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## The Formation of an Afghan Community in the United States

Between 1978 and 2000, the first sizable Afghan communities in the United States took root. During this time, Afghans built community institutions from the ground up to achieve economic and spiritual sustenance, adjust to life in the United States, and preserve their culture for future generations. In doing so, the U.S. Afghan population evolved from a collection of scattered informal networks into established communities with permanent institutions. In the process, individuals increasingly began to conceive of themselves as Afghan Americans with a permanent future in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

Since at least the first decade of the twentieth century, a small number of self-identified Afghans have lived in the United States.<sup>2</sup> Most Afghans immigrants to the United States, however, arrived in the decades following the 1978 coup by the far-left People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. Although the new Afghan government implemented a number of progressive reforms, it proved to be among the most authoritarian and oppressive in the world. Massive waves of arrests and violence were common during the regime's first years, and armed rebellion soon broke out against the government.<sup>3</sup> The Soviet Union intervened in December of the following year to ensure that Afghanistan's government

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<sup>1</sup> This terminology and conceptualization owes an intellectual debt to George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> John Baden, *Through Disconnection and Revival: Afghan American Relations with Afghanistan, 1900–2016*, working title (forthcoming PhD dissertation, Case Western Reserve University, expected completion in 2017).

<sup>3</sup> For more on PDPA violence and arrests see Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Peter Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan: Messianic Terrorism, Tribal Conflicts, and the Failures of Great Powers* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011); Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

remained Communist-inspired and friendly with the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union, however, was unable to defeat the rebels, and Afghanistan would endure war throughout the next decade and beyond.

Conflict and persistent political persecution forced millions of Afghans abroad after the events of 1978 and the subsequent Soviet intervention. Although Iran and Pakistan received the vast majority of these refugees, tens of thousands made their way to Western nations such as the United States. The United States government was generally receptive to admitting Afghan refugees, although the number of arrivals was relatively small compared to the worldwide Afghan refugee population.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, there were approximately 28,444 Afghan-born residents in the United States by 1990.<sup>5</sup> The San Francisco Bay Area, especially the area surrounding the suburb of Fremont, became the largest concentration of Afghans in the country. The Northern Virginia suburbs of Washington D.C., New York City (particularly Queens), and Southern California also became important centers of the U.S. Afghan residence.<sup>6</sup>

Afghan refugees to the United States were disproportionately from the more affluent and well-educated segments of Afghanistan's society<sup>7</sup>. Several factors accounted for this. Many of the first Afghan immigrants to the United States during the late 1970s and early 1980s were students abroad and diplomatic families who were overseas at the time of the coup. After the coup, many simply stayed in the United States. Elites, employees in politically sensitive positions, and the intelligentsia were vulnerable to arrest, and frequently needed to escape the country. Other Afghans who relocated to the United States had familial or professional connections there. Although some cultural distance generally existed between themselves and the United States, it was not always as wide as one would imagine.

These individuals' overall high levels of education and affluence in Afghanistan, however, often did not immediately translate to success in the United States. Many had to leave property behind in Afghanistan and spend great sums of money to leave Afghanistan, often through the aid of smugglers. Compounding these

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<sup>4</sup> For government reception of Afghans, see also John Baden, "Can Refugees Be National Security Assets?: Afghan American Contributions to U.S. National Defense since 1978," *Marine Corps University Journal* 7(1) (2016).

<sup>5</sup> Campbell Gibson, Emily Lennon, "Table 3. Region and Country or Area of Birth of the Foreign-Born Population: 1960 to 1990," U.S. Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0029/tab03.html?cssp=SERP>, access: 9 III 1999.

<sup>6</sup> For state estimates of Afghanistan-born residents in the United States, see Steven Ruggles, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, and Matthew Sobek, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 6.0 [1990 5% sample] (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2015), <http://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V6.0>, access: 28 VII 2017.

<sup>7</sup> For an examination of Afghan-immigrant education levels, see: Steven Ruggles *et al.*, Integrated Public Use Micro, data Series: Version 6.0 [1980 5% sample] (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2015), <http://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V6.0>, access: 20 VIII 2017.

problems, educational and professional credentials frequently did not transfer to the United States, and family members often lacked advanced English skills. As a result, many recent migrants had to take up laborious work as taxi drivers, painting buildings, gas station clerks, restaurant work, and other service-industry jobs to make ends meet.<sup>8</sup>

Psychological integration into U.S. society also took time. During the 1980s, many Afghans in the United States viewed themselves as Afghans in exile. Reflecting on Afghans' situation in 1986, Aman Meerzaman, an organizer of a protest against the Soviet invasion, told the *Washington Post*, "We love this country [the United States], but our culture is behind us and we will return to it [Afghanistan]".<sup>9</sup> The U.S. press, and presumably many Americans, also frequently described Afghans in the country as displaced people rather than as "Afghan Americans".<sup>10</sup>

Fortunately for them, many Afghans did not need to choose between U.S. and Afghan interests in international relations during the 1980s. Most Afghans in the United States were highly critical of the Soviet government, which had invaded their country. The United States was the Cold War adversary of the Soviet Union and supportive of the Afghan rebels' struggle. This had several benefits for Afghan immigrants. First, as victims of an adversarial (and Soviet-supported regime), Afghan refugees were more likely to be admitted to the United States than refugees from many other countries.<sup>11</sup> Employment could also be found in Afghanistan-related work with the U.S. government. Among the most notable of these

<sup>8</sup> For more on this see Abdul Tawab Wahab, "Tawab Wahab Interview," Little Kabul Stories, 16 XII 2013, <http://littlekabulstories.org/portfolio-post/tawab-wahab>; David Green, "The Fare Society: Among Foreign-Born Cabbies at National Airport, America Is Made Anew," *Washington Post* 3 VII 1994, C3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers (751036947). For a fictionalized account see Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* (London: Penguin, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Marc Fisher, "500 Exiled Afghans March in Northwest: Protest Marks 7th Anniversary; Protest Marks 7<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Invasion," *Washington Post* 28 XII 1986, C1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers (138722809).

<sup>10</sup> A search of local and metro sections of U.S. newspapers using NewBank revealed that the term "Afghan American" was not commonly used by newspapers during the 1980s. Terms such as "Afghan refugee" were often used instead. By the 1990s, "Afghan immigrant" and "Afghan American," become more frequent. By the (early) 2000's, Afghan American and Afghan immigrant were more commonly used than "Afghan refugee." Estimates of percentages cannot be concluded with much certainty, due to the number of false positives of the term "Afghan refugee". Nevertheless, using a combination of searches, it is apparent that "Afghan American" became an increasingly common term used to describe Afghans in the United States in newspapers until at least 2010, when data is more uncertain. The term "Afghan refugee" was almost certainly used with less frequency until at least 2010, when data is less certain. "Search," Infoweb.newsbank.com, America's News, NewsBank, access: 16 XII 2016; missing years for the *San Francisco Chronicle* were found accessed with a San Francisco Public Library card, using infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.sfppl.org, access: 22 VII 2017.

<sup>11</sup> Susan Gzesh, "Central Americans and Asylum Policy in the Reagan Era," Migration Policy Institute, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-americans-and-asylum-policy-reagan-era>, access: 16 XII 2016. For more on Cold War foreign policy considerations' impact on refugee policy, see Carl J. Bon Tempo, *Americans at the Gate: The United States and Refugees during the Cold War*

employers were the Dari and Pashtu language services of the U.S. government broadcasting organization *Voice of America*, which aimed to broadcast news into Afghanistan un-censored by its regime.

Additionally, overall U.S. attitudes towards the Afghan people during the Afghan-Soviet war were remarkably positive for a Muslim-majority country during that era. In contrast, immigrants from Iran and predominately Arab nations such as Lebanon or Libya had to struggle with the coverage of their home-countries' hostilities, and even violent clashes with the United States. These conflicts elicited negative coverage of their countries of origin which could, in turn trigger unfair backlash at Iranian or Arab immigrants. This backlash, however, could extend to anyone who appeared Middle Eastern, including Afghans.<sup>12</sup>

Still, these differing experiences appear to have had contemporary implications. Afghan establishments such as grocery stores and restaurants continue to proudly identify themselves as "Afghan," complete with imagery of their homeland. In contrast, grocery stores and restaurants in the United States specializing in items from most Muslim-majority countries have tended to somewhat obscure their national origins to the general public.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, Afghans could to a degree, freely speak out on issues affecting their homeland, such as the Soviet Union's military intervention, without fear of U.S. backlash.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Afghan immigrants participated in protests against the Soviet Union throughout the 1980s, usually marking the anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.<sup>15</sup>

By the late 1980s, the war in Afghanistan had turned against the Soviet-supported government, and the events that followed would have dramatic consequences for Afghans in the United States. In 1989, the last Soviet troops withdrew from Afghanistan, and the Soviet-sponsored government fell in 1992. These events opened up the possibility of return for many Afghans who presumably would no longer have to fear government persecution or Soviet domination of their native country. Unfortunately, though, these hopes proved to be fleeting for most. Fighting soon broke out among competing Afghan rebel factions. Civil war, and at times

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(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Baden, "Can Refugees Be National Security Assets?: Afghan American Contributions to U.S. National Defense since 1978".

<sup>12</sup> For examples of harassment against U.S. Afghans during the Gulf War era, see Peter Baker, "After Closed Minds, Open Arms Greet Fairfax Immigrant Family," *Washington Post* 8 IV 1991, D3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers (140537058); Maryam Qudrat Aseel, *Torn Between Two Cultures: An Afghan-American Woman Speaks Out* (Sterling: Capital Books, 2004), 79–80.

<sup>13</sup> Some restaurants, do however, identify themselves as Lebanese.

<sup>14</sup> This situation would change in the 1990s after civil war broke out in Afghanistan, and the Taliban later took control of much of the country.

<sup>15</sup> "Afghan Invasion Anniversary: Big Protests at Soviet Embassies," *Associated Press*, *San Francisco Chronicle* 28 XII 1982, San Francisco Public Library; Karlyn Barker, Sari Horwitz, "Lafayette Park Is Stage for Political Drama," *The Washington Post* 8 XII 1987, A34, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Katy Butler, "March on Soviet Consulate in S.F.," *San Francisco Chronicle* 28 XII 1987, A13, NewsBank Inc., (485183).

anarchy, engulfed Afghanistan for much of the 1990s. For most Afghans in the United States, a return to Afghanistan seemed as remote as ever.

These would be watershed events for the U.S. Afghan community. The continuation of conflict after the Soviet withdrawal signaled that returning to Afghanistan would be next to impossible in the near future. Although many by this time had already decided upon life in the United States, the new conflict cemented this. Indeed, by the decade's close, a majority of the 45,195 Afghan immigrants in the country would become U.S. citizens.<sup>16</sup> The civil war also made unifying behind a common political cause extremely challenging. Partially as a result, there seems to have been a decrease in public political action among Afghans in the United States during the 1990s. At the same time, though, a wave of non-profit foundations organizations, such as Afghan Coalition and Help the Afghan Children, were formed.<sup>17</sup>

Some of these institutions, such as Afghan Coalition, focused on issues affecting the U.S. Afghan community, including helping immigrants adjust to life in the United States and access social services. Others organizations such as Help the Afghan Children and The Children of War focused on providing financial and educational support to Afghans in Afghanistan and refugee camps in neighboring countries. Notably, major organizations that lasted into the next decade tended to address unifying issues such as charitable work and service provision, rather than political advocacy.

Although Afghans continued to face difficult circumstances, many made significant progress towards integrating into U.S. society during the 1990s. Afghan-born residents in 2000 had slightly higher levels of higher education than U.S. Americans overall, slightly lower individual median incomes, and markedly lower overall median family incomes.<sup>18</sup> A wide gap in income and social advancement also existed between Afghans. Strikingly, 22.8 percent of Afghan-born individuals were estimated to be living in poverty, compared to 12.2 percent of all people

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<sup>16</sup> "FBP-1 Profile of Selected Demographic and Social Characteristics: 2000, People Born in Afghanistan," U.S. Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/population/cen2000/stp-159/STP-159-afghanistan.pdf>, access: 16 XII 2016.

<sup>17</sup> "Najib Aziz," The Children of War, <http://thechildrenofwar.org/web2/about-us/1-about-us.html>, access: 16 XII 2016; "About HTAC," Help the Afghan Children, <http://htac.org.af/about-htac/>, access: 16 XII 2016; Baden, "Through Disconnection and Revival: Afghan American Relations with Afghanistan, 1900–2016 (working title for forthcoming PhD dissertation)."

<sup>18</sup> Figures for U.S. population overall in 2000 were as follows: 30.7 percent of individuals 25 years or older had at least an associate's degree, median family income was 50,046 dollars, male full-time, year round workers made a median 37,057 dollars and 27,194 dollars for women. For those U.S. residents born in Afghanistan, the figures for 2000 were as follows: 36.2 percent of individuals 25 years or older had at an associate's degree or higher, median family income was 36,967 dollars, male full-time workers made a median of 33,984 dollars, and females 26,515 dollars. "Profile of Selected Social Characteristics: 2000. Census 2000 Summary File 4 (SF 4) – Sample Data," U.S. Census Bureau, [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?\\_fpt=table](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?_fpt=table), access: 28 VII 2017; "FBP-1 Profile of Selected Demographic and Social Characteristics: 2000, People Born in Afghanistan," "Table FBP-2. Profile of Selected Economic Characteristics: 2000".

in the United States.<sup>19</sup> Although median income levels were about average, Afghans tended to live in areas with high living costs such as the San Francisco Bay Area, New York City, and Washington D.C. suburbs. This undoubtedly caused many to live in more economically modest circumstances than their incomes suggest. Still, homeowners (nearly 41 percent of housing for Afghan-born residents was owner-occupied) benefitted from rising housing prices through equity gains. Indeed, just under half of owned-homes by Afghan-born U.S. residents were estimated to be valued at or above \$200,000 in 2000 (the national median value was \$119,600).<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, an estimated 49.2 percent of Afghan-born households who rented paid more than 35 percent of their income on rent in the United States, as opposed to 29.5 percent of the national renter population, an indicator of low levels of disposable income.<sup>21</sup> Taken together, these are clear signs of a larger than average wealth-gap among U.S. Afghans, but impressive signs of integration into the U.S. economy, given the circumstances and how recent many of the arrivals were.

Although refugees and immigrants enjoyed at least a modicum of success in the United States during this time period, problems in Afghanistan persisted. In 1996, the extremist Taliban movement seized Afghanistan's capital, and by the decade's close, controlled nearly all of the country. The Taliban regime were able to provide a greater level of order to war-torn Afghanistan, but carried out numerous human rights violations and severely restricted human liberties. Few international governments recognized their authority, and the Taliban generally held other nations in contempt. The international terrorist organization, Al Qaeda established bases in Afghanistan. In 1998, the United States launched cruise missile attacks against Al Qaeda bases in Afghanistan in retaliation for the bombing of embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. In the decade's closing years, reports of religious extremists, civil war, and terrorists had largely replaced the previous decade's often positive portrayals of Afghanistan and its people.

Accessible U.S. Afghan records from the 1990s and the first years of the twenty-first century reveal overwhelming hostility to the Taliban.<sup>22</sup> *Omaid Weekly*,

<sup>19</sup> "FBP-2 Profile of Selected Economic Characteristics: 2000, People Born in Afghanistan," U.S. Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/population/cen2000/stp-159/STP-159-afghanistan.pdf>, access: 16 XII 2016; Alemayehu Bishaw, "Poverty: 2000 to 2012," American Community Survey Briefs, U.S. Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/acsbr12-01.pdf>, access: 16 XII 2016.

<sup>20</sup> "FBP-3 Profile of Selected Housing Characteristics: 2000, People Born in Afghanistan," U.S. Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/population/cen2000/stp-159/STP-159-afghanistan.pdf>, access: 16 XII 2016; "Profile of Selected Social Characteristics: 2000. Census 2000 Summary File 4 (SF 4) – Sample Data".

<sup>21</sup> "FBP-3 Profile of Selected Housing Characteristics: 2000, People Born in Afghanistan;" "Profile of Selected Social Characteristics: 2000. Census 2000 Summary File 4 (SF 4) – Sample Data".

<sup>22</sup> See collection of *Omaid Weekly* 8(406) 2000, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles; Ctn. 14:5, Ctn. 24:14–19, Ronald T. Takaki papers, Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley.



the largest U.S. Afghan newspaper, frequently ran scathing articles about the Taliban, and forcefully criticized the United States for not taking enough action against the regime. A January 31, 2000, article for instance, criticized U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Karl F. Inderfurth for meeting with a Taliban official in Pakistan. The editorial stated, “Such a meeting between a high-ranking official of the sole superpower and an official of a group best known for its barbarities – ethnic cleansing, religious extremism, terrorism, drug production and cultural and traditional genocide – serves only to legitimize the terrorist militia [the Taliban]”.<sup>23</sup> An apparently small minority of U.S. Afghans did view the Taliban favorably before September 11, 2001, largely for bringing a measure of stability to the country after so many years of civil war. After the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks, however, Taliban supporters became an absolute rarity.

By 2000, the ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan had taken a toll on Afghans in the United States’ relationships and interactions with Afghanistan. By that time, most Afghan immigrants had lived in the United States for at least ten years.<sup>24</sup> In that time, much had changed, and few had managed to travel there in the interim. Indeed, a new generation of U.S. Afghans had grown up in the United States, and had not been to Afghanistan since they were very young, if at all. For them, Afghanistan was a distant memory or location of many family stories; even if the cultures of Afghanistan, Islam, or the U.S. Afghan community continued to be pillars of their lives. Tragically, many Afghans in the United States had to endure survivors’ guilt regarding the past, and discussion of Afghanistan could trigger depression or guilt over events that occurred long ago and whose outcome they had little control.<sup>25</sup> Identities and relationships with homelands, however, are nothing if not fluid and subject to change. In later years, it was not uncommon for U.S. Afghans to reconnect with Afghanistan.<sup>26</sup>

Despite a growing psychological distance among some U.S. Afghans, a robust and conspicuous Afghan community had emerged in the United States by 2000. An informal Little Kabul complete with Afghan stores, restaurants, and a bakery had formed in Fremont, California. New York City and San Diego were home to Afghan mosques, and U.S. Afghans in the Washington D.C. area continued to broadcast world news in Dari and Pashto through *Voice of America* to Afghanistan and Afghan communities abroad.

By 2000, one could speak of distinctly “Afghan American” communities and identity. That year, an estimated 57.5 percent of U.S. residents born in Afghanistan,

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<sup>23</sup> “U.S. fiddle while Afghanistan burns,” *Omaid Weekly* 8(406) (2000), Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

<sup>24</sup> “FBP-1 Profile of Selected Demographic and Social Characteristics”.

<sup>25</sup> For discussions of survivor’s guilt, see Yasmine Delawari Johnson, “The Girl with the Green Eyes,” and Zohra Saed and Sahar Muradi, “Introduction” in *idem*, *One Story, Thirty Stories: An Anthology of Contemporary Afghan American Literature* (Chicago: University of Arkansas Press, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> Baden, *Through Disconnection and Revival*.

and 67.1 percent of all U.S. residents of Afghan ancestry were U.S. citizens.<sup>27</sup> U.S. newspapers, too, increasingly referred to individuals from Afghanistan as “Afghan Americans” in the late 1990s and especially during the 2000s.<sup>28</sup> This likely represented not only a change of outside perception, but self-identification as well. Still the addition of the word “American” to their identity did not necessitate the removal of their “Afghan” selves. In fact, just under five percent of Afghan-born residents were estimated to speak only English in the home in 2000.<sup>29</sup>

On the Tuesday morning of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, few Afghan Americans could imagine how dramatically their lives would be altered in the events about to unfold. Afghans in the United States would experience the grief and the terror of other Americans that day, as well as the added threat that the attacks would undue all they had labored to build in the country. For example, the founder of the non-profit Help the Afghan Children, Suraya Sadeed, recalled in her memoir that she believed the backlash against Afghans in the United States would be so great that she would have to cease operations (she did not).<sup>30</sup> American flags went up on Afghan-owned property and businesses, and some braced for a backlash to come.<sup>31</sup>

To be sure, hate crimes, harassment and unwarranted suspicions all rose against Muslims and people of broader Middle Eastern descent in the attacks’ aftermath.<sup>32</sup> Yet, in wake of so much tragedy, grief, and anxiety, there were also signs of hope. After the United States and its allies overthrew the Taliban regime, there was a chance that a new era would arrive in Afghanistan with a new government and international investment. At the very least, the overthrow of the Taliban had finally made travel to Afghanistan possible for the U.S. and Western diaspora. In the following months and years, many would return to Afghanistan

<sup>27</sup> “Profile of Selected Social Characteristics: 2000. Census 2000 Summary File 4 (SF 4) – Sample Data”.

<sup>28</sup> See footnote 8. “Search,” Infoweb.newsbank.com, America’s News, NewsBank, access: 16 XII 2016. Missing years for the *San Francisco Chronicle* were accessed with a San Francisco Public Library card using infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.sfpl.org, access: VII 2017.

<sup>29</sup> “FBP-1 Profile of Selected Demographic and Social Characteristics.”

<sup>30</sup> Suraya Sadeed, Damien Lewis, *Forbidden Lessons in a Kabul Guesthouse: The True Story of a Woman Who Risked Everything to Bring Hope to Afghanistan* (New York: Hachette Books, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> See Saed, “A Week Later,” and Fahim Anwar, “Stand-Up Comedy,” in *One Story, Thirty Stories*, eds. Saed, Muradi, 137–138, 142; Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural of America* (New York: Back Bay Books/Little, Brown and Company, 2008), 422–423.

<sup>32</sup> For reported hate crimes and harassment against U.S. Afghans and/or Muslims, see Christopher Ingraham, “Anti-Muslim Hate Crimes Are Still Five Times More Common Today than before 9/11,” *The Washington Post* 11 II 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wp/2015/02/11/anti-muslim-hate-crimes-are-still-five-times-more-common-today-than-before-911/>, access: 16 XII 2016. Overall, Muslims went from being the victim of 2 percent of religious hate crimes to 12 percent. Mike Brunner, Monica Alba, Bill Dedman, “Hate Crime in America, by the Numbers,” *NBC News* 8 VI 2015, <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/charleston-church-shooting/hate-crime-america-numbers-n81521>, access: 16 XII 2016; Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural of America*, 422–426; Baden, “Through Disconnection and Revival: Afghan American Relations with Afghanistan, 1900–2016 (working title)”.



for the first time in decades, or ever. Donations poured into Afghan American-led non-profit organizations, such as Suraya Sadeed's Help the Afghan Children, which did charitable work in Afghanistan.<sup>33</sup> Some returned to see family, pursue economic opportunities, or lend a hand helping to rebuild their ancestral homeland. A new era in U.S. Afghan life, especially regarding diasporic relations with Afghanistan, had begun.

Yet, many of the fundamental trends remained. Afghan-born citizenship rates would increase from 57.5 percent in 2000 to 62.8 percent in 2010.<sup>34</sup> While some U.S. Afghans returned to Afghanistan to work in its government (an ally of the United States), a larger number appear to have served with the U.S. government and military as interpreters, cultural advisers, and in other critical capacities.<sup>35</sup> Since this time, many Afghans in the United States have continued to embrace multiculturalism and live as Afghan Americans who honor both U.S. and Afghan cultures.

The events of 2016, though, have demonstrated that the future is never certain nor linear. A turn towards xenophobia in the U.S. politics, paired with the country's on-going struggle against a handful of deranged adherents of terrorism has threatened to undermine the always fragile progress towards acceptance and multiculturalism. Increased violence in Afghanistan has also threatened to curtail diasporic relations between Afghans in the United States and Afghanistan.

Still, the U.S. Afghan community continues to grow and thrive. From 2007 to 2015, 19,916 U.S. visas were given to Afghans who were once employees of the U.S. government in Afghanistan, and to their spouses and children.<sup>36</sup> Their life experiences and backgrounds may prove to be markedly different from previous generations of Afghans in the United States. Additionally, Afghan migration to new locations may shift centers of U.S. Afghan life away from traditional centers such as the San Francisco Bay Area or the Washington D.C. metropolitan region. Their presence will undoubtedly shape the evolution of U.S. Afghan culture.

This history and up-coming challenges point to a rich and unsettled future. Regardless of its path, scholars and future generations of Afghans in the United

<sup>33</sup> Sadeed, Lewis, *Forbidden Lessons in a Kabul Guesthouse: The True Story of a Woman Who Risked Everything to Bring Hope to Afghanistan*, 229–233, 259–261.

<sup>34</sup> "FBP-1 Profile of Selected Demographic and Social Characteristics: 2000, People Born in Afghanistan;" Steven Ruggles, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, and Matthew Sobek, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 6.0 [2010 ACS].

<sup>35</sup> In October 2012 alone, there were at least 1,080 U.S. linguists in Afghanistan. Most of these appear to have been Afghan American, or at least Americans whose heritage was from countries neighboring Afghanistan. Jesse Ellison, "As War Nears an End, Our Afghan Translators Are Being Left Behind," *Daily Beast* 21 X 2012, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/10/21/as-war-nears-an-end-our-afghan-translators-are-being-left-behind.html>, access: 16 XII 2016. See also Baden, "Can Refugees Be National Security Assets?"

<sup>36</sup> Andorra Bruno, "Iraqi and Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Programs," Congressional Research Service, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/homesecc/R43725.pdf>, access: 16 XII 2016.

States will be able to look back to the 1980s and 1990s as the formative years of Afghan community in the United States and “Afghan American” identity.

John Baden

**The Formation of an Afghan Community in the United States**

Summary

The following article surveys Afghan refugees’ integration into the United States during the 1980s and 90s. It examines some of the difficulties they faced in the United States and their efforts to build institutions to sustain and enrich their lives in the United States. Throughout this period, many Afghans also sought opportunities to contribute to Afghanistan’s welfare. Furthermore, the persistence of war inhibited return to Afghanistan. As integration into U.S. society increased during the decade, Afghans in the United States increasingly began to conceive of themselves as “Afghan Americans” with a lasting future in the country.