Both of the Kandahar study villages lie directly south of Kandahar city in Dand district on irrigated agricultural plains. From 1978 to 2002 with the fall of Najibullah the villages were on the front line of conflict, being within 10-15 km of the city and most households

were refugees either in Kandahar city or in Pakistan. The discussion here focuses more on developments since 2001 although the patterns of inequality found in both villages have deep historical roots.

The proximity to the city and the rise of its economy since 2001 has given both villages access to jobs and labour opportunities and non-farm incomes sources are important for many households. Dand district is also relative secure on account of its proximity to the city and the fact that this Popalzai territory, contains the birth village of President Karzai and so is closely aligned to the current government. What characterises the two study villages, although in different ways is the presence of a strong social hierarchy which displays little more than self interest. With respect to the structures of power and land ownership in Lalakai the following comments was made:

‘In the villages of Dand, you will not find such a village where the whole land belongs to three families...in other villages it is the malik system but in our village [the main landowner] is the landlord and head of shura’<sup>5</sup>

Although there are two other landowners in the village, the malik hold absolute power. He owns over 500 jeribs of irrigated land, much reportedly acquired from Hindu traders who fled the city in the 1990s. All this land is cultivated by sharecroppers, many of whom are recent migrants to the village. They either live in houses that he owns or have built their houses on his land. The *malik* is also well connected to key members of the Provincial Council all the way up to the top of government in Kabul. He was widely seen to be self-interested and pursuing his own interests although he saw himself as acting in the interests of the village.

‘As head of the NSP (we) constructed a road, which was beneficial for the village ...that is why people of our area again requested me to become head of the NSP shura’<sup>6</sup>

A village informant spoke for most:

‘ People say that people came to organise the village to elect shura members but there wasn’t any voting process because the *malik* elected himself and the *haji* for the shura ....this road was only gravelled for his car. We are far from that road and don’t have access to that road’<sup>7</sup>

The *malik* was reported to travel with armed escorts, a mixture of people in police uniforms and personal guards but his sharecroppers were also seen to be part of his security, informing him of any strangers in the village. One informant commented:

‘If we don’t inform him, then one day he will find out and then he won’t leave us alone...he is a very smart person because he searches for farmers who don’t have any

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<sup>5</sup> Focus Group discussion, February 2009

<sup>6</sup> Interview with the Malik, January 2009 ?

<sup>7</sup> Interview with son of Hhold A19

income, are very weak and can't do other work. He searches for a person who will always accept what he says'<sup>8</sup>

Thus while there is some sense of physical security in the village, for many it is largely dependent on association with the *malik*. There is no school within the village which some attributed to the *malik*'s lack of interest in education. For those who are economically dependent on the *malik*, life can be uncertain as they can easily lose their sharecropped interest. For those households who have established independent income sources through non-farm work a degree of economic independence is possible.

There is also a strong hierarchy in Julan structured around six maliks. There is a 'head' malik for the whole village (whose father was a *malik* before him) an assistant to this malik and four sub-maliks, each of which has part of the village under his jurisdiction. The shura is made of these six maliks and four other villagers but the decision making and the power lies as informants made clear (Pain, 2010c) with the former. The *maliks* are also well-connected into provincial and central political structures which have provided employment for the relatives of the maliks as bodyguards for key political figures in Kabul. The *malik* himself described his authority:

“As a *malik* in this village, I make the solutions and agreements for people....my rate is not specific and differs according to the problem. Once a daughter of the head of (a government) department had failed in a board examination and her father came to me to pass his daughter. I, that girl and her father went to [name] and told him to enrol that girl in the Medical Faculty and he did’<sup>9</sup>

For both villages only a minority of men over 18 in the study households are literate – about 3% in Lalakai and 16% in Julan; for males of school going age 56% of males in the case study households are at school in Lalakai and only 21% in Julan. Of the 79 females over 5 years in the study households, only one, a older woman, was literate.

In summary given the strong social hierarchies in these two villages and the largely self interested behaviour of the elite, the provision of public goods in this village is limited. These are in a sense, private villages or republics run largely by and for the benefit of the social elite. These are autocratic regimes where the village base is a means for the social elite to leverage greater power in relation to economic self interest or provincial and national politics. There is no evidence of any developmental interests.

Kandahar remains an environment of acute physical insecurity and the fieldwork team accounts were full of reports of police actions, security force presence and security incidences. Despite the proximity to Kandahar City and its relative security the villages are vulnerable to Taliban attack but the most vulnerable are arguably the village elite. But Kandahar City through a potent mix of a trading centre with a rich agricultural hinterland, a key transit point in relation to the opium economy, a hub in transnational trading links and a reconstruction economy drive by an international presence and war offers

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<sup>8</sup> Informant from household A01

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Malik,

considerable economic opportunities, even if access to the higher reaches are highly regulated by informal means.

What has this meant for household livelihood trajectories? The evidence from the case study households points to three very distinct types of trajectories (see table 3). For those with land and inherited social position– the one household in Lalakai (D10) and the four in Julian (E40, E42, E48 and E57), they have greatly prospered through a combination of agricultural assets, deployment of these into other income sources (e.g. livestock markets), a movement into non-farm income and the securing of employment through connections to the politically powerful. Some have done this more easily than others and E57 for example has had a more difficult path to prosperity. These households have also been helped by the institution of the joint household which has given the households command of labour resources to allow them to diversify. A sixth household (D42), an immigrant to the village with no land, has also prospered through a contracting business built through connections to the social elite in Lalakai. These households' economic security is not in doubt although their physical security in part depends on a continuation of the current political arrangements.

There is a second group of four households who from poor beginnings and without the land resources or the patronage networks of the first group have also benefited from the dynamic urban economy but not nearly to the same degree. These include three households from Lalakai (D03, D16 and D19) and one from Julian (E56). For the three households in Lalakai the building of a degree of economic security has been a slow process and the means of doing so variable. In the case of D03 through effort and small savings the sole adult male worker has gradually built a small business trading shoes in the city, acquired land, built his own house and separated from landlord 1. For D16 despite the death of the father when the children were young, the support of a maternal uncle and the hard work of three brothers in the labour market and through sharecropping has enable the household to build reliable access to credit and get married. This is also true of D19 where the father also died and the labour of five sons has enabled the household to slowly build its economic security and get married. E56 on the other hand, with just one male labourer has also built itself through hard work; access to credit through his wife's relations was fundamental to his improved circumstances.

The third group of six households are those that are struggling to survive. These include 3 households from Lalakai (D01, D00 and D12) and three from Julian (E46, E50 and E58). In the case of D01, a sharecropper with landlord, despite being labour rich (5 labour members) through bad luck or judgement it has made a series of ill fated investments based on credit provided by the landlord and is facing mounting debts that it struggles to meet. For the other two households (D00 and D12) both are in dependent relations with the landlord needing to maintain access to credit from him but subject to his decisions on all matters. In both the wives work as servants to the landlord's household with the threat of dismissal and loss of living quarters ever present. Either sickness (D00) or widow status (D12) gives neither household any room for manoeuvre.

Table 3 Household Trajectories

WG	No	Overall	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Other Issues
Lalakai						
I	D10	Prospering	Land	Multiple other income sources	Six sons	Well connected
II	D05	Prospering	Construction business	Well connected	Four Sons	
III	D01	Struggling	Diverse but unreliable income	Various failed businesses on credit	Working sons but mostly casual work	Dependent on landlord
III	D03	Slowly improving	Small business	Access to credit	Combination of activities	Only one male labour
III	D16	Slowly improving	Diverse income sources in city	Three active brothers	Ready access to credit	
III	D19	Slowly improving	Diverse income sources in city	Five active brothers	Access to credit	Supportive relatives
IV	D00	Struggling	Sick husband Sick son	Only one son	Wife servant of landlord	Dependent on landlord
IV	D12	Struggling	Widow works as servant to landlord	Two sons with seasonal work	Dependent on landlord	
Julan						
I	E40	Prospering	Land	Diverse income sources	Rich in male labour	Well connected
II	E42	Prospering	Employment of sons through connections	Land & contracting business	Rich in male labour	Well connected
II	E48	Prospering	Land	Diversification into transport	Rich in male labour	
II	E57	Prospering	Land	Middleman in custom house	Cooking business	Connections
III	E46	Struggling	Sharecropper that has lost land	Death of son in army & head's ill health	2 sons working as casual labour	Debts
III	E50	Struggling	Death of head of household	Sons working as casual labour	Debts	
III	E56	Slowly improving	Resourceful,	Access to credit	Support from wife's relatives	
III	E58	Slowly improving	Death of father	Diverse income from city	Rich in male labour	Access to credit

Of the households in Julan, E46 has just lost its sharecropping arrangements after 20 years, a son in the army being killed but it needs to maintain relations with the landlord for credit for sickness and marriage of the children. E50 experienced the death of a father when the sons were young. While there are 6 adult males and they have their own house, they work more in the limited village economy, are struggling to keep abreast of debt management and rely on a landlord for access to credit. Finally household E58 also suffered a death of the father, (a brother of E40), and the paternal uncle has been by all accounts rapacious and provided no support; the household depends on the three sons working as labour in the urban economy to survive. The household is struggling to keep ahead of its debt burden. What appears to distinguish the Group 3 households from those in Group 2 is household specific or idiosyncratic factors such as death or illness which make it difficult for them to escape the dependent relations in which the landlords are keen to keep them.

But one striking contrast to be noted between Kandahar and Badakhshan is the absence of any substantial discussion on food insecurity and consumption rationing in the poorer households. This would appear to reflect the fact that sufficient work, even though poorly paid and irregular, is available so basic food consumption can be assured even if food quality for the poorest as in D12 is not good.

For members of these households other than the head – sons, wives, daughters and daughter in laws – individual economic and welfare outcomes largely reflect the fortunes of the household indicating equitable distribution within the households. For sons, autonomy is limited and most work without question for the collective good of the household. For wealthier and better connected households this often means access to better paid employment. For poor households sons are restricted to the urban and agrarian labour market. Access to education for sons is largely the preserve of the wealthier households. For wives, daughters and daughter in laws the social norms largely dictate their outcomes. Daughters have limited access to education although the case of the educated wife of E57 indicates that it has been possible. It is in the making of marriage that daughters of poorer households may find themselves at an early age exchanged to ensure a brother's marriage or married out for the value of a bride price.

## **Discussion**

This paper has argued the case that there are important differences between villages in terms of their capacities and histories of providing public goods, notably that of physical security. All villages have been located to varying degrees in contexts of physical insecurity. At times this has caused households to flee as refugees, as in the case of Sar-i-Pul and Kandahar villages but stay put in the case of the Badakhshan villages which possibly experienced less intense violence. Are these differences trivial and do they matter and more to the point do they evidence the degree of collective action that Wade found (1988) with respect to the management of risk in relation to natural resources or the moral economy of Scott's (1976) Vietnamese village? Can one reasonably talk of these as village republics?

In terms of outcomes the differences between villages and provincial contexts are certainly striking. There are certainly distinctive patterns of behaviour over time which has led to different outcomes for villages. In this sense the differences are not trivial because not least they may predispose the ways in which villages are able or willing to work with external agencies to undertake development activities. Equally although not explicitly stated, they may influence where agencies choose to work. Shur Qul has been often held up as a success story for an NGO but it is debatable whose project success and provision of public goods it actually is; it could well in this case be that the NGO's success is more subject to the pre-conditions existing in the village. Either way it could be argued that these village differences do affect poverty outcomes (for better or worse), with Khilar remaining relatively neglected in terms of public good provision (possibly on account of its remoteness and smallness) while Toghloq has been seen to be difficult to work with (too unruly). So these differences matter, particularly where higher level institutions are so problematic.

In the case of the Sar-i-Pul villages with the most impoverished environment of the three study provinces, no evident history was found of deliberate action for public goods. The differences between villages are also more subdued. There are certainly differences in resources, history and power between the villages making Gahdy relatively dependent on Tuti. But overall these villages appear to have been unable for whatever reason either to provide significant public goods or have sufficient resources to ensure economic security for households. A moral economy exists but it is very limited in terms of what it has been able to offer (Shaw, 2010).

In the Kandahar villages given the gross inequalities in land holdings and the self interest of a social elite, public good provision is minimal and even resisted (as in the case of education) even though there is a physical security regime of sorts to be found. Here Woods notion (2003) of the Faustian bargain holds good extent not found in the other locations. But economically these are the most prosperous of villages with even the poorest being able to gain food security but under conditions of a high degree of dependent security. If the dynamics of the Kandahar economy were to run out of steam however there would not be much for those households that have moved into it, to fall back on. These autocratic village regimes thus pose the greatest challenge for the provision of a wider portfolio of public goods and maybe escape out of the village for those household that can manage it, is the only route possible. In this sense these are indeed villages still behind a mud curtain but actively kept there by a village elite.

Thus it would be difficult to argue that these village cases evidence collective action in the way in which Wade (1988) found it, even in the case of Shur Qul where public good provision was strongest. But the distinctive features of villages and their patterns of behaviour makes the concept of village republic useful not least because of what it might offer for public good provision in Afghanistan's fractured institutional landscape and because of the durability of villages as places where people live given wider institutional uncertainties. Indeed the puzzle for both the Badakshani and Sar-i-Pul villages is why so many household continue to live there given the existing and future limits to what any agrarian economy can offer and thus remain in a poverty trap.

Part of the answer undoubtedly is the importance of attachment of people or households to a place – a place of belonging and central to feelings of identity and wellbeing, although if there were opportunities to migrate to somewhere else rural that offered access to better resources, they probably would but the existence of such places is doubtful. But it is possible that staying put is also closely linked to something else that villages offer to households. Villages are places by virtue of history, marriage and relatedness, that are full of social relationships. These relationships offer access not least to informal credit (Klijn & Pain, 2007) a key resource required to secure welfare and most easily obtained from those with whom you are related. And villages and households may also offer physical security against a hostile outer world.

The more difficult issue is trying to untangle the factors that may give rise to such village differences and to what extent these are immutable or changing. It was suggested that for three villages in Badakhshan for which longer village histories were put together, there is an element of path dependency in these patterns related in part to physical location, chance, the role of key individuals and deliberate action. But what perhaps Shur Qul indicates is an evolving history of institutional change in comparison with the other two Badakhshan villages where patterns of behaviour have been more fixed. In the case of the Kandahar villages one might argue that pre-existing social inequalities have locked for the present the village into one particular configuration of social inequalities that current patterns of power and patronage have done much to reinforce. Change here will be more difficult.

Thus possibly pre-existing preconditions of resource endowments over which patterns of social differentiation emerge, as influenced by history, location, change and human action are critical ingredients of village history. But what is clear that these remain significant elements of Afghanistan's current institutional landscape and of significance to the wellbeing of households who lives within them. Greater attention needs to be given to them not least it a limited access order is likely to persist..

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