Migration, Mobility and Solutions: An Evolving Perspective

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Labour Mobility for Refugees
ILO-Geneva, 11 September 2012

Definition of a refugee

1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees

A person who owing to a **well-founded fear of being persecuted** for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is **outside the country of his nationality** and is **unable or**, owing to such fear, is **unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country**.

Durable solutions promoted by the UNHCR

- Voluntary **repatriation** to the country of origin;
- Local **integration** into the country of asylum;
- **Resettlement** to a third country.
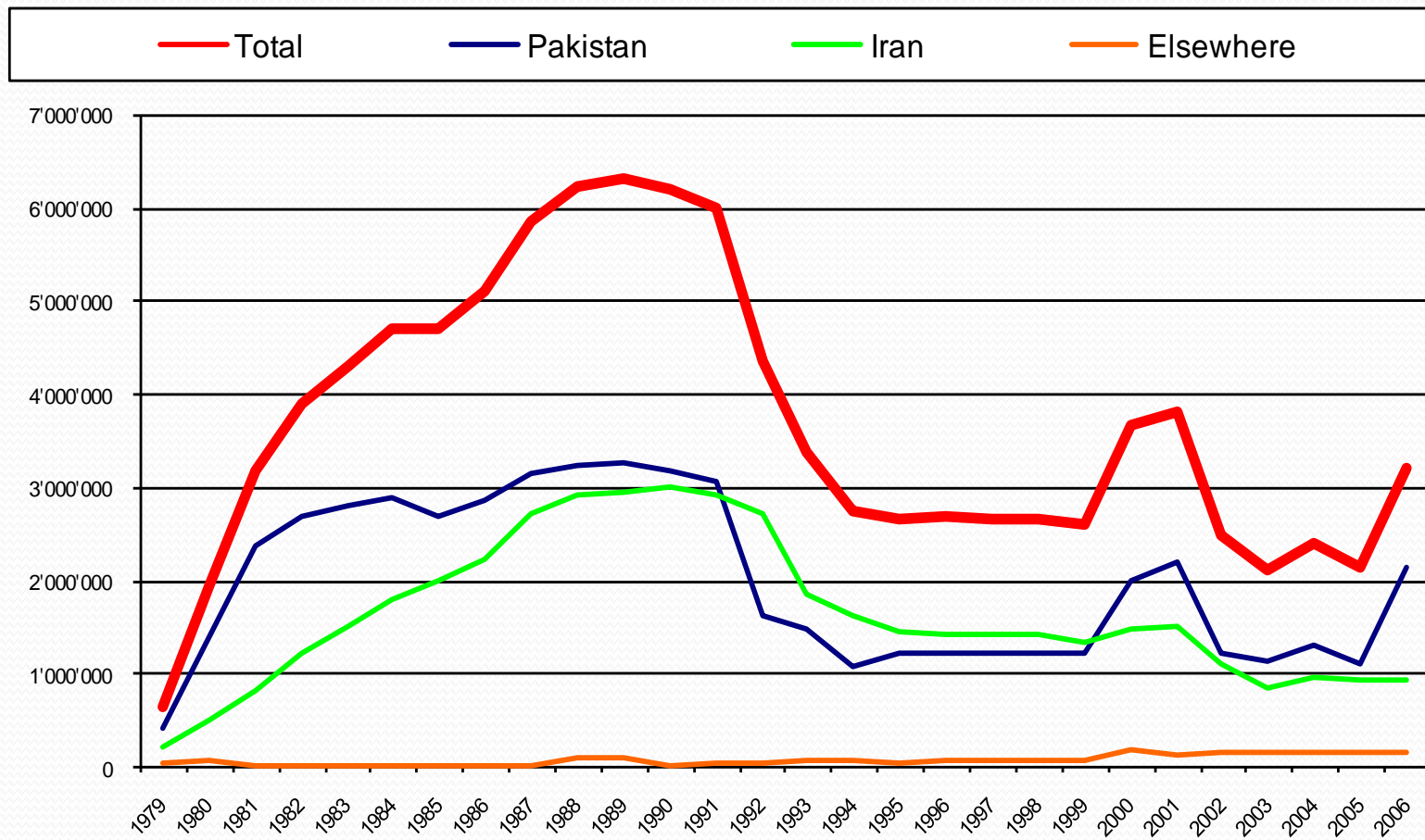
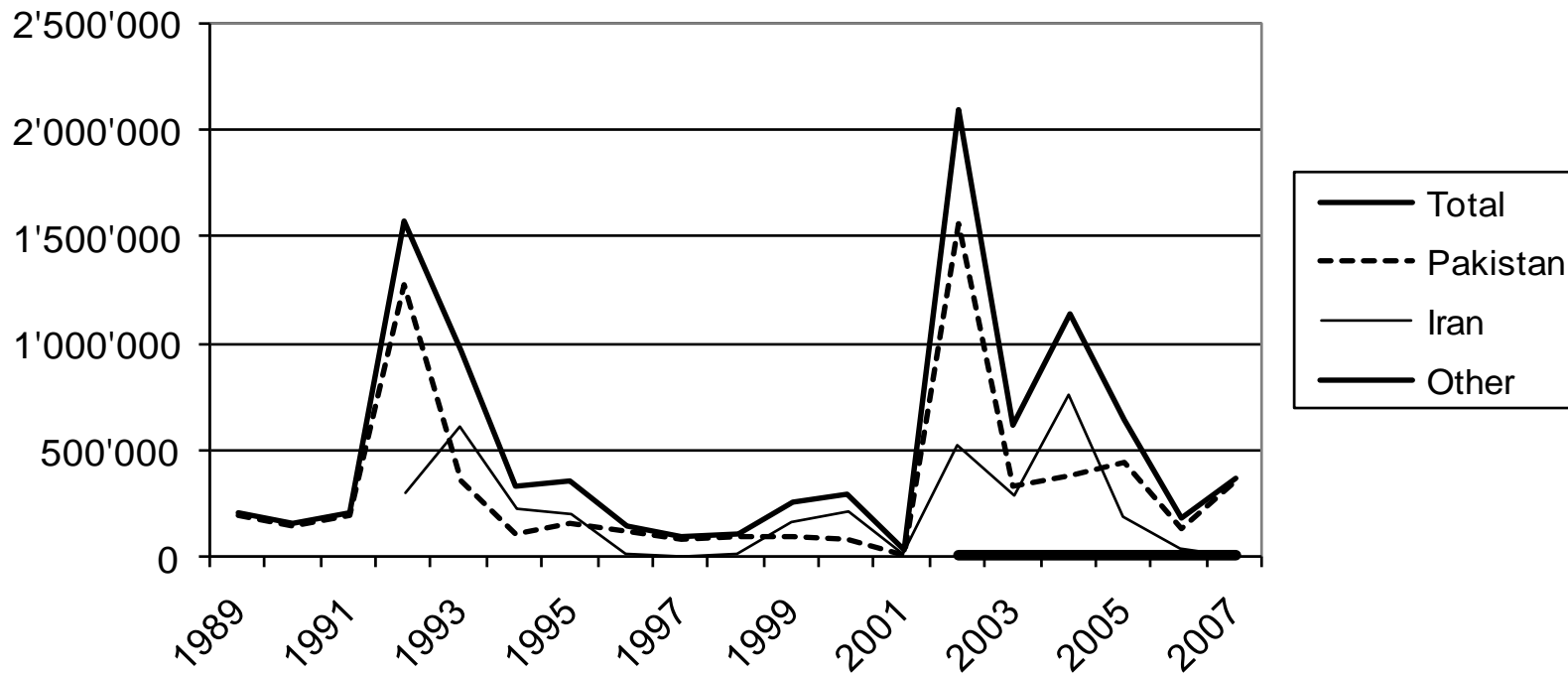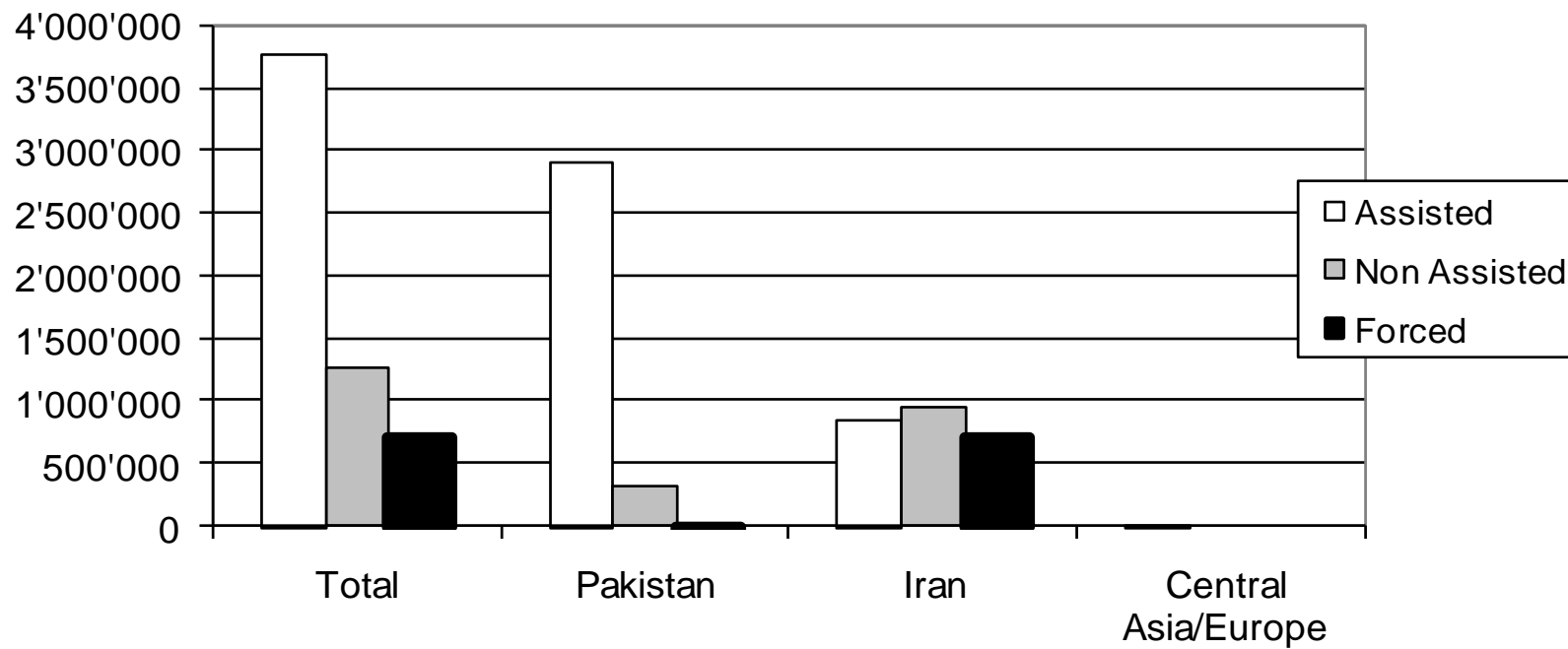**Figure 1: Afghan Refugee Population (1979-2006)**

Figure 2: Repatriation Statistics to Afghanistan

Figure 3: Assisted vs Non-Assisted (Voluntary and Forced) Return to Afghanistan (2002-2007)

The transnational turn

- *Migration* is **no more conceived as a linear movement** *between a point of departure and a point of arrival.*

- *It is a more **complex circulation**, an **ongoing movement** between two or more social spaces.*

- *People maintain **multiple ties** using improved global transportation and telecommunication technologies; in a sense, they may be **socially at different places at the same time**.*

- **Transnational social networks** *as systems.*

Economic theories of migration

- ***Neoclassical economics of migration***: *international migration is caused by geographic differences in the supply of and demand for labor (macro level); individual rational actors decide to migrate because a cost-benefit calculation leads them to expect a positive net return (micro level).*

- ***The new economics of migration:*** *migration decisions are not made by isolated individuals, but by larger units of related people, typically households or extended families; the goal is not so much to maximize expected income, but to minimize risks by diversifying the allocation of household resources.*

The refugees in this world

- ***Migration** may appear as an anomaly that jeopardizes the international order of nation-states, but it is a **constitutive feature of human history**.*

- ***Nominalist** – instead of realist – **appraisal of typologies**: the distinction between refugees and labor migrants does not exist in the world independently of a set of bureaucratic and academic practices.*

- *The line between **refugees** and other types of **migrants** is blurred: they **share a number of social features**; individuals may belong to several categories at a time or successively; social networks may comprise people with different statuses.*

- ***Labelling refugees**: a bureaucratic process that can be alienating; the extreme vulnerability of refugees to imposed labels (R. Zetter) vs refugee as a distinct social type (E. Kunz).*

Beyond typologies: the strategies

- ***Humanitarian biopolitics****: people receiving humanitarian aid are deprived of their full humanity being taken care in a very patronizing way.*

- *Increasingly **many potential refugees do not want such a regime of protection and assistance**.*

- *Refugees are not mere victims but people adapting to the world system using their social and cultural resources; like other mobile people, they explore the interstices of state policy and humanitarian action; they develop their own alternative solutions to **maximize opportunities** and **spread risks** (mobility, transnationalism, irregularity).*

- *Such a diversification can be observed in **political affiliations**, **economic activities**, **geographical residences**, and last but not least **legal statuses**.*

Policy implications

- *The three solutions to the refugee problems usually recommended and promoted by UNHCR are based on the idea that the **movement must stop**;*

- *Considering the fact that ongoing **migration** is a tool of reconstruction and a **constitutive feature of Afghan social life**, there is a real necessity to go beyond these three solutions;*

- *A **more comprehensive solution** that takes into account the strategies developed by the Afghan population. including the **back and forth movements** between Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, must be promoted.*

Methodological implications

*Research should reconstruct the **strategies** developed by people more than highlight their **motivations** (for instance through the push and pull model); asking **how rather than why** people migrate.*

Focus on three flows or three "hows"

- *The **spatial mobility of individuals**, the migration routes, and the smuggling rings: how people travel? how do they cross fighting zones and international borders?*

- *The **transfer of goods and money**, and the trading activities across international borders: how migrants send their savings to their family left in Afghanistan?*

- *The **circulation of information** through visits, telephone, letters, and e-mail: how people communicate even if scattered and in spite of the absence of modern facilities in Afghanistan?*
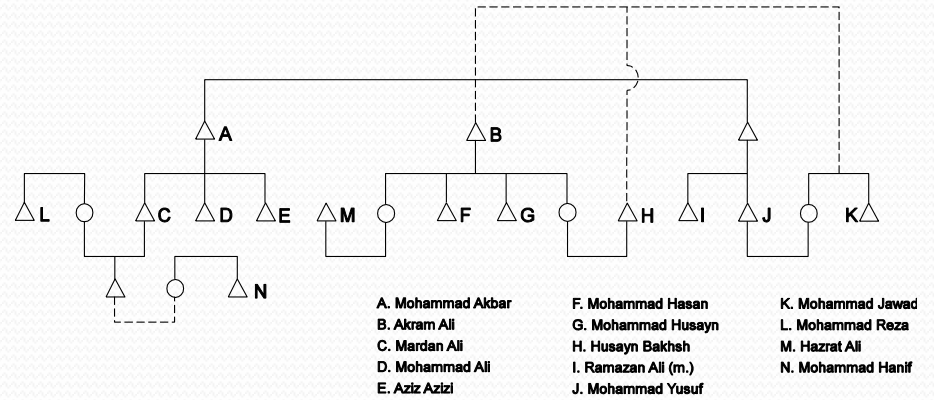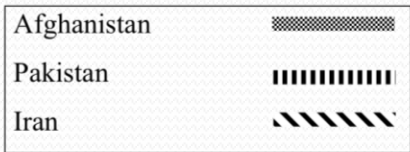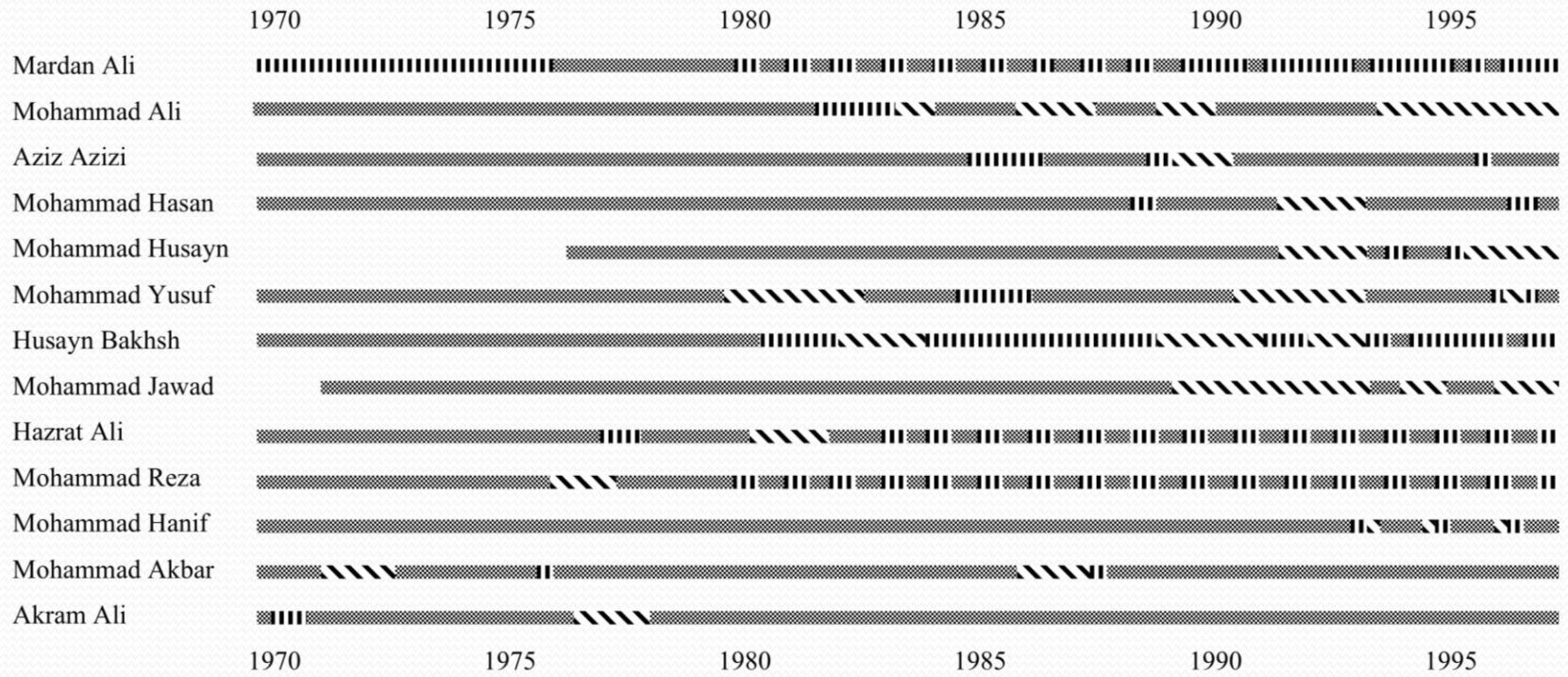
A multi-sited ethnography

Hazarajat

Quetta

Tehran

Geneva

New York

Auckland

Name: Father's name:
Sex & age: Origin (area & ethnic group):
Nb. of children: Education:

Year	Residence (& type of home)	Live with who?	Reason for move	Type and location of work	Reason for job change	Partners (& kinship links)	Location & function of partners	Father's residence and work	Brothers' residences and works	Family history (birth, marriage, death
1996/1375										
1995/1374 Mazari's death										
1994/1373 Taleban in Kandahar										
1993/1372 Benazir elected										
1992/1371 Najib falls										
1991/1370										
1990/1369 Tanai's coup										
1989/1368 Soviets withdraw										
1988/1367 Zia's death										
1987/1366										
1986/1365 Najib succeeds Karmal										
1985/1364										
1984/1363										
1983/1362										
1982/1361										
1981/1360										
1980/1359										
1979/1358 Soviets intervene										
1978/1357 Sawr Revolution										
1977/1356										
1976/1355										
1975/1354										
1974/1353										
1973/1352 Daud's coup										

Place & date: Signature

A. Mohammad Akbar   F. Mohammad Hasan   K. Mohammad Jawad
B. Akram Ali   G. Mohammad Husayn   L. Mohammad Reza
C. Mardan Ali   H. Husayn Bakhsh   M. Hazrat Ali
D. Mohammad Ali   I. Ramazan Ali (m.)   N. Mohammad Hanif
E. Aziz Azizi   J. Mohammad Yusuf
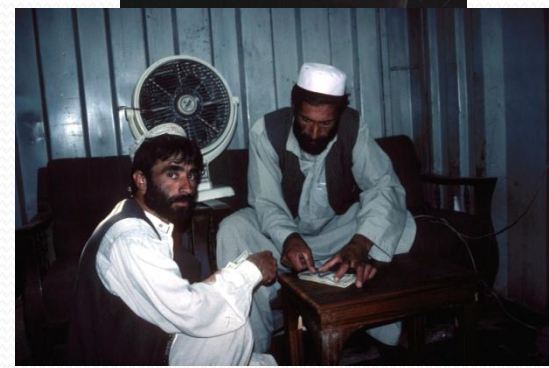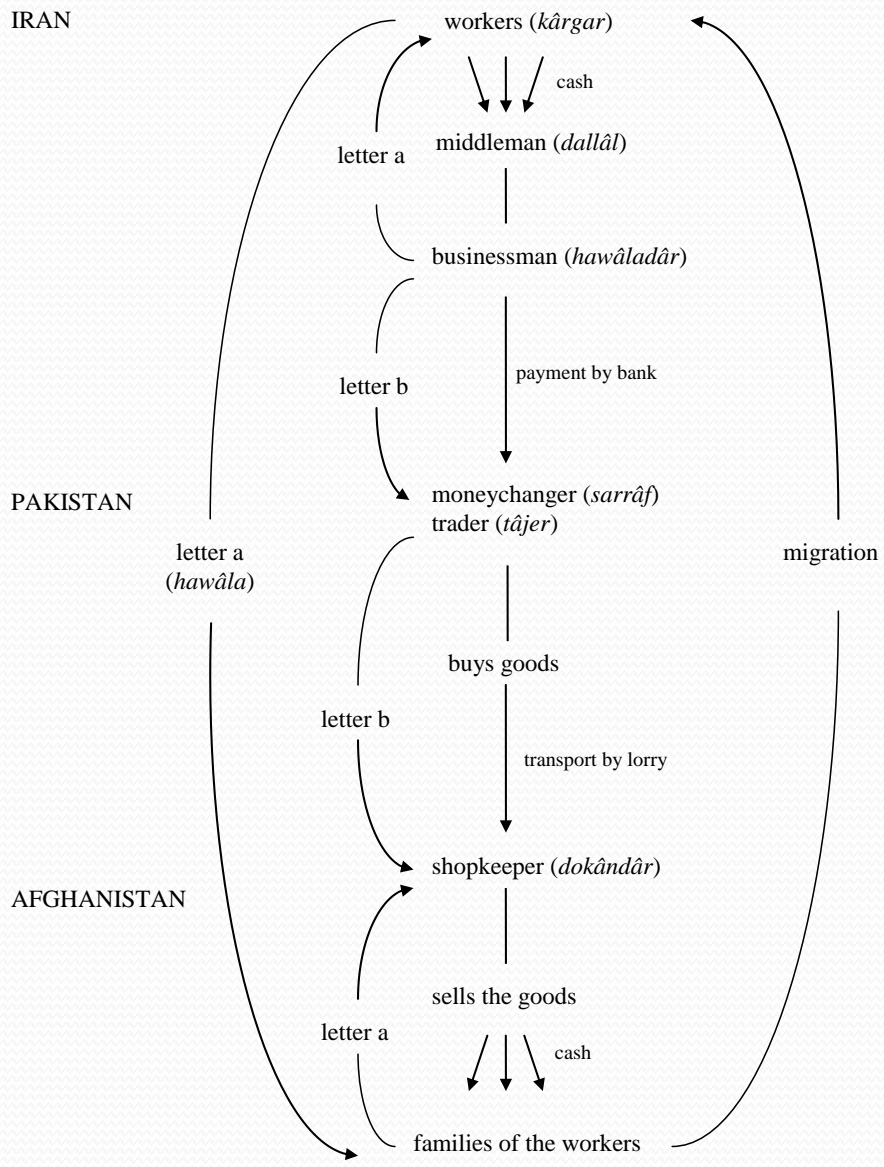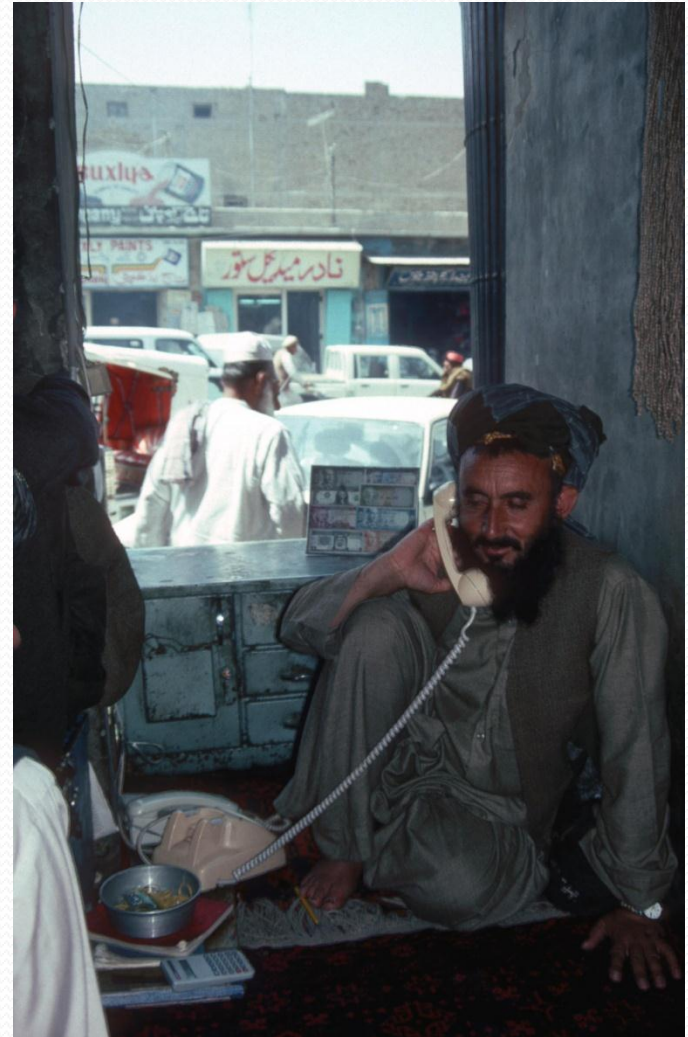
Itineraries of principal informants

Remittances and trade between Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran

Principaux mouvements migratoires des Afghans dans le monde

AMÉRIQUE DU NORD

EUROPE

ASIE

IRAN

PAKISTAN

PAYS DU GOLFE

Océan Atlantique

Océan Pacifique

AFRIQUE

Océan Indien

AMÉRIQUE DU SUD

MALAYSIE

INDONÉSIE

Océan Pacifique

AUSTRALIE

NOUVELLE ZÉLANDE

Principaux mouvements migratoires afghans

Flux migratoires distants

Mouvements migratoires secondaires

Source : compilation d'Alessandro Monsutti

Dorian RYSER, mars 2009

Concluding remarks

- *Refugees are **not mere victims**; they are able to develop efficient responses and adapt to the world system using their social and cultural resources.*

- *Their migratory networks form a **transnational system**; displacement and **dispersion** are not only a response to war and poverty, but may be a **strategy**, a social, economic and political asset.*

- *The **Afghan case** partially **blurs the boundary between forced and voluntary migration**: the strategies of people labeled as refugees and those of economic migrants are often similar; refugees and other types of migrants share a number of social features; individuals may belong to several categories at a time or successively.*

- *The **international refugee regime** promotes solutions that are based on the idea that **movements must stop**; by contrast, **mobility, dispersion** and **transnational ties** may be seen as a **key livelihoods strategies**.*

There is a need to rethink the notion of solution in bringing mobility and labor in the picture.

But how can we promote this conceptual and policy agenda without weakening the international regime of protection?