

Securitising the Pakistan-Afghanistan borderland: impacts on the Ahmadzai Wazirs

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Abstract

Taking ‘Ahmadzai Wazirs’ of erstwhile FATA, Pakistan as a case study, this research attempts to explore the impacts of the securitization discourse and border fencing on the socio-cultural lives of the tribesmen who have lived for centuries in the Pakistan and Afghanistan borderland area. This is done by focusing on the perceptions which Ahmadzai Wazir tribes have on the state’s securitization and border fencing narrative, and the resultant impacts on them. In the wake of the policy maker’s decision to fence the border, this paper investigates the perception of the border community about the ongoing border fencing project and the ways in which the borderlanders defy the territorial notion of state sovereignty. We thus try to engage this comparatively newer theoretical framework, the borderland theory to investigate perceptions of the local people as a distinct cross-border community in order to investigate the notion of security from the perspective of the people on the borderland. The theory allows us to see borderland as a distinct entity as opposed to the hitherto dominant state-centred approach of looking at the border region as state peripheries. A mixed research method was employed to get primary and secondary data and draw analysis.

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1. Introduction

Every state border, every border region, is unique. Their meanings and significance can vary dramatically over space and time, as regimes change in one or more of the adjoining states, and as borders are ‘closed’ or ‘opened’, or as price advantages lurch from one side of the border to the other (Anderson & O’Dowd, 2010). The Pakistan-Afghanistan border called the ‘Durand Line’¹ is unique in its nature, location, and historical and geo-political significance, and therefore requires a localized study. The ‘Line’ divides tribal communities by making them the citizens of two different independent countries (Dupree, 1973). For this reason, the British during their rule and later the Pakistani government after independence in 1947 have deliberately kept the borders porous, allowing tribesmen to cross without any formality and leaving it mostly unattended and without effective control, for more than a century (Rais, 2017). The border, however, has undergone a significant change in the post-9/11 era, from being a long porous stretch of land to one that is today closed with “three rolls of barbed wire sandwiched in the six-foot gap between the chicken wire fences” (Reuters, 2017).

The Ahmadzai Wazirs (hereafter Wazir),² who straddle on the Pakistan-Afghanistan borderland on both sides of the Durand Line are affectees of the state-sponsored attempts at fortifying the border. Like other tribes living on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, the Wazirs on both sides share a commonality in their culture and way of living. A strong economic integration also marks their identity. Many of the Wazir families own landed property on both sides of the border. There is even an adage that one who doesn’t own a property in Birmal (also locally called Barmal)³, is not a Wazir. Birmal is on the border and split between Waziristan region in Pakistan and the Paktika province of Afghanistan. Inside Pakistan, it is designated as a tehsil (administrative subdivision) in South Waziristan Tribal district. On the Afghanistan side, it is designated as a district of the Paktika *Woluswalay* (province). The local tribesmen have been used to free movement across the border without any difficulty. Up until recently i.e., the beginning of the War on Terror, the Wazir tribesmen did not consider the Durand Line as an international border to stop them from travelling to Wana (headquarter of South Waziristan) on daily basis. Now that the border has been fenced making it equally difficult for families, labourers, and businessmen, who straddle this border on daily basis, it is pertinent to know the perceptions of the local Wazir tribesmen who are directly or indirectly affected by the border closure.

This research aims to investigate the perception of the local Wazirs about fencing’s implication for their socio-cultural and economic lives, and to further explore ways in which the border community defies state’s territorial notion of sovereignty. This is done through a perception-based study. The fencing of the border may have made it difficult for the border communities to maintain cross-border socio-cultural ties, thus putting at risk what is now commonly understood as ‘community security.’ This term carries a mention in the *Human Development Report of 1994* published by the United Nation Development Program; “Community Security—protecting people from the loss of traditional relationships and values” (UNDP,

1994). According to the report, community security is one of the seven components of human security. It is important because ‘most people draw their security from membership in a group – a family, a community, an organization, a racial or ethnic group that can provide a cultural identity and a reassuring set of values (UNDP, 1994). We argue in this paper that fencing the border in the name of hard security is endangering the notion of ‘community security’ for the very people who are border dwellers and as such have maintained very strong identification and communal interests with fellow tribesmen across the border in Afghanistan.

Based on our research question, empirical case study approach was adopted. Data was collected by employing mixed method. A self-administered questionnaire was filled from among 300 respondents of the Wazir tribe in order to ascertain their perception about border fencing and its impacts on the stability of Waziristan. The respondents were selected from among the four major sub-tribes of the Wazir tribe; Zali Khel, Toji Khel, Gangi Khel, and Khojal Khel, who are known to have greater dependence on the border due to having land property and relatives across the border. Since, in the tribal society, people live in villages which are usually homogeneous clusters of same tribes, therefore Proportionate Simple Random Sampling method was employed for selecting villages. Once the villages were identified, the respondents were selected again by using Random Sampling Method while sitting in a commercial area where people of the same village came from all walks of life. Due to a peculiar nature of the tribal society, where movement of someone from outside the village is usually seen with suspicion, our sample included only male members of the village excluding women, disabled and elderly persons. To provide an explanation to the findings based on quantitative survey, interviews of prominent tribal elders, local political leaders, business community, and government official were conducted. All the names of the interviewees except the government officials for the purpose of this paper are pseudo-names. Moreover, I have also drawn on individual stories to make my argument of the defiance stronger.

This paper also suggests future theoretical research on the questions of insecurity, imposed through securitization policies of by the state, which is putting human security at risk in tribal spaces of the borderland. The paper contains four parts. The first section deals with the theoretical framework, the second covers the historical context of the Pakistan-Afghanistan borderland and purpose behind the fencing project, the third provides analysis and discussion from primary data, and the final part consists of the conclusion.

2. Literature review

Fences and walls are centuries old and most familiar tools which states have used to check undesired flow of people across their state boundaries, for example, the Great Wall of China, Hadrian’s Wall, and walls around medieval cities in Europe (Jones, 2016). Nonetheless, except for a few, there was little inclination at large towards close borders among states of the world up until recently. Data shows that before 1990, only fifteen countries had developed walls and fences on their borders (Jones, 2016). The fall of the iron curtain in 1989 rather created the

hope of a sans-border world in making. The idea of a 'borderless world' with the uncontrolled phenomenon of globalization was achieving a paradigmatic status, as critical scholars and academics strongly advocated it. Many border scholars saw the opening of borders as unrealistic, however still a majority among them viewed border opening as 'good' and 'desirable' (Newman, 2015). The European Union led the process of opening their internal borders and transforming them into cross-border regions in order to develop them culturally and economically, so that free movement across the border could be made possible without any hindrance (Newman, 2015). However, these prognoses appeared to have been too early. Instead of creating a borderless world, 'the affective fear of a global and interconnected terrorist threat allowed the state to return with a vengeance' (Jones, 2009).

The globalization discourse of a 'borderless world' is greatly challenged by 'the post 9/11 securitization discourse,' which promotes the idea of fencing and erecting wall on the external borders (Newman, 2015). A study by Reece Jones on 'Geopolitical boundary narratives, the global war on terror and border fencing in India' concludes with very similar findings. He is of the opinion that the global 'War on Terror' is greatly contributing to the territorial model of a bounded territory containing an organized population and having unchecked control on movement across the border (Jones, 2009). The result is that in the year 2015 only, countries as varied as, Kenya, Bulgaria, Saudi Arabia, Austria, Slovenia, Estonia, Hungary, and Tunisia projected or started building of border walls (Jones, 2016). Moreover, India, Israel and the US have also been working with great pace on closing their borders with Bangladesh, Palestine, and Mexico respectively. Not all the border closing projects are progressing peacefully; some have precipitated stronger criticism both inside and outside their countries. For example, the US-Mexico border wall has become a routine heading of leading newspapers in the states and not unknowingly the bone of contention between the two major political parties, the Republicans, and the Democrats. The response to such hard cores fencing of the border and border walls is as diverse as the states themselves which, I assume, results from who are being impacted by such border changes and in what manner.

There is much literature available on the relationship between border fencing and national security. States which face cross-border intrusion of terrorists, immigrants, and/or drugs calculate the cost of intrusion against the costs of erecting barriers. Depending upon the intensity and frequency of the intrusions – expressed in terms of opportunity-cost functions, a state might be left with little choice but to pursue a border policy of zero openness (Jellissen & Gottheil, 2013). Here, though Rosière and Jones (2012) have contested the defensive purpose of border fencing, except in a few case examples, including that of the Line of Control between Pakistan and India. They argue that due to advancements in technology and communication, the purpose of fencing has shifted from defensive to becoming a marker of sovereignty for restricting the movement of 'undesired people.' "To argue further under the theoretical assumptions first developed by Buzan, Waeber, and De Wilde (1998), "no issue is per se a security issue." This so-called Copenhagen School asserts that issues are constructed as security ones through "a specific speech act... some issues are selectively depicted as posing

an existential threat to a given community. Once construed as such, security experts and professional politicians are responsible for taking the threatening matters into their own skilled hands (Deleixhe *et al.*, 2019).” This aspect of border fencing seems quite relevant particularly in the case of fencing the Pak-Afghan border keeping in view its history and the irredentist claim by successive Afghan governments over parts of Pakistan’s territory. However, this debate should not derail us from the main theme, i.e., the socio-cultural insecurity of the borderlanders under the securitization agenda and fencing of border by the Pakistan government.

As far as national security is concerned, we are sensitive of the fact that people living in other parts of the country and particularly policy makers in the centre, may rightly be worried about the danger of intrusion and feel it necessary to protect the border, but at the same time it is imperative to investigate the response of the local people who are directly affected by the such hard closure of a border which has always remained in the past fluid enough for them to navigate for economic and socio-cultural reasons. Though unfortunate, the fact remains that as the case of Pakistan suggests, states have always made recourse to national security agendas while dealing with challenges on border regions. However, to quote Alvarez, ‘as long as they see cross-border links as a violation of the natural order, as forms of trespassing or treason, it will not be able to grasp the realities of borderland society’ (Alvarez Jr, 1999).

3. Theoretical framework

Borders had long been treated in academics as no-man-land up until very recently. Even in the aftermath of World War II (WWII) when many new states emerged on the world map thus delineating many more international borders, there was no major research carried out (Newman, 2002). Anderson *et al.* (2002) have attributed this paradoxical ignorance of borders to the academic disciplines, such as the social sciences affected by the dominant narrative of seeing the world as being divided into units or compartments called ‘nations.’ While the borders were ‘perceived as being physical and static outcomes of the political decision-making process, to be described rather than analysed’ (Newman, 2002). The state-centric approach had reached its dominance in the mid of twentieth century and started to decline after the WWII, but the intervention of the state in society was so profound that it was impossible to separate the two. The state had become an everyday reality. In such a state-centric world view, borders were considered as peripheral, and unworthy of any academic inquiry.

Political geography was most probably the first discipline to deal with the study of borders/boundaries, but here too mainly concentrated on the description, location, and political and historical processes which led to the demarcation of borders (Donnan & Wilson, 1999). Based on the processes leading up to the demarcation and delimitation of boundaries, and their positions in the geographic environment, the major theme in this genre of studies remained the formulation of boundary typologies (Donnan & Wilson, 1999). However, in the aftermath of WWII, scholars started looking toward the functionality of borders in contrast to the previous approach of studying borders as objects resulting from historical and political decisions made

in centres (Kolossoff, 2005). Recognizing border as a given reality, cross-border cooperation/non-cooperation and its socio-economic impacts were problematized (Kolossoff, 2005). Besides political geographer, historians, sociologists, political scientists, and anthropologists also began to study state borders as a way to investigate ‘the changing national and international dynamics of territory, sovereignty and identity’ (Donnan & Wilson, 1999). Donnan and Wilson (1999) attributes this shift in ‘the methodological inquiry of state borders to the regional integration of Europe, the changing role of the US in the world economy and its relations with Mexico, and the effects of the post-imperialism and post-colonialism becoming evident to new generations in Africa and Asia’.

In order to recognize and understand the dialectical relationship between boundaries and the physical and human environment which shape them and are in return shaped by them, geographers introduced the concept of border landscape (Donnan & Wilson, 1999). Prescott has identified four main research themes in literature related to the border landscape; first, boundary as an element of a cultural landscape which includes the form and function of state and its institutions along the boundary, second, the way in which boundary influences the economic and demographic landscapes which stretch away from the boundary line on either side, third, impacts of the boundary on the border inhabitants, and effects of the boundary on national policies. This new scale of inquiry opposed to the state-centred scale drew the attention of almost all other disciplines.

We thus try to engage this comparatively newer theoretical framework, the borderland (border region, or border landscape) theory to investigate perceptions of the local people as a distinct cross-border community about the ongoing fencing project on the Pak-Afghan border. Borderland is described as ‘a zone (region and landscape) within which lies an international border, and a borderland society as a social and cultural system straddling that border’ (Van Schendel, 2005a). The borderland theory sees borderlands as units different from rest of the country where the border landers are socially and culturally connected across the border. Instead of looking at the border regions as peripheries to two adjoining states where the states’ sovereignty ends, borderland is considered as a spatial zone in its own right (Van Schendel, 2005b). This helps to move beyond the dominant state-centred geographical approach and focus more on the ‘geographical imagination of the border-landers.’ The borderland study is important because the so-called peripheral regions identify themselves apart from their surroundings and thus their relationship with their states and national centres does not remain smooth (Tagil, 1982).

4. National security discourse and fencing the frontiers of Waziristan

The border between Afghanistan and Pakistan as outlined earlier called as the Durand Line is around approximately 2,430 kilometres long. This border was a compromise between British Indian empire and the Afghanistan state, redrawn under the British pressure through its officer Sir Mortimer Durand, who was the foreign secretary of the British India, who had been

appointed in Afghanistan by the government of British India in Afghanistan to resolve multiple issues and settling the border was one of them (Dawn News, 2009). The absence of hard border fencing on this border meant that in real practice, the tribesmen on the border freely moved across these for social as well as economic purposes. The proposal to fence the Pakistan–Afghanistan border was first made by President General Pervez Musharraf during his meeting with the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, in September 2005 (Ramesh, 2005). The president reiterated the idea again in February 2006, this time with great emphasis and sought the backing of the US and Afghanistan governments. While talking to ABC News, he said, “I’ve been saying let us fence the border and let us also mine the border. We are experts at mining, they should mine the border on their side. We will fence it on our side” (Plett, 2006). However, work did not start on the project immediately. It was in February 2007, that Musharraf in response to US and NATO pressure finally decided to start working on fencing (BBC News, 2007). By May 2007, Pakistani troops had “completed 20 kilometres (12 miles) of fencing in North Waziristan’s Lwara Mandi area” describing the area as “the difficult part where most militants reportedly were crossing over” (BBC News, 2007). The work on fencing, however, did not go smoothly, rather caused much tension between the two neighbouring countries. This also led to an open fighting between armies of the two countries at Angor Adda, when the Afghan troops came and removed the fence (Dawn News, 2007).

The issue of securing funding was the main predicament in fencing the entire 2500 km long border. This was repeatedly made clear by authorities in Pakistan that since fencing is in the interest of both the countries, therefore, it should be jointly carried out. In the meeting with Condoleezza Rice, Musharraf had categorically said that due to rough terrain, it was impossible for his country to erect the fence by itself and therefore, he said, “we could do selective fencing” (Ramesh, 2005). Later, when the work on fencing the border was in progress, the then Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Khawaja Asif would ask the US to pay for the fencing (Dawn News, 2018, February 9). Afghanistan’s opposition to fencing also resulted in a cautious approach from Pakistan. Afghanistan has never officially recognized its border with Afghanistan. Instead, it has irredentist claims over certain territory of Pakistan inhabited by the Pashtun ethnic group. In response to a press conference by the Foreign Secretary of Pakistan, Riaz Muhammad Khan, wherein he revealed his country’s plan to erect fence on the border in order to stop “militant activity from Pakistan inside Afghanistan,” the spokesman to Afghan President Hamid Karzai, Khaleeq Ahmad said, that “Fencing or mining the border is neither helpful nor practical. That’s why we are against it. The border is not where the problem lies” (BBC News, 2006). The same position was taken by Omer Zakhilwal, Kabul’s ambassador to Islamabad later in October 2018. While talking to Pakistani media, he said that “We do oppose the barbed wire. That is against the closeness of the population on both sides and the interdependency that exists [between them]” (Gul, 2018).

The United States’ position is far from being vague on the Pak-Afghan border fencing (Shaffan et al, 2020). In response to Musharraf’s proposal of fencing during his meeting with Rice, a spokesman for the state department of the US, Sean McCormack issued a statement saying that

“Washington thought it was important that Pakistan and Afghanistan take up this idea” (Ramesh, 2005). During a congressional debate, Alice Wells, State Department diplomat for the region categorically explained that “the Durand Line serves as an international boundary ...that is how we approach the Durand Line” (Gul, 2018). The ongoing project of fencing the entire Pakistan border along Afghanistan was commenced in the aftermath of a series of terror attacks on both sides of the border and the ensuing blame game of providing safe havens to militant networks on the ‘other’ side of the border. For example, in a public address following a massive bomb blast in Kabul on August 10, 2015, Ashraf Ghani, the president of Afghanistan, was quite vocal in blaming Pakistan for all evils. He said,

“In the middle of night, at 1:30 am, dooms day descended upon our people. It was not an earthquake, it was not a storm, it was human hand.... I ask the people and government of Pakistan: if a massacre such as the one that occurred in shah shaheed had happened in Islamabad and the perpetrators had sanctuaries in Afghanistan, had offices and training centres in our major cities, how would you react?” (Jafferlot, 2016).

Similarly, only a week after a massive truck bomb attacked diplomatic enclave in Kabul on May 31, 2017, which left 95 people dead and hundreds injured, the President once again directed his accusations towards Pakistan for imposing an “undeclared war of aggression” against Afghanistan (Ashrafghani, 2017). However, Pakistan has always refuted such allegations as “baseless and unfounded” (Sadiqi, 2017, June 5). Responding to Ghani’s accusation, permanent representative of Pakistan to the UN, Maleeha Lodhi, told the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) that “Terrorist safe havens are inside, not outside, Afghanistan” (Dawn News, 2017). Pakistan has equally accused Afghanistan of providing safe havens to terrorist networks. In the backdrop of the blame game ensued from the May 31, 2017 terrorist attack in Kabul, DGISPR, Major General Asif Ghafoor posted on twitter that “security of Pakistan-Afghanistan border enhanced. Stringent actions against illegal border crossers. Recent terrorist incidents linked to sanctuaries across.” The sole purpose of the fencing is said to check the infiltration of militant across the border. Announcing the commencement of fencing the border, the Chief of Army Staff, General Qamar Javid Bajwa said that a secure Pakistan-Afghanistan border was in the interest of both the neighbouring countries (Sadiqi, 2017, June 22). In a separate statement issued a year later, Bajwa asserted that the “fencing is an obstacle for checking terrorism and not between people of both sides” (ISPR, 2018).

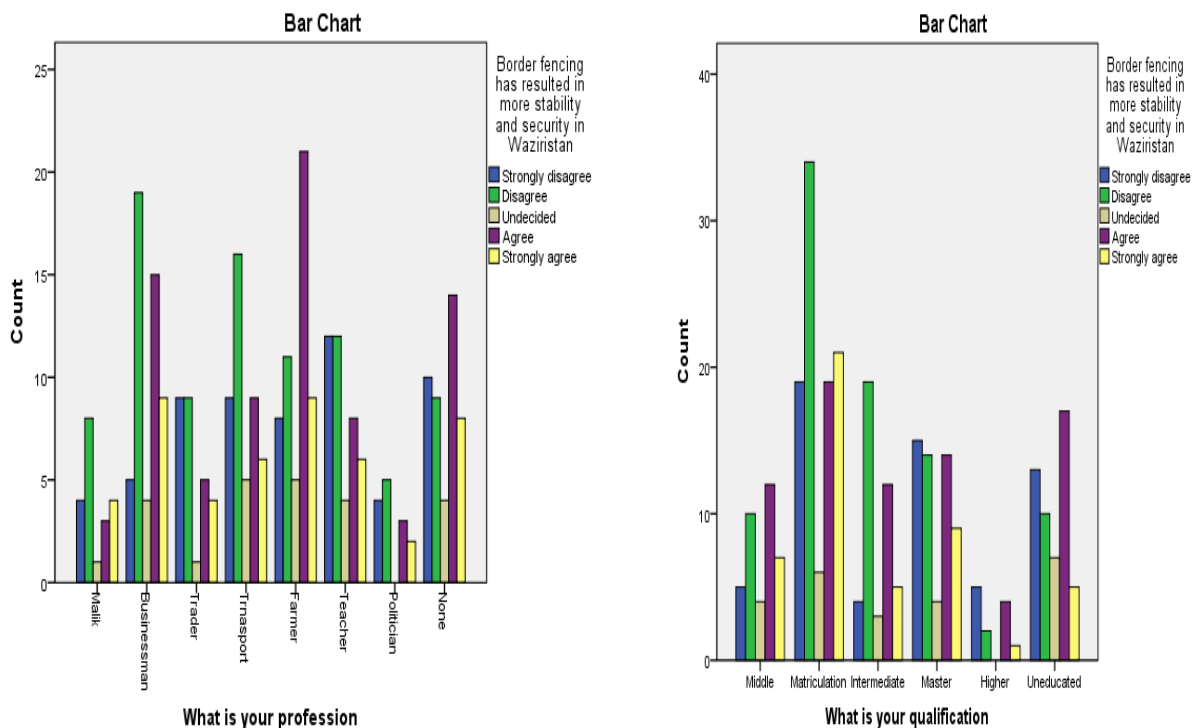
The Physical makeup of the fence is such that it is made up of a pair of 10-foot-tall trellis topped with razor blades and separated at a distance of six feet which is again covered by three circles of the blades. Talking to media personnel, DG ISPR argued about the project’s total cost including fencing, gadgets and surveillance equipment to be worth around Rs. 70 billion (Dawn News, 2018, January 28). Work on fencing is yet to be completed. Talking to media, DG ISPR Major Gen Baber Iftikhar, revealed that by 2021, 90% of fencing had been completed. To quote him, “Fencing the Pakistan-Afghan border was a major responsibility due

to the region’s terrain and other difficulties. Despite all the difficulties, Pakistan has completed the fencing work on 90 per cent of the border. Border management is constantly improving, and we are hopeful that it will be fully secured in the near future (Dawn News, 2021).

5. Security or insecurity: perceptions of the Wazir Tribe

The local people responded quite differently to the dominant national security narrative afforded to border closure. Based on the quantitative survey, less than half of the respondents were of the view that fencing has resulted in more stability and security in Waziristan. A detailed analysis revealed that respondents with little or no education background maintained an optimistic view about the protective function of the barrier, while those with college and university degrees mostly negated the notion that fencing has improved the security situation in Waziristan. Similarly, when the same question was assessed on the basis of the respondents’ profession level, except for farmers and the unemployed, majority of those who belonged to other professions including, Maliks (tribal elders), politicians, teachers, businessmen, and transporters were of the view that border fencing has not resulted in greater security in Waziristan (see Figure 2). The borderland theory helps us investigate other factors beyond the dominant state-centred defensive narrative of the border fencing. This reinforces what Van Schendel confirms about security discourse in these words, “The security discourse – which sees border regions as landscapes of defence, security scrapes, or zones of subversion, interdiction and exclusion – seriously hampers an understanding of their human dynamics” (Van Schendel, 2005b).

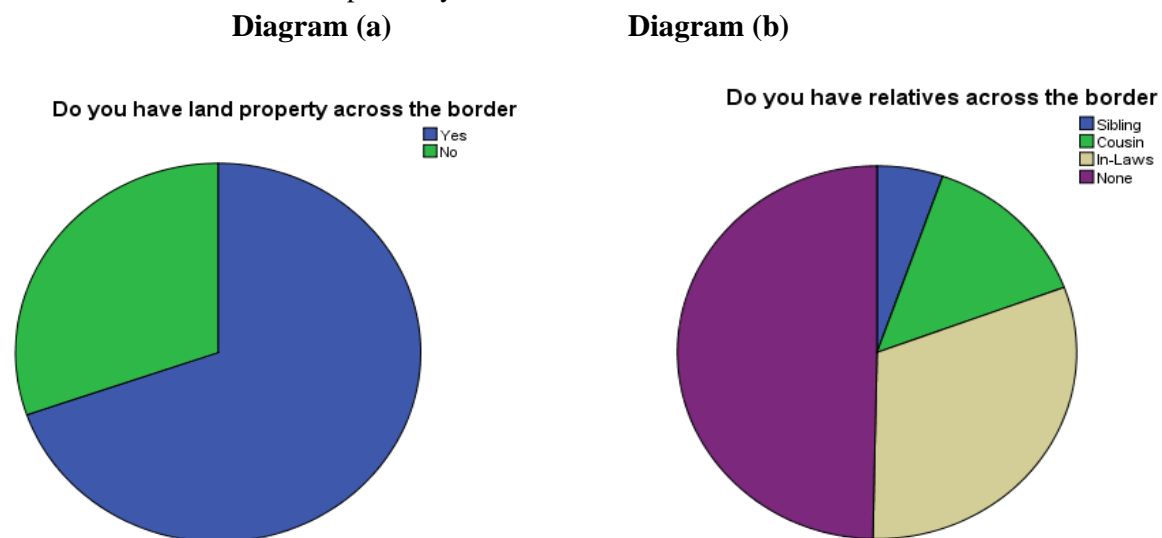
Figure 2: Bar Chart (a) and Bar Chart (b) show the frequency of respondents against their professions and education level respectively



6. The line that cuts the community into two halves

One of the main reasons behind the sense of insecurity among the Wazir tribe is that they are now divided into two parts making it difficult for families to visit each other on occasions of sorrow and joy (*gham khadi*). Data revealed that more than half of the respondents have landed properties, and relatives on both sides of the border (See Figure 3). As revealed in an interview with a tribal elder, he argued about the adage that “anyone who does not own land property in Birmal is not a Wazir” (Saud, personal communication, September 15, 2021). Another elder, Samandar Khan clarified by divulging that the four major sub-tribes of Wazirs, Zali Khel, Toji Khel, Gangi Khel, and Khojal Khel have got a greater share while a Pinzageena (fifth part) is given to Sarki Khel. However, Sarki Khel have sold most of its land property in Upper Birmal. While the rest have made an agreement not to sell or purchase land property in the mentioned locality (personal communication, September 13, 2021). Land property inherited from forefathers (*Neekat*) carries cultural meanings in tribal society, the retaining and safeguarding of which from forceful encroachment is considered as an obligation (participant observation).

Figure 3: Diagram (a) and Diagram (b) show the level of respondents who have got land property and relative across the border respectively



Similarly, tribesmen are apprehensive of the closure of border and perceive of fencing on the border as dividing them permanently. Nonetheless, it was also revealed that members of the Wazir tribe were allowed to cross the border provided they have Pakistan national identity card. On a question from a tribal elder, Ikram Wazir, about why fencing would divide families when there was a formal route and the people belonging to Wazir tribe could easily move through it without any visa requirement, he expressed the fear that despite the Durand line being an international border between two independent sovereign states, they were afraid that since the relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan were not very friendly from the very beginning due to Afghanistan’s irredentist claim, any dispute between the two may directly lead to border

closure. He further argued that the example of the 38th parallel between North and South Korea was before us. As it was an ordinary border and the clash between the two countries had led to its closure for decades thus dividing families and close relatives forever (personal communication, September 18, 2021). A query to Amir Nawaz, former Assistant Commissioner Wana sub-division, about any policy for rehabilitation of the people who suffered due to fencing of the border, it was revealed that the government had no policy formulated yet, and none was under any consideration. Telling the story of his cook, he said, that his cook who belonged to Upper Birmal was as yet a servant of the Pakistan government. He also confirmed that fencing was certainly dividing families and there was a possibility that relatives on the two sides of the border might not visit each other as frequently as they did before. He also confirmed psychological pressure, which the tribesmen went through when they crossed the check points to participate in ceremonies related to sorrow and joy- *gham khadi* (Personal communication, September 5, 2021).

It was not unsurprising that a significant portion of the respondents (tribesmen) carried dual nationality; the Pakistan national identity card and Afghani *Tazkira*, even though, there is no dual national agreement between the two countries. However, these figures may be subsequently higher if data is collected on the Afghan side of the border, since they frequently need to cross border and are dependent for services and businesses on Wana city (participant observation). In order to have a first-hand experience of major changes occurring due to fencing on the border, I visited Upper Birmal which is located in Afghanistan. After lunch at a hotel owned by a fellow wazir man, the owner asked me to keep his Pakistani identity card with him in case I were to go to New Adda sharing border with North Waziristan of Pakistan. I was told that having no Afghani identification, mattered less, but having a Pakistani identity card could subject me to worst consequences. To quote him, “while on the Pakistan side of the border, you are equally supposed to own Pakistani identity card, otherwise you can never move through any check post, let alone enter through Angoor Adda Gate.” Understandably, this scenario has put the tribesmen in great trouble as to which identity should they permanently adopt. Opting one while leaving the other, is not without its share of losses. Statistics confirms the people concern in this regard. Majority of the people fear that border regularization will certainly make it difficult for the people to choose between the two nationalities. On the Afghan side, they own land property and have relatives, while on the Pakistan side, they too have land property and greater prospects of prosperity and development.

In an interview with a seasoned politician and a local leader of Awami National Party (Pashtoon nationalist party), Ghani Khan quoted Dr. Najeeb (Former President of Afghanistan) saying that Wazirs were the only people who protested marks of border as way back as 1893. The reason was that they felt that they were being divided. But since the border was left open till 9/11, nobody ever felt that there did really exist an international border (personal communication, September 25, 2021). On a question from Salim Wazir, whether wazir on the other side of the border are in any way different from them, he replied in negative. This reflects that the genealogical and social connectivity knows no border, no matter how strongly it may

be fenced. He reiterated that Wazirs on both sides of the border are the same people, wearing the same clothes, eating the same food, and speaking the same language. “There is not a single social or cultural difference between them” (personal communication, September 18, 2021).

This may be unsurprising that Wazirs on the Pakistani side of the border have always responded to events on the Afghanistan side of the border. This happened, for example when on March 13, 2019, eight Wazir in Upper Birmal were killed by the Afghan forces, fellow tribesmen in Waziristan strongly condemned it through media talks. A caravan of Wazirs led by Ali Wazir (Member of National Assembly and leader of the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement-PTM) recorded protest in Lower Birmal too. Another example was when the tribesmen from Waziristan celebrated the selection of Sofia Wazir to US legislature. Sofia Wazir though belonged to Afghanistan but since she hailed from the Wazir tribe, she was highly celebrated on social media platforms by the people of Waziristan. These two examples indicate that social bonds between the people of the same tribe residing across the border are much stronger than the fence which divides them.

From the discussion above, it may be concluded that local people on the borderland see fencing as dividing them into two halves, thereby creating a greater sense of insecurity among them. It is also feared that division may cause identity crisis, and thus may pave a way for local nationalist uprisings. This issue came to surface when a debate arose as a result of the brutal killing of young Pashtun girl Farishta in May 2019. The Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) staged protest in Islamabad to demand justice for Farishta’s family was mocked and ridiculed by the media channel, ARY News. The channel aired that Farishta was an Afghan girl and demanding justice for her showed that PTM was an Afghanistan sponsored movement. This news further infuriated the protesters who took to the Twitter to start a strong campaign with a hashtag *#Main bhi Afghan hun* (I am an Afghan too). Prominent PTM leader and member of the National Assembly of Pakistan, Mohsin Dawar twitted, *Joghrafye badlegi kho qamona na badlegi, za Afgan wom, Afghan yam, ao Afghan ba wom* (Geography can be modified but nationality never changes, I was an Afghan, I am an Afghan, and I will remain an Afghan). Another leader of the movement and Member of the National Assembly of Pakistan Ali Wazir took to the twitter in a rather harsh mood twitting, *O bhai! Jb mujhe tumharay Gujjar, Aarayan, Butt ovr Ranay nasal per koi takleef nhi tou tumhay meray Afghan nasal honay pay kia takleef hai?* (O dear! when I do not care what origin do you have whether it is Gujjar, Aarayan, Butt or Rana, then why are you being disturbed by my Afghan nationality). Another Facebook user, Jabal Noor Wazir posted a Pashto poetry verse with a hashtag *lar ao bar yo Afghan*,

*Rooh main Kabul zrha Pekhawar day
Toorkhama wran shay da janan deedan la zama*

(Kabul is my soul, Peshawar my heart
Torkham {border crossing between Pakistan and Afghanistan} shall
cease that stops me to see my beloved)

It is generally observed that the rise of PTM has given rise to ultra nationalist feelings among the Pashtun youth. They feel that they have been suppressed and are deprived of the fundamental rights enumerated in the constitution of Pakistan. Moreover, they are highly concerned about the ongoing conflict in their territory and across the border in Afghanistan. What is more significant is the feeling which the Pashtuns on both sides of the border carry for each other. Nonetheless, the hitherto open border policy of Pakistan was very much successful in diluting such feelings. The people never felt that they were really divided, rather they consider themselves the citizens of both the neighbouring countries. Now that the border is being fenced and regularized, it gives rise to questions: whether the Wazirs can still have dual nationalities when there is no such understanding between the two neighbouring countries? What will be the effect of the closed border policy on their socio-economic and cultural lives? Will fencing divide the Wazir tribes into two distinct groupings, and what impact this shall have on their identities? Will Pakistani and Afghan identity supersede the tribal bondage after the border becomes a hard one and divide in the process communities that have hitherto remained oblivious to the border reality only a few years back? Only time will tell.

7. Conclusion

This paper problematized the project of unilateral fencing of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border by the government of Pakistan. It attempted to understand the perception of local communities, especially the Wazir tribes who have their tribal kin and kith living across the border on both sides and traversing the border regularly before fencing was undertaken. From the state's perspective, securitizing the narrative of the state from external threats primarily terrorism is contested by local communities, who see this fencing as an attempt to divide the Wazir in this case study, socially and culturally into two halves. The researchers mainly focused on understanding the perceptions of the Wazir tribesmen about the fencing of the border and resultant impacts on them. Keeping in view the meaning tribal communities attach to familial ties and land property (*khowra or land*), it concludes that the socio-cultural division may create additional security problems, by deepening a sense of alienation and division among them.

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List of interview respondents

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Notes:

¹ The border which divides Pakistan and Afghanistan is called the Durand Line after the name of the officer in charge of boundary demarcation-Sir Henry Mortimer Durand. This border was drawn by the British colonial rulers through an agreement with the then ruler of Afghanistan, Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, in the year 1893.

² Ahmadzai Wazir is a tribe living across the Pakistan-Afghanistan border inhabiting part of the South Waziristan district of the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan and Paktika province of Afghanistan. A portion of this tribe is also scattered in other districts of Pakistan i-e Bannu and Kurram. The erstwhile FATA is located along Pakistan's North- western Hamalaya zone and South-western Sulaiman Mountains and runs as a narrow tract along the Indus River with the parallel lines almost North to South. This region was in 1947 constitutionally designated a tribal region in Northwest Pakistan and comprised of seven semi-autonomous tribal agencies and six frontier regions. The seven semi- autonomous agencies or administrative units included - Khyber, Mohmand, Bajaur, Kurram, Orakzai, North Waziristan and South Waziristan agencies. Additionally, the FATA included Frontier Regions' that adjoin the districts of Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu, Lakki Marwat, Tank and Dera Ismail Khan. This tangled mass constitutes an area of 27,220 square kilometers and is inhabited by around 4,993,044 people belonging to different Pakhtun tribes (www.pbs.org.pk). Under the 25th Constitutional Amendment in 2018 FATA's special status was abolished, and it was amalgamated with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan.

³ Birmal or Barmal is the area which transcends the border and inhabited by the Wazir tribe on both sides of the border.