

# BETWEEN PRECARIETY AND RESISTANCE; THE BIOPOLITICS OF AFGHAN REFUGEES IN BALOCHISTAN'S URBAN AND RURAL SPACES

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## ABSTRACT

*This is a qualitative study that investigates the biopolitical governance of Afghan refugees in Balochistan, Pakistan. The examination shows how state power produces precarity and how refugees show resistance in response in urban and rural areas. This study uses 26 in-depth interviews with ethnographic sampling strategy based on participant observation and analyzes policies. The interviews are conducted in urban Quetta and rural Pishin. Findings reveal a regime of control. The state enforces a regime of hyper-surveillance through police checkpoints, kirayadaari forms, and bureaucratic channels in Urban Quetta. On the other hand, the government enforces strategic neglect with the deliberate absence of healthcare, and legal protections in Rural Pishin which produces vulnerability. Refugees demonstrate different agencies through everyday resistance in response. In the case of resistance shown, Urban strategies include shadow economies, and digital warning networks. Nonetheless, Rural resistance is more collective in nature. Rural Afghans depend on kinship-based farming cooperatives, and cross-border support systems. Another core contribution of this study is its analysis of generational transformation. First-generation refugees focus on cultural preservation and memories of Afghanistan, while second and third-generation Afghan refugees that are born in Pakistan are increasingly asserting place-based belonging while also claiming rights within their Balochistan, Pakistan. Conclusively, the prolonged "temporariness" that is imposed by state policy is a political fiction. It comes in obscuring de facto permanence by arguing for a fundamental policy shift. Instead of managing refugees as a temporary problem, there should be recognition of their established presence. It recommends context-specific interventions and build pathways for their regularized status. This research moves forward theoretical debates on biopolitics and agency of refugees in South Asian borderlands while offering urgent practical insights for one of the world's most protracted refugee situations.*

**Keywords:** *Biopolitics, Afghan Refugees, Everyday Resistance, Spatial Governance, Precarity, Urban-Rural Comparison, Refugee Agency*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

For over 40 years, Balochistan has been a host of Afghan refugees due to the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Initially, Balochistan was a haven for many Afghan refugees but now there is a need to understand how Balochistan will integrate Afghan refugees into society. Geopolitical landscapes have changed; however, social, ethnic and geographical links remain intact. Integration is a major concern, especially with the emergence of new identities as a result of the open-border policy through Islamic Solidarity. This has now turned into a national security issue and a way to manage the undocumented status of refugees, who are consequently depicted as a burden on the economy and/or as potential security threats. This phenomenon reflects a global trend – i.e., the global community has not offered a long-term solution for the challenge of long-term refugee status, but usually creates policies designed to maintain temporary status – which is termed by some scholars as "protracted displacement." In Balochistan, this has created the "paradox" of an Afghan population that is economically essential, has been living in Balochistan for generations and has permitted some degree of assimilation with the local population, but they are still legally excluded from the system and viewed as being deportable.

Earlier scholarship on Afghan refugees in Pakistan has provided valuable insights. They thoroughly focus on socio-economic conditions and legal frameworks, and at multiple times in security dimensions. Major studies have documented urban poverty in Quetta's enclaves and analyzed the Proof of Registration (PoR) system, while some traced the geopolitical instrumentalization of refugees. Yet, the critical gaps remain. There is an urban bias in these studies. The rural refugees who constitute the majority in Balochistan remain largely invisible in literature. Likewise, most analyses often bifurcate into either humanitarian narrative of victimhood or security discourses of threat, none focusing to capture the dynamic agency of refugees. No study discusses how they have been navigating and negotiating state power over the years. Most significantly, there is a lack of theoretical engagement with the biopolitical nature of refugee governance. There is no discussion of the systematic ways in which state institutions and policies actively manage, and control Afghan refugees' bodies and lives to produce conditions of precarity.

This study directly addresses these gaps by posing a central research question i.e., how does the Pakistani state govern Afghan refugees in Balochistan through biopolitical mechanisms, and how do refugees resist these controls in urban and rural areas? It uses a tripartite theoretical framework by employing Foucault's biopolitics, Butler's precarity, and theories of everyday resistance. This

research aims to examine beyond simply documenting the empirical accounts of the urban refugee experience through descriptions of where they live and how they live, but also to interrogate the underlying logics of power and agency. This study is driven by three major objectives: the first is to provide empirical comparisons between two locations, one in urban Quetta and the other in rural Pishin, showing how these areas utilize different biopolitical apparatuses of both surveillance and neglect. The second objective is to document the different forms of both formal and informal resistance to these two different deployments of biopower that are employed by Afghan refugees in the urban Quetta and rural Pishin environments. Finally, the third objective is to show how they lived experiences and forms of resistance employed by Afghan refugees change over generations of displacement.

The purpose of this research is to advance the theoretical framework of biopolitics and agency as they pertain to the unique borderland context of South Asia; this is essential for developing new avenues of global social theory. Additionally, the research provides rare, in-depth qualitative data from both urban and rural areas, while providing a platform to give voice to the refugees that are experiencing these realities. Lastly, the findings are vital to policymakers as they present compelling evidence that the current paradigm of temporary management is failing. The results also suggest that there are more sustainable, just and viable alternatives to managing an ongoing displacement situation. The discussion about state power and the resilience and innovation of refugees' resistance to those forces shows that understanding the biopolitics of precarity is a critical starting point for envisioning a future beyond an endless state of limbo.

## 2. Literature Review

The literature about Afghan refugees is voluminous, with many areas of focus and multiple disciplines represented. This review identifies three primary areas of literature. 1) Theoretical frameworks related to Power and Displacement, 2) Empirically based studies done on Afghan Refugees resettled into Pakistan and 3) Also, highlighting existing literature gap(s) that this study seeks to address in order to contextualize current Research within the context of continuing academic dialogue.

### 2.1. Theorizing Power, Precarity, and Agency in Displacement

The primary foundation of this research is grounded in three interrelated paradigms. The first of them is Michel Foucault's idea of biopolitics, that is, life can become an object of political authority and the way in which governments manage their citizens by means of laws, regulated institutions for example, is the overarching framework of analysis of the treatment of refugees. Foucault's biopolitical framework illustrates that government documentation systems are not neutral tools designed simply to record who lives where and under what circumstances, instead the systems are actually instruments for categorising and controlling life. Giorgio Agamben (1998) has built on Foucault's biopolitical framework through his ideas of the "state of exception" and the creation of "bare life" (*homo sacer*) which can reveal how refugees experience a similar legal limbo where their rights are effectively suspended. However, as some have observed (Ramadan, 2013), Agamben's Eurocentric camp model has to be examined carefully when applying to South Asian settings, where sovereignty is typically divided and informal structures dominate the power structure.

The second perspective on which the current treatment of refugees is predicated is the concept of precarity as outlined by Judith Butler (2009) and calls our attention away from state control towards the implications of such control. She points out how the structures of both the political and economic processes produce "differentially distributed" degrees of vulnerability within the population and consequently some lives are treated as more worthy of grief than others' lives. Therefore, within the study of refugees, the Butlerian approach will reveal how states are producing insecure conditions rather than simply responding to such conditions (Waite, 2009).

Third, literature on resistance and agency opposes the narratives of passive victimhood. James C. Scott's (1985) "weapons of the weak" and Michel de Certeau's (1984) "tactics of the everyday" provided frameworks for understanding how marginalized populations channelize power through, often invisible, daily practices rather than overt confrontation. Recent scholarship on refugee agency, such as Asef Bayat's (2013) "quiet encroachment" and work on "social navigation" (Vigh, 2009), has emphasized the impact of survival strategies and tactics that jointly reshape political possibilities.

### 2.2. Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: Empirical Landscapes

Empirical research on Afghan refugees in Pakistan is dominated by urban-focused studies, especially of Quetta. Work by Monsutti (2005) and Khan (2018) gives rich ethnographies of Hazara and Pashtun communities. He has given details on different dimensions such as economic informality, ethnic enclave, and the psychosocial impacts of protracted exile. Moreover, Policy analyses, such as those by the International Crisis Group (2021) and SAFRON reports, document the shifting of legal regime from the 1990s *laissez-faire* approach to the contemporary securitized framework of the PoR card and repeated repatriation deadlines. Likewise, a parallel and smaller body of work examines rural refugees i.e., with Rana's (2019) study of Pishin being a notable exception, highlighting agrarian labour exploitation and near to total service exclusion. Collectively, this literature establishes the socio-economic contours of refugee life but also tends to treat refugees as objects of policy or victims of circumstance.

### 2.3. Critical Gaps and This Study's Intervention

Major gaps persist despite these contributions which this study aims to fulfill. Firstly, there is a stark urban-rural divide on the grounds of analysis. These studies rarely compare these contexts. They miss how the state deploys fundamentally different governance strategies (surveillance versus neglect) across both areas. Second, literature suffers from temporal flatness; there is less analysis of how refugee experiences and strategies evolve across generations within a context of permanent temporariness while the history of displacement is well-chronicled. Third, there is a theoretical disconnect that is the empirical studies do not engage with concepts like biopolitics, and theoretical applications remain abstract and rarely grounded in the specificities of South Asian borderland politics. In summation, a methodological and epistemic gap prevails, research remains largely extractive, with few studies taking in participatory or decolonial methodologies that position refugees as co-producers of knowledge about their own lives (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021).

This study fill in these voids by using a comparative urban-rural pattern of analysis for the biopolitical and biopolitics in various places, look at the changes in refugee status through a generational perspective, and produce a more sophisticated analysis of the political context of refugee status by integrating theoretical frameworks that build upon the collected qualitative data in a grounded way, while also employing participatory research to include the voices of refugees. As such, there is a desire to create an alternative discourse regarding the political nature of dispossession, including an understanding of how refugee status impacts the political nature of refugee governance and the ways in which these populations can resist dominant forms of power in the context of one of the longest-running refugee crises in history.

### 3. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research design with a critical ethnographic focus and a participatory orientation to explore the biopolitical experience of Afghan refugees living in Balochistan. In selecting the methodology for this study, the researchers placed greater emphasis on depth and context than they did on breadth of research. The refugees' voices are central to this research, as they allow for an examination into how everyday life is affected by the ways in which state power is both exercised and contested.

#### 3.1. Research Design and Philosophical Approach

The research used a critical ethnographic approach, because it highlights how history, politics and the relationship between these two areas creates a context in which refugee experiences exist (Madison, 2011) This ethnographic method also goes beyond the description of the physical situations of refugees, to identify and address how refugees resist and re-interpret biopolitical categories in their lives. Evidence to support this argument was obtained from conducting research in multiple areas, i.e. urban Quetta (Jinnah Town, Satellite Town, Airport Road, Mari Abad, Hazara Town), and rural Pishin (Surkhaab, Saranan, Chaghi). The purpose of the dual site approach was to allow for a comparative analysis of Urban and Rural refugee experiences. A second part of the research design was to use a Participatory Action Research (PAR) model of Participatory Action Research (PAR) wherever possible. Therefore, the research engaged members of the refugee community in questioning the research design and in the collaboration of data interpretation, thus resisting extractive research methodologies and providing opportunities for the participants to be seen as co-knowledgers, rather than simply as subjects (Fine, 2017).

#### 3.2. Data Collection Methods

Data was collected through three primary, triangulated methods which are as follows:

1. Unstructured, semi-structured interviews: A total of 26 semi-structured interviews were administered: 13 participants from the urban setting and 13 participants from the rural setting. Purposeful and snowball sampling methods were used to select respondents; this process created a mix of respondents based on key factors (location, ethnicity, and legal status). Three categories of participants were identified: (i) Urban (ii) Rural (iii) Immigrant, based on participant characteristics. Interviews (lasting from 60 to 90 min) used thematic questions on geographical location (rural/urban), interactions with governmental authorities, livelihood strategies and preservation of culture. Each interview was conducted in the participant's language (Pashto/Dari/Hazaragi) and, if necessary, with the use of an interpreter, all interviews were recorded (with participant consent) and later transcribed and translated.
2. Participant observation and Ethnographic Fieldwork: Approximately 12 weeks of ethnographic fieldwork were conducted at field sites, which involved observing daily routines at home, in the marketplace, from workplaces (construction), and from agricultural fields and communal spaces to record practices and spatial strategies that interviews could not document adequately, along with comprehensive field notes on participants' lives.
3. Document and Discourse Analysis: Secondary sources (e.g. official SAFRON policy documents, UNHCR's reports, and media coverage of refugees on-line) were analysed to gain an understanding of how the formal structure of refugee policy and public discourses on refugees operate.

#### 3.3. Data Analysis

The process for analyzing data consisted of multiple phases and was iterative in nature. The interviews and field notes were analyzed using Braun and Clarke (2006's) thematic analysis method, through deductive (i.e., biopolitical surveillance, economic resistance) and inductive codes from data (i.e., checkpoint literacy, digital kinship). In addition to this analysis, a narrative analytic approach was also employed in order to document the ethical nuances involved in individual refugees' stories. Policy and media analyses so as to unpack the language that seeks to organize and control people were completed through Critical Discourse Analysis. The analysis was completed using both manual and qualitative data software, with the use of constant comparison and a sense of reflexivity providing strength to the analysis.

### **3.4. Positionality and Reflexivity**

The researcher's role as an academic in Pakistan required continuous reflexivity, resulting in keeping a research journal to record preconceptions, emotional reactions, and ethical issues; establishing trust over time with participants helped mitigate the power dynamics of researching vulnerable groups; and providing transparency regarding the study's objectives and incorporating participant feedback into initial interpretation provided clarity and support for the validity of findings. The inclusion of Participatory Action Research (PAR) elements served not only to prevent researcher biases but also to ensure conclusions drawn from the analysis of data were firmly grounded in lived experiences of study participants.

The methodological framework that was developed allowed for the production of ethically based and data rich as well as the generation of theoretically based new ways of seeing the complex relationship between biopolitical governance and agency of refugees in Balochistan through a deep ethnography of lived experiences according to critical and participatory research principles.

## **4. Ethical Considerations & Consent to Participate**

The reasons to develop an ethical framework based on the concepts of respect, beneficence, and justice were especially critical because this research with a vulnerable group of people took place within a politically sensitive context. Furthermore, this framework was incorporated throughout the entire research process to ensure the protection of participants' safety, dignity, and autonomy.

### **4.1. Informed Consent Process**

Meaningful informed consent is an important ethical principle for this study. Considering the potential for participant literacy issues, potential safety and security issues, and the cultural context, verbal consent from participants was obtained before collecting any data. A written consent form could create a paper trail that poses a risk to anonymity and/or the safety of participants if found by law enforcement officials.

The consent procedure was conducted in the participant's native language (Pashto, Dari, or Hazaragi) by the researcher, assistance of interpreter was taken at different times. The process covered the following:

- a) The purpose and academic nature of the research.
- b) The voluntary nature of participation and the unequivocal right to withdraw at any time without consequence.
- c) The methods of data collection i.e., interview, observation, and the request for audio recording.
- d) The measures taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, including the use of pseudonyms and the removal of all identifying details from transcripts and publications.
- e) The potential risks, including the psychological discomfort of discussing traumatic experiences and the remote, though minimised, risk of breach of confidentiality.
- f) The potential benefits, including contributing to scholarly and policy understanding of their situation.

Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions, and consent was reaffirmed at the beginning of each interview session. Also, the participants were informed that they can withdraw at any point at any time. The researcher documented the giving of consent in their field notes.

### **4.2. Confidentiality, Anonymity, and Data Security**

Protecting participant identity was must. All data was immediately de-identified right after collection. Pseudonyms are used throughout this manuscript and any related outputs. Potentially identifying information like specific addresses, unique workplace details, names of relatives etc., was omitted from transcripts and field notes. Digital audio files and transcripts were encrypted and stored on a password-protected device, with access restricted to the primary researcher. Physical notes were kept in a secured location. All data will be destroyed after the mandatory five-year retention period required by the institutional review board.

### **4.3. Risk Mitigation and Trauma-Informed Practice**

The researcher chose a trauma-informed approach. In recognizing that discussions of displacement, police harassment, and family separation could be distressing. Interviews were conducted in private settings chosen by participants to ensure their comfort and security. The researcher was attentive to signs of distress and prepared to pause or terminate the interview if necessary. In the case

of rural areas, a school principal helped with the interviews who chose her name to be kept hidden though it is acknowledge in the study.

#### **4.4. Reciprocity and Positionality**

The study has followed the principles of reciprocity acknowledging the extractive part of research. Participants were compensated for their time and expertise, however. Moreover, the researcher committed to sharing summarized, and accessible findings with the community through trusted intermediaries and to using the research for advocacy where suitable. The researcher's positionality as a Pakistani national, but with a background of immigration, was continuously reflected upon to navigate power dynamics sensitively and avoided replicating the very structures of authority under examination.

### **5. Findings**

The study reveals that there are two significantly different types of control exercised by the government over how Afghan refugees live in Balochistan: hyper-surveillance in the city of Quetta and neglect of rural areas like Pishin. Within these very different frameworks of government control, refugees have developed strategies that reflect their culture and context and allow them to resist authorities every day. One additional finding is that younger generations experience and react against displacement much differently than older generations.

#### **5.1. The Urban Regime: Governance through Hyper-Surveillance in Quetta**

In the city of Quetta, the government maintains its authority through a complicated and unclear design that enhances visibility and increases bureaucracy. The Proof of Registration (PoR) is merely a form of identification to establish a level of "precarious legality" among individuals, and the kiraya daari or 'rental registration' system turns private dwellings into 'hubs' of governmental surveillance. As one Pashtun resident explained with sorrowful tone, "When you register your house, it is like giving them a key to your home." The requirement to have these registrations are enforced through strategically placed checkpoints which create an increased level of surveillance, especially at the entrances to areas designated for ethnic groups such as Hazara Town. Additionally, the process of moving through the checkpoints is ritualised in the sense that residents of Hazara Town create "checkpoint literacy" by being able to navigate their way through various checkpoints while remaining non-threatening and understanding the varying amounts of financial penalties for small violations. The complete effect of this process has resulted in a "Condition of Conditional Presence" for Refugees that shapes how we view our lives as well as how we envision our own futures.

#### **5.2. The Rural Regime: Governance through Strategic Neglect in Pishin**

The state has created an enormous "service desert" in rural Pishin where large areas are without any functioning health clinics, secondary schools or easy route to legal institutions. "In Saranan, the government is but a rumor. The only time we see it is when a police van comes to our village," said Abdul-aziz Elimov from Saranan. As a result, refugees are merely an economically self-sufficient replaceable agrarian labour force, working on informal sharecropping systems that provide no legal recourse for exploitation. The lack of formal institutions not only provides no safety nets for these individuals but also serves to enforce control over these groups through the means of survival, basically having to first secure water and food, treat medical emergencies and provide an education for their children. Thus, with all energy being consumed by material struggle, there is little or no room for individual and/or collective political power to emerge.

#### **5.3. Modes of Resistance: From Evasion to Collective Preservation**

The individuals identified as victims because they endure physical and psychological violence do not just accept their victimization. Rather, they actively resist. Over time, the refugee community has created unique survival strategies built on resiliency and the local context. In urban environments where individuals are faced with threats and violent acts from the authorities, their mode of resistance is characterized by being invisible but with the ability to be resourceful through creativity and innovation. Individuals develop alternative transportation systems that operate in the "shadows," create informal businesses that exist outside of the formal economic sphere, and use digital communication through encryption technology to communicate with others when they are threatened.

Many participants of the study used WhatsApp as a vehicle for issuing community alerts when police raids were occurring ongoingly. In rural communities, resistance is done collectively and based on tradition; this is organized through kinship structures that pool resources together to collectively lease farmland, resolve disputes through traditional jirga processes rather than through government or state mechanisms, and continue to practice cultural forms of expression as acts of reaffirmation of individual identity in response to governmental policies and practices. One study participant, a Pashtun sharecropper from the Surkhaab area, said, "In the city, you hide to survive. In the village, we all survive together."

#### **5.4. The Generational Shift: From Memory-Based to Practice-Based Belonging**

A pivotal finding in this study is the generational divergence in refugee subjectivities. First-generation refugees, who experienced displacement has for a long time and till now maintained a "memory-based belonging" which is oriented towards cultural

preservation and a narrative of eventual return to Afghanistan, a hope of return. Their resistance lies in teaching native languages and history in hidden home schools and folklore stories shared with the young ones.

For second and third-generation refugees; many born and socialized entirely in Pakistan the case is different. For them belonging is practice-based, and it is rooted in the daily realities of their Pakistani neighborhoods and villages. Their resistance is digital and forward-looking like the modern channels used by the government. It is focused on claiming educational rights, documenting abuses on social media, and demanding recognition within the only state they have known all their lives. "My fight isn't to go back to a country I've never seen. My fight is to be here, where I live and have been living," a female Hazara student stated. This shift represents a basic and obvious change in protracted exile, i.e., from a temporary crisis to a permanent condition by demanding new forms of political claim-making.

## 6. Discussion

The findings of this research show how Pakistani state controls and exerts different levels and with different patterns their strategies to regularize and control Afghan refugees inside Balochistan. This discussion will interpret these findings through the theoretical framework, and examine their implications for policy, and also acknowledge the study's limitations.

### 6.1. Theorizing Spatially Variegated Biopolitics and Agency

The evidence for how biopolitical patterns used by government can be adjustable to different conditions and then used for a single basic purpose is given through the stark contrast between urban surveillance and rural neglect. This purpose is; maintaining a refugee population as politically marginal yet economically exploitable. This "bifurcated biopolitics" challenges the applications of Foucauldian theory that presume a homogenous state apparatus. In Balochistan's borderlands, however, sovereignty is fragmented, and power operates through a patchwork of formal bureaucracy (in cities) and informal abandonment (in villages). This supports critiques of Agamben's Eurocentric camp model, instead shows a more diffuse state of exception that can manifest as either intense scrutiny or total neglect, depending on the refugee's location.

Furthermore, the documented resistance to the strategies moves the discussions on refugee agency forward. The research goes beyond the binary opposition of victim vs resistance to show what has been labelled as tactical pragmatism. It is the cumulative and therefore often hidden labour that goes into creating a sustainable existence when faced with extreme limitations. Refugees in urban areas utilise the informal economy and digital technology to advance their resistance, whereas those in rural areas utilise traditional forms of collective action and mutual aid to resist. The movement/agency is seen as a parallel world-making process and not necessarily as a means to challenge state sovereignty. The developmental understanding of the generational resistance epistemology developed through this study, i.e. First-generation cultural preservation to later-generation claims of local rights, provides a model that advances a more temporal understanding of how agency develops over prolonged periods of displacement and are influenced by either memory or lived experience among those displaced.

### 6.2. Policy Implications: The Failure of "Temporary" Frameworks

Evidence gathered from multiple sources shows that all policies and regulations are rooted in the idea that programmes are short-term or temporary do not work. The PoR System and kiraya daari (rental agreements) created both solutions as well as mechanisms that continue to create insecure workers (i.e., precarity) and low-wage, docile, and compliant labor forces. This research argues that there needs to be a complete paradigm shift from giving assistance in a charitable manner, to providing assistance towards developmental solutions to poverty. In order to achieve this paradigm shift, three concrete changes must take place and they are:

1. Acknowledgment of An Long-Term Reality: The Development of a National Coherent Policy to Provide Regularized Status for Refugees Born in Pakistan is an Important Step Towards Moving from Temporary Conditional Documentation to Rights Based Residency Permits.
2. Context Specific Solution Implementation: In Urban Areas, Regularizing the Long-Standing Shadow Economy through the Availability of Work Permits and also through the Creation of Municipal ID's for Service Use. It is Important to Recognize That Additional Documentation would not Represent or Place Additional Burden through Another Biopolitical Framework; instead, it would Facilitate Financing of Refugee Life. In Rural Areas, The Top Priority Should be Ensuring a Bridging of the Service Gap, by means of Mobile Clinics and Schools, but above all Providing Legal Protections from Agrarian Abuse.
3. Engaging the Knowledge of the Refugee Population: The Policy Design Must Include Meaningful Participation from Refugee Communities, since they Have Participated in this Research. Their Survival Strategies and Methods of Coping, from Informal Credit Systems, Community Warning Networks, etc., Represent Un-Used Knowledge and Expertise That Can be Effectively Used to Develop products and Solutions That Are Specific to Communities.

### 6.3. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study has limitations that point to future scholarly arenas. While the qualitative depth of 26 interviews is a strength, it limits statistical generalizability. The security constraints in certain border districts may have excluded the experiences of the most isolated

or vulnerable refugees. Future research should pursue longitudinal studies to trace the generational trajectories identified here, and comparative borderland studies with other protracted situations (e.g., Rohingya in Bangladesh) to identify common logics of governance and resistance. Additionally, the emergent theme of digital resistance warrants dedicated investigation into how technology is reshaping refugee political subjectivity and transnational networks in South Asia.

In conclusion, this study reveals that after forty years, Afghan refugees in Balochistan are not a temporary anomaly but a permanent social fact. The state's biopolitical strategies, whether of surveillance or neglect, have sustained control but failed to resolve displacement. Conversely, refugee resistance, through daily acts of preservation and adaptation, has sustained life and community. The path forward lies in recognising this agency, regularising this presence, and building policies on the reality of shared futures rather than the myth of imminent return.

## 7. Data Availability Statement

The qualitative datasets generated and analysed during the current study are not publicly available. The primary data consist of audio recordings and verbatim transcripts of 26 in-depth interviews. Moreover, detailed ethnographic field notes, and research memos containing sensitive personal narratives, biographical details, and accounts of politically sensitive activities related to Afghan refugees in Balochistan are also part of this research. Public archiving of this data is not possible because of the ethical and security concerns. Participants have shared their experiences under strict guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity. Much heed has been paid for their vulnerable legal status and the real risks of surveillance, harassment, or deportation. By making the raw data publicly available would overcome this confidentiality and could put in danger the identity of participants by exposing them and their communities to significant harm.

Also, derived data which support the findings of this study, including anonymized and aggregated thematic analyses, are presented within this article. Moreover, specific, contextualized anonymized excerpts from the transcripts are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request for purposes of verification and academic scrutiny and can be obtained from the ICRMS department upon request. And, any such request will be subject to a formal data access agreement that ensures compliance with the original ethical protocols of ICRMS, particularly regarding the protection of participant identity and the non-identification of specific locations. Researchers and scholars must agree to use the data solely for the agreed verification purposes and not to attempt to re-identify individuals. However, the policy documents and UNHCR reports cited multiple times and on different parts are publicly available from the respective government and organizational websites.

## 8. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the protracted displacement of Afghan refugees in Balochistan is governed through spatially differentiated/variegated biopolitical regime. In the case of urban Quetta, the state exerts control through a panoptic regime of hyper-surveillance. In this, leveraging documentation systems, police checkpoints, and the kiraya daari apparatus to enforce a condition of perpetual deportability. In contradiction, in the case of rural Pishin, power operates through a strategy of a strategic neglect, where the deliberate absence of healthcare, education, and legal protection which renders refugees institutionally invisible, yet economically exploitable. These are not policy failures as has been stated in other scholarly studies, but they are complementary techniques for managing a population deemed as simultaneously useful and undesirable. Furthermore, refugees have exhibited remarkable agency through context-specific repertoires of everyday resistance confronting this architecture of control. Urban refugees have been developing a different kind of tactical culture and thus are creating parallel economies and warning systems to avoid detection by the state using digital coordination. By contrast, rural refugees maintain their collective resilience through kinship-based solidarity as well as continued preservation of their cultural identity. In other words, the findings of the research were divided into different generations, whereby first-generation refugees resist by utilising memory and preserving culture that relates to their homeland, whereas their second-generation children do not follow that path and their third-generation grandchildren are now increasingly asserting the same rights and sense of belonging to Pakistan, which is the only society they have ever known. The shift from a memory-based relationship to a practice-based identity signifies that the protracted period of exile has created a new class of political actors who will demand recognition on new terms.

The findings of the study challenge both the current academic interpretation and the current government policy approach to this long-standing, ongoing crisis. The study has implications for both how we think about the application of biopolitical theory and how we apply that theory to the current refugee crisis. More specifically, the findings support more sophisticated applications of biopolitical theory that consider the way in which space is configured across the world, the fragmentation of power across borders and that power changes over time. The study's findings also reject the belief that the current refugee crisis is simply a temporary problem that will merely "go away"; instead, it argues that all governments must start to recognize that the current refugee situation has reached a level of permanence. This means that governments need to go beyond merely providing an inadequate humanitarian response and instead begin to provide a policy response based on the recognition of a permanent refugee status for all refugees who are currently in the refugee situation and those who will be in this situation in the future. Practical steps to implement these changes include creating pathways to the establishment of legal status in countries of refuge (with a focus on the permanent legal status of Pakistan-born refugees); designing policies and programs that will create sustained access to urban informal economies and provide

basic urban services (and rural services) to those refugees living in rural areas; and, most importantly, allowing refugees to participate in the development of policies governing their future.

Ultimately, this research brings forth the debate that the Afghan refugee situation in Pakistan is no longer a transient crisis but an enduring social reality. The refugees of Balochistan are not waiting subjects in a historical pause; they are active agents constructing viable lives and have their futures within constraints of these biopolitical patterns. The central challenge, and also an opportunity for scholarship and policy, is to cease seeing them through the lens of temporariness and to begin engaging with the complex, resilient societies they have built. Justice, stability, and human dignity depend on this recognition.

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