

Structural Violence in Afghanistan: Evidence from Herat and Kandahar

Paper to DSA Panel on 'Power, Politics and Development in Afghanistan', Oxford, September 2016.

Danielle Huot and Adam Pain

Introduction:

As Afghanistan enters another decade of armed conflict, physical violence and its impacts on people's livelihoods remains a primary humanitarian and development concern. Attempts to 'conflict proof' aid programmes have focused on limiting the power of warlords¹ with the goal of reducing the potential for direct violence in which the actors and objects of violence are readily identifiable. Here, the actor is the warlord and the objects are the civilians victimized by conflict. While direct violence is certainly widespread, subtler forms of violence also exist in Afghanistan – violence that is embedded in the structure of society and acts daily to constrain those without power and resources. Variably described as 'silent' or 'quiet violence', the concept of structural violence describes the ways in which systematic inequalities – created or perpetuated by human agency – cause avoidable harm by impeding basic human needs.²

This paper examines how structural violence is generated and experienced in contrasting contexts of rural Afghanistan. Field evidence from five villages in Herat and Kandahar indicates that there is variability in the ways in which structural violence manifests itself according to context and explores possible reasons behind this variability. As will be seen, social structures in the study villages are defined by three core features. The first two, class divisions based on land ownership, and connectivity to centres of political power (whether through informal political settlements, formal governance structures, or both) are closely related. The third, that of gender, is largely independent of class and political connectivity but more linked to specific cultural norms.

As this paper will show, landed elites play a central role in how the study villages are characterised. Earlier research has examined the relationship between elite behavior, land distribution, and public goods at the village level.³ It found that in villages where land ownership was egalitarian, the elite were likely to be both more numerous and economically insecure, and

¹ Goodhand, J. (2002). Aiding violence or building peace? The role of international aid in Afghanistan. *Third World Quarterly*. Vol. 23, No. 5, pp. 837-859

² Leach, M. (2015). The Ebola crisis and post-2015 development. *Journal of International Development*, vol. 27, pp. 816-834

³ Pain & Sturge (2015). Mapping village variability in Afghanistan: the use of cluster analysis to construct village typologies. SLRC Working Paper 32. London: Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium; Pain, A. (2016). Using village context analysis in Afghanistan: methods and wider implications. SLRC Working Paper 46. London: Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium.

therefore were interested in widening public good and promoting social solidarity.⁴ However, villages that had a small number of economically secure elite with large landholdings had less incentive to expand access to services and were seen to act more in their own interest.⁵ The evidence presented in this paper is consistent with those findings, with three of five study villages having a small number of landed, wealthy elites who largely run the villages for their own benefit.

Methods:

This paper draws on research conducted in five villages of two provinces in Afghanistan – Herat⁶ in the west and Kandahar⁷ in the south as part of a longitudinal household panel study under the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) programme on livelihoods, service delivery, and state legitimacy in conflict contexts. Evidence from three Sar-i-Pul villages (in the north) is also used but less than the that of Herat and Kandahar as the data is still being processed. Table 1 summarises the locations of the villages and codes used.

Table 1: Village codes and location

Village Code	Location
A-H	Herat
B-H	Herat
C-H	Herat
A-K	Kandahar
B-K	Kandahar

The longitudinal study began in 2003 with panel of 390 households in seven provinces of Afghanistan. Information was gathered on livelihoods, food security, access to services, and coping mechanisms that served as a baseline for future studies in order to trace changes in these key aspects of Afghan's lives.⁸ In 2008-09, a subsample of the original panel of households was revisited in Kandahar, Badakhshan, Sar-i-Pul, and Faryab. Since 2014, a third round restudy has been ongoing with the same households from Kandahar and Sar-i-Pul interviewed in 2008-09 and a subsample from Herat interviewed in 2003. These three provinces differ in terms of reconstruction funding level, conflict and poverty outcomes. Both Kandahar and Herat are provinces that have received high levels of aid and military funds but have experienced different

⁴ Pain, A. (2016). Using village context analysis in Afghanistan: methods and wider implications. SLRC Working Paper 46. London: Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium.

⁵ Pain, A. (2016). Using village context analysis in Afghanistan: methods and wider implications. SLRC Working Paper 46. London: Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium.

⁶ Huot et al. (Forthcoming, 2016). Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories: Evidence from three villages in Herat province

⁷ Pain & Huot. (Forthcoming, 2016). Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories: Silent violence in two villages in Kandahar province

⁸ Pain & Grace. (2004). Rethinking rural livelihoods in Afghanistan. AREU: Synthesis Paper Series, Kabul

levels of violent conflict, Kandahar being high and Herat being low.⁹ With regard to public services, Herat has the highest net attendance ratio of girls to boys in primary education while Kandahar has among the lowest in the country.¹⁰

The research team conducted three gender segregated interviews, one preliminary and two in-depth with the sample households. They collected detailed stories from people about their lives and key changes and events that had taken place since the time of the last interview.

A Framework for Structural Violence in Afghanistan:

The term structural violence dates back to 1969 when Johan Galtung used it to describe inequalities built into societies that “show up as unequal power and consequently unequal life chances.”¹¹ Thus at the heart of Galtung’s concept of structural violence is the unequal distribution of power that systematically disadvantages those with less resources. The concept has been subsequently refined and the framing that aligns most closely with the Afghanistan context is from Uvin (1999) who describes structural violence as a combination of extreme inequality, social exclusion, and humiliation / assaults on one’s dignity.¹² Returning to the example of the warlord as the actor of *direct* violence, a structural violence lens generally will not explicitly implicate the actor of violence in a given situation; what it does instead is illuminate why violence is distributed in certain, systemic ways.¹³

Gendered Exclusion as Structural Violence:

A major dimension of structural violence in Afghanistan is that of gender whereby women are almost totally excluded from the public sphere. One of the most tangible impacts of this exclusion on a national level are discrepancies in gendered access to services and employment - the net primary school attendance ratio for boys and girls, though showing improvement since 2005, currently sits at 64% and 48% respectively. Though only 19% of the Afghan labour force is women, they are vulnerably employed¹⁴ at higher rates than men (87% versus 79%).¹⁵

Observations from the field however indicate that cultural context is an important factor in determining the degree of exclusion. While Herat is a more permissive environment than

⁹ World Bank, (2015). Afghanistan: Poverty Status Update: An analysis based on National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) 2007/08 and 2011/12. Washington, World Bank.

¹⁰ The National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (2012-2013) is conducted by the Central Statistics Organization and is the closest thing Afghanistan has to a census

¹¹ Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, Peace, and Peace Research. *Journal of Peace Research*. Vol 6, No. 3, pp. 167-191, quote page 171

¹² Uvin, P. (1999). Development aid and structural violence: The case of Rwanda. *Development*. Vol. 42, No. 3, pp. 49-56

¹³ Ho, K. (2007). Structural violence as a human rights violation. *Essex Human Rights Review*. Vol. 4, No 2.

¹⁴ Term used by the NRVA to denote sporadic, low wage labour

¹⁵ The National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (2012-2013) is conducted by the Central Statistics Organization and is the closest thing Afghanistan has to a census

Kandahar (and Sar-i-Pul even more so, where women graze sheep and accompany their husbands to Mazar-i-Sharif to work in brick fields) their opportunities to make external connections, become involved in village level government, or seek employment outside of the home are extremely limited in both provinces. In the study villages of Kandahar, the general absence of public good was only one barrier to women's access to services – there was a widespread sentiment that girls did not attend school because “it is against our customs and traditions.”¹⁶ As most respondents cited a variation of this when asked about education for girls it is unsurprising that of all the respondent households in Kandahar, only two reported any level of education for girl children. The first allowed their now teenage daughters to attend school to year two, and the second is a widow who has flouted customs to send her teenage daughters to secondary school.

In the Herat study villages girls universally attended primary school, but resulting from of different circumstances. In the first (village A-H) girls attended both primary and secondary school due to the presence of female teachers in the village, which is absolutely essential for girl's attendance past primary. In the third (village C-H) a relatively liberal *arbab* supportive of girl's education has created an environment in which families allow their teenage daughters to walk to a secondary school in the neighbouring village. In the second (village B-H) girls are taught until around class 9 (roughly until age 13) by the village *mullah*. However, once they are older they can no longer attend class taught by a male and therefore do not go on to secondary school:

“both of my daughters are engaged and if I send them to a school that has no female teacher people will talk badly and it will harm our reputation in the village.”¹⁷

Perceived benefits of education for girls differed from those for boys; while respondents in Herat wished their sons to be educated so they could provide for the family – aspirations of having a government or NGO employee in the household were frequently cited – the desire to have an educated girl largely revolved around the fact that it would result in a higher *peshkash* when it came time for her marriage, and that she would be in a position to take better care of the home and her family.

In contrast to some women in Herat who reported working for income from the home (mostly embroidery and / or tailoring for a few hundred Afs), and evidence from study on saffron in Herat that found women's involvement in the organization and management of saffron production,¹⁸ those in Kandahar operated completely in the domestic sphere with limited opportunities for external contact. One female respondent in Kandahar, in answering a question regarding mobile phones said:

“one of my youngest brothers-in-law asked my husband to buy a mobile phone for me, as I am the [elderly] woman of the house. He told my husband that sometimes no one (i.e. male) is at

¹⁶ HH B42, village B-K, Kandahar, male respondent

¹⁷ HH B39, village B-H, Herat, female respondent

¹⁸ Pain & Minoia. (Forthcoming, 2016). Saffron: the social relations of production

home and there should be a mobile phone at home. My husband just looked at him and said ‘you are my brother otherwise I would get very angry; never say such a thing as to buy a mobile phone for women of this family.’¹⁹

It was similarly more difficult for women of each province to access health care than male respondents as they need permission and a male companion to travel to the nearest facility. Another commonality that ran through the provinces was around knowledge of National Solidarity Programme (NSP) processes and functions of the Community Development Committees (CDCs). Despite CDCs having gender quotas, it was common for women to report that no CDC existed in the village – in some cases, even when the respondent’s husband was part of the CDC himself.²⁰ No CDC in any of the study villages had female members, though a woman in village C-H describes being asked to attend one meeting in which there were to be MRRD representatives. It is thus clear that there is a gendered division in access to public life and women are largely absent in the management of development projects and their associated funds.²¹

Land, Networks, and Structural Violence:

Structural violence is generated and manifests itself variably between villages. In the cases to be presented, structural violence results from power and wealth imbalances linked to landholding inequalities, which aligns with Galtung’s original theory that placed inequalities in power and resources at the heart of structural violence.

Afghanistan is characterized by unequal land ownership patterns. It’s land Gini coefficient has been estimated as 0.57 indicating that an estimated 2.2% of the population owns about 19% of the land.²² Four of the five study villages examined in this research had markedly skewed land ownership patterns (detailed below in Tables 2 and 3). These four villages were also the most resource rich of the five, and large landholdings closely aligned with concentrations of relative wealth and power.

Table 2: Herat study villages land ownership:

Landowners	Village A-H		Village B-H		Village C-H	
	# of HHs	Land ownership (jeribs)	# of HHs	Land ownership (jeribs)	N	Land ownership (jeribs)
Large	1	100	1	850	3	5-6
Medium	10	10-15	5	15-20	30-35	3-4
Small	30	1-2	21	5-8	7	1-2

¹⁹ HH B42, village B-K, Kandahar, female respondent

²⁰ HH B46, Village B-K, Kandahar, female respondent

²¹ Pain, 2015, 2016; Huot et al. (Forthcoming, 2016). Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories: Evidence from three villages in Herat province

²² Huot et al. (Forthcoming, 2016). Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories: Evidence from three villages in Herat province; citing World Bank 2005

Landless	95	-	16	-	5-6	-
Total irrigated arable		150		1020		170
Total irrigated grapes		150		70-80		0
Total rainfed land		400		0		0
Total HHs	135		43		50	

Table 3: Kandahar study villages land ownership:

Landowners	Village A-K		Village B-K	
	# of HHs	Land ownership (jeribs)	# of HHs	Land holding range (jeribs)
Very large	1	500		
Large	10	30-40 (50-100)	4	220 – 240
Medium	15	10-15 (20-30)	10	90-120
Small	60	1-5 (5-10)	100	10-20
Landless	425		206	
<i>Hamsaya</i>	20		30-40	
Total irrigated arable	2500		3200	
Total irrigated grapes	200		1000	
Total rainfed land	1500			
Total households	500		320	

Land rich households are commonly the village elite who constitute village government and its connection to the districts and beyond. These connections give them immense influence as life for many Afghans revolves around connections and what can be gained through networks – at

the top rungs of society connections can be deployed to gain positions in high level offices²³ or to make extremely lucrative business deals²⁴ whereas for the rural poor connectivity can often mean the difference between employment or unemployment, health and sickness, and even shelter or homelessness.²⁵ As Jackson writes (2016: p.vi):

“while institutions exist in name and edifice, network connections are what govern access to resources – being appointed as a governor, gaining employment in the civil service, obtaining the release of a relative from police custody, securing the rights to sell vegetables in a bazaar, and so on. As a result, there are no truly ‘public’ goods, and even the most basic forms of protection or access to education and economic opportunities must be sought through network ties.”

Thus land ownership and connectivity are closely related as those with large village landholdings are often also those with access to networks that connect them to the district, provincial, or national level.²⁶

Elite / Status	Village	Land ownership and classification	Involvement with CDC	Involvement with ALP	Connections (to level)
Arbab and village head	Village A-H (Herat)	20 jeribs – large landowner	Head	Head	Provincial
Landlord 1 – absentee landlord and member of Kabul Supreme Court	Village B-H (Herat)	850 jeribs; very large landowner	No	No	National
Arbab of Mina and village head	Village B-H (Herat)	Unknown	Head	Head	Provincial
Arbab and village head	Village C-H (Herat)	2 jeribs; small landowner	Head	No	District
Landlord 2 – village head who controls village	Village A-K (Kandahar)	500; very large landowner	Head	Head	National

²³ Jackson, 2016. Seeing like the networked state: Subnational governance in Afghanistan. SLRC Report 12. London: Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium

²⁴ See Minoia & Pain (2015). "90% real" - The rise and fall of a rentier economy: Stories from Kandahar, Afghanistan. SLRC Working Paper 38. London: Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium

²⁵ Pain & Huot. (Forthcoming, 2016). Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories: Silent violence in two villages in Kandahar province

²⁶ Huot, et al. (Forthcoming, 2016). Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories: Evidence from three villages in Herat province; Pain & Sturge (2015). Mapping village variability in Afghanistan: the use of cluster analysis to construct village typologies. SLRC Working Paper 32. London: Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium

economy and institutions from the village to the province					
Landlord 3 – village head	Village B-K (Kandahar)	240; large landowner	Head	Head	Provincial

Four of the five study villages (two in Kandahar – village A-K and village B-K, and two in Herat – village A-H and village B-H) had structural commonalities that characterise them: all have extreme inequalities in land ownership (see tables 2 and 3) and a small group of tightly knit, wealthy elite who are a minority of the landowners but are the ones connected to the provincial or national level. In three of the four villages with these structural commonalities (village A-K, B-K, and B-H) there are broad similarities in the ways in which structural violence is expressed. First there is limited provision of public goods, second there is elite domination over economic opportunities in the village, and third there is elite control of village management and development activities often leading to elite capture of resources.

The provision of public goods in villages A-K, B-K, and B-H with the exception of wells built by NSP, is severely limited. None have a school, health centre, or reliable electricity. Village A-K is completely controlled by one family the head of which is Landlord 1 who has direct linkages to the Karzais and General Raziq.²⁷ He together with his nephew and brother own the majority of the land in the village (around 500 *jerib* rain fed and 50 *jerib* irrigated), leaving around 85% of the households in the village landless. In 2009 Landlord 1 had guards who have since been formalized as Afghan Local Police (ALP) that answer directly to him. The family controls all formal and informal institutions that link the village to the province – his brother heading the CDC, his nephew leading an informal Dand District *shura* that is the first point of contact for any aid or development projects coming to the district, and Landlord 1 himself is a Provincial Council Member of the Kandahar Provincial Assembly.

In the second village (village B-K) land distribution is again skewed. 64% of households in this village are landless with the family of Landlord 2 owning 328 *jerib* of land. Before Landlord 2’s father’s death he was the head of the CDC and the village leader with links to Karzai, a position that his son has since inherited. Additionally, in each of the Kandahari study villages there are small subsets (between 20 and 40) of *hamsaya* households (tied labour) who who work as servants for the major landowners and are tied in dependent relations.

In the third village, B-H in Herat, 37% of the households are landless, again with one large landowner (Landlord 3) owning 83% of the total land. Landlord 3 comes from a wealthy family who own many businesses in Herat City and now sits on Kabul’s Supreme Court.²⁸ Village B-H was created by Landlord 3’s father fifty years ago when he purchased approximately 1000 *jerib* of

²⁷ The Police Chief of Kandahar

²⁸ SLRC Research Officer field observations

land and offered around twenty migrants – nomads and otherwise landless families from surrounding villages – a small parcel of land and a house in exchange for work as sharecroppers.²⁹ This established early patron-client relations in the village that, the dynamics of which persist to now despite Landlord 3 having terminated his sharecrop arrangements with all but a few in the village (detailed below).

The landed elite thus control work opportunities within the village. In village B-H, around six years ago Landlord 3 ended his longstanding sharecropping relationships (around 45 years) when he converted 70 *jeribs* of his land to saffron cultivation and mechanized wheat harvest on the remaining 780 *jeribs*. At present only one male in the village remains in his employment as the *nazir* or manager of his lands. This has had a major impact on the village economy as those formerly working as sharecroppers have been forced to survive off seasonal, casual labour outside the village which is limited. This has resulted in most households sending male members to Iran to send back remittances, exposing them to greater degree of risk. The journey to Iran is made on foot and Afghans cross the border illegally with human smugglers which exposes them to possible detainment, injury, or even death. As Landlord 3 lives in Kabul, employed by the Supreme Court, he is largely an absentee landlord and not overly involved in village governance. However, there was an account given by his *nazir* of dependency on Landlord 3's political status to solve a legal issue:

*"...[my son was charged with] murder, and in these cases the accused person should be killed or put in jail for his lifetime...if we did not have support from [Landlord 3] I'm sure my son would be in jail for his lifetime. But he supported me and told [the police] it was a traffic incident in which [my son] should only be in jail for six months."*³⁰

Though Landlord 3 largely regulates economic opportunities in the village as most work is on-farm, village governance falls to the *arbab* of Mina³¹, which is a village four kilometers away and was not part of this study. Village B-H also shares a CDC and Afghan Local Police (ALP) with Mina, and the *arbab* is head of both these units. This arrangement has been a poor one for village B-H as they have little involvement in official CDC matters and, aside from the construction of three wells (one of which was captured by a secondary village elite member), they have not had any investment in their village. Seeking independence from Mina is a difficult option for village B-H to consider; as one respondent said:

*"...if we select any arbab from our own village his life will be in danger from the arbab of Mina."*³²

Despite this, at the time of the interview village B-H was attempting to establish its own CDC and respondents claimed that though officials from MRRD had approved a separate CDC some time

²⁹ Huot, et al. (Forthcoming, 2016). Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories: Evidence from three villages in Herat province

³⁰ HHB38, village B-H, Herat, male respondent

³¹ Village name anonymized

³² HH B34, village B-H, Herat, male respondent

ago there had been no movement in the process. This could reflect village B-H's lack of connectivity to the provincial or national level – the only figure who holds that power is largely uninvolved in village affairs and unlikely to campaign on its behalf.

In contrast to village B-H, where public services haven't expanded as the consequence of an absentee landlord and a shared CDC with another village under the rule of a powerful *arbab* who directs funds away from them, village A-K and B-K are deprived of public goods because of the complete control of landed elite over all development projects that come to the village. Here the elite have been able to divert funds and benefits largely to themselves. Elites have consolidated their power over village affairs and access to political networks through involvement with formal institutions such as CDCs and / or the Afghanistan Local Police (ALP). The ALP in Herat was established in select villages of the study district around three years ago in response to deteriorating security, and *arbabs* were tasked with managing recruitment. Village A-H and B-H have ALP while C-H does not. In village A-H and B-H the *arbabs*, who were already the head of their respective CDCs also became the heads of their ALPs with their friends and relatives recruited to serve as police. As is clear in this quote from a respondent in village C-H it is not always obvious who they truly serve:

“There are lots of security issues all over Herat but in our district security is very bad: local police, Taliban, thieves, all of them are active and we don't know who is for our protection and who is not. [Recently a person was killed in village A-H], some people say the arbab of [village A-H] who is also the head of ALP was involved in this incident but I don't know what is right and what is wrong.”³³

This, compounded by the widespread feeling of disconnect that respondents had from government, has consolidated the position of *arbabs* as political gatekeepers and gives them immense power at the village level. They largely act with impunity and there were many stories of arbitrary action against villagers. A particularly notable one in village B-H was of a man who was jailed for failing to get his neighbor to comply with a community canal desilting. In examples such as these it is clear that the *arbab* used his power as head of police to solve a routine village management issue. As the respondent describes, when he was jailed he was told:

“...don't forget one thing: whatever the arbab is saying, in the district it is right and the District Governor and Police Commander accept his decisions.”³⁴

An account of Landlord 1 in village A-K is also consistent with the absolute power that village leadership can hold. In 2009 when a key informant asked why others had not been elected to the CDC, the response was as follows:

³³ HH C24, village C-H, Herat, male respondent

³⁴ HH B35, village B-H, Herat, male respondent

“Do not ask this question elsewhere. If [Landlord 1] hears this, he will kill you...We can’t do anything against powerful people. When an organization comes, it gives help to the maliks and elders...the road was gravelled only for his cars. We are far from that road and don’t have access to that road.”³⁵

Consistent with a small group of landed elite holding dominion over village governance, many examples were provided by the informants of elite capture, and the quote below about village A-K’s struggle to bring electricity to their homes lends insight into the dynamics at play:

“The story is this that the government brought electricity to [Landlord 1’s] house but not for the rest of the village. We all went to [Landlord 1] and...requested...for electricity to the rest of the village. He said if you can pay for wire and pillars, I would ask the government to connect the wires and distribute the electricity for the entire village. Therefore, we made a group of village representatives collected the money from the village and bought the wire and pillars then we asked [Landlord 1] to ask government to come and connect the wires and distribute the electricity for all the village people.”³⁶

Elite capture also resulted in a paved road from Kandahar City leading directly to the front door of Landlords 1 and 2 in their respective villages,³⁷ privatization of an NSP well meant for communal use in village B-H,³⁸ and the stationing of guards outside only the homes of Landlord 1 and 2 – essentially ensuring security in the areas close to their households but nowhere else.³⁹ In these cases, as Pain (2016) notes, any benefit these services bring to others in the village is merely a by-product of elite capture. It was clear that this was the case in villages A-K and B-K particularly with regard to the road and expansion of security. Though in 2009 respondents described not having access to the road in village A-K as it was solely for the use of Landlord 1, by 2015-16 this had changed and respondents were able to travel to Kandahar City with ease which opened up new channels of access to health facilities and the urban economy. Though respondents recognized the dearth of public goods in their villages, they were also pleased with the relative security of the district which was attributed largely to the elites.

Involvement with formal institutions provide a channel to the state and access to large revenue streams. It is therefore unsurprising that there are also accounts of violent competition among elites – this can also be observed at levels beyond the village in which regional strongmen compete for financial resources.⁴⁰ Seven years ago in Sar-i-Pul the former head of the CDC fell ill

³⁵ Son of HHA19, February 2009 (Pain, 2010: 11)

³⁶ HH A05, village A-K, Kandahar, male respondent

³⁷ HH A19 (2009), village A-K, Kandahar, male respondent; HH B46, village B-K, Kandahar, female respondent

³⁸ HHB35, village B-H, Herat, male respondent

³⁹ HH A03, village A-K, Kandahar, male respondent

⁴⁰ Jackson, 2015. Politics and governance in Afghanistan: the case of Kandahar province. SLRC Working Paper 34. London: Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium

and was replaced by his son, who was murdered shortly after by a fellow elite family in the village⁴¹. Although the details are unclear it is evidently a case of violent inter-elite competition.

Variations in Structural Violence as based on Village Context:

Paul Farmer (2005)⁴² has expanded upon Galtung's original definition of structural violence by incorporating human agency. Though Farmer refers primarily to the agency on the part of the actors of structural violence, or those perpetuating unequal power distributions, what is equally true is that there is (constrained) agency on the part of the subjects of structural violence. Differing degrees of agency could be found in villages A-K, B-K, and B-H, which also fundamentally differed from the variations observed in villages A-H and C-H.

In village A-K, respondents arguably displayed the least amount of agency of the three villages. Let us consider two examples, the first a *hamsaya* household in this village that evidences the nature of tied labour relationships and the near complete dependency on Landlord 1 for shelter, food, and water,⁴³ and the second an account of man who tends dairy cows of Landlord 1. The *hamsaya* household is headed by a landless widow who has worked in Landlord 1's home since the late 1990s. The family spent years as refugees in Pakistan during the Soviet revolution, and upon their return to Afghanistan Landlord 1 offered them a home in exchange for work – she was then and remains now a servant in his home, and more recently her son began grazing his livestock. They are not paid a salary but are given food three times a day, a house to live in, and allowed to take water from his well. The arrangement is precarious for the widow, and she is acutely aware that her work – and with it her home and access to food – could be taken away:

“If I do not cook their bread and my son does not graze their cow they will take that house from us. After that someone else will come and live here. Because there are a lot of people that want to have such an opportunity.”

For this household other sources of income are limited - her son does casual labour as a scrap dealer in Kandahar City but the income is minimal. The dairy manager began working for Landlord 1 a number of years ago under the agreed upon wage, which has failed to increase as the work has:

“When the landlord talked to me about managing the cows, I requested 15,000 PKR (150 USD) as a monthly salary. He told me I will give you 12,000 PKR (120 USD) and with the passage of time I am going to increase your salary but he has not increased it yet. I accepted his offer and started working with him. At the beginning there were two persons working with the dairy; one was responsible for taking care of cows while I was accountable for cultivating and cutting alfalfa for cows. The other person spent only 9 days on the farm and then escaped because he didn't have

⁴¹ HH 1420, village B-S, Sar-i-Pul, male respondent

⁴² Farmer, P. (2005) *Pathologies of Power*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

⁴³ HH A16, village A-K, Kandahar

enough tolerance to work in the farm as keeping and feeding the cows is indeed a very difficult task. The other person was also getting 12,000 PKR (120 USD) salary and had been provided a small house for living as well. Now I am working alone in the farm and responsible for both keeping cows and cultivating and cutting alfalfa for them. In the beginning there were only 11 cows but now there are 30 cows."⁴⁴

The dairy manager's wife also reported that not only does Landlord 1 often fail to pay his salary on time, he does not have the option of seeking employment elsewhere as it would displease Landlord 1 and their arrangement may be jeopardized. As a result of limited household income, they have had trouble gathering the necessary *peshkash* to marry their sons and last year were forced to exchange their 14-year-old daughter in order to secure a marriage arrangement for their son. The wife laments the situation and fears for her now pregnant daughter's health but as she says, "what could I do when there was not enough money in my hand to marry my son?"⁴⁵ As Wood (2003)⁴⁶ explains, the poor rely on social networks and contracts in societies that lack formal welfare systems. Evidence from the field indicates that connections often established or solidified by marriage arrangements are integral for access to credit and are an essential dimension of livelihood security⁴⁷ – in Herat for example, a woman whose husband was addicted to opium and therefore unable to provide for her child was dependent on her in-laws for food and shelter.⁴⁸

The above examples show people can be forced to accept the terms and conditions set by Landlord 1 whether the employment arrangements bode well for them or not. They also highlight respondents being compelled to act in ways that ensure short term security at the expense of longer term prospects to improve their livelihoods – what Wood has coined the Faustian bargain.⁴⁹ Implicit in this trade-off is the freedom to act independently in exchange for dependent security.

In village B-K, more respondents had been able to find footholds in Kandahar City's war-time bubble economy where military, reconstruction, and development opened opportunities for labourers and petty traders.⁵⁰ This granted certain respondents – namely male, and employed in the urban economy - a greater degree of autonomy as was seen in village A-K. Further, B-K's village dynamics changed significantly with the passing of the former head, an influential, wealthy man who headed the CDC and had links to former president Karzai. Though his son, Landlord 2,

⁴⁴ HH A01, village A-K, Kandahar, male respondent

⁴⁵ HH A01, village A-K, Kandahar, female respondent

⁴⁶ Wood, G. (2003). Staying secure, staying poor: The Faustian bargain. *World Development*. Vol 31, No. 3

⁴⁷ Huot, et al. (Forthcoming, 2016). Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories: Evidence from three villages in Herat province; Minoia et al. (2015). The social life of the onion: the informal regulation of the onion market in Nangarhar, Afghanistan. SLRC Working Paper 26. London: Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium

⁴⁸ HHA01, village A-H, Herat

⁴⁹ Wood, G. (2003). Staying secure, staying poor: The Faustian bargain. *World Development*. Vol 31, No. 3

⁵⁰ Pain & Huot. (Forthcoming, 2016). Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories: Silent violence in two villages in Kandahar province; Minoia & Pain (2015). "90% Real" – The rise and fall of a rentier economy: Stories from Kandahar, Afghanistan. SLRC Working Paper 38. London: Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium

inherited his father's position as head of the CDC, he does not have the same authority or command the same respect. Most respondents did not view him as the village leader as he has not been able to retain the degree of connectivity as his father, which has resulted not only in less voice at the provincial level but also in a disappearance of development projects and funds, including those from NSP. Landlord 2 had this to say:

*"If my father was alive, no one at the district and provincial level will dare to transfer our projects to other villages. But now...we do not [even] know about the project that came to our [district]. In other village of Dand district, there are many projects which are under implementation, but in our village there is none. In the past, you will not be able to find development project in other villages, [but] there were [always] many projects in our village."*⁵¹

A key departure between village A-K and B-K in reference to differing degrees of agency is the experience of exile: A-K is a village of migrants whereas B-K is not. Each respondent in A-K had the shared experience of years of living as refugees in Pakistan during the Soviet Revolution and returning to Afghanistan in the early 2000s landless, with no home and limited financial reserves. Landlord 1 offered each respondent shelter in exchange for sharecropping his land, which ensured an unequal distribution of power from the beginning and established early dependent security and dynamics of patron-client relationships. B-K in contrast had households with long family histories in the village that allowed greater time to earn money, accumulate savings, create networks, and buy land.

One village in Herat, village C-H, had relatively egalitarian land ownership patterns and provides evidence that where land ownership is more equitable village leadership is more supportive of the public good. It is the poorest of the Herati study villages and the only one that is not controlled by a powerful head:

*"[the] arbab is the head of this village but he is not a powerful person, he is the same as us – he is not a rich man and he does not have a gun."*⁵²

It also has the most equitable land distribution of the five study villages (see tables 2 and 3); ownership of five to six *jeribs* qualifies one as large landowner in the village, three to four as medium, and one to two as small – the latter category being where the *arbab* falls. The *arbab*, who is also head of the CDC, was noted to be honest and kind, and displayed interest in promoting social solidarity and widening access to services. Consider this description of how he allocated labour and funds to implement an NSP project (construction of a well):

"When there [was] a construction project in our village, the head of the CDC [the arbab] was making a schedule in which every person from our village is able to work in the construction site between 8 and 10 days each, and everyone in this village got up to 3000 Afs (USD 44) for the

⁵¹ HH B40, village B-K, Kandahar, male respondent

⁵² HH C24, village C-H, Herat, female respondent

*project period. Because it was a collective project, each and every individual should get involved in these projects.*⁵³

In contrast to the heads of villages A-K, B-K and B-H, the *arbab* of village C-H describes his duties as multifaceted, with the primary role of “being a bridge or middleman between the government and the people.”⁵⁴ It is his job, he says to “convey the voices of our villagers to the government officials in the District Governor’s [office].”⁵⁵ Note that in contrast to the other village leads, the *arbab* does not describe a connection beyond the District level. Also distinctly missing from his responsibilities is that of village security as village C-H does not have ALP. Though the *arbab*’s lack of access to networks has resulted in limited services in the village – it does not have a school or a health facility – it displays a developmental mindedness with the longest history of girl’s education, which began in the *mujahedeen*, was interrupted during the Taliban but resumed shortly after 2001.

Though the more equitable land holding patterns observed in village C-H has, at least in part, led to a relatively more developmentally minded environment it certainly cannot be said to be untouched by structural violence. Degrees of exclusion differ depending on the specific structural constraints that are in place; whereas structural violence in villages A-K, B-K and B-H played out along lines of patron-client relationships between small groups of powerful land-holding elite, in village C-H constraint and oppression was more contextual and largely revolved around its lack of access to networks. The absolute importance of connections for access to resources is clear in this example – despite a collective will from the village’s residents and support from their *arbab*, they have been unable to bring formal services to the village. In lieu of public good delivered by an external agent (the state or an aid agency), village C-H has developed internal processes – for example, without ALP, there is a security *shura* or peace council that serves as the contact point for insurgents in the area.

The last village, A-H in Herat, is somewhat unique as compared to the other study villages in the sense that it has both large land-owning, wealthy elite and has extensive public goods. It is the only village of the five that has a school and a health centre. This is likely linked to the fact that it is on the edge of the Hari Rud river and is the only village that has reliable and consistent access to water for irrigation. Landowners in village A-H have converted their land from wheat to grape gardens, the latter of which is much more valuable – where the sale of wheat cultivated from one *jerib* of land will earn around 8,000 Afs, one *jerib* of grape sales will yield around 100,000 Afs.⁵⁶ Thus even small landowners with one to two *jeribs* of land can generate relatively large income and landless households can easily find daily wage labour on grape gardens, which mitigates the establishment of dependent security observed in villages A-K, B-K, and B-H.

⁵³ HH C15, village C-H, Herat, male respondent

⁵⁴ HH C15, village C-H, Herat, male respondent

⁵⁵ HH C15, village C-H, Herat, male respondent

⁵⁶ HH A12, village A-H, Herat, male respondent

Conclusion:

At the crux of structural violence are imbalances in power that constrain and limit the agency of those without resources. In the study villages, there were three major lines of social inequality along which power was unevenly distributed: class structure as based on land ownership, connectivity to formal or informal centres of political power, and gender. The harm inflicted upon women as a result of gender inequalities is a more overarching or generic form of structural violence that is attached to cultural norms of the prevailing province. Therefore, with variations according to cultural context, women are generally omitted from government, public goods, the economic realm, and are denied access to services, particularly education, at higher levels than their male counterparts. Land ownership and connectivity, as the final two core inequalities observed at the village level, are closely related and in contrast to gender, are village-specific.

In villages A-K, B-K, and B-H commonalities could be found with regard to land distribution patterns and the landscape of village level elites. This led to three shared manifestations of structural violence: limited public good provision, control of economic opportunities, and dominion over village level affairs / management which led to elite capture. However, there are also variations in the way that structural violence manifested between villages, which indicates the importance of context. Place specific dynamics impact determine the tangible outcomes of structural violence: as was presented in this paper, whole villages can be excluded from public good provision due to lack of political connections beyond the district level (as in village C-H), members of the same tribe as their powerful elders and government officials can be omitted from aid because of elite capture (as in villages A-K, B-K, and B-H), access to government and the employment opportunities is gendered (as seen in every village but more pronounced in some than others), and lucrative village specific economies can mitigate structural violence (as was seen in village A-H).

This research found that unequal land distribution at the village level is linked to imbalances of power, resources, and wealth, which have created the conditions for structural violence. The fact that a majority of households in the study villages here are landless is not unique to these villages – research in 47 villages in Nangarhar found that up to 65% of households are landless.⁵⁷ Despite this, recognition of these degrees of inequality and their consequences has been largely absent from the aid agenda in Afghanistan.

⁵⁷ Pain & Sturge, (2015). Mapping village variability in Afghanistan: the use of cluster analysis to construct village typologies. SLRC Working Paper 32. London: Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium.