



Afghan Forced Migration: Reaffirmation, Redefinition, and the Politics of Aid

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Abstract

This paper examines important issues concerning forced migration of Afghan refugees and how these issues are related to the politics of aid, gender, place, identity, power, and inequality. The paper argues that the experience of forced migration in conjunction with the challenges encountered by Afghan refugees in Pakistan refugee camps aid in reproducing social structures and shaping gender relations. In the process, many Afghan refugees are able to reaffirm self and group identity and belonging from multiple locations. The paper concludes with an analysis of the prospects and challenges of returning to Afghanistan.

Keywords: Aid, Development, Conflict, Refugees, Migration, Gender, Afghanistan

1. Introduction

The events of September 11, 2001, have renewed international interest in Afghanistan. Although forced migration of Afghan refugees has occurred since the 1970s, the recent attacks against the United States and its allies have rendered the situation of Afghan refugees one of primary international concern. Through examining the case study of forced migration of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, this paper seeks to demonstrate that forced migration is not just a product of internal wars and local impoverishment but is closely linked to the fundamental economic and political structures and processes of the contemporary world. By doing so, this paper highlights tensions and negotiations involved in the construction of identity among Afghan refugees.

The civil war in Afghanistan that began in the late 1970s has interrupted the rhythm of daily activities and forced many Afghans to abandon their homes and land. By engaging in the process of restructuring and re-establishing themselves as a group in Pakistan refugee camps, Afghanistan refugees have succeeded in transcending space and place through time within the context of their temporary dislocated situation. This paper will argue that the common features of religion, cultural values, memories, and experiences of dislocation have allowed many Afghan refugees to legitimize and reinforce individual and group location and identity in foreign lands. The different accounts of Afghan refugees express the various circumstances that forced them to abandon their homes and to live as dislocated people in a foreign land. The economic and mobility constraints imposed on Afghan women refugees in Pakistan have severely limited their economic contribution to household income and thus reduced their living conditions and positions within the family. The process of reproducing and modifying traditions and customs in host countries serves to recreate a sense of belonging and reconnect Afghan refugees to their homeland.

2. Refugees: Dislocation and the Politics of Belonging in the Post-Cold War

Human migration has a long history, but it is only in the twentieth century that the issue became politicized and internationalized (Kushner & Knox, 1999, p. 8). Increasingly, forced migration is linked to the process of globalization and the shifting of international geopolitics (Kushner & Knox, 1999, p. 9; O'Neill & Spybey, 2003, p. 7). As decolonization occurred after WWII and the Cold War struggle for geopolitical influences heightened, the migration of peoples from former colonies increased (Kushner & Knox, 1999, p. 10). In keeping with Cold War anticommunist foreign policy and security concerns, refugees from communist countries were well received in western European countries (p. 11). However, the situation changed after the Cold War as the movement of people entered a new phase.

Increases in interstate wars produced displaced populations, many spilling into neighboring countries or oscillating within border areas. Viewed within this context, the study of migration can no longer be based on narrow conventional theoretical frameworks emanating from modernization theories and approaches.

The study of forced migration in the form of refugees provides important insights into how people interpret and construct space and place. The complex relationships between identity and place have been examined by scholars from diverse disciplines (e.g., anthropology, sociology, social geography, and history). Within the anthropology discipline, refugee studies provide new ways of thinking and understanding about borders and the connection between people, identity, space, and place (Malkki, 1997, p. 61). This new thinking and understanding allow anthropologists to pose new challenges to the naturalization of the association between people and places and rework ideas of home and community.

Among displaced peoples, the act of remembering places is important in anchoring individuals' and groups' belonging and identities to a particular place. As such, the notion of

"homeland" remains one of the most powerful unifying symbols for mobile and displaced peoples . . . even in more completely deterritorialized times and settings—settings not only where "home" is distant but also where the very notion of "home" as a durably fixed place is in doubt—aspects of our lives remain highly "localized" in a social sense. (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997, p. 39).

In this context, special attention must be paid to the ways in which Afghan refugees have constructed, contested, and negotiated spaces and places.

The increasing magnitude of forced displacement as people escape from violence (which in many instances resulted from a state's failure in conflict resolution) critically challenges the conventional study of migration. Studies of forced migration that are mainly devoted to refugee issues and have generally neglected political and security issues need to be critically challenged, as displaced populations exist within and outside of state borders. While the movement of people from the South to rich countries in the North constitutes a combination of forced and economic migration, this migration has become more complex as identity politics become more entrenched.

3. Background of Afghan Forced Migration

The 1951 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines a *refugee* as anyone

who owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or public opinion, is outside of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country. (quoted in Kushner & Knox, 1999, p. 10)

This definition clearly applied to Afghan refugees migrating to Pakistan during the late 1970s soon after the Soviet occupation. However, this conventional definition of refugee has been challenged. In particular, critics argue that the definition is narrow and that it is irrelevant in the contexts of warfare and economic degradation such as flooding and drought (Castles, 2008, p. 2; Kushner & Knox, 1999, p. 12; Martin, 2002, pp. 26–27; Piguet, 2008, p. 2). Attempts have been made over the years to extend the definition of refugee to refer to those who are forced to flee

from persecution and conflict, consumption beneath the subsistence level, and natural calamities such as floods, earthquakes, famine and drought. (Mandel, 1997, p. 79)

According to this definition, disruptions must be paramount to life-threatening situations. This change effectively eliminates refugees' eligibility in events that are not life threatening (Mandel, 1997, p. 79). For the purpose of this paper, the term *refugee* will be used to refer to individuals who are forced to emigrate out of their homeland by a broad range of conditions that includes warfare, political persecution, economic deprivation, and environmental degradation.

The refugee situation in Afghanistan is not a recent development, nor is war the sole cause of Afghan forced migration. Since the 1990s, environmental degradation has forced many to abandon their homes (Mandel, 1997, p. 89). Afghan mass migration throughout the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century can be separated into four phases from the 1970s to the present.

The first phase of Afghan mass migration occurred soon after the military coup in 1978 carried out by the Afghan Marxist political group, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), against the Daoud government. Increased tensions within the PDPA attracted attention from the international community. In response to the emerging threat of political fragmentation within the PDPA, the Soviet Union sent 80 000 troops to Afghanistan in December 1979. The presence of Soviet troops in Afghanistan was seen by the United States and its Western allies as a new threat to international security. Subsequently, Western financial aid, arms aid, and other support were offered to Afghan resistance forces, collectively known as *mujahideen*. Intense fighting throughout Afghanistan led many people to flee to the neighboring countries of Pakistan and Iran (Jazayery, 2002, p. 232). The spread of violence throughout the country—along with the changes to landownership and marriage customs introduced by the PDPA soon after it took control—forced many to abandon their homes and villages. The majority of these refugees belonged to the Pashtun ethnic group, the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan. Many were poor peasants, subsistence farmers, small landowners,

and clergy. Most Afghan Pashtuns perceived the reforms initiated by the PDPA as “anti-Islam and anti-Pashtun” (Schmeidl, 2002, p. 19). Attempts by Soviet troops to overthrow Afghan traditional practices such as *pardah* (female seclusion) created negative reactions from the majority of male Afghans. The introduction of mass education met with strong resistance from most Afghan males, who interpreted this action as “un-Islamic” (Mayotte, 1992, p. 152). Subsequently, these changes forced many Afghans to flee the country.

The second phase of Afghan mass migration took place with the withdrawal of Soviet troops, which began with the election of the new Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1986 and was completed in 1989. The withdrawal resulted in an increase in the internal power struggle among the mujahideen groups (Jazayery, 2002, p. 239). This conflict in turn created two simultaneous migration movements: immigration into and emigration out of Afghanistan (Mandel, 1997, p. 89). While many Afghan refugees (about 1.2 million) were encouraged to return following repatriation, others fled from the growing violence throughout the country. In stark contrast to the first wave, in which the majority of refugees were Pashtun farmers, those who migrated in the second wave were mainly from urban business, professional, and Dari-Persian speaking backgrounds. Most fled Afghanistan because the mujahideen perceived them to be Soviet collaborators. Similar to the first wave, these Afghan refugees often left their homes carrying few personal belongings other than their clothes. Many settled in Nasir Bagh Camp in Pakistan’s Peshawar province. Ethnic and language differences between the Pashtun and Dari-Persian speaking groups soon gave rise to tensions in the camps (Schmeidl, 2002, pp. 19–20).

The third phase of Afghan mass migration occurred soon after the political victory of the Taliban in 1996. The Taliban introduced a repressive regime with the “quest for a pure Islamic society” (Schmeidl, 2003, p. 11), and the political situation was exacerbated by a drought that created widespread food and water shortages throughout the 1990s (p. 12). The persistent of violence and drought conditions meant that the state could no longer ensure adequate food, aid, or care for most of the population, particularly those residing in the countryside. The refugees consisted mainly of non-Muslim religious minorities and Shia Muslims. As famine and diseases spread, many were forced to migrate to Pakistan and Iran (Khattak, 2003, p. 200). During this period, an estimated 2 million Afghan refugees fled to Pakistan and about 1.5 million were forced to migrate to Iran. Others migrated to other countries in South Asia, the Middle East, North America, and Europe (Schmeidl, 2002, p. 12).

The fourth phase of Afghan mass migration occurred soon after the events of September 11, 2001. The fear of U.S. retaliation, increased socioeconomic and political instabilities, and environmental disasters (e.g., drought) generated large outflows of Afghan refugees. However, after the attack against the United States, the situation in Afghanistan “spun out of control, with refugees largely trapped inside Afghanistan because of closed borders in neighboring countries” (Schmeidl, 2002, p. 12). Intense fighting during late 2001 and the beginning of 2002 forced many to flee their homes. However, the majority of Afghan refugees soon returned to Afghanistan (Khattak, 2003, p. 201).

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

4. Life as Refugees

The experience of forced migration proved to be traumatic for many Afghan refugees. Most Afghan refugees continue to relive the traumatic experience of war and the memories of home and the life that they were forced to abandon (Barakat & Wardell, 2002, p. 918). For many, the destruction caused by the ongoing civil war and environmental degradation led to the loss of family life, land, and sources of income. These experiences are traumatic and play an important part in shaping individual and collective memories and social relations (Khattak, 2003, p. 198).

Many Afghans regard Pakistan as an ideal country to migrate to. Economic opportunities in conjunction with the religious ties between the two countries motivated many to settle in Pakistan. Although Pakistan did not sign the Geneva Convention or any other international conventions related to refugees, it recognized Afghans as refugees (Khattak, 2003, p. 198). However, research shows that Pakistan’s action of recognizing Afghans as refugees is not humanitarian based. Rather, the Pakistan government’s decision was influenced by the desire to gain international military, economic, and diplomatic status (p. 205).

Initially, Afghan refugees could register as refugees only if they resided in Pakistan Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and Balochistan province, two of the poorest provinces in Pakistan. By requiring refugees to register in these two provinces, Pakistan’s government believed that the refugees could be controlled and sent back into Afghanistan with little cost in financial resources and time. Registration provides Afghan refugees access to basic needs and necessities: shelter, food, water, education, health, and material aid such as clothes and blankets (Khattak, 2003, p. 201). In the beginning, the aim of the Pakistan government

was to contain the refugee population in areas believed by the authorities to embody “cultural affinity”, specifically, between Afghans and the Pakistani Pushtun population. A problem, of course, was that the Hazaras, Tajiks, and Uzbeks shared neither the same language nor the same culture with the people of the NWFP and Balochistan. Additionally, settling Pushtuns meant fueling Baloch–Pushtun tensions in that province. (Khattak, 2003, p. 201)

Viewed within this context, the Pakistan government's decision to view Afghan refugees as a homogenous group demonstrated state failure to recognize ethnic diversity among Afghans and contributed to ethnic tensions between Afghan refugees and local Pakistani ethnic groups. In addition to ethnic tensions, the different waves of Afghan refugees created economic and environmental pressures in the two provinces (Khattak, 2003, p. 201). This further fueled tensions between Afghan refugees, the local population, and the Pakistan government. Aside from registration, Afghan refugees are required to "declare political allegiance to a *tanzin* (political party) as a precondition for eligibility to receive food, shelter and security" (p. 203). The process of repatriation of Afghan refugees, which began in the late 1980s and led many to return to Afghanistan, must be viewed within the context of Pakistan's "resentment of hosting the largest refugee population in the world over more than two decades and without much assistance from the international community" (Bialczyk, 2008, p. 13).

Afghan refugees in Pakistan initially lived in tents, but as time passed, many built compound walls and brick houses, indicating that they are not returning to Afghanistan anytime soon (Khattak, 2003, p. 202). Aside from residing in camps, many Afghan refugees have migrated to the cities since the 1980s in search of employment opportunities. The move to urban centers accelerated with the second wave of Afghan professional and business refugees. Many Afghan refugees found support through ethnic or family networks in the cities (UNHCR, 2006, p. 3). The government of Pakistan set up an intricate and efficient administering system of managing refugees in camps. This system connects the federal government to the village administration and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). At the camp level, the provincial governments coordinate with camp administrators who work with various Afghan appointees (*maliks*) to distribute food, material aid, water, education to refugees. The *maliks* are respected leaders who often serve as spokespersons for their camps and as teachers and religious leaders within their groups. As such, they possess enormous power and influences over Afghan refugees' material and religious well-being. The *maliks* are also linked to Afghan political parties (Khattak, 2003, p. 202).

Under these conditions, Afghan women refugees face various levels of constraint in Pakistan refugee camps. Being refugees and women in Pakistan, they have had to face the structural constraints that refugees face everywhere: low wages, poor working conditions, and limited economic opportunities in host countries. The situation is further compounded by restrictions on their mobility. Prior to the mid-1990s, Afghan refugee women's income-generating opportunities were restricted by the Pakistani government, aid agencies, and Afghan political parties (Khattak, 2003, p. 203). Most Afghan women thus found themselves caught up in the political conflict between their leaders and the Pakistani government (Mayotte, 1992, p. 156).

Most Afghan women encounter challenges in adjusting to their new lives in Pakistan. Thousands of Afghan refugee women who enjoyed freedom of movement in Afghanistan find that the imposition of *purdah* in the camps severely restricts their mobility. Many Afghan refugee women do not share or know the culture and language of their host country, and isolation between Afghan women refugees and the local population is thereby increased (Barakat & Wardell, 2002, p. 910–911; Mayotte, 1992, p. 157).

By the late 1980s, the Cold War was ending, and Western interest in aiding Afghan refugees underwent a significant decline, particularly after the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in 1996. The decline in aid reflects the shifting geopolitical relations and priorities of donor countries, which forced thousands of refugees to fend for themselves. Following the September 11 events, the Pakistani government decided to close its border with Afghanistan and refused to admit new Afghan refugees. The government at the time defended its decision by suggesting that the country does not have adequate infrastructure to support the latest wave of Afghan refugees and that the government wants to prevent infiltration of Al-Qaida terrorists into Pakistan (Khattak, 2003, p. 198). In 2002, the Pakistan government decided to close a number of camps in NWP,

including Nasir Bagh, Jalozei, and Kacha Gahri, as well as issuing eviction orders for the residents in these camps. . . . Camps in South Waziristan were closed in September 2004, the remaining camps in FATA were closed between July and September 2005 and two camps in Balochistan were also slated for closure. (Bialczyk, 2008, p. 23).

The closure of these camps effectively displaced many Afghan refugees. In addition to camp closures, there are reports of outbreaks of violence in Pakistan refugee camps. The most recent event occurred on May 2007, when three Afghan refugees were killed and ten others injured during a violent confrontation between Pakistani authorities and residents of the Jungle Pir Alizai refugee camp. At the time of the conflict, the camp was scheduled for closure on June 15, 2007 (Bialczyk, 2008, p. 23).

Beginning in 2002, the UNHCR launched its repatriation program and as of 2005 had helped 1.56 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan return to Afghanistan (Michael, Corbett, & Mola., 2005, p. 13). However, ongoing instabilities in Afghanistan have made the process

a dubious success, and arguably in the interests neither of the majority of its intended beneficiaries nor of the long-term reconstruction of Afghanistan. In assisting a mass return of refugees to Afghanistan . . . UNHCR is responding more to

the perceived political interests of its donors and host governments, than to the actual interest of the majority of its “beneficiaries.” (Michael et al., 2005, p. 13)

These criticisms reflect competing interests and rising tensions among donor countries and governments.

5. The Politics of International Aid

As mentioned in the previous section, international aid to Afghan refugees in Pakistan during and after the Cold War has been highly politically driven. During the Cold War, the aim of Western aid to Afghan refugees was to undermine and destroy the Afghan Communist regime supported by the Soviet Union. By the 1990s, international aid was delivered to Afghan refugees within the context of the ongoing civil war and without cooperation from the Afghan state government (Jazayery, 2002, p. 249). Commenting on the effects that geopolitics has on aid distribution, Fielden suggests that

as long as the world community allows the provision of foreign aid to be linked to geopolitics, international humanitarian and development assistance in refugee contexts will be inconsistent, counterproductive, and highly contradictory. (Fielden, 1998, p. 480)

Viewed within this context, the politics involved in providing aid to Afghan refugees in Pakistan during and after the Cold War effectively contradict and undermine the humanitarian aspect of aid itself.

From 1979 to 1997, UNHCR spent more than US \$1 billion in aid on refugees in Pakistan (Bialczyk, 2008, p. 13). During the 1980s, UNHCR funded a ten-year, three-phase, \$87 million Income Generation Project for Refugee Areas (IGPRA) to build more public infrastructures and slow down the environmental damage caused by overgrazing lands in NWFP and Balochistan province. Much of the IGPRA employment opportunities were provided to “Afghan men—and in some instances to twelve and fourteen-year-old boys—on road, canal, and reforestation projects” (Khattak, 2003, p. 203). Given that the men refugees were outnumbered by women, UNHCR’s decision to exclude women from participating in the IGPRA project further increased Afghan vulnerabilities. The 1990s saw a drastic cut from UN aid to Afghan refugees in Pakistan, and this cut also came to have significant implications to Afghan women refugees’ living conditions (p. 203).

In the early 1990s, UN member states and other Western aid agencies agreed to establish a “holistic approach” to Afghanistan reconstruction. This new plan required cooperation and coordination between aid agencies to help with long-term development projects. After September 11, 2001, the newly elected UN Secretary-General, Mark Malloch Brown, was in charge of taking over the task of administering aid to Afghanistan. The UN also pledged \$652 million in aid to help with the reconstruction in Afghanistan. In January 2002, at an international conference held in Japan, donor countries signed an agreement that promised further funding (\$4.5 billion) over the next five years to Afghanistan (Jayazery, 2002, pp. 247–248). In 2006, during the London conference, international donor countries signed an agreement, the Afghanistan Compact, in which donor countries pledged to fund US \$10 billion to Afghanistan for the period of 2006–2010 (UNHCR, 2007, p. 353).

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6. Stories of Forced Migration

Latifa, an Afghan refugee woman who was forced to flee Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1982, provides details about the circumstances that forced her and her family’s migration out of the country:

When the Russians began to work in the computer center I decided it was no place for me to work. They told me I could no longer wear my chader. My father had been hiding for a year-and-a-half and had not been living with my family in Jalalabad . . . it was early evening the night of our flight when he joined my mother, grandparents, four sisters, a brother, and myself. My other brother is fighting for jihad. We waited forty-five days in a village not far from Jalalabad until it was safe to move on. Nine of us shared one room. I know many who went ahead of us came under the enemy fire. Later we saw their graves as we crossed the mountains. When we finally moved on, my father remained behind in Jilalabad. In the event one of us was captured, he might be in the position to win our release. (Mayotte, 1992, p. 160)

Latifa’s account of lost family members and forced separation from relatives reflects the situation shared by many Afghan refugees. The loss of employment, land, and family members played an important role in shaping Latifa’s dislocation. Her story demonstrates how most Afghan families are uprooted and become fragmented so that the family structure is no longer intact. The absence of the male presence allows for changes to take place within the family structure (Emmott, 1996, p. 36).

Nuria, a former school teacher who left for Pakistan in 1981, explains the differences between her living conditions in Afghanistan and in Quetta refugee camp:

Not only did I flee my homeland, but a way of life as well. In Lashkar Gah I had a profession and was able to travel freely between my home and the school. I wore Western clothes; never did I wear the chader. I felt no constraints. Even

the fact that I was not married, generally a stigma in our society for one my age, was not a problem. Here in Quetta, however, I felt pinched in everyway. . . . Here we have no space. Not only was the living area small, the women were confined to their quarters. Suddenly, my freedom of movement was taken from me. I was not allowed to work or go outside without at least wearing the chader. . . . Always I was accompanied by a male. I became very depressed. I was homesick and worried constantly about the fate of my father. . . . Will our family never be whole? Will we forever remain in a foreign land? (Mayotte, 1992, p. 174)

Nuria's account reveals her attachment to her former home and life and her desire to return. The determination to remember her former home has allowed Nuria to cope with the changes that have occurred around her. The memory also serves as a way for Nuria to anchor her identity and extend her belonging to her former land and home from a distance. In essence, *home* and *homeland* came to represent the way of life that Nuria was familiar with, a place where she feels comforted and at ease. For Nuria, the meanings of homeland are connected to the feeling of belonging to a particular place and community. The symbolic meanings and memories of home have allowed places to possess a "temporal depth" (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997, p. 15). With the advent of forced relocation, the meanings associated with home are separated and capsulated in memory. The concept of self and home are interwoven into the various aspects of present daily life (pp. 15–16). Because Nuria is intimately connected with her home and homeland, the forced migration led to a feeling of being lost. Nuria's connection to her land and home derives partly from the ownership of land. Additionally, the loss of home and land contribute to the feeling of homelessness (Emmott, 1996, p. 36).

The experience of dislocation, in conjunction with feeling lost, reflects common devastating psychological impacts that result from war and violence. Separation from family members, along with the abandonment of her home as a result of war, proved to be a traumatic experience for Nuria. The loss further shaped Nuria's self-identity and contributed to her feeling of dislocation. Parkin (1998, p. 316) suggests that memories of deceased family members who died before the flight serve to legitimize individual origin as well as serve as a way to cope with the grief.

The experience of war and being suddenly uprooted from the land has generated feelings of significant loss. Khattak (2003) proposes that war has destroyed the image of a secure and sacred home for the majority of Afghans. In this context, leaving home came to be perceived as an act of abandonment of the most sacred place. Khattak suggests that the "physical leaving of home" is thus seen as the process of venturing into "unprotected terrain" (p. 196). The loss of home is also linked to the loss of a country. Thus, leaving home comes to mean leaving one's "nation, culture, history, and identity" (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997, p. 17). The memory of home serves as an important element in the coping process (Khattak, 2002, p. 106). Additionally, memories allow Afghan women to maintain hope of returning to their home. For Nuria and Latifa, along with many other Afghans, the devastating situations that caused them to flee Afghanistan are only the beginning of the journey into exile. Afghan refugees regard the process of resettlement as the next important event in their lives.

7. Process of Resettlement

Once they enter the camp settings, the former solid and small village way of life that most Afghans are familiar with is replaced by living alongside thousands of people who come from different Afghan ethnic groups. Members of various Afghan tribes and clans are expected to coexist despite the fact that they previously were enemies. As an extension of their belonging to their homeland, many Afghan households in Pakistan refugee settlements are similar in shape and structure to the layout of typical urban and rural Afghanistan, but on a smaller scale (Shalinsky, 1994, p. 128). This is the process of recreating a familiar mental landscape out of an unfamiliar territory. As such, the experience of war serves to shape the reconstruction of settlement on a foreign land. The features of refugee settlements often reflect the common culture and the use of space within the home (Khattak, 1994, p. 129). In this sense, the reconstructing of the former mental and social landscape in a new settlement allows Afghan refugees to transform space into place.

Another cultural feature that is retained by Afghan women is the frequent interaction between women from different households despite their displaced situation, new living arrangements, and the imposition of purdah. The social support network established among Afghan women provides emotional support and strengthens community identity (Emmott, 1996, p. 33; Shalinsky, 1994, pp. 130–131). Additionally, the network allows Afghan women to construct an alternative space within a place that separates them from the social network of Afghan men. The establishment of social support networks by Afghan refugee women serve as a challenge to the practice of purdah in Pakistan refugee camps (Emmott, 1996, p. 33). These networks undermine the rigid hierarchy that is constructed and maintained by Afghan men in refugee camps. In essence, the social network established by Afghan women serves as a means of coping with the emotional stress and pressures they face. The cultural practices of hospitality and marriage celebrations (which include communal food preparations among friends and neighbors as well as the performing of wedding songs) continue to play an important role among Afghan refugees, especially women. These rituals and traditions, in addition to reinforcing communal identity and belonging (Shalinsky, 1994, p. 131), also serve to raise the visibility of Afghan women (Mayotte, 1992, p. 155).

Aside from their traditions and customs, Afghan refugees have also brought their Islamic faith and political beliefs, which are further redefined as the years in exile are prolonged. For example, although the men from Kabul had not previously worn beards or prayer caps in their original homeland, they started to wear these in exile. These types of practices imply that Afghan men are represented as “good Muslims” (Mayotte, 1992, p. 155). These symbols empower many Afghan refugees and allow them to differentiate themselves from the “others” on foreign land. Another cultural aspect reconstructed in Afghan refugee camps is the re-establishment of provincial judicial committees set up by various Afghan men’s conservative groups. This reconstruction served to strengthen Afghan collective group autonomy and customs against foreign influences. This feature of life among Afghan refugees undermines the argument that geographical dislocation is linked to cultural dislocation (Rogers, 1991, p. 64). The reconstruction of former judicial committees also gives Afghan refugees a specific link to their origin and a feeling of belonging to their homeland. Despite the hardships of adapting to the new life in exile, the idea of returning to their homeland serves as a source of determination and of strength for Afghan group identity and belonging.

8. Dislocation and Extending Belonging

Being near the border reflects Afghan refugees’ desire to extend their belonging to their homes and land. Most Afghans are expected to return after peace is restored in the region. Thus, most Afghans perceive their dislocated situation as only temporary. The impact of war and the experience of losing their land has forced many Afghans to retreat to their cultural values as well as to their traditions and customs in order to recapture their old way of life and to reinforce group identity and solidarity (Mayotte, 1992, p. 155).

The attempt to emulate the social and political structures of the homeland provides a chance for different refugee groups to exploit the homeland myth in order to benefit their goals. Among the cultural values that are heavily emphasized among Afghan refugees is the strict enforcement of gender segregation and purdah for Afghan women. The imposition of purdah further restricts Afghan women’s mobility and reinforces gender inequalities within the patriarchal social, economic, and political structures. Purdah is perceived as an important part of the Afghans’ honor code as well as a desired status symbol in Afghan society. Among Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan, the enforcement of purdah became intensified and affects both rural and urban Afghan women, particularly those who rarely practiced it in Afghanistan. Under the harsh restriction of purdah, most Afghan women feel insecure and lack control over their daily lives (Emmott, 1997, pp. 35–36; Mayotte, 1992, pp. 155–157 ; Moghadam, 1993, pp. 221–222).

9. The Pressure to Maintain Tradition and Cultural Practices in Refugee Camps

The imposition of purdah is often perceived as a way for Afghans to reinforce group identity and as a way to cope with the new settlement arrangements within refugee camps. The strict observance of traditional practices among Afghan women became a symbol of *jihad* (holy war). The pressure to assume the role of preservers of culture has created a wedge between generations of Afghan refugee women. While the older generation of Afghan women refugees are expected to preserve traditional cultural values, younger Afghan generations are required to cope with the difficulties of the new life. Within refugee camps, Afghan women continue to perform domestic activities (Mayotte, 1992, pp. 156–157, Moghadam, 1993, pp. 243–244). However, the lack of economic opportunities in Pakistan forced many Afghan men to go back to Afghanistan and join Afghan resistance groups (Khattak, 2003, p. 203; Mayotte, 1992, p. 155). The absence of men has led some Afghan women to take the role of head of the household (Emmott, 1996, p. 33; Mayotte, 1992, p. 155, Shalinsky, 1994, p. 129). Under such circumstances, Afghan women must accept international or national assistance or obtain employment in the labor market in order to support themselves and their families (Emmott, 1996, p. 36; Moghadam, 1993, p. 244).

Difficulties in gaining employment in the labor market have forced some Afghan women into prostitution as a necessary means of economic survival (Mayotte, 1992, p. 158). In Pakistan, many professional and business Afghan refugee families soon discover that they are unable to support themselves and their families with only one person’s income. Afghan women are thus required to enter the labor market to provide and contribute to family income (Mayotte, 1992, p. 157; Moghadam, 1993, p. 243). Many Afghan refugee men are unable to accept the new economic role of Afghan women despite their own inability to fully support their families. This loss has often led to domestic violence, depression, and alcoholism (Mayotte, 1992, p. 158). The prevalence of domestic violence in Pakistan refugee camps has contributed to changes in Afghan gender relations and has important implications for women’s health.

10. Prospects and Challenges of Returning Home

There are different perceptions among Afghan refugees regarding the idea of returning home. These perceptions are shaped by the circumstances surrounding the flight (Emmott, 1996, p. 35; Khattak, 2003, p. 200). For those Afghan refugees whose homes had been destroyed during the war, there is little hope of rebuilding because of the limited available employment opportunities and the ongoing violence occurring in Afghanistan (Emmott, 1996, p. 35; Khattak, 2003, p. 109). Thus, the constant thought of returning home serves to shape the Afghani sense of belonging to and identity with their homeland. For the majority of Afghan refugees, Pakistan is perceived as a foreign and hostile place

where daily life is a constant struggle. The discomfort strengthens the feelings of belonging to and desire to return to Afghanistan (Emmott, 1996, pp. 35–36). Viewed within this context, the process of mourning over the loss of home serves to legitimize and reinforce the attachment of Afghan refugees to their former homes. Afghan refugees' desire to return to their homes is shadowed by the reality of the destruction of their homes. With limited assistance from government or aid agencies, the task of rebuilding appears to be daunting for many Afghan refugees. At the same time, the idea of returning home serves to relieve the pressure of the hardship of daily lives in camps (Khattak, 2003, p. 204). Together, the mixed emotions reflect hopes and challenges that Afghan refugees experience in perceiving their current dislocation and future prospects of returning and rebuilding their lives in Afghanistan.

Changes occurring in Afghanistan since 2001 have encouraged many Afghan refugee women to return to Afghanistan. The account of Homaira, who was born in Kabul in 1968 and immigrated with her family to the United States in 1978, reveals her determination to help with Afghan postwar reconstruction. Specifically, Homaira is committed to

empowering my Afghan sisters through education. If we're going to reach Muslim women, we must do it through education and their religion. . . . Afghan women have been through so much emotional and psychological stress that it's difficult to reach them. This is a challenge for us: how to reach the minds and hearts of these women, who have been deprived of the true meaning of their faith. (Mehta & Mamoor, 2002, p. 19)

Homaira's statement reveals that changes to Afghan women's status will not occur any time soon. On November 29, 2001, the Women for Afghan Women (WAW) group organized its first conference in New York, "Women for Afghan Women: Securing Our Future." Throughout the conference, issues about the history of the Afghan women's rights movement in Afghanistan, human rights abuses under the Taliban regimes, and suggestions on rebuilding the country were raised (Mehta & Mamoor, 2002, p. 19).

In 2002, WAW members were invited by Afghan Prime Minister Hamid Kazai to attend a conference held at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in New York. At this conference, Kazai made an appeal to Afghan diasporas to come home and contribute to the country's reconstruction (Mehta & Mamoor, 2002, p. 19). Kazai's appeal further encouraged many refugees to return to Afghanistan.

According to a report in the *UN Chronicle* (Rutsch, 2002), many Afghanistan refugees who have returned to Afghanistan have not yet returned to their homes. Rather, they migrate to major urban areas such as Kabul and Herat. A significant number of Afghan refugees hesitate to return until normalcy is restored in the country. According to a United Nations official, Maha Muna, Afghan women will face many challenges in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. The drought situation in Afghanistan has led the UN to caution against an immediate mass return of Afghan refugees. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the Ministry of Women's Affairs of Afghanistan (MOWA) have signed an agreement that pledges to restore and improve Afghan women's legal, political, and social rights. These developments reflect the growth of the women's rights movement in Afghanistan.

The above overview of patterns of emigration of Afghan refugees since the 1970s seems to indicate that the argument that aid and development contribute to empowering refugees politically, economically, and socially clearly does not apply in this case, especially with regard to Afghan refugee women. Despite the generous aid contributed by the international aid agencies, the living conditions for Afghan refugees in Pakistan continue to deteriorate. So far, lack of cooperation and coordination between aid agencies poses major obstacles to improve the lives of Afghan refugees. Additionally, poor health care and housing, low incomes, and the rise in domestic abuse negatively affect Afghan refugees in Pakistan (Jazayery, 2003, p. 248). Pakistan's recent decisions to seal its borders and refuse admission to admit new Afghan refugees further intensify the Afghan refugee crisis.

11. Conclusion

This paper demonstrated that the forced migration of Afghan refugees is complex and must be viewed within the contexts of gender, environmental degradation, and shifting geopolitics and interests of donor countries. The continuation of violence and political instabilities have created various waves of Afghan refugees for more than twenty years. For most Afghans, dislocation and memories of home serve not only to perpetuate the desire to return but also to reinforce individual and group identities and sense of belonging to the homeland. The shared features of religion, cultural values, memories of war, and dislocation allow Afghanistan refugees to legitimize and reinforce their sense of group identity, origin, and belonging. Additionally, the continued practice of rituals and customs among Afghan refugees in refugee camps strengthen group belonging. Through the process of redefining themselves, Afghan refugees have created a distinct identity for themselves in the host society. Inability or reluctance to return to their home contributes to the feeling of dislocation. The experience of forced migration has aided in the process of reshaping Afghan gender roles. The constraints (e.g., on mobility) that are imposed on Afghan women in refugee camps prevent them from gaining employment and thus contribute to their dislocation and undermine their status within the household.

As we have seen, postwar reconstruction in Afghanistan required considerable cooperation and coordination between countries and international intergovernmental aid organizations. The tendency to exclude Afghan women refugees from

participating in development projects in the past demonstrates a need for international aid agencies and governments to consider the significant roles women play in Afghan reconstruction. Although a significant effort has been made by international aid agencies to deliver food and other relief needs to Afghan refugees scattered throughout Afghanistan since 2001, improvements to Afghan lives have been slow. The lack of coordination and cooperation between international aid agencies and governments hinders the effectiveness of aid delivery.

In the post-Cold War period, issues of globalization, exclusion, poverty, and North–South economic inequalities dominated many discussions about international security, international relations, and development aid. When approaching the issue of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, one must question the different interests of donor countries, host countries, international aid agencies, and aid recipients. As we have seen, the decision to provide aid to Afghan refugees in Pakistan reflects donor countries' Cold War and post-Cold War foreign policies. This paper demonstrated a clear connection between international political interests in Afghanistan and aid to Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Although the link between politics and aid serves to benefit donor countries' interests, it clearly undermines the humanitarian aspect of aid itself. The growing number of refugees worldwide puts further strains on existing aid resources. This paper calls attention to the geopolitical factors that could potentially endanger the effectiveness of aid provision to Afghan refugees.

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Table 1. Afghan Refugees in Pakistan, 1996–2006

| Year | Number of refugees |
|-----------|--------------------|
| 1996–1999 | 1.2 million |
| 2000 | 2 million |
| 2001 | 2.1 million |
| 2005 | 1.2 million |

Source: UNHCR, 2005.

Table 2. Financial Pledges to Afghanistan

| Country or aid agency | Amount |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| United States | \$3 billion (2005) |
| USAID | \$427 million (2005) |
| Asian Development Bank | \$500 million (2003–2005) |
| Japan | Up to \$500 million (2003–2005) |
| EU countries | \$800 million (2003–2007) |
| Canada | \$1.2 billion (2001–2011) |

Sources: Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan (2008); Jazayery (2002); Padilla, foundation, & Tomlinson (2006).