

HPG working paper

The nature of social cohesion?

Lessons from relations between Afghan refugees and their neighbours in Pakistan

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About this report

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Contents

Acknowledgements / 3

List of boxes, tables and figures / 5

1 Introduction / 6

The research project: social cohesion and displacement / 6

Afghans in Pakistan / 6

Methodology / 10

2 Social cohesion, religion and identity / 12

3 Social cohesion and time / 17

4 Social cohesion in private and in public realms / 22

5 Social cohesion, economic cooperation and competition / 26

6 Social cohesion, politics... and cricket / 29

7 The gendered dimensions of social cohesion / 33

8 Aid and social cohesion / 36

9 Conclusions / 41

There is no such thing as social cohesion! / 41

Social cohesion or acceptance? / 41

The nature of conditional social cohesion / 42

Agency / 43

Gender / 43

The role of aid / 44

References / 45

Appendix: the study locations / 48

List of boxes, tables and figures

Boxes

- Box 1** The challenge of interpreting what people say / 32
Box 2 Reflections on intermarriage / 34

Tables

- Table 1** Number of individual interviews conducted with refugees and Pakistani nationals, by location type / 11
Table 2 Contrasting comments about refugees earlier and later in the same interviewees / 32

Figures

- Figure 1** Population of registered refugees in Pakistan / 7
Figure 2 Map of Pakistan / 9
Figure 3 Map of study sites / 10

1 Introduction

The research project: social cohesion and displacement

Social cohesion has become a concern for humanitarian actors in recent years, particularly in relation to displacement. In many countries, a significant share of resources from programmes for assisting displaced people are shared with the populations among whom they live ('host communities'), specifically to prevent resentments undermining social cohesion. This means that effectively hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent at least partly in the name of social cohesion.

While there has been some debate in academic and policy circles about how best to define social cohesion, less attention has been paid to understanding which aspects of social relations or social cohesion are most important to displacement-affected people, and the extent to which social cohesion is a priority in their lives (Holloway and Sturridge, 2022). This study of Afghan refugees in Pakistan takes this latter starting point: rather than testing theories of what determines social cohesion in a population, it undertakes the preliminary task of better understanding what matters to Afghan refugees and to the Pakistani nationals among whom they live, in the domain that could loosely fit under an umbrella of 'social cohesion'. We have not attempted to define the term in advance, but have looked to understand social relations quite broadly.

The questions which the study looked to answer are:

- What aspects of social cohesion matter to displacement-affected communities?
- What factors drive or undermine social cohesion between and within refugee and host communities?
- What is the role of aid in shaping social cohesion?
- How might aid actors contribute to better social cohesion outcomes for affected people?

This paper is part of a two-year project by HPG exploring social cohesion in displacement. It builds on an initial literature review (ibid.) and is published alongside a separate case study of Burundian refugees in Tanzania (Sturridge et al., 2023).

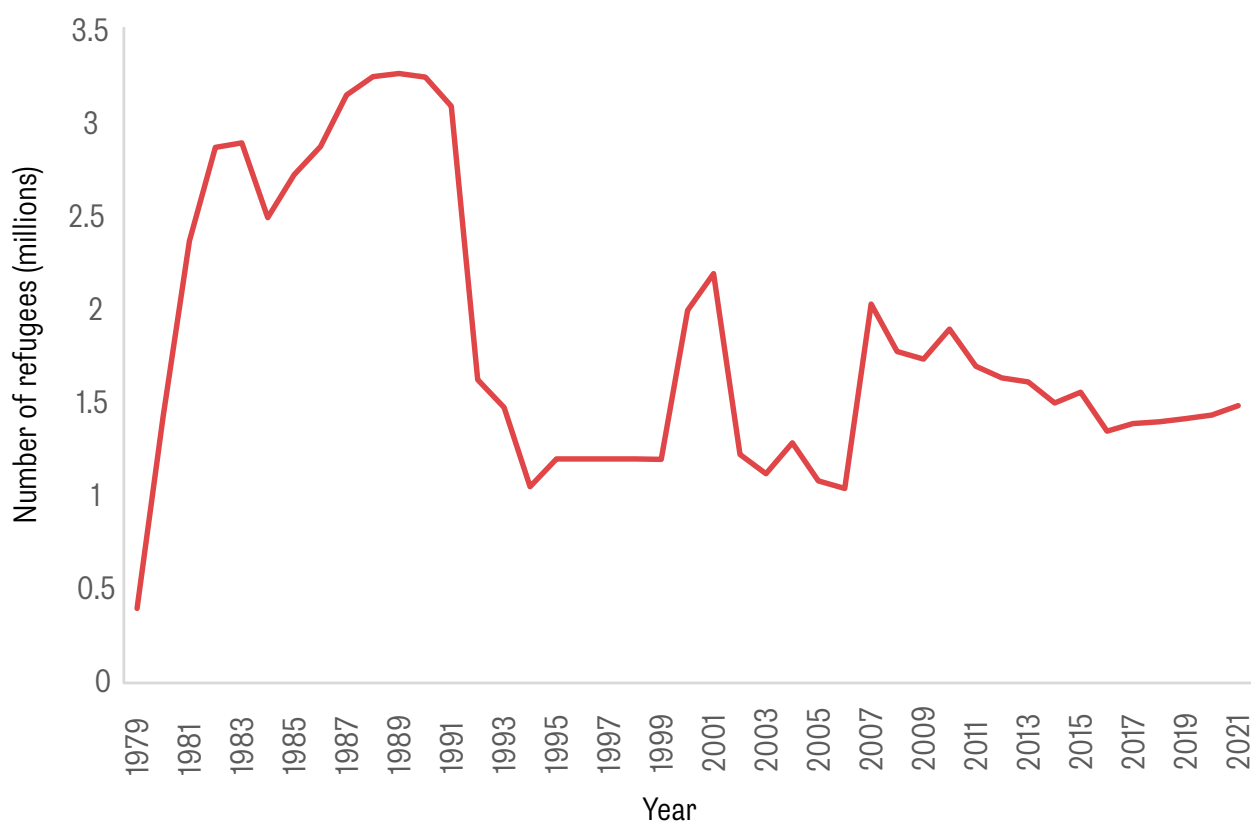
Afghans in Pakistan

Pakistan was chosen as an example of protracted displacement where relations were generally reasonably good between Afghan refugees and the Pakistani nationals among whom they live, though with some sources of friction. Because external aid had played a limited role in people's lives, it was also an opportunity to understand what mattered to people where their perceptions had not been overly shaped by a highly visible international aid effort.

Population movement between what is now Afghanistan and what is now Pakistan has been occurring over centuries. There are strong language, cultural and often familial ties between the populations in

Afghanistan and northwestern Pakistan, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Around 80% of the Pakistani population of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are Pashtuns,¹ who also make up close to half of the population of Afghanistan, and are in the majority in the south and southwest of Afghanistan, the areas bordering Pakistan. More sizeable population flows date from the late 1970s and the Soviet-Afghan war, from which over 4 million Afghans sought refuge in Pakistan. The majority of that influx have since returned, but many continued to live as refugees in Pakistan alongside refugees from more recent flows provoked by continuing insecurity and political turmoil in Afghanistan. The refugee population – or at least, the registered population – is currently less than half what it was at its peak (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Population of registered refugees in Pakistan



Note: Registered refugees are those with a valid Proof of Registration (POR) issued by the Government of Pakistan Registration Authority.

Source: World Bank

Of around 1.3 million people currently registered as refugees (UNHCR, n.d.), the majority were born in Pakistan to Afghan-born parents or grandparents. Around half live in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (see

¹ Pashtuns make up a little less than 20% of the overall population of Pakistan, making them the second-largest linguistic or ethnic group.

Figure 2). Overall, they only constitute around 2% of the population in the province, but most are concentrated in Peshawar District where they make up almost 20% of the population. Most of the Afghans in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are Pashtun, but other ethnic groups and people with different languages are also represented. An ethnically diverse mixture of speakers of different Persian languages are often locally referred to as Farsiwan (i.e., Farsi/Dari speakers), though the categorisation of so much diversity into a single group is essentially a Pashtun perspective, as is the word Farsiwan itself.² Many of them are Shi'a, unlike the Pashtuns (and the majority of Afghans) who are Sunni.

The majority of refugees live in urban and peri-urban areas. (The terms 'refugee' and 'Afghan' in this report refer to the population of Afghan heritage without Pakistani citizenship, the majority of whom were born in Pakistan.) Around one-third live in 'refugee villages' or camps, though they no longer receive any significant or systematic material assistance there. The material advantage of staying in camps is that accommodation is rent-free. There has been minimal voluntary repatriation since 2016, though there is some short-term movement back and forth.

Pakistan is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and has no national asylum system. Refugees have a Proof of Registration (POR) card, which gives them rights to healthcare and to education alongside the local population, and also the right to work and freedom of movement. There is currently no route for most of them, or their children born in Pakistan, to obtain Pakistani citizenship or a National Identity Card. These are necessary for access to a wide range of services and rights, from owning property or a business to buying a mobile telephone SIM card.³

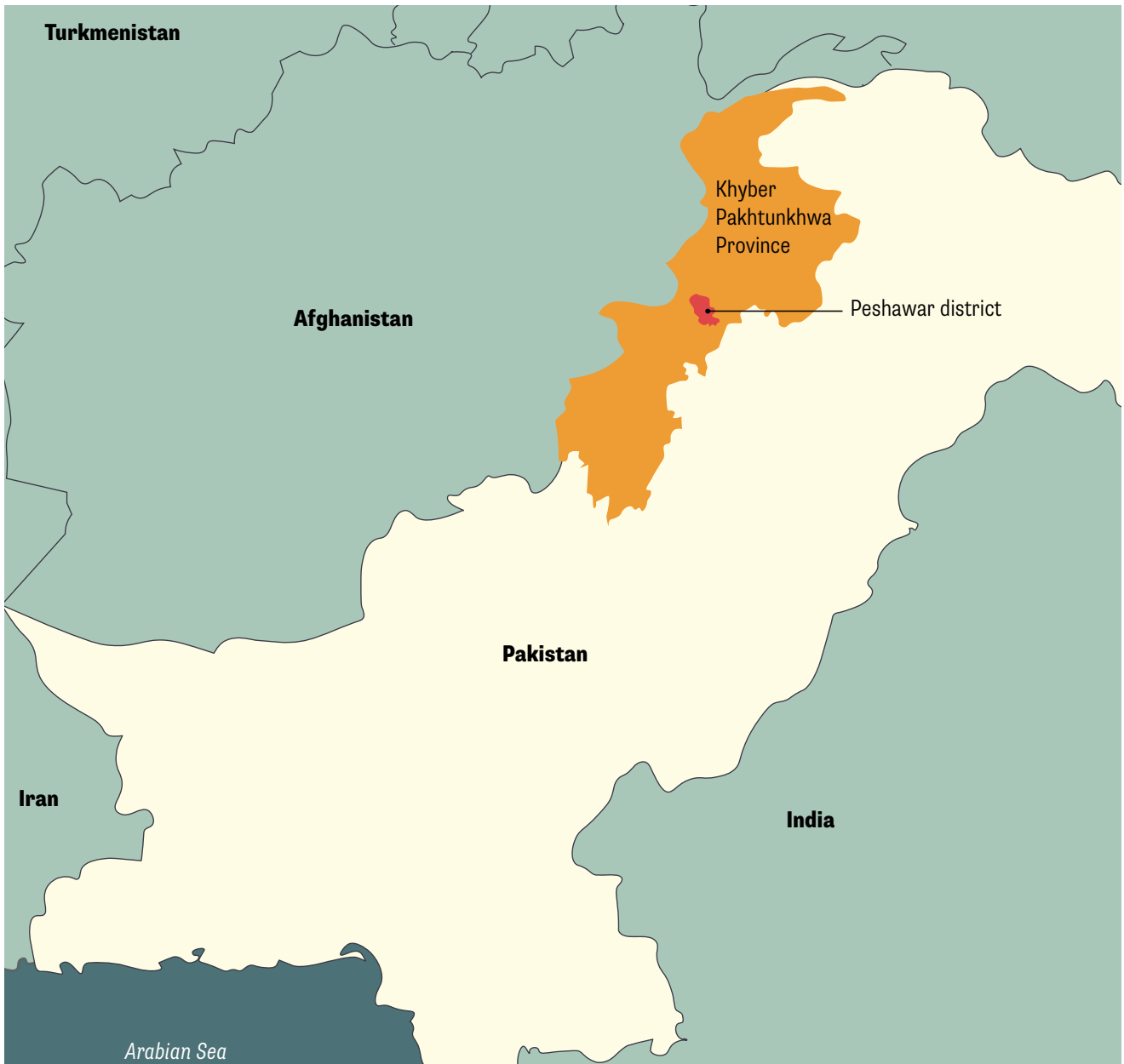
In general, relations are good locally between the Afghan and Pakistani populations (e.g. Oeppen et al., 2023). In a 2018 survey in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 92% of Afghan respondents said that the response of the host community was either welcoming (63%) or very welcoming (29%) (Javed et al., 2020).⁴ The majority of Afghans in Peshawar are Pashtun, and so share language and culture with the majority of the Pakistani population there. The political response to their presence has changed over the years, though. Initially very welcoming, political tensions rose during the mid-1980s, in 1999, again in 2001 (after the al-Qaeda attacks on the United States (US) on 9/11), in 2014 following a massacre at a school in Peshawar that was traced to Afghanistan, and more recently in response to a fresh influx following the return of a Taliban government in Afghanistan in 2021. State attitudes and policy to the Afghan presence have been variously affected by global politics, regional politics and local/national politics (see Ruiz (2002) and Amnesty International (2019) for more details).

2 Farsiwan is the Pashtun grammatical plural form of Farsi (meaning 'Persian'). Non-Pashtun Afghans may refer to themselves as Darizuban, or Dari speakers, rather than as Farsiwan. We use Farsiwan here because it was the description most commonly used in the interviews. The complexities of identities within the overall Farsiwan/Darizuban population are not the primary topic of this paper.

3 See EUAA (2022), in particular section 1.3, for a detailed discussion of the legal situation regarding Afghans in Pakistan.

4 As with all surveys, it may be that people responded more favourably than they really felt (see Box 1 in Chapter 6).

Map of Pakistan



Interviews for this study took place in November 2022, during a time of some decline in the economic and political situation in Pakistan, but before the recent spike in political tensions in the wake of the arrest of the former prime minister Imran Khan. The report was also finalised before the announcement by the Pakistani government in October 2023 that it would arrest and deport thousands of Afghan migrants who lacked the documentation necessary to stay. Any impact on social cohesion of this policy lies outside the scope of this paper.

Methodology

A total of 91 interviews and 10 focus group discussions (FGDs) divided equally between men and women were held with Afghan refugees and Pakistani citizens in 11 sites. Most interviews and FGDs were conducted in Pashto, but some were conducted in Dari, to ensure that all interviewees and FGD participants were speaking a language that they felt completely comfortable with. The sites included a formal refugee village, informal refugee settlements (where the majority of residents were Afghan) and places where Afghans lived among the local population. These places were chosen to find a wide diversity of informants, and also to reflect a range of situations, from city centre to peri-urban (see Figure 3). A variety of methods was used to gain sufficient diversity among interviewees (see Table 1, and the appendix which gives a short description of each site and why it was selected).

Additionally, 10 interviews were conducted with key informants, including staff from the government entity responsible for the refugees (the Provincial Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees); health staff from a basic health unit at one of the camps; staff from local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs); and both secular and religious scholars/academics.

Figure 2 Map of study sites

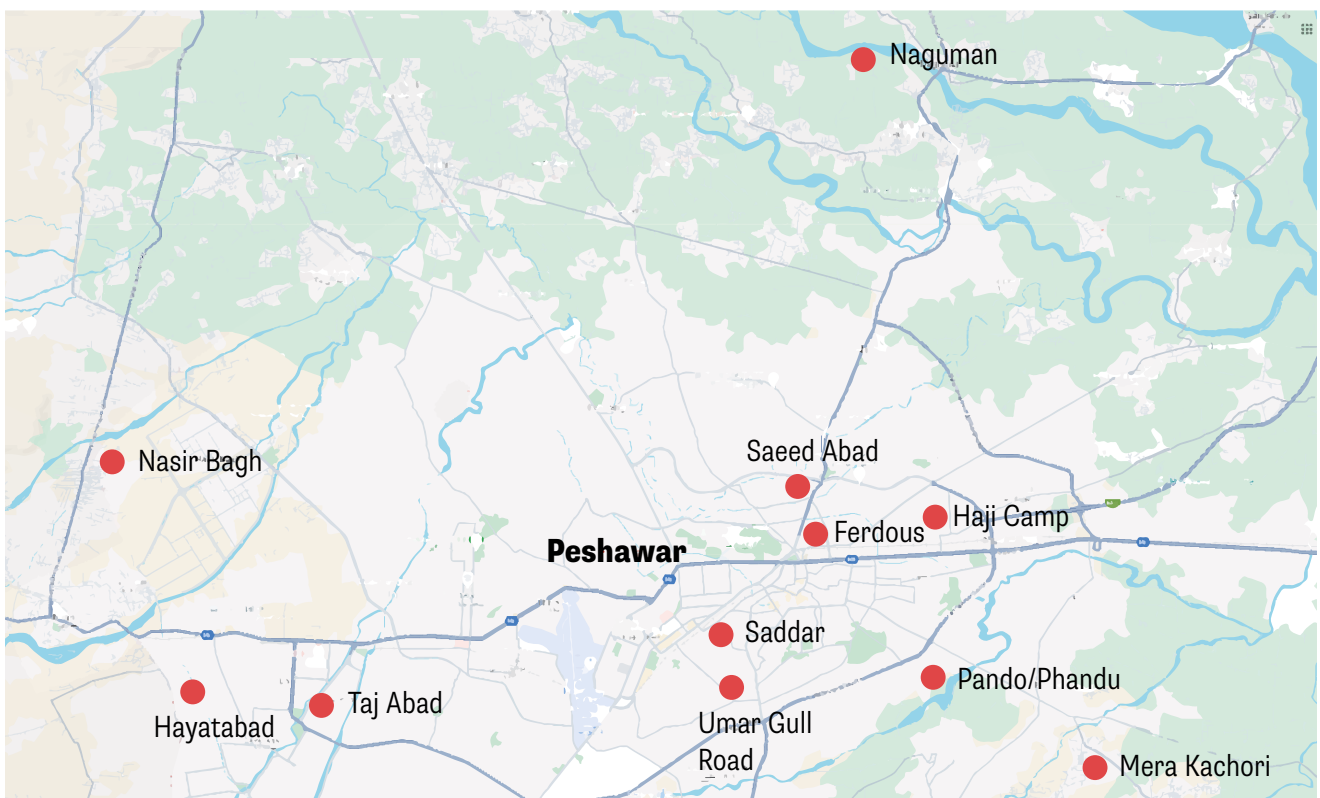


Table 1 Number of individual interviews conducted with refugees and Pakistani nationals, by location type

Location	Interviews with refugees	FGDs with refugees	Interviews with 'hosts' (Pakistani nationals)	FGDs with 'hosts' (Pakistani nationals)
Formal refugee villages	26	1	0	0
Informal refugee villages*	29	0	12	0
Out-of-camp, non-refugee villages	17	4	7	5
Total	72	5	19	5

* This includes settlements that were once recognised as refugee villages, but where refugees continue to live. See appendix for details.

As explained above, the paper does not attempt to test any particular theories of social cohesion. We were more interested in first understanding what dimensions of that broad term are actually important to the people involved, without imposing any predetermined definition of the term 'social cohesion'. Interviewees were therefore asked about their experiences of interacting with others from within and outside their own community – and whom they considered these to be. Questions were asked about what made these relations better or worse; what was most important to people about their relations with others and why; and about positive and negative social experiences. Only at the end of the interview or discussion were any questions asked about external assistance and its impacts on social cohesion.

Towards the end of the research period, a few interviews and FGDs were focused more specifically on certain themes that had emerged during earlier interviews and where more understanding was needed. These themes were: humanitarian assistance; intermarriage; business relations; gender relations; rental accommodation; Pashtun–non-Pashtun relations; and children.

The following six chapters are windows into an examination of the relations between Afghans and Pakistanis in Peshawar. The reflections on social cohesion look from the perspective of religion and identity; changes over time; social relations in public and private spheres; relations of economic cooperation and competition; politics (and cricket!); and aid.

None of these windows claim to include a definition of social cohesion; none of the chapters cover everything that could be called social cohesion; and many of them include discussions of aspects of social relations that may go beyond that term. The final chapter ties these reflections together, still eschewing a formal definition of social cohesion or a concern to set particular boundaries to the discussion. People's own social lives are the starting point of the enquiry, and they remain the focal point in the conclusion.

2 Social cohesion, religion and identity

Almost all the interviews began with interviewees, Pakistani and Afghan, speaking of the good relations between the two communities, which was described simply as being ‘because we are all Muslims’. (This was true even of those interviews where the interviewee then went on to criticise the refugees and their presence.)

Our language is different, but we have the same religion. That’s why we have spent the time peacefully with each other. (Afghan woman, Pando)

Of course, sometimes people get annoyed over minor things like dirty streets or complaining about children, but really, we are all Muslims...and this means we don’t have any real conflict. (Afghan woman, Taj Abad)

This can’t be taken at face value: Muslim societies are no less fractured than any others. (Indeed, the research areas around Peshawar have been home to many thousands of internally displaced people (IDPs) who fled violence between different Muslim populations.) Closer reading of what people said shows how religion has played several different roles in shaping relations.

Several Pakistanis said that they accepted and helped the Afghans because of their *own* religion, not because of the Afghans’ faith. This quotation echoes a commonly expressed sentiment.

I am a Muslim, so I know how to create a peaceful society. Our faith advises us to live in harmony and peace. (Pakistani man, Umar Gull Road)

Beyond that, a *shared* religion has meant that, for the most part, people can attend prayers together and have the same practice of attending funerals in each other’s communities. This in itself does not indicate particularly good relationships: people sometimes spoke of communities ‘only seeing each other for funerals’ to mean there was no real relationship. However, these occasions created spaces where people met each other and showed each other respect.

Shared religion was also a framework by which people met each other’s standards for morality and social acceptability. Many Afghans were accepted because they met the religious standards of the local community.

[The Afghan refugees] are religious people and have good character. (Pakistani man, Nasir Bagh)

Some of the refugee families are very good by nature. [...] Their women cover themselves and never go out of the house unless they really need to. (Pakistani man, Pando)

Adherence to the same moral code was more than a religious standard. Afghan and Pakistani Pashtun share a cultural code, called Pashtunwali (or Pakhtunwali), which provides for strong mutual support

but also demands strong adherence to outward signs of honour (e.g. women covering themselves and not going out, as referred to above). This code overlaps with Islam, is also in some ways distinct from Islam, but is strongly identified by its adherents with their religion.

There is so much similarity between the teaching of Islam and Pashtunwali. In fact, we can say that Islam and Pashtunwali are the same in social perspectives. (Afghan man, religious scholar, Peshawar)

The shared sense of identity is thus more than a common religion (Islam), but also one not shared by all. Part of the code of Pashtunwali is the coming together at times of ‘sorrow and joy’ or *gham khadi*, such as births, weddings and funerals. Although Pashtuns also attended funerals for non-Pashtuns, this informant made it clear how it was a distinctly Pashtun identity which had created the institution (the hujra) that brought them together.⁵

As Pashtuns, we visit their hujras and they also come to our places. (Afghan man, Taj Abad)

Identities create ‘in-groups’ and also ‘out-groups’, those who are excluded by what brings the in-groups together. Indeed, the very construction of a diverse set of people under the label Farsiwan (a Pashto term) is a way of reinforcing a Pashtun identity by reference to a created out-group – the people who are not us. Afghans who are not Pashtun do not share Pashtunwali. Even as Muslims, they do not share the same interpretation of Islam, as many are Shi’a. Like many strong identities, Pashtunwali created a strong bridge between in-groups (Afghan and Pakistani Pashtuns) that could be exclusionary. The connection between different Pashtun was often stronger than the connection between different Afghans, as this woman makes clear.

The [Pakistani Pashtuns] and us [Afghan Pashtuns] think of each other as part of one family [...] We have better relations with them than with the [Afghan] Farsiwan people. (Afghan Pashtun woman, Pando)

Some Pashtun use conformity to religious standards to justify denigrating the out-group, the Farsiwan.

We don’t really think of [the Afghan Farsiwan] as part of our community [...] They are too liberal, or I can say vulgar. They spoil the social and moral environment of this place. The Pashtun refugee families follow the same moral code and moral standards as we do, so we accept them. (Pakistani Pashtun man, Nasir Bagh)

Some of the refugees are Farsiwan, and we don’t like them. They create disturbance in the society. Their women are modern. They wear short dresses, they play loud music in cars. Most of them take drugs, even on the street. (Pakistani Pashtun man, Pando)

5 ‘Hujra is a place of social gathering [...] It is considered one of the paramount characteristics of Pashtuns’ culture and pride. Its purpose is to provide shelter, food and entertainment to the people’ (Rehman et al., 2021).

In the absence of any corroborating evidence, it is difficult to take seriously the accusation that the majority of Farsiwan women or men were taking drugs, whether or not on the street. It is not even possible to maintain that Farsiwan have been excluded for their weak adherence to religion. Rather, it is related to non-conformity to particular outward signs of a religious-cultural tradition. Generational differences in adherence to a similar norm that is both cultural and normative was sometimes used to explain why Afghan elders were more accepted than the young.

Older members of the Afghan community tend to be quite charitable and modest, and they especially tend to have strong religious ties. (Pakistani Pashtun man, Taj Abad)

Again, it is hard to substantiate that Afghan youth are really less religious, or less charitable, than their parents and grandparents. It is easier to see that they may be less modest, at least on some interpretations: largely Pakistani-born, they can be seen as more modern and more assertive, as will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

The positive and negative attitudes towards Afghans that have been shaped by a normative code, created by a mixture of religion and culture, show how its hugely important role in strengthening social ties comes with conditionality. In some cases, it has created out-groups, though Pashtun–Farsiwan relations are certainly not always problematic or distant. This normative code offers a route to acceptance that is *conditional*.⁶ This is a common reality for migrant and minority groups across the world, having to balance one's own preferences for oneself against the worry about how one is seen – and even a concern for how the group with whom one is identified is seen.

The Afghan Pashtuns' closer relationships with Pakistani Pashtuns than with non-Pashtun Afghans is not to say simply that their Pashtun identity is stronger than their Afghan identity. Pashtun self-identity can be a part of their Afghan identity, and several non-Pashtun Afghans noted with some resentment that many Pashtun think of themselves as 'the real Afghans', both in Afghanistan and in exile.

Some Afghans say we [Farsiwan] are not real Afghans [...] They don't want anything to do with us, they only associate with us for a funeral. I get hurt when someone says that 'you are not Afghan, you are Persian'. [...] Some of the Afghan Pashtun think they are superior to us... (Afghan Farsiwan woman, Naguman)

Another woman was clearer on distinctions between members of the Pashtun population.

The Afghans from Kabul particularly treat us [Farsiwan] badly [...] they consider us a different community. (Afghan Farsiwan woman, Naguman)

6 Acceptance by society is, of course, always conditional. Pakistanis in the 'host community' also live in a society where there is pressure to follow a normative code. That is beyond the scope of this paper, but see Levine et al. (2019) and Levine (2020) for a discussion of the changing demands for conformity of Pakistani Pashtuns from the (former) Federally Administered Tribal Areas as a result of displacement and return.

What she says also introduces an aspect of social cohesion which has been strongly shaped by identity: social cohesion as the perception of collective membership of the same *community*. Although people have multiple identities, and can therefore feel in the same community as another in one way but not in a different way, here the sense of separated communities would surely be considered as a diminishment of social cohesion. This Farsiwan woman directly links religion, identity and community to the quality of social relations, identifying them as barriers, just as others had described them as enablers.

We [Farsiwan] are looked upon as a very liberal community, and the Afghan Pashtuns try to keep away from us. So, we also then try to stay away from them. So, you can say that culture, norms and traditions, these are barriers to good relations among the different tribes within the Afghan community. (Afghan Farsiwan woman, Naguman)

The Farsiwan–Pashtun divide may appear to be drawn on language lines, but it is clearly a question of identity and not of language.

We can speak Pashto fluently, we are not asking them to talk to us in our language, but they should respect us. (Afghan Farsiwan woman, Naguman)

This is seen more clearly by the quality of relations between non-Pashtun Afghans and Pakistanis, almost all of whom were Pashtuns in the study sites. Because their identity as Pashtuns plays a different role for Pakistanis, several non-Pashtun Afghans said that they had better relations with Pakistani Pashtun than with Afghan Pashtun. There were no Pakistani interviewees who criticised the non-Pashtun Afghans particularly, though the extent to which they are considered as part of the same community is less clear cut.

The Pakistani are good people, they treat us equally. [...] They treat us as they treat their own community. [...] We have better relations with Pakistanis [Pashtun] than with our own [Afghan] Pashtuns, because they do not make us feel different. (Afghan woman, Naguman)

I count Afghan Pashtuns as the part of the community. A few Farsiwan have also settled here, but they are very few, so I wouldn't call them part of the community. (Pakistani woman, Pando)

Social cohesion in the sense of people feeling that they belong to a wider society is not the same as everyone living in the same place having good relations with each other. Even after identifying a community as 'the other', most still spoke of having good relationships.

It is important to get along with others, whether they are from the community or other communities. (Afghan woman, Pando)

Identity created a sense of community, but one defined as much by who is outside as who is inside. An increase in the closeness, or social cohesion, within a community can serve to create more divisions, or to decrease social cohesion, in the wider society. There is no useful way of combining the dynamics

of each internal grouping with the whole set of intra-group dynamics (which can overlap, since people have multiple identities) and of adding this to the strength of identity and social organisation at the level of the wider society, in order to create a single value for social cohesion. Social cohesion, in other words, is not a societal quality that has a single value.

This lens of religion/identity also already shows how the same factor may improve one aspect of social relations (i.e. increase social cohesion) and at the same time, and even for the same reasons, reduce other aspects of it. Positive membership of a community can be distinct from, and may even be contrary to, one's ability to enjoy positive social relations, as the situation of women showed. Their acceptance (and the acceptance of their husbands) is guaranteed by their adherence to rules of purdah,⁷ so that they can enjoy a place in a socially cohesive society only to the extent that they are excluded from that society.

The way in which different facets of social cohesion can have opposite dynamics will be seen again in the following chapter, when we look at social relations in respect to time.

7 Purdah is a religious and social practice related to the physical segregation of the sexes (in practice, the seclusion of women), and the requirement that women cover their bodies.

3 Social cohesion and time

There are broadly two theories about how social cohesion changes over time. It has been argued that social cohesion can be disrupted by perceived differences and misunderstanding, and that social cohesion can therefore improve over time as individuals and communities come to know each other better and build trust (e.g. Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006; Vemuru et al., 2020).⁸ A second model argues that a displaced population can initially be accepted with compassion by a host community but that, over time, social cohesion can become threatened as the displaced population remains longer than the host community had anticipated (Jayakody et al., 2022).

Both theories found some support from trajectories of relationships in Peshawar. The first model was described by both Pakistani and Afghan nationals and by external observers.

To develop an interaction with someone, it's really important to know their culture, their values. [...] With time, it gets easier to get along with others, as you get familiar with them. You get an understanding of their norms, culture and traditions. (Pakistani woman, Pando)

Some Afghan families move home frequently, so you don't really get to know them, but with the ones who've been living here for a while – yes, I have a good interaction with them. (Pakistani woman, Nasir Bagh)

The Pakistanis? They are generous people. Over time, we've got more familiar with them. They don't have any bad intentions towards us [Afghan refugees]. (Afghan woman, Taj Abad)

Many Pakistani informants also described the trajectory posited by the second model.

In the beginning, we welcomed them here due to humanity and brotherhood. But this area has just got too many people now. Facilities like electricity, gas and water aren't enough for the whole community, it's causing real problems. Now, we want them to go back home. As we say, 'A guest is a mercy from Allah, but when he stays for more than three days, then it becomes a burden.' (Pakistani woman, Nasir Bagh)

This quotation describes a straightforward story through time, but closer attention to what people said gives a richer picture, full of contradictions and hidden nuance. This woman explicitly refers to competition but she speaks of two things. One is the increase in population. The population of Peshawar has been growing at more than 4% per year over the last 20 years and the infrastructure

⁸ In several fields, this is known as the contact hypothesis, which posits that intergroup contact can reduce prejudice between majority and minority group members.

and service provision have not kept pace.⁹ The refugee population has not grown, and though she recognises that refugees are not the cause of the population increase, this woman sees them as the ones who the surplus.

The point on competition is distinct from her argument that the refugees were guests who had overstayed their welcome. This was a common theme in interviews, but it treats the notion of time very differently. Competition may be seen to increase with the length of time of exile, but the notion of time-limited guests suggests that refugees would *never* be given a chance to integrate. From the beginning, their acceptance was based on their status as temporary guests, not as putative migrants. This woman is therefore saying that competition with refugees would never have been accepted. Her feeling that when things are scarce, it is the ‘other’ who has to go is turned by another woman into more direct blame for overpopulation on the refugees.

Tensions between refugees and locals have increased. They don’t like each other [...] There isn’t enough drinking water for everyone, schools are overcrowded because these refugees have so many children. (Pakistani woman, Nasir Bagh)

This appears to suggest that social relations were not subject to either of the theories mentioned above about time, but were dependent on their numbers, which changed over time. This is an example of what has been called ‘group threat theory’ (see Pottie-Sherman and Wilkes, 2017).¹⁰ Closer examination, though, puts group threat theory in doubt. The current population of Afghans in Pakistan is less than half what it was at its peak at the end of the 1980s (see Figure 1 above), which was the time when the interviewees were describing relations as having been much *less* competitive. It is possible that she perceives numbers to have increased, but it is more likely that her resentment has been exacerbated by increased competition, and refugees provide an easy scapegoat for a situation where infrastructure and economic opportunities have not kept pace with population increase.

The following interviewee also seems to be expressing a negative trajectory from welcome to competition, but his words see competition in very different terms.

When they first arrived here, my grandfather gave them cash and my uncles let them live in our houses. As Muslims, we have a duty to help the displaced community. However, after spending time with us, when they left the camps, they start acting negatively towards us. When the government removed the restrictions on them, they set up businesses and then they showed their true colours. (Pakistani man, Umar Gull Road)

9 The population of Peshawar District rose from 2,026,851 in the 1998 census to 4,331,959 in the 2017 census, a growth rate of just over 4% per year. The population of the metropolitan area has been growing at an estimated 3.7% per year, according to UN World Population Prospects data (see www.macrotrends.net/cities/22051/peshawar/population).

10 Group threat theory says that the larger the size of an out-group, the more the in-group perceives it to threaten its own interests.

He describes Afghans establishing competing businesses as bad behaviour, the personal fault of refugees. According to this interviewee, Afghans tricked Pakistanis into providing hospitality, and had hidden their true nature and real intentions. Although this relatively extreme view was rare, he was not the only informant to ascribe the Pakistanis' changing attitudes to negative behaviour on the Afghans' part.

When they moved here, they were innocent [...] At that time, we accepted them. But over time, their behaviour has changed towards us, and because of that, our attitude has also changed. They don't keep the streets clean, even their houses are very dirty. The drainage system is completely blocked with their rubbish. Their children disturb our children and don't let them play in their streets [...] Sometimes, we regret that we let them stay on this street. Some of them are very good and noble people, but most of them are very bad. (Pakistani man, Pando)

I do not like the Afghan people. They are selfish, they don't show any appreciation for living in our country. The majority of them are fake, they really hate Pakistan in their hearts. (Pakistani man, Umar Gull Road)

It is not always easy to distinguish between reasons for (or causes of) resentments, and the factors that provoke resentments and at which resentments are targeted. The interview team acknowledged that it is true that streets with many Afghan refugees are often the dirtiest. (This is at least in part because refugees find accommodation in the poorest, unpaved streets with no drainage or sewage system, and local authorities have no political reward in investing scarce resources in fixing the streets of people who can't vote.) But are the dirty streets the reason why the FGD participant doesn't like Afghans, or are they just the easiest way of venting a dislike of foreigners? The long litany of implausible complaints linked to the majority of Afghans in the above quotations suggests the latter. The last interviewee quoted above probably expresses the most honest answer: he does not like the refugees because they do not show gratitude."

No single theory explains all the different roles that time can be seen to be playing. Afghans came to understand the host community better and to feel more at home. The next generation, born in Pakistan, feels so at home that they feel entitled to acceptance on terms that are no more conditional than for any Pakistani citizen. This change from grateful guest to equal, but 'foreign', neighbour is an unwelcome one for some. So, time has brought a growth in one dimension of social cohesion (the Afghans feeling part of the Pakistani society) which in turn reduces it in another (the willingness of some Pakistanis to accept the Afghans as 'guests').

11 There is little evidence anywhere that the Afghan population is broadly hostile either to the state or people of Pakistan. Indeed, their main frustrations are that they are not legally able to integrate properly as Pakistanis, even though most were born there. See further, below.

The influence of time on social cohesion cannot be understood without thinking about agency, because changes in attitudes over time did not simply happen to Afghans: they consciously changed their behaviour over the years. Social cohesion was never simply a gift, but was something that they bought, and whose price they are constantly renegotiating.

At first, they were grateful for any help and welcome that they received, expecting their stay to be short.

When we arrived some 40 years ago, we were expecting that peace would soon be restored in Afghanistan. We were only thinking about spending a short time in Pakistan, and then going back home. (Afghan man, Nasir Bagh)

As dependants, they were willing to pay a high price to buy acceptance, but they aspired to greater independence than this.

It was important to get along with everyone when we first came, because it was very difficult time. [...] After a few years here, I felt that we could live more independently. [My family] wasn't dependent on anyone, not on people from our own community nor on Pakistanis. We were poor, but my husband and sons made sure we didn't have to worry about food to eat or clothes to wear. (Afghan woman, Pando)

She still wanted good relations with neighbours, but, like most other refugee interviewees, she did not want to feel permanently obliged to behave in ways that would maintain her acceptance or 'social cohesion'. Other informants, particularly from the younger generation, went further in expecting a *right* to be accepted.

When we first arrived in Pakistan, we were just worried about survival. Now we think we deserve rights. (Afghan woman, Pando)

Most of the interviewees who spoke of discrimination were younger, such as university students. One of the frustrations of the educated is that their refugee identity prevents them from seeking jobs in the civil service, and even the private sector is often reluctant to employ educated Afghans due to a fear of legal complications. The educated and the young are also less willing to accept discrimination.

Once my teacher in the university was telling the class that Afghans don't allow their women to get education, they don't allow them to go outside the house as if they are backward. I stood up in the class and told the teacher that she did not live in Afghanistan, so how could she say this about my people? I told her – I am Afghan, and I am studying in this university. My female cousins are also in school, some work in different offices. I even told her that there are Pakistani people who treat their women like slaves. I asked her if she ever had been to tribal areas in Pakistan, where men don't allow their women to participate in anything, even to attend a funeral in their neighbourhood. (Afghan woman, university student, Hayatabad)

This degree of assertiveness and self-confidence was in striking contrast to the way in which women from the older generations spoke to us.

Other interviews revealed how time plays yet one more role in shaping changes to social relations.

Afghans' need for social cohesion does not move up and down on a single axis. Their needs from society have changed, and so the *nature* of the relationships and acceptance that they look for has changed, but in different ways for men and women. Men were more likely to have looked for help with businesses and practicalities (see Chapter 5). Families, including women, worry about the future of their children, and this is closely tied to political status.

Now, we worry for our children. They have no future without education, healthcare and a national ID. (Afghan woman, Taj Abad)

And, as the following quotation shows, their children's futures are also tied to social status.

My priority used to be finding shelter and food. Now, my priorities are to wed my daughters to respectable families. (Afghan woman, Pando)

Different kinds of social relations need to be advanced to achieve different kinds of goals, and these have changed over time. Understanding the role of time in shaping social relations therefore needs to be grounded at least in an understanding of two different realms of social relations – the private and the public – to which the next chapter will turn.

4 Social cohesion in private and in public realms

Two themes from the previous chapter are important for the following discussion of social relations in the public and private spheres. First, we saw that Afghans were active agents in their own social relations. A second theme was the multiple different dynamics of social relations all playing out at the same time. Here we examine two different kinds of social relations on which Afghans depend, and how they consciously manage them.

At an individual level (the private domain), over time Afghans expanded the number of people with whom they were personally familiar, and deepened relationships with them as individuals. At the community (or public) level, time was more ambivalent, leading to communities being generally more familiar with each other, but also leading to greater resentments. The contrasts between these dynamics were captured well by this Afghan man in Nasir Bagh:

So here's what I've seen in the last five years. People who have lived for a long time here have close relationships – with the local community and also with the migrants, as they are very supportive of each other [...] But their relationship with people who are just renting here [temporarily] is not that strong. That's because the locals don't know them and they don't trust what they don't know. They ask themselves – Who are these people? Where did they come from and why? It takes time to build trust. (Afghan man, Nasir Bagh)

General mistrust can grow at the same time as individual trust grows. These different dynamics are important because Afghans need both sets of social relations. Afghans know that in times of need they may all come to rely on cooperation from people in their neighbourhood, even from those they do not know personally. Many of these stories came from women. (Men's stories were more often about what we think of as the private sphere, about individuals that they had come to know, because social norms dictate that men socialise outside the family and are responsible for interactions with society.) Often, these were everyday stories that would not be remarkable for a non-migrant population. Young children went straying after playing on the street and were brought home by Pakistani neighbours who recognised them; Afghans didn't know where to take their children who fell sick, and Pakistani neighbours or landlords went with them to a hospital to ensure they got the proper care; neighbours stayed to comfort a mother whose child had gone missing; a young child died and the family had no idea what to do, until neighbours stepped in and organised everything for the funeral and the mourning. They were important stories for Afghans because, without extensive personal social networks in the country, they depended more on such neighbourliness with people they didn't know as a kind of safety net. As refugees, they were less likely to take such kindness from strangers for granted. Such help was regularly offered across any ethnic distinctions, as these two women particularly noted: the first when Pakistani Pashtuns helped arrange the funeral when her newborn baby died, the second when the community came together to help with her missing child.

It made me realise that I am part of this community. I was not made to feel that I was different, that I was [a] Farsi [speaker]. There is no difference. It was mainly the Pakistanis who helped me, but even the Afghan Pashtuns helped.¹² (Afghan Farsiwan woman (married to an Afghan Pashtun), Naguman)

When people in the neighbourhood got to know my [child] was missing, the women came to stay with me until he was found – Pakistanis, Farsiwan, and from the Afghan community [i.e. Afghan Pashtuns].¹³ (Afghan Pashtun woman, Nasir Bagh)

These interactions do not evidence anything beyond very minimal levels of relationship between the host and migrant communities, but that minimum is the most essential for many people. The knowledge that if you have a genuine need, your neighbours or even strangers will treat you with the minimum kindness owed to other human beings is a hugely important safety net. It was not constructed entirely intentionally, but it has been maintained by managing the frictions and resentments that exist between the communities. Many refugee informants spoke of how they maintained good standing in the neighbourhood by ensuring that their behaviour was respectable or that their children did not disturb others on the street.

This general neighbourliness was not enough on its own, either to advance one's situation or – in times of particular trouble – in most cases with the authorities. It was necessary to build relationships with people in the host community as *individuals* for several reasons: people who want to set up businesses or even to have a SIM card need to enlist the help of a citizen to be the formal owner. These all require personal trust, not merely the kindness of a stranger. Afghans have largely been successful in this but it entails dependency and loss of agency.

Even after more than 35 years in Pakistan, we still depend on [Pakistanis]. To register for an electricity meter, a motorbike, a SIM, to verify your identity with the police – we depend on them for everything. So, we have to get along with them, even if they don't like us or if their attitude isn't positive towards our people. We are helpless in such matters. (Afghan man, Taj Abad)

Friendships are also needed as insurance against the kinds of eventuality where strangers would not be of help, especially in relation to trouble with authorities. These problems cropped up frequently in interviews, with refugees finding themselves in difficulties with the police, usually for reasons related to their status. That required a local person to intercede on their behalf.

Whenever the police find an Afghan refugee without their Proof of Registration card or Afghan Citizen Card, they take them to the police station. They only allow the refugee to go back home when they receive a reference from a Pakistani. (Afghan woman, Pando)

12 Her use of the word 'even' tells a story in itself! (She clearly found it more surprising that she was supported more by Afghan Pashtuns than by Pakistani Pashtuns.)

13 Likewise, there is significance in this woman's use of the phrase 'the Afghan community' to mean the Pashtun community, distinct from non-Pashtun Afghans.

Whenever the police arrest us or a relative, then our Pakistani friends come in to stand bail for us. You can judge the level of trust that there is for yourself – they give us their own mobile numbers to use, and they take the responsibility in the police station. (Afghan man, Nasir Bagh)

There is something disturbing about the casual way in which this Afghan said ‘whenever the police arrest us or a relative’, in a context where it was assumed that the arrest had nothing to do with any genuine criminal behaviour. But even in such circumstances, getting involved with the police on an Afghan’s behalf is not something to be taken lightly. It risks being drawn into a scandal, even as an innocent intermediary. Some talked of the risks to the family’s reputation or honour, and even its possible impact on marriage opportunities for women in the family, if anyone in the family was seen to be associated with police business. It is essential therefore to find a genuine Pakistani friend, or perhaps more accurately to create a real friendship, for such eventualities. These were clearly genuine friendships, but some refugees spoke of a deliberate strategy to cultivate such relationships, or at least to create more opportunities for such friendships to arise. This was social cohesion management as *agency*.

I never made any strong friendships with [Pakistanis] and this was one of my greatest mistakes. I advised my son to make connections with [Pakistanis], and now he is flourishing. [...] We have to form these relationships to achieve what we need to. (Afghan man, non-Pashtun, Ferdous)

I’ve really thought about this. I feel I belong here, so I have chosen to adopt the culture of Peshawar. If I am visiting [Pakistanis], so, I wear Pakistani-style dress. And whenever I visit the Afghan community, so, I wear the Afghan-style dress. See, when I was coming here, I was told I’d be meeting with Pakistani people, so you see, I’m wearing your style of clothes. (Afghan woman, non-Pashtun, Naguman)

We [refugees] want to have strong ties with the Pakistani community, so that in case of any need they can support us. This can be in running businesses, dealing with administration, but also getting some political support for our protection. (Afghan man, Nasir Bagh)

I’ve lived here for a very long time, I grew up here, so I know the norms and traditions of this area. I know how to deal with people. I make sure I have good relations with everyone, so I don’t just go to visit people when it’s a special occasion [e.g. a funeral]. Sometimes, I just pop in to see people socially, at no special time. This is how I build up my social networks, in both communities. (Afghan Pashtun woman, Pando)

Social cohesion is a quality of the public domain, rather than of individual relationships, but the two cannot be treated in isolation of each other. In the private domain, time allows relations to grow stronger.

Personal bad experiences seem to be rare. However, even where the relationship is entirely exploitation-free, there is a cost for Afghans in terms of security and dependency. They are forced into relationships of trust by their legal status: even when everything goes well, a degree of uncertainty hangs over them.

The owner of the shop had given me a written contract, that [...] he would return the 45,000 rupees [around \$150], but then, he refused. He knew that because I was a refugee, I couldn't do anything to him. I couldn't go to the police station and file a case against him. The same thing happened to us also when we rented a house. (Afghan businessman, Nasir Bagh)

We have our own house in University Town, it's registered in the name of a Pakistani man. My parents sometimes worry about this. They say that they never know if anyone from that family will ever come to claim this house as their own. (Afghan woman, Hayatabad)

Usually, people around know that the business is really owned by the refugee. The police and local authorities will know, but they keep quiet as they also benefit. They'll often get things from those businesses, whether it's clothes or carpets or solar panels or spare parts for cars. If there's any dispute, it'll be a problem for the refugee, as he doesn't have any legal status. Legally, any money invested isn't his, but secondly, he doesn't have the strength or power to put any pressure on the Pakistani partner. (Pakistani businessman, Hayatabad)

The relative importance of public and private spheres for society in general seems to have changed over time in ways unrelated to the presence of Afghans. Many spoke of a rise in individualism in society, possibly driven partly by economic necessity, which has reduced the time people have available for a communal life. Such changes have affected the broader web of relations into which Afghan relations fit. It was beyond the scope of this study to investigate this fully, but the following quotations provide an important clue to broader changes in the context within which all social relations need to be understood.

We used to get together to perform ceremonies in the street, where we would take breakfast together on religious holidays. But now, everyone now takes breakfast at home with their family, not like it was a few years ago. People are losing some love for others as time goes on. That may be because everyone is now too busy worrying about working, because of inflation. (Pakistani man, Taj Abad)

Things used to be much better. People were less materialistic. But now everywhere there is materialism. Everything now is about some personal gain or benefit. We used to be like family with the local Pakistani people, but now everywhere is materialism. It has destroyed relationships and friendships. (Afghan man, Nasir Bagh)

The following chapter takes a more detailed look at how individual interests have been advanced or constrained by competition and cooperation between Afghans and Pakistanis.

5 Social cohesion, economic cooperation and competition

Although a few Pakistani interviewees complained about economic competition from Afghans, the economic relationship between the two groups is better seen as a mixture of cooperation and competition. Different individuals will see more of one of those two components than the other, as discussed below.

Afghans rely on Pakistani citizens to access many things, including mobile phones and to register assets such as vehicles, property or businesses. In most cases, Afghans are receiving simple favours from their Pakistani friends. When an Afghan puts a business in the name of a Pakistani national, the business relationship is usually based on a personal relationship. In some cases, the business relationship was initiated by Pakistanis, who offered a partnership to an Afghan whom they had come to know and trust. Simple favours such as registering a phone SIM card may only require having trust with one Pakistani national, but having a larger network of Pakistani friends made such opportunities more likely.

These business relationships and partnerships were of a wide variety. The role of the Pakistani national could largely be as an official front, as seen above. With smaller businesses, the partnership more often entailed a division of responsibilities, with profits shared depending on the role taken. The stories suggest that there is a premium for being the official partner of a non-citizen, above and beyond what would have been paid for those responsibilities otherwise. The stories also suggested that the Afghans had been happy to pay this, and still saw that they had been done a favour.

My friend, a Pakistani, is my legal partner. We both benefit from this. [...] I manage the shop and bake the bread, I pay the wages of the workers and the rent. He pays the gas and electricity bills [because they are registered in his name]. He takes 30% share in the profit. He is a wonderful man and has always been very loyal to me [...] In the past six years, we haven't had a serious disagreement, because we are both sincere. (Afghan businessman, Saeed Abad)

Sometimes, the relationships were closer to that of employer–employee, for mutual benefit. Such relationships, too, arose from either side.

Often, a refugee buys a car and registers it in the name of a Pakistani host that he has a good relationship with. They may pay them in-kind or in cash. Sometimes, it's the Pakistani who buys the car, and rents it out to a refugee taxi-driver on a daily basis. (Afghan man, Peshawar)

Wealthy Afghans were better able to use their position to take more control in these relationships; they were even able to offer an economic opportunity to someone they thought they could trust but with whom they did not have a personal friendship.

I work as a salesman in the electronics shop of a very wealthy Afghan [...] He asked me to register

his business in my name, partly because I am not from a rich family, so I am not powerful enough to make any trouble. It's also because my family is from the area bordering Afghanistan. There's more of a closeness between us, and that means there is more trust. (Pakistani 'business owner', Nasir Bagh)

This man is well paid for giving his name to the business, as well as receiving perks such as discounts at the shop that he 'owns' and being able to offer a relative a job. He enjoys a lifestyle that would otherwise be unobtainable, but both sides are taking a risk.

Among our interviewees there were a few cases of Afghan women entering into business relations. These illustrated the same range of relationships, from those that were fairly equal, to a Pakistani businesswoman taking on an Afghan woman as 'partner' (catering to her Afghan clients), to cases where Pakistanis simply appear to be trying to help Afghan women with little business interest for themselves.

I borrowed [a sewing machine] from my [Pakistani] landlady. She has never asked for anything in return. They've never said a word that would make me feel I was under any kind of obligation to them. (Afghan woman, Taj Abad)

My daughter has a qualification from a madrassa [religious school], and she wanted to open a madrassa for girls. Being a refugee, we weren't allowed to register a madrassa. My [Pakistani] friend helped me with the registration process, and also ran the campaign in his street and nearby houses. We now have around 100 students, of whom 80 are Pakistani. It would have been impossible if I didn't have a good and trusting relationship with my friend. (Afghan man, Nasir Bagh)

The significant population growth in the last decade in many of the research areas of Peshawar has put some pressure on housing for everyone, but the refugee experience has its own particularities. Landlords tend to charge refugees more money. This may not be straightforward exploitation. Landlords spoke of running greater risks renting out to Afghans, and all risk carries a premium in business. This was recognised by both sides.

The deposit for this home is normally 50,000 rupees, but since we are refugees we have to pay double. That's because normally, when someone rents out a home, either the two sides know each other, or there will be a guarantor who knows them both. But for refugees, it's not normal for a local person to take the responsibility of being a guarantor, so you just have to pay double the deposit. It's a kind of insurance, in case the refugee leaves the house without warning, leaving bills for the gas, electric and water. (Afghan man, Taj Abad)

In theory, the premium balances out the disincentive from the perceived risk, but some Pakistani renters felt that they find it harder to obtain accommodation because Afghans pay more, or that this has pushed up the overall rental levels for everyone. It was beyond the scope of this study to assess

how far any overall increase in rents for tenants is better explained by the increase in demand for accommodation relative to the supply, rather than by the presence of a refugee population. Some Pakistani renters felt that landlords favoured renting to refugees for other reasons.

It's easy to evict refugees, there's no hassle. They can't afford to get involved in anything that concerns the police. So, they have to pay rent on time. (Pakistani man, Taj Abad)

Whether the problem is general inflation, the failure of the housing supply to keep up with the increasing population or the rental premiums paid by Afghan refugees, the perception is what matters:

Because of these people, the rents have gone up. (Pakistani man, Nasir Bagh)

This does not appear to have been the cause of a great disturbance in social cohesion, but it is one additional pressure, and it is something that is brought up by those who, for whatever reasons, already harbour resentments.

Afghans are also caught in a trap by their rental situation, whereby the rental market serves to constrain social cohesion indirectly. From reports, they are forced to change their accommodation more regularly than other renters. This may be because they were evicted because of a perception of trouble, because they cannot afford rents as they go up, because landlords look to profit from them by increasing rents more than in the normal rental market, or for any other reason.¹⁴ A frequent claim from the host population is that as a result of this situation, the refugees living on any street are more likely to be new, unknown to the other residents on the street, and therefore less trusted.

As with other business relations, it can be misleading to look for a single quality of social relations in a society. Economic differentiation in both communities shapes how people see things. It is generally true in the world that the more powerful or rich can take advantage of more situations, and housing in Peshawar is no different. Pakistanis with some scope to engage in business can benefit from partnerships with Afghans, whilst the poor are more likely to feel competition for low-skilled jobs or businesses which demand small capital. Landlords with second homes to rent out at higher prices see the refugee presence in one way; those who have less – tenants competing with refugees who have been forced to pay higher rents – are affected differently, but do not necessarily see themselves as sharing a common economic situation (see Betts et al. (2022) for a similar finding in Uganda).

14 This is based on reports from interviewees. It was beyond the scope of this study to independently quantify average rental turnover among the Pakistani and Afghan populations.

6 Social cohesion, politics... and cricket

This is a study of how Afghans and the Pakistanis among whom they live described their relationships, and it was therefore not designed to examine external factors, such as the role of the media or regional politics in Pakistan or Afghanistan. But these topics did arise in conversations and, although not presented as a full analysis, they offer a degree of context to the developing social relations between the two populations.

Afghan foreign policy has fluctuated over the years, and this has provided a changing backdrop to local perceptions of Afghans. The relationship between Pakistan and India looms over much that happens in the region, including relations between Afghan refugees and their Pakistani hosts.

In 1947, Afghanistan was the first country in the world that opposed the creation of Pakistan. Then in 1965 during the war between Pakistan and India, Afghanistan refused to give refuge to Pakistanis, but instead we have been hosting them for more than 40 years. (Pakistani man, Nasir Bagh)

Pakistanis speak of the influence of Afghan politics on relationships.

The Afghan refugees blame Pakistan for destroying Afghanistan and interfering in its internal politics. This position has been promoted and sponsored by Afghan governments in different times, and it's also related to the influence of India in Afghanistan. In the [first] Taliban era, India didn't have such influence in Afghanistan, and relations were good, both at state level and at community level [i.e., with refugees]. Then in the era of President Hamid Karzai, sometimes there were tensions and sometimes things were normal. But then with President Ashraf Ghani, things got too much inclined towards India, and that is why it's changed. [...] For Pakistan, the key issue is the influence of India in Afghanistan. And for Afghanistan, it's the way Pakistan serves the interests of the US, as they see it. (Pakistani man, Nasir Bagh)

One Afghan interviewee also spoke of the influence of Afghan national politics.

President Hamid Karzai and President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan were more inclined towards India than Pakistan, so we had to face the consequences, because our relations [with Pakistanis] are affected by the political relationships of Pakistan and Afghanistan. When Sardar Daoud [Khan] was the president of Afghanistan [1973–1978], he was supporting Pashtun nationalism and the separatist movement in the Pashtun belt [of Pakistan]. So, the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan was not good. Such state-level relationships have always affected our lives as refugees in Pakistan. (Afghan man, Nasir Bagh)

This political analysis does not come from an isolated, educated elite. These perceptions are widely shared, and were expressed here by a man who could not read and write. (He was asked where he got his news and political updates from, having told the interviewer that he could not read or write. He smiled and replied, 'I am illiterate, but not ignorant'.)

According to interviewees, the political relationship has mainly affected Afghans because of its impact on the relationship between the refugees and the state or local authorities, i.e. what is sometimes called ‘vertical social cohesion’.¹⁵ Community relations at street level have been largely resistant to the flux of such political change. However, the two domains are not entirely separate. Deeper-seated political fears in Pakistan about the rise of a powerful neighbour in Afghanistan may have influenced some perceptions of Afghans as a threat to local society.

Most interviewees did not see their identity largely in national terms most of the time (see Chapter 2), but nationalism at state level comes to the fore when it comes to cricket – a sport that arouses passions across the sub-continent.¹⁶ Cricket was brought up unprompted in 12 of the 24 interviews and FGDs with Pakistanis, reflecting its ability to cause a rise in tensions locally. Several interviewees talked about the consequences of a very close game in the Asia Cup between Afghanistan and Pakistan shortly before the interviews were conducted.¹⁷ Partly provoked by the behaviour of players, crowd trouble at the ground led to widespread tensions in intercommunal relations that had not completely subsided at the time of the interviewing. But far worse in Pakistani interviewees’ eyes was that Afghans had celebrated when India beat Pakistan in cricket.

These refugees are living in our country but they are complaining about Pakistan and supporting India. (Pakistani man, Nasir Bagh)

[Some university students] started targeting us, saying ‘these refugees should be expelled from our country because they are against Pakistan and supporting India’ [...] This was about a month after the match. (Afghan man, Hayatabad)

We’ve never done anything wrong to them since they are here. But yes, their affiliation with India hurts us a lot sometimes. They celebrated when Indian won at cricket, which is totally unfair. Sometimes I feel they are not Muslims, that’s why they like the Hindus. (Pakistani woman, Nasir Bagh)

This goes beyond sporting rivalry. It was a rare tangible expression of two contrasting attitudes towards the expected relationship between the state and the refugees. Some Pakistanis had expected Afghans to identify with the nation that has hosted them, perhaps not appreciating that many Afghans feel that it is the Pakistani state that has denied them the opportunity to feel truly Pakistani, even when they were born there.

These tensions need to be put in perspective: even cricket had undermined relations between the communities to a very limited extent. No violence ensued and Afghans felt safe. This can be contrasted

15 This is contrasted with ‘horizontal social cohesion’, the relationship between people or communities, which is the focus of this study.

16 For example, the Pakistani prime minister at the time of the interviews, Imran Khan, owed his reputation to his achievements as one of the greatest cricketers of all time.

17 7 September 2022, Sharjah Stadium. Afghanistan 129/6 (20). Pakistan 131/9 (19.2).

with other countries that have seen demonstrations directed against refugees, including with violence, such as in England and Wales during 2023.¹⁸ It was still possible for this Afghan to keep things in proportion:

I supported the Afghan cricket team during the recent games. I knew that it would hurt some of my Pakistani friends, but I did. I thought, it is a game not war. (Afghan man, Nasir Bagh)

Despite the resilience of community relations to political upheavals, state policy and state attitudes to refugees have had an impact. Refugees' frequent difficulties with the police have been mentioned, and this is clearly related to their legal status rather than to any criminality. Mistrust of Afghan intentions in Pakistan (e.g. perceived support for Pashtun separatism) increases targeted actions of the police against refugees, whether as deliberate policy or out of heightened mistrust of refugees among the police. Over time, this police action creates negative stories that seep into wider perceptions and stereotypes.

So many times the police or army vans have come to our street for them. We [Pakistanis] are fed up with these problems. So many times the army has had search operations in our area, which caused a lot of problems for us. Many Afghan people are noble. They mind their own business. But many of them are also involved in illegal work. Because of these people, the good Afghans are also affected. And because of them, we are also affected, because we are living in the same village. (Pakistani man, Pando)

The interviewee here is trying to be fair to the refugee community and not to generalise about their illegal behaviour. But it is still likely that his observation of the 'many' refugees involved in crime has been shaped by police targeting refugee communities, rather than any knowledge about the actual criminality of any individuals (see Box 1). The same, too, is likely in the following case of someone who tried to help a refugee with their problems, but then backed away when the case was serious – or rather, when he was told by the police that it was serious. We know nothing about the alleged offence in this case or whether the accusation of drug smuggling was genuine, but the impact of police activity is clear on perceptions of the refugee community and refugees' ability to find homes and to work alongside the Pakistani community.

One day I got a call from home that my son had been arrested by the police. I went straight to the police station, and found out that actually the police had arrested our neighbour, an Afghan refugee, and my son had just gone to the police station to get him released. I was also saddened by the arrest of the Afghan refugee. But police told us that the refugee was involved in drug smuggling. That's when I took my son away and told the police that we don't get involved in these matters. We belong to a respectable family. I advised the landlord to evict them from the house. They are drug dealers and can spoil the neighbourhood. We don't want to live with fighters, criminals, smugglers and drug addicts. (Pakistani man, Nasir Bagh)

¹⁸ See, for example, Dearden (2023) on riots outside a hotel housing asylum seekers in England or Loader (2023) on violent protests at Llantwit Major in Wales in March 2023.

Box 1 The challenge of interpreting what people say

There are two distinct challenges in taking what people say at face value. One is that people know what they are supposed to say and are happy to conform with polite norms. Almost every interview started out with positive expressions about the relationships between hosts and refugees. Only when invited to do so did a few Pakistani interviewees give negative opinions about the presence of refugees, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2 Contrasting comments about refugees earlier and later in the same interviewees

Opening remarks	Later comments (by same interviewee)
Yes, I think the refugees are a part of our community. They spend a lot of time with us and share moments of happiness and grief with us. So I think they are a part of our community. People who live with us and share every moment with us whether good or bad are a part of our community.	Most of them are hypocrites and swindlers [...] it is not important to get along with the refugees. Now that there is complete peace in Afghanistan and the new government is very good, I think they need to go back to their country...
We invite and include them in every special moment. We respect them as other Muslims.	Most of the refugees are involved in illegal activities [...] these people commit crimes in one place and hide easily in another place.
Whether they are refugees or minorities, we consider them as community members.	Refugees are not from our community. One day they will go back. They are useless for us. They are just a burden for us in the community.

The second challenge is that people's stated reasons for their attitudes may not be playing a strong causal role. Assistance to refugees seems to have acted as a lightning rod for pre-existing resentments rather than causing them. Frustration with how children play on the street was another example, where the refugee label was quickly used against children's behaviour that would be common among all children. This can be a serious challenge for policy around social cohesion, if the assumption is made that removing the attributed cause of resentment will change attitudes.

7 The gendered dimensions of social cohesion

All social relations in Pakistan (and Afghanistan) are strictly gendered, and this inevitably also applies to those related to social cohesion. The different voices of women and of men have been apparent in almost all the chapters above. It is surprising, though, how little attention has been paid to gender in theoretical discussions of social cohesion in aid circles.

Men and women in Peshawar needed different kinds of social cohesion. Men are allowed to enjoy a full range of interpersonal and social relations and to take their place in the economic life of society. They are able to create a wider range of individual relationships, and also depend more on individual relationships since their need is to deal with the external world, to advance a business interest, and to find a job and somewhere to live. Because their responsibilities lie outside the domestic realm, they are more likely to sacrifice neighbourly relationships in order to obtain greater economic prospects, e.g. by leaving a camp or former-camp environment, where they were living only with their own people, in order to brave potential frictions with Pakistanis for the sake of more job opportunities. Afghan men are more likely to face resentments because their role brings them into potential competition with the local community – in business, for jobs, etc.

Afghan women were more likely to express satisfaction with their relationships with Pakistanis, but their demands are much lower. Women have few opportunities for meeting with women from outside their own family and direct neighbours. Their concerns were more about neighbourliness and about the safety net that this provided, than about finding contacts who could help the family to advance its interests (although they were just as positive about the benefits of intermarriage; see Box 2). Female students were in a very different category; they seemed to be as assertive in their expectations of equal treatment with citizens as their male colleagues.

The price that people paid for acceptance, or the trade-offs that they made, were also gendered. Both paid a material price, but in different ways, according to the nature of their situation. Men had myriad ways of helping each other. In business, as we have seen, they make offerings to their partners above and beyond any arrangements that have been made about profit sharing. Their Pakistani partners, though, would also offer additional help in times of need. In a culture of great reciprocity and sharing, it is not necessarily possible to analyse the terms and conditions that lie behind a relationship.

Women had fewer ways to manage their relationships, beyond the normal exchange of favours and assistance, and presence at weddings or funerals. When they received food aid in camps, women often shared a portion with neighbours. It is not easy to say how far this was out of a concern that their Pakistani neighbours also had equal material needs that were not being assisted; as a deliberate strategy to prevent resentment; or just because it is their culture to share their harvest or good fortune with others, and it is simply natural that this is extended to food aid rations.

Box 2 Reflections on intermarriage

Marriage in both Pakistani and Afghan culture is usually seen as being between families, not just the two individuals getting married. That intermarriage occurs at all should not be taken for granted. In both Pakistani and Afghan culture, marriage within the family is the norm: for intermarriage to take place, it must override this family barrier.

At the simplest level, therefore, intermarriage indicates enough social cohesion for people to join their families together. A closer look reveals much more about identity, economics, gender relations and status in society.

Intermarriage is partly a symptom of other cultural shifts among Afghan refugees. Their ties to Afghanistan are changing, as most now accept that their families are in Pakistan for the long term or permanently. Young Afghans were for the most part born in Pakistan, have the same education as Pakistanis and barriers between them are few. Intermarriage is then partly an outcome of Afghans having moved away from childhood betrothal and towards giving the couple some say in the union.ⁱ

The choice of a marriage partner reveals much about people's objectives for their lives. Afghan families are more likely to look for marriage partners for their children among Pakistanis than the reverse. There is a gender dimension to this. Children in Pakistan only get citizenship from their father. An Afghan family marrying their daughter into a Pakistani family thus ensures citizenship for their grandchildren. On the other side, Pakistani families fear marrying their daughters into an Afghan family without permanent rights to remain in Pakistan or who may choose to return. Given the patriarchal culture that wives follow their husbands, there is a fear that grandchildren would grow up in difficult conditions in Afghanistan.

Individual instances of intermarriage are not in themselves proof that relations between communities are universally good. Nor is intermarriage yet on a scale where it is creating communities that are intertwined as families. But intermarriage is a sign of *something*. For it to take place, Afghans have to be taking a long-term perspective in Pakistan and it is a sign that they are actively seeking to improve their own status in the society where they live. Pakistani families have to see that the Afghan family is stable, and the family must be well-known and trusted where they live. On both sides, then, it indicates something beyond the purely individual relationship.

ⁱ Several interviewees spoke of a broader change in gender attitudes, similar to changes that occurred in the same area among IDPs from the areas bordering Afghanistan (see Levine et al., 2019 and Levine, 2020). Such social change is outside the scope of this study.

Women's contribution to social harmony, though, must be set in a wider context. Social norms for Pakistanis and Afghans in Peshawar dictate that women maintain family honour through their behaviour, including purdah and restricting any study, work or career to those opportunities that are accepted by the (albeit changing) religious-cultural code. As mentioned above, their 'modest' behaviour helped Afghans, in particular Pashtuns, to gain a greater degree of acceptance. It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyse how far women willingly embrace this behaviour as their own religious obligation or whether they regard it as a price that they have to pay to maintain peace and to avoid retribution. It can be said, though, that women pay a high price for social cohesion through their compliance with strict norms, but that they enjoy few of its benefits, because the same behaviour that buys them social acceptance prevents them from enjoying it.

8 Aid and social cohesion

Most refugees in the study areas were not receiving significant amounts of aid. Those in camps were receiving free accommodation and occasional one-off transfers, but these covered a very minor part of their needs. Most Pakistanis were not receiving aid, though the state gave some assistance to households identified as poor, mainly through Ehsaas (formerly known as the Benazir Bhutto Income Support Programme) which makes both regular contributions to poor households and also made emergency payments during the Covid-19 pandemic.¹⁹

Opinions about the importance of aid in relation to social cohesion varied. Most aid actors, from both national and international agencies, took it for granted that aid could play a critical role, either positive or negative. However, their explanations reveal different opinions about the actual state of social cohesion, in particular between refugee and Pakistani populations, and also an adherence to very different theories about where social cohesion (or its lack) comes from and how aid plays a role. Because these assumptions and theories were expressed only implicitly, a large number of quotations are used in this chapter.

One aid worker's assessment of the need to involve all stakeholders might seem fairly typical in the aid world.

In its recent project for refugees, [the INGO] has also involved the host community. Trust between the host community and refugees was the big challenge at the time of implementation. (INGO worker)

The claim that trust between the communities was a 'big challenge', though, does not chime with the findings from this study or other studies that have been conducted in the area (e.g., Javed et al., 2020 and Oeppen et al., 2023). It is not clear on what the INGO was basing its belief or what kinds of trust it expected to create. A second INGO worker also uses fairly standard aid language about their work but with implicit assumptions that raise questions.

We have provided various social and economic opportunities under our programmes. This has helped them to establish a strong relationship within the refugee community and outside, with the host communities... (INGO worker)

The assumption that refugees were lacking strong relationships with the host communities, even after three or four generations of living among them, is both surprising and, from our own work, not at

¹⁹ One researcher of aid flows found that flows to citizens were slightly higher than those to refugees, but both were dwarfed by assistance that people received from within the community (Prof. Shahida Aman, pers. comm.)

all true. Beyond the normal aid hubris that a project can put all that right, it also suggests that social cohesion can be built through business. The potential for businesses to be seen as competition does not seem to have been considered.

Some aid workers focused on the potential for aid to create resentments, disturbing social cohesion.

Sometimes aid for refugees has created resentment among the host communities, because they are not entitled to the aid by the aid organisations criteria, even though they live in same place.
(INGO worker)

This was echoed by an INGO worker who claimed that the organisation had improved social cohesion by dividing aid between the two communities.

Help is not just provided to the refugees, but a portion is for the host community [...] This has a good effect, and as a result, social cohesiveness has improved. (INGO worker)

This is a commonly held attitude in aid circles but, even if empirically true, it risks ignoring the price that the refugees are being made to pay for social cohesion: instead of refugees sharing aid to gain acceptance, the aid agency is making that decision on their behalf, both on how much should be shared and with whom.

Another INGO worker saw things in the exact opposite way. Aid targeted to the refugees could *help* social cohesion, because the main problem is the fear of the behaviour of the refugees, driven by poverty and need.²⁰

The struggle grows when one part of society thinks that the other is going to infringe upon their rights and resources. [...] If humanitarian actors provide refugees with enough resources to cope with their challenges, then the host community would not feel threatened by them. (INGO worker)

Aid also allowed refugees to build social relations with their neighbours by sharing their food aid.²¹

The assistance received by refugees has been a key factor for building belonging and accelerating social cohesion between refugees and Pakistanis. The refugees were receiving more food items than they needed, and they were sharing the extra food items with their [Pakistani] host neighbours.
(Afghan man, Nasir Bagh)

20 A similar attitude was found in a recent study in Cameroon, where the local population felt that aid had reduced refugees stealing food from their fields, driven by desperation (Levine et al., 2022).

21 A quantitative study in Lebanon also found that cash transfers had a slight tendency to diminish violence against refugees, through mechanisms that included sharing of aid (Lehmann and Masterson, 2020).

Yet another implicit theory was contained in the opinion of a different INGO worker. Here social tensions are not primarily driven by perceptions of fairness or unfairness, but by ‘genuine problems’ which aid can address.

Aid actors have the responsibility to try to address genuine problems being faced by both communities, especially economic and livelihood problems. Once these concerns of society members are addressed, tension fizzles out. (INGO worker)

The argument that social cohesion improves with economic and livelihood wellbeing is not well evidenced. (Attitudes in Peshawar are probably more tolerant than the reception that refugees have received in Britain, a much richer society.) In all of the above examples, social cohesion was regarded as a legitimate concern of aid, but it was largely being interpreted simplistically, as having a single value in a society and following causal relationships that were not connected to how people actually behave or could be expected to behave.

There were also arguments that aid could directly create conditions for good social relations, rather than only work indirectly, as proposed by the views so far presented, but again, arguments rest on different implicit assumptions.

Building social cohesion requires strong partnerships with businesses, community groups, the police, other local agencies and local governments. (National NGO worker)

Here, too, there are questionable assumptions about the Afghans’ own inability to have created strong partnerships with businesses over several generations and for the need for stronger relationships with the police. Almost all our interviewees felt that refugees would be better off with a far *less* ‘strong’ relationship with the police! Another aid worker suggested a different mechanism.

The [Pakistani] community should be included and encouraged to join in projects, so that the implementing organisations can teach the communities to respect one another. (INGO worker)

The argument that aid can teach people how to have *good* relations with each other suggests that aid agencies are not aware of just how much the refugees and their Pakistani neighbours already know about living together in peace. It also raises a questionable proposition that social cohesion depends on teachable skills.

Refugees and their Pakistani neighbours took a different attitude to aid. Questions about assistance were not asked until the end of interviews, after people had already spoken extensively about the factors that affected social relations. Not one interviewee from either population group mentioned aid as a factor until directly prompted to do so.

One or two individuals did express hostility to refugees receiving aid, but their language suggests that there are deeper resentments at play, and that aid was merely a convenient outlet for that resentment.

Yes, the Afghans are now overly prosperous and wealthy, while our people are in poverty. The primary cause of this imbalance is simply that major organisations provide the people of Afghanistan with too much aid. (Pakistani man, Umar Gull Road)

If it is hard to believe that the refugee community is really so much richer than the Pakistani population, it is (sadly) even harder to believe that this has been achieved by aid projects. In fact, this same interviewee had already given several other reasons for his hatred – his word – of refugees. He claimed that ‘refugees are involved in all illegal activities [in Peshawar]’, and said that ‘the majority of them are bogus and fake and contain hate for Pakistan in their hearts’ and that ‘most of them are thieves’. It is highly implausible that these attitudes would be affected by any change in aid distributions. As Swift (2014) observed, internally driven behaviour cannot always be appeased and sometimes simply has to be accepted.²²

On both sides, almost everyone felt that aid should be targeted by need, with each side tending to feel their needs were being ignored.

Most of the people of both communities are poor. We want the poor people of our [Pakistani] community to get aid too. Aid actors always give aid to the refugees and this affects social cohesion. (Pakistani man, Pando)²³

The Pakistani government provides the Pakistani community with subsidised flour, but we can't receive it with our POR cards. Are we not human beings? Are we not Muslims? We are also poor and have needs too. This kind of discrimination affects our relationship with the Pakistani community. (Afghan man, Taj Abad)

However, the most striking finding from the interviews is that these feelings are not felt more strongly or more widely. We found no evidence for a narrative of social cohesion being destroyed by resentments and jealousies when ‘other people’ receive assistance. People’s sense of fairness was more sophisticated than such a narrative suggests.

The Afghan refugees have fled a warzone. Personally, I’m happy when they are helped, as they are also human beings like us, and Muslims too. They are needy people and they need help. I don’t think that assistance to refugees makes any difference to us [Pakistanis]. (Pakistani woman, Pando)

On the other hand, corruption in targeting is *not* accepted, whichever community was involved. Aid targeting in Pakistan has been found to be problematic because of manipulation by local leaders (see, for example, Shah and Shahbaz, 2015). These same problems were echoed here.

22 Swift’s (2014) analysis of this behaviour is not unique, but she expressed it perhaps more concisely than others: ‘the haters [are] gonna hate, hate, hate’.

23 It is important to remember that his comment about aid affecting social cohesion was prompted.

They need to give priority to *poor* people [...] Influential people in our community often receive aid, whereas the needy people, the ones who have less influence, don't. This is what leads to disagreement and causes conflict. (Afghan man, Taj Abad)

The NGOs have to give [the local leaders] their share of the aid to be able to implement their projects easily. This is quite disturbing as there are lots of poor people [i.e. those who lose out on aid]. But being refugees, we can't say anything. (Afghan woman, Naguman)

It is important that they provide aid to the needy, whether they are members of our community or from Afghanistan. (Pakistani man, Taj Abad)

Attention has been focused on how aid can cause social disharmony only between communities, but the more serious issue in Peshawar was the creation of social tensions *inside* each community because of this (perceived) unfairness and aid manipulation.²⁴ The transparency and operationalisation of aid targeting are the salient issues for social cohesion, much more than the principle of sharing aid between communities.

24 The problem of tensions within communities caused by lack of transparency in targeting is discussed by Grandi et al., 2018 and Samuels et al., 2020.

9 Conclusions

There is no such thing as social cohesion!

Some of the literature on social cohesion has criticised the way in which its definition has been changed to suit different purposes. It has been described as ‘a moveable feast’ (Cheong et al., 2007), a ‘concept of convenience’ (Bernard, 1999) and as plastic, capable of being moulded to suit anyone’s needs (de Berry and Roberts, 2018). Yet this cannot be solved by finding a more precise definition. Social cohesion is not one ‘thing’, not even a thing with several dimensions. The label ‘social cohesion’ can be attached to many dimensions of social life that play different roles, have different trajectories and can be favoured or constrained by different factors. It does not seem obviously helpful to try to force them all into a single definition, even though the term social cohesion could be applied to them all.²⁵ The problem is thus not about the definition but about clarity of thought, as de Berry and Roberts (2018) identified from a review of World Bank project documents: social cohesion was always spoken of as being important, but without actually saying what exactly was important or why.

Social cohesion is also not a quality that hangs over a whole society like the weather. Some groups can show great cohesiveness among themselves (e.g. Afghan Pashtuns), but this can be mirrored by a distance from others. The social cohesion of a society is not the aggregate of the cohesiveness of its different subgroups. A strong identity at the level of a sub-group (e.g. religious minority or ethnic group) may increase or reduce the degree to which its members identify with the collective. Collective identity may be important in creating some kinds of collective agency but not others: people in Peshawar were often able to act with common purpose (e.g. in supporting a bereaved mother) regardless of their identity divisions.

This means that it is unhelpful to speak *generically* about social cohesion between Afghans and Pakistanis. A desire to improve one aspect of how people live together demands explicit discussion about that specific aspect of relations. Aid agencies who wish to use their interventions to increase social cohesion may do best to deprioritise such plans until they have clearly identified which aspect of relations needs to change, in what ways and why, until they have elaborated a convincing social theory or theory of change by which their proposed interventions will bring about the intended change.

Social cohesion or acceptance?

The concerns in the aid sector for ‘social cohesion’ that motivated this research programme are often about the acceptance by the majority of the presence of a minority. This is not the same as social cohesion. The term social cohesion implies a society at peace with itself, and where people’s bonds to

²⁵ Many concepts have this quality – that they can be applied to things or to abstract qualities that in themselves have little or nothing in common. This is known as ‘family resemblance’, in opposition to the essentialist idea that a definition can find what is essential to everything under its umbrella (Wittgenstein, 1953, #66 and #67).

their society are strong enough for a single social identity to emerge, coexisting with other identities. In contrast, aid discussions about social cohesion in situations of displacement tend to address the specific relationship between migrants (the minority, the outsiders) and the majority, local population. This may say little about the overall social cohesion in the society as a whole, which is more than the relationship between these two groups. Social cohesion with an outsider group may be hampered by a highly cohesive, and insular, hosting society, rather than by a more fragmented one – or outsiders may face more mistrust in a society that is already divided. These are empirical questions, and theory should prepare us to look in both directions.

The benefits of social cohesion as acceptance of the (out-group) minority are not equal for all. Many Afghan and Pakistani interviewees identified social acceptance as an unbalanced relationship, where the benefits of acceptance were largely for the refugees, i.e. the outsiders. Pakistanis, for the most part, did not feel that they needed social cohesion or good relationships with the Afghans, though they were happy to have them.

To be honest, we don't depend on them, but they depend on us. [...] I don't think it is important for us to get along with them. I can't think of a time when our relations with the refugees were important. (Pakistani man, Taj Abad)

Many said that, as Muslims, they wanted to live in peace with their neighbours and felt a moral obligation to help those less fortunate than themselves. What could be called social cohesion was, in a sense, a charity bestowed. Acceptance can be seen to be a *part* of social cohesion, but if this is what external agencies and organisations are really concerned about, it may be better if they were explicit about discussing acceptance.

The nature of conditional social cohesion

Minorities know that their acceptance in society is conditional and cannot be guaranteed. The nature of this conditionality is as important as the resulting state of relationships. People may prefer to forgo a degree of social cohesion rather than to pay the price. Judgements about the state of social cohesion can therefore only be made after explicitly analysing the trade-offs that people have chosen or refuse to make. In Pakistan, the price paid by Afghan refugees has not generally been high.

Aid agencies should not make decisions about such trade-offs on behalf of all refugees. It is not wrong to consider how far aid may exacerbate tensions or resentments. This is something that refugees are used to doing. It may be advisable to consult them in any such calculations and to understand their preferences on which trade-offs are in their interests. (This is quite distinct from a situation where aid is not targeted solely based on people's displacement status, because the needs of some in the host community are equal to those of the refugees.)

Agency

We have argued that social acceptance is not something that *happens to* refugees, but it is something that is partly **intentionally shaped** by them. Social cohesion doesn't just happen. People **manage** their relationships. Surprisingly, this perspective is rare in the aid literature on social cohesion.²⁶

Throughout this paper there have been examples of the ways in which Afghans, men and women, have actively chosen to build their social connections with the local community and create stronger individual relationships. They encouraged their children to make Pakistani friends, took care to visit and be friendly, offered gifts to business partners and generally nurtured their relationships. Families controlled the behaviour of family members in order to manage the acceptance and status of their members in several dimensions, including gender norms.

The limits on their agency in this respect are set by the resources at their disposal, including opportunities for employment and housing; by their own situation, including their status and education; and by external factors such as the national political and media environment.

Agency also means that they choose when not to prioritise social cohesion. Some people who had opened up businesses were aware of the jealousies, actual or potential, that this was raising, and how this could harm their social relations and even the relations at community level. No-one said that they regretted having tried to advance their lives, or that jealousies were too high a price to pay for having a better life. The young in particular chose when to stand up for their rights and risk friction with their friends or colleagues – and when it was acceptable for them to support the cricket team that they chose.

External actors looking to help refugees to improve the quality of their lives should perhaps think about **how to support refugees to manage their relationships** rather than looking to shape those social relations, or social cohesion, directly themselves. Refugees will know which aspects of those relationships are most important and how best to influence them. Refugees will also know which trade-offs they want to make to improve various dimensions of their relationships with others, and when it is preferable to put up with some degree of tensions for the sake of some other goal (e.g. defending their rights). It should never be assumed that refugees would (or would not) choose to sacrifice material wellbeing or their dignity for the sake of acceptance.

Gender

Because of their different roles within the family and in society, men and women were generally concerned to different degrees about different aspects of their social relations. If external actors are to recognise the agency of displaced people in the management of their social relations and of social cohesion, this necessarily involves recognising the diversity of perspectives and priorities that

²⁶ The literature review by Holloway and Sturridge (2022) does not contain any use of the word 'agency' – except in reference to aid agencies.

exist within any society. To be meaningful, a discussion on social cohesion has at least to specify whose perspectives and needs are being referred to. Ideally, it would include discussion of differences and commonalities in the needs, priorities and roles of different people, in particular of men and of women.²⁷

The role of aid

In the case of Pakistan, aid played a very minor role, if any at all, in shaping social cohesion. This may not be true everywhere, because aid levels to the refugees are quite low in Pakistan and because international aid was broadly matched or exceeded by social protection from the state to its citizens. Although aid agencies do not always think of state social protection support as an equivalent to aid, the refugees and their Pakistani neighbours did. Calculations about fairness thus need to consider assistance more widely than just that given by ‘aid agencies’.

Social cohesion is more than just the acceptance of the minority by the majority. In the case of Peshawar, aid caused most resentment **intra**-community because of unfair or opaque targeting of aid, and in particular due to diversion by powerful gatekeepers. This is rarely considered as a social cohesion issue by aid agencies. (In situations where there are larger flows of external aid, targeting at community level may be relatively more important in creating or minimising resentments.)

It was striking that aid agencies believed that their role in regard to social cohesion was much greater than it was. This may be generally true of aid agencies’ assessment of their role, but here it also exposed their lack of appreciation of the realities of social relations between people. There was no consistent theory by which aid efforts changed social relations, let alone any deep discussion about the various different dimensions of social cohesion. Much of what was said by aid workers about how people behaved was generally in contradiction to what we heard from the people themselves.

Some people were quite strong in their criticism of how aid was affecting social relations. Although probably unfounded (see Box 1), this is a narrative that fits easily into an aid-centric perspective, inflating the importance of aid in people’s lives. This may partly explain its excessive weight in aid thinking generally. Policy and programming for displaced people should not be designed in reaction to these expressions without much more intelligent engagement with what really shapes behaviour and attitudes in society.

²⁷ No assumption is made here that men’s and women’s perspectives will always be different. Nothing can be assumed either way without finding out what is the case.

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Appendix: the study locations

The selection of interviewees was guided by two considerations: to maximise diversity (by age, sex, ethnicity/spoken language, economic status, displacement status, etc.) and also to find people who would speak openly. Research team members (all Pakistani Pashtuns) had worked in different capacities in some of the areas over several years and they were able to use previous contacts in those places to find interviewees who would talk freely. This was also helpful in setting up some group discussions. In some cases, it was possible to select people fairly randomly in public places, such as a bakery or health centre. Where it was necessary to find particular profiles to ensure diversity, some interviewees were asked to help in finding other informants who met particular criteria of age, sex, etc. To increase the diversity of interviewees, two places were used in each of the following study locations.

Nasir Bagh

Nasir Bagh, located on the outskirts of Peshawar, served as an Afghan refugee camp that opened in 1980. At its peak, the camp accommodated a population of 100,000 refugees (Colville, 2002). However, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) closed the camp in May 2002, and many of the refugees returned to Afghanistan after the Taliban were ousted. Nonetheless, a significant number of Afghan refugees have settled in the nearby village, where they currently reside in rented houses. This is due to the fact that the area is rural and rent is comparatively low, but it is also close to the main area in terms of accessibility to hospitals and markets, such as Board Bazar and Khyber Teaching Hospital.

Currently, the study site/location has been officially categorised as a non-camp site. However, due to a very large Afghan refugee population in the area, and because historically it was an official camp site, it can be considered as a semi/unofficial camp site.

Taj Abad

Taj Abad is an informal settlement comprised mostly of mud houses, currently occupied by Afghan refugees. The settlement is located on disputed land between the railway authorities and residents of Tehkal and Regi Lalmah. Consequently, rental rates are significantly lower and are mainly paid to residents of Tehkal and Regi Lalmah. Following the closure of Kacha Gharai camp, the refugees relocated to Taj Abad due to its proximity to the camp. Taj Abad is situated near Board Bazar, Hayatabad, and Karkhano Market, and basic amenities are readily available in the area.

Currently, the study site/location has been officially categorised as a non-camp site. However, due to the closure of nearby Kacha Gharai camp, a large number of Afghan refugee population have moved to this area and form the majority in this area. In addition, many of the Afghan refugees have constructed their own mud houses by encroaching upon government or disputed lands; therefore, Taj Abad can be considered as a semi/unofficial camp site.

Hayatabad

Hayatabad is a planned area under the authority of the Peshawar Development Authority. It is home to a mix of affluent Afghan refugees and members of the host community. The standard of living in Hayatabad is generally higher than in other areas of Peshawar, with residents enjoying a greater sense of security and cleanliness. However, this higher standard of living comes at a cost, as the area tends to be more expensive in terms of rent and other commodities.

The study site/location has been categorised as a non-camp site.

Naguman

The Naguman Afghan refugee camp is situated on the outskirts of Peshawar, along the Charsadda road. According to the 2018 report by the Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees, the camp houses 410 registered Afghan families, with some unregistered refugees also residing there (Jackson and Mosel, 2013). The camp primarily consists of mud houses and is a mixed community, primarily composed of Afghans who make a living through daily wage labour or small businesses. The refugees have settled in this area due to its convenient location, providing easy access to the city of Peshawar, and lower living costs.

Currently, the study site/location is officially categorised as a camp site.

Mera Kachori

The Mera Kachori refugee camp is situated in Peshawar, and is comprised of three sub-camps, namely Mera Kachori, Zandai and Baghbanan. The camp is named after the neighbouring village of Mera Kachori and is presently home to more than 13,000 Afghan refugees, primarily Pashtuns, who share cultural and linguistic bonds with the local population in Peshawar. The living conditions in the Mera Kachori refugee camp are difficult, with restricted access to essential necessities like clean water, healthcare and education. Nonetheless, the camp has a dynamic community of its own with local markets, schools and mosques.

Currently, the study site/location is officially categorised as a camp site.

Umar Gull Road

Umar Gull Road, situated near the area of Saddar in Peshawar, is a bustling locality that originates from the Ring Road and extends through Saddar. It is a diverse neighbourhood that is home to a variety of communities, including Pakistani residents (of the Khalil tribe of Pashtuns), as well as individuals who have migrated from other parts of Pakistan, and Afghan refugees. The Afghan refugees have opted to settle in Umar Gull Road due to its more affordable rental prices and proximity to the commercial hub of Saddar.

The study site/location is categorised as a non-camp site.

Haji Camp

Haji Camp (Sethi Town) is an urban area situated in Peshawar. This locality offers a wide range of basic facilities, including access to education, healthcare, markets and public transportation. One of the key advantages of living in Haji Camp is its close proximity to the Peshawar Haji Camp bus station, which provides residents with convenient transportation options to other parts of the city and beyond. In terms of demographics, the community of Haji Camp is diverse and multi-ethnic, with a significant population of Pashtuns, Hindkowan (i.e. speakers of Hindko), and Afghan refugees, especially Hazaras and Tajiks. Haji Camp is home to a number of local businesses and small enterprises that offer employment opportunities to the residents.

The study site/location is categorised as a non-camp site.

Saeed Abad

Saeed Abad is situated near Bacha Khan Square, along Pajagi Road, which serves as vital thoroughfare connecting various parts of the city. The community of Saeed Abad is a diverse mix, comprising Afghan refugees and local residents. The Afghan refugees, who form a significant proportion, are primarily involved in the retail sector, operating businesses such as clothing, cosmetics and bakeries. The area is characterised by a blend of residential and commercial properties, with several small shops, restaurants and businesses catering to the daily needs of the locals. Residential properties in Saeed Abad primarily consist of houses and are considered to be relatively affordable, in contrast to the more upscale areas of Peshawar.

The study site/location is categorised as a non-camp site.

Pando (or 'Phandu')

Pando is a locality situated approximately 7 kilometres northeast of the Ring Road and about 9 kilometres from Tarnab Farm in Peshawar towards the southwest. The area is predominantly inhabited by local residents and Afghan refugees. Due to its semi-urban nature, the lifestyle in Pando is relatively modest. Afghan refugees are drawn to this locality due to the availability of business opportunities and its proximity to refugee camps, enabling them to access the aid provided to them more easily (UNFPA, 2022). Pando hosts the Basic Health Unit, one of eight government health facilities in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Services offered include emergency obstetric and newborn care services and psychological counselling.

The study site/location is categorised as a non-camp site.

Ferdous

Ferdous is the busiest and most commercially vibrant area in the city of Peshawar. The market has a rich history and has been a prominent fixture in Peshawar for several decades. Over the years, it has grown in size and popularity. The market owes its success to its prime location, which is easily accessible and conveniently situated near major transportation hubs.

Ferdous market is renowned for being a hub of clothes merchants, where both imported and locally made clothes are readily available. Additionally, the market hosts a thriving fruit and vegetable market. Owing to the nature of the market, the majority of Afghan refugees have established their businesses here, with clothes merchants and fruit and vegetable dealers being particularly prevalent among them.

The study site/location is categorised as a non-camp site.

Saddar

Saddar is a thriving commercial and residential area situated in the heart of Peshawar. It is one of the busiest and most prominent regions in the city, home to a diverse array of businesses, shops and services. Saddar is a sought-after destination for both locals and tourists, offering a wide range of products and services, including clothing, electronics, household items and food. The area is renowned for its lively bazaars, where vendors sell a variety of products. It is also home to several restaurants and food vendors. In addition to being a commercial hub, Saddar is also a significant residential area, with numerous housing societies and apartments located in close proximity. It is well connected to the rest of the city, with major transportation hubs such as the Peshawar Bus Terminal and the Peshawar Cantonment Railway Station situated nearby.

The study site/location is categorised as a non-camp site.



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