

GENDER, MOBILITY AND SELF:
AFGHAN WOMEN IN
VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

by

CHRISTINA W. O'BRYAN

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DISSERTATION APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Christina W. O'Bryan

Title: Gender, Mobility and Self: Afghan Women in Vancouver, British Columbia

This dissertation has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Department of Anthropology by:

Lynn Stephen, Ph.D.	Chairperson
Lamia Karim, Ph.D.	Core Member
Diane Baxter, Ph.D.	Core Member
Susan Hardwick, Ph.D.	Institutional Representative

and

J. Andrew Berglund	Dean of the Graduate School
--------------------	-----------------------------

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

Degree awarded September 2014

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Christina W. O'Bryan

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Anthropology

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In this study of Afghan women and the relationship of identity to gendered mobility, I found that the Afghan women in this study were affected by prevailing ideologies which recognized them as refugees no matter how long they had lived in Canada. In this dissertation, I assert that the category of refugee haunts discussions of class, the creation and continuation of a sewing cooperative, and veiling--so much so that in each category, the gendered role of Afghan refugee woman is not only attached to these Afghan women but they must also reinscribe it repeatedly in order to receive services and participate in other community activities and structures. That reinscription becomes a part of a process in which—as part of an avowedly multicultural metropolis and country—they must by definition remain Other in order to belong. There must be the multiplicity of cultural identities in order to sustain the contemporary Canadian multicultural identity.

The processual nature of identity articulated by Malkki and Kondo could be lost in this static counterpoint, but the women in this study find ways of using combinations of strategic essentialism and resistance to articulate their own identities through practice. Perhaps more significant, they may have sustained their own power to define themselves by carving out spaces both real and metaphorical in which they define themselves in

relation to acts of living which reconfirmed their own identities rooted in values which exemplify *Afganiyat* (Afghanness), *Insaniyat* (humanness) and the concept of *Mardomdari*.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Christina W. O'Bryan

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene
Harvard University, Cambridge Massachusetts

DEGREES AWARDED:

Doctor of Philosophy, Cultural Anthropology, 2014, University of Oregon
Master of Arts, Cultural Anthropology, 2005, University of Oregon
Bachelor of Arts, Biological Anthropology, 2003, Harvard University

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Globalized multiculturalisms
Gender
Immigration and forced migration
Self and Identity
Afghan diaspora and other Muslim diaspora populations

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Teaching Fellow (Instructor), University of Oregon,
September 2013-June 2014

Graduate Teaching Fellow, University of Oregon
September 2009-June 2013

Dissertation Field Work, University of Oregon
January 2008-June 2009

Graduate Teaching Fellow, University of Oregon
September 2003-December 2007

GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Postdoctoral Teaching Fellowship,
Food and Culture,
University of Oregon, 2014-2015

Stern Fellowship, Globalized Multiculturalisms,
University of Oregon 2009-2010

Center for the Study of Women in Society,
Gender, Space and Self: Afghan Women in Vancouver, B.C.,
University of Oregon, 2008

Departmental Research and Travel Grants
Gender, Space and Self: Afghan Women in Vancouver, B.C.
University of Oregon, 2004

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DEDICATION

To Warren Lewis Webb, who made me realize that I needed to do this.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Hamasa's kind and patient face is momentarily altered with a shadow of visible pain before her customary smile reappears. It is Afghan Cultural Heritage Day. Today, under a bright and sunny sky outside the Scandinavian Community Centre in Burnaby, B.C., I sit, chatting with her while she works in one of the many booths that are spread across one side of the lawn with items for sale. On the other side of the lawn, some fifty feet away, musicians on a soundstage play Afghan music to a bank of folding chairs filled mostly with Afghans. People come and go from the music venue and a number of people—mostly men in shirts and jackets—are standing around the edges of the audience talking. A few women in the audience have dressed in some form of traditional Afghan dress—most of which I can recognize as Afghan, though I am not fluent in specific tribal, ethnic or geographic versions. The rest of audience would otherwise be indistinguishable in terms of clothes from any other similar gathering in the Vancouver area but for the sound of rapidly spoken Dari everywhere.

We are conversing in English. I have just commented that, with all the pain associated with Afghans' departure from Afghanistan, they now have a widening international social network which is creating connections across nations, classes, educational levels, and ethnicities. (This I now "know" to be valued among Afghans because I have read about *Mardom-dari*—a concept which, if I have understood the Afghan-American author's definition, roughly translates to economic well-being, but also accumulated social capital that encompasses, among other things, relationships which extend across such social boundaries.)

Of course, just because an experience is valued does not mean that its pain can be borne and not all values are shared by all Afghans, though I know Hamasa shares this particular value because it is part of the source of her kindness and friendliness toward me. Hamasa began, as she often did, with the phrase "You know, Christina jaan¹. . ."—still kind, still patient, and ever polite, she says, , "You know, Christina jaan, for us it is not the same."

¹ "Jaan"—literally "dear"—is used by both Afghans and Iranians. Iranians tend to use it only for those who are closest to them, and it conveys intimacy and/or friendship and affection. While Afghans also use "jaan" for intimacy and affection, it is also used to denote respect. So, a mother will address her son as "Youssef jaan" or a close friend as "Meena jaan" but she might also address her elders, an employer, or a superior as, for example, "Sima jaan" or "Hamid jaan"—using first names with "jaan" added. Traditionally, it has been rude to simply call people by their names without the additive, but many Afghans in the Vancouver area have adopted the naked first name. Hamasa and other women that I came to know well usually added the "jaan" to my name as I did with theirs.

Indeed it is not. For many Afghans in this study, it is true that the refugee experience and the identity of refugee which attaches to Afghans in relation to so many categories of experience and identity in this setting—the painful history of forced separation from a country whose memory is imprinted on the mind and heart. It is, in effect, a category which seems to haunt the lives of many of the women I met—those who assented to being part of this study, those who would only let me use a comment or story here or there, and those whose words and lives I have to leave out even though they have helped to frame my understanding

. The term “refugee” is problematic itself. How is it, for example, that Afghans who have lived in Canada for 15-20 years or more and even second generation Afghans who are born and raised in Canada are still so often categorized as refugees? That discussion is examined more fully in Chapter III, but here, by way of introduction, it is presented as prelude to and part of other discussions which focus on gender and ideologies of class.

My comment—which was meant to convey that I understood something about Afghan values—not only demonstrated my stunning lack of sensitivity on a subject that I actually knew so well I never imagined I could behave so callously, it also defines for me an aspect of what Charles Taylor calls “misrecognition” in his essay “Multiculturalism” (Taylor 1993) In her brief response, Hamasa conveyed a world of complexity that I, an American living in a country that has not seen decades of war and devastation like that which has redesigned much of Afghanistan, have never known and will likely never know. Even when such a migration is undertaken by choice, it is most often wrenching,

and choice is a relative term. Hamasa is teaching me about the perils of well-meaning misrecognition.

Afghan women—like Iranian women a generation before them—have become symbols of what are often represented as repressive and oppressive values both in Afghanistan and in Islam. In most Western discourse, this essentialized identity—synthesized in the image of a woman dressed in the head-to-toe garment called the *burqa* who may not leave her home unaccompanied—has become synonymous with Afghan womanhood. This representation is so powerful that, even in a liberal, multicultural city like Vancouver, B.C., some Afghan women in this study report being asked, “Where is your *burqa*?” Such seemingly trivial incidents reflect a larger discourse which affects Afghan women’s social mobility in terms of accessing resources, finding enough education to manage, and building connections that would help them function in the Vancouver area. Part of such incidents includes a discourse of essentialization and labeling that effectively and continually reinscribes the role of Other for many Afghan women.

Taking identity as a starting point for achieving these kinds of mobility, this dissertation explores the situation of a small group of Afghan women in the Vancouver metropolitan area. I explore some of their experiences and perceptions to examine how concepts of self and identity may be caught up in the politics of recognition (Taylor 1994) in a multicultural setting where they must, in effect, remain Other in order to belong. I specifically illustrate and analyze how Afghan women reinscribe their given identity from “refugee” to a more complex realignment of selfhood that involves Islam, gender, class, age, and nationality. One of the primary ways that I suggest that they do

this is through the principle of *Mardom-dari* which gives them a symbolic and ideological bundle of practices which are translatable to the Afghan community and also specific credible ways for behaving and positioning themselves in the large city of Vancouver.

Like Afghans in general, Afghan women have been repeatedly essentialized and stereotyped in media and literature. In his work in the Afghan town of Istalif, Noah Coburn observes that “accounts [of Afghans] coming out of the region. . .often rely on stereotypes and generalizations” (Coburn 2011:Loc. 66) and this is certainly true of Afghan women in the region, who have frequently been portrayed for more than a decade as passive victims.

Many Afghans now live outside Afghanistan in Western societies where the advantages of pluralism and democracy presumably provide freedom from such constraints, allowing redefined spaces of self for Afghan women. Coburn found that the realities of Afghans were far more complex and heterogeneous than was usually portrayed. Realities for a worldwide community of Afghans whose social field extends throughout the world—an international community of which the women in this study are a small but illuminating part—are equally complicated and diverse. In Canada, diversity itself is often articulated as a national identity and Vancouver B.C. has been recognized as the third most diverse metropolitan area in the world (GVRD 2001). Embedded as it is in globalized “webs of significance” (Geertz 2003:145) which helped to create Canada’s identity and status as an intentionally multicultural society, recognition and celebration of ethnic and national origins are meant to be encouraged. This intentional multiculturalism has many components that make it a useful context for focusing on the roles that mobility

plays in concepts of self and identity and how those concepts relate to larger trends and flows in local, national and global contexts.

This project explores how “acts of living” and ideals of Afghanness (Ansary 2003:122) may be mobilized in response to essentializing discourses of Afghan women which are present in the globalized, multicultural metropolis of Vancouver, B.C. How do they engage in or become engaged by the politics of recognition to claim their own ideas of self and womanhood in the process of simple acts of living? In the course of this research, it became clear that the term “refugee” is itself embedded with the politics of recognition. Once a person departs her country of origin to take refuge elsewhere, she becomes a refugee, but once she becomes a permanent resident or a citizen, is it appropriate or accurate to continue calling her a “refugee?” How can we categorize the experiences of Afghans who have migrated to the Vancouver area in terms of, for example, class, gender, and refugee status (which is often racialized)? What is their experience in this setting which has been an important part of the Canadian multicultural project?

How do they experience their social mobility—their ability to connect with other Afghans, with family, and with friends, but also to find education and employment? This dissertation focuses on how some Afghan women respond to persistent essentializations by both the society surrounding the Afghan community as well as some essentializing discourses within the Afghan community. Essentialization has an effect on how women are able to find jobs and access education, but also how easily they are able to, for example, participate in creating and sustaining their own perceptions of themselves? It is in the nature of multiculturalism that there must be multiple cultures to create

multicultural identity—an identity which has been attached to Canada in recent decades and an identity which it has promoted for reasons which I will elaborate. However, for Canada to remain multicultural, those multiple cultures must ironically sustain their differences in order to belong. They must, in other words, be continually essentialized and difference must remain one of their essentializing markers which simultaneously signals their belonging and their not-belonging.

These essentializations—usually rendered in the form of casually mentioned stereotypes like “Where’s your *burqa*?”—reflect certain assumptions and expectations present in the Vancouver area’s politics of recognition and they can also reflect obstacles to functioning fully in the social, political, and economic life of the metropolitan area. Do these obstacles follow women when they seek education or employment? When Afsana, who had taken training in law enforcement, began looking for work, was it her Afghan heritage and Muslim faith that stretched out the job-hunting for so long? Or was it—in 2009—the sequelae of economic disaster which had befallen the United States, Canada’s neighbor and primary trading partner?

Understanding how these women address, among other things, the seemingly permanent label of refugee in a multicultural setting which both embraces them as part of the “multi-“ and simultaneously essentializes them as perpetually “ Other” offers us insights into how difference is recognized, addressed and categorized. It also provides an opportunity to deepen our understanding of aspects of Afghan culture(s) as they are translated into a Western setting at a time when United States military involvement in Afghanistan is diminishing. Finally, in a large metropolitan area, finding and maintaining personal, academic and work relationships across the boundaries of many

social fields is important for health and survival on many levels. In village settings or the neighborhood enclaves which legendarily characterize settlement patterns in North America, it is possible to maintain such relationships, but the Vancouver area—like many metropolitan areas today—has developed what geographers have called a “heterolocal” pattern in which settlement and resettlement is guided by influences other than existing affinities and affiliations like country of origin or ethnic heritage. How can we understand the Vancouver area that the women in this project experience and mobilize to their own use? In order to understand how Afghan women navigate Vancouver we must first learn something of their history and that of the Afghan diaspora.

Creation of the Afghan Diaspora

The overthrow of the Afghan government in April 1978 marks the beginning of Afghans’ role on the world stage as refugees. The subsequent invasion and occupation by the Soviet Union created a modern incarnation of Afghanistan’s reputation as a wartorn country. The September 11, 2001 attack on the United States brought U.S. and other NATO troops to Afghanistan because the Taliban government had made it a refuge for the terrorists who hijacked the planes which made the attack. There is, however, considerable history which came before, between and after these events which taken together created the Afghan diaspora of the late 20th and early 21st centuries and the role of Afghans as the world’s largest group of refugees.

To examine this history, I will focus briefly on three periods in Afghan history: 1) the early history—from 330 B.C.E. to the late 18th century--of the place that is now called Afghanistan, 2) the period from the late 19th century to 1978—specifically women’s circumstances in Afghanistan, 3) the contemporary period which I define as beginning

with the 1978 coup and continuing into the present. While the last period comprises the years when Afghans began to migrate in largest numbers from Afghanistan, I think it is important to at least mention the other two aforementioned periods—the first period to address some tropes about Afghans and the second period to provide some context for discussing how women’s lives became caught up in larger narratives which included structures of power within and beyond Afghanistan.

Early Afghanistan Origins and History

The history which created this Diaspora is often attributed to some natural warlike characteristics of the Afghan population—characteristics which have, in recent centuries, repelled great powers’ attempts to intervene in Afghan history for their own purposes. That, as author Tamim Ansary writes, is the view of the nations whose interventions in Afghanistan did not succeed, but Afghanistan’s history is filled with invading empires from the east and from the west (Ansary 2012). Part or all of what is now Afghanistan has been invaded and conquered by Greeks, Turks, Persians and Arabs from the west and by Mongol and Indian empires from the east. Alexander sojourned there in 330 BCE, Islam came to Afghanistan in the 7th century CE, the Silk Road traversed the northern part of Afghanistan from that time until the 15th century, and Genghis Khan’s Mongol army swept through Afghanistan in the 13th century. The result, according to some authors, is an Afghanistan which no longer appears to have an “indigenous” population. It is now populated by descendants of those groups, among whom are numbered the many identified ethnic groups. Also, it is now almost entirely a Muslim country, though multiple religious traditions existed in the area—including Buddhism, Zoroastrianism,

and Judaism-- before Islam arrived (Ansary 2012; Barfield 2010; Dupree 1980; Ewans 2002; Magnus and Naby 2002).

It was not until the 18th century that much of what is now Afghanistan began to coalesce under a new Pashtun leader named Ahmed.² At that time, the region had been Muslim for 11 centuries. Woven as it is through the rhythms of daily life as it is with a requirement to pray five times a day, Islam has had enormous impact on Afghanistan, joining with existing traditions like, for example, *pashtunwali* to create ideologies and practices that have become signal features of depictions of Afghan culture. *Pashtunwali* incorporates concepts of hospitality and even refuge given to an enemy who requests it with principles of revenge for wrongs experienced. *Pashtunwali* has its foundation in regional traditions but also in ideals of generosity and hospitality found in Islam, and it is often suggested that this part of *pashtunwali* was at the heart of the Taliban's decision to shelter Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda before and after the attacks in 2001 (Ansary 2012; Barfield 2010; Dupree 1980; Misdaq 2007; Rashid 2000).

Afghanistan from the 1800s–1978: State Formation, Gender Policy and Politics

Afghanistan as an early geographic entity probably first emerged with the selection by fellow tribal leaders of Ahmed Abdali as the principal leader. Calling himself Ahmed Shah Durrani (the Pearl), in the 18th century, Durrani created an Afghan empire which included all of what is now Pakistan, extending from Punjab in northwestern India to include Mashad in northeastern Iran. While the formal

² Often English translations add vowels between consonant sounds where there are none in the written Farsi. If Ahmed's name were properly spelled in English, it would be Ahmd.

independence of the state we now identify as Afghanistan was a century and a half away, Durrani's elevation to Shah in 1747 had several effects which persist today: 1) the elevation of Pashtuns to be the most powerful ethnic group in Afghanistan; 2) the creation of a Durrani royal line among Pashtuns related to Durrani (either as direct descendants or as consanguineal kin—cousins, aunts, and uncles) that ruled Afghanistan from 1747 to 1978 and 3) a corollary population of elites who claimed relationship to the royal line and appear to have become members of Afghanistan's upper classes (Barfield 2010; Dupree 1980; Ewans 2002; Magnus and Naby 2002; Misdaq 2007; Tanner 2004). I will explore more of this aspect of class among Afghans in Chapter IV.

In the late nineteenth century, both hidden and overt strategic battles of the so-called "Great Game"--in which Russia and Britain competed with each other for Afghanistan and other parts of West Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East--were being enacted in Afghanistan. King Amir 'Abdur Rahman, who ruled from 1880-1901, raised the age of marriage for women, increased women's rights to divorce, to own property and to inherit as widows. In addition, he forbade forced marriages and the levirate (in which widows were required to marry their brothers-in-law and declared that the brideprice could be demanded by the wife at any time (Hatch Dupree 1984:306).

Veiling was still the norm, though prior to this time, women's circumstances varied by local traditions, urban/rural location, tribal customs and traditions, as well as different ideas about Islam. Even if a woman wore only a headscarf, she was generally careful to adhere to customary ideals of covering the body so that only the hands and face showed. It was a standard of modesty which was believed to be based in Qu'ranic ideals, though the Qu'ran requires modesty of men as well as women.

The reign of Abdur Rahman appears to have been the first time in Afghan history that such a different interpretation of the Qu’ran was used to proscribe child marriages, forced marriages, and veils, among other customs relating to women. Earlier, it was common for women to be betrothed at very young ages—twelve or thirteen were considered marriageable ages. While marriages might be arranged with the inclusion of the prospective bride’s assent, it was common to arrange marriages as part of building family alliances. In particular, in some parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan, one form of arranged marriage including forcing a woman to marry her rapist—suggesting that the raped woman was not considered to be a victim but a miscreant who had misbehaved (Ansary 2012; Barfield 2010; Dupree 1980; Ker Chiovenda 2010; Rashid 2000). That this was also painful for the rapist (albeit for different reasons) is illustrated in observations made by Melissa Skye Ker Chiovenda at the 2010 American Anthropological Meeting in New Orleans. She noted that one village leader commented that forcing rapist and rape victim to marry made everyone unhappy and that perhaps he should change that practice in his own community (Ker Chiovenda 2010).

Rahman was the first of several leaders who attempted to change conditions for women. After Rahman and up until the 1978 coup, there were repeated efforts by some rulers who were either educated in or greatly influenced—according to many sources for this research by the West to change, to “modernize”, conditions in Afghanistan, particularly for women. These influences sometimes came directly, as I will discuss below, but also sometimes indirectly from, for example, visitors from colonized India. Having come to believe that restricting women’s rights was contrary to Islam and undermined the healthy functioning of society, several of these rulers argued that

improving women's situation with education would contribute to stronger, better families and so elite families made a point of providing both sons and daughters with education (Ansary 2012; Barfield 2010; Dupree 1980; Ewans 2002; Hatch Dupree 1984; Magnus and Naby 2002).

In a country where women had routinely been prevented from education by custom, resources, and lack of available schools for girls, this was revolutionary. However, religious leaders—mullahs—objected profoundly each time, believing that education of women would have the opposite result, would violate their particular Islamic ideologies and would lead to the degradation and dishonoring of family and nation (N.H. Dupree 1984).

After Rahman's rule ended, his son Habibullah reigned until his son Amanullah ascended to rule. From 1919-1929, Amanullah appears to have taken up his grandfather's reforms and extended them to include monogamy (rather than the traditionally permitted polygyny) and "compulsory" education for girls. During Amanullah's reign, the king and queen, who had spent quite a bit of time in Europe, sought the end of *pardah* and of veiling with chadoris³. The women in his family led by example, removing their veils and going out in public to speak about women's equality:

“Some people are laughing at us, saying that women know only how to eat and drink. Old women discourage young women by saying their mothers never starved to death because they could not read or write⁴. . . . But knowledge is not

³ *Purdah* is the Arabic word for curtain, and is used in different ways to describe many forms of segregation of the sexes—including veiling. In Afghanistan, the *burqa* has traditionally been called the *chadori*, though many Afghans have incorporated the word *burqa* as well.

⁴ This probably was not true, in any case, for women who were outside their families' care. In the latter part of the 20th century, as more and more men died in war, the number of widows increased. Because their male relatives were also fighting and dying, the increasing number of widows became apparent as some turned to begging on the streets. A literate woman—except during the Taliban regime—might have had at least some chance to earn some money without ruining her reputation by turning to sex work or other illegal work (Barfield 2010).

man's monopoly. Women also deserve to be knowledgeable. We must on the one hand bring up healthy children and, on the other hand, help men in their work. We must read about famous women in this world to know that women can achieve exactly what men can achieve." (Queen Suraya, quoted in N. H. Dupree 1984:307)

Amanullah was overthrown in 1929, in part because he had attempted to enact changes of law and custom that undid traditions relating to women—traditions which included (among other things) brideprice, forced marriage, marriage of girls under the age of sixteen, and the wearing of the *chadori* in public. His successor (a Tajik and the man who forced his abdication) lasted less than a year before another descendant of a Pashtun line associated with the Durrani lineage—Mohammed Nadir --deposed him, executed him and assumed the throne. Mohammed Nadir Shah ruled from late 1929 until he was assassinated in 1933, at which time, his son Mohammed Zaher Shah—who would become the last king to rule Afghanistan—took the throne. From Amanullah's reign (1919 to 1929) until the 1979 Soviet invasion, repeated efforts to liberalize women's roles within Afghan society were made. Some lasted for a period of time and were then repelled by the more powerful religious and conservative elements within Afghan rural society. Afghan's varied geography included mountain valleys where small groups had been so isolated for such long periods that not only were their languages unique to those groups, but political power was often retained and fiercely defended. This, combined with multiple ethnic groups—each jockeying for power of their own—and a segmentary lineage pattern⁵ which existed in the Pashtun (majority) ethnic group, created multiple nodes of self-contained and semi-autonomous power. In addition, the role of *qaum*—a

⁵ A lineage pattern which includes categories and hierarchies of lineages in which sublineages often have considerable power of their own.

word which Afghans use variously to mean ethnic group, tribe or family—in shaping subgroups created other decentered loci of power and loyalty (Barfield 2010; Zulfacar 1998). The concept of *qaum* is discussed further in Chapters III and IV. The centralization of government was therefore always contested and a successful ruler was a ruler who could maintain the allegiance of a sufficient number of these competing nodes of influence and power to avoid being overthrown or worse (Ansary 2012; Barfield 2010; Dupree 1980; Zulfacar 1998).

Zaher Shah’s reign, which began in 1933, oversaw a gradual liberalization of women’s rights. In 1959, his cousin—then Prime Minister Mohammed Daoud—created a stir when his wife and wives of his ministers appeared in public with their faces unveiled. Dupree describes it as follows:

One of the more important events in modern Afghan history occurred in 1959. With no prior public announcement or official proclamation, Prime Minister Mohammad Daoud, Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Mohammad Naim, other members of the royal family, the cabinet, and high-ranking army officers appeared on the reviewing stand with their wives and daughters on the second day of Jeshn (August 24-30 that year), the week-long celebration of independence from British foreign affairs after the Third Anglo-afghan War (1919). The women had exposed their faces for all to see. (L Dupree 1980:530-31)

“The women had exposed their faces for all to see.” It was not unheard of, but accompanying a celebration of independence with a display of women’s bare heads—particularly their hair—was a historic gesture that defied the norms and values espoused by more conservative elements of Afghan society in a country where most women wore clothing that covered their hair, necks and bodies and sometimes even their faces (Dupree 1980).

Afghanistan was at that time—the late 1950s and early 1960s--a country isolated from the rest of the world. Many elite Afghans who had the means had been sent abroad for their education where they were taught more secular Western values and the women in these most powerful families in the land were now taking off their veils. It was a symbolic gesture, but it accompanied efforts at reforming the status of women regarding education and the right to work outside the home. Such changes—“[w]omen’s emancipation in the Western sense”--were, according to Nabi Misdaq, “seen as a threat to the fabric of patrilineal Afghan society and contrary to the injunctions of Islam” (Misdaq 2007:71). Misdaq also counters the argument that tribal resistance to centralized government was the primary obstacle to giving women more rights. “The greatest obstacle in the twentieth century,” he notes,

. . . turns out not to have been tribal resistance to being ruled from a strong centre [sic] or the tribes losing their privileged position, but the need to reform the attitude of men towards women, especially in the urban centres, by admitting to a public role for women (Misdaq 2007:71).

By the end of Zahir Shah’s reign, Westernized ideas about governing and ways of living were making serious inroads into Afghan culture. A photograph from Harriet Logan’s book *Un/veiled* [sic] shows a trio of young women walking in a Kabul neighborhood in the early 1970s, dressed in roughly the same clothes a young working woman in her twenties might have been wearing in North America or Western Europe at that time. There is a difference, however, in the consequences of such behavior. The trio in Logan’s book were walking down the street in those clothes “despite the virulent criticism of the majority of Afghans still faithful to the Muslim tradition. The *mullahs* (Muslim priests) did not hesitate to throw acid on the bare legs of such impudent young women” (Logan 2001:22) (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Afghan women walking in a Kabul neighborhood 1972 (Logan 2002:22-23).

In 1973, Daoud deposed his cousin the king and proclaimed himself President of a newly governed Republic of Afghanistan. In many ways, he continued the changes in women's conditions in Afghanistan. Ruling from 1973 to 1978, his regime engaged in reforms—adding to women's rights, for example—but it was therefore in frequent conflict with Muslim other leaders who favored maintenance of traditional practices mentioned above. Daoud is famous for having invoked the Qu'ran—like Abdur Rahman in the 19th century—to challenge the assertions by religious leaders that, for example, Islam required veiling or forced marriage. He also alienated other political groups like the various Afghan communist groups, allegedly imprisoning and even assassinating leaders whose views might have endangered his government (Ansary 2012; Barfield 2010; Misdaq 2007; Ewans 2002; Magnus and Naby 2002).

Daoud also found himself increasingly caught between the Soviet Union and the United States. Both countries had contributed financially to Afghanistan's development and poles of political persuasion had been emerging within Afghanistan, with some groups expressing loyalty to socialist and communist values of the USSR and others to the democratic values of the U.S. Daoud himself had flirted with communism and had considerable support from the USSR, but his increasing conflict with Afghan communists encouraged the Soviets to believe that his government was too unstable to continue. With their encouragement, the Afghan communists staged a coup and assassinated Daoud and his family, and with numbers of Afghans began to look for ways to leave Afghanistan (Barfield 2010; Rostami-Povey 2003; Zulfacar 1998).

Gender and Islam in Contemporary Afghanistan: The 1978 Saur Coup to the Present

On April 28, 1978, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan—an amalgam of communist groups—overthrew the Daoud government. Najma describes it this way: “We were sitting having coffee that morning and we saw them bombing the [presidential] palace. We did not know what was happening. Then it came over the radio.” In that historical moment, it appears, the world that Afghans had known—a world in which there were tensions, admittedly, but which had had some relative stability (e.g., no violent government overthrows or assassinations) since 1929 was immediately changed and seemingly changed forever. Though most of the older Afghans I met in the course of this study appear to wish for the return of the Afghanistan they once knew, they also appear to be resigned to the permanence of the change in Afghan life. In many ways, it was this coup—brought about by no doubt well-meaning Afghans who sought to modernize and

remoralize Afghanistan including imposing more secular values—that probably did more to open the gateway to the destruction of much of the cultural world and norms and values of the people we now identify as Afghans than any other previous invasion, with the possible exception of Chinggis Khan (Genghis Khan)⁶ (Ansary 2012; Barfield 2010; Ewans 2002; Magnus and Naby 2002; Misdaq 2007; Tanner 2004).

I will not go into detail here about the year and a half between the coup and the December 1979 invasion by the Soviet Union, except to say that, while the imposition of the communist government changed conditions for women relatively little. Those women whose families disagreed with the communists and/or felt their safety to be threatened by the new government would have been more likely to leave Afghanistan, but, according to women and men that described the coup to me, the focus on restricting women's lives just because they were women did not occur until nearly two decades later. Two of the most prominent leaders of the PDPA were assassinated and the Soviet army invaded Afghanistan twenty months after the Saur coup, expanding the numbers of refugees who were already trying to leave and creating the first wave of the Afghan diaspora (Baraulina, et. al. 2004).

The Soviet Era. The 1978 coup gave way to an invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union beginning December 24, 1979 and the Soviet war and occupation would last almost a decade before the Soviet Army left Kabul and drove north over the very roads that the USSR had helped to build in the 1950s. In the intervening ten years, the

⁶ Louis Dupree called Chinggis Khan (Genghis Khan) the “atom bomb of his day” in part because his destruction of the city and region of Balkh destroyed much of the center of what was civilization in that area, but in particular destroyed the *madrasa* system which apparently was a resource of enlightened learning in not just religious matters, but also science and humanities (Dupree 1980). For reasons I will go into in my discussion about the Taliban regime, this may have had consequences centuries later in creating circumstances which led to the rise of the Taliban *madrasas*.

Soviet occupiers attempted to reconfigure what had been a society with long traditional foundations of village, family, and tribal life that were woven together with Islam, which had been the prevailing religion in the area since the 8th century C.E. Customs which prescribed the roles of women, men and families were disrupted with no regard for the fabric of Afghan life that had existed before. At the time of the Soviet invasion, most of Afghanistan's—estimates vary from 75-90%--lived in rural villages. Subsistence agriculture—combinations of crops and livestock—was the prevalent economic pattern, with a few nomadic pastoralists whose journeys inevitably included market exchange—often in the form of barter—as they passed by or through villages (Barfield 2010). The Soviets' creation of collective farms and industrial groups included massive relocations and disruptions of the rhythms of family life and traditional lifestyles in rural Afghanistan. The rise of insurgent fighters—the *mujahideen*—drew many other Afghans away from their homes and families, disrupting life further with their absences but also with deaths of fathers, husbands, and sons. These disruptions left families--in which the role of fathers, husbands, sons, and brothers were powerful and critical—without the resources to support the many widows and orphans who would normally have depended on traditional family networks (Magnus and Naby 2002; Rashid 2001; Ewans 2002).

Soviets, whose society was built around the state's role as provider of those services, had not been able to conduct war and build a Soviet-style society at the same time, so many women were left without the protection of either their families or the state. The attempted secularization of a society deeply embedded with the role of Islam in social, family, and community life particularly rankled and violated customs that apparently had existed in the area for centuries. Women's roles had already been

changing during Zaher Shah's reign, but also during his successor Daoud Khan's presidency. Though the Soviets had backed the coup that ended Daoud's government, they actually promoted women's rights to work and to be educated more forcefully. Such policies, however, apparently altered the customary balance of power in families where gendered division labor was underpinned by tradition and religious ideologies. Islam was threaded through the daily lives of Afghans—particularly rural Afghans—and even if only the requirement to pray five times a day at specified times had been undermined or prohibited, that would have been disruptive enough. Afghanistan's rural population was estimated variously at 70-80% of the whole Afghan population—mostly living in villages and small towns which practiced low-technology agriculture. Relocation for meeting Soviet labor plans was inherently disruptive (Barfield 2010; Ewans 2002; Magnus and Naby; Moghadam 2002, 2004; Rashid 2000; Dupree 1984, 1990).

At the same time, while Afghan women were being oppressed as Afghans and being deprived of the men who anchored aspects of their community and family lives, the Soviets' lack of regard for traditional values also meant that women were required to be educated and employed, opening up other possibilities (Moghadam 2004). There was also universally available health care, which, according to at least one woman consulted during this study, lasted a few years past the departure of the Soviets. An acquaintance who did not participate in the study--Qamar-- put it this way: "In Najibullah time, we had health care. We had education--free."

The *mujaheddin*—who were (not so) secretly funded by the United States, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Pakistan--consisted of groups constituted along ethnic, geographic, historical, and ideological lines and those lines changed throughout the conflict. The

predominantly Pashtun Taliban, constituted a group which believed in a more stringent form of Deobandist Islam with rules that—in the minds of the Taliban—would bring back something like the earlier Muslim caliphates. There were also different ethnic constituencies like the Tajik leader Ahmed Shah Masood’s fighters in the Panjshir Valley (Rashid 2000; Tanner 2002).

Many of them had fought each other in the past, though they came together to resist Soviet occupation. In the wake of the Soviet invasion of 1979, word spread throughout the Muslim world that there was a *jihad*--a holy struggle to defend the faith--occurring in Afghanistan against a godless invader. Thousands of Muslims from places as close as Pakistan and as far away as Indonesia and North Africa found their way to Afghanistan to join the *jihad* (among them Osama bin Laden) (Ahady 1998; Jones 2002; Rashid 2000; Tanner 2002).

During the Soviet era, Pakistan’s border provinces saw the beginning of a new kind of *madrasa* that has had long-term implications for the region politically and religiously.

The Pakistani Madrasas. These Pakistani *madrasas* were Islamic schools for boys that were reportedly funded by the Pakistani and Saudi governments to provide Sunni resistance to influence by the Iranian Shiite state as well as anticommunist fighters. They succeeded in both endeavors, but *madrasas* also became repositories for orphaned boys and for boys from Afghan families who could not afford to take care of them. In many of these *madrasas*, they were taught a black-and-white view of the world and a stringent form of Islam which held, among other things, that women should be segregated from men and should be required to veil--which the Taliban took to mean the wearing of

head-to-toe *burqas*. (Rashid 2000; Lamb 2002; Jones 2002) It was not the first time in Afghan history that there had been an effort to work out societal issues on the bodies of women, but it has left a lasting mark on Afghan society which, as noted earlier, was headed in another direction.

The young students in the Taliban who took over the Kabul government in 1996 appear in retrospect to have viewed women through a lens derived from their *madrasa* upbringing. Many of them had been sent to the *madrasas* at a very young age by poor families or widowed mothers who lacked the resources to raise them. Raised on a narrowly interpreted version of Islam which treated women as profane and as threats to moral order, they were divorced from the traditional matrix of extended family life that informed Afghan culture. Without the daily family life that would bring them into contact with mothers, sisters, aunts, or grandmothers, they had little experience or understanding of women to counteract or nuance what they were taught. They were dependent on their teachers for interpretations of females, and they were frequently taught to see women as lesser, even subhuman, entities which must be disciplined and subordinated. Their very specific notions about women included ideas about how Afghan women--and all Muslim women—should comport themselves (Lamb 2002; Rashid 2000).

The Soviets withdrew their troops in 1989. The withdrawal was marked by efforts to portray the Afghan public as grateful: one woman, who was ten years old at the time, told me that Afghans were required to line the streets and throw roses at the tanks driving past them. Following the Soviet withdrawal, a civil war broke out between the very leaders who had united to fight the occupation. While the Soviet occupation had

undermined many cultural standards of Afghan societies—in part by moving large groups of people around the country to meet labor needs but without regard for their own histories and attachments to where they had been living--the civil war was responsible for tremendous destruction of whole villages and cities. Neighborhoods in the capital Kabul were reduced to rubble. Afghan infrastructure—which had never been strong because most Afghans tended to resist centralized government—was gutted along with the visible structures of buildings, communities, and neighborhoods on the landscape. Women, girls and young boys were victimized in multiple ways by warlord-led gangs who raped and pillaged seemingly at will. Interethnic strife was exacerbated. At the same time that the Balkan Wars were receiving media attention in the United States for their brutality, massacres, and violence against women, violence of the same order was occurring in Afghanistan with little attention in the American media (Tanner 2002; Lamb 2002; Rashid 2000).

From the Soviet Withdrawal through the Taliban Regime. With the withdrawal of Soviet troops, the existing government lasted only a few years and with that decline, Afghanistan fell into chaos. Competing interests—largely framed in terms of competing ethnic groups and tribal groups within ethnic groups—led to a civil war in which the majority ethnic groups and their leaders fought each other, then sometimes allied to fight other leaders. It was during this time that the word “warlord” began to be popularly used in the West to apply to leaders like Ismail Khan, Gulbaddin Hekmatyar and Ahmed Shah Massoud. For nearly seven years after the Soviets began withdrawing, the country appears to have been ungovernable. While there were nominal leaders in charge, the feuding between the leaders of various political, ethnic, and tribal alliances created such

chaos that more Afghans flowed across the borders into Pakistan and Iran, especially, seeking to escape.

1996-2001 Taliban Regime. The onset of the Taliban regime inspired yet another wave of Afghans leaving Afghanistan. Afghanistan's economy had been destroyed by years of war and its concomitant devastations of infrastructure and societal norms. More important, the loss of so many men from their families left many women without husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons—sometimes without any men at all. The Taliban took control of the government at a time when the populace was tired of the continuing chaos of war and particularly weary of the excesses of many of the leaders—generally called warlords in the Western media. The rigorous ideals of the Taliban were, at first, apparently welcomed for these reasons. It appears that only after they began to enact somewhat more stringent Islamic laws, regulations and rules that Afghans began to chafe. The Taliban followed their own version the Deobandi school of Islam and Deobandism—like Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia—advocate that Muslims “. . .cleanse themselves of infidel ways, such as those exemplified by the European imperialist colonizers” (Ansary 2012:121).

Most Afghans—an estimated 80% (Dupree 1980) have historically practiced Islam following the less conservative Hanafi school—one of four sects of Sunni Islam—and there appears to have been considerable dislike of the Taliban's interpretation of Islam even among more traditional practitioners of Deobandism. Rashid observes that the Taliban arose largely from the beliefs of mullahs in Pakistani *madrasas* whose background and education did not reflect the scholarly traditions of Deobandism as it was

conceived in India. In the hands of the Taliban, it apparently became an amalgam of Deobandi Islam and *pashtunwali* (Ansary 2012; Dupree 1980; Rashid 2000).

This, combined with the Taliban government's regulations, meant that women who did not have the requisite *mahram* available to accompany them, were unable to go out in public to buy food and other essentials, much less go to work outside the home. Many women in this study and their families fled to nearby countries like Pakistan and Iran, as well as to more distant places like Russia, Europe, and North America. Other women stayed, responding to Taliban strictures by making work in their homes—taking in laundry and sewing, holding forbidden schools, or baking bread to sell, for example. “Had we not done this,” said one woman, “we would have been in the streets begging” (Lamb 2002). Women who had lost their male heads of household and lacked the resources to hold schools in their homes or fund home-based businesses were *zanane bee sarparast*-- “unprotected women”-- having no men on whom to depend. (Pont 2001; Lamb 2002)

Christina Lamb's *Sewing Circles of Herat* documents in Herat secret schools for girls that were disguised as “sewing circles.” Herat, the home of Queen Gowhar Shad, had been a liberal city with a long history of literary culture, and with many poets. In this city of high culture, the notion that women should be uneducated was, according to Lamb, unacceptable. Women formed sewing circles--the only form of activity for which the Taliban would allow them to go out and meet outside their homes. Hiding notebooks under the pleats of their *burqas*, they met where they could. (Lamb 2002:156-160) Ironically, it was their very seclusion and the Taliban's prohibition against reading, among other forms of entertainment and learning that drove some women to other

forbidden acts—like wearing makeup--which were more easily enabled by the all-enclosing *burqa*.

Some authors argue that—far from being victims—women who resisted were taking an active part in setting the foundation for a future Afghanistan. The underground schools and community organizations would, writes Elaheh Rostami-Povey, empower women, leaving them feeling more capable and functional. Such empowerment would become social capital for the post-Taliban era. (Rostami-Povey 2003) Because women were not allowed to work, they were not allowed to teach, and girls’ schools were closed. Literacy statistics had traditionally been lower for Afghan women than for Afghan men (and for all Afghans lower than for most of the rest of the world), but, during the Taliban regime, they dropped even lower. In her 2004 article⁷, “The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same,” Benazeer Roshan describes the continuing difficulties faced by women after the fall of the Taliban government. Among other issues, she reports figures from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) that indicate Afghan women’s nearly 80% rate of illiteracy was the third highest in the world (Roshan 2004 [2013]).

However, none of the travails of Afghan women or the Afghan population at large were sufficient to motivate the world’s attention in any way that was more than perfunctory. Prior to the September 11, 2001 attacks, the United States had been moving toward some rapprochement with the Taliban government, though there had been attacks specifically on Al Qaeda training facilities. There were observations in the media of the restrictions imposed on women. On television, the *burqa* became fodder for a few

⁷ Republished in 2013 under the same title in *Berkeley Journal of Gender, Law and Justice*.

television shows—a family drama called *Seventh Heaven*, for example—and after September 11, 2001 comedian Bill Maher could be seen railing against the “beekeeper suits” Afghan women had been required to wear.

September 11, 2001 and Beyond. On September 11, 2001, the United States was attacked by four planes—three of which found their targets and one of which was forced into the ground. Less than a month later, the U.S. and other NATO troops invaded Afghanistan and began a war which, as of this writing in 2014, continues (U.S. troops are scheduled to leave by the end of 2014). Though none of the nineteen men who flew the planes were Afghan (one was Egyptian, one was Lebanese, two were from the United Arab Emirates and fifteen were Saudi Arabian) (9/11 Commission report), the Taliban government had provided refuge to Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda after they were forced to leave Sudan in the mid-1990s (Rashid 2000; Tanner 2007).

In the years since 2001, Afghanistan has been invaded by the U.S. and other NATO troops as well as troops from nonNATO countries like South Korea. While women’s circumstances changed—less required veiling, more available education and employment—it is also true that the West’s lengthy involvement in Afghanistan has created a backlash and, at the time of this writing, outside Kabul and even in Kabul to some degree, women must cover. It is not the law which requires it, but custom enforced by serious consequences. For example, in the film *Afghan Star*, which follows a season of Afghanistan’s version of “American Idol,” the slip of a head scarf off the head of one

of the female performers led to condemnation—including a few death threats against her and against the producer of the show (Marking et. al. 2010).

These and other reasons have created conditions in Afghanistan that continue to push Afghans to consider leaving and, for many of the women in this study there was a pull encouraging migration to Canada.

A Brief History of Canadian Immigration and Refugee Issues

Canada has become a nation known for its multicultural identity and acceptance of refugees and immigrants. By comparison, in the United States, there is considerable discord over immigrants who come from Central and South America. In the United States, words like “illegal” and “undocumented” have acquired meanings far beyond the actual words—“webs of significance” (Geertz 1973)—which include ideas of worthiness, fairness, corruption and much more. In this discourse, so-called economic migrants become opportunists rather than refugees fleeing the increasing structural inequalities imposed on them by national and international economic systems which privilege the global market economy. So penetrating are the attached ideologies that they attach not only to “legal” immigrants but also to people with Hispanic or Latino heritage whose families have been in the United States for generations. They also throw into relief the experiences of immigrants who leave their country of origin for “worthy” reasons like escaping war, disaster, or persecution. Though Canada has a reputation for being more diverse (by percentage of the whole population) and more accepting of difference, it has had and continues to have its own variable relationship with regimes of worthiness. In any case, the dawning awareness in the West of the suffering in Afghanistan—especially

in the wake of September 11—has created Afghans as “worthy” refugees and immigrants.

In part, it was its increasing embrace of its own version of multiculturalism that led Canadian immigration policies to the point at which Afghans were given refuge. Canadian-Afghan relationships had some special history which will be discussed later in this chapter, but Canadian policies with regard to immigration overall are part of the story of how Afghans came to the Vancouver area.

Canada is a settler society, which is to say that the native populations live within the borders of a society which is populated by colonizers and later post-colonial⁸ immigrants from other parts of the world—most notably western Europe and particularly Great Britain and France—who settled in what is now Canada during the 17th, 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, creating their own government which subordinated native needs to those of the settlers. The United States and Canada became the two most popular destinations for immigrants and refugees and Canada, though it has around 10% of the U.S.’s numbers in population, has in recent decades accepted a much higher ratio of refugees. Only Australia has accepted a higher ratio of refugees and only recently.

Chapter II covers in some detail the circumstances of Afghans in the Vancouver area, but a few lines historicizing their arrivals might be useful here. The first Afghan reported to have come to Vancouver was an Afghan engineer named Inyatullah Nasery, whose work in the Yukon eventually brought him to Vancouver, where he decided to settle his family in 1974, opening the first Afghan restaurant in Canada—the Afghan

⁸ Using the word ‘post-colonial’ is always tricky because in many ways, the contemporary globalized world and global market economy suggest that colonialism is not “post” at all, but merely transformed. However, in this statement, I am referring to the fact that the initial period of colonization of North America by Western European settlers is over.

Horseman. Afghan Horseman is one of the tourist attractions in the Granville Island area, which includes many shops and other restaurants.

However, the majority of Afghans in the Vancouver area arrived in four waves of migration after the 1978 Soviet coup. The first wave began with the coup and ended with the Soviet withdrawal in 1989; the second wave occurred in the seven years of civil war after their withdrawal; the third wave came about in 1996 when the Taliban took over the government in Kabul and continued until around 2001; and the fourth wave began when the U.S./NATO-led powers invaded Afghanistan in 2001 and continues. Canadian immigration policies changed somewhat and Afghans were no longer granted immigration rights and refugee status as readily as they once were, so smaller numbers of Afghans have been gaining entry since 2001 (SAH Conference 2009). More about this history will be included in Chapter II.

Methodology

Any time-limited project leaves its researcher with the sense of how much more could or should have been done had there been more time, money or other resources and that is certainly true with this project. I set out to accomplish a small project which would focus on women who could exemplify and/or illuminate issues regarding identity, gender and mobility in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural population.⁹The primary

⁹ In the course of the project, there were many obstacles—some of which are discussed in the paragraphs that follow—but one major difficulty had to do with the basic management of the immense flow of information and notes. Repeated problems with computers as well as the intrusion of health and family issues nagged my writing at the end of the process, but there were two enormous losses just at the end of my eighteen months of field work.

I had saved emails pertaining to my research—anything between a research participant and me and the emails from several listservs—to analyze when I began to write. Anxious to back them up (they were stored on my email server) as well as free space on my email account, I began to back them up on my computer's Microsoft Outlook files. Once I had the mirror Outlook file, I deleted all of the files on the

methodologies used were participant observation and interviewing with some archival research in the form of library and internet searches and time spent going through records at various locations. Most of my work was done in four settings—a settlement agency, a church refugee committee, an interfaith refugee committee, and one of a number of organizations which raised funds and generated projects to help women in Afghanistan-- but I did not study any of these institutions as organizations in themselves. They were primarily tools for finding Afghans—which turned out to be somewhat more challenging than I anticipated it would be—and for observing individual helping relationships more closely.

While my research put me in contact with a group of women at a specific settlement organization, this study population is not a discrete group of women found in one setting. The process of identifying, recruiting, and engaging people for this study was in the end quite challenging and took me down paths different from those I had imagined when I designed the study. Initial plans to use snowball sampling worked—sort of—but by no means did each referral or suggestion result in a distinct subject who would sit down with me for a few hours of interviewing and then allow me to wander around with her family. Human Subjects Compliance protocols required a complex consent process

email server. To my horror, they vanished from the Outlook file as well, never to be found again, though I consulted with the University's computer help office.

In addition, two file boxes of notes—in small notebooks and on small pieces of paper—vanished during the moving process back to the United States. They would be legible to no one but me, but they contained a large percentage of the field notes that I had scribbled in tiny notebooks, but also—when I ran out of room—on bits of paper and cardboard (anything in reach), napkins, envelopes, notebook paper, and so forth. These were the notes I took when I returned to the car and wanted to catch the memories fresh and while some of them had been reconstructed and entered into my field journal notes, the majority remained to be finished after I returned from the field.

I was able to find many things by backtracking through other notes and my calendar, but the loss to the ultimate project was incalculable.

which, in the end, tended to aggravate existing difficulties in making connections with Afghan women. There were the ordinary difficulties of “cold calling” and finding ways to find people, but also, as an American, my country’s history of meddling in the region (Afghanistan, yes, but also Iran and Pakistan) did not lend itself to easy rapport. Thus, it took quite a bit of time to begin building relationships in which at least some Afghans could discern my intentions and interest. The word a number of women used was “honest.” While I was certainly honest, it seems to me in retrospect that what they were commenting on was the fact that I was open about myself and my feelings. Fieldwork conducted over a long period of time makes it hard to be anything else, I found.

There were also other factors which made recruitment difficult. Connecting with different groups—even discovering what groups there were—was consistently a challenge because the formal name of a group was often called something else informally—an Afghan Women’s Group at Crossroads which included an hour of English but which was mostly a support group—might be referred to by the women in the group as English class. Moreover, there were difficulties in translating not just language but intention. Early in my research, I was invited to a meeting of women which was held at a local community center. I had contacted the woman who invited me—Palwasha—through the Afghan Women’s Network office in Toronto and contacted her to contact me. I met Palwasha—a trim woman with mid-length hair that was very attractively styled and dressed in a classic woman’s suit—and sat with her during the meeting. The meeting was conducted mostly in Dari, and though I could grasp some of the discussion, I depended most of the time on Palwasha to translate.

Perhaps forty or fifty women sat along tables arranged in a large u-shape around the room. The meeting was opened by Sabia and Hamasa then chaired much of the meeting. Setara stood up to recite some poetry. Discussions ranged over community issues and upcoming events as well as the importance of finding resources such as funding for programs. The specifics generally eluded me because fluency with Dari still eluded me.

More important in terms of methodological considerations, I had come to observe and had not prepared anything to say and the meeting was held in Dari, so, when Palwasha leaned over and asked me if I wanted to say anything, I said no, I hadn't really prepared anything to say. It was a fundamental error on my part. In my mind, I saw this as the first of many potential observations, but I was to realize later that this was—as were many other moments—an important chance to announce my project and solicit participants. Even more important, it was an opportunity to demonstrate interest in and commitment to the Afghan women my identified subjects—Afghan women—in terms that were meaningful to the women in that room. Too late, I realized that my discomfort with “marketing” my project interfered with the task of building a cohort. While I dislike imposing the language of business and commerce on this process, in fact, what I needed to do was very much what sales people have to do—cold calls, advertising/marketing my “product” and at these tasks I generally failed for several months.

It was not that I would have found any interested participants in that particular group, but more people would have known something about me and that, along with the building familiarity I had with some Afghans, would have ultimately contributed to familiarity with more and more members of the community and that would have, in most

cases, increased at least some trust in my motives. As it was, I was told by at least a couple of people that some Afghans suspected that I worked with CIA—an agency for which I would have been an extremely unlikely candidate, but, reflecting on the experience of Afghans with American power projected through CIA, I could understand why the belief persisted.

In the end, I could not build any kind of statistically representative sample, but I was able to deeply connect with a group of 41 Afghans., primarily but not exclusively women. The population of this study is heavily weighted toward women who are older—old enough to have grown children and even grandchildren. While I had interviews and conversations with a few men, overall, there was only one usable, intact interview with a man. Formal sit-down interviews were difficult to obtain in general, and particularly difficult to obtain from men—who often worked two or more jobs as well as volunteering for various activities within the community--though there is always the possibility that I did not try hard enough.

Study Population

Four potential cohorts for this project were identified: 1) Afghan women, 2) Afghan men, 3) nonAfghan women who had also been refugees, and 4) individuals who worked with Afghans through various agencies—e.g., settlement agencies--and organizations (for example, church refugee groups). While a study of all these organizations would certainly be valuable, again, that was not my aim in including the cohort of agency/organization workers. They were included as individuals to examine some of the commonalities of their perceptions, perspectives, and influences regarding “refugees.”

The Settings

As I have noted, it took time to find Afghans who were willing to meet with me. In the first seven months of the study, I made cold calls—in person, on the phone, and on reference from someone who knew an Afghan. Though I was spending time in a few places where Afghans worked (restaurants, for example), however willing people might have been to be interviewed, there often was not time because women and men that I met in these settings were working and raising their children and lacked the time to sit down and talk.

However, combinations of internet searching, cold calling and word of mouth had led me by early summer to a group which raised funds to support women in Afghanistan among whose members were a few Afghan women. By mid-summer, I had discovered a few church refugee committees which had either worked directly with Afghans or helped other refugee committees, and by fall, after contacting a woman with whom I had spoken several years before, I was able to connect with a support group for Afghan women (and a few Iranian women) at a local settlement agency. In addition, over time, I made a number of contacts, acquaintances and friends who were not associated with any of the organizations that helped me make more sense of the settings in which Afghan women lived and functioned. Over the course of the study, I had four settings for participant observation, a group of Afghan women in a settlement agency support group, a church refugee committee, a group of women who raised funds for women in Afghanistan, and an interfaith group of church refugee committees.

Setting 1. Settlement agency: Crossroads. More than one settlement agency had services that focused on the needs of Afghan women, but it was at Crossroads that I

found the group with which I eventually spent the most time. The support group for Afghan women met weekly from 10:00 am to noon, with many of the women staying afterward to share lunch or snacks and time together. An hour of the time was given to English lessons and, initially, I was given permission to visit and observe the group which, over time, came to include a few Iranians as well. When their erstwhile English teacher had to leave, I asked if I could replace him and they agreed. From that point on until I left the field nine months later, almost every Thursday, I spent the better part of my day with the women in the group.

Setting 2. Church Refugee Committee: Faith Congregation of Vancouver (FCV). A number of churches in Canada have refugee committees which help with various aspects of newcomer life for refugees, from sponsoring them to helping them find housing, organizations to assist them, medical care, household goods, and so forth. Much of what they do is funded through their respective church organizations, but also through fund raising in various ways.

Faith Congregation of Vancouver was a relatively liberal congregation with several church committees—one of which was a refugee committee that had worked with a number of people from countries in both Eastern and Western Africa, the Middle East, South East Asia.¹⁰

Most of the members of the committee were women, almost all were Anglo- or European-descended Canadians and most were over fifty. Some of the most active members were in their seventies. In addition, there were younger members of the

¹⁰ I am being intentionally vague here because at least one refugee committee that I know of unintentionally caused difficulty for a refugee they had helped when the government in his country of origin discovered where he was, which resulted in difficulties when he returned for a visit.

committee like Nora who taught school and was, with her partner, raising two sons. Then there was Alicia, who had grown up in the prairie province of Saskatchewan, who now lived with her husband in nearby Richmond. Lindsay--a librarian in her late forties who had raised two children in a small, cozy house in a neighborhood whose view of the Fraser River suggested that the modest-looking homes were perhaps not so modestly priced—told me that she was “in training” to be a member of the committee. Working full time left little time for committee activities which included fund-raising by various means.

I joined the committee in summer 2008 and over the course of a year, participated in various activities including committee meetings where organized their activities. One such activity was helping prepare the monthly lunches served after Sunday church—the proceeds of which went to the committee’s coffers—as well as a raffle, sales of a cookbook full of international recipes as well as recipes contributed by members of the committee and from some of the refugees who had been helped. I also helped one Afghan recipient of the committee’s help as she prepared a monthly lunch for the congregation—the purpose of which was to raise money to repay the government for her transportation to Canada.

The exact membership of the committee was unclear, but during the time I joined it, numbers seemed to fluctuate somewhere between 10 and 20, with some younger members of the congregation joining in the months before I left. There was a core group of about ten who showed up for most monthly committee meetings

Setting 3. Group helping women in Afghanistan: Women's Network for Afghan Women (WNAW). WNAW was a group of women—mostly Anglo- and Europe-descended women with a few Afghan women—that raised money to fund projects in Afghanistan—including donations to schools and supplies for girls. Monthly meetings were held—mostly--at one member's apartment. Few members (five or six) appeared to come to those meetings and, at least during the time that I was there, there was never more than one or two Afghan women at the meetings and sometimes none. Apart from monthly meetings, the major project in which I participated included a table at an annual Christmas fair held at a local historic manor. A number of nonprofit groups had tables at the event and WNAW had a wide array of goods from or about Afghanistan, from jewelry to books to clothing and knickknacks.

Setting 4. Interfaith Committee. In addition, working with the FCV refugee committee led to an opportunity to understand refugee issues even further when a group of church refugee committees came together in 2009 to help bring several Palestinian families out of a refugee camp in Syria. These were Palestinians who had fled Iraq as circumstances deteriorated there and taken refuge in eastern Syria near the Syria-Iraq border. At the time, there was concern that they were going to lose that place of refuge and, together these committees organized an effort to bring some of the families to the Vancouver area as part of a larger effort among a number of organizations in Canada.

Disguising Identity

Confidentiality was an ongoing concern because it became apparent to me over time that I needed to be more sensitive to how small the world of the Afghan community could be both in the Vancouver area and within the larger international social field of

Afghans. Many Afghans knew about other Afghans' business. Therefore, almost everyone has been given a pseudonym unless they specifically, asked me to use their real names. In addition, in a few cases, I have taken the extra step of dividing some stories over more than one name so that it would be hard for a fellow Afghan in the Vancouver area to discern the name of the person whose experiences I might be describing. I did this not because I thought anything bad would happen, but because I gradually came to understand that, in addition to the many other gazes which were trained on Afghans in the Vancouver metropolitan area, it was sometimes the gaze of their fellow Afghans which was most problematic.

Afghans live with a certain degree of surveillance on many fronts. Any group of people that emerges from a setting in which so much conflict and factionalizing has taken place will arrive in the receiving country with at least some antipathies intact. While the conflict doesn't necessarily rise to the level of violence that existed in the country of origin, it is nevertheless problematic for many individuals to have their private activities and thoughts exposed to their fellow migrant countrymen/women. In addition, comments by many Afghans suggested to me that there was abundant surveillance of various kinds (other than official). Immigrants are subjected to the gaze of their fellow immigrants as well as the official and nonofficial gazes of the metropolitan area, province and federal agencies. For Diaspora Afghans everywhere, there are additional gazes to be concerned about because their role in the story of September 11, 2001 has made them targets of suspicion and it is assumed by most Afghans that governments—particularly the United States government—are surveilling them in various ways. Additionally, countries

adjacent to Afghanistan—Iran was mentioned in particular—are believed to be engaged in combinations of surveillance of Iranians, but also of Afghans who have family in Iran.

For these reasons and out of a wish to be abundantly cautious, not only have I used pseudonyms for individuals, I sometimes created more than one pseudonym for one individual's experience if I believed that creating too complete a picture of that individual would cost her anonymity. This means that, in some cases, I have lost the richness of one narrative thread seen through one person's life and I experience this as a loss because there are moments when this dissertation feels more journalistic than ethnographic. Nevertheless, I thought it was more important to protect identity in some situations.

For pseudonyms, I chose names from a list of Afghan names compiled from books I had read as well as an online list of names. This is important to clarify because I chose these names without any clear understanding of what they might indicate to other Afghans. So, if certain names are more common to Tajiks or Hazzara than Pashtuns, I would not necessarily have been aware of it. In addition, because I was not studying the organizations themselves, I have given most of the organizations pseudonyms or attempted to disguise the actual organization where possible.

Participant Observation and Interviewing

I conducted participant observation in the four settings previously mentioned. Overall, 92 people served either as participants in the study or as informal consultants. Of these, 41 were Afghans—36 women and 5 men¹¹. Sixteen were nonAfghan women

¹¹ The number of men is a bit misleading because I draw information from casual conversations with many men, but only 5 participated directly in the project and even those were –something missing here

who had been refugees and 25 (also nonAfghan) worked or volunteered at various organizations that worked with refugees and/or Afghans.

Seven Afghan women-- Setara, Rukhshana, Nayaab, Sabia, Najma, Roena, and Roya—and one man—Emad—were able to sit down for a formal face-to-face interview with recorder and/or notepad. Thirty-three other Afghans conversed with me casually in public settings like Nawrooz concerts, meetings, restaurants and other events. For that reason, once I had consent, I developed an interviewing “technique” that could be conducted on the fly as I ran into people casually or at various events or just while we were talking. Many of the questions on my questionnaire were the kinds of questions I would ask in ordinary conversation—“Where did you grow up?” “Where do you like to shop for clothes?” and so on—especially between women. Therefore, I was able to find a lot of information informally for which I was going to use the more formal sit-down interview. In the end, I only attempted to use the full questionnaire for those who agreed to a formal interview. For other women, I used the on-the-fly technique. This second group of Afghan women and men were often willing to tell me about themselves in casual conversations in settings like the ones noted above.

Yet, consent was an ongoing concern. Though I had labored to produce a human subjects compliance protocol which was passed with very few revisions, I had also created an overformal consent form which, I was to find, made little sense to the people I wanted to study. From their point of view a conversation-by-conversation consent process or a look at the final product was more reasonable. So, while I dutifully explained the various ramifications of consent to one person after another in order to comply with my own commitments to the university, I also took the added step of asking,

after various conversations and sometimes during them, “Is it all right if I use this in my research?” Usually the answer was yes; sometimes the answer was no despite initial consent and I began to realize that the process of researching and producing a dissertation was too strange to explain to all but those who had done graduate work themselves. Often, the answer would be conditional—e.g., “Yes, but not the first part about Mohammed and Aziza” or “You can talk about this conversation, but not about my life and my family.”

Another problem arose in relation to longer-term participation with people who had not clearly understood—even with the consent form—what I was doing with all this information.

Pakiza and I are sitting in her large living room—I on a comfortable sofa and she in an armchair. Over the last several months, we have discussed her journey from Afghanistan, her family, her various experiences since she moved to Canada and we are yet again talking about her life, the journey out of Afghanistan, and the difficulties she has had finding regular work that pays enough to support her large family. We are also talking about marriage and family--it is a constant source of interest for some Afghans that I have never married and have no children—when she breaks into something I am saying: “I don’t want you to talk about my family in your book.” (From field notes)

I was stunned. Pakiza’s story was to be a central narrative thread and I thought she understood that. It encompassed all the elements I wished to discuss in this dissertation and there was the larger story of her family’s tenacity in pursuing refuge in the Vancouver area. At the time, I experienced a sense of devastation. I had been building a narrative thread around Pakiza and her family, for it highlighted not only a methodological but a substantive issue with the research.

Pakiza’s departure from the project was the first of many instances in which I found out later that someone did not understand just what I was doing. It was hard for

me to explain adequately the nature of the research and the academic discipline for which it was being conducted. Thus, I began to realize that some women were not clearly aware of how their information was going to be used. For example, one day—after many conversations that I planned to use in my dissertation—as we were traveling to another woman’s home together, Qudsia asked me “So what is it you are writing about?” Qudsia had read and signed a consent form, she was smart and literate, and it had never occurred to me that she might not understand what we had been discussing.

In terms of methodological issues, I had to remove the details of her life from the study because further discussion revealed that she did not realize that I was planning to use our conversations. I am allowed to describe our conversations, but not the contexts in which they occur when those contexts reveal her identity. This is a bargain which I had to make more than once—conditional participation, i.e., conditioned on my keeping confidential the identity of the individuals. I made it gladly, but, in terms of issues relating to the substance of this dissertation, this situation illustrates some of the issues of communicating from a society that is steeped in overwritten legal documents to people from a society that is steeped in centuries of oral tradition. This was clarified for me by Roena, who participated in the study and this is discussed in Chapter V.

In the end, I managed the ethics of consent for people who did not ever agree to a formal sit-down interview with a multiply layered combination of

- providing a copy of the consent form and initial verbal explanation of consent, then
- repeated questions about whether I could use what was said in my research,
- limiting my use of conversations to those that occurred in public settings where privacy would not be expected,

- using pseudonyms even to the point of dividing some people’s observations across more than one pseudonym,
- and, ultimately, dropping many people from the research cohort when it became clear that it was not clear to them how it would be used and I felt that it would put them at risk socially in ways that I could not foresee.

This last item may seem as if I substituted my own judgment for that of the women in question, and I suppose that is true, but I learned early that a lot of information that I assumed would be neutral in fact had meaning that I had not considered. At dinner with Afghan friends, I casually mentioned that I had an appointment to observe a session with an immigration lawyer—just mentioned—and the hostess immediately guessed whose case I was observing, though I had mentioned no names or particulars. Fortunately, the hostess was a good friend of the “subjects” in question and fortunately, this happened early in my work because I learned to keep even such minor observations to myself after that.

Learning the Language

Interviews (structured and unstructured) were conducted in a variety of situations and locations either in English or Dari—Afghan Farsi. Afghans speak with different accents, different kinds of slang, and use a form of Farsi which is different from the more commonly taught Iranian Farsi (Persian). Though I can speak enough Dari to talk about a few limited issues, I never mastered any real fluency with Dari while I was in the field and so was often dependent on interpretation or at least clarification by other people in the room. In the end, my failure with Dari turned out to be helpful for my research in ways that I might not have anticipated—which I will discuss later below—but it was

certainly a failure of the standard to which our discipline holds us. Ideally, this frees the anthropologist-researcher from dealing with an intermediary. Information can come from the research subjects unmitigated by an interpreter's views, biases or confusion.

However, without real mastery of a language, trying to catch everything becomes difficult because so much effort is expended attempting to hear and understand the words that don't yet come easily that other observations are lost. In addition, it can be common even for lifelong speakers of Dari to throw in Pashto words—which I did not anticipate—and I had difficulty understanding through accents, slang, and contractions. Even if I thought I could understand a lot of what was being said, I used interpreters most of the time—whether it was casual interpretation by someone else sitting in the room or a formal interpreter. I originally lined up a few Afghan women to be my interpreters but found that several of the women I interviewed preferred to be interpreted by someone outside the Afghan community, which meant that interpretation sometimes occurred with the help of an Iranian, which sometimes (though not always) created other issues. Early in my field year, one woman complained that when she first arrived in the Vancouver metropolitan area, agencies (governmental and non-governmental) and organizations tended to use Iranians to interpret for Afghans, though Afghan Farsi and Iranian Farsi can be very different and some Afghans complained privately that when agency personnel used Iranians for interpretation, they couldn't understand what they were saying. In one group that worked with me—a mixed group of Afghan and Iranian women—both Afghans and Iranians told me that, though they all spoke Farsi, it could be very *mushkil*—difficult-- to understand each other through different accents, vocabularies, grammar and usage. Afghan Farsi—Dari-tended to be more formal, I was told. 'How are

you’--“Chetoor asti” for Afghans—is contracted to “Chetoori” for Iranians, for example. Vocabulary differences could be problematic—‘chair’ in Persian was ‘*sandali*,’ ‘*chawki*’ in Dari. When I used the word *sandali* in conversation to mean ‘chair,’ my friend Maimuna looked very puzzled and then burst out laughing when I explained what I was trying to say before she corrected me and explained to me that in Afghanistan, *sandali* was a kind of warm bench that people sat around with a blanket covering them and keeping in the heat.

For the neophyte anthropologist going into the field, it is hard to know which connections will bear fruit and how those connections will arise. In the end, my Dari proved insufficient for lengthy discussions, so, where an interviewee did not speak English well enough, I used an interpreter¹². Often, interpreters were nearby friends or family, though I did hire someone when interviewing required it. Interestingly, when I did hire someone formally to interpret for me, the Afghan women I consulted preferred not to use a fellow Afghan but, in each case, chose an Iranian.

An unforeseen positive outcome of my struggles with Dari was that it seemed to create a bond between many of the women I consulted and me. I think this emerged largely because of their kindness and willingness to accept me, but also because we were engaged in parallel struggles. I was quite open about my difficulties—which helped me understand theirs. In addition, I was able to use my language-learning process as part of my English-teaching process—for example, making sentences in Dari, bringing them to class and then asking students to speak them back to me in English. I do not

¹² Following the standard of most multilingual agencies in the Vancouver area, I use the word ‘translation’ to mean translation of written communication and the word ‘interpret’ to mean translation of spoken communication.

recommend it as a strategy, but in general, while my language-learning—so prized as part of preparation for the field work experience—was not a success, it paradoxically improved my ability to relate to the women I taught, their ability to relate to me and contributed to deep affection and fondness on both sides which continues.¹³

In their research among African immigrants in Washington, D.C., Wilson and Habecker derived a sample primarily “drawn from personal contacts and networking, so the results are not necessarily representative.” (Wilson and Habecker 2008: 439) I could make the same statement about working with Afghans in the Vancouver metropolitan area; I found that making connections with Afghans was quite difficult initially. There are many logical reasons for this—not least that I am an American and, at the time of my field work, my country’s military was making war in Afghanistan—a fact which was not universally regarded positively by the Afghans I met. There was also—understandably-- a persisting rumor that I worked for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) which would drift back to me periodically. Examination of the history of CIA involvement in Afghanistan and in its neighbors Iran and Pakistan makes the persistence of this rumor understandable. In Iran, the 1953 coup that ousted a democratically elected leader named Mossadegh and installed the Shah on what became known as the “Peacock” throne is now known to have been engineered by the CIA. Pakistan’s role as intermediary for the disbursement of CIA funds to the *mujahedin* fighting the Soviets was seriously problematic (i.e., numerous disbursements did not reach Afghan leaders) (Coll 2005; Rashid 2000, 2008). In Afghanistan itself, presence of CIA officers at different times as

¹³ It has occurred to me in the two years since leaving the field that, had I gone into the field speaking Dari from the start, my effort to learn Dari would have been appreciated, but it—for some—it would also have contributed to suspicion about me because it would have signaled the kind of preparation that is normally undergone by CIA operatives.

covert operatives and as visible advisors or participants led to a suspicion by many that the American CIA—like the everpresent KGB during Soviet involvement in Afghan affairs—was behind any sustained interest in Afghans.

I could never tell how seriously anyone took such an assertion, but one friend assured me that a number of people suspected me. In terms of initiating and engaging the research, this was, however, a problem until I finally made contact with a group of women who came to know me better. While they might have entertained private notions about me in relation to the CIA, the issue never surfaced in our day-to-day interactions and they were endlessly polite and caring.

However, all this is background to a historical reality which informed the situation for Afghans in general. History informs cultural norms and values—books like O’Neill’s *Disciplined Hearts* and Dossa’s *Politics and Poetics of Migration* attest to this reality—and Afghans as a people and a nation have been tossed about quite a bit by various historical trajectories. It is understandable that they might—particularly after the faithlessness of the United States and the rest of the world after the Soviet invasion—find it difficult to trust.

One of the first comments made to me by Najma when she was a prospective participant was “People are always coming in and doing these projects that make money for them. Why don’t they give all the money to the people who really need it?”—in this case, meaning Afghans. I pointed out, a little indignantly, that though I had some grant money, the large majority of my project was funded out of my own pocket and she softened a little bit, but over time I have come to see her point. Certainly, my Ph.D. is a profit of a kind from this research, and whatever else befalls this research—whether it

molders in digital oblivion or finds a publisher and a market—if the community does not receive some benefit, I become another user of people who have been used enough. This dissertation is researched, written and edited with the understanding that I am on notice—when the work is finished, I have a debt to the community and particularly to the women who helped me glimpse pieces of their lives.

Positionality of Researcher

No matter how “scientific” cultural anthropologists have attempted to be, it is an inescapable reality that our ethnographies about other people will reveal to the reader as much about us—if only through the subjects on which we choose to focus. My own background as a white, middle-class woman in her sixties—a baby boomer—who carried within her familial and cultural histories of Orientalizing people who were categorized as “Other” certainly informed what I would categorize as a colonized perspective. “Other” was a category which ranged from Native Americans and Hispanics and African Americans in the United States to any people categorized as nonwhite anywhere else in the world and even some who were categorized as white. Many white boomers were taught not to be overtly racist—to be “tolerant” and “accepting.” However, to learn cultural anthropology in the beginning decades of the 21st century is to be importuned to recognize that racism and its companions—ethnic prejudice, Orientalism, and remnants of a colonizer’s mind—are more complex than such solutions would suggest. So, as part of my training in cultural anthropology I began a project to interrogate and unravel my own Orientalism. It is a lifelong project for most of those of us who grow up white—even more specifically white Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs)—in America because most of us have little understanding of the real dimensions of racism or Orientalism, so I

do not contend that I am fully decolonized, only that I have made considerable headway in the de-Orientalization and decolonization of my perceptions and ideological perspectives. That process informs my choice of subject in part.

The choice of the Vancouver metropolitan area deserves some explanation as well. Most American cultural anthropologists dream of working abroad in some exotic (to them) location. Canada is, of course, another country and thereby defined as “abroad,” but Afghanistan certainly would have been such a location for me and there are indeed colleagues who are doing or have recently done their research in Afghanistan— notably Noah Coburn, whose book *Bazar Politics* was published in fall 2011, as well as Melissa Ker Chiovenda of Brown University and Andrea Chiovenda of Boston University. However, while I have had a longstanding interest in doing research in Afghanistan, it was a visit to British Columbia that persuaded me to focus on Afghans outside Afghanistan. Rostami-Povey has noted that Afghan women who live in the Diaspora have different roles in the West than they have in countries closer to Afghanistan. In Iran and Pakistan, according to Rostami-Povey, they apparently are better able to address certain women’s issues, but in the United States and the U.K., she finds, they tend to find themselves in the role of mediating their identities as Muslims and Afghans (Rostami-Povey 2007). September 11, 2001 happened as I was preparing to vacation in British Columbia. Normally, I bypassed the Vancouver area in favor of the back country to the north of Vancouver, but the local Vancouver papers carried brief interviews with a member of the Afghan community, which was enduring negative attention as the association between Al Qaeda and the Taliban government. The negative attention seemed less toxic than that which occurred in Eugene, Oregon—home of the

University of Oregon. A number of Muslim women in the Eugene area reported that for several weeks, those women who veiled hid in their homes because of the negative attention that they received when they went out in public. This was an ironic flip of the mirror in relation to women in Taliban Afghanistan who had not been allowed to go outside without veiling for five years. Occurring as it did in one of the most politically liberal/progressive communities in Oregon—if not the most liberal—this was surprising. What, I wondered, had life been like for Afghan women—almost all Muslim—in the Vancouver area?

In the following chapters, I explore this question and related questions, beginning with the background contexts for this research in Chapter II, a discussion of conceptualizing self and identity in Chapter III, explorations of class and an Afghan term *Mardom-dari* in Chapters IV and V, and an examination of what Leila Ahmed calls the “discourse of the veil” that I observed in the Afghan community.

CHAPTER II

THE VANCOUVER CONTEXT

“Har Kas-ra watan ash Kashmir ast”
“Everyone’s homeland is Kashmir to them”
Afghan proverb (Zellem 2011)

“It may not be your country, but it is your land.” (Anna)

Introduction

It is Afghan Cultural Heritage Day. Today, under a bright and sunny sky outside the Scandinavian Community Centre in Burnaby, B.C. I am visiting with Hamasa and Roya as they work in one of the many booths that are spread across one side of the lawn with items for sale. On the other side of the lawn, some fifty feet away, musicians on a soundstage play Afghan music to a bank of folding chairs filled mostly with Afghans. People come and go from the music venue and a number of people—mostly men in shirts and jackets—are standing around the edges of the audience talking. A few women in the audience have dressed in some form of traditional Afghan dress. The rest of audience would otherwise be indistinguishable from any other similar gathering in the Vancouver area but for the sound of rapidly spoken Dari everywhere. It blends the combination of open diversity and contained communities that I often saw during my field work. On the one hand, here is a group of Afghans celebrating their own heritage. On the other hand, they are doing it in a venue built for a group celebrating a very different nationality. On one hand, it is an event open to anyone. On the other hand, practically speaking, very few non Afghans appear to be attending. Is this multiculturalism? (From Field Notes)

A population with a large proportion of refugees and immigrants has contributed to the branding of Canada as a country known for its multicultural identity and compassion. A large population of refugees and immigrants has contributed to this branding of Canada as the land of diversity. Within Canada, Vancouver is one of the most diverse metropolitan areas in the world—indeed it is a place where being an immigrant or refugee appears to be largely normalized. Vancouver is diversity and diversity is Vancouver. But how does it feel for those who are the “diverse” individuals

who land there and attempt civic integration with the city? What kind of experiences do Afghans have in Vancouver when they arrive labelled as “refugees” and attempt to establish permanent lives and shed that identity? What kind of diversity exists within the Afghan immigrant population that continues to matter within their community? How has Canada’s particular version of multiculturalism affected Vancouver area social relationships and interactions among Afghans and between the Afghan population and others in the city? .

“Refugee” and the Vancouver Context

Afghans have migrated to Canada both as immigrants and refugees, but it is their role as refugees that often becomes a kind of added identity. In the UNHCR’s 1999 Statistical Overview of refugee populations worldwide, with an estimated 2,636,500 people fleeing Afghanistan, Afghanistan was the country of origin with the largest number of refugees in the world. In 2007, the number was reduced somewhat, but still above two million and still the largest number of refugees from any single country (UNHCR 2011) (Table 1).

Table 1. Origin of major refugee populations at the end of 2007.

Afghanistan	3,100,000
Iraq ¹⁴	2,300,000
Columbia	552,000
Sudan	523,000
Somalia	457,000
DR Congo	370,000
Burundi	376,000

(UNHCR 2008)

¹⁴ In 2007 Afghans and Iraqis accounted for half of the world’s refugees by the end of 2007.

The major receiving countries for Afghans have not been in Europe or North America, as is sometimes assumed. Pakistan and Iran have taken the largest number of refugees (USCRI 2007. *World Refugee Survey*. USCRI website: <http://www.refugees.org/>). However, Afghans are now living in Europe, North America, and Australia as well as Asia and the Middle East. The largest Afghan community outside of Afghanistan and its neighboring countries is in California, in the San Francisco Bay Area, but there are also Afghan communities in India, France, Australia, Germany, Britain, and in the United States, in New York, Los Angeles, the San Diego area, to name but a few locations.

“The Premiere Destination”: Diversity and Vancouver

When compared with other metropolitan Afghan communities in North America—Toronto, New York, and San Francisco, for example--the Vancouver area Afghan community is small. At around 4620 residents (according to the 2006 census) it comes to a less than one-tenth of the 48090 residents claiming Afghan ethnic origin in Canada (Table 2). The vast majority of Afghans living in Canada reside in one of the three major metropolitan areas—Toronto, Montreal, or Vancouver, with Toronto claiming nearly half at 23,230--and other Afghan communities in relatively smaller cities like Winnipeg and Alberta. Regardless of their official classifications, most of them began their journey to Canada as refugees—forced migrants. Except for those who arrive as refugee claimants/asylees (refugees who come to Canada and then apply for admission, which is different from the majority of refugees who apply from elsewhere),

almost all Vancouver area Afghans have arrived in Canada as landed immigrants¹⁵ (Citizenship and Immigration Canada website).

Table 2. Number of respondents claiming Afghan ethnic origin (Statistics Canada 2006 Census)

	#	%
Canada	48090	100.00%
Montreal MA	4945	10.28%
Toronto MA	23230	48.31%
Vancouver MA	4620	9.61%
TOTAL FOR ALL	32795	68.20%

(Statistics Canada 2006)

Being a refugee requires considerable navigation in the metropolitan area, largely because the primary effects of being a refugee happen not only in relation to the formal legal designation of “refugee” but because those effects are embedded within the ways that Afghan women are often categorized and treated by others. First, there appeared to be an occasional tendency in some settings to make decisions for some women rather than ask for their participation in decision making, as happened when there was a conflict for the Afghan women in the support group between our meeting and another meeting which had been arranged for them.

The women are upset, Tooba tells me. When I ask why, she tells me that in addition to coming to the support group where I teach English, they have been

¹⁵ I did meet one person living in Surrey who was in the process of applying for asylum at the border. Hers was a story that would have made a very illuminating addition to this dissertation, but submitting oneself to interviews and investigation by an anthropologist is not compatible with the process of submitting to interviews and investigation by the Canadian authorities for many reasons.

going to another group provided by [another settlement agency]. It is only a few weeks before the end of my field work and, it turns out, there is a conflict between the times for my group and the other meeting, which has been scheduled for almost the same time for several weeks to come. The affection—love is really the right word here—I feel for the women in this group is deep and I know it is returned by the majority of them. Part of the reason they are upset is that they felt as if they weren't included in the decision making, but many of them are upset because the meetings will intrude on the few remaining, precious times we will have together.

She just told them, says Tooba, that they had to be at those meetings; they agreed to it, but they didn't really understand that they had agreed to be there for the next six weeks.

Frances, the woman who ran the other group had put together a program filled with important safety and other kinds of information—all good information for the women in the group to have. She and I knew each other and she knew that I worked with this group of women every Tuesday. The women themselves did not tell me anything about this situation. Only Tooba, who did not go with them to the other meeting, was forthcoming. From what I can glean, it appears that the whole program was conceived, organized and decided without their active participation and then presented to them when all the planning was finished and the appointments set up. It was not unusual to see this pattern—where the service was provided without the participation of the target population. It seemed, after discussing this a little more with Tooba, that the women were upset because they thought they had agreed the program would be a good idea, but they did not quite realize that they had agreed to it. This was partly laid down to some problem with the interpreter whom Tooba thought the women did not understand well. This sometimes happened when Iranian immigrants were used as interpreters. There were a few Iranian women in the group that I taught and all the women in the group agreed—whether they were Iranian or Afghan—that it was sometimes difficult (*mushkil*) for Dari

speakers to understand people who spoke Persian and vice versa. However, I also noted that this was also often the case—that programs of one kind or another were put together and presented with little consultation of the women in question.

Second, I noted in some settings that Afghan women—but also other refugees—were sometimes treated as if information about their lives was a matter of public interest but without awareness of their extreme vulnerability to multiple kinds of surveillance. For example, in more than one setting information about an individual refugee or a family of refugees was shared casually. Early in my field work, when I was introduced to Khalida, who had just arrived, a member of the refugee sponsorship group which had helped her, sat down with me and began telling me about her (Khalida's) life and circumstances without asking Khalida first. Khalida spoke little English at that point, so she probably did not know that she was being discussed as she sat there at the same table. In another instance, I discovered that one refugee committee was in the habit—as some other church committees apparently were—of reporting the progress of refugees they had helped in a monthly newsletter that was published for the congregation to read.¹⁶ It was an important part of being accountable to the congregation for their activities and the age of mimeographs and photocopies. It would have been minimally intrusive in an earlier time but the explosion of possibilities for surveillance of all kinds made possible by the internet created vulnerabilities for unaware refugees who did not necessarily know their new lives were being reported proudly to church congregations.

¹⁶ This appeared to be a practice of other refugee committees as well, though not all discussed in such detail the personal stories of the refugees they had helped.

Late in my field work, I began to realize that the life of one woman whom I will call Husna was being openly discussed in one church's newsletter—how she had settled in, how she was finding ways to make money and how well her children were doing in school. These were things that family members might talk about or even brag about within the family or to family friends, but as much as a person being helped by such groups might appreciate the help, there was nevertheless a line crossed.

Such a line became apparent during my research on the internet, I routinely Google the names of the people I meet to learn more about the community. Most such searches come up empty, but, of course, any name that has appeared in a magazine or newspaper surfaces Husna had been interviewed and so part of her story was now public knowledge. However, another aspect emerged one day.

I met with committee members today to discuss Husna's situation. I found information from the newsletter on the internet with information about Husna that I think she does not want shared. But it was not the newsletter itself. The information was incorporated into the national organization for Faith Congregations and published as part of their report to the wider national congregation and beyond. The fact that it came up early in a casual search means it is easily accessible for surveillance by other countries. . . .

The committee did not completely realize how vulnerable Husna and her family were on several fronts—first, it did not apparently realize that the information would become part of the national organization's information.

Second, Afghans who had left Afghanistan through Pakistan or Iran often still had family there and Iran particularly—but also Pakistan—reportedly spied on Afghans who had lived in either one. I also noticed that it could be difficult for some Afghans to have information about their lives shared so casually outside the Afghan community because it highlighted to other Afghans their relationships outside the community. In the case of

those Afghans who had been helped to come to Canada by church committees, most Muslims would not criticize help from a church under the circumstances, but a small group apparently did. This could be harder on some women than others and could add to any other differences brought from Afghanistan. Furthermore, there was a discomfort among some women with being helped at all. The position of refugee is one in which stereotypes the identified refugee as permanently in need of help on many fronts, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

Third, the designation ‘refugee’ persisted as an attachment to Afghan women in, for example, in news reports and casual conversations with non-Afghans. It was also present in the names of some groups that worked with them—church “refugee” committees or the “Inland Refugee Society”, for example—but also in governmental regulations (“Immigration and Refugee Protection Act”) and related publications, as well as some news coverage. There was an ever-present attention to the simultaneous care and containment of those designated as refugees.

In coming to Vancouver, Afghans have joined a population which is now one of the most diverse metropolitan populations in the world. Of the seven most diverse cities in the world, Vancouver is listed as third with only Toronto (#1) and Miami (#2) superseding it. (New York, Los Angeles, Montreal and Sidney are the remaining four). With a percentage of nearly 40% foreign-born residents area-wide and two municipalities in the area that boast foreign-born residents over half their respective populations, the 2006 Census listed nearly 250 nationalities and ethnicities present. With Toronto and Montreal, it is one of the three largest metropolises in Canada (GVRD 2001; Hiebert 2005a and b).

The Vancouver area (Figure 2), has been called by some Afghans the “premiere” destination for refugees and immigrants.¹⁷ Partly, this had to do with landscape. In a metropolitan area intersected by the Fraser River and bordered on the north by the Coast Mountains, alluvial soils created productive farmlands which were supplanted by development in a setting that can be breathtakingly beautiful.



Figure 2. Greater Vancouver Regional District (Vancouver Metropolitan Area) (In-Vancouver Web Services. www.vancouver-bc.com)

In the winter of 2008-09, there were snow storms which left snow on the ground for weeks, supplanting the more common rainy winter days in the lower B.C. mainland, so that the clouds were more often lifted. On particularly sunny days, on several of my routes through the metropolitan area, stunning views could be seen of the mountains which hover to the north over Vancouver. While the downtown core had tall buildings in mall clusters, they did not achieve the canyon-like quality that emanate from New York skyscrapers. The entire metropolitan area had an open feeling, perhaps in part because it was possible to see so much of the surrounding geography. For many Afghans—

¹⁷ Except where immigration status (immigrant, landed immigrant, government-assisted refugee, refugee claimant, etc.) is explicitly discussed, immigration refers to migrant populations regardless of status.

especially Afghans who had lived in Kabul as most of the women in this study had, the nearby mountains evoke familiar kinds of landscape in Afghanistan. There was also, for many Afghans, a sense of acceptance that had to do with articulated ideals of multiculturalism. In addition, because the presence of Canadian troops in Afghanistan brought Afghanistan to the news fairly frequently, there seemed at the time to be a heightened interest in Afghans.

The alteration of Canadian identity which has been evolving over the last half-century now seems to be firmly in place. Canada now has a reputation as a globally multicultural country with a richly—intentionally—diverse population which augments these existing connections to potentially enhance its role in the world on several fronts. For example, its two largest non-European immigrant populations are Chinese and East Indian—two of the largest and fastest growing economies in the world. With a few exceptions—notably Fareed Zakaria—Canada’s particular version of diversity as an advantage is rarely observed in American media. On his Sunday morning television show, Zakaria has noted more than once that Canada’s diversity has benefitted its economy and improved its standing in the world (Zakaria 2012).

Daniel Hiebert of the Department of Geography at the University of British Columbia (2009:22) notes that the 2006 census shows that “nearly 42 percent of Vancouver’s population identified themselves as non-white” –that 41.7% of metropolitan Vancouver’s population derives from visible minority groups. Of these, West Asians—the region of the globe to which Afghans are assigned on the census--numbered 28,155 or 1.3 % (Hiebert 2009a: 23). Hiebert is one of a coterie of researchers who focus on the multicultural makeup of the Vancouver area. Much of what follows is derived from

research papers written by Hiebert, Kathy Sherrell and David Ley singly or with collaborators. Also, sometimes collaborating with each other, they have written for Metropolis BC (MBC), which is part of “the national Metropolis Project” which describes itself as an “international forum for research and policy on migration, diversity and changing cities.” MBC has co-directors at both University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University and provides frequent multidisciplinary fora and research papers regarding “immigration and integration affecting Canada and the Vancouver region.” (Metropolis BC www.metropolis.net).

The ethnic origin profile of the metropolitan area has changed substantially over the last forty years from immigrants whose countries of origin were predominantly (85%) from Europe to two primary sources of immigration—China and India—comprising nearly 50% of immigrants. When other Asian countries are included, the various regions of Asia from the Pacific Ocean to the Iranian border and from north India to Sri Lanka have become the primary source populations for the increasing Vancouver area immigrant population.

[N]early half (47 percent) of the Vancouver population aged 15 or over is foreign-born (first-generation immigrant). This statistic appears to defy common sense; one might think that the recent acceleration of immigration would be associated with Canadian-born adults, especially the elderly, and foreign-born children. But the opposite is true. The ratio of foreign-born in the adult population is actually greater than that for children (40 percent), many of whom were born in Canada to immigrant parents. In fact, over 20% of residents living in the metropolitan area identify themselves as second-generation immigrants on the 2006 census (Statistics Canada 2006). In other words, nearly 70 percent of Vancouver’s residents are either immigrants themselves or the children of immigrants. (Hiebert 2009: 20)

The Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) defines refugees and immigrants as follows: “A refugee is forced to flee for their [sic] lives. An immigrant chooses to move

to another country.” (CCR 2010) The reality is somewhat more complex. That an immigrant is one category and a refugee is definitionally another is a convenient fiction that allows countries to ignore the realities of the global market economy and the role that vast inequalities of wealth plays in pushing migrants from their countries of origin. The assumption is generally that an immigrant leaves her home country by choice with the intent of moving to Canada, applies to Canada to be accepted, and is granted admission on the basis of characteristics or circumstances defined by the Canadian government as desirable—from reunion of family members to labor-related needs.

Most of the Afghans in this study left Afghanistan under some degree of duress whether or not they were formally categorized as refugees. The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) –with field offices around the world—provides the gateway through which Afghans and other refugee populations must pass before being granted admission to Canada.

UNHCR convention rules define a refugee as a person who,
...owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.^[4]
(United Nations High Commission for Refugees. 2012: [Text of "Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees"](#).)

In 1967, UNHCR’s definition of refugee was expanded to include people who might fall outside the original definition yet faced similar consequences that prevented their safe return to their countries of origin. (UNHCR <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/refugees.htm> Retrieved 07 October 2011)

Many of the women I met had had to first become categorized through UNHCR as “convention refugees” before they could be admitted to Canada through the

regulations in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA). Others came to Canada as part of Citizenship and Immigration Canada's (CIC's) Family Class sponsorship. Family class sponsorship allows for sponsorship of other family members—children, spouses, parents, siblings, nieces and nephews and, in some cases, adopted children—who are eligible to be sponsored, assuming there is no other impediment.

Sponsorship involves committing to providing support for the individual or family for a specified period of time—usually a year—and there are multiple opportunities for being a sponsor. Some Afghans who already had relatives in Vancouver were able to come as family class sponsees. For example, two women in the study—Sabia and Setara—were sponsored by, respectively a brother and by daughters who had migrated to Canada earlier. Another woman—who served as a consultant but not specifically as a subject¹⁸—told me that was able to bring her son and his two daughters through family class sponsorship.

Other categories of sponsorship include:

Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs)—organizations (mostly religious) that sponsor refugees on a regular basis and generally work with CIC;

Constituent Groups (CGs)—which are often offshoots of SAHs;

Groups of Five (G5)—five or more Canadian citizens or permanent residents who guarantee support for a refugee;

¹⁸ As noted in the Methodology section of Chapter I, there were a number of women who did not specifically want to be subjects but who gave me permission to use parts of conversations.

Community Sponsors—usually organizations in the refugee’s target community of settlement, more restricted than SAHs, which are in the “business” of sponsoring refugees.

In addition, some refugees arrive in Canada under the Government Assistance Refugee Program--“GAR refugees”--in which the government covers the costs of migration, at least temporarily.

Citizenship has reportedly been somewhat easier to obtain in Canada than it is in the United States and information from both countries’ immigration websites generally gives the impression that it only takes a few months. However, in both countries, there are—as discussed earlier in this chapter—restrictions and other obstacles which must be surmounted and migrants from certain parts of the world face more daunting impediments to citizenship. It can take years in both countries for an applicant to be granted citizenship.

A refugee, once admitted, becomes a Permanent Resident (formerly called Landed Immigrant) who may become a citizen after certain conditions are met, including time elapsed living in Canada without leaving for more than 6 months. Canada allows dual citizenship and some Afghans have claimed citizenship. Nineteen hundred Vancouver area Afghans claimed Afghan citizenship in the 2006 census—1585 only Afghan citizenship and 320 multiple citizenship.¹⁹ Claiming Afghan citizenship is not always possible for Afghans who have no official records left of their citizenship in Afghanistan because war and crisis have wiped clear their official records—a common problem for refugees from regions with widespread warfare, but also common because

¹⁹ Census figures don’t always add up because figures are extrapolated from a sample population.

the circumstances of becoming a refugee do not always lend themselves to the careful retention and retrieval of such records. Moreover, some Afghans in this study noted that the centralized record-keeping that Canadians and Americans take for granted requires a centralized governmental bureaucracy and, as Moghadam notes, centralized government has generally been difficult for Afghans to obtain. (Moghadam 2004)

In the Vancouver area—and presumably in other parts of Canada as well—ideas of class are complicated by immigration status—whether one is an immigrant, a landed immigrant, a refugee, a government-sponsored refugee, a family-sponsored immigrant, sponsored by a sponsorship agreement holder, and so on. These relationships are explored in somewhat more detail in Chapter IV. Though most Afghans arrived in Canada as landed immigrants, it has been estimated that about 95% of Afghans living in the Vancouver area began their journey to Canada as refugees who then came as landed immigrants who had made their initial application from a third country (Private conversation 2008). Canada has taken one refugee for every three of its citizens; the U.S. has taken one for every five. Only Australia has a higher ratio of accepted refugee to number of citizens (Gunew 2004; Hiebert 2005a).

In a world where the presence of refugees marks the failure of a state to govern—to manage its own population well enough so that its denizens want to remain within its borders—even the creation of non-forced migrants hints at some kind of failure. Refugees—and sometimes even immigrants—become the symptoms of the pathology of that failure and discussions about “deterritorialization” and the diminishing power of the state ensue. Yet, this ignores a reality that becomes increasingly evident--states continue to have power in a number of ways, but perhaps the most power they employ is the

conceptual power of the state which, despite trafficking and illegal migration, is the unit around which transnational movements must still organize. Malkki notes, for example, that Hutu refugees, though they seized on their own power to define and categorize themselves—an approach which might seem extra-national—they in fact still positioned themselves in terms of the state. They were real Burundians, as more assimilated town refugees were not (Malkki 1995). Still, the physical reality of the state is implicit and explicit and the entity of that state and its identity—i.e., that there is some identity called “Burundian”—persist. For so-called illegal immigrants, the border and its associated spaces must still be recognized and planned for. For traffickers, the borders may in fact be the stimulus for transnational operations. Thus, even in their porosity, states remain the structure through which these transnational flows must navigate. Were states truly deterritorialized, there would be nothing around which to structure those flows.

States also have the power of definition and the regulatory power that creates, inhibits, or prevents access to certain benefits and privileges. Health care, for example, may be differently available for income groups, but also differently available to immigrants and refugees. In Canada, immigrants and refugees who are admitted as permanent residents have access to the medical health system that citizens use—though there are sometimes different limits on usage. In this way, Canada not only provides a state-sanctioned access to a state program, it reinforces with every encounter with the government medical bureaucracy the power of the state to define and recognize every participant. Moreover, Canadian health care is a system which was ultimately designed to protect the state itself by providing a baseline level of health in its population and thus avoiding some of the disruption caused in the United States, for example, of medical

bankruptcies and all that follows. It reduces disparities in well-being and thereby—in theory—increases the percentage of those living in Canada who can contribute to the economy.

Aretxaga observes that Foucault’s concept of “governmentality” suggests “the rise of a new kind of sovereign power from the eighteenth-century, one in which the power of the absolute sovereign was replaced by an array of practices and discourses aimed at the ordering and control of bodies and populations.” (Aretxaga 2003:399) States and societies create discourses which are deployed—even with the best of intentions—to discipline populations in areas as varied as health, corrections, sexual behavior, to name but a few. Contemporary discussions, for example, that focus on defining marriage and enshrining that definition in law—whether it is marriage solely between a man and a woman or an expansion of the definition of marriage to include gay and lesbian unions—are meant to embed certain values in the legal and normative frameworks of society (Foucault 1990).

The state is, ultimately, not only a physical reality but a discursive and subjective entity in which identity, normalized belief systems, and the many structures which support it exist, if only because there is a critical mass of people on the planet agreeing to—imagining—this ‘reality’ (Althusser 1971; Anderson 1983; Foucault 1991). For this reason, its centrality will persist, albeit in continually mutating form, for the foreseeable future. Its logic has been embedded in the global organizational mindset.

In transnational flows, disciplining of subjectivities must necessarily be multi-sited and multiply constructed. Citing Bourdieu, Appadurai envisioned

. . . a general change in the global conditions of life-worlds: put simply, where once improvisation was snatched out of the glacial undertow of habitus, habitus now has to be painstakingly reinforced in the face of life-worlds that are frequently in flux. (Appadurai 1996:55-56)

Thus, improvisation “no longer occurs within a relatively bounded set of thinkable postures but is always skidding and taking off, powered by the imagined vistas of mass-mediated master narratives.” (Appadurai 1996:55-56) If we assume the state to be one of those master narratives—albeit one that is changing with the times—then globalization is just another permutation of the system of nation-states to which we in the Western world are so accustomed. In any case, the state’s role in creating discursive realities that adapt to changes on the ground seems unassailable.

Some states (the former Soviet Union, for example, or Northern Korea) have responded to out-migration by creating more stringent regulations that contain an unwilling population. Other states create different coping strategies—one of which has been multiculturalism, or more appropriately multiculturalisms. The word “multiculturalism” has lost any definite meaning because it is deployed to define many different circumstances. People who use it seem to know what they mean, but meaning is complicated by the different ways the word is used. In settler societies like the U.S., Canada, Australia, and many Latin American countries—places whose governments were founded by immigrant populations, it connotes an acceptance of diversity. However, in societies—countries--which experience themselves as having an already distinct identity, multiculturalism tends to be more about exclusion than inclusion. Diversity becomes an unwanted intrusion into identities which are imagined to be historically discrete in countries like Germany—where Chancellor Angela Merkel described multiculturalism as an approach which “has failed, utterly failed” (Weaver 2010).

Canadian Multiculturalism

In the first decade of the 21st century, Canada claims a foreign-born population that is about 20% of its national population. Two cities in the Vancouver area-- Richmond and Surrey--have foreign-born populations exceeding 50%. Richmond's has a substantial Chinese-speaking population and Surrey's Sikh population is home to the largest Vaisakhi (New Year—celebrated usually in April) celebration in North America—the second largest outside of India. Accordingly, Surrey has been nicknamed “Curry” by some people in the Vancouver area.

Canadian multiculturalism—an aspect of a settler society in which diversity was a beginning point rather than one that arrived late—had its roots in the two colonizing populations from Britain and France and the ongoing struggle to build a country with both originating nationalities. Such a statement appears to ignore the role of First Nations in multiculturalism, but Canadian multiculturalism did not emerge in response to a desire to build relationships with First Nations. It did not emerge until the two colonizing populations decided to make peace with one another to reduce the squabbling between Francophone and Anglophone Canadians. The history of colonizers with First Nations is as fraught with invasion, betrayal and long-term damage to the people indigenous to what is now North America as is the history of the United States. It is a history which also includes efforts to erase tribal histories, languages, and ways of life that also included the removal of Native children from their families to boarding schools. The purpose of the Europeans was to colonize the land that had been occupied by its indigenous inhabitants, and even as the first intimations of Canadian multiculturalism

emerged, the inclusion of First Nations came late in the process, it almost looks as if it was an afterthought (Kymlicka 2007 and 2008; Thobani 2007).

The conflict over multiculturalism in Canada between French and British colonizers is extended through a lengthy national argument over bilingualism—ultimately settled in favor of having a bilingual country in form if not completely in substance. In practice, Quebec is the only province that has a majority population which speaks French as its first language, though there are minority populations in other provinces where French dominates. However, government documents, elections, laws, policies and official conveyances have at least both French and English translations.

The official bilingualism has some interesting ramifications. Two thousand eight was an election year not only in the United States, but in Canada as well. Canada is governed by a parliamentary system and, during my field year, the 2008 elections took place. There were five candidates for Prime Minister—Liberal, Conservative, New Democratic Party, Green Party and Bloc Quebecois. Separate debates were held in English and in French—and while the English speakers mangled their French pronunciations a bit and the French speakers mangled their English pronunciations, all sides were nevertheless able to converse fluently. This is quite a contrast with the American presidential campaigns where another language is only invoked for gaining votes at rallies for Latinos, for example, and in 2004, John Kerry was even derided for being able to speak French.

Multiculturalism has had some unanticipated and ironic effects. The minority Francophone population, located mostly in Quebec, has on more than one occasion expressed a wish to secede from Canada. Even now, in the 21st century, there continue to

be Quebecois who would like to sever the relationship. In 1980 and 1995 referenda were held on partition. In 1980, the referendum was defeated by about 60% to 40% of votes. In 1995, the referendum was defeated again, but the vote was considerably closer—2,362,658 voting “no” versus 2,308,360 voting “yes.” Ironically, the margin may have come from what former Quebec Premier Jacques Parizeau called “ethnic minorities”—meaning immigrants. It is ironic because their very presence in Canada results from the arc of increasing diversity that began with the decision by the Anglophone majority to accommodate Francophone demands to create a bilingual country—which ultimately led to the experiment in multiculturalism that Canada still practices (Kymlicka 2007; CBC News Digital Archives 2009).

Out of its bilingual history, Canada has carved for itself a new identity. Faced with the repeated threats of secession and a continuing labor shortage caused in part by a “brain drain” to the United States and England, Canada passed the 1988 Multiculturalism Act and redefined itself as a state in search of diversity. This addressed not only labor issues, but it also provided the state with an opportunity to assert control over the trends in globalization that brought so many would-be Canadians to its door. New definitions and ideologies could be incorporated into the Canadian identity. (Kymlicka 2007) To be Canadian is now to be diverse—“multicultural”—and this allowed the state to decide what was and what is “culture.” Moreover, it was able to decide what then becomes a “legitimate” culture. Becoming a multicultural society which encouraged a hospitable climate for foreign-born residents who could fill some of the gaps created by a labor shortage was a creative approach which, overall, appears to contribute to Canada’s

economic, cultural, and international well-being. (Beach et. al. 2002; Gunew 2004; Kymlicka 2008)

The word “multiculturalism” is defined and valued differently depending on context. In Europe, Australia, Canada, the United States and a number of other countries “multiculturalism” designates the presence of diverse ethnic, national, or racial backgrounds, but it tends to mean something different in different settings. Kymlicka observes that European countries like France and Germany whose national identities are organized around specific historical and ethnic interpretations tend to deploy “multiculturalism” to enact exclusionary practices which isolate more recently immigrated populations like Algerians or other groups from France’s former colonies, though those populations might have been in France for generations. In Australia, multiculturalism tends to be about aboriginal as well as migrant issues. In the United States, multiculturalism has historically focused on issues relating to race, and though more recently it has become focused on immigrants from south of the U.S.-Mexico border, even that aspect of the discourse is racialized. In fact, discourses of multiculturalism almost universally include racialized ideas and identities, no matter how each country addresses diversity. (Gunew 2007; Kymlicka 2007)

Canada and the United States—respectively the second and first most popular destinations of refugees and immigrants—began as nations of immigrants and this seems to have shaped discourse around and approaches to multiculturalism as a concept mandating inclusion. The Canadian Multicultural Act of 1988, which mandates respect for cultural origins and practices among other things, has its roots in this attempt to reconcile diverging interests between the Anglo-Canadian and French-Canadian

populations. The factor which expanded Canada's approach to multiculturalism beyond biculturalism was the involvement of the Ukrainian community which saw an opportunity to make the issues that were being resolved between the Anglo- and French-Canadian communities applicable to a broader range of nationalities. (Kymlicka 2008)

An even more expanded diversity over the last few decades –i.e., expanded beyond European-descended populations to populations with arguably more different cultural heritages--has resulted primarily from an assertive effort to bring immigrant populations, regardless of immigration status, to Canada in order to address an increasing need for labor. The makeup of such populations—in terms of socioeconomic and educational backgrounds—may vary with needs perceived by the Canadian government for structuring its work force. For several years, the emphasis was on increasing population alone, but the last few years have seen an increasing emphasis on factors such as educational background and degree of fluency in either English or French. Other factors that affect the makeup of the population include the presence of existing groups—family members, community members and even non-affiliated sponsoring organizations.

Critics like Neil Bissoondath point out that multiculturalism encourages rather than discourages essentialism and this was certainly true from my observation. Canadians were fond of telling me “America is like a melting pot where everybody is supposed to blend in; Canada is more like a tossed salad where each ingredient stands out.” If the vivid flavor of each ingredient is equivalent to the vivid presence of diverse communities, ethnicities, and lifestyles, then that was certainly true in the Vancouver area. Social service agencies are key sites of the enactment of multiculturalism and in promoting the essentialization of Afghan women as life-long “refugees.”

Interface: Agency/Organization (AO) Workers and Afghan Women

Frequent interactions with social service agencies and organizations are often part of an Afghan woman's life when she has departed Afghanistan as a refugee. As part of my research, I worked not only with Afghan women but also with people in a few agencies and organizations that were working with Afghans or had worked with Afghans and other refugees. This aspect of the research could have been a dissertation itself. However, I did not study the organizations themselves. Instead, I looked at aspects of roles and relationships of individuals who worked with Afghan women to those women.

There were many agencies in the Vancouver area which ministered to the needs of refugees and immigrants. An early one was S.U.C.C.E.S.S. which was begun as a way to help the increasing numbers of Chinese-speaking immigrants learn enough cultural practices to enter and join Vancouver area social fields more successfully. In the 19th and earlier 20th centuries, Chinese immigrants had, as noted later in this chapter, been exposed to considerable social and legal discrimination, as had other groups like the Japanese. In the latter 20th century, the role of Chinese-speaking immigrants changed somewhat with immigrants who came to the Vancouver area as business travelers and then as business people who wanted to settle in the Vancouver area. Vancouver held many attractions—not least of which were the setting and climate, but also its location on the edge of the Pacific Rim. Early interactions with the population of mostly European-descended Vancouver area residents incurred some difficulties, such as the “monster houses” that Katharyne Mitchell documents in *Ungrounded Empires*, edited by Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini (Mitchell 1997)

Other agencies also developed in response to increasing immigration, and services grew around those agencies—help with finding housing, medical care, school, among other things. In addition, smaller groups like the church refugee committees with which I worked, provided sponsorship and other kinds of help similar to that of some agencies. In addition, there were groups that advocated for and helped Afghan women specifically. I became a volunteer in several of these settings, as noted in the Methodologies section of Chapter I—a church refugee committee, an interfaith group of refugee committees, an advocacy group and a settlement organization. All were nongovernmental organizations, though various aspects of their work involved—more or less—some involvement with government policies for immigrants and refugees.

Through participant observation—volunteering to teach English to a support group for Afghan and Iranian women, volunteering to help with fundraising for an advocacy group, and volunteering to help with multiple chores for a church refugee committee—and interviewing with people who worked for such agencies and organizations, I hoped to understand Afghan women through multiple lenses. Some things that emerged from this part of my research revealed interesting aspects of ways in which women were recognized as women refugees.

As part of understanding how women experienced themselves and how they were perceived by some of the agency and organization workers, I included a small rudimentary mapping exercise (See Appendix I. Maps). The exercise was intended to help me discover something about the relationship of identity and mobility to the politics of recognition in relation to agencies and organizations? How, I wondered, did the women imagine the possible range of their ability to explore the metropolitan area and

how did the workers imagine that range? The results are discussed further in Chapter IV in relation to how refugee identity is classed. For this chapter, it is enough to note that the potential range imagined by agency and organization (AO) workers was narrower than that of the Afghan women in the study. The map that Afghan women carried in their heads included a far wider range of exploitation of the metropolitan area than the maps that many people who worked with them imagined for refugee women.

To get some sense of how well women were able to navigate the metropolitan area, I asked the women to draw the maps they carried in their minds—their ‘imagined maps’—of the Vancouver area. In casual conversations about Afghan women and in many media representations of them, I noticed that essentialization of this kind of mobility of Afghan women (which is closer to reality in Afghanistan) is sometimes allotted to Afghan women who have settled in the West. Because popular discourse like news media tends to essentialize Afghan women in terms of their ability to move around in public space outside the home, I wanted to examine some aspect of this part of an Afghan woman’s identity. I wanted to understand how she recognized herself in relation to it and how others might see her. To analyze this I asked several Afghan women to draw maps of their “imagined” Vancouver area, encouraging them to put down as much detail as possible. I then asked people who worked with them to draw maps of the Vancouver area they “imagined” that Afghan women knew about. I was interested not only in how far the Afghan women’s activities physically took them in the Vancouver area, but also in how far their minds took them.

A few women were able to draw me something resembling a map, but for most, I had to rely on combinations of participant observation, interviews, and casual

conversation. Because some of the women were not map literate and because it was a harder question to answer than I realized, I sometimes had to fill out my own imagined map from their answers. From the women who did answer, I found that, when compared with maps drawn by some people who worked with Afghan women, there were distinct differences in the imagined range of Afghan women's exploitation of the Vancouver area.

The Afghan women who drew maps or who articulated to me how far they traveled in the metropolitan area indicated a much wider range of travel than that imagined for them by some of the people who worked with them. For example, Setara's idea of where she will go and where she has gone ranges all the way to Mission Ridge in the east, Whistler in the north, Vancouver Island in the west, and the border in the south. Yet, refugee support worker Alicia's perception of an Afghan woman's physical range of movement is confined to the block on which an Afghan woman lives. Another refugee helper, Rose, expressed the idea that Afghan women's activities are confined to the area of Vancouver where settlement and other immigrant service agencies are located.

The relatively more confined perspective of the AO personnel who work with Afghan women can be understood in relation to the limited nature of the interactions which are permitted with clients of some agencies. Regulations and ethical limits don't permit many of workers who help refugees to spend time just "hanging out" with them the way an anthropologist can. This was not the problem for all of the AO workers, however. At least one woman—Rose, who worked with an international aid agency—mentioned how much she had enjoyed being invited to Afghan homes.

Nevertheless, despite her more extensive interactions with Afghans, the map that Rose imagined for Afghan women did not anticipate the wider imagined geography of the women themselves. Further research might reveal whether or how this affects the options considered for clients by people who work in refugee helping agencies and organizations. It might perhaps drive a tendency to enable dependency in situations where women might do better when they can make choices for themselves. A perspective which believes that Afghan women have very limited mobility can contribute to the reinscription of the role of needy, victimized, permanent refugee that I discuss elsewhere in this dissertation.

What was, for the most part, missing in my various study populations was the public discourse of conflict over “illegal” immigration and the grumbling over “those people” who don’t fit in, whose customs aren’t “like ours” that populate public debates in the U.S. on immigration. This was perhaps related to the aforementioned percentage of foreign-born residents and their Canadian-born offspring which makes up an interest group that is more than half the population of the metropolitan area. It may also be related to the patterns of settlement in the Vancouver area.

Geography of the Vancouver Area Afghan Community

The term Vancouver metropolitan area is meant to signify what is variously referred to as a Census Metropolitan Area or, in local municipal parlance, the Greater Vancouver Regional District, which includes Vancouver itself and a series of communities listed near the beginning of this chapter. Most Afghans who have settled in British Columbia have settled in the Census Metropolitan Area, but there are small populations of Afghans who settled outside the designated metropolitan area, in

communities on Vancouver Island and in other parts of Lower Mainland BC. Those populations are very small and no Afghans are listed on the census for other parts of BC. (Hiebert and Sherrell 2009)

Afghans are dispersed throughout the Vancouver metropolitan area. In terms of other Afghan populations in Canada, it was the second largest Afghan community in Canada—superseded only by the Afghan community in Toronto. Of those who were born in Afghanistan, most arrived in the four waves of immigration described in Chapter I. The British Columbian Afghan population is largely found in the lower mainland, and specifically in the Vancouver metropolitan area. In the 2001 census, three cities—Burnaby, Surrey, and Vancouver, all part of the VCMA—had the largest numbers of Afghans between them. While Vancouver had the largest number, Burnaby was considered to be the heart of the Afghan population. In 2006, Burnaby still held that role, though Surrey had the largest Afghan population. In 2008-2009, when I was living in Surrey, Burnaby—particularly Edmonds Street—continued to be perceived by non-Afghans as the place where Afghans tended to be. This is no doubt related to the fact that the Afghan Women’s Sewing Cooperative is there and a large meeting hall owned by a member of the Afghan community is also there. Edmonds Street in particular has many ethnicities evident in its storefronts—African, Vietnamese, Arabic, Afghan, and so on—because this part of Burnaby, with its relatively low-cost housing has long been an area where newcomer populations and particularly refugees have been settled in their first months or years while they are living on government assistance. Dossa’s research focused predominantly on women living in subsidized housing in Burnaby.

TABLE 2. Census 2006 Numbers of Afghan by Cities with >25 Afghans

<u>City</u>	<u>2006</u>
Surrey	720
Burnaby	645
Coquitlam	530
Vancouver	515
Richmond	325
New Westminster	245
Port Coquitlam	145
Maple Ridge	55
Greater Vancouver*	40
North Vancouver	30
Abbotsford	30
Langley	25

*outside incorporated areas
(Statistics Canada 2006)²⁰

Heterolocalism and Settlement

In 1998, Zelinsky and Lee described “Heterolocalism: an Alternative Model of the Sociospatial Behaviour of Immigrant Ethnic Communities” as an alternative to prior discourses of assimilation and pluralism. These two discourses –but primarily the assimilationist discourse—have accounted for explanatory models regarding American immigration since the early 1900s. Zelinsky and Lee proposed to add a third explanatory model which does not so much supersede the other two but which acknowledged subsequent changes in the makeup, conduct, and settlement of immigrant populations in the United States. “Heterolocalism”, the term they coined, is defined by four “attributes”,

²⁰ Statistics Canada is a little problematic because it estimates, rounds figures, and extrapolates. In one table, for example, Afghans from 1st, 2nd, and 3rd generations were listed. The total was 10, but the entries in the three columns were each zero. No information was attached to the table that explained the disparity.

or characteristics—first, immediate dispersion of newly arrived immigrants throughout the host country; second, a spatial “disjuncture” between the location of the newcomer’s home and work; third, the development of an ethnic community despite the lack of “propinquity”; and fourth, that such occurrences are largely unique to the 20th [and by extension the 21st—they were, after all, writing in the late 1990s]. To these, they added a fifth possible attribute—that heterolocalism was visible in both metropolitan and rural areas.

The settlement pattern of Afghans in the Vancouver area changed in the time between the 2001 census and the 2006 census, with populations of Afghans increasing in Surrey and Coquitlam. Following Zelinsky’s prescription, Afghans have been moving in increasing numbers to New Westminster, Port Coquitlam, Coquitlam and other suburbs of Vancouver, even moving out into the Fraser Valley (Hardwick 2005; Zelinsky 1997).

Zelinsky and Lee’s first characteristic—immediate spatial dispersal—is complicated in the Vancouver context by several factors that are not directly a result of the choices that immigrants make for themselves. First, both immigrants and refugees are helped in finding their homes by a constellation of settlement organizations and other agencies and groups that provide resettlement services. Such resettlement often involves low-income housing either independently found or found through “B.C. housing”—which has units located throughout the metropolitan area.

The second characteristic—distance rather than nearness between home and work—certainly applies to Afghans who work. Rukhshana, who lives in Burnaby, commutes to downtown Vancouver. Mahria, who lives in Maple Ridge, commutes to Surrey to work at Sears. Roena commutes from North Vancouver to Vancouver. The

Vancouver area has a public transit system of rail and buses that covers much of the metropolitan area, if not all, and is continually expanding its routes into communities and neighborhoods farther from the Vancouver core. However, the multi-zone fare system complicates the ease of transportation by inserting an economic burden. To travel from my apartment in the Whalley neighborhood of Surrey to downtown Vancouver, I had to travel through three zones, which at the time cost me \$3.50/trip or \$139/month for a monthly pass. Housing costs and salary rates also affect the choice of home in relation to work. Housing was somewhat less expensive in communities like Surrey and Delta, but jobs with better salaries—while not exclusive to the urban core area—tended to cluster closer to Vancouver proper.

There is also spatial disjuncture between multiple jobs. For example, Sorosh works at Vancouver airport's Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) office, which is in Richmond near the southwestern part of Vancouver, for one job and to Burnaby for another, while he lives in Surrey. Hamid, who is an engineer, has family living in North Vancouver, lives in Vancouver himself, has jobs throughout the urban area—a school in Surrey, a building in Richmond—and additionally works at Ariana TV as a sportscaster.

Another feature of this spatial disjuncture is relative distance from shopping areas. In earlier models of assimilation, part of ethnic clustering was related to nearness of shopping areas, but Zelinsky and Lee find that, in the latter 20th century, technological changes had created conditions that allowed people to live farther from the shops they patronized. I found this to be commonly the case with the Afghan and Iranian women in the ESL group with which I worked. The women would commute from their homes in

Vancouver, Burnaby, Surrey, and Coquitlam to the class in Vancouver, and after class groups of women would go to Metrotown in Burnaby to shop or window shop.

The third characteristic, which Zelinsky and Lee call “community without propinquity” was apparent in the numbers of people attending community events like Nawrooz (Afghan New Year) and Eid celebrations, a spring picnic for the Afghan community held at a riverside park, or holiday prayers—for which a banquet hall might be rented.

The number of people attending such events was small—a few hundred—when compared with the size of the Afghan population noted in the 2006 census. On the other hand, work schedules, family obligations, social obligations outside the family and other demands on daily life would have had an impact. In the eighteen months of my stay in the Vancouver area, community gatherings for such events as Nawrooz or a fundraiser for Afghan widows and orphans took place in, for example, a community centre in Burnaby near Metrotown, in a park down by the Fraser River, in an elementary school cafeteria in Coquitlam, and in two banquet halls in Surrey.

Zelinsky and Lee’s fourth characteristic—that such changes from earlier enclave models rely on the technological changes of the late 20th century—is certainly applicable in the Vancouver area where the technologies of public transportation have been deployed to improve access to more parts of the metropolitan area.

The fifth attribute—dispersal beyond the metropolitan area into other parts of British Columbia is not evident, except for very small populations of Afghans on Vancouver Island and groups so small that they register very few on the census.

Other Selected Characteristics of the Vancouver Afghan Population

Identities, Ethnic Origins and Multiculturalism

While the categories of Canadian multicultural tend to homogenize Afghans and inscribe them as permanent refugees, there are important differences within the Afghan population.

Afghanistan has been, as has been noted earlier, a multiethnic society, with groups whose heritage goes back many centuries. Louis Dupree's *Afghanistan* (1980) is generally considered one of the primary ethnographic resources for anyone beginning research regarding Afghanistan. It includes history, geography, extensive archaeological discussion as well as a discussion of various lifeways and lists from around 20 ethnic or religious groups. Afghanistan is located geographically where Central Asia, South Asia, and West Asia come together, and different sources include it in different places. At least one source (Bowen and Early 1993) includes it in a collection of articles about the Middle East. The Canadian census includes immigrants with Afghan heritage along with Iranians, Turks, Azeris and Armenians as "West Asians" (Statistics Canada 2006).

Geographically, Afghanistan is situated in Central or South Asia, though I have seen it placed by sources in the Middle East by a book about the Muslim Middle East, as well as West Asia by the Canadian census, and in the subcontinent. However, its largest ethnic group—around 40%--is Pashtun (Barfield 2010). The 1947 partition which divided what had been India and East and West Pakistan the Pashtun population between Pakistan and Afghanistan. However, it could also be argued that its other populations—Tajiks, Hazara, Uzbeks, et. al.—are more ethnically related to Central Asia (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan) or West Asia (Iran) (Dupree 1980; Bowen and Early 1993, 2002). Pashtun,

Uzbeks, Tajiks, Kirghiz, Hazara, and an array of other ethnic groups all have roots both within and beyond contemporary Afghan borders. Dupree believed that there was no indigenous Afghan population. Customs may differ between ethnic groups and even within ethnic groups between family lines, regions or villages, but much of traditional Afghan life revolves around the family. Descent among Afghan ethnic groups has been almost always patrilineal and residence patrilocal though there are variations among ethnic groups regarding the details. Last names did not always change with marriage. Some women continued the custom of keeping the last names of their families of origin while their children took the names of their fathers. This did not seem to relate to ethnic, tribal or national background—there were Iranian women as well as Afghan women who kept their family names and married as well as widowed women who did so as well.

The politics of recognition—described by Charles Taylor in his article “Multiculturalism” (Taylor 1994)—and the Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988 create an increased emphasis on ethnic origin and the 2006 census provides breakdowns of ethnic origin—which are derived from regional ethnic similarities and/or propinquities—and more detailed breakdowns. There are some difficulties with the categories. First, ethnic origin is something of a misnomer. Of the 247 ethnicities listed on the census, well over half are nationalities. A more refined assessment of ethnicity for populations which have multiple ethnicities are missing. Afghans are categorized as one “ethnic origin” for the most part save for a very few who identify themselves as Pashtun—which could mean they have Afghan or Pakistani nationality.

Second, census tables show numbers of respondents who claimed a single “ethnic origin,” numbers of respondents who claimed multiple ethnic origins, and the combined

total of both. For purposes of this discussion, I used the combined total to talk about the Afghan community, primarily because it is easier to do so, but also because there is thus far a relatively small proportion of Afghan-identified respondents claiming multiple ethnic origins.

Third, the visible minorities category lumps certain nationalities together, though they do not necessarily have as much in common with each other as they might have with other nationalities. For example, “West Asian” populations contained immigrants from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, though Pakistan—despite being a Muslim country—is generally associated with South Asian/subcontinent populations in other lists and Turkey.

Ethnic origin is a critical aspect of identity in Canadian multiculturalism which to some degree privileges those nationalities with high numbers, high cultural profiles, or both. Taylor’s discussion of multiculturalism examines this critical aspect of identity--the “politics of recognition.” Put simply, the politics of recognition suggests that groups—in this case, visible minorities or ethnic groups—must be recognized in order to have validity in public and governmental discourse.

Of the 48,090 Afghans in Canada recorded by the 2006 census, 41,590 claimed one ethnicity—Afghan—while 6,500 claimed Afghan as one identity among multiple ethnicities. Ontario claims the largest number—31,295--with Quebec running a distant second--5,855 Afghans. The great majority of British Columbian residents who claim Afghan heritage live in the Vancouver metropolitan area—4,620 out of 4,730 in the province overall. The Afghan community seems very small when it is compared to other “visible minorities” in the Vancouver area. The largest visible minority populations are

the Chinese at around 402,000 and “East Indians” population at around 182,000, and British. According to the 2006 Census, the population of the VMA was 2,249,725. Yet, while the Afghan community itself is small, it is part of a larger minority—Muslims—which is growing in the VMA and the other major metropolitan areas of Canada. After Iranians and Pakistanis, it is the third largest Muslim nationality in the VMA—distinguishing it from Canada overall and from the two other large metropolises--where Lebanese outnumber even Iranians. However, this comparison is complicated by the fact that, though Lebanon’s population is predominantly—nearly 60%--Muslim, nearly 40% of Lebanese are Christian (CIA World Factbook 2010)

Such similarities and differences have implications for choices made by governmental (federal, provincial, regional, municipal) and non-governmental agencies regarding which groups will receive funding and other resources. For example, one source of work has been agencies—governmental and non-governmental—which work with refugees and immigrants. With the large numbers of Iranians and Afghans who migrated to Canada over the years, it was important to find speakers of Farsi. However, several women in this study reported that jobs for Farsi speakers tended to go to Iranians—even when they would be working primarily with Afghans, who speak a different form of Farsi.

Language

Most Afghans encountered during this project speak English to some degree—with younger Afghans and Afghans who have lived in English-speaking countries generally demonstrating stronger proficiency—even perfect fluency--than older Afghans or Afghans who have recently arrived. It is not uncommon for Afghans to be bilingual in

their country of origin. While the *lingua franca* in Afghanistan is Dari—a form of Farsi which is usually described as more classical (“like Shakespearean English,” I was told repeatedly) or more Arabized--the majority of Afghans I met could also speak at least some Pashto. Pashto is the original language of the Pashtun—generally acknowledged to be the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan. In addition many Vancouver area Afghans spoke Iranian Farsi, Urdu (Pakistan), or languages from one of the former Soviet Socialist Republics that border Afghanistan—Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. In addition, because a number of older Afghans had been educated in the Soviet Union and because the Soviet Union had occupied Afghanistan for ten years, several Afghans in this project also spoke Russian.

Most Afghans discussed in this study spoke—in addition to Dari and English—one or two other languages. In some cases, this had to do with having lived lives that took them abroad before they migrated to Canada. Sorosh, who had acquired a master’s degree in mechanical engineering in the Soviet Union, was certified to teach Russian, and had been cultural attaché in India before migrating to Canada, told me that he spoke Dari, Pashto, Hindi, Urdu, Russian and English. Qamar’s husband had been a diplomat stationed in Turkey, so she spoke Dari, Pashto, Iranian Farsi, and Turkish. Najma had attended the London School of Economics when she was young and later had lived for two years in India and also spoke Hindi and English as well as both kinds of Farsi.

Many Afghans also learned other languages in the journey from Afghanistan to Canada—which often included stays of varying lengths in other countries like Iran, Pakistan, Russia, and India. In addition to Dari, other languages that Afghans spoke included Arabic, French, German, Hindi, Russian, Turkish, and Urdu.

English Language Learning. “Me and Najma are going to take driving lessons together next week,” said Beheshta in response to a question of mine. My inner grammar police winced and I was faced with a dilemma. Should I tell her that the construction of that sentence—which has become normalized in casual speech—is ungrammatical? I was sure she would care because she prided herself on her previous employment as an educator. In Afghanistan, Beheshta was a teacher—as were so many Afghan women in this study. I decided to tell her and I pointed out that it should be “Najma and I are going to take driving lessons.” She did not answer and later, I noticed that she uses the ungrammatical construction as if I had never spoken.

In this incident, at least two strands collaborate to keep Beheshta rooted in the ungrammatical construction. The first is that in Dari, it is more usual to put the pronoun first. The second strand relates to English language teaching, which focuses on providing usable language skills that make newcomers functional on the “street”—i.e., in the circuits of ordinary life—rather than perfect grammar.

A corollary issue is that much English language learning is infused with teaching cultural values and behaviors that a newcomer might need to know from Canadian history and politics to the proper way to put garbage out on the street to how to properly greet another person. The point of learning Canadian politics and history is perhaps obvious, but the disposal of garbage and learning proper greetings are cultural issues that encompass, for example, Vancouver area environmentalist values, and proper greetings are necessary for finding jobs, meeting with teachers, and so many other interactions.

Religion

Afghanistan is now 99% Muslim. While there have been other religions—Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity in particular—in the last three decades, Afghan societies have become increasingly hostile to non-Muslim faiths—even those which are considered to be “people of the book” (i.e., the two other monotheistic faiths—Judaism and Christianity).

A minority of Afghans in Afghanistan (19%) are Shia Muslim. Most Afghans (~80%) practice Sunni Islam. The difference between the two emerged in the early centuries of Islam when the followers of Mohammed differed over whether or not the leaders of the still-young religion should be descended from Mohammed’s line or should be chosen from the *umma* (the Muslim community). The split between these two factions appears to have been quite traumatic—so much so that the term *fitna* which originally applied to that early sedition has come forward into contemporary times and now is used to characterize chaos and disorder of many kinds (Armstrong 2001; Pandolfo 1998). I discuss this more fully in Chapter VI.

Islam in Afghanistan has revolved largely around the village *masjid* (mosque), *mullah* (pastor), and *madrasas* (religious schools) which produced Qu’ranic scholars.

As an outsider to the Afghan community in Vancouver, I experienced Islam like a river running through the lives of many of the women I was studying and, while I did not often discuss the content of faith explicitly with the women, it was everywhere in the lives that were being lived in front of me. Islam is structured so that every day is filled with it for the believer. Five times a day (unless it is impossible for reasons of health or safety or some similar obstacle), a Muslim is required to stop whatever else she is doing

and pray. The way that prayer alone was threaded throughout the daily life of a Muslim kept women grounded in Islam hour by hour and ideals and practices of generosity and hospitality that I read as Afghan, were often attributed to Islam when I asked about them. For example, when I asked Tooba about different Afghan behaviors—kindness, politeness, and generosity—that I attributed to *Afghaniyat* (Afghanness), she invariably responded, “Yes, Christina jaan, that is Islam.”

Practice of Islam might have varied somewhat among Afghan Muslims in Vancouver, but there was a rootedness in faith that I thought I saw, symbolized in the presence of prayer, the absence of secular belief, and observance of the most fundamental dietary restrictions without apparent lapses. (I cannot stipulate the adherence to dietary proscriptions with absolute certainty because I was not with any particular woman for days on end. However, I never saw any evidence of pork or clearly pork products, alcohol or other *haram* (forbidden) substances. Only one woman admitted ever having been casual about eating pork or imbibing alcohol and she always presented it as past behavior—part of her careless youth: “I loved bacon and I smoked cigarettes.” Such comments were invariably delivered with a mischievous twinkle.)

Most—the overwhelming majority--Afghans in the Vancouver area are Muslim and most are Sunni or Shia. I also knew some Afghans who attended Sufi prayer meetings on Friday nights. There were also, reportedly, Afghans in the Ismaili congregation. There was a very small contingent of Afghan Christians. some of whom would not acknowledge their Christian faith openly because choosing Christianity is considered apostasy by many Muslims and Afghan Christians have experienced some prejudice and isolation—and even threats in at least once instance. There was also a

very small number that eschewed religion altogether, but this is also apostasy—while it is relatively easy to become Muslim (though perhaps not so easy to be accepted as a Muslim, depending on one’s background), once you are a Muslim, you are not supposed to leave Islam.

When Islam was discussed, it was often presented in relation to the importance of monotheism—“There is only one God”-- rather than as Islam itself. Islam would be discussed tangentially—most often in relation to some behavior that was right or wrong, as I describe in Chapter VI where the wearing or not wearing of *chador* (headscarf) was a source of open disagreement. The deeper content of belief was not a topic of conversation apart from such commentary or experience and so most of my assumptions about the content of faith among the women are drawn from observations of behaviors or actions rather than discussions. It was common on Fridays—when I was shopping at a local Afghan market--for the proprietor or the clerk to point to the clock and say, “Excuse me, I have to go to prayers.” When I taught a ten o’clock class in English language skills at one of the settlement houses, it was usual for many women to remain after the English portion of the meeting—to chat and eat lunch—but there were always two or three women who left for midday prayers. There were also a few women who would move to a corner of the room and kneel—or in one case, sit—quietly, praying, for a few moments before rejoining the rest of us. Some brought zippered, foldable prayer mats along for the purpose. On the occasional warm-weather picnic, large quilts and blankets were brought out and then even more women knelt down and prayed together.

Tooba—who had been to Mecca for Hajj—kept to prayers five times a day and almost always left the ESL group early so that she could attend midday prayers. Hediye

collected all five prayers into one prayer in the evening. Ziba and Khandan brought mats with them in zippered cases and laid them out in a corner of the room, kneeling to pray. Khandan, who could not kneel, sat in a chair, engaging in prostrations that were modified to accommodate her physical difficulties. Tabbasum would sit at the large table and pray quietly, moving her hands over her face and down to her lap and up again. Some other women continued chatting and socializing and took care of their praying later. *Dietary issues and mobility*. Islam has some regulations concerning food. While many regulations are related to the consumption or avoidance of pork and pork products, there are also some Muslims who follow stricter guidelines concerning, for example, slaughtering practices for meat and poultry. Food may be categorized as *halal* (permissible) or *haram* (forbidden) and there is a third category which was variously named *makroo/makruh* or *mushbooh*, depending on which source I found. Most Afghans used the word *makroo/makruh*, which falls somewhere between *halal* and *haram*—“disliked.”

For some Afghans in this study, finding suitable food products in the Vancouver area became more challenging. Many discussed the ban on pork as a rational dietary concern—not saying that Islam forbade it, but saying that it was not healthy, had too much fat and cholesterol. In fact, the leaner cuts of pork can have less cholesterol and fat than the beef chunks which are part of Qabeli pallow²¹ in many homes, so it seems likely that this was a justification for avoiding pork—not that any such justification is needed. Foods of all kinds are considered unacceptable in different cultural settings all over the

²¹ Among Afghans in this study, *Challow* was rice and *pallow* was rice flavored with spices and sometimes sugar, then topped with red raisins, candied carrot sticks, and pistachio nuts. Rice is a staple food for Afghans, served at almost every meal and good rice has a very specific fragrance, according to the women (and men) I asked.

world. However, there was some concern over how to avoid *haram* foods. Pork is not the only forbidden food, and there are also many products—gelatin is one--which may be made from *haram* ingredients.

Shopping at large supermarkets like Price Smart, SavOn, or Safeway, could be difficult for devout women and I observed that clerks (often non-Muslims) sometimes treated such concerns as little more than superstitions and for some women, this appeared to be a source of a little shame. One solution that we developed was a full list of ingredients (downloaded from a website for Muslims), noting which items were *haram* and which were *halal* and which were *makroo* or *mushbooh*—or uncertain, which could be taken to the supermarket on shopping day.

Such complications—which might be otherwise minor--tended to isolate devout women whose English skills were not strong because, while they could take their list with them to the supermarket and point to ingredients, reading the ingredient lists still took time and energy and many women ended up shopping in the more expensive small markets which provided *halal* products. A further complication came when it came time to choose a restaurant to go to for group celebrations. While many celebrations were undertaken with food brought from home and set up in the classroom, there were also times when the group wanted to go out and the choice of restaurant was generally dictated by the most restricted diets. So, the restaurants that were patronized were almost always establishments owned by Afghans or Iranians.²²

²² Though it should be noted that at least one Afghan restaurant now serves alcohol on its menu, which might make it less acceptable to some. On one planned outing, the women in the ELL group were considering Afghan restaurants in the area and the one Afghan restaurant that served alcohol was not even considered.

Ramadan. Some of the challenges Afghan women face are met by Muslims everywhere. The month of Ramadan—often pronounced ‘Ramzan’ by Afghans—brings with it many issues that Afghans must confront. While fasting is the activity most associated with Ramadan, in fact it is much more than that. To begin with, the act of fasting is not meant only as some abstemious, self-denying behavior. It is enacted as an opportunity to understand intimately what it is like to be hungry and to deny oneself such a basic necessity as food—ultimately to understand what it is like to be that poor. From sunrise to sunset—at times prescribed now by careful attention to local weather and daylight patterns, all healthy adult Muslims are required to refrain from eating or drinking—including water. Exceptions are made for the very young and the very old and for anyone with ailments which would be exacerbated by fasting, but all Muslims are still expected to abide by other tenets of Ramadan. These include heightened attention to other behaviors.

During Ramadan, an Afghan Muslim is ideally reflecting on his or her own spirituality, on maintaining good ethnical behavior, on treating other people with kindness and compassion, and on being generous and giving. Even less apparent behaviors are called into action. In one situation, I witnessed a woman and a man arguing over a financial matter. The woman did not believe what the man was telling her, and several times she invoked Ramadan “With the taste of Ramadan in your mouth, tell me what you have done with this money!”—implying that he was going to lie to her.

Most people politely declined to be interviewed during Ramadan, patiently explaining to me that Ramadan was not a good time. Complications of Ramadan in the Vancouver area are similar to complications for Muslims in most northern parts of the

world. Islam—which had its beginnings in the Middle East, an area closer to the Equator—requires fasting during the daylight hours and its calendar rotates through the year at a rate that is different from the Western Julian calendar. Sometimes Ramadan occurs in the fall, winter, or spring when daylight hours are relatively short. However, in late spring and early summer, when the days are longer, the length of time required for fasting can be as long as sixteen hours or more. In 2008, Ramadan occurred during the month of September. In 2010, Ramadan began in the middle of August.

Gender and Sexuality

The proportion of females to males in the Afghan population might be expected to be larger because widows are a large proportion of the Afghan population, but the census records very little difference between proportions of males to females in any of the three metropolitan areas where the largest Afghan populations are found. The ratio is about 1:1. According to census figures—which are derived from a 20% sample and rounded up or down, depending on the actual figure, the Afghan female population outnumbered the male population slightly, as it does in Montreal (Table 3).

Table 3. Gender breakdown for Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver

Metropolitan area	Male	Female
Montreal	2445	2500
Toronto	11615	11615
Vancouver	2300	2315

(Statistics Canada 2006)

I spent considerably more time with Afghan and Iranian women than men from any national origin and, as this study was not a representative statistical sample, I cannot evaluate how realistic the census estimates were. Given the high number of widows

remaining after the violence of the last thirty years, it is hard to imagine that the ratio of females to males would be so close. However, as I have noted elsewhere, Canadian immigration policy has sometimes privileged families and couples. It is difficult to determine the degree to which policies affected the gender demographics. The relative parity between male and female may reflect some factors that cannot be seen in the raw census figures. Immigration regulations varied by status, by era, and other conditions so that, for many years, a married woman with children could not migrate to Canada without her husband. This presented difficulties for women whose husbands might be, for example, unable to leave Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation. Additionally, the process of applying—already complicated enough—would be further complicated for a woman who began her application as part of a family with a husband and wife at its center but found herself widowed in the lengthy period that might ensue between application and consideration.

Gender Roles. Gender roles among Afghans vary—often in relation to levels of education and to class in Afghanistan. Afghanistan has been 80-95% rural (depending on which source one relies) for most of its history. Women have historically been responsible for home and family and—especially in rural Afghanistan—are often part of family subsistence enterprises whether they are in agricultural communities, pottery-making villages or pastoral groups (Coburn 2011; Dupree 1980; Pont 2001). While men, are responsible for assuring the family’s economic base, both men and women may work in the fields, depending on circumstances. Dupree, writing in the 1960s and ‘70s, and Pont, writing at the beginning of the 21st century about Taliban Afghanistan, both describe observing women working in the fields. Men have also traditionally been in

charge of the family's honor and its public face of respectable behavior as well as upholding community standards.

However, in the cities, women—particularly women from families of more prominent standing—often work outside the home even though they may still be responsible for the life of the family at home. Most older Afghan women that I observed had had jobs—careers—in Afghanistan. Many were teachers. One had managed dormitories at Kabul University—a not-inconsiderable job in a country which had historically secluded its women in many segments of society. Another had worked in the Ministry of Labor. Another had been an elementary school principal. Each of these women came from fairly well-to-do families from what we might call elite strata in society, with servants, nice homes and beautiful things.

In the Vancouver area, Afghans exhibit gendered division of labor, though the roles may range from circumstances in which the husband works and the wife manages the home life to circumstances where the wife works and the husband remains at home (though I generally observed this last option when the husband was chronically ill or retired). Overall, most of the young Afghan women I met worked in a job outside the home and most of the older Afghan women I met tended either to work in lower-paying jobs where they spoke Dari or Farsi most of the time or worked at home taking care of children and grandchildren. A relative few worked outside the home in jobs which required good English.

In October 2008, I attended a faire produced by a Canadian-Islamic group which promoted more understanding of Muslims. The faire was held in the middle of downtown Vancouver and open to everyone. There were a number of men dressed in the

long, white robes commonly seen in Saudi Arabia. A number of women were covered from head to toe with their faces showing. Other women wore headscarves and still other women wore neither, dressing in typical Western clothes like jeans and blouses.

Under a canopy over an information booth, there were several men—some in all-white shirt over pants and wearing *kaffiyehs*,²³ but also some in button-down white shirts and black pants. I approached one of the latter and extended my hand as I introduced myself. To my surprise, he recoiled, lifting his hands up to his shoulders. Assuming that he could not touch me because I was a woman, I murmured something about assuming that it should not be a problem because I was easily old enough to be his mother and possibly his grandmother. Very politely, he explained that it would still be inappropriate for him to touch me, that there were certain boundaries that he observed. I did not have this experience with any Afghan men that I met and I noticed that Afghans almost always shook hands on greeting each other—at meetings, at celebratory events, and in other public settings—male to male and female to male. Women meeting other women they did not know tended to shake hands, but within a very short time—at least in my experience—it became *de rigueur* to embrace, even kiss each other on the cheek, simultaneously smiling: “Salam, chetoor asti? Khub asti?” (Hello, how are you? Are you good [fine]?)” and then “Khub astum, tashakkor? Shoma chetoor?” (I’m well, thank you. How about you?)

Sexuality. For purposes of this dissertation, the categories of sex, gender or sexuality which are considered are heterosexual male and heterosexual female. Though Canada in general and the Vancouver area in particular have reputations for policies

²³ The black-and-white checkered headscarf made famous by Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat.

which accept other interpretations of sexuality, for most of the Afghans I encountered, this was a subject which could not be discussed. They were aware of lesbian and gay people, and, having had interactions with Indians when they lived in Afghanistan, some of them knew what hijras were, but beyond those labels, it was made clear to me that any formats outside heterosexual female or male were considered to be abnormal and *haram* (forbidden). Though Islam historically has had other sexual behaviors than heterosexual, at this time in history, they have acquired a negative connotation. At one point, there was an open event at the Simon Fraser University campus featuring Irshad Manji—a well-known critic of Islam who had grown up in a Muslim family and attended religious schools in the Vancouver area. I mentioned the event to a group of Afghan women and they were interested in attending until they discovered that she was a lesbian. Several faces in the room changed—faces that almost always smiled at me. “That is *haram* [forbidden]!” said one woman emphatically. Canada has passed legislation permitting same-sex marriage and the annual “Pride Parade” in Vancouver is a metropolitan celebration of diversities of gender and sexuality in which many gay and nongay residents of the area take great interest and pride. News anchors ride floats from different news channels, for example.

However, many older Afghans made it clear—more from the seriousness of their demeanors than by words—that a two-gender system with compulsory heterosexuality was not only the norm but the only option. The effects of strong opinions in the larger Muslim community were clear from responses—or, more accurately, lack thereof—to my efforts to contact lesbian and gay Muslims. At one point in my research, I attempted to connect with a local group of Muslim gays and lesbians, but the effort never bore fruit. I

was told by the person who returned my call that he would give my name and number to group members if any of them wanted to call me back, but no responses came. I had a number of non-Afghan friends and acquaintances in the Vancouver area who were gay or lesbian and fully out, so the contrast was striking, though certainly understandable given pronouncements about homosexuality that I heard among some Muslims and some Afghans in particular. It should also be mentioned that I also met Muslims who, while not particularly comfortable with homosexuality, made a point of expressing at least tolerance if not acceptance.

Marriage and Family

Among the Afghan women I met, most women appeared to have some variation of arranged marriage. No one reported having been forced to marry—which is often how nonAfghans and nonMuslims that I met tended to perceive arranged marriage. What I noticed was that marriage among these women was more about creating and building families and even younger women had had their marriages arranged for them—though not all and not as high a proportion as was true for the older women.

Among those Afghans who would discuss it, arranged marriage was favored over what is often called a ‘love match.’ The ‘love match’ model favored by Westerners is inherently risky and predisposed to all kinds of *difficulty*. There is, first of all, the everpresent risk of divorce when love is no longer as strong and several people pointed out that rates of divorce are much higher in Western countries where the ‘love match’ model prevails. Arranged marriages and the societal rules—in most Muslim marriages accompanied by a marital written or sometimes verbal contract—which surround them provide a matrix of obligation, responsibility and entitlement which ideally assures a

degree of predictability. Westerners often focus on such alliances as just that—alliances between families, but this overlooks a critical aspect of arranging marriages. Yes, alliances between families may be cemented in some ways, but also, the foundation for creating and building family life with clear connections and relationships is also cemented. An arranged marriage may be as much about building a future as it is about combining pasts and Afghans in this study appear to understand this without articulating it. While the combining of families changes as Afghans are now making their lives in an entirely different country, it still provides a relative stability to adhere to such societal standards, especially in a highly diverse setting.

Afghans are notorious for having big families—a pattern that persists in refugee settings, as noted by Tober (2006) and confirmed in comments by some of the people with whom I talked in the course of this study. Ideas about the importance of large families—often assumed by population demographers to be more related to agricultural lifestyles where offspring are considered to be onsite labor—are also present in nonagricultural families. Though the tendency to large families may be associated with socioeconomic status and education levels (i.e., higher income+higher education levels=lower birth rates), this does not necessarily hold true in all situations. A former high school principal in the Afghan community had six children, a woman with no more than a fourth grade education had eight grown children, and there were two women with no more than high school education who had small families of two or three children.

According to Tober, Taghdisi, and Jalali, the predilection among Afghans for having large families is related to other considerations. For example, in Iran in particular, they noted that, while Islam and contraception might seem to be mutually exclusive

ideologies, in fact, Iranian clinics encouraged birth control and lower-income Iranian families responded positively, but Afghan families—also often lower income in Iran—resisted. The reasons, the authors found, were multiply constructed, but at least partly reflected a suspicion that the Iranian government was bigoted about Afghans and trying to limit the Afghan refugee population within its borders. In reality, Iran has taken in more Afghan refugees than any other country and has largely been obliged to manage the costs²⁴ of such refugee invasions without help from other countries—about which the Iranian government has complained frequently to the international community. (Tober, et. al. 2006)

Class, Education and Employment

On several occasions, people who worked with Afghans—one of them was an Afghan who worked with Afghans--in one setting or another said to me that Afghans were “very hierarchical.” This was not something that was initially apparent to me, but over time, it became evident in comments about life in Afghanistan: “We visited the people in the villages,” “I was the wife of the Chief of Police for the region,” and “We had a nice life.” It also seemed present in the near-reverent attitude of some women toward people of greater means and status, but perhaps one of the most significant indicators was employment in Afghanistan. Almost every woman in this study had worked in Afghanistan outside the home—in bureaucratic jobs in the ministries, in schools as teachers, as professors at the University, as health professionals. More important than the fact that they worked was that they expected to hold jobs and it

²⁴ Such largesse should perhaps be considered in criticisms of Iran, though it remains true that Afghan families with members in Iran are suspended in a state of perpetual waiting in response to Iranian threats to expel Afghans—returning them to situations in Afghanistan which are often dangerous and even deadly.

became apparent that it was related to elite status. This is quite different from the 1950s world that shaped many North American perceptions about women's roles—perceptions in which women of certain status were not expected to work. Work for women was often treated as if it was an artifact of lower-class lifestyle. Among the women in this study, it seems as if it is exactly the opposite—as if higher social status and class must include some sort of professional life for women.

This may well have to do with issues of social obligation—a kind of *noblesse oblige*—that is part of the Afghan social and moral fabric. Literacy rates for Afghans were low in general. In the news, is often noted, for example, that low literacy rates have complicated the process of training Afghan troops and police by NATO forces. Literacy rates among women in Afghanistan are still lower than rates for men. Moreover, during the Taliban regime, coeducational schools were outlawed, and girls' schools were closed. Boys' education suffered too, however, because most of the teachers had been women, which meant many boys' schools had to close as well. This then steered more boys toward the madrasas. Educated families left Afghanistan for Pakistan and other parts of the world, taking their education and their cosmopolitan worldviews with them. (Rashid 2000:106) Women stayed at home more, girls were not in schools and had less to do, so more girls began getting married younger again--as early as age thirteen. (Lamb 2002:105)

Of all the women I met during the course of this study, only Waseema acknowledged that she was illiterate.²⁵ I was unable to find specific literacy statistics for

²⁵ Before I finished my field work, I found a group of retired English language teachers who took over the job of English teaching and within a fairly short time after my departure, I heard that Waseema was not only learning to speak English but she was writing English. So, while she was still illiterate in her language of origin, she was now literate in English.

the Afghan community itself. Educational levels of the Vancouver area Afghan population range from those who have degrees like M.D. and Ph.D. to people (mostly women) who are not able to read. Of the women who would tell me directly, the average amount of school was 12 years, though it was not clear how Afghan schools compared with the United States school systems.

Setara, with only a fourth grade education, was reading the papers intensely every time I saw her and she read poetry aloud beautifully at different occasions. Younger members of the Afghan community who had spent at least part of their school years in Vancouver area schools tended to go on to some kind of higher education—some to universities, some training for specific careers like, for example, law enforcement, human resources, or social work. One relative newcomer who was working on her English, thought she would get training to become a pharmacist assistant.

Employment statistics concerning the Afghan community in general were not available, though there are statistics for the visible minority group of which Afghans are a part—people of West Asian origin. Within this population, 64% of men tended to work outside the home, in comparison with 47% of women. The disparity continued when women and men were compared with the employed Canadian population overall: the rate for men was about three percent lower for men of West Asian origin when compared with men overall and ten percent for West Asian women. The trend continued in areas like unemployment—with West Asians having an unemployment rate of 11.8% compared with 7.4% for the overall population. Income levels were affected, too; the average income for West Asians was about \$6000 lower than that of the Canadian population. These trends continued throughout the employment and income statistics.

Moreover, women on the whole tended to earn quite a bit less than men—63% as much as West Asian men (Canadian women overall earned about 62%--one of the few areas in which West Asian women were doing better than the whole Canadian population).

(Statistics Canada <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-621-x/89-621-x2007003-eng.htm>).

However, such statistics represent employment for Iranians, Pakistanis, Azeris, Armenians and Turks as well as Afghans and there are substantial differences in the average levels of educational background between these populations. Though many Afghans in the Vancouver area might be considered to come from relatively elite families and therefore most of the women I met were quite literate, there were still issues relating to both education and employment. A particular issue for some educated women was credentialism--the use of credentials to specify eligibility for jobs. Credentialism provides a bottle neck for educated immigrants who arrive with master's degrees, Ph.D.s, medical degrees and other professional degrees from all but a few universities outside North America, the United Kingdom and Australia. Once they arrive in Canada, they find out that the degrees for which they labored in Afghanistan do not count. Among the women in this study—official participants and casual conversant—there was only one person—a psychologist—who had successfully been able to transfer her degree.

. She was able to do so because that particular university was listed as one of a special group of universities whose degrees could be counted in Canada.

It was a problem that affected men as well. While Hamid was able to practice his profession as an engineer, Sadeed and his wife both restarted their education when they arrived and acquired a medical degree and a degree in childhood psychology,

respectively. Sorosh, who had a degree in mechanical engineering from the Soviet Union, had not been able to transfer his degree and expertise:

Chris: So how was it when you came here to find work? Were you able to transfer any of your experience that you had working in Afghanistan when you came here?

Sorosh: I have a master in mechanical engineering from Russia in Volgograd. In my minor studies, Russian literature, have diploma to teach Russian as second language.

Chris: So you speak Russian and Dari and Pashto?

Sorosh: I do. And Urdu and Hindi and a little English, Tajiki. And history and philosophy, so I got three degrees from Russia during six years. So I was familiar with nonAfghan cultural environments, so it wasn't new for me being in another country and another society. But answering your question about using all my skills, no.

Chris: Are you using able to use it in your current work (with a local television program) a little bit?

Sorosh: No. I don't. After one year, I forgot it. . .that I'm an engineer unfortunately. I do because after finishing my studying and returning to Afghanistan, . . I was chief engineer of [for a] transport and engineering company for ten years. I started working [here] as a painter for \$8.00 an hour.

“After one year, I forgot it.” The same experience awaited many Afghan women. Rukhshana, who had also been trained as an engineer now works with an immigrant services agency.

Young women and young men appeared to expect to work and in May 2009, there was a job fair held by members of the Afghan community. In order to stimulate interest among young Afghans in different kinds of work, a number of Afghans from various jobs were recruited to offer examples of the wide range of professions in which Afghans worked. Included were examples of physicians, psychologists, chiropractors, human resource specialists, engineers, entrepreneurs—to name a few. Held at a local school/community center, high-school and college age members of the Afghan

community could come to hear different speakers and talk directly with other Afghans to find out about their jobs.

Health

While health statistics are not specifically available for the Afghan community, some may be inferred by other statistics. In general, immigrants are more likely than non-immigrant populations to suffer from heart disease, diabetes, and cancer and refugees—forced migrants—may experience multiple stressors which can contribute to disease, if only because war and deprivation contribute so often to malnutrition, disease, and other illnesses which then also weaken the system in ways that affect life in the future.

Canadian health care—which is famously available to nearly all Canadians and to various immigrant and refugee classifications when they are officially admitted—can be compromised by several factors. Difficulties with English create potentials for misunderstanding and misinterpretation. In casual conversations with several health care professionals from physicians to office staff to pharmacy workers, this was a frequent complaint from medical professionals. With nearly 250 ethnicities or nationalities present in the metropolitan area and over 50 languages, it is not always possible to find an adequate interpreter. Children—who are generally quicker to learn English than adults-- are often pressed into service as interpreters, as are other family members and friends.

For Afghan women, the comparison of health care in Canada with that which was/is available in Afghanistan depends to some degree on when they left Afghanistan. Health care in Afghanistan was better in some periods of the last thirty years than in others, depending on who was in power. During the Soviet era, according to some of the

consultants for this research, there was free health care available where there was access to it. However, once the Soviets left, the health care infrastructure was gradually dismantled and, during the Taliban government, women were not allowed to be seen by male doctors and female doctors were often prevented from practicing. Since the fall of the Taliban government, according to women in this study, health care access has depended on location and local culture. In parts of Afghanistan that continue to adhere to more stringent forms of Islam, it remains difficult for women to acquire the level of health care that North Americans take for granted.

Age and Generation

About 70% of Afghans living in Vancouver proper are between the ages of 15 and 45, 53% are between 15-35 and just under 30% are between 15 and 24. This differs slightly from the age ratios of the Afghan population Canada-wide, in which around 75% of Afghans are between 15-44. In both Canada and Vancouver, the largest proportion of Afghans in every age group are first generation—i.e., foreign-born (Table 4).

Census 2006 age statistics record respondents age 15 and older, so statistics on children under fifteen were not available, though rough estimates may be extrapolated. In the Vancouver area, the majority of Afghans of any age are foreign-born first generation immigrants and over half--52.9%--of Vancouver area Afghans are between the ages of 15 and 35. Canada-wide, the majority of Afghans at any age are foreign-born, first-generation immigrants. Seventy-five percent are under 45, 55% are under 35 and 31%--nearly a third—are under the age of 25 (Table 5).

Table 4. Afghan Vancouver Area Population by Age

Afghans in Vancouver proper				
	TOTAL	1st gen	2nd gen	3rd gen
15-24	970	860	105	10
25-34	765	720	45	0
35-44	635	625	0	10
44-54	525	520	10	0
55-64	210	205	0	0
65-74	100	95	0	0
75+	75	75	0	0
TOTAL	3280	3100	160	20

(Statistics Canada 2006)

In the chapters which follow, I will explore how identity is conceptualized, employed, and deployed among Afghans in Chapter III. Then, in Chapters IV, V, and VI, I will explore class and gender more in depth.

Table 5. Afghan Population Canada-wide by Age

Afghans throughout Canada	Total - Generation status	1st generation	2nd generation	3rd generation or more	
15-24	10450	9650	725	75	
25-34	7865	7690	160	20	
35-44	6660	6505	90	65	
45-54	4790	4730	25	30	
55-64	2195	2175	20	0	
65-74	880	870	0	0	
75 and over	395	380	15	10	
TOTALS	33235	32000	1035	200	

(Statistics Canada 2006)

Conclusion

For Afghans, the Vancouver context represents home—even a “premiere destination”—in which a diverse population and discourses of Canadian multiculturalism appear to welcome Afghan refugees and support them in keeping their cultural practices. At the same time, however, there are discourses of care and protection in some groups which work with Afghans that collude with some governmental policies regarding refugees to limit options for Afghans (as well as other refugees) and reify them as permanent victims. Processes of inscription of refugee identity begin with the process of formally applying to come to Canada and Afghans are actively encouraged to essentialize their refugee identity because it must be essentialized by them and others in order for them to gain legal entry to Canada as “refugees.”

Thus the legal process of applying for and receiving formal refugee status lays the ground for expectations that become attached to refugee status that do not necessarily line up with the realities that refugees—in this case, Afghan refugees—experience on the ground. Here I provided one example of this as reflected in the relationships between Afghan women and AO workers. In the mapping exercise I carried out, I found that Afghan women experience a larger world for themselves than that imagined for them by some of the workers who help them. How this may be related to their conceptions of self and practices which exhibit senses of identity is further discussed in Chapter III.

CHAPTER III
THROUGH LENSES OF GENDER:
CONCEPTUALIZING SELF AND IDENTITY

“. . . [I]dentity is always mobile and processual, partly self-construction, partly categorization by others, partly a condition, a status, a label, a weapon, a shield, a fund of memories, et cetera. It is a creolized aggregate composed through bricolage.” (Malkki 1992:37)

“If I think about who I am, I have been. . . several identities. And most of the identities that I have been I’ve only known about *not* because of something deep inside me—the real self—but because of how other people have recognized me.” (Hall 1989:22)

“. . . [S]elves which are coherent, seamless, bounded, and whole are indeed illusions. . . .”
(Kondo 1990:14)

“I am a human being” (Anna)

Introduction

For many of the women in this study, identity has been played out in two arenas—in Afghanistan and in the Vancouver area. A third arena, rarely discussed in depth,²⁶ is their management of identity in a third country—India, Pakistan, Iran, Kuwait, among others—which became a waiting area while each woman, either individually or as part of her family, pressed her case for admission to Canada. Globally, Afghans have become a classic example of what Edward Said describes as *Orientalism*. “There has been a tendency,” he observes, “to see all cultures as “organically and internally coherent,

²⁶ This category might have been discussed in depth if a more experienced researcher were conducting the research. As it was, I did not realize until I returned from the field how little I explored this part of their experience.

bound together by a spirit, genius, *Klima*, or national idea which an outsider could penetrate only by an act of historical sympathy” (Said 1979:118-19).

Afghan women are sometimes presented in the media as mysterious, hidden, and veiled. At the same time, they are often recognized as permanently wounded, as permanent refugees (and thus permanently temporary), and as permanent victims. Their images have stood in as symbols of a failed state (Afghanistan) and representations of Afghan and Islamic traditions. These stereotypes of Afghan women thus frequently conflate their gender and national origin into a single category. In this chapter I discuss the different ways in which the gendered self and identity of Afghan woman has been influenced by place (Afghanistan versus Vancouver), ethnicity and tribe, and Islam. This discussion is meant to break apart the essentialized stereotypes often read onto the bodies of Afghan women and to suggest that complexity and fluidity of their gendered identities through place, space, and time as they have moved from Afghanistan and settled in Vancouver.

In Afghanistan

Categories of identity in Afghanistan do not translate unmodified to identities in the Vancouver area, but Western media representations of identity among Afghans often revolve around ethnic and tribal identities. Barth defines ethnicity in four ways. Ethnic groups, he writes, are “largely biologically self-perpetuating,” share “fundamental cultural values,” make up “a field of communication and interaction,” and have memberships which are both self-identified and identified by others (Barth 1969pr:10-11).

It is perhaps the last component that becomes the most important: there must be some identified others against which one is perceived to be different. As Barth notes later, it is not social isolation that is necessary for the development of an ethnic group, but the development, definition and maintenance of boundaries that keep some in and some out that are required. However much terms like “ethnic group” are labels affixed by Western classificatory systems like anthropology, they are also communities of shared identity which transcend geographical locations in particular regions of Afghanistan. Therefore, it seems appropriate to begin an exploration of identity among Afghans in the Vancouver area with a short discussion of these categorizations.

Ethnicity and Tribe

Apart from Barth’s definition, one textbook defines ethnicity as “A sense of historical, cultural, and sometimes ancestral connection to a group of people who are imagined to be distinct from those outside of the group” (Guest 2014). While there is an intellectual history to the use of “imagine” and its variations (Anderson 1991; Taylor 2004; Todorova 1997).to describe the process of creating assumptions and beliefs and narratives therein, it has a sufficiently different meaning when used in more ordinary discourse and the use of it can create misunderstandings about the nature of truth and reality. Most use of the concept of imagining refers to fabricating something outside reality, but concepts like ethnicity and tribe are—for good or for ill—social realities if not always biologically provable ones.

Emile Durkheim calls the beliefs and practices which accompany these realities as “social facts” which modify and “constrain” human behavior even when we cannot

physically measure them. “The air,” he asserts, “is no less heavy because we do not detect its weight” (Durkheim 1895).

In Afghanistan, the word “ethnic” is applied in general to groups which recognize themselves as descended from particular origins. Pashtuns, for example, consider themselves to be descended from one progenitor—Qais Mohammed. Hazaras are generally considered to be descendants from Chinggis Khan’s army because many Hazaras have facial features which resemble Chinese or Tibetan faces. DNA evidence suggests that many Hazaras have combinations of Turkic and Mongol ancestry, but they have historically been racialized and persecuted anyway—I assume because of the prevalent occurrence of such features.

In Afghanistan, ethnicity and tribe appear to be identities which anchor all others, though ethnicity in Afghanistan is complicated because it is not clearly defined. It appears to overlap with nationalities (Tajiks and Uzbeks, for instance have majority groups in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and Uzbek as an identity is, according to one informant, composed of other identities) and racial categories. In the end, the definition appears to be more political—in terms of Taylor’s “politics of recognition” but also in terms of who wields power and which kind. Ethnic groups are so-designated because they are recognized as such. While some have the primary progenitor that anthropological definitions incorporate into the definition of ethnic, some do not.

Dupree listed 21 ethnic groups in *Afghanistan* (Dupree 1980:57-65), though he includes religious groups—Hindus, Jews and Sikhs, for example--in his list. He also offers a racial breakdown, asserting that the primary ethnic groups can be categorized in relation to three primary racial groups—Caucasoid, Mongoloid, and Australoid. These

categorizations are relics of a time when such analyses did not take into account the DNA evidence that indicates that there is more difference within so-called races than between them. They also do not reflect the degree of intermarriage between groups over the centuries. British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) lists 9 (BBC http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/1658073.stm dl May 5, 2014). The Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) World Factbook records the following percentages Pashtun 42%, Tajik 27%, Hazara 9%, Uzbek 9%, Aimaq 4%, Turkmen 3%, Baloch 2%, other 4% (CIA <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>, dl May 5, 2014). Barfield's figures are a little different—Pashtun ~40%, Tajik ~30%, Hazara ~15%, Uzbeks and Turkmen ~10%, and Aimaq ~2%, allocating the remaining 3% to other, small tribal groups (Barfield 2010:23-31). The relative proportions of these ethnic groups have varied historically, and at a public event held in a Vancouver restaurant, I heard at least one woman question the figures:

Nobody knows how many Pashtuns there are. Sometimes I hear 70%. Sometimes as little as 30%. I want to know who is coming up with these figures. How can they be true if they are so different?

Indeed, it does become difficult to know. Part of the picture has to do with ethnic political power in Afghanistan. Pashtuns, recognized as the largest ethnic group, is also the group which, since the 18th century Durrani empire has held ruling power through either direct descendants of Durrani or descendants of Durrani siblings. Therefore, it has had some influence over how the numbers are identified and calculated. Further difficulties with identifying the size and proportion of some ethnic groups is that borders were drawn in 1947 which created some ethnic groups—Pashtuns and Baluchs, for example—on either side of a national border. In parts of the world where borders are

somewhat porous in some places, groups do not necessarily migrate via constructed roads with border checkpoints. In addition, it appears that large numbers of Pashtuns may have migrated out of Afghanistan during the era of Soviet occupation (1979-89) (BBC <http://news.bbc.co.uk/>), reducing the proportion of Pashtuns in the Afghan population.

Ethnic groups form a foundation for identity in Afghanistan and they also appear to be racialized to some degree. There has been, for example, a history of persecution of Hazaras which includes what is often described as genocide in the late 19th century when King Abdur al Rahman ethnically cleansed Hazaras from some parts of Afghanistan, killing many and resettling many survivors to other parts of Afghanistan. In the book and film *The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini touches on this history as it extends into the 20th century. The companion and best friend of the protagonist Amir is Hassan, whose mother was Hazara. The harassment, persecution, killing, and abuse of Hassan as well as of abuse of his son Sohrab are themes which inform the arc of the story. It is Amir's admonishment of his father-in-law's disdainful reference to "that Hazara boy" when Amir brings Sohrab back to the U.S. to live with him and his wife that settles for the story line that the persecution must end in Amir's family (Hosseini 2003).

Religion is also related to ethnicity in Afghanistan in some cases. According to the CIA World Factbook, the majority of Afghans--80%--are Sunni Muslims and Shia Muslims are about 19% of the population (CIA dl April 10, 2010). Pashtuns are mostly Sunni and Uzbeks and Hazara are generally represented as practicing Shia Islam. However, in the Vancouver area, I met women who were Pashtun and Tajik who were also Shia so the relationship between ethnicity and Sunni/Shia of Islam is not perfectly aligned.

There are, additionally, tribal groups within ethnic identities. Pashtun tribal ideology considers that Pashtuns are all descended from a common ancestor—Qais Mohammed (Barfield 2010; Dupree 1980; Rashid 2000; Zulfacar 1998). Within tribes, the *qaum* is a unit which most Afghans I have asked describe as “family,” or “ethnic group” but which may also—according to Noah Coburn—include nonconsanguineal relatives, as he observed in the town of Istalif. Istalif, famous for its blue pottery, included in the pottery *qaum* not just the blood relations within families but also people who, while not directly, biologically related, were members of professions which might be included in the production of the pottery (Coburn 2011).

Afghan identity has been categorized in other ways. Earlier Western fascinations with the intricate interplay between ethnic and tribal identities have become reified, reinscribed and fully orientalized as awareness of Afghanistan increased in the wake of September 11, 2001. Of the triad of intersected identities so prominently and frequently mentioned in discussions of intersected identity—gender, race and class—none has been prominently mentioned. Race—largely in relation to persecution of Hazara—was discussed limitedly until recent years and I could find little discussion of class beyond Zulfacar’s discussion of *Mardom-dari*, which I explore in Chapters IV and V. Also of significance in identity is religion and since the 8th century C.E., Islam has been a part of the religious framework in Afghanistan. At this time in history, it is more appropriate to describe it as the religious framework. While earlier times in history have included many other religious belief systems, in the early 21st century, Islam dominates: 99% of the population is Muslim.

Islam

' . . . Islam points out a middle path between self-denial to the point of abuse and self-indulgent chasing after glitter and ostentation.

Accepting Islam doesn't mean forsaking the world; it just changes the focus. *The acts of living take on a meaning of which they are bereft in a materialist framework.* . . . If everyone followed [Muslim] practices, none of today's problems would exist. Families would be rock-solid. . . .

There would be no warfare, no injustice, no division between the rich and the poor. No one would live in ways that despoil the Earth. People would devote themselves to other people instead of to things.' (Ansary 2002:122 *italics mine*)

These are the words of a brother Riaz Ansary to his less devout, more secular brother Tamim, explaining why he has turned toward Islam rather than continuing on a more secular path. They are the words of a man, but they encapsulate an attitude I saw among many Afghan Muslim women who spoke to me of their faith. However, it is the italicized sentence that characterizes the practice of Islam as I observed it: "*The acts of living take on a meaning of which they are bereft in a materialist framework.*"

How life is lived matters, not just that it is lived well. Living well may mean having material wealth, but it also means living with the thread of your faith woven through each day so that "acts of living" are not just doing the dishes, getting the children off to school and celebrating Eid together after fasting for the month of Ramadan. "Acts of living" are also found in expressions of kindness and politeness, fasting during Ramadan to remind you of how those who are poorer than you are suffer, and in helping members of the community who are in need—for example, organizing fund-raisers which will provide money for widows and orphans in Afghanistan. They are also found in the way a woman (or a man, for that matter) matter-of-factly pulls out a prayer rug in the corner of the room and conducts midday prayer for a few moments, then equally matter-of-factly puts the rug away and resumes whatever else she is doing. They are found in

the moment that the man who worked in the Afghan-owned convenience store down the street from me asked, “How can I help you, Sister?”— adding the term *kw’ahar*, (which he used with Afghan and other Muslim women), raising me slightly above the role of ordinary customer and making me feel special and well-treated when I came to his store. They could be found as well in the way he excused himself after I had paid for my purchases, pulling on a jacket and hurrying out the door, saying, “*Maybakshin* (excuse me), I have to go to prayers” as casually as if he had said, “I have to go to the bank before it closes.”

Further, “acts of living” relate not just to the overt acts of reference to faith, but to attitudes of kindness, politeness, and care for fellow human beings. In Chapters IV and V, I discuss an Afghan concept that Maliha Zulfacar calls *Mardom-dari*. *Mardom-dari* is about practice—about acts of living being used day in day out in consideration of care of family and community—as well as attitude. “A *Mardom-dar* is a person who reaches out to others in times of need” (Zulfacar 1998:44). These are standards for behavior which are part of Islam as well as Afghan tradition. They particularly exemplify *Insanyat* (roughly translated as humanness)—“a humane person who is considerate and compassionate toward others” (Zulfacar 1998:44). Personal responsibility for oneself is indeed important, but the responsibility of human to human is deeply felt and richly threaded through “acts of living” in many ways.

Such acts of living not only exemplify *Insanyat* but *Afganiyat*—Afghanness—as well, notes Zulfacar. She thus identifies attitudes and acts of generosity and compassion toward others as being the foundation not just of Muslim identity but of Afghan identity.

Gender

Understanding the role of gender in Afghanistan is complicated by historical shifts. Ethnographers do not offer a lot of information about gender roles before the 19th century, but, as I noted in the historical discussion in Chapter I, there were waxing and waning efforts to change the circumstances of women. For much of the history of Afghanistan—while there have been a few examples of famous women like Queen Gowhar Shad of Herat and Malalai the heroine of Maiwand²⁷—women do not appear to garner much in the way of mention. Something of the circumstances of most Afghan women can be inferred from the efforts of rulers to change: Forced marriage, marriage of young girls under 16, access to education and literacy as well as bans against compulsory veiling were a few of many items which were addressed by Abdur Rahman in the late nineteenth century, Amanullah and Zaher Shah in the early twentieth century, and President Daoud in the 1970s (Dupree 1980; Ewans 2002; Lamb 2002). Much of this history is discussed in Chapter I.

Ethnographies ranging from Nancy Tapper's *Bartered Brides* Margaret Mills' "Gender of the Trick" and Nancy Hatch Dupree's work in the 1980s and 1990s have built picture of cultural and historical change in relation to Afghan women. In the last decade and a half, new generations of anthropologists and other social scientists have been studying Afghan women in Afghanistan and in the Diaspora. In 2001, Anna Pont's work *Blind Chickens and Social Animals* explored Afghan village life in two villages in Qandahar and more recently Melissa Skye Ker Chioyenda—who has been examining

²⁷ Gowhar Shad is famous for her contribution to an expansion of arts—from architecture to poetry—in 14th century Herat and Malalai of Maiwand is noted for her exhortation to Afghan fighters in the second Anglo-Afghan War.

working on Hazara perceptions of marginality--has worked on women's issues in a village near Jalalabad. The exploration of Afghans' lives in Diaspora has been expanded by Maliha Zulfacar's research in California and Germany, and studies of Afghan women in particular by Diane Tober, Parin Dossa, Elihah Rostami-Povey, Miranda Samuels and Fariyal Ross-Sheriff and others (Dossa 2006a and b; Ker Chiovenda 2012; Mills 2001; Pont 2001; Ross-Sheriff 2006; Rostami-Povey 2003, 2007; Samuels 2008; Tober 2006; Zulfacar 1998).

In Vancouver

For Afghan women in the Vancouver area, imposed identities are localized and then combined with ideologies of class, gender and race that overlap and intersect to create discourses of difference specific to Afghans. Several people who worked with Afghans—some Afghan and some non-Afghan—commented on how hierarchical Afghans were in relation to other “visible minorities.” One person who often works with Afghans told me that they were “more different from us [meaning Canadians of Western European heritage] than any other group except Africans.” It is important to note that this exoticization is far from what is intended by non-Afghans who worked with Afghan women in various capacities. Some people from helping agencies are themselves former refugees from countries like Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

Afghans themselves have their own characterizations and tropes—two of which are related to gender. What is interesting is the different way in which ideal types of man and woman are framed. While men are framed in terms of their authenticity—a “real Afghan man,” women are framed in terms of being morally good.

“A Real Afghan Man”

“He’s a real Afghan man,” says Emad as we sip coffee in the Metrotown mall in Burnaby. Emad, himself an example of a hardworking man who juggles an engineering career, an occasional stint as sports reporter on the weekly Afghan community television show on Ariana TV, is meeting me to give me tickets to a Nawrooz concert that I have arranged to purchase. We talk at length about his interests, which range widely from running to environmental issues. He is talking about a local Afghan entrepreneur who is well known in the Afghan community. I ask Emad what this phrase means—“a real Afghan man”—and, though he tries to answer, he seems to find it difficult to explain more. It seems as if the phrase must be sufficient unto itself.

Asking other Afghans about this phrase—“a real Afghan man”—yielded equally little clarity, so I turned to ethnographic and other material. Zulfacar’s observations about *Mardom-dari*—noted in Chapter IV—are at least partly relevant. A “real Afghan man” is responsible, generous, and has and keeps connections with people outside his own family and friends. According to Zulfacar and Tapper, he is responsible for the well-being of his family—well-being which encompasses not only providing for the family’s economic survival, but also for its spiritual, ethical and normative well-being—in particular including a family’s honor. Afghanistan, though it is far from the Mediterranean is sometimes categorized as being part of the “Mediterranean honor complex.” While there are similarities in how honor is organized, Afghan perceptions of honor differ greatly among groups and even villages and there is also an ongoing struggle between more “modern” (i.e., Western) ideals of manhood and some traditional rural ideals of manhood (Chioyenda 2012; Monsutti 2007; Tapper 1984; Zulfacar 1998).

Andrea Chiovena notes that, in a society where “visions of heroic deeds” and “violent warlordism” are often held up as stereotypical Afghan male behavior, for several young men from a village near Jalalabad “no single mode of masculinity but several competing models” exist. The pressure to conform to standards of their fathers’ generation—standards which somewhat rigid ideals of personal honor and aggressive behavior with attention to the smallest perceived slight—competed with what Chiovena describes as the more relaxed lifestyle of urban life in Jalalabad and other cities where young men went to school or for work (Chiovena 2011).

Their power to define their own standards of behavior was limited by the roles permitted within the village and their ability to find/make lives outside the village. They were affected by the politics of recognition within their villages, which—created in ideological frameworks about appropriate behavior which were embedded in and derived from societal and Afghan religious frameworks—essentialized them into their roles as fierce, sometimes violent men (Chiovena 2011).

There are also at play characteristics of *pashtunwali*, which is mentioned frequently in literature about Afghans. *Pashtunwali* is, briefly, a code of conduct for Pashtuns which, among other things, requires that a guest be protected above all else—even above one’s own kin. It also requires blood vengeance for certain offences and that is the aspect of the code which is best known. There are “walis” for other ethnicities—*tajikwali*, *uzbekwali*, for example—but because *pashtunwali* is associated with the largest ethnic/tribal group in Afghanistan, and because Pashtuns have been the focus of studies, it often becomes generalized to all Afghans. As women explained to me or exemplified to me their codes of behavior, I ventured to ask if this had to do with *pashtunwali*. As I

have noted before, most Afghans that I knew were well aware of the tendency in Western media to essentialize Afghans as tribal people who adhered to exotic codes of behavior—they had heard this before, but Tooba was the one who pointed out to me that the treatment of friends and strangers was from Islam, not from being Afghan.

These observations about conflicting versions of manhood in Afghanistan are significant for several reasons—first, because men in these villages are embedded in constructions of power that do not allow them to define themselves; second, because—that perceived lack of power notwithstanding—men tend to have more powers of definition and decision within village communities in Afghanistan. Women may lack power that seems meaningful to outsiders, but they may also be far from powerless. Women’s power tends to be constructed differently—reflecting to some degree Lamphere’s dichotomy between public and private (Lamphere 2009). I do not mean to suggest that women’s power is equal to men’s only that it exists in somewhat different form. For example, Nancy Tapper observed a situation in which an abused wife who had had enough finally threatened her husband with infidelity (Tapper 1991:221). Ordinarily this could be a cause for more violence or even death—the Taliban, for example, were known for executing adulterous women. However, in the instance reported by Tapper, the woman’s threat had some real consequences for the man: should her proposed infidelity become public knowledge, it would be her husband’s failure to maintain his family’s honor that would have cost him. However, any discussion of Afghan women’s power in Afghanistan is complicated by the fact that there is no monolithic Afghan womanhood and life chances for women are greatly affected by class, *qaum*, urban or rural location, and a larger societal and governmental trends.

A Good Afghan Woman

So, then what is a “real Afghan woman?” With Emad’s phrase still in my ears, I arrived home at the end of the day wondering just that. A Google search conducted out of curiosity revealed Afghan women portrayed overwhelmingly as victims—of rape, of acid attacks, of poisonings, of forced marriage, of suicide and of continuing Taliban-like social relationships. Apart from the role as victim, there were a few rays of hope in articles celebrating Afghan women’s triumphs, for example, in soccer, in creating a women’s air force unit,²⁸ and education and nothing that helped me understand what might have been a counterpart to a “real Afghan man.”

This identity as victim was present in the Vancouver area as well. When I told people that I was studying Afghan women, it was the role of victim which was often an identifying feature, suggesting that the Google search reflected views of some non-Afghans in the Vancouver area as well. At fund-raising events for the Canadian Woman’s Network for Afghan Women (CWNAW), for example, there was a burqa available for women customers to try on so that they could understand what it was like to live inside the pleated garment and peer out the crocheted eyescreen. It was not presented for customers to admire the fabric or the color or the quality of the crocheting. It was presented as part of the Afghan woman’s victimhood.

How does this relate to the ways that Afghans characterized Afghan women? Authenticity—“real”—was the theme that surfaced in relation to Afghan men, yet I did not hear that theme in connection to women. More often, a woman’s character was discussed in terms of her moral qualities. For example, veiling became a source of

²⁸ Which a soldier returning from Afghanistan told me did not actually exist.

discussion repeatedly as a moral act. The usual context presented in the literature presented veiling as a means through which women upheld the honor of their family while they also upheld their virtue by shielding themselves from the public gaze of men (Ahmed 2002; Mernissi 1987; Tapper 1991). However, it was also present in discussions which characterized veiling by women as part of being a good Muslim and thus a good Afghan. Instead of a real Afghan woman, discourse tended more often to focus on moral goodness.

The graciousness and generosity of spirit that characterized the women in this study appeared to be ends in themselves—part of a constellation of acts of living that emerge in moral space where it is more important to do good than just to be good. One's interior is shaped by how one behaves outwardly. The phrase “good Afghan woman” was not used itself. It was the ideal presented when—after my conversation with Emad—I would ask “What is a real Afghan woman?” Answers came framed in morality rather than authenticity. A good Afghan woman, ideally therefore, is a moral woman who practices her (almost always) Muslim faith in accordance with the preferred customs of her fellow Afghans. This, as I discuss in Chapter VI, did not necessarily mean that all Afghan women practiced their faith in the same ways. Veiling, in particular was practiced differently and with different ideologies about women's roles. So the practice of faith in certain ways was an ideal and to ignore those ideals did bring some women criticism.

A good Afghan woman marries an Afghan man. While there are a number of younger women who have married non-Afghans, it is often accompanied by certain difficulties. One young woman reported to me that she and her family did not speak for

ten years when she took up with and married a man whose ancestry was European and most of the Afghan women I met were married to or had married Afghan men. She is also a good wife and mother who raises good, polite children who treat their elders with respect. The house is ideally kept clean, serene and beautiful. Food is not only delicious, but healthy to eat and there is always plenty of it. Children are educated—for some people this may mean university education and for others religious education—and family life is rich with daily prayers and weekly (or more often) visits to the mosque or masjid.

The definition of a good Afghan woman varies according to the particular interpreter of values of course, but I thought I discerned at least two ideals not only from the way people lived their lives, but also from the admiring way that some women were described or even looked up to by others.²⁹ One ideal version of an Afghan woman that came through in small comments and observations had to do with grooming. One woman said to me that there was “no excuse” for not having beautifully kept nails. A number of women who were at the age where most of us have graying hair had jet black hair—with haircuts that were kept up on a regular basis. Almost all the young Afghan women I met had long, flowing dark hair and most of the women were skillfully made up, with the exception of a few women who had been to Mecca for pilgrimage.

A good Afghan woman appreciates her husband and demonstrates it by making the home not only clean and beautiful, but a place where the cares of the day can be cast aside. Women are also generally responsible for the food, though this is not always so in every family. For example, when I had dinner at Najma and Mujtaba’s house, I would

²⁹ This will be more fully discussed in Chapter IV, “A Nice Life.”

compliment Najma on her *bonjon borani*—an eggplant dish which included tomatoes and yogurt--or her *bolani*--a kind of fried ravioli with potato-and-leek filling-- and at least once or twice, she told me Mujtaba had made it.

A good Afghan woman may veil or not, depending on the ideology of the family and there is disagreement within the Muslim community about not only veiling, but about Islam itself, as exemplified in works by authors as different as Leila Ahmed (2002), Ayan Hirsi Ali (2006), Irshad Manji (2005) and Fatima Mernissi (1987 and 1991), to name a few. In the Vancouver metropolitan area Afghan community, I observed wide differences of opinion and practice about veiling, on which I elaborate in Chapter VI. In the cases where it was discussed, it became clear that the act of veiling—whether it involved a headscarf or whether a woman wore a full *burqa* or *chadori*—was closely connected to a woman’s identity and sense of self as a good woman.

A good Afghan woman was a good social and economic partner in life, intelligent and educated, and dedicated to the raising of her children and the creation of a good family that contributes both to the local community and the larger world. There was, additionally, a religious component for Afghan Muslims. Among the women that were part of this study and those who did not participate but with whom I spoke casually, there was a persistent thread of religion. As I have noted, a very small number were Christian or at least open to faiths beyond Islam. The remainder, Muslims, appeared to practice their faith on a daily basis—most including the required five prayers and many attending mosques or masjids on a regular basis.

In addition, referring back to the Google search, a good woman does not get raped. As noted previously, in parts of Afghanistan, the rape of a woman is considered to

be the woman's fault as much as or more than the man's. Thus, the Google search, while revealing a focus of the Western gaze on women as victims is also linked in the moral imagination of many Afghans to a woman's moral deficiencies. If she is a good Afghan woman, she is not available to be raped. She does not comport herself in ways that expose herself to the gaze of men who cannot control themselves, for example.

Thus, ideologies of Afghan womanhood seemed to revolve repeatedly around the moral imaginations of others in which goodness became an essential part of being a woman, a good Muslim woman and thus a good Afghan woman. A good Afghan woman was not just a woman who *was* good; she did good—her actions revealed her character. Alongside the importance of goodness was also a discourse—only articulated by women (I never heard a man say this)—in which several women echoed something that I had noticed in a publication by Human Rights Watch (2006b): “We Want to Live as Humans.”

Moral Imagination and Moral Space: To Do What Is Good in Order to Be Good

“The conversation inevitably turned to the Taliban.

‘Is it as bad as I hear?’ I said.

‘Nay, it’s worse. Much worse,’ he said. ‘They don’t let you be human.’”

(From *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini)

After listening to me explain my project as partly a quest for understanding what it means to be a woman, Anna leans forward—tiny in the overstuffed armchair—in her home near downtown Vancouver and begins with, “I am a human being!” This is the second time she has said it during our discussion, and she is both emphatic and indignant and her face combines sadness, anger, and an earnestness that all but strikes me physically though she is on the other side of the room with a length of beautiful red

Afghan carpet between us. She is not so much responding to me particularly as she is responding to the many ways that the lives and bodies of Afghan women have been used to serve other needs than their own—by societies and governments both Afghan and non-Afghan. The quote from *Kite Runner* was written by a man and it is a male character in *Kite Runner* who speaks. Yet it is a recurring theme in conversations with Afghan women in the Vancouver area—sometimes uttered casually, sometimes indignantly, sometimes with the passion I see in her face now.

Anna indicts arguments over the veiling/unveiling of women over the course of Afghan history and the hyperfocus of the West on the *burqa* to support the United States' military presence in Afghanistan, but it is more than that (Abu-Lughod 2002; Pont 2001). Discourses about veiling and other essentializations that supposedly focus on women actually objectify women by treating them as if they are pieces of furniture to be moved around in someone else's redecorating project. In one case, the redecorating project is the American-NATO project of wresting a country from the grip of the Taliban.

"I am a human being!" Anna says it a third time, clarifying that this is not just a biological or taxonomic category but an identity and a definition of self. It is a definition that is constructed in what Charles Taylor calls "moral space."

"Much contemporary moral philosophy, particularly but not only in the English-speaking world, has . . . tended to focus on what is right to do rather than on what it is good to be, on defining the content of obligation rather than the nature of the good life" (Taylor 1989:1)

Taylor, in *Sources of the Self*, goes on to write that this "narrow focus "has no conceptual place left for a notion of the good as the object of our love or. . .as the privileged focus of attention or will, " calling this view "a cramped and truncated view of morality. . ." (Taylor 1989:1). He suggests that good defined in the content—and the

context--of obligation is practice without underlying love for goodness in itself informing that practice. However, Mahmood suggests that part of the process of creating love for moral behavior occurs in the very process of practice and in deepening one's understanding of the content of obligation as extending far beyond what it is good to do.

At least some of the background for this discussion comes from Mahmood's exploration of the women of the Egyptian mosque movement who engage in parallel yet contrapuntal projects-- resistance and simultaneous submission to Islam. This is antithetical to North American ideals of independence and assertiveness--particularly to the Western feminist enterprise which, rooted in individualism and a human rights discourse, assumes that self-actualization can only be understood and enacted in terms of a self, separate and alone. Not all women see the self in such a distinct and separate way. In Islam, a principle concept is the *umma*, which is the word for the Muslim community. For some women, as Mahmood demonstrates, it is in the creation of a subjectivity that is formed in beliefs wider than belief in self—whether it is the *umma* or some other community of belief. Mahmood writes of negative and positive freedom, and it is here that much of the power of transformed subjectivity lies. Negative freedom is “the absence of external obstacles to self-guided choice and action, whether imposed by the state, corporations, or private individuals”— the freedom which is so often exemplified in stereotypic American thinking. On the other hand, there is positive freedom, which is

“ . . . understood as the capacity to realize an autonomous will, one generally fashioned in accord with the dictates of ‘universal reason’ or ‘self-interest,’ and hence, unencumbered by the weight of custom, transcendental will, and tradition. . . . [P]ositive freedom may best be described as the capacity for self-mastery and self-government, and negative freedom as the absence of restraints of various kinds on one’s ability to act as one wants.” (Mahmood 2005:10-11)

Drawing on Judith Butler Mahmood observes that “norms are not simply a social imposition on the subject but constitute the very substance of her intimate, valorized interiority” (Mahmood 2005:23). Norms are also “lived and inhabited, aspired to, reached for, and consummated” (Mahmood 2005:23). For example, Mahmood observes that the veil, for women in the piety movement, must inextricably be linked to expressions of modesty while, for secularists, modesty is a characteristic which may be expressed in many ways. She recounts a debate between a teacher and a student on ethical conduct between unrelated men and women. For the student the argument was rooted in negative freedom—she should not be restrained in her behavior because her character was good and she was not doing anything wrong. The teacher, however, was urging an interpretation that relied on the positive freedom of intentional good conduct. In the wake of the colonial dismantling of cultural norms and touchstones, it was pious behavior—in this case maintaining a lowered gaze with a male tutor--that permitted the freedom of interaction in the first place. (Mahmood 2005:100-103).

Such an approach evokes a kind of subjectivity that makes the woman a responsible agent in the management of good behavior. In secularized (largely Western) norms, the emphasis has increasingly been placed on the responsibility of the man to contain his own behavior, though it was not so long ago the other way around. In many Islamic societies, protection of a woman’s pious behavior has been enshrined in various forms of sexual segregation. In all of these norms, it is the role of action—behavior—that instructs the subjective mindset of the self. Action, then, precedes thought and feeling in the creation of subjectivity and thereby of the self and experienced identity. Among Afghans, as I will discuss in further chapters, this may be exhibited in ideals of

behavior that mandate extraordinary³⁰ politeness even with those one does not like, generosity and shelter for guests even at the expense of kin, and what Thomas Barfield describes as the “primacy of maintaining honor and reputation “ (Barfield 2010:59). I commented several times to Afghans on the politeness and generosity I experienced from many Afghans, asking if this was an example of *pashtunwali*, an Afghan code of behavior about which I had read. The answer remains most vivid was Tooba’s. Tooba, in her seventies, had made the required (for all Muslims if they are able) pilgrimage—*hajj*—to Mecca. She had a face with cheekbones like Dolores del Rio’s which were made even more striking by the headscarf—*chador*—she always wore. She was by nature a teacher—often encouraging me to find ways to teach better and often illuminating some small issue that I did not understand. When I asked if all the politeness and kindness I was experiencing was *pashtunwali*, she laughed at me a little before answering: “It is Islam.” In this, it seemed she was confirming a notion that part of Islam had precisely to do with Mahmood’s observations about training one’s interiority. If identity is “crafted” as Dorinne Kondo asserts and “mobile and processual” as Lisa Malkki states, then it is within our actions that selfhood—and thus identity--emerges and perhaps it is our actions that train our interiorities.

Almost all of the women I spoke with focused on “what is right to do” but also on “what is good to be” and that focus seems to be wrapped up in their definitions of themselves as women and as Muslims. Like the women in the women’s mosque movement described in Mahmood’s *Politics and Piety*, they exert themselves in doing

³⁰ Extraordinary to my American eyes, which were raised in a time of politeness but which have now spent many years watching manners change to more casual, less polite standards.

what is right as part of being good—they use their actions as part of the “training their interiority” and that training is informed by their particular Muslim ideologies, by cultural values that traveled with them from Afghanistan, but also by aspects of Vancouver and Canadian culture and values. Many of the women that I met seemed to find that the acceptance and embrace of difference which are embodied in the discourses of Canadian multiculturalism were quite compatible with their own ideals of goodness and of reaching across borders. Thus, for example, they allowed an American anthropologist to sojourn in their midst for eighteen months and participated either officially or unofficially in helping that anthropologist learn more about them. The fact that this sample of Afghan women—both participants and people who engaged in casual conversations³¹ with me—was, however, biased should offer some caution about making assumptions about all Afghan women. By definition, they were people who wanted to help me understand. People who did not want to be a part of that process simply did not engage with me. As noted earlier in this chapter, one role in which Afghan women in the Diaspora have found themselves is described by Rostami-Povey (2007) in relation to Afghan women in other Western settings—that of mediators of identity. This certainly appeared to be a positive moral value present in the population of this study. One woman, who repeatedly declined to be an official participant, still made a point of trying to educate me ongoingly about Afghan culture and history, usually with anecdotes from her own life.

³¹ Human subjects compliance protocols made casual conversations with non-participants (people who were not officially part of the subject cohort) problematic as sources of data, so I engaged in protections on two fronts. If there was a comment I thought I wanted to use, I would ask, describing the study, and I have only used such conversations if they occurred in public settings where privacy could not be assumed.

Conclusions

Identity among Afghan women in this study is composed of multiple categories—class, gender, racialized/ethnicized refugee status—as well as age, mobility and other categories. Afghan women’s lives have also been explored in relation to terms of moral imagination and moral behavior and what it means to be a good Afghan woman. In the chapters which follow, I examine how evocations of class and gender interact in Afghan women’s lives in the Vancouver area with ideas of goodness through *Mardom-dari* and ideals of behavior toward others.

CHAPTER IV

MARDOM-DARI: STATUS, CLASS AND “A NICE LIFE”

“The whole adventure of the modern world was, for a long time, blocked out in terms of these great collective identities. As one knew one’s class, one knew one’s place in the social universe.” (Stuart Hall 1989)

The Pashtun, they proudly say “I am from this tribe,” but the other [nonPashtun] people, they don’t say because they know they are not. If they say or not they are not very important. (Najma)

Introduction

Sabia and I are sitting in the entry room of the Afghan Women’s Sewing Cooperative on Edmonds Street in Burnaby. Women are coming and going around us—many wearing a *chador*, or headscarf, and some are bareheaded. I have just asked Sabia about how she feels about Canada. Most of the older women I came to know in the course of this project expressed themselves first and foremost as Afghans living in a country other than Afghanistan. Many also expressed loyalty and love for Canada--usually expressed as appreciation for a protector in time of great distress and dislocation. In the process of synthesizing these perspectives as in her own comments, Sabia expands on her feelings about Canada to talk about her erstwhile life in Afghanistan:

I love Canada because we are safe. I had a very good life--big house, car, chauffeur, and a cook to cook for me and--everything I had. Good life in Afghanistan. It is not like I didn’t have it.

. . . It was very nice life. I was a teacher—very respectable. My husband was chief of police. I didn’t come here to find something in here. Nothing is different, but my life was better than here, but only [it was not so] safe. I have six children. My children are safe. My husband is safe—and my son. This is the only [main] reason I love Canada. We are safe and my children became well-educated.

As we continue talking, and as women continue to pass by, Sabia points to one woman after another: “She had a nice life” and then “She also had a nice life” and “So did she.” Freshta used exactly the same phrase to describe her life in Afghanistan when she spoke to a reporter for an article about Afghan immigrant women in the Vancouver area: “I had a nice life in Afghanistan.”

What is it about “a nice life” that resonates so powerfully for Sabia? Her comments urge some examination of class, and that is the focus of this chapter. I will begin by briefly discussing class and status and the social universe of Afghans as it is described in the literature and as I perceive it from my field research. From there, I will explore the role that status—particularly in terms of ethnicity and tribal lineage—plays in what Weber calls “class situations,” and for the remainder of the chapter, I will focus on how I came to understand class in relation to some of the women in this study. In particular, I will discuss an Afghan concept which Maliha Zulfacar called *Mardom-dari* as a possible means to inferring how class might be made visible to an outsider.

Class and Status

In this dissertation I use definitions of class derived largely from Max Weber’s notions of “class situations” and “life chances.” I call on Weberian concepts related to class instead of Marxian definitions—rooted as they are in relations of production and industrial settings—because they do not apply as well to the enmeshed and imbricated nature of status and class in Afghanistan. Afghanistan’s population has been largely rural—over 80% in small villages—in which lower technology subsistence strategies like horticulture and agriculture were employed with some sedentary pastoralism. In addition to these strategies, a smaller number of Afghans were nomadic pastoralists who brought

products from their own livestock as well as goods and news from other parts of the region with them as they passed near the villages.

Historically there was a substantial rural-urban divide in the Afghan society which was related to structures of status and class. Further complicating any examination of class was the role of ethnicity. While class or status cannot be read directly off of ethnicity, certain ethnicities tend to have particular roles in Afghan society historically. For example, the majority of Pashtuns were not part of the royal infrastructure, but the overwhelming majority of rulers since Ahmed Shah Durrani was elected to the throne were Pashtuns. They either claimed direct descent from Durrani or were descended from other lineages that were directly descended from one of his ancestors (Barfield 2010; Dupree 1980; Ewans 2002; Magnus and Naby 2002). These factors, in addition to factors like the physical geography of Afghanistan and the previously mentioned segmentary lineage contributed to decentered (from the federal government) structures of power and further contributed to the complex ways that class was structured in Afghanistan

Weber notes that “‘Economically conditioned’ power—i.e., class—is not identical with ‘power’ as such” and goes on to note that other aspects of power—including status—can confer power on individuals and groups (Weber in Gerth and Mills 1958 [1946]:180). In Afghanistan, the feedback between status and class is part of what creates the power that often appears to outsiders to be only class or only ethnic/tribal situation. Social stratification occurs in intersections between all three of Weber’s matrices so that a family without great wealth but with high status—usually conferred by ethnic and/or tribal heritage—may have more power than a family whose sole claim to power is wealth alone (Barfield 2010; Coburn 2011; Dupree 1980). This is undoubtedly

changing with the large infusion of capital into Afghanistan from international troops and agencies but also with the poppy crop. It is, however, unlikely that any of these resources of wealth escaped the patronage system which is common among Afghans and which favors those who already have resources (Barfield 2010; Coburn 2011; Ewans 2002).

Thus, class is frequently linked to status through ethnicity, kinship, *qaum*³², and tribal affiliations in Afghanistan. Scholars have noted this tendency. Barfield (2010) has commented on the fluid nature of ethnic boundaries, and Zulfacar observes that “class structure in Afghanistan is fluid” (Zulfacar 2006:33). Coburn’s description of *qaum* makes it clear that *qaum* may include non-family members, though it is often conflated with tribe in earlier literature and is also a source of status. (Coburn 2011). For the purposes of this study, class, status and party are also related to educational levels and ideals of generosity and their realization in social interactions. A discussion of class in the context of Afghanistan is necessary complex and requires the unknotting of a bundle of statuses which in Western analysis are not normally associated with “class” in the purely economic sense, but which are crucial to Understanding the exercise of power and hierarchy. The Afghan social universe includes multiple considerations of hierarchical standing, but also particular behaviors—acts of living. In these acts of living may be discerned elements of ideology which link ideals of success with generosity and one’s place in the social universe. For the purposes of my discussion here, I necessarily embed my discussion of the complexities of class into an understanding of the social universe.

³² *Qaum* is a term which most Afghans I’ve talked with define as “family.” Coburn, however, observes that it is embedded with historical understandings of lineage as well as nonconsanguineal relationships which may include, for example, professional relationships (Coburn 2011).

The Social Universe

Ross-Sheriff illuminates some fundamental aspects of class for women in the Afghanistan, where most of the women in this study lived before they left Afghanistan.

“Prior to the Soviet invasion. . . many middle- and upper-class women in Kabul moved around the city without a male member of the family. They studied at universities, considered education as their right, and held professional jobs as career women. Lower-middle- and lower-class Kabuli women, on the other hand, seldom left their homes without being escorted by a male member of the family. For them, interaction between men and women outside the privacy of their homes was strictly limited. In the old city section of Kabul, houses were built around inward-looking courtyards in neighborhoods that were divided ethnically by kin-oriented sections.” (Ross-Sheriff 2006:207)

A number of them had working lives outside their homes, most of them lived in Kabul, and most of them—largely older women who had been born before the 1970s—had experienced a time in Afghanistan when freedom of mobility (which was an indicator of both class and status) for women was more or less taken for granted. Social mobility—the ability to engage in desired social relationships whether they were with family members or academic settings or employment settings--was and apparently is linked also to aspects of women’s identity in relation to class and status. Social mobility requires some spatial mobility—ability to go where one wants to and when one wants to.

After the Soviet invasion, there was overall oppression of Afghans by the Soviets, but Moghadam notes that opportunities for women in terms of work and education actually increased as Soviets worked to create a more socialist society as they had done in the Central Asian Soviet republics (Moghadam 2004).

The design of class and status as they had apparently been understood for centuries had been under assault in subtle ways even before communism reshaped Russia into the Soviet Union. However, the influence of the Soviet Union—which had invested

millions of dollars in Afghan infrastructure like roads and irrigation canals in the decades before 1979—brought with it ideological investments that found a home in the minds of many Afghans for several decades before 1979 . From the late 1940s onward, the welded nature of class and status as they had been lived began to be questioned with the emergence of groups of Afghans interested in communism. (Ewans 2002; Barfield 2010; Misdaq 2006)

By all accounts, the Soviet Union’s ten-year occupation devastated many of Afghanistan’s cultural practices and traditions as the Soviets attempted to remake Afghanistan into their view of a class-free society in which genders were mixed in school and work and planned, centralized government would replace such traditions. Though similar changes—particularly with regard to women’s increased mobility--had been emerging in the decade or two before the Soviet invasion, they had largely been emerging in urban areas where more privilege, wealth and education tended to congregate. Under the Soviet occupation, these changes were mandated in the previously more traditional areas, shattering much of the social universe that the majority of Afghans who lived in rural villages and farming areas had previously known. These changes had been attempted by several rulers before but had always been met with strong resistance (and usually the end of the ruler’s leadership by death or overthrow) from rural religious leaders (Barfield 2010; Dupree 1980; Ewans 2002; Misdaq 2006).

Resistance by rural leaders to change that was handed down from “above”—whether it came from a single ruler or a collectivist occupier—appears to have been repeatedly rebuffed. In Chapter I, I briefly discuss parts of Afghan history that contributed to the emergence of the Afghan diaspora. When the Taliban took Kabul and

began their five-year control of the Afghan government, they were initially received positively. Coming as they did on the heels of a civil war which took the dismantling by Soviets of Afghan values and traditions even further, the Taliban appear to have been perceived by many Afghans as restoring good Islamic order to a country which had at that time (the middle 1990s) had been fragmented by war and associated kinds of chaos for nearly two decades (Barfield 2010; Ewans 2002; Magnus and Naby 2002; Rashid 2001). Disenchantment occurred later as, according to Barfield, “. . . Afghans were repelled by their nihilism, which glorified death seeking at the expense of life” (Barfield 2010:267).

Though Marxist ideologies were responsible for the coup which inaugurated the subsequent decades of war, Marxist views may have lacked resonance among most Afghans because they violated some closely held ideas. Ideas like the importance of education and employment for women, for example, tended to challenge norms in which women had few rights to determine their own lives outside the constraints of family and marriage. Thus, there was a tension between Islam and communism. Richard Tapper (1984) suggests that, had the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) couched its views in Islamic ideologies, there would have been more support for them among the populace. However, Shahrani observes that secularism was indeed part of the modernizing project for at least some rulers long before the communist coup. From the time of Abdur Rahman Khan’s rule (1880-1901) various rulers “. . . gave lip service to Islam, but they were nevertheless determined to create a secular and ‘modernized’ nation-state, patterned after Western models”(Shahrani 1984:165). For nearly 100 years after Abdur Rahman Khan, various rulers attempted various forms of “modernization.”

This is borne out to some degree by comments from some women in this study. For example, Khorsheed often observed—with a hint of mischief twinkling in her eyes—“In those days [meaning the 1960s and 1970s when Afghanistan was Westernizing], we could smoke and drink and eat pork.” “I like bacon,” she would add, laughing. While not everyone affirmed such transgressions, it was clear that many Afghans of a certain age and lifestyle had come of age during the 1950s, ‘60s and ‘70s when more Westernized behaviors were popular and the barriers between appropriate Islamic behavior and inappropriate unIslamic behavior had, for them, been challenged if not erased. Moreover, the distance between rural and urban populations was increasing and while there were propertied classes living in the rural villages. The accumulated components of (wealth, elite family status, education, travel-and particularly travel abroad, for example, tended to accrue to certain families living in the cities—particularly Kabul, which was the center of political power (Ansary 2012; Barfield 2010; Dupree 1980).

The 1978 Saur Coup and Its Aftermath

In many ways, the 1978 Saur (April) coup was a collision between Marxist ideas about class rooted in relations of production and Weberian property-based class situations in relation to life chances. As noted earlier in this chapter, ninety percent of the population lived outside the urban areas—a pattern that reportedly continues today though the percentage Barfield cites in his 2010 book is closer to 80%. Around the same percentage of the population was illiterate and many Afghan communists saw communism as a way to address this issue. Some of the initial changes made by the Soviets were in the arenas of education, education for women, and land and credit

reform. When the Soviets invaded in 1979, they brought with them a lack of respect for Afghan and Muslim traditions, an assumption that social class differences were to be erased, and an assumption that women—as part of the productive apparatus—must be educated and employed. However, these changes violated some of the most fundamental perceptions of a society which had been rooted in the privileges accruing through kinship and ethnicity and a society in which about ten percent of Afghans lived well to extremely well while the other ninety percent lived much more precariously. Ironically, some of the people most dedicated to a system which privileged a small percentage of elites were the people who were not elite themselves (Barfield 2010; Magnus and Naby 2002; Misdaq 2006; Moghadam 2004).

Richard Tapper opined that Abdur Rahman’s reforms in the 19th century might have been more accepted had they used Islamic ideologies rather than Western, more secular arguments (R. Tapper 1984). Communism’s secular focus created opposition from the very groups it purported to help—groups which fought back regardless of ethnic heritage or social class. Therefore, when Afghan Marxists introduced reforms, they were, in a sense, doomed to failure. Shahrani quotes Fred Halliday:

Another Marxist writer, Fred Halliday, claims that given the strength of traditional social structural principles in predominantly rural Afghanistan, ‘any attempt to reform such a system by appealing to the class interests of poor and landless peasants was bound to run into considerable difficulties’.” (Shahrani 1984:11)

Thus, if we believe Tapper and Shahrani, the communists’ changes might have found resonance in the deeply stratified country had they come cloaked in the traditional and Islamic values of the society in which most of them had grown up. However, they were not so framed. In the wake of the coup, like millions of refugees before them,

hundreds and then thousands of Afghans began to seek a home—they hoped it was temporary—elsewhere. The 1978 Saur coup and the 1979 Soviet invasion began a process of refugee migration which, according to the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) created the largest refugee population in the world (Gordon 2013; UNHCR 2010). For the most part, it appears that Afghans with greater resources of wealth, social capital and/or education tended to flee initially to the Soviet Union or to countries in the West. Afghans with fewer resources fled to Iran and Pakistan. Often Afghans who were Shi'a fled to Iran and Sunni Afghans would flee to Pakistan. Some also fled to India, like Najma and her two children who spent two years there. “We tried and tried to leave for Canada,” she said, “but they would not let us go without [her husband] Mujtaba.” Mujtaba was working for the Afghan government and unable to leave. It took two years before he was able to join his family, and he had to take a slip out of the country on a trip to Europe before being able to rejoin his family and emigrate with them to Canada.

The gendered nature of education and employment noted above began to change during the Soviet occupation (Moghadam 2004), along with education and work outside the home. While these had been primarily the province of women from elite families as well as men and during the Soviet era, they began to be available to women from other strata in Afghan society. Thus, the Soviets, who were notoriously unsympathetic to traditions, values and customs which had been the lynchpins of Afghan culture, created opportunities for nonelite women that had not existed before—opportunities which were all but extinguished by the time the Taliban government was driven out (Moghadam 2004). Zulfacar—whose dissertation was published in 1998 and thus before September

11, 2001—observes that, before the Soviet invasion, women with university educations tended to be employed as teachers or secretaries. Women with English capability might work for United Nations agencies or for USAID:

. . .most traditional families were hesitant to allow their women family members to work with foreign organizations (sic). Only those from “high class” families, and who had been exposed to the western world and live in the West through governmental posts, were able to work in these offices. The salary of a secretary in the foreign posts was much higher than the salary of a female working as a teacher with the Afghan government. However, working with the government involved social prestige and connection to the intricacies of the power structure. (Zulfacar 1998, 117)

Rukhshana was an engineer in Afghanistan. “I loved engineering,” she told me. “It was so clean and I loved to be able to solve problems.” Her engineering background eventually led her into working for the United Nations Development Programme [sic] (UNDP) both in Afghanistan and Pakistan and her command of English exemplified aspects of what Zulfacar is describing.

Class in Canada—and in Vancouver with its high proportion of foreign-born residents—appears to be intersected with immigration. It is also apparent--partly through other social scientists’ research but also through observation of discourse and behavior in the Vancouver area—that categories of citizenship and immigration are also classed (Dossa 2004; Thobani 2007). If, as Kaaren Haldeman observes, “objective assumptions about class as intimately tied to income and education limit our understandings of class as feeling” (Haldeman 2009:223), this properly reflects circumstances of a people who, in their country of origin, may have had prestige and relative wealth related to their lineages, but whose economic prospects have been affected, even devastated, by war or persecution.

Roles of Ethnicity, Tribe and Class in the Afghan Social Universe

The ascent of Ahmed Shah Durrani (1722-1772) to power initiated the most enduring elite in recent Afghan history, continuing control over the area of Pashtuns and cementing the role of the Durrani Pashtun lineages as Afghanistan's royalty from 1747 until 1973. Ahmed Shah Durrani was originally Ahmed Shah Abdalli—a descendant of the Abdalli tribe through the Popolzai and Saddozai lines. Descendants of the oldest son Popol—the Popolzai tribe--produced Durrani's line, which ruled until 1818. For the next 160 years, descendants of the youngest son Barak—the Barakzai—ruled (Barfield 2010; Magnus and Naby 2002; Dupree 1980). In one way or another, these two Durrani tribes have produced class situations in which life chances were enhanced by the social capital which accrues to those lineages. Status by virtue of being a member of these lineages blended with class to create the most elite members of society—almost all of whom were Pashtun for much of Afghanistan's history from Durrani's rule forward until the late 20th century.

Over lunch in a Burnaby restaurant, Najma—herself a Pashtun—casually offers me a thumbnail sketch of how ethnicity and tribe intersect with power to stratify Afghan society:

C: Could you explain this to me because one of the things that happens to me is that I ask people and they say “I am from Kabul.” . . .So within Pashtun, there are a lot of groups. . . are these family lines?

N: Yeah, family lines and some of these Pashtun they have more power, like Mohammedzai—the king Zaher Khan and Daoud Khan and Amanullah . They are the tribe of Mohammedzai which always has the power. They come first. The second one is Popolzai which . . . Also there is Barakzai, which is a branch of Mohammedzai. . .they are also thinking they are on top. . The rest of the Pashtun, they are okay. . . .The Pashtun, they proudly say “I am from this tribe,” but the other [non-Pashtun] people, don't say [what tribe they are from] because whether or not they say which tribe, they know they are not Pashtun. If they say or not they are not very important.

Najma is acknowledging the role that ethnicity plays in class. Pashtuns—the most numerous ethnicity in Afghanistan—with their segmented tribal structures and relationship to the Durrani lineages are the most powerful ethnic group in Afghanistan. Even among Pashtuns, notes Ashraf Ghani—presidential candidate in Afghanistan’s 2009 and 2014 elections and an Ahmadzai Pashtun himself--“No Pashtun will ever admit that another Pashtun is his natural superior” (Ashraf Ghani, quoted in Kenner 2010). Ghani’s comment reinforces the ethnic component of stratification among sublineages to which Najma alludes toward the end of her comments.

Tajiks---the next largest ethnic group after Pashtuns—have been the largest group of urban dwellers in the major cities of Afghanistan like Kabul, Mazar-i-sharif and Herat, but are otherwise largely mountain-dwelling (Barfield 2010; Coburn 2011; Dupree 1980). While rural Tajiks are mostly subsistence farmers, urban Tajiks—literate in Farsi, long the regional language of government administration, high culture, and foreign relations--have “. . . historically been the bedrock of the merchant community, bureaucrats, and educated clergy.” This has allowed them to accrue power within the various bureaucracies in ways that survived changes in power at the top of government. (Barfield 2010:26).

Many Hazara, by contrast, have been relegated to lower status—even having been slaves—since Abdur Rahman’s campaign suppress the Hazara. Other ethnic groups—Uzbeks, Nuristani, Aimaq, et. al.—appear to fill the gap between Pashtun and Hazara.

Najma’s comments reflect Weber’s observations about power as “economically conditioned”—in this case, status in terms of power--and she is referring here not just to

military power, , but also to the overall power of one's group to persuade or coerce and, perhaps most important, to define who will be important or not. Weber's notion that power is "economically conditioned"—not entirely and not always, but significantly—situates power firmly in class. Najma's observations suggest that power is connected to status that the two dwell together in people's perceptions.

In *Afghan Immigrants in the United States and Germany*, Maliha Zulfacar focuses on social capital and *habitus* among Afghan immigrants. Zulfacar is an Afghan herself, now teaching in Cal Polytechnic in California after spending several years as Afghanistan's ambassador to Germany. Differentiating social capital from Bourdieu's other forms of capital (economic, cultural and symbolic), she explores the ways in which social capital—accumulated through kinship relationships and social and kinship hierarchies—both defines and is deployed by the individual (Zulfacar 1998). In a paper for the research organization Metropolis BC, Parin Dossa notes that Afghans tend to talk about themselves in relation to their families. While this is not uncommon, she and Rob Norquay—who studied eight Afghan women in Toronto—both relate it to the highly individualist nature of Westerners' self-perceptions, suggesting that Afghans' sense of self may be more highly influenced by ethnic and family contexts (Dossa 2006; Norquay 2003). Perhaps more than that, it is important to understand lineage as a source of power among Afghans in Afghanistan.

Dorinne Kondo's assertion that the self emerges within contexts of power is meaningful here (Kondo 1990). Zulfacar observes that Afghanistan is a largely society (Zulfacar 1998:21) in which patrilineal groups are organized in a "nested" pattern with smaller groups being part of larger collections of groups. This "segmentary lineage" has

been a prevailing pattern for the largest ethnic group, Pashtuns, and where the family lines related to Durrani constitute inherited access to and participation in the power and control, class becomes enmeshed with other categories like kinship and ethnic identity (Dossa 2006; Zulfacar 1998). It is significant in part because relations of power in Afghanistan have contained, as Tamim Ansary describes them, “a propensity to fragment” (Ansary 2012:346), but also because it creates structures of power and identity that shape individuals.

Disparities between rural and urban populations in Afghanistan—with more wealth being concentrated in urban areas—have also created more contexts for class differences which were conditioned by ethnic and tribal heritage. In Afghanistan, since the time of the Durrani Empire, such “class situations” have accrued largely to Pashtuns as an ethnic group and even more particularly to descendants of Durrani tribes. Zulfacar describes Afghanistan as a

. . . ‘less-differentiated’ society, where the co-ordination of social interaction is obtained primarily through a web of personal interaction. In the ‘highly differentiated’ societies of the West, by way of contrast, the comparatively limited availability of social fields results in multi-linkage roles for individuals in different fields” (Zulfacar 1998: 43).

Thus, class is not restricted to the economic status of a family, but is heavily influenced by its social capital--connections which may emerge as a result of economic status often also emerge in relation to kinship and *qaum*. The evidence of a family’s success is reflected in several areas, according to Zulfacar, including not just its social capital, and economic standing, but also its size and what Zulfacar terms the “socio-political standing of its senior male member”(Zulfacar 1007:43). This latter issue will be discussed more in the next chapter, but all of these factors that relate to class may

contribute to the comment I heard several times about Afghans in the Vancouver area—that they are “hierarchical.”

In the Vancouver area, such comments seemed to reflect what the speaker perceived as a tendency to defer to perceived superiors in some settings. This might have been a complaint about deference to some fellow Afghans in certain settings—to an older person with more experience and history in the Vancouver area or to a professionally and financially successful couple who contributed in multiple ways to the Afghan community. Not one of the people who mentioned this hierarchical feature of Afghans complained that Afghans were deferential to them. However, this last statement may be unfair because many Afghans who have been refugees have had to learn multiple lessons about how to function in many settings as they made the journey not just from Afghanistan to Vancouver, but also from a country in chaos to one place of refuge after another until they arrived in Canada. In each situation, they had to learn once again the parameters of power within each new social universe and what one person called “dependency” could also be seen as learned behaviors that help forced migrants to adapt to constantly changing social universes.

Hierarchical behavior was not obvious to me. What I did notice was exceptional kindness and adherence to etiquette as well as what might be called *noblesse oblige* among some Afghans and great generosity with time and resources among others. They behaved in ways that conveyed the sense that one must contribute generously from what one has to others who may not have as much and that one must participate in and contribute to the larger community. This is not unique to Afghans, and, as noted in Chapter III, generosity is a trait that is mandated by Islam (and other religions).

However, this *noblesse oblige* has a corresponding phenomenon in at least one of the sources for this dissertation. Maliha Zulfacar describes a constellation of societal behaviors and expectations that she calls *Mardom-dari* which may be useful for examining evidence of how class is negotiated among Afghans in the Vancouver metropolitan area.

The “Content of Obligation”: *Mardom-dari*

Comments like Sabia’s—“I had a cook and a chauffeur”—that revealed a relatively direct consciousness of class (having servants) were rare in Vancouver. There were intimations of class consciousness in some discussions with people whose status or class (or both) in Afghanistan had apparently been higher than another person’s. No one said, “I am of a higher social position than _____,” but that awareness might be revealed in the way that one person would say, “She comes from a good family” that I interpreted sometimes to include a hidden addendum, “But mine is better.” (However, such conversations were rather rare and tended to be more about status in terms of a family’s lineage than solely about apparent wealth. If I confine my definitions of class to Weberian “class situations” based on property and lack of property (property being any variation of wealth which affords more comfortable economic circumstances—employment income, land holdings, inherited wealth, for example), the influence of status is difficult to escape. Status appears to be too deeply embedded in class among Afghans.

Class is not simply a structural element of any society but is—harkening back to Malkki and Kondo—“mobile and processual”—a process with sets of embedded interactions which reflect more than economic standing and power. Zulfacar identifies an

aspect of class and status—*Mardom-dari*—which is about comportment and demeanor but also about moral imagination and the sense of mutual obligation which guides how an Afghan should ideally live in the world.

Mardom-dari is roughly defined by Zulfacar as the “accumulation of social connections within one’s own group through economic, symbolic, and social means”:

It is of considerable social prestige to have a reputation for being a *Mardom-dar*, meaning having accumulated widespread social relations through direct participation in social, religious, and political affairs. In a society like Afghanistan, where the social relationships are a durable, life-long process, the function of *Mardom-dari* always pays off in different forms and manners. *Mardom-dari* is mutually practiced, and the forms of exchange vary on the type of resource one has”(Zulfacar 1997:43-44)

For these reasons—the durable nature of relationships and the mutual practice thereby—Zulfacar drew on Bourdieu’s notions of social capital to study her fellow Afghan immigrants in Germany and the United States. Economic resources and power are basic aspects of a *Mardom-dar* household, but it is possible to be *Mardom-dar* without much political or economic power and, as Zulfacar elaborates, social connections beyond “one’s own group” are also an aspect of *Mardom-dari*:

Mardom-dari enables links and connections to diverse social resources and connections. One can invest in tangible and intangible social exchanges within one’s own ethnic group and also in those not belonging to one’s group. It is the willingness to participate in all social events, such as funeral rites, family crises, or other related social events that characterizes *Mardom-dari*. These forms of exchange involve social and symbolic credits and may result, for example, in being invited to important social, political, and religious events. In a society in which access to scarce resources is not simply limited but in fact influenced by individuals, connections and ties to important and beneficial social resources remain vital in obtaining and improving one’s social position. (Zulfacar 1998:45)

A *Mardom-dar* is *Insanyat*—humane, considerate and compassionate. “The *Mardom-dar* family is known for generosity and can be relied upon in times of sorrow

and joy” (Zulfacar 1998:44). Anna speaks fondly of a time when she traveled with her father—an important Kabuli businessman—to parts of Afghanistan that were distant from their home in Kabul. They would visit villages in the country to look in on families that they knew. “No matter how poor were the villagers,” Anna notes, “they put out all the good food and tea that they could,” in a way that implied without actually saying that her family had considerably more wealth than the villagers she and her father were visiting. Nevertheless, the villagers were hospitable even to their own detriment: “No matter how poor. . . .”

Hospitality is a valued, even revered, tradition among Afghans, and among other Muslims. It is also a part of *pashtunwali*, a Pashtun tradition which covers behavior ranging from revenge to hospitality. Misdaq, an Afghan himself, writes that Islam has been “the unifying factor in Afghanistan for centuries” yet Islam “is not the only institution that regulates everyday affairs.” The “customary tribal code” of *pashtunwali*—which precedes Islam-- has sometimes conflicted with Islam and it is *pashtunwali* which underlies, among other things, codes of hospitality and proper conduct toward guests (Misdaq 2007:275-6). *Pashtunwali* may be practiced by anyone—rich or poor, urban or rural, educated or not—but *Mardom-dari* appears to be practiced largely by people who are considered to be successful and usually in terms of either acquired or inherited resources. It thus indicates the ability to be generous with resources and time, which if expended correctly, receive recognition and status in return.

The villagers who hosted Anna and her father may have been exhibiting *pashtunwali*, but Anna’s father was exhibiting the characteristics that Zulfacar describes as *Mardom-dar*. Looking in on villagers and visiting with them—often offering to help

them—he was sustaining relationships with people beyond his own social class, being generous and attentive to their circumstances, looking after their interests and demonstrated his own capacity to expand his social field beyond his own status and class. I am making this sound as if it is calculated and without the warmth and friendship that, in Anna’s narrative, appears to have been present on all sides. These customs and attitudes may have been obligatory in terms of cultural norms and practices, but that does not mean that they occurred in an affection-free vacuum.

Zulfacar’s description of *Mardom-dari* suggests some comparison with an observation by Charles Taylor in *Sources of the Self*: “[M]oral philosophy tended to focus on what is right to do rather than on what it is good to be, on defining the *content of obligation* rather than the nature of the good life”(Taylor 1989:1 Italics mine). Taylor’s comments are discussed more fully in Chapters III and V, but they relate to class in particular in relation to the “content of obligation.” *Mardom-dari* is composed of personal behaviors, public actions (though not necessarily always public), and (usually) some degree of economic wealth. It also appears to be infused with moral content which dictates that a good life is not just about being good but about doing good—in particular, about the content of obligation inherent maintaining social capital. To be *Mardom-dar* is to be a person of wealth who shares that wealth—contributing to community resources like building schools, and supporting community events as well as, if needed, helping family members through crises and celebrations. It encompasses not only widespread social connections throughout one’s extended family and lineage but beyond one’s own community and social rank but also beyond one’s country as well. The truly *Mardom-dar* person has not only enough access to wealth to afford excellent life chances for

himself and generosity towards others, but also has friendships and professional relationships beyond Afghanistan. Moreover, he (or she) attends to those relationships and maintains them over time.

Mardom-dari reflects status, but it also binds together the elements and interactions which imply class in circumstances where class itself is rarely discussed directly—either because it is not acceptable to do so or because discussing it with an outsider anthropologist is uncomfortable or inappropriate. Herein, *Mardom-dari* is useful because, in a situation where class and status are not always self-evident as they might be in observing the enactments of power in, for example, a small village, Zulfacar has provided a tool for exploring evocations of class—particularly in relation to status. It is by no means a perfect vehicle to examine class differences, but noting who contributes, what they contribute and how much they contribute all suggest levels of resources that distinguish life chances within a group of people who do not readily admit to class difference despite the fact that, by all accounts, they live with an exquisite awareness of it (Barfield 2010; Coburn 2011; Dupree 1980; Misdaq 2006; Zulfacar 1998).

It was not that these Afghan women denied directly the presence of class among them; it was more that direct questions about class and status were—like questions about ethnicity—were almost never answered directly or were never answered at all. It was perhaps evident in the geography of seating at community events like an Afghan community gathering where some groups sat in front and others sat at tables that were located progressively farther away from the action and the music and prize giveaways that happened on the stage. I also thought I detected it in the occasionally solicitous or deferential demeanor between individuals or in lavish descriptions of one person or

another. One young woman who had worked with Mrs. Khan and Dr. Khan was quite fulsome in her praise of their kindness and generosity. It was certainly true that their presence and influence could be discerned in many corners of the community from the funding of the Dari-language television program for the Afghan community which appeared on the multicultural channel every week to providing considerable support for an Afghan community picnic.

Zulfacar quotes Nazif Shahrani from his study of the Kirghiz—an ethnic group which has been present in Afghanistan for centuries:

Perhaps at present as well as in the past, wealth in livestock and other items has been one of the most crucial factors in effectiveness of a leader's performance and maintenance of influence, but what is important in this instance is not the possession of goods and animals, *but how they are used to help the community* [Shahrani: 1979, p. 164]. (Zulfacar 1998:45 italics mine)

To be *Mardom-dar*, one is generous with one's resources, ideally has enough resources with which to be generous, and one contributes to one's community. Part of that contribution, I inferred from many women's comments, was the act of work—holding a job outside the home.

Work, Gender, Class and the Content of Obligation: The Gift Not Given

Many of the Afghan women I met in the Vancouver area had worked outside the home in Afghanistan. Najma had been a government bureaucrat. Neelofar had been an elementary school principal, Lema was a biology professor; Mahira had been a psychologist, Nayaab had been a gynecologist, and Lailiha had been a university administrator. As Ross-Sheriff noted above, there was an association between education and socioeconomic class between women who worked outside the home. In Vancouver, there was a similar association.

While there has been an association between education, work, and socioeconomic class in the cities of Afghanistan, women also worked in the rural areas of Afghanistan, according to several women in the study. The teacher in a village might be the woman who has had the most schooling, which sometimes means a woman with an eighth grade education is the teacher. Afghanistan's literacy rates for women have been extremely low in a population whose literacy rate overall has been low. The CIA World Factbook has figures from 2000 that list the overall literacy rate at 28.1, for men 43.1% and for women 12.6% (CIA 2000).

Coburn and Pont both note that women also worked in jobs that contributed to the family beyond preparing food, housekeeping and child-raising. Coburn, as noted earlier, observes that women contributed to the creation of pottery from Istalif (Coburn 2011)—not specifically as potters themselves but by decorating them or grinding the glazing material. Pont observes that women in the part of Kandahar where she did her research worked in the farm fields just as much as (perhaps more than) the men (Pont 2001). These were family jobs, so it appears that women worked as part of their farming families or as part of the professional *qaum*, rather than earning a separate income. Their contributions were part of the resources of the family or *qaum*.

In the Vancouver area, remunerative work among many of the women consulted for this study seemed to reflect not just the importance of necessary income, but also an impulse to give to the community—to be of use. Furthermore, for some people, work itself was not enough, but it was also important to do work which is commensurate with one's education and best abilities. Of course, one volunteers one's time for events and community organizations, but, if my reading is accurate, for several of the women in this

study, they thought one contributed most valuably when her highest abilities and education are engaged in her job.

Among the women who spoke with me as part of this study, it became apparent that for many women, work was an important component of identity and I view this as perhaps an extension of being *Mardom-dar*, in part because the desire to work was so connected to class. However, none of the women in the study linked work explicitly to the desire to contribute which I identify as relating to *Mardom-dari*. My conclusion had to do with the fact that the women who asserted that they had worked usually also had stories which indicated a life which included education and travel and the means to leave Afghanistan and survive elsewhere. Najma tells me about her quest for work in the Vancouver area. “I take this course and then this course and then they tell me if I take this course, I will get a job, but then I apply for job[s] and I do not get it. I am a human being. I need work, too.” This might have been related to age--Najma thought she was around 65.³³ She had held a job working with refugee resettlement services in Alberta before she and her husband moved to the Vancouver area to be near their children. It was in Vancouver that jobs began to vanish. Najma has told me that she went to the London School of Economics for a year, so it seems as if lack of education cannot be the reason that she is not getting hired. “Now,” she tells me, “I take the bus to the library. I go to Chapters [a Canadian nationwide bookstore chain similar to the now-defunct Borders] and have coffee at Starbucks. I go all over Vancouver area.” Vancouver public

³³ A number of Afghan women would give me one number for their age on one occasion and another number at another occasion. While many birth records were lost in the upheavals of the last three decades, I was told that this was more related to cultural factors like, for example, a lack of emphasis on birthdays—the actual day of birth was the only important birthday. It might also have had to do with the disparity between Muslim and Western calendars.

transportation is free or reduced cost for senior citizens, so Najma can afford this on the carefully managed income she receives from the state.

Hamasa, who is a few years younger, recounts nearly the same experience:

They said I could be a filing clerk, so I took classes and learned to be a filing clerk, but no job. Then they said I needed more training, so I should learn the computer and I take classes to learn about computers. I apply for jobs with computers, but again, I don't get the job. Then they suggest something else for me to learn and I take more classes, but I don't get a job. No job.

I was a teacher in Afghanistan, but I cannot teach here. I would have to go back to the university again to be a teacher, but I can't afford it because I don't have a job. So now I volunteer; I go to meetings; I help. If I stay home, I get depressed, so I go out and see people.

Negaar points out that she had a good job and education: "In Afghanistan, I was in charge of the women's dormitories at university. Later, I went to Tehran and studied psychology." Negaar arrived in Canada with a university education and three years of work in Kuwait where she had lived before receiving permission to come to Canada. Initially, when she arrived in Canada, she lived in Manitoba, helping newcomers settle in. Because she spoke Dari, Farsi, and some Arabic after her stay in Kuwait, she was able to work with several newcomer populations at once without the use of an interpreter. Yet, when she came to Vancouver, jobs began to grow scarce. She worked for a while at Salvation Army and similar organizations until a serious illness disabled her for two years. After that, she was unable to find a job and, like Hamasa, turned to volunteer work.

While age may have been a problem for Najma, Hamasa and Negaar, it is also likely that age combined with their status as immigrants worked against each of them. Nevertheless, it was clear that they had expectations regarding paid work as educated

women they had grown up in class situations which included work in public spheres outside the home.

Having their education and professional credentials honored in Canada was a problem for Najma, Hamasa and Negaar and other women. For Afghans and other immigrant and refugee groups, the training and education which one received outside Canada was often not recognized by the Canadian government. Nayaab, a gynecologist trained in Afghanistan is unable to practice her profession without expensive and time-consuming re-education in the Canadian education system. Similarly, Lema—who had been a biology professor in Afghanistan—was not able to teach. This problem—which I call credentialism—relates to class in a very particular way for these women. As noted earlier, being able to work in a meaningful, well-regarded job was part of the constellation of factors which were related to class if one considers class through Zulfacar's lens of Mardom-dari. Having enough to share is important and having remunerative work certainly contributes to that. Paid work is also part of contributing and seems, as Ross-Sheriff observes, to be related to class (Ross-Sheriff 2006; Zulfacar 1998).

Of 49 Afghan women I worked with, 24 were or had been employed outside the home—about 50%, compared with 15 of 24 Afghan men—about 60%. Moreover, the jobs which women were able to get were considered to be low-skill jobs like resettlement work, while many men—though they were not able to practice their previous professions—were able to acquire jobs which were considered to require more skill, such as government jobs with Canadian Border Services. This may in part have had to do with

difficulties with English, but it seemed to affect women whose English-speaking-and-writing skills were strong as well as those whose skills were not.

Mahira—a psychologist-- reported that she had been able to find work in her original, chosen profession because she had received her Ph.D. from a Soviet university which was one of the few universities outside North America whose degrees were recognized by Canada. Even so, she had to wait a few years while the process of submitting and supporting her credentials ground through the bureaucracy.

Such circumstances were related to an environment in which immigrant education, preparation and ability in the immigrant's country of origin are presumed by the governmental and non-governmental structure to be inherently inferior to Canada's. This is further complicated by the multiple ways that gender and immigration have been classed when women were, in the past, offered fewer or different services than men—not just because Canadian policies misrecognized them as having different needs but because expectations were lower. Newcomers were encouraged—and refugees were part of that solicitation—to provide additional labor force in whatever areas needed the added labor. Daniela, who came from the former Czechoslovakia in the 1960s, was told that she did not need English classes—like those that were provided free of charge to her husband—because she would not be working. In fact, she did want to work. Czechoslovakia was a Soviet satellite and women in countries with communist governments were expected to work. Practices like this and the situation mentioned earlier--in which women took class after class to improve their skill array yet were still repeatedly unable to find employment—effectively created immigrant women as an underclass. Limiting their opportunities to participate in the economy as employees decreased their financial

resources and those who did not have other resources were dependent on state benefits—medical as well as financial benefits for older people of retirement age. Thus, they were structurally incorporated not into their own desires and expectations but into the expectations of the society around them which recognized them as dependents and so made them exactly that.

Class and Immigration: The Social Universe Recalculated

“The kinship system [of Afghanistan] implies a stable, complex, social unit which has persisted with limited change. Thus, in a different social system, its functions and benefits will not only change, but also modify some of its principal and fundamental features.” (Zulfacar 1998: 42)

In the United States and German settings Afghan women and men found themselves consigned to a single lesser class—“refugee.” Zulfacar reports that women relied in part on previous positions of privilege to define themselves by blending context, tradition, class, tribal affiliation, educational background and other elements from previous life in Afghanistan with contemporary experiences as migrants to construct positive ideas of themselves (Zulfacar 1998). This appears to have been true in the Vancouver area as well.

A Narrative of Class

“There’s a kind of narrative of class that always makes the past look simpler than it probably was.” (Stuart Hall 1989:21)

In conversations where I discerned intimations of class or status or both, the reporting of “class situations” tended to be presented as a story of a halcyon past. Anna, for example who is discussed above, remembers visits to the village with her father fondly as a time when people who extended their courtesy and generosity. She does not mention the complex nature of power and hierarchy that may have pulled people away

from other responsibilities to entertain her father and her. She does not note whether or not it was inconvenient for them. She was a child in these remembered past incidents, embedded in cultural ideas and practices which may have taken the inherent inequalities in such a situation for granted and she recounts only the generosity and courtesy of the villagers she and her father visited.

In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym describes what she calls “reflective nostalgia.” Reflective nostalgia is nostalgia that busies itself with the dreams of the past as it is both remembered and imagined. For Sabia, the imagined past she describes at the beginning of the chapter evokes a life of relative privilege that, with chauffeur and cook, suggests a level of economic comfort that most refugees and immigrants do not experience upon arrival in the Vancouver area, regardless of their status in their country of origin. The lucky Afghans who arrive having been sponsored by family who already lived in Canada begin their lives with a support system that others have to find or build themselves. Though some had the foresight to send money out of Afghanistan before they fled, many did not or they had to spend most of whatever resources they had to pay for help in leaving the country. For many of the older Afghan women in this study, memories of “a nice life” still contrast sharply with the lives they are living in the Vancouver area. There is a kind of curtain in time between the last liberal, westernized period in Afghanistan and the chaos and devastation which have followed it.

Embedded in this reflective nostalgia is loss. Nearly every Afghan with whom I spoke echoed Sabia’s words of gratitude about Canada. Anna, who has lived in Canada since the early 1980s, puts it this way: “It may not be your land, but it is your country.” It was in Afghanistan that one knew one’s “place in the social universe.” The social

universe in Vancouver is different. One evening, after Anna, her husband and I visited an Afghan family in Vancouver for dinner, Anna was upset as we drove home. I thought we had had an evening full of good food and good company but she was fuming: “They served us leftovers—nothing fresh did we have tonight! Even the poorest farmer in a village would not do that.” The standard, apparently, was that even the poorest of the poor would have freshly made food and tea to serve a guest.

What interested me was the expectation of a certain kind of treatment by “even the poorest farmer.” I suspected that the remembered village food probably was not always freshly cooked, but that had sometimes been prepared and stored for the next meal, because this is what I observed in most Afghan homes that I visited in Vancouver.³⁴ Still, such memories were part of what it meant to have a “nice life”. People of lesser means and standing were expected to treat their socioeconomic superiors with great respect and deference—even sacrificing their own meager resources for guests of higher social position. This deference was often absent in the world of exile where Afghans of all social positions were obliged to rub elbows with not only Afghans of other social positions but people from all over the world. In particular, they were rubbing elbows in a setting which preaches equality (however imperfectly it is enacted) between all human beings which—however imperfectly enacted—provided access to health care and education and other aspects of a comfortable life that narrowed or eliminated some of the markers of class difference.

³⁴ This opinion was supported by a conversation with Neelofar about rice. Neelofar had six children, so, for her “you just cook up a big pot and it is gone soon. If it is not gone, you just put a lid on the pot and set it out on the balcony.” (This conversation took place in the winter and winter in Vancouver generally assures that a shaded porch will function quite nicely as a refrigerator when the family refrigerator is already full.)

However, the nice life that Sabia described in Afghanistan was not only rooted in perceptions about socioeconomic status. It was also shaped by cultural understandings about manners and the way life was supposed to be. The anchors that Sabia and Anna knew in Afghanistan—family, family prestige or standing in the wider society, relative wealth, and education—are meaningful but not in the same way in the Vancouver area.

For people with less or no privilege, knowing one's place in the social universe confirms habitus and frames not only expectations and station, but traditional ways of seeing the world and experiencing it. This allows one's social imaginary to be relatively stable and stability is critical for maintaining a certain amount of unity, which in turn is important for sustaining order. In exploring the politics of recognition, Charles Taylor observes that there was a flip side to recognition—*misrecognition*—which could result in damaging individuals. If so-called lower classes are addressed in a way which leads them to participate in their own subordination, is it a kind of self-misrecognition or is there some other distinct value pertaining to the presence of order? It may be that knowing one's place in the social universe is indispensable for managing social relations—regardless of whether that place is higher or lower in the hierarchy. In addition, particularly for populations who come from highly stratified countries of origin, it may be necessary for grappling with the changes that accrue to being lodged more or less permanently in a classed category like “refugee.”

By definition, as recipients of the services of the settlement house, they might be perceived as having lower socioeconomic status, but in the Vancouver area, immigrants of various class situations can and do use settlement services like English language classes.

Class and Space

At one community event, there were certain people sitting in the front of the room. Several were members of somewhat more prominent families in the Afghan community. Other families sat together toward the back. I sat at a table with friends—one, like myself, who had never married and had no children, and two who were widows who were there with their unmarried daughters. Though I was invited to join acquaintances at the front of the room, I declined—primarily because it would have been rude and unkind for me to abandon the friend with whom I came, but also because, as I looked around the room, it was clear that I was sitting at a table appropriate for my status as a woman alone: the other women at the table included another single woman, three widows and two single daughters. Thus being a single woman also contributed to public readings of class and status.

In field work, as a professional outsider, an anthropologist may be able to navigate a kind of liminal class status—never belonging to any particular class but having a relationship to several classes. Being a university graduate student with enough resources to spend a year or more doing field work in another country squarely places me in the category of some level of elite. On the other hand, coming to this role so late in life complicated my status. I was dressed in running shoes and pants with a jacket—on the shabby side of fashion for that event. Mrs. Khan—who was always the exact opposite of shabby—was, however, being very *Mardom-dar* in asking me to join her and thus reaching across class, national and cultural lines.

Spatially, though there was not an exact correlation with other class situations, but there was a rough gradation of status: in the front of the hall, near the entertainment and

the master of ceremonies were families sitting at tables who were visible players in the Afghan community. Some were men who seemed to have come with other men, and some came as a part of couples. Further away from the front of the hall were families of somewhat lesser status and class—many were widows with their children and grandchildren. Further away still from the action in the front of the hall was at least one family that looked somewhat isolated, and I knew from other sources that at least one family member's work in the community was at that time un- or at least underappreciated by several members of the Afghan community. I noted that, except for me, there had been few visitors to their table.

Class and its attendant dimensions of status could also be spatialized in an obvious way by noting where different Afghans lived in the Vancouver metropolitan area. Economically defined class situations could be deduced from living situations: people who were well off (usually but not always families in which the husband and father was still alive) lived in houses in residential areas of the Vancouver metropolitan area's communities. People who were less well-off might live in townhouses or apartments. However, this was a little illusory because there were nice-looking townhouse developments and apartment houses held by B.C. housing, which provided subsidized housing for many refugees. Many were subsidized and—unless I was told by the occupants or found out some other way—I could not always tell which kinds of housing were subsidized and which were not. Several Afghans that I knew lived in subsidized housing, either because they were living on limited incomes or because they lived on the stipend to which they were entitled after the age of 65. Thus, living

situations varied widely from Setara, who lived with her son and his family, to the Khans who had two homes, one in Vancouver and another in the mountains.

Stratification and Immigration

Class among Afghans remains multiply constructed and intersected with kinship, clan, and other factors. But Afghans in the Vancouver metropolitan area must contend with additional categories of stratification related to their status as refugees and immigrants. Weber defines status in terms of honor, style of life and exclusivity apart from economic circumstances. The status accorded refugees and immigrants fits comfortably into this category. In the Vancouver metropolitan area it becomes obvious that refugees and immigrants may effectively be treated as if they are from lower classes. No matter how illustrious the ancestry of a visible minority immigrant or refugee may be, the largely white power structure has created a normalizing narrative and set of public programs and discourses in which many people who arrive as immigrants—and particularly as refugees—are misrecognized. They appear to be perceived repeatedly as low-wage labor to be used as needed. They are then adequately if not always comfortably warehoused on government pensions and Canadian health care. For many of the women I worked with, however, this is not how they saw themselves. Negaar, Nayaab, Hamasa made clear that work was an important part of life for them. To be marginalized and warehoused rather than perceived as potentially fully participating members of Vancouver area society was painful and—particularly in Najma’s case—isolating.

Different eras of migration can also result in different kinds of class readings of immigrants. Baraulina, in her research among Afghan immigrants in Germany, notes

three “waves” of Afghan refugee immigration that reflect the different wars and changes in power over the last thirty-two years:

In the first phase, which followed the takeover of power by the communist DVPA in 1978 and the Soviet invasion of 1979, refugees were primarily members of the western-oriented educated elite (e.g. university professors, teachers and students), high-ranking public officials or well-situated businessmen, who encountered, or feared, the repression of the communist regime. After the takeover of power by the mujahideen in 1992, people fled the country who had belonged to or worked for the communist regime or were associated with it. The third phase began with the ascendancy of the Taliban, from their takeover of Kabul in 1996 to the deposing of the fundamentalist regime in 2001. As a result of the repressive politics of the Taliban – in particular, the repression of women – members of the urban middle class who had held out until then made attempts to immigrate to the West. Ethnic and religious minorities also increasingly left the country – for example, Shiite Hazaras, the Ismailis, Hindus, Sikhs – whose lives were threatened by the extremist Taliban.” (Baraulina et al. 2007: 9-10)

She notes that the earliest emigrants from Afghanistan were few until after the 1978 coup, when members of the elite, whom s/he defines as high-ranking officials, well-educated elite (professors, teachers, et al.). However, Baraulina’s observations about Afghans in Germany limit the second wave of emigrants to those who left after the Soviet pullout when the mujahideen wars prevailed. My own observation from conversations with Afghans was that people who had supported the communist overthrow or worked for the communist government were not only in danger after the Soviets left Afghanistan but also before their withdrawal. Stories emerged which made it clear that mujahideen were at work during the communist regimes. Najma noted that the mujahideen would go to the houses of people who worked for the communist governments and either threaten or, in some cases, summarily execute them.

The Russians always wanted more soldiers. They wanted my brother for the army [the Afghan army which was working with the Soviets]. He was seventeen, but when he got old enough, they were coming for him. Everywhere, he had to be careful where he goes. One night, we were having

dinner and there was a knock on the door and a *mujahideen* came for my brother. He wasn't old enough, we said. They said he had to come. He did not go that night. The next night he goes to Pakistan with my mother. When the mujahideen come next time, "We don't know where he is."

Furthermore, there were multiple regimes with different—often conflicting—leaderships, each of which inspired a separate wave of migration from Afghanistan. Exile carries its own connotations of impurity, as Malkki notes, and therefore the category of refugee is problematic.

Many Afghans were at pains to make clear to me that they did not come to Canada as refugees. In fact, most Afghans did not come to Canada as refugees. They had to leave Afghanistan to make a claim at a UNHCR office in another country—e.g., Syria, India--yet they were inspired to leave Afghanistan because they wanted or needed to find refuge from events that took place there. This suggested that the role of refugee held negative meanings for them as well. Most Afghans entered Canada as landed immigrants, according to a non-Afghan who worked with Canadian Immigration Services. Dossa, quoting Malkki, describes refugees as "matter out of place"—evidence of the failure of social and political order. As such, they also become a subordinated category in modern discourse which privileges the bounded, stable state (Dossa 2004; Malkki 1993).

A Narrative of Class Recalculated

One way I was able to observe class was through visits I made to people's homes. As I observed, many Afghans favored new, higher quality furnishings for their homes. Even those whose means were somewhat limited seemed to find ways to acquire them. I was sitting in Khalida's living room one day, complimenting her on her sofa—beautiful, upholstered with brocade fabric, and , and edged with carved wood—and the elegant,

embroidered, lace-trimmed fabric squares she had placed on her occasional tables. I was also noting privately how costly these pieces of furniture were on what I knew was a very limited income. Khalida was a young mother with three children to raise and she was still learning English, having spent a good portion of her life in Afghanistan and then in Pakistan. When she asked me about how I furnished my house, I talked about how I had my grandmother's old upholstered rocking chair, the red antique writing desk that used to be in one of my favorite rooms in my grandparents' house and how I enjoyed using the old everyday plates that they had used—plates with scratches that had been put there over countless mornings of breakfasts and evening meals.

Khalida responded—a little sharply, I thought at the time—that she did not want used things around her. Later I recognized her comment as a response to my own boorishness—a boorishness which resided in two aspects of my comments. First, there was my failure to grasp that my affection for the memories that the aforementioned plates and furniture held for me defined me as a person of limited means who would live with used stuff instead of buying new things. The second boorishness was really a thoughtless disregard for Khalida's own history and feelings. Four generations of her family had had to flee Taliban Afghanistan. As is common with many refugees, there was not enough time or space to take with them the things that might have been passed on from one generation to another. Though she never said this specifically, I later realized that I might also have been reminding her of that pain which was associated with the larger pain of having to lose one's country.

There was a third aspect to Khalida's response. A mutual friend—an older woman named Aziza--had been able to pick up some furniture from an elderly neighbor

who moved away. Aziza had lived on a limited budget for many years and enjoyed finding bargains in thrift stores, moving sales, and estate sales. To Aziza and to me, the table—which was in excellent condition and comparable to the kinds of furniture I had seen in Khalida’s house—represented a thoughtful, surprisingly elegant, free gift to a young mother in limited circumstances. To Khalida, the table represented used stuff—the kind of thing that would be given to someone needy. The position in which she found herself as a refugee required her to depend on assistance, which did not fit with the social position in which she experienced herself as belonging. While she bore with grace the things she had to do as a refugee (such as cook fund-raising meals at a local church to raise money to repay her transportation from Pakistan), it appeared to me that she guarded what parts of life she could from reminders of the status which had adjusted her class downward from what it had originally been.

I do not need this. I have nice furniture. This is not things I need. I have nice things. [She gestures at the furniture.] I do not need used. I do not need things from Aziza.

[And later.] I do not need used.

Such attitudes were not unique to Afghans, I should mention. A friend who worked with refugees told me a story about a recently arrived Palestinian family which had been sponsored by a local refugee committee. It is common for such refugee committees to acquire donated household furnishings, dishes, flatware, pots, pans, and so forth to set up the newcomer family’s apartment for immediate occupancy. Such things are almost always donated or purchased at low cost from moving sales or thrift stores, and they are usually nice if not beautiful—the kinds of housing goods that I was used to as a graduate student and a person of otherwise limited means. However, on arriving,

this family took the carefully acquired and stored pieces of furniture with which their new apartment had been furnished and placed them outside, emphatically—disregarding or not understanding that, offended as they felt by the gesture, they were committing a profoundly offensive gesture themselves. It was a gesture that dismissed considerable hard work and effort on the part of refugee committees which often had to stretch very limited resources to go a long distance—resources that often included considerable hours of time and heart that went into helping the very people who were behaving so disrespectfully. Of course, part of the problem was that the family in question felt disrespected itself. It was a situation in which cultures clashed with one another—the culture of preparing a home for refugees and the culture of refugees who in whose minds dwelt awareness of what Hall calls their place in the social universe—an awareness which had yet to grapple with the dissonance which resulted from the change in social universes. Moreover, it was a historical moment in which many other influences came to meet each other—the contretemps between “the West and the rest,” the history of colonization in which the West had created not only the world from which the family had emerged, but also the conditions which forced them to seek refuge. The Canadians, comfortable and at home, meant to be welcoming and meant to provide the basic elements of safety and home.

These circumstances are rife with complexities both apparent and invisible that exemplify how refugee status can intersect with class. The women and men who worked on such refugee committees often committed hours of exhausting effort to the project of rescuing people from other countries whose existence was imperiled by war or persecution or other ills which create refugees. For the most part, they are sensitive to the

wounds to pride and spirit that the process of becoming a refugee instilled and strove to offset the impact of such wounds.

While the family had come from a refugee camp to Canada, they had once had a middle-class lifestyle before war had come to the country in which they lived and they would not have lived with used things in their old, pre-refugee lives. For them, the role of refugee was temporary—an identity which resided alongside and subordinate to their other identities. For the refugee committee, it was a practical matter. Committee members depended on being able to find donated or inexpensive items in order to do their work and to help several families rather than only one or two. It was possible, when such situations arose, to hear some *sotto voce* grumbling about how refugees who behaved in this way perhaps lacked gratitude but were out of touch with the practicalities of their new lives—one of which was that the status of refugee tended to categorize people according to their economic class situation and thus to a lower class without regard for their social standing in previous lives.

In both of these cases—Khalida’s and the Middle Eastern family’s—the people in question had lived as refugees in other countries in difficult, even dire conditions before they were able to come to Canada. Their sense of place in the original social universe--where they placed themselves in their respective social imaginaries--was more important than the social categories in which they found themselves at the time. Recycling and finding ways to use and enjoy used or antique furniture and other items is a project in which many Canadians—like Americans—indulge and a beautifully decorated home filled with antiques can be a marker of higher social standing in Canada just as it sometimes is in the United States. Most of the Afghans I knew tended to favor larger,

heavier, more formal furniture—new, if possible. I also knew several Afghans like Hamasa who—though they had grown up in what I would categorize as elite families-- had adopted this lifestyle. It should perhaps be mentioned that families that I identified as having been elite in Afghanistan did not always seem elite in Canada—particularly if their circumstances were not as well-appointed as those of others in the Afghan community. Furthermore, I found myself confused about who was “elite” in Afghanistan by some individuals’ reporting of their own status. Self-reporting of a life with higher class and status in Afghanistan might have been inversely related with actual status and class in Afghanistan, but it is also entirely possible that people who are conscious of the life they had in Afghanistan and equally conscious that their circumstances might seem reduced to an outsider, feel the need to clarify that life was nicer in the time before they had to leave.

Still, for the setting in which they came to live—Canada—many Afghans’ status as refugees relegated them permanently to socioeconomic lower classes as permanent refugees and permanently temporary and therefore, permanently needy.

People who are already materially well off –whose class situations include adequate economic resource—are more likely to have the education, the status and the political understanding to see what is coming, and the material resources to leave before looming political disaster and war descend on a population. In the sample represented in this dissertation, there is a high association between education, existing material resources in Afghanistan, and earlier dates of departure in the four waves of migration described in Chapter I (Baraulina 2007). For some forced migrants, those material circumstances remain available in the country of refuge but often they are exhausted by

the costs of leaving. Thousands of dollars may be paid for various items, from bribing officials to paying for long taxi rides out of the country. Najma reports bundling her brother and her mother into the taxi that was to take them from Kabul to Pakistan through the Khyber Pass—a taxi ride that apparently cost thousands of dollars.

Class, Racialization and Immigration Status in the Vancouver Area

Changes in material circumstances force, as Zulfacar noted, some degree of leveling between economic (not necessarily social classes/status) classes once they leave Afghanistan. Relationships in which class was rooted in status in terms of lineage through tribe, ethnicity or *qaum* become reconfigured in relation to categories of citizenship and immigration (Zulfacar 1998). In *Exalted Subjects*, Sunera Thobani refers to the “historical racialization of the category of citizen” and the “multitiered structure of citizenship” in Canada. Thobani’s book is about the racialized treatment of First Nations, but she observes a racialized hierarchy of citizenship which affects immigrants as well as First Nations people in which white identity as citizen is normalized—“repeatedly reinscribed as the authentic and trustworthy marker of citizenship in daily life.” Even further, nationality is not guaranteed with citizenship. She notes that “some citizens are denied such claims” of nationality while others automatically acquire it (Thobani 2007:1).

This part of identity is processual, wherein specific identities become racialized and stratified so that citizens are superior to non-citizens, and citizens whose citizenship was acquired when they were born in Canada are to some degree perceived as being superior to those whose citizenship was granted later in life. Racialized categories become further divided because white citizens are superior to nonwhite—“visible

minority”—citizens and white immigrants may be considered to be superior to nonwhite citizens. Other categories may be further divided. For example, immigrants are not all the same. Some are immigrants who have theoretically migrated out of choice³⁵, and some are refugees. Moreover, some refugees may have been forced to leave their countries of origin, but they must become refugees in order to qualify for certain benefits, among which was admission to Canada. It is at this point that the identity of refugee first becomes most powerfully inscribed, and the first point at which the so-identified refugee must participate in that reinscription by articulating in multiple ways on long, intricate forms the nature of their refugee status.

We met today at Caroline’s house—Alicia, Neelofar, Lindsay and I—to fill out forms for an entire family—applications to enter Canada as refugees. After a *salade Nicoise* prepared by Elizabeth in her tiny apartment kitchen, we clear the table and Alicia, who has until recently been the chair of the refugee committee, pulls thick files out of a filing box and sets them on the table. There are nine people in the family—a mother, a father, a grandfather and six children—and nine thick files. After two decades of helping refugees come to Canada, Alicia is the expert. She parcels the files out, dividing them between us, and it is our job to review applications to make sure that they contain corresponding information on, for example, former addresses. “They have to be the same,” she says, “exactly the same. If Mohammed’s application says he lived at 201 Cherry Street from May 2001 to June 2003 and his daughter’s application says she lived at 201 Cherry Street from May 2001 to May 2003, the application can be rejected. They’re trying to catch people in lies.” I asked what lies. Alicia said, “It might not even be a lie. In some places people have included a relative’s child in their family, but they consider that child to be theirs, but we [referring to the Canadian government] think a child is only a child if it’s born to the parents.

Each application must match on point after point—addresses, dates lived at those addresses, jobs listed for husbands and wives listed on one spouse’s

³⁵ This is an illusory definition of immigrants. People who migrate out of economic necessity are not counted as refugees though their circumstances may be every bit as dire as those who qualify as refugees because they fit the Geneva Convention’s definition which focuses largely on war, persecution and related conditions that were the focus of the post-World War II convention’s concerns. The reconfiguring of global populations in response to the global market economy’s influence on individual countries is largely ignored.

application must match the list on his or her partner’s application. Illnesses listed must be documented thoroughly on the application. Proof of birth must be included if possible, though in places that have experienced infrastructural damage and failure through war or disaster, even something as taken-for-granted as a birth certificate in the United States or Canada may not be available.

This thorough documentation that begins at the moment of entry is required of all immigrants, but refugees are given particular scrutiny in relation to their worthiness. It is not enough to be needy, the circumstances must indicate that you are unable to return. The bar for a non-refugee immigrant is not set quite so high. Thus, from the beginning, the relative statuses of citizens, non-refugee immigrants and refugees are conferred. An overview might simply reflect three categories (Figure 3).

In the Vancouver area, class and race often intersect in the very refugees who become symbols of the state’s tolerance and acceptance. Racialization is most apparent in governmental labels like “visible minorities” which clearly define such populations in relation to their visible difference.

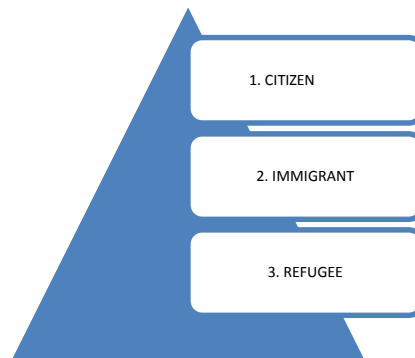


Figure 3. Three-category overview.

However, this hierarchy appears to be intersected by race and ethnicity (Figure 4):

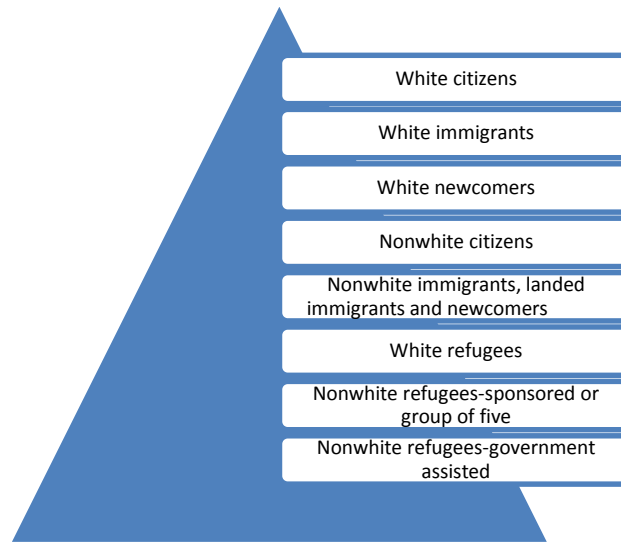


Figure 4. Three Categories Intersected by race and ethnicity.

This is not a label which just applies to refugees, however. It is assigned also to the children of people who are from visible minorities even if the parents have been living in Canada for two decades and the children are Canadian-born. The label is further used in ordinary discourse and though there are policies and structures which further racialized and class refugee populations, it is in day-to-day conversations and experiences that the stratification of such categories becomes most apparent. For example, at no time in my relationship with refugee committees, settlement agencies and other groups which worked with Afghan women did I hear anyone casually describe the circumstances of any non-refugee's life in his or her presence in the way that Khalida's were described to me. Similarly, it would have unthinkable to print the details of a committee member's life in a newsletter as the details of Husna's life were printed for a local congregation and then incorporated into the national newsletter. There were at the heart of these situations well-meaning efforts to sustain attention on the need for resources to allocate to future

sponsees, but there was also a kind of infantilization in the process. It is hard to escape infantilizing people who are in need of such massive help and it becomes a continuation of colonial power as many of the refugees who come to Canada come from previously colonized countries. The citizen—in these cases, almost always descendants of colonizers or of later white immigrants who became incorporated into the infrastructure laid down by colonizers’ settler societies—is in a position of what Said called “flexible positional superiority” (Said 1978). She knows quantities of information about the refugee, but the refugee does not have the bureaucratic or the interpersonal agency to discover similar kinds and quantity of information about the citizen who is helping her, but not because she has no agency at all. Rather because the nature of the structure in which she is attempting to function keeps her continually busy, focused on settling in, finding schools for her children, learning where services and stores are and how to get to them, discovering how transportation services work, learning English, recovering from the damages of living in a war-torn and war-weary place, and more. Whatever agency is theoretically possible or whatever agency she may feel in terms of feeling entitled to discover more about her citizen helper, circumstances make it difficult to enact that agency.

The role of citizenship—what kind and how acquired—also becomes a means to managing the population by categorizing race, ethnicity and nationality (Bissoondath 1984; Gunew 2004). In *Exalted Subjects*, Sunera Thobani notes that “. . .the liberalization of citizenship has enabled representations of the nation state as being a liberal democracy in essence rather than a colonial settler society” (Thobani 2007:100). While this is part of her argument that the Canadian face of multicultural acceptance and

toleration of difference is, in reality, reinscribing what she terms an “exaltation” of whiteness, it is also relevant to a discussion of the ways that immigrant or refugee status also becomes in effect part of class stratification. Lynn Fujiwara also discusses such “differential citizenship” in *Mothers without Citizenship*, noting the “inherent between citizenship as a system of equality and social class as a system of inequality results in unequal citizenship” (Fujiwara 2008:24).

In the course of my daily life in the Vancouver area, this stratification was never articulated openly by anyone, but it was made apparent in other ways. I often heard some *sotto voce* complaints from people with white settler heritage and long generations of family in Canada about the influx of immigrants—specifically, visible minorities—but they were rare and usually couched in terms of specific difficulties. “I wish they would learn English,” one waitress complained. Other issues have surfaced in the literature that present difference as an understandable problem--as if it is not related to racial differences. Katharyne Mitchell’s discussion of so-called “monster houses”—houses that were considerably larger and more ornate than the cottage styles preferred by the largely white Canadian neighbors--is an example of this confrontation. It was a confrontation between the perceived Canadian (mostly white) “us” and the Other as exemplified by Chinese immigrants and the houses they built in Vancouver. The Chinese houses tended to occupy more space on the lot than had been traditional, changing the styles of neighborhoods in the Shaughnessy neighborhood of Victoria. While race was not the specific site of confrontation—the explicit argument was not “no Chinese here,” there was an emphasis on the implacable nature of cultural difference that began in zoning which was “used to shape the taste of potential homebuyers. . .”(Mitchell 1997b:166).

Mitchell notes that images like opium-smoking and uncleanliness became naturalized in relation to Chinese residents as part of the public discourse—regardless of any facts which contradicted such prejudices. Zoning was designed to preserve a hierarchy by, for example, preserving larger tracts of property on which wealthier people—mostly Anglo Canadians when the zoning originally took place in the beginning of the 20th century—and thereby to preserve class differences and tastes.

While hierarchies that suggest class situations exist between and among the white European-descended power structure and immigrants and refugees, there are also ramifications of class within refugee groups. The perspectives of two women who contributed to the development of a cooperative project for Afghan women in Vancouver offer some possible insight into some ideologies of class within the Afghan community.

Conclusions

The life chances offered in the Vancouver area did not exactly provide Afghan women with the same nice life Sabia described, but several Afghans described Canada's approach to multiculturalism—enshrining the value of keeping one's own culture--as a factor in choosing Canada over the only destination country which was more popular—the United States. In 2004, in conversation after a presentation about Afghan women, Sahar, a psychologist, referred to Canada as “the premiere destination” for refugees and immigrants.

So, what is a nice life and how does it relate to conceptions of class and status? In part, it is related to the disparity in circumstances that many of the women in this study find between their lives in Afghanistan and their lives in Canada. Before leaving Afghanistan, most of them had work of some kind and sufficient financial resources to

have domestic help or to do things like travel abroad or go to university. Sabia wanted me to know—I am reading her mind, but it seemed to be everywhere in our conversation that she wanted me to understand it--that she was much more than a refugee from a war-torn country and that she had a substantially different life and history before Afghanistan became the repository of war and violence for which it is known today. Her brief litany of her own nice life evoked not only a vision of a privileged life in Afghanistan but a nostalgic glimpse of a world which was to vanish with the events that were set in motion by the 1978 April coup³⁶—a world in which “one knew one’s place in the social universe” (Hall 1989).

Sabia’s description of a “nice life” with which I began this chapter serves as a metaphor for the complexities of what we commonly understand as class and its relationship with kinship, status, education, mobility, immigration status, and processes of racialization. Embedded in Canada’s reconstructed categories of multiculturalism which include a class assignment as low-wage labor, a racial assignment as a “visible minority” and a citizen assignment as a permanent refugee, understanding how class has functioned in the different stages of Afghan women’s lives is a major challenge. The elements of class and status as discussed in Afghanistan and as manifested through one’s position in *Mardom-dari* become welded with understandings of class and status in Canada. The result for Afghan women is a constant renegotiation of their self-identities through shifting contexts.

³⁶ I refer to this event as a coup, not a revolution, in part because so many Afghans I met do not appreciate the use of the word “revolution,” which would signify a somewhat nobler cause than they perceived the overthrow of Daoud’s government to be.

The social universe of Afghans in Afghanistan includes class situations that are embedded in relations that derive through ethnicity and tribal lineage, melding Weber's class situations with his concepts of status. In the Vancouver area, ethnicity and lineage undoubtedly inform Afghans' emic understanding of their places in the social universe, but other factors such as the influences of differential regimes of citizenship and immigration can affect an etic researcher's view into the nuances that are woven into a population's unarticulated understandings. The hegemony of citizenship and immigration discourses both obscure and rearrange class within and in relation to the Afghan community so that class within the community is different from and influenced by hierarchical categories of citizenship and immigrant status (e.g., "immigrant" and "refugee") beyond the community.

Thus, *Mardom-dari* as Zulfacar describes it was used as a vehicle for examining class and it did offer some insight—perhaps not so much into how class was perceived but into how behaviors were engaged in ways that could symbolize class. Class is perhaps discernible in behaviors like the generous use of financial resources but also in commitments of time and energy and the importance of social capital. In Chapter V, I provide case studies of *Mardom-dari* in relation to three women, two of whom were intimately involved in a development project which created an Afghan women's sewing cooperative. I suggest how the concept of *Mardom-dari* also becomes a cultural resource which Afghan women deploy in a demonstration of agency as they seek to push back at their marginalized status in wider Vancouver.

CHAPTER V

THE “CONTENT OF OBLIGATION”

Introduction

The role of obligation and responsibility appears to be strong among the Afghan women I met. They exemplified the concept of *Mardom-dari* when they had considerable resources and also when they did not. In this chapter, I will discuss three women whom I thought exemplified *Mardom-dari* in particular ways. One—Roena—contributed (with her husband) to multiple aspects of the Afghan community, using both financial resource and professional life. Two of them—Sabia and Rukhshana—were deeply involved in the founding of a women’s sewing cooperative. Each woman had devoted considerable resources—whatever resources were available—to the Afghan community. Their demonstrations of *Mardom-dari* also provided considerable personal satisfaction to them and perhaps even a sense of empowerment as they sought to tap into a sense of agency in their lives. I begin with a discussion of one of the important venues where *Mardom-dari* was expressed.

The Cooperative

Meena, the Afghan Women’s Sewing Cooperative, was set up in 2003-2004 as a project which would emulate the success of other development cooperatives in other parts of Canada. In interviews and from various bulletins, newsletters and news articles, it is apparent that the project had many founders. Funding for different aspects of the project was provided by a widely varied array of groups, agencies and organizations—local municipal organizations, community development organizations, church organizations as well as Canada-wide organizations that focused on women and on Afghan women in

Canada in particular. This was the first sewing and handicraft cooperative for Afghan women and the great majority of the early members—over 90%--were government assisted refugees.

Methodological Issues, Caveats and Misgivings in Relation to This Discussion of the Cooperative

I was not permitted to study the cooperative itself by interviewing its members—in part, I was told, because there had been too much news coverage in the past that had created difficulties for the members. What the specific issues were was not clear to me, but it is easy to infer that the first group of women who became members of the cooperative would have been thrust into the spotlight of news media with little preparation for having their personal stories told in such a public way. As with so many other situations in this study—it became clear to me that it would take a matter of years to build the trust necessary, even assuming that I was the person in whom that trust could be invested. What I mean by this last statement is that Afghans have had considerable experience with well-intentioned people who believed they knew what would benefit them and all too often it has cost Afghans more than they or the well-intentioned people could have foreseen.

For these reasons, I might have chosen to exclude any discussion of the cooperative itself and I am still somewhat conflicted. However, the cooperative was a subject of discussion in two of the interviews for this project. Sabia and Rukhshana discussed it at some length as part of their own stories and I came to believe that some of the themes that surfaced in those interviews could provide some observations of value. It was part of their stories and therefore became part of the overall discussion being

presented in this dissertation. I gave the Cooperative a pseudonym, as I have done with other groups, because I was not studying the cooperative itself but the reactions of two women—Sabia and Rukhshana—to their experience with it.

Rukhshana looks quite a bit younger than she is—a woman in her late forties. In university, she studied engineering, which she loved, and after graduating, found herself working in development organizations in both Afghanistan and later in Pakistan—eventually working in the United Nations Development Programme. She and her husband migrated to Pakistan and then to the Vancouver area in 2002. At the time of this study, she worked with one of the primary resettlement organizations in the Vancouver area, and had been a primary project coordinator for developing Amina. The underlying idea that she and people from other organizations had for the cooperative was that it would be a group of Afghan women who, working together, could learn some of the basics of building a business—finances, marketing, and business practices, for example. All this would happen in a cooperative setting, which, in this case meant that each woman would take an equal portion of the earnings regardless of her contributions. As I will discuss later in this chapter, this was not a design that appealed to everyone, but Rukhshana saw it as a chance for women to help each other in multiple ways. The cooperative would provide a chance for some social interaction, yes, but it would at the same time be a resource for usable job skills which would improve the likelihood that Afghan women could “hit the ground running.”

Sabia, as noted in the beginning of Chapter IV, had been a teacher in Afghanistan and had lived in economic circumstances comfortable enough to have a driver and help around the home there. While her situation may have been somewhat less economically

advantageous in Vancouver, she had built up considerable social capital in the Vancouver area with her activities as an advocate for Afghans and sometimes for Muslims in the wake of September 11, 2011. Before September 11, she told me, she did not necessarily wear a headscarf or make a point of dressing a certain way. In Vancouver—an area with a liberal reputation—the reaction was apparently not as strong as in other places, but it was still uncomfortable for some women who veiled to appear in public. Sabia made a point of wearing headscarves as part of an effort to combat the essentializations that were abounding about Islam, using her headscarves to stimulate conversation about Afghans and Muslims, but also to exemplify the fact that she—who was not a terrorist—was wearing a headscarf and therefore Canadians could stop worrying about whether or not women wore headscarves. As an older woman who was active in the Afghan community and who had created a visible public profile, she seems to be a logical choice to be part of the process of setting up the cooperative.

A Brief History of the Cooperative

There were different accounts of its founding, but it seems to have been the brainchild of several people, including Rukhshana and Sabia. Planning for the co-op began in 2003 with a project team drawn from members of the Afghan community as well as members of various agencies and organizations. By 2004, the 45 members of the new Co-op were, according to a report, “developing the structure of the Co-op and creating a participatory and democratic decision-making system” as well as setting up committees for membership communication, business administration and incorporation (Habib and Friesen 2005:4).

Rukhshana's vision for the cooperative was that it would help train Afghan women who were new to the area in a marketable skill (i.e., sewing and alterations), would build a network of entrepreneurial women who could support each other in times to come, and to provide a setting in which the cooperative would earn some money for the women who participated while they were learning their marketable skills. It would also provide a place where Afghan women of all backgrounds could come together—i.e., it would be a class-free setting, by definition, and everyone would draw equally from the profits regardless of what they put contributed in the form of labor.

The Co-op was opened in 2004 with great fanfare—publicity, pictures in the paper, and—by all the apparent evidence, considerable positive regard and support from the community. The initial idea was to create a cooperative in which women could work together and share in the profits equally at the same time that the co-operative provided training in various skills from sewing to business skills for its members. Experts were called in to help the women understand how to keep the books, how to manage a business, how to market their products as well as sew. Various agencies joined together to support the cooperative, including the Red Cross and a local settlement organization, Immigrant Settlement Services (ISS). The cooperative design had been used in other Canadian communities successfully.

Rukhshana had been responsible for finding much of the funding for the co-op. She wrote grants, solicited other community support, and generally put the project together through the various international, national, provincial, municipal and non-governmental agencies that participated in providing funding. Funds were raised, space

was rented, and local business people offered their time to help train women in the co-op in the aforementioned business strategies.

An important consideration was the language barrier, so handouts were translated into Dari, but an even more important consideration was the fact that many Afghan women are illiterate. As the migrating populations of Afghans have changed according to the period in which they left Afghanistan, they have also changed in terms of educational background. Many of the Afghans I met came from backgrounds in which women had had at least some education and in Afghanistan, education signals increased economic resources, increased life chances and thus membership in at least middle class families. However, as the years of conflict wear on, more newcomer Afghan women arrived who had grown up in the wake of the Soviet withdrawal and subsequent civil war, Taliban regime, and post-Taliban social pressure against women's literacy which continues well after the 2001 NATO invasion. Such situations needed to be addressed, so the project team was "exploring the development of innovative communication systems such as using symbols and audio/visual recording to address the illiteracy barrier of its members (Habib and Friesen 2005:5). An "inventory" of skills relating to sewing and handicrafts and to the cooperative in general was created and plans were made to accommodate work shifts to member needs as well as to help members find transportation. (Habib and Friesen 2005:4)

The story of the cooperative—which I have drawn primarily from newspaper articles, reports to funding organizations and the two women interviewed here who helped it begin—is the story of many development projects. As James Ferguson points out in *The Anti-Politics Machine* (Ferguson 1994), development projects routinely do not

succeed in achieving their stated goals, though they do sometimes result in other unintended positive consequences. This does not always mean that they do not succeed in providing a benefit of some kind. This appears to be, in many ways, the case with the Afghan Women's Sewing Cooperative. As the project continued, it became clear that there would be some issues, apparently. The aforementioned experts, for example, operated on the Western model of business in which an appointment made is an appointment to be kept. However, Rukhshana cited the example of an accountant who had been hired to consult with the women in the co-op only to arrive to find the doors closed and locked because the women had gone to a wedding.

Such missed connections reflected a variety of issues. Time management and perception, for example, can be different from society to society. Some Afghans make jokes about "Afghan time," for example—suggesting that Afghans tend to arrive late to various functions. I did not find this to be particularly true myself. The Afghans with whom I interacted were generally quite punctual. However, as Johannes Fabian reveals in *Time and the Other*, it is part of the colonizing discourse that the Western idea of time becomes the norm from which all other perceptions are deviant (Fabian 1983). What Fabian calls "denial of coevalness"—the denial of equally valid perspectives about time—is apparent in the ways that differences in perceptions and use of time have become the locus of Othering for other populations, like Native Americans or Hispanic Americans in the United States, for example.

Missed appointments and other disconnects also likely reflected different priorities and different versions of common sense. The hegemony of Western ideals of common sense dictates that activities relating to a money-making opportunity are

superior to activities relating to the maintenance of social capital. From Rukhshana's recounting of the incident, it appeared that two versions of common sense were in conflict with each other and—at that moment—the common sense of the Afghan women may have won out. A wedding is freighted with multiple significances—among which is a critical transition in life, the joining of families, and the beginning of new families not to mention a chance to celebrate in the wake of difficult times. Perhaps even more important, common sense might have suggested that an hour of an accountant's time to help with what was to be a transitional situation for a few women—the co-op—must be subordinated to an event which was part of building an entire community. Of course, for Rukhshana, the co-operative was about building and supporting the Afghan community—making a sustainable link in which women could transition from their refugee status to being part of the wider Vancouver area community in which social capital was necessary but so often subordinate to the importance of economic capital.

Rukhshana and Sabia

“Afghans are very hierarchical.” (Anouk)

If, as I was told on several occasions by people who worked with Afghans—by both Afghans and non-Afghans—Afghans are “hierarchical, “ then it is possible that a cooperative in which everyone shared from the profits regardless of their contribution might not have been the most appropriate setting for helping newcomer Afghan women find their footing in the Vancouver area. Rukhshana recounts the situation of one coop member:

Sima was learning greatly—greatly learning, quickly. Grade five graduate student. Her learning—and there were a few more like her—really, the right fit for the co-op. Freshta, she's telling me--she's a trainer--she said, 'Rukhshana, I think it's a wonderful model, but not for the right people. We have a few people

who are not made for this model or this model is not made for them.” So that really gave me a very good insight into looking into the path for Sima. This absolutely was a person who—if the co-op had had a few Simas—it would be absolutely a different situation. She was the one who was eagerly trying to learn, improve her skill try to improve her language, go to the market, find out and learn and learn and learn.

Sima did not continue with the cooperative—apart from socializing with co-op members. According to Rukhshana, she did what the co-op was designed to help her do—she and her husband took the training she had received and began their own business. In Rukhshana’s view, Sima had been ready to learn—ready for the model of learning that the co-op provided which, while it was a co-operative, was also a training ground for some of the skills needed to enter the world of work in Canada. There were other women who joined the co-operative for a while and then moved on to become entrepreneurs, building small businesses with their families—opening a convenience market, marketing jewelry at craft fairs—pressing ahead to make a place for themselves in the Vancouver area economy.

As Sabia expressed it to me, there were other needs to be addressed. A place where women could come to drink tea, do a little work, and talk with each other, for example, provided a buffer against the harsher realities of the world of a forced migrant. In Canada, the life of a refugee can be stripped of so many niceties that made for the nice life many remembered in Afghanistan. In the remembered Afghanistan of many people with whom I spoke, there was time for visiting and socializing, for enjoying good Afghan food together and for having enough time in life for actually living life. In Canada, Dossa has noted, refugees and immigrants are expected to be ready to engage (Dossa 2004)—meaning to be ready to look for work, to take on any tasks or courses that might be required to prepare for work. This is difficult for most immigrants in general, but can

be even harder to do for forced migrants--Afghan and non-Afghan alike. Being forced to leave and often under great duress, they frequently arrive in Canada suffering multiple ailments related to stress and physical disease or injury. Hitting the ground running often means they must first attend to multiple health issues these things—as well as find housing, furnish their homes adequately, enter their children in school, take advantage of free English language lessons which are only available free in the first 1-3 years after their arrival, and so on. All this must be accomplished before they can actually “hit the ground running” as the Canadian infrastructural and social discourses envision. In Canada, hitting the ground running generally means—as it does in the United States—finding a job and supporting oneself and one’s family as soon as possible. What is rarely understood well is the degree to which hitting the ground running also must wait until a newcomer has learned her way around the infrastructures—governmental and nongovernmental—which are in place to both assist and control newcomers. The multiple bureaucracies made available to newcomers can help or hinder (or both) a newcomer’s movement through the system.

It is possible that the design of the cooperative itself—focused on placing the women in a work setting in which they would be rapidly propelled into the local economy and the design of which ran so directly opposite to Afghans’ reported tendencies (to the degree which they can be essentialized)--was part of the problem. If, as Anouk and Rukshana assert, Afghans are more inclined to be hierarchical than many other groups, another kind of project—with a design that perhaps at least gave a nod to Afghan social structures--might have been met with more acceptance. Also, the project could also have been affected by some of the accumulated stresses that comes from

having been a refugee—in particular an Afghan refugee with thirty-plus years of war, occupation, and instability in the homeland. Policies for refugees—how much help they get, how many years of free English classes, and even the kinds of English they are taught—tend to overlook the realities of being a refugee. More specific discussion of this occurs in Chapter VI, but suffice it here to say that the task of setting up a new life in a completely foreign place with many different cultural practices, and where even the language requires learning not only a new vocabulary, but a different alphabet, gendered pronouns (Farsi does not) and a grammar which mangles sentence structure ('I can speak English very well' rather than '*man inglisi bisyar khub gap zada mitunam*' ['I English very well speak can']) is undoubtedly daunting. Add to that the array of illnesses and other problems with which many refugees arrive, and it is not surprising that so many need more help than the host country—comfortable and economically secure by comparison as well as free of war on its own soil—imagines.

In Zulfacar's study, women categorized traditional domestic roles and traditional limitations on spatial mobility as part of womanhood, part of their commitment to their families, complementary rather than subordinate, and part of who they were—part of their selfhood (Zulfacar 1998). (Dossa 2006a & b; Norquay 2004; Zulfacar 1998). Such perceptions may have served a tendency to hierarchy in ways that perhaps could not be foreseen even by fellow Afghans who had been working in more secular Western environments.

Another possible difficulty in the design of the cooperative might have been its resemblance to socialist and communist organizational designs as they were imposed on Afghans. Rukhshana had seen the cooperative design work while she was still in

Afghanistan and Pakistan, but in the Vancouver area, there were a number of people who may have equated the cooperative design with those organizations imposed by the Soviets. I observed on more than one occasion a real antipathy among some older Afghans toward communism in particular. Negaar, who had grown up in the 1950s and 1960s, noted on more than one occasion that “I am not a communist!” She had strong negative reactions to people she perceived as having been members of Khalq or Parcham—the two constituent wings of the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). If Afghans are hierarchical—and even assuming such an essentialism can be made about people whose backgrounds are so diverse politically, ethnically, and intellectually—the share-and-share-alike concept of the cooperative might have been anathema for many. Newcomers, still adjusting, might have found it more comfortable to let local Afghans with more experience of the area guide them. Without the testimony of some of these women themselves, it is impossible to know, of course.

For Sabia’s part, I believe she understood her role as the helpful (possibly *Mardom-dar*) older woman, drawing on her long experience in the Vancouver area and also on generations of Afghan customs which dictated respect for elders, respect for teachers and respect for those who had the education and the standing to expect such respect, and customs which dictated awareness of if not overt statements of class. It seemed to me that Rukhshana was also acting in accordance with the principles of *Mardom-dari* as outlined by Zulfacar. She and other people who helped to set up the cooperative had the evidence of other successful cooperatives for immigrant and refugee populations in Canada before them and her own experience with UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) led her to believe that a cooperative venture would work well.

According to Rukhshana, the other women complied with Sabia's efforts to create hierarchy. Rukhshana observed—as Anouk had—Afghans' allegiance to a hierarchical structure even in the cooperative's intentionally non-hierarchical setting—and to her this led to the ultimate failure of the project. When I recounted to her that I had been told by someone that there might be a fund-raiser for the cooperative, Rukhshana grimaced. That was not the design that she had worked so hard to provide. The cooperative was meant to be self-sustaining rather than a charity. In part, she cited the hierarchical nature of Afghans as related to what she saw as the failure of the project. But she also blamed the implicit training that refugees acquire in refugee camps. She blamed life in refugee camps which taught people to expect to be given things—food, clothes, shelter, etc.—instead of providing refugees with marketable skills. Refugees in camps are people in waiting—waiting to be rescued, waiting to be fed, waiting for whatever comes next. Differences in class might be differently configured in the camps because people who had connections, money and other resources had already left and generally were able to find housing for themselves outside camps and countries in other parts of the world. Many of the women who were newcomers who became part of the cooperative had been in refugee camps in nations adjacent to Afghanistan.

In addition to other reasons, Sabia may also have felt that this justified an assumption that she should be looked up to because she had not had to spend time in a refugee camp. She had relatives who brought her to Canada under their sponsorship—relatives who had the means and opportunity to flee Afghanistan early enough in the thirty years plus of turmoil to have also been able to avoid refugee camps. Moreover, she was the experienced Canadian hand who knew—after more than two decades in

Canada—how to navigate various aspects of the Canadian, provincial and municipal bureaucracies.

Sabia's efforts with regard to the co-op and her involvement with the Afghan community and her efforts to contribute in the larger Vancouver area community may be seen by some as intrusive now, but they also suggest an effort to reinscribe "a nice life" in which she felt valued and looked up to by the surrounding society and in which she exhibited Zulfacar's description of *Mardom-dari*.

Sabia was not shy about expressing great pride in her activities and accomplishments over the last twenty-five years. As we talked, she pulled out a large notebook fat with photographs and clippings detailing numerous activities in service of multicultural organizations, Muslim organizations, and Afghan organizations. Her role as an exemplar of a committed and contributing *Mardom-dar* member of society appeared in the thick album of photos and news clippings she showed me. In doing this, she was both reinscribing her nice life and doing the same kinds of things that ideas of *noblesse oblige* do to drive the activities of many women who appeared in the society pages of newspapers in the United States and in Canada. They were also very like the efforts of members of the Faith Congregation refugee committee, the interfaith committee and the women of the group which worked to raise money for women in Afghanistan.

In pursuit of *Mardom-dari*, she was to be found at almost any Afghan community event and there are numerous pictures of Sabia with politicians and other public figures. In fact, I cannot remember any community event where I did not see Sabia—often with her husband Shareef. As one of the founding members of the Co-op, she prided herself on teaching newcomer Afghan women sewing skills, providing them what she considers

to be a buffer zone where they can “have some tea and talk without having to struggle with English.”

At the time of our interview, Rukhshana’s view of Sabia’s efforts are a little sad:

She wanted to be the teacher, but she could not sew as well as some of the women. She did not want to be like everyone else; she saw herself as a leader helping “them”—the little people—and she thought she should be paid more than anyone else. But that was not the spirit of the cooperative.

I noticed that Sabia wanted to be included in other settings—a workshop on sponsoring refugees that was organized by a group I worked with, for example—but that when others heard of this, I was sometimes discouraged from including her or working with her. Elizabeth—who had worked with Afghans numerous times over the years—warned me about Sabia and Shareef: “Don’t work with them. They keep inserting themselves into projects and taking credit for them.” It may be important here to note that my own experience of Sabia did not reflect these complaints. She was ever-gracious—as were almost all Afghans I met—and willing to help, even consenting to two separate interview times so that I could acquire more information.

While Sabia was trying to enact *Mardom-dari*, she was—however unwittingly or wittingly--enabling behavior that reproduced/created refugees (Afghan refugees) as lower-class. It is partly this that bothers Rukhshana, whose own background in development came from working with the UNDP in Afghanistan and Pakistan during the Soviet occupation as well as after the Soviets left.

Mardom-dari is, to some degree, in the eye of the beholder. As I was finishing up my field work, and on subsequent visits to the Vancouver area, Sabia’s widespread and active participation—what I have here characterized as her *Mardom-dari*-- had become the source of some complaints by people within and outside of the Afghan community.

The complaints came from some people within the Afghan community who privately expressed discomfort with the way that Sabia and her husband inserted themselves in what was sometimes seen as a self-aggrandizing way. When I casually mentioned that I was going to include Sabia in list of invitees to a seminar about sponsorship, two different people—one a leader in the Afghan community and another an agency worker who worked with Afghans—discouraged me from doing so. “Don’t invite her!” said one. “They [Sabia and her husband] are just out for themselves.” In the end, time ran out and I was unable to include as many Afghans as I might have liked to include.

I also heard later from Rose, who worked with the local chapter of an agency that had been involved with the cooperative, that Rukhshana herself had been criticized by some of her fellow Afghans for her impassioned defense of her vision of the cooperative. Had her vision—which was designed in a way that would bring about some of the class-leveling that Zulfacar observed in both Germany and California—prevailed, it might have challenged the hierarchical norms that were asserted by some non-Afghans and Afghans alike. In the end, it seems as if both Sabia and Rukhshana lost something in the process of trying to bring about a worthy project designed to help Afghan newcomer women.

Roena

The efforts of Sabia and her husband to enact *Mardom-dari* had apparently created some negative feedback in the Afghan community. Zulfacar’s description of *Mardom-dari*, may make it possible to discern the class situations of other members of the Afghan community—especially when combined with Weber’s notion of life chances and Hall’s observations about knowing one’s place in the social universe. For example, there was an hour-long, Dari-language television show which ran on one of the local

multicultural channels every week, with two repeat airings, and it covered news from Afghanistan, news relating to the Vancouver metropolitan area Afghan community, as well as features concerning health, education and lifestyle. The show, which engaged a number of members of the Afghan community in various production and on-air roles, was produced—and apparently largely funded—by Roena and her husband Sadeed, a physician and medical professor with a nationally and internationally, as well as locally, prominent reputation. Roena, who was a psychologist who specialized in early childhood education, also wrote and produced a segment of the show which combined storytelling with teaching, among other things, Dari. She and Sadeed arrived in Vancouver in 1983 by way of Pakistan and then Portugal after having to sell some of her jewelry and borrow from family to buy Iranian passports in order to emigrate to Canada (Crosby 2004). Twenty-five years later, when I met them, they had two homes—one in Vancouver and one in the resort area of Whistler, B.C. where part of the 2010 Winter Olympics were held—and had come from spending six months dedicated to learning English at the local library to rebuild their professional as well as personal lives. I was told by a non-Afghan who worked with Afghans that—though he never mentioned it himself—Sadeed was descended from Amanullah Khan, who is highly regarded by many Afghans, as noted in the introduction.

As the Afghan community's most visible “power couple,” Roena and her husband certainly exemplified the definition of *Mardom-dari* as Zulfacar described it. Professionally, socioeconomically, and socially, they were in a position to contribute to local Afghans as well as to the larger society on many fronts. In the funding of the television show which served the Afghan community and supporting public events they

were generous in sharing their resources with the larger Afghan community. Other examples of their *Mardom-dari* include active participation in health care education and training as well as political activity in relation to Canada's participation in the war in Afghanistan. According to Zulfacar, *Mardom-dari* includes not just beneficent behavior (and the economic resources that support it) like the supporting of services for the community, but also the ability to build and sustain social relationships across social groups. I observed this in Roena's life: not only did she teach early childhood development and education at a college that is largely devoted to the education of First Nations students, she participated in numerous forms of outreach both within the Afghan community and beyond it. Even her willingness to be interviewed by me and to remain available to my questions exemplify Zulfacar's description of *Mardom-dari*.

While many Afghans that I met seemed to spend considerable time within the Afghan community, Roena and her husband were active not only within the community but in service of the larger communities of Vancouver, Canada, Afghanistan and the world. Her husband Sadeed's medical background gave him further access to wider medical communities throughout North America and he regularly went to Afghanistan to contribute his skills as a physician. Roena and he have also been active in a group which supports both education and medical care in Afghanistan—including Kabul University.

Like Rukhshana and like Sabia, Roena made a point of contributing—often with her husband—to the larger community, and it was common during my stay in the Vancouver metropolitan area, to find people—particularly Afghans who worked with them—who spoke of Roena with what seemed like admiration and a little reverence. In

some cases people I spoke with assumed that she and her husband were always the wisest and best of people. If I use Zulfacar's description of *Mardom-dari* as my guide, Roeena and her husband conducted themselves exactly as any model of Zulfacar's *Mardom-dar* family should.

The interpenetration of social relationships in which a *Mardom-dar* person must engage suggests the expansion of social fields which are deterritorialized much in the way that Appadurai visualized ethnoscapas that sprawled metaphorically across the borders of countries (Appadurai 1996). It creates overlapping and sometimes nested social fields which cross ethnic, professional, religious, national, geographic, and political boundaries and it is, to a large extent, only possible in its full expression for people who have the economic means and social position to execute it. Thus—at least from an outsider's perspective, it seems as if *Mardom-dari* must be executed in very specific ways or under only certain conditions. The *Mardom-dari* which Sabia and her husband exercised was not always well-received in large part because it was perceived—rightly or wrongly—as self-serving. While no one within the Afghan community criticized Rukhshana's work with the co-op, the observations that Rose—a non-Afghan member of an agency that worked with the cooperative—made suggest that the conflict between her vision and Sabia's cost her in social capital as well.

Yet I heard little criticism of the motivations of Roeena and her husband in exercising what I perceive as their *Mardom-dari*. Was this a result of their social standing in class and status as it emanated from Afghanistan or of their professional and economic success—with its consequent higher socioeconomic standing in Canadian as well as Afghan social values—or perhaps a combination of both? The relative dearth of

criticism in comparison with Rukhshana's and Sabia's situations suggests that *Mardom-dari* must be exercised with a certain kind of discretion, demeanor, and purpose. What stood out most clearly in the actions of Roena, Sabia and Rukhshana was the commitment that each had to finding a way to contribute to the Afghan community from whatever resource and position she held. It is incumbent on the *Mardom-dar* to contribute and, while that may be seen as self-serving, as it sometimes seems to be in Sabia's case, it is also part of the cost of reaching out to make change. It may be that it is necessary, in the larger discourse of refugee identity that prevails in the Vancouver area, to elevate one's *Mardom-dari* in whatever way one can. At the time of my research, the planned withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan in 2011 was increasingly discussed on the news and anti-war discourse was also increasing. There was, in conversations with non-Afghan Canadians, more war-weariness even among those who supported Canadian military presence and these factors contributed to a dampening of interest in Afghans in general. In a setting where the recognition of a particular immigrant group is required for that group to maintain access to resources, the profile of individual Afghans is a necessary component of keeping the changing needs of the Afghan community visible. One small example of this can be found in the funding for the support group at Crossroads in which I taught English. The women themselves often expressed the need for the group, as Hamasa so succinctly put it in Chapter IV: "I go to meetings. . . . If I stay home [too much], I become depressed."

Groups like the Crossroads group demonstrate the value of a profile in which the needs which emanate even from long-ago forced migration are reinserted into public and/or institutional awareness so that attention and resources to that group's needs may

continue to flow. This was made evident during and after the field work when the funding for the group and its facilitator became imperiled in 2009 toward the end of my stay in the Vancouver area. Funding was found, at the time, but I have since been told that the funding will end in summer 2014. Little is understood about the ongoing need for such groups. Because Afghans and other immigrant groups tend to be treated as if they are permanently Other and because little is understood about some of the lifelong consequences of forced migration on forced migrants, they must repeatedly justify the need for funding such groups. Maintaining the attention of agencies and funding sources over the lives of the affected populations can be challenging in a society where the values of multiculturalism dictate some effort to treat all the competing multiple cultures equally. Thus, regardless of what criticism came their way and regardless of the reasons for which they might have been criticized, it was ultimately this sense of obligation that seemed to be the most important driving force for all three women. In each case, that obligation is also related to and derived from a deeply felt commitment to the Afghan community. And most importantly, seems to have been an available cultural resource from which each could create a sense of belonging and worthiness.

CHAPTER VI

“TO ENJOY THE WIND”:

GENDER, VEILING AND ACTS OF LIVING³⁷

“Studies of women’s integration into the world system. . . often analyze the material changes in women’s lives without connecting them to processes of religious and cultural transformation.” (Bernal 1994:59)

“My brother, he was open in the breeze and I was covered. . . . It doesn’t make sense why my brother can enjoy the wind and I cannot.” (Rukhshana)

Introduction

Setara is upset. It is the end of a two-hour meeting and the food has been cleared away [there was almost always food at the end of meetings I attended], most of the other 26 women who attended have left, and there are only a few of us left. Thinking the meeting is all over, I am busy taking quick notes to be fleshed out later. Setara is a bright-eyed, articulate woman with short, dark hair who caught my eye on the first day I met her. She strode into the room on Eid—the end of Ramadan—with a big smile and a warm hug, saying “Eid Mubarak!”³⁸ She did not look as if she was in her early sixties as she reported herself to be.³⁹

Today, she speaks very fast; her manner is quite agitated and I am dependent on Mina to interpret. “The women have been at her,” says Mina “because she does not wear a headscarf or anything.” In fact, Setara usually wears some kind of scarf over her shoulders—as almost all older women I have been meeting in the Afghan community—and many of the younger women-- seem to do. Scarves which are treated as merely decorative by people who grew up in Western, non-Muslim societies, are an important part of sustaining Muslim identity for many women and can always be thrown over one’s hair when the situation requires it. Setara simply does not appear cover her head with it unless it is absolutely necessary. Otherwise, whenever I have seen her—indoors or out in public—she has been bareheaded. (From Field Notes)

³⁷ This chapter includes material from my master’s paper as well as a course paper on veiling.

³⁸ His roughly translates to “Happy Eid.” Eid is celebration. There are many Eids in Islam. In this case, Eid referred to Eid-al-Fitr which celebrates the end of Ramzan.

³⁹ As noted earlier in Chapter III, age and birthdays were did not have the same resonance for many Afghans that age has for Westerners.

In this vignette, I discovered the first of several indicators of a thriving and active debate among a number of Afghan women about veiling. But this debate was only one part of a larger conversation rooted in ideological frameworks of Islam concerning religiosity, visibility/invisibility, space and freedom. Women's bodies become the symbols for so many ideas that we can lose sight of women themselves. In this chapter I use the actual and metaphorical space of questions of veiling as a vehicle to recover a sense of Afghan women's agency I seek to answer questions such as, if we determine that a woman has agency, what is the character of that agency and how does it reflect her relationships? Further, what kinds of factors enable or impede her ability to enact that agency to conduct those relationships? For example, when an Afghan woman chooses to veil or chooses not to veil, how does that affect her ability to conduct social relationships or even just travel through the metropolitan area without being accosted? In this chapter, I also attempt to answer these and other questions in relation to the women studied for this project.

Overall, veiling appears to have had its roots in the notions of how womanhood should be performed, what the nature of freedom is, and it was present even in conversations about seemingly unrelated subjects like finding work. Because veiling is associated with Islam, because the Taliban's dictum that women must veil has persisted in Afghanistan long after the Taliban government was dismantled, veiling is profoundly associated with Afghan women in particular.

Veiling is an intensely political act for Afghan women even when they are trying to avoid being politicized. What follows in this chapter is a brief analysis of veiling

among the women who became part of this study in relation to the “webs of significance” (Geertz 1973) which they articulated through both words and actions.

Initial Observations and Caveats

Setara’s situation was one of many related to veiling that I either heard of or witnessed and, surprisingly, had unwittingly ignored until I returned to Oregon at the end of my field season to begin writing my dissertation. I had written my master’s paper and some coursework on veiling and observed an over-focus on it—pointed out by authors like Lila Abu-Lughod (2002)—that I hoped to avoid. Nevertheless, as often happens, my field work brought the issue to me. As I sifted through my field notes, I came to realize that the issue of veiling was far from settled among these Afghan women. Because they were such a small number in relation to the size of the overall Vancouver metropolitan area Afghan population and because there are other variables⁴⁰ which might have skewed this sample, I cannot assume that the issue was similarly unsettled throughout the community⁴¹ though I suspect that it is. In any case, often field work provides unanticipated correctives. Despite my best intentions, the issue of veiling emerged repeatedly in my notes and observations. I should not have been surprised. Western obsessions with Muslim veiling often focus on the veil as an artifact untethered to the woman herself (NYT 2012; Hale 2005) as well as distinct from the overlapping contexts of meanings in which she articulates her life, but veiling is a practice—an “act of living” (Ansary 2002)—that encompasses multiple aspects of identity from gender and class to religion and nationality of origin. It is also related to spatialized aspects of womanhood

⁴⁰ Previously discussed in Chapter I under Methodologies.

⁴¹ I could also not extrapolate from my study population because by definition, these were women and men who were willing to let me peer into their lives a little, which undoubtedly skewed the sample.

(Mahmood 2004; Mernissi 1987). Hoodfar's description is both simpler and also infinitely complex: "Veiling is a lived experience, full of contradictions and multiple meanings" (Hoodfar 1993:5). It is, as noted before, an inherently political act, as I will explore further in this chapter.

First, however, any discussion of veiling and Afghan women or Muslim women in general should begin with the acknowledgement that, however much I try to avoid it, with this chapter I am potentially (perhaps inevitably) participating in the processes of essentializing, reinscribing and Orientalizing criticized by authors like Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) and Shahnaz Khan (1995). I have tried to make it clear that this research does not describe all Afghan or Muslim women, but only refers to the small number of women who contributed to this study and who are part of a larger population and that in terms of age, class, and other categories, they cannot be assumed to be completely representative.

Yet, veiling has become a lens through which other aspects of womanhood is viewed. Because it surfaced in my research so persistently, I am adding to that research on veiling and adding some of the voices in it to the larger body, hoping that my discussion here contributes in the longer term to de-essentializing Afghan women. Many Afghan and other Muslim women have become weary of having their lives narrowed to this one exoticized garment. Therefore, the Western focus on veiling to the exclusion of more serious problems in their lives (Abu-Lughod 2002; Hoodfar 1993; Khan 1995) had left many women wary of talking about veiling with curious nonMuslims like me.

At this time in history, there are parts of the world in which acts like going to school or choosing what she will wear—acts which are assumed to be usual in many Western societies for women and girls—are acts that can cost a woman her safety and

even her life. Whether an Afghan woman veils or does not, in this historical context, it is a political act, embedded in ideologies of religion, history and tradition that intersect with notions of freedom and space.

The remainder of this chapter examines selected issues in relation to veiling, in the first part exploring the history of veiling in Islam, in Afghanistan, and then in Canada and other multicultural countries. For the last part of this chapter, I focus on aspects of performativity—e.g., the performance of womanhood—in the Vancouver area in relation to the interaction of veiling with two conceptual frameworks—ideas of freedom and ideas of space. First, however, I will define and describe some terms and frameworks for the discussion which follows.

Definitions, Descriptions and Frameworks

For purposes of this work, I use the term “veil” primarily—and its variations—to refer to its various forms and “cover” as a secondary synonym. Both terms are used to refer to various coverings of head and sometimes also of body—from simple headscarves to full *burqas*⁴². I have omitted a lengthier focus on the many forms and styles of veiling in Islam because it is not particularly relevant to the focus of this chapter. In this study, women who veiled tended to use *chador* or *hijab* (sometimes also *hijab*) to describe headscarves or other kind of veiling which cover only the hair and sometimes the shoulders. *Chadori* (pronounced “CHADree” or sometimes “CHADeree”) and *burqa* are

⁴² I should perhaps note that it seems more descriptively neutral to use the term “cover” because “veil,” “veiled,” “veiling,” and other variations on “to veil” could easily be seen to bear considerable exoticizing baggage. However, the Arabic term *hijab*—which is used by Afghans as well as the Dari words *chador* and *chadori*—is related to *purdah*, or curtain, which is the seclusion of women from men and even from the rest of society, and thus the effective creation of a veil between the woman and the world around her (Mernissi 1987). Because this is the usage employed by many authors on veiling as well as the term I heard most often in my field work I decided that the use of “veil” was more appropriate in part precisely because it bears this baggage—fraught with intimations of Orientalism though it is—better than the more neutral term.

used to describe the forms of veiling in Afghanistan which cover the woman's entire body from head to toe with only a slit or a crocheted screen through which she can see. Other forms of veiling, or covering, may include *jilbab* and *abaya*—both of which may be used by Muslims to describe other forms of covering the body. *Shalwar kameez* describes a long tunic over pants or trousers.

As noted before, the act of veiling or not veiling is a political act—in particular, in recent history it has become a powerful symbol—“...volatile, sensitive, and politically fraught” (Ahmed 2011:10). The wearing of any kind of veiling in Islam certainly appears to have been political from the beginning in the sense that it arose in contexts of gendered relations of power that included ideals about protecting women and practices of gendered division of labor. Framed as it is in the discourses and practices of power—especially gendered power in which patriarchal ideological notions of women's behavior which assume the dominance of males over females—it provides a kind of metaphorical and geographical map of how women are embedded in and contribute to those discourses and practices ((Ahmed 1992, 2011; Ahmed-Ghosh 2003; Kandiyoti 1991; Mahmood 2004; Mernissi 1987, 1991).⁴³

In the wake of September 11, 2001, covering one's head, body, head-and-body, and face is part of multiple articulations of power—regardless of how benignly the woman who veils or does not veil perceives her action. It signifies something specific about her position with relation to multiple social fields from her immediate relationships, to the society in which she is living, and—if she is an immigrant—to the subgroup of

⁴³ It should be noted that many societies which would be categorized as patriarchal also include the practice of “veiling” among men (e.g., the Tuareg [Rasmussen 2013])—which is to say that men cover as well—suggesting that male power is only one antecedent for veiling.

immigrants and their Canadian-born children with whom she interacts as well as that group's relationship to society. In this historical moment, it also signifies her relationship with larger entities like the nation in which she lives, the nation from which she originated, the Afghan Diaspora or "ethnoscape" (Appadurai 1996), the nations through which she passed, and even to global discourses regarding Afghans, Islam, Muslim women, immigrants and political relationships throughout the world. It also—to bring the point back to the individual—often signifies her own relationship with Allah/God.

It was the Western gaze that initially made that action contestable and extraordinary. In Afghanistan, that Western gaze arrived not as it had in much of the colonized world through actual colonization, but through the travels of Afghan royals and elites to Europe and later North America as well as exposure to the colonized countries near Afghanistan (Barfield 2010; Dupree 1980; Ewans 2002; Magnus and Naby 2002).

Veiling and the women's bodies who wore the veils were thus repeatedly entangled in distinctions between classes, between urban and rural dwellers, between variations in ideals of religiosity, and between Afghans. Several times, policies concerning the veil have been intimately associated with the waxing and waning of power at the top—kings and elites—and at the village level—mullahs and local leaders. Veiling was an issue in the forefront of repeated attempts to change—to "modernize" Afghanistan--by rulers and elites who had had the resources to travel far beyond Afghanistan and had been influenced by European and North American societies. These efforts to change cultural practices conflicted with centuries of tradition and with local structures of power which were rooted in Pashtun lineage and mitigated against centralized government dicta. They also conflicted directly with Islam as it was

interpreted by many religious and political leaders throughout Afghanistan. (Ansary 2012; Dupree 1980; Misdaq 2006)

Veiling and Tradition in Afghanistan

Veiling seems to have been a common practice in what is now Afghanistan since Islam spread to the area and the history of the role of veiling in Islam is contested. Veiling appears to have preceded the introduction of Islam (Ahmed 1993; Hoodfar 1993; Mernissi 1987). Leila Ahmed notes, for example, that women were veiled in Byzantine society where “the veil or its absence marked the distinction between the ‘honest’ woman and the prostitute” (Ahmed 1992:26). Though the veil is often thought of as a purely female garment, the Qu’ran reportedly directs both men and women to dress and comport themselves with modesty, discussing male modesty more than female modesty. Veiling is a choice that bespeaks modesty through respectful covering of the body. (Barr et. al. 2002; Hoodfar 1993; Khan 1995; Ahmed 1992, 2011; Mernissi 1987).

Ahmed (1992, 2011) and Mernissi (1987) suggest that veiling had its earliest associations with rank and class and that only Muhammad’s wives veiled while he was alive. After his death, however, upper-class women began to employ various forms of veiling, particularly as Islam began to conquer areas where veiling was the custom. As it spread throughout what is now the Muslim world, “Islam explicitly and discreetly affiliated itself with the [largely Christian and Jewish] traditions already in place in the region,” writes Ahmed, thereby syncretically incorporating veiling into its own traditions (Ahmed 1992:4 & 25).

In Afghanistan, efforts to change veiling practices began in the 19th century and were associated with Afghan kings’ efforts to modernize Afghan society—by which they

usually meant bringing into Afghanistan more Western cultural and infrastructural practices--and they have historically been associated with political rearrangements globally and regionally. The influence of colonialization was certainly felt despite the fact that Afghanistan was not specifically colonized during the European colonial explorations that began with near the end of the fifteenth century (Ansary 2012; Barfield 2010; Dupree 1980). The powerful influence of British colonization of India—which bordered Afghanistan until the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947—spread through the region during and after the colonial era, affecting many cultural practices, including that of veiling in Afghanistan.

In addition, increasing efforts to centralize the government of Afghanistan—efforts that challenged traditional Pashtun segmentary organization--rose and fell, then rose and fell again. Along with structural and infrastructural changes associated with efforts to centralize, changes in centuries-old cultural practices such as the *mahr* (brideprice), marriage of young women at puberty (including forced marriage), education for women, abolition of the levirate, and many other gender-related practices, the practice of veiling came under attack. Afghanistan's many ethnic and tribal groups have existed for centuries within traditions that often included highly patriarchal and hierarchical structures that were wrapped around religious ideologies that became synonymous with such traditions. As rural and urban differences also became more exacerbated, class became synonymous with these categories of residence. Women's roles were caught up in national projects of "modernization" and the veil became a critical symbol for the "unleashing" of changed gender relations everywhere. In Afghanistan, this process

unfolded in ways that brought down governments (Barfield 2010; Dupree 1983; Hirschman and Mahmood 2002; Moghadam 2002).

Much of this waxing and waning occurred in a powerful tug of war between 1) the above-mentioned efforts to centralize Afghanistan's government (and eventually to create a country which more closely matched Western national designs) and 2) the acephalous nature of Pashtun kinship which had been organized around segmentary lineages (Ansary 2012; Ewans 2002; Misdaq 2006; Zulfacar 1998). Into this continuing struggle were thrown the lives of kings but also the lives of women.

In the long term, Afghan heads of state came and went—whether they died in office, abdicated, or were deposed or assassinated—but these multiple strands of conflict came to rest in the bodies of women through the generations. Ideologies of statehood and government and economic, political and structural changes became associated with mandated cultural changes affecting gender relations—all under the umbrella of “modernization” which might be translated to Westernization. And wherever there were ideologies and discourses about gender relations and about women, there appears to have been an equally contentious conversation about veiling (Ansary 2012; Batur 2012; Dupree 1980).

From the 1880s through 1973, there were reports of unveiling by Queens from Abdur Rahman's queen Bobo Dan, King Amanullah's queen Soraya and the less famous queens of Nadir Shah and Zaher Shah up to and including the wife of President Daoud in the mid-1970s. In Queen Soraya's case, unveiling was associated with reports and pictures of her in Western clothes while she was traveling in Europe—even with her throat and arms exposed in bare-armed dresses. This was a scandalous action for people

whose repertoire for women's clothing included the *burqa*. Such activities resulted in varying responses from the population, and it also seems as if the negative responses from the population were related to coercive practices by the government in its efforts to reform, as well as to the degree of tinkering with traditions such as those related to women. It might reasonably be said that there appeared to be a repeated preference for tradition and the order that emanated therefrom—perhaps because such order reinscribed one's clear sense of his or her place in the social universe. The preferences for tradition appear to have resided in men's choices as the decision makers in public life, and thus for choices for not veiling—caught up as they were in both cases with the desires of men in power to project particular ideals and images of the nation and their preferred cultural values (Ansary 2012; Dupree 1980; Mirdaq 2006; Zulfacar 1998).

In many Muslim societies and even pre-Islamic societies, women were veiled to set themselves apart and to signal a husband's wealth or status. Gradually, however, urban Afghan women began to shed their veils with increasing Western influence, and, by the middle of the 20th century, higher status was often signaled by the absence of veiling rather than its presence. However, the veiling that was discarded by city women was transformed into the sign of rural women's status. Rural women who would not have veiled in earlier times began to veil when they went to town, in part as a sign of their status and "sophistication". Pont observes that "The *burqa* and chadar were sought after goals and external signs of respectability. (Pont 2001:31). However, Pont also notes that the "general perception of a veiled woman in urban areas was that she was either a villager living [in the city] or visiting the city, or a woman of lower economic standing" (Pont 2001:31). Ironically, the very garment that rural women wore to mark their higher

status had just the opposite effect when they were in the city—a circumstance which is echoed in Vancouver where veiling tends to connote to the larger population that veiled women are women with less education, less wealth, and less sophistication (Hamdani 2004 & 2005; Dossa 2004;).

During the Soviet era, Moghadam (2004), describing a visit to Afghanistan and Pakistan in 1988, extolled the considerable presence of women in work and girls in school during the Soviet occupation while she also catalogued the abuses of the *mujahideen* and the repressive goals of Muslim fundamentalists. Her positive regard may have garnered some criticism, but it was echoed by at least a couple of women in the Vancouver area—both of whom noted education for girls and universal health care even continuing after the 1989 Soviet withdrawal into “Najibullah time”—referring to the leader who was President of Afghanistan until 1992, during and after the transition.

In addition, the Soviet occupation gave rise to the *mujahideen*—freedom fighters, they were then called—and, having caused surrounding states like Pakistan to fear their own safety from some subsequent incursion by the Soviet Union, further gave rise to Pakistan’s funding of *madrasas* in Pakistan which produced multiple consequences, among them the later rise of the Taliban out of the Civil War. This was already discussed in Chapter I, but it is relevant to a summary of veiling in Afghanistan because the Taliban were also major actors in the history of veiling in Afghanistan. The highly conservative elements of Pashtun Muslim ideology—represented most visibly by the Wahhabist Taliban—emerged from *madrasas* (religious schools) that were based in Pakistan and in Western Pakistan there resides a deeply conservative population base of Muslims who support Taliban thought and actions (Ansary 2012; Rashid 2000; Tanner 2007).

Rukhshana, who was part of my earlier discussion of *Mardom-dari* in Chapter V, alludes to this in the following discussion of the journey from Afghanistan to Canada which necessitated several years in Peshawar. She discusses veiling—in this excerpt, she uses the word covering—in the context of the time when, because men were away at war, women took over many jobs that men usually did. It begins with an observation from me.

Chris: During the Soviet era, you could go to school. You didn't have to wear *hijab*.

Rukhshana: No, no, even in mujahideen time⁴⁴, you really had--Kabul didn't change a lot and the only fear was the shelling and the killing, but women became more active in the society because the men became more--because the society became more dependent on women. The men were killed, or sent for fighting or left the country because of the military service. So the society became very much dependent on women and girls, of course and they became the breadwinners. The government ministries—the majority were women. Teachers—the majority were women. . . . So it was the women who were safe from military service, but if you had a brother, your brother will be sent abroad, but the sister is safe, taking care of the elders. So it was a huge dependence on women in the society.

But in Pakistan, it was surprisingly an absolutely different situation. When I was at some of these camps, I had brought what clothes I could—what big shawls I could. In those camps, you needed to have *burqa—chadori*—or even in one time when I was on one of those buses, fully covered with this black shawl and black coat and then glasses in that hot weather! [Here, Rukhshana's voice descends to a whisper] It was not enough not to stare at the bus driver herself. So I said to myself okay, it's not the cover. Staring is a habit so that women's cover shouldn't be an excuse so that the man will just—it's rubbish, it's rubbish absolutely.

In her description of the change in conditions for women from Afghanistan to Pakistan, Rukhshana is illuminating several things. To some degree, she is disputing a version of reality which describes Afghans as less polished, egalitarian and Western than Pakistanis and she foreshadows the emerging influence of the *madrasas*: it was Pakistan

⁴⁴ The time between the 1989 Soviet withdrawal and the 1996 Taliban takeover of the capital Kabul.

where she was required to shroud herself in black. She also alludes to the beginning years of Islam—“...women were liberated one thousand four hundred years ago. . .”—as the time when women were liberated from being “buried,” echoing Mernissi’s observations about early Islam as a release of women from erstwhile restrictive practices of pre-Islamic times. She also describes the dependence of Afghan society on women, though apparently in wartime, which might account for at least part of what Valentine Moghadam observed that led her to write about some relative gains for women in Afghanistan during the Soviet era (Moghadam 2004).

During the civil war, it appears that the wearing of a veil or not wearing one—while it might have become a reason for discrimination and even violence in specific settings and confrontations—was an issue that was subordinate to the widespread chaos, or *fitna* (in this context, moral and political chaos) that rendered women⁴⁵ vulnerable—available targets--regardless of whether or not they veiled. During the Taliban regime, veiling once again became an issue as women were required to wear the full *chadori* as well as submit to increased regulation and seclusion. Afghans had practiced *pardah*--or seclusion for women--to varying degrees and women had veiled for centuries, depending on variables like “. . .family practices, age, class, area of inhabitation, ethnicity, economic and social status, and the influence of religious and political powers.” Even as these elements affected the adoption of *pardah*, *pardah* itself affected social, “economic, political, matrimonial, and educational issues” as well (Pont 2001:31).

⁴⁵ Not only women, it appears. According to some sources, boys were also kidnapped and incorporated into some warlords’ sexual lives.

Some Afghan women found the *chadori/burqa* to be a blessing, not a curse. Pressure from Americans and other Westerners to unveil could be just as unwelcome as Taliban dicta requiring veiling.

In fact, the *chadori* or *burqa* came to feel like “part of our culture,” said one woman, in part because the society had changed so that women who had not previously veiled no longer felt comfortable without veils. In having had the *burqa* forced on them during the Taliban regime, they now find that they do not want to be required to take it off: “We will not take it off just because the West wants us to. . . Some of us may take it off once we are ready and our society is ready. To be pressured by the West to take off our chadori is as bad as Taliban imposing [it] on us [in the first place]. We have the right to choose what to wear.” (Rostami-Povey 2003:272)

Rural women, who had relatively less restriction from the government before the Taliban, had been targets of violence and social controls from both the Soviets and the mujaheddin. The Taliban disarmed Afghans, and that meant that many of the women Pont interviewed felt safer during the Taliban regime: “Now it is OK. I enjoy life. After a long time, we live with peace and are back on our land,” said one woman (Pont 2001:49). The issue of wearing or not wearing the *burqa* could distract from other, more critical realities like food and safety. Another woman exclaimed, in exasperation, “All I hear since the fall of Taliban is chadori, chadori, chadori [*burqa, burqa, burqa*]. My problem is not chadori, my problem is that I don’t have any food to feed myself and my children (Rostami-Povey 2003:272).

In the years following the fall of the Taliban government, veiling remains an issue in Afghanistan. Most women inside Kabul continue to veil. Outside of Kabul, it may not be required by law, but customs and values strongly encourage veiling. In 2008, according to the documentary *Afghan Star* detailed the journey of four contestants—two men and two women—in an *American Idol*-style television show from which the

documentary draws its name. Both female contestants attired themselves in clothes that covered them from neck to toe with *chadors* covering their heads. One—Sitara--allowed her chador to slip while she danced on the stage. The subsequent commentary from scandalized citizens in her home town of Herat included a suggestion that she should be killed. Both female contestants received death threats after they left the show, but special condemnation was given to Sitara (*Afghan Star* 2009).

Things may have changed somewhat in Kabul by 2013. A BBC journalist noted that *burqa* sales in Kabul had “plummeted because they’ve gone out of fashion as women are taking off the burka and actually covering their heads just with scarves. . .” (Kay 2013). The comments reflect what is apparently a change in Kabul, but, based on conversations with anthropologists doing field work in Afghanistan at the time, the differences between rural and urban populations in relation to veiling persisted at the same time (Chiovenda 2012; Ker Chiovenda 2012). Documentaries like *Afghan Star* and its shorter sequel *Fallen Star* suggest that the changes that occur in Kabul are not necessarily replicated in other large Afghan cities like Kandahar and Herat.

Veiling continues in Afghanistan as a part of performing gender. The increasing presence of Muslim immigrants and refugees from all over the world has placed them in landscapes of diversity in which veiling and not veiling take on new meanings for Afghans and for the societies into which they have moved. The veil has become a symbol--the presence or absence of which is used as a vehicle for addressing diversity--and Islam in general has been a focus of some forms of social control in many countries as Muslim immigrant populations have grown throughout the world. Multiculturalism, with its many definitions, has been differently configured in different countries.

Canada, Multiculturalism, Islam and Veiling

Veiled Muslim women in particular have become the unwilling foci of attention from non-Muslims and from Western governments. In France, “L’Affaire du Foulard”-- notoriously portrayed Muslim girls’ headscarves as affronts to French national secular values and the Parliament passed a law forbidding them. Subsequently, “l’affaire du foulard” was taken a step further. French laws were put into place banning the wearing of particular kinds of religious items—the face-veil among them.

In Europe, there appears also to have been a collision of racialized Muslim identities—related to veiling in particular with whiteness. In the Netherlands, for example, Van Nieuwkerk observed that Dutch women who converted to Islam no longer saw themselves as “‘real Dutch.’” (Van Nieuwkerk 2004:229). “Dutchness” and identifiable markers of Islam had become mutually exclusive, and since whiteness and not-veiling are conflated categories, Muslim women who veil had become “the ‘ultimate others’ of Dutch self-perception” (Van Nieuwkerk 2004:245). In Britain, Franks observed a similar phenomenon with “white femininity as a construction of discourses which has helped to maintain racism” (Franks 2000:917) by associating the veil with a racialized identity that articulates white women who *hijab* as if they are no longer white.

In Turkey, a country with a majority Muslim population but a history of secular government since the end of the Ottoman Empire, veiling was prohibited after a military coup in the 1980s. In 1999, Merve Kavakci, a female Member of Parliament, was asked to leave when she entered Parliament wearing a *hijab*. In the years since 1999, the ban on headscarves has been abated so that headscarves are permitted in schools and in

Parliament, to name a few places, but the underlying principle of controlling how a woman may cover her body remains.

The veil in many Western countries has become a peculiar binary symbol of both the aggression of terrorism and the victimization of women—so that the woman becomes the embodiment of both at once. In Britain, notes Franks, “Even before September 11, *hijab* was associated with terrorism, even among South Asian immigrants surveyed” (Franks 2000:924). This view is constructed as part of binary opposites with Muslim women being simultaneously categorized as oppressed victims in need of rescue or as terrorists or, at least, would-be terrorists. Franks describes a young woman who is categorized as white in British society, and who was born Muslim—a combination which runs counter to conventional wisdom in Britain where “white” Muslims are assumed to be converts. The young woman, Miriam, further confounds expectations by deciding to *hijab* though her husband prefers that she go unveiled. It is the early 1990s and Miriam’s intention is to signal sympathy with Muslim victims in the Bosnian war, but she notices that her veiling has the effect of creating more avoidance from other people. This, writes Franks, “is because the veil, in the context of British society, has its ‘unintended consequence’ of attracting the non-Muslim gaze and in this respect it turns her into a spectacle.” It thus “destabilises and refigures power relations” (Franks 2000:926). Thus, the veil has become the means for challenging power relationships both within this woman’s family and in the context of the larger society. Conflict over veiling has not been limited to the West. Even in the Central Asian republics of the twentieth-century Soviet Union, the removal of the veil was part of the anti-classist, pro-nationalist strategy

of Stalinist Russia in expanding the Soviet empire (Carle 2004; Kavakci 2004; Cole and Kandiyoti 2004).

A Summary of Canada's Encounters with Veiling

“Here our values are that we want to see your face.” (Yolande James)

“When conservatives warning of “creeping Sharia law” in Western society meet up with liberals worried about the supposed “dehumanizing” effects of Muslim dress on women, such bans can become popular.” (Baldauf 2011)

In the last decade or two, like other countries who are embroiled in discourses of veiling and multiculturalism, Canada has wrestled with Muslim women's veiling in multiple settings that included the voting booth, the classroom, the courtroom, and the administration of the citizenship oath as well as numerous smaller sites of interaction. The above-mentioned items summarize only a few issues relating to veiling—which were identified in a 2012 CBC (Canadian Broadcast Corporation) report—that surfaced in the legal system from 2007 to 2012. Earlier situations relating to veiling had occurred (Hoodfar 1993; Khan 1995), but it was in the years after the 2001 attacks on the United States that concerns about Islam and differences related to Islam began to coalesce around Muslim women and the wearing of various forms of veiling that included covering the face in one form or another. By 2011, the prevailing attitude of the governments—federal and provincial—seems to have been synthesized by Quebec's Immigration Minister Yolande James: "Here our values are that we want to see your face" (CBC 2011). A few of the areas where legal resolution of differences were required include:

The Voting Booth. Voters are not actually required to show their faces when they vote, but the presence of veiled women at the voting booth has become a concern in

recent years. The presence of women with face-veils challenged unexamined assumptions about voting in Canada—for example, that election officials should be able to see the face of a voter. There were no rules per se that required visual confirmation of identity. Requirements for proof of identity included a number of options—some of which did not include pictures—voters could vote by mail, which required no more identification than a signature. However, some officials expressed concerns about being able to see an individual’s face as part of preventing voting fraud—for example, being able to see evidence of lying.

As the population of Muslims increased in Canada, this became a problem for those Muslim women whose veiling covered their faces. It famously became an issue in Quebec, where devotion to secularism has been an organizing principle around which much legal decision-making was defined. In 2007, just before I began my field season, there were radio reports on CBC that Quebec—unsolicited—had determined that Muslim women who veiled and covered their faces would not be required to show their faces in order to vote. This provoked two kinds of outcry: one which criticized the government for permitting women to vote without undergoing the scrutiny that would verify they were who they said they were and another—from some members of the Muslim community who worried about a backlash--noting that they had not asked for such an accommodation and that it drew further attention to them in the wake of already contentious discussions (Atasoy 2006; Hussain 2011; CBC 2012; Hoodfar 1993; National Post 2007). Veiling at the voting booth became a national issue and, after disparate approaches—some areas allowed veiled women to vote without showing their faces and others required them to show their faces—in 2007, federal law permitted women to vote

without revealing their faces. As of 2013, Elections Canada provides the following information:

If an elector wearing a face covering presents himself or herself at the polling station, the deputy returning officer will invite the elector to show his or her face. If the elector agrees to remove his or her face covering, the poll official will follow regular voting procedures. Election officials have been instructed to exercise respect and sensitivity in following this administrative procedure.

If the elector does not wish to remove his or her face covering, the deputy returning officer will advise the elector that he or she must provide two pieces of authorized identification, both with the elector's name and one with the elector's address, and then swear an oath attesting to his or her eligibility to vote. If the elector agrees to provide the identification and swear the oath, the poll official will follow regular voting procedures.

If the elector refuses to uncover his or her face and also refuses to provide two pieces of identification and take the oath, or to be vouched for, he or she will not be permitted to vote (Elections Canada website 2013).

In the Courtroom. In Toronto, an adult woman who asserted that she had been molested by family members when she was a child, brought a case seeking redress for sexual abuse. In her adulthood, she wears a *niqab*—in this case, she was fully veiled from head to toe with only her eyes and hands showing—and she maintained that she should be able to testify against the defendants fully veiled. It would, she said, violate religious beliefs that were deeply held on her part if she were required to reveal her face. The case went to Canada's highest court. The lower court decided that she should remove her face-veil to testify. Two subsequent appeals reversed the first judge's decision. Finally, in 2012, Canada's Supreme Court found that, if the lower court deemed it necessary for her to remove her face-veil, then she must do so, citing the need for a fair trial in which the facial expressions, for example, might in some cases be a critical aspect of assessing the credibility of a witness—in this case, the credibility of the accuser (Mackinnon 2012).

Whether the veil interfered with the cross-examination.
Whether the witness would be appearing before a judge only or before a jury.
The nature of the evidence. (CBC News 2012)

In the Classroom. In 2009 and 2010, a woman who attempted to take English classes at CEGEP (College d’Enseignement General et Professionel)—similar to junior or community colleges in the United States—was required to remove her veil in order to attend classes. She refused and was then refused admission—on two separate occasions. Naema Amed was an Egyptian immigrant who wanted to take English which was provided by the government for newcomers. Julius Grey, the lawyer who defended the right of a Sikh boy to wear a ceremonial dagger to school did not see the *niqab* in the same light: "If you put a barrier to the showing of the face, then you don’t integrate. I can hardly see how friendships can be made, how social life can go on with someone whose appearance we don’t know" (CBC 2011)

Receiving Government Services. A bill was proposed in Quebec to control the wearing of face-veils in order to receive government services. While it was not passed, the reason it was not passed appears to have been related to beliefs that it did not go far enough.

Citizenship Ceremonies. Face-veils are now banned for individuals who are taking the citizenship oath, owing to the “public nature of the oath” (CBC 2011). Much is made in Canada of the difference between the “melting pot” U.S. approach to diversity and the Canadian “tossed salad” in which, presumably, all the ingredients stand out separately. Grey’s comment suggests that the Canadian model may still have as its goal full integration or assimilation. The stated national commitment to diversity, by definition, has included people with profound religious values—Muslims among them—

and the secularism which has been adopted as a way to elide bigotry has paradoxically become perceived by many as a tool for bigotry against Muslims.

On television. *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, a situation comedy which ran from 2007 to 2012 on CBC television, focused on a Muslim community in a small fictional town in Saskatchewan province. One of the women wears *hijab* all the time, and little is made of it.

Employability. Perceptions about veiling have become problematic for Muslim women in general, but Afghan women in particular in relation to employability. Belle: “Not wearing the veil has probably affected me in a positive way and by that I mean that I probably got jobs that I potentially would not have gotten had I been wearing the scarf.” She goes on to note that she has family members who have not been hired or “have had to entirely switch careers because of the veil.” (Nayebzadah 2010:47). Hamdani (2004, 2005), and Hoodfar (1993) have also noticed that the wearing of the veil affects employability among Muslim women in general. Dossa (2004, 2006), whose research was done in the Vancouver area, observed that veiling did indeed affect employability, but also that Muslim women who did not veil were also burdened with an “invisible veil.”

This list and the discussion of veiling in other countries exhibits the range of settings and countries in which veiling has become a way in which to symbolize Muslim women in general and thus Afghan Muslim women as perpetual Others who must defend themselves. On the one hand, those who prefer to veil may be essentialized by anti-veiling discourses. For example, Sima, a Pashtun, characterizes Asiyaa, a Tajik, as

“fanatic” because she veils. On the other hand, pro-veiling discourses may stereotype women who eschew the veil partly or altogether as un-Islamic or even morally faulty.

Much of Canadian commentary on women and veiling reduces Muslim women to binaries—veiled/not veiled, Muslim/nonMuslim (Atasoy 2006; Nayebzadah 2012). With regard to veiling, Nayebzadah proposes a third category which she calls “nonbeliever.” This category may be a believing Muslim woman who does not believe that grounds for veiling can be found in the Qu’ran. This is largely Rukhshana’s position, as I will discuss later in this chapter. She experienced the requirement to veil as “rubbish” and cited the beginning of Islam as a time when women were, supposedly freed from prior restraints.

The notion that being able to see one’s face is an important part of credibility surfaces in arguments about voting, courtroom testimony. The idea of a face as a fundamental identifying part of the individual surfaces in all of these, but particularly in the administration of the citizenship oath. These have interesting implications in relation to ideas of selfhood and overarching politics of recognition in the courtroom. “Here our values are that we want to see your face” becomes a statement about your identity: ‘Here our values are that you don’t exist and have no identity if we cannot see your face.’”

There is the added concern about security which, in terms of statistical likelihoods, is wrongly focused on veiled women. While there have been a few incidents of females in *niqab* or *burqa* as suicide bombers, they are relatively rare. The overwhelming majority of individuals committing or attempting to commit terrorist acts have been male. Yet, it is the presence or absence of veiling which appears to capture ideologies of difference which are then translated—some would say racialized (Dossa 2004, 2009; Hoodfar 1993; Hussain 2011)—into perceptions of potential for terrorism.

In the United States, constitutional precedents regarding freedom of expression—including freedom of religion--can override concerns about security so that a veiled woman might generate concern and worry in the population, but that concern would have to surmount legal hurdles to becoming law. Ironically, Canada—with its multicultural act which specifically encourages immigrants to keep their culture—is not as constrained by the Charter of Freedoms as the United States is by the Bill of Rights. The legal bar to intrude on a woman's right to dress herself as she sees fit is lower, though this has been changing in the first decades of the 21st century.

Related to this is the confrontation between deeply held religious values in which the veil is part of a woman's fundamental identity and secular ideals in Canada which have been considered necessary to protect values that include diversity, including religious diversity. Secular values presumably provide a neutral space in which all faiths can mingle without prejudice. However, these so-called secular values are rooted in belief systems which have emanated from the Judeo-Christian and Western European Enlightenment ideologies which have specific traditions and their own historical trajectories—trajectories which may diverge from, for example, some ideologies of gender and freedom. They further raise questions about the nature of freedom and its characteristics. For example, a Muslim woman who veils might argue that being forced to de-veil compromises—even steals—her freedom while advocates of secularism might argue that the wearing of the veil is per se a theft of freedom and a reflection of an overweening and patriarchal set of beliefs which actually reflect roots in religious ideologies themselves.

Performativity, Gender and Veiling

In the Room: The Animate Headscarf

Headscarves often refuse to lie quietly on their wearers' heads. Looking around the room, I am slowly being made aware of how blind I have been to the presence of veiling in the room, almost as a physical presence in itself. Headscarves will not simply sit quietly on the heads of their wearers. There are endless readjustments that could be misconstrued as fidgeting. Fidgeting is not the right word. Today, for example, Khandan sits quietly with a smile on her face, automatically reaching up and adjusting her scarf—loosening it slightly and then retying it beneath her chin. Even in this room full of women, she wears it so that the front of the scarf juts out slightly over her forehead—enough to cover her hair [she would understandably be wearing a headscarf in front of men].

I realize suddenly that in all the months I have been “teaching” English (I use quotation marks because I have come to realize how poor a teacher of English I am and how much I want these women to have a good, professional teacher⁴⁶), I have seen Khandan's smiling face every week, but rarely her hair. The scarf initially looks plain, but on second glance, it is a gray-on-gray pattern that is rather elegant up close.

Khandan always dresses extremely modestly with her blouses buttoned all the way to the top and loosely flowing over her pants which fall to her instep, covering her ankles. Her scarves are usually formed into triangles that are tied under her chin. The scarves vary in color and pattern but they are never flashy—the most elaborate being subdued prints—and they are always tied in a loose knot under Khandan's chin. The looseness of the knot is interesting to me because Khandan never ties her scarf so tightly that she would not need to adjust it. In fact, throughout the three hours of the class and subsequent lunch, she adjusts it perhaps seven or eight times as the fabric appears to be too slippery to sustain a knot. I don't know what this means—that she does not secure the scarf more reliably—or whether it means anything. (From Field Notes)

The headscarf is far from an inanimate part of a woman's attire. It entails a continuing vigilance with regard to how well it sits on the head, covers the hair—perhaps the shoulder, depending on the wearer's intent—and I often noticed that it required frequent attention. While none of the women I met during my research wore a *chadori*

⁴⁶ In fact, before I ended my year and a half in Vancouver, I found a few retired ESL teachers who took over, with much greater results for the women in the group. One woman who was illiterate in Dari not only learned to speak English but began to write in English.

(*burqa*), many wore headscarves that tied under the chin. Others wore long, rectangular scarves that were wrapped around their heads and necks. Tabbasum wore a long scarf over her hair, a turtleneck covered by a long-sleeved tunic that came down to her knees, and long trousers—completely covered except for her hands, face, and a glimpse of the hair above her forehead.

This adjusting of the headscarf is not unique to Khandan. Any time that I was in a room full of women, I noticed that there were almost always one or two women who were adjusting their headscarves, either by pushing them back off their foreheads or, more commonly, forward to cover their hairlines, and tying or retying the pointed ends beneath their chins.. While a few of those women wore a *jilbab* or *abaya*, most dressed modestly, which is to say that they were covered from neck to toe and their arms were covered to the wrists. For the nonMuslim outsider-observer from the United States, it looks uncomfortable—as if the scarf does not belong on its wearer’s head or as if the act of veiling adds a degree of discomfort, but it seems likely that this is a misrecognition on my part. Hoodfar (1993) and Dossa (2004) have both noted that it can be profoundly uncomfortable for women accustomed to veiling to be without one. By comparison, the women who do not veil sit relatively still.

Their headscarves came in different varieties—some draped and pinned over the hair so that only the face was visible—but most either wore long, rectangular scarves with the ends crossing under the chin and left loose over the shoulders. Some women wore squares folded into triangles and tied under the chin. With the exception of two women, almost all the Afghan women in this study who did not veil at least had a scarf nearby or draped around neck or shoulders that could have been pressed into service

should circumstances warrant it. What those circumstances might be—visiting a mosque or *masjid*, being in the presence of unrelated males, blending in where other women routinely veiled—varied according to each woman, as did the reasons for veiling or not veiling.

Why Women (Un)Veil

In her Master's thesis at Simon Fraser University, Rahela Nayebzadah—a daughter of an Afghan-Canadian family herself—explores veiling and not-veiling with ten young Muslim women. Five of the women veil and five do not and most are under 30. Only one is over 50. Nayebzadah observes that there are clear reasons for veiling—such as obedience to Allah. The reasons offered for not veiling seem somewhat less formed (Nayebzadah 2008).

In her 2011 book *The Quiet Revolution*, Leila Ahmed describes other reasons for veiling: “Affirmations of identity and community, of pride in their religious heritage in the face of the ‘sting of prejudice’ and of negative stereotyping, all elements threading these American Muslim responses, were similarly in evidence in responses that were articulated in Europe” (Ahmed 2011:209). She observes that veiling helps to “anchor” identity “in the transnational Muslim identity rather than in ethnicity or nationality” (Ahmed p. 210 (2011)). In some quarters, headscarves may also be fashion statements which may signify wealth, privilege, and style in relation to a host of other interests. There are catalogs and websites offering many varieties of Islamic dress for women. This is ironic: according to Fatima Mernissi, Muhammad's original message was one of equality (Mernissi 1987).

For some Muslim women, veiling can also suggest resistance to Western dominance and hegemony, though I never heard any Afghan woman express such a sentiment during my field season. It was, however, articulated to me by Aisha, a young Uzbek student that I met. At 28, she had spent the first decade of her life living in the Soviet Union, which discouraged and, at certain points, prohibited veiling. After the Soviet Union dissolved in the early 1990s, she began wearing *hijab* as a protest toward the previous Soviet rule, but as time went by and she became more involved in practicing the erstwhile forbidden and hidden Islam, she acquired a perspective about Western hegemony that incorporated, ironically, the Soviet critique of Western societies with Islamist critiques of Western culture along with her own critique of Soviet dominance. She began veiling in part as a protest against Western hegemony but also as a statement of identity and anti-colonialism:

I did not veil when I was younger. Then, when the Russians no longer controlled us, I started to think about Islam and I wanted to be Muslim. We were always Muslim, but we did not necessarily know it until we were all Uzbeks. Even Uzbek is not the real name for us—it's a Russian name.

Then I began to think about the West and Israel. At first, we were excited when we learned about Israel—about how the Jews had made a country. Then, when I understood what had happened to Palestinians. . . America helped it happen, and I saw that America did not help the Palestinians and so I began to put on *hijab*. I wanted to say something for being Muslim—that the America should not have control of everything.

For still other women, veiling is a practical choice: they veil because if they do not, in some societies, they risk being harassed, assaulted or arrested, depending on the government or customs of the country in question. For some women, it is something to be removed wherever conditions permit it. A Saudi student whom I had seen casually several times—whom I had never seen wearing a headscarf--told me that when she went home, she always resumed veiling though she never veiled outside of Saudi Arabia. For

other women, it was a source of what Hanna Papanek—studying *purdah* in Pakistan—termed “portable seclusion” (Papanek 1971:520). An Afghan woman who wore a simple *chador* in Canada and the United States told me that she preferred to veil when she went home to Afghanistan and she liked the privacy that the *burqa/chadori* provided her.

In the West, the veil is often portrayed as an oppressive garment which is somehow forced on women, but Wikan observed that it was a source of pride and beauty for women in Oman (Wikan 1991). In *Between Marriage and the Market*, by Homa Hoodfar, the veil sometimes becomes a source of contention in marriage arrangements. She describes a well-educated woman who refused an otherwise ideal suitor because he insisted that she veil. Other women in Hoodfar’s study see the veil as an important part of the identity of a wife (Hoodfar 1993). (Ahmed 2012; Hale 2005; Hoodfar 1993; Rasmussen 2013; Wagner et. al. 2012:521).

Of the Afghan women that I met, about half wore some kind of head covering; the rest were bareheaded except when circumstances (e.g., going to mosque or going to any kind of religious setting for some; in the presence of Muslim men for others; in the presence of non-Muslim men) called for it. Almost none of the women—young or old—wore clothes that revealed arms or legs, though many younger women wore sweaters and jeans that hugged their figures sometimes snugly. The full coverage probably had something to do with the fact that most of my field work was conducted in cooler months (and Vancouver can be cool even in the summertime) but it was still remarkable to me. Two women wore knee-length skirts that revealed their legs below the knee. A few

women occasionally wore skirts that fell below the knee—sometimes well below the knee—to events at Eid⁴⁷ or Nawrooz⁴⁸.

Religion was the primary reason given for veiling—as part of being a good Muslim—but it is apparent that veiling signifies multiple aspects of the woman wearing it, her place(s) in society, and society’s laws, norms and values. For Tooba and her friend Rabia, it was going to Mecca for *Hajj*⁴⁹ that evidently occasioned a change to veiling. Tooba always wore a headscarf positioned so that the front shaded her forehead and shielded her gray hair from view. It had the effect of emphasizing her high cheekbones and kind eyes. A few years before I met her, she and her friend Rabia had gone to Mecca for *Hajj*, the pilgrimage that Muslims must make at least once in their lifetimes if they are able to do so physically and financially. She had never worn a headscarf before she went to Mecca for *Hajj*, but since her return, she faithfully wore a headscarf whenever she was outside her home. Similarly, her friend Rabia, with whom she had gone to Mecca, framed her own face with a headscarf, though Rabia’s scarf was set back on her head so that her salt-and-pepper gray hair made her dark eyes more vivid. For both women, I was told, it was a transformative experience and this item—the headscarf—was its public statement: “I am a devout Muslim.” Like Sabia, they used their headscarves to claim public space. Though they were, in part, proclaiming their devoutness, they were also, like Sabia, linking their veiling to their right to be present on the landscape and, perhaps, in the process disputing discourses which essentialized them as refugees. How and whether this

⁴⁷ The end of fasting for Ramadan.

⁴⁸ Customary New Year celebration for Afghans and Iranians, held at the spring equinox.

⁴⁹ One of the five “pillars” of Islam in which the devout Muslim is obliged to undertake a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in his or her lifetime, if one is able-bodied and can afford it.

is how such a choice is read in the large non-Muslim and non-Afghan society will be discussed later in this chapter.

It seems significant that I was told about Tooba's and Rabia's pilgrimages by other women—within Rabia's and Tooba's hearing—but not by Rabia or Tooba themselves. I made an inward comment that this prevented either woman from appearing immodest yet allowed their friends to exhibit the strength of their faith openly and so modesty in dress was echoed by the modesty in their deportment surrounding their Hajj.

Several younger Afghan women—most of whom had lived in Afghanistan when they were young but left in the late 1980s or early 1990s before the civil war and before the Taliban regime—told me they veiled routinely largely as part of their commitment to Islam. Some younger women veiled in certain circumstances—when they were in largely Muslim settings or working in settings where other Muslim women veiled. I also observed two younger women—who veiled when they worked at some businesses owned by Muslims—removed their veils after they left work, suggesting that their headscarves were worn to comply with the social norms in whichever setting they found themselves, but that where they had a choice, the headscarf came off—in one case, moments after one woman walked out the door after her shift was over. I was not able to interview them for a variety of reasons—at least one of which was that they just did not want to talk about taking off their *chadors*.

For younger Muslim women in Germany, Patricia Ehrkamp found that the issue of veiling could be suffused with “complex webs of domination, conformity and resistance. . .” (Ehrkamp 2013:33). She adds that

. . . younger migrant women's experiences reveal that power and resistance are not just gendered, but mediated by such axes of difference as

religion, generation, and rural–urban divides. Gender roles and everyday resistance are not simply enacted in compliance with or opposition to men’s exertions of power, but they also challenge older migrant women who are instrumental in perpetuating patriarchal power relations.” (Ehrkamp 2013:33)

Performing Womanhood

Much of the discourse of the veil that I observed in the Vancouver area was carried out in verbal conversations, but also in actions. Women had multiple reasons for veiling **or** not veiling and their actions—what Judith Butler would call “performance acts” (Butler 1990:521)—or “acts of living,” as Tamim Ansary’s brother called them (Ansary 2002), signaled perceptions of womanhood that included not just expressions of faith, but also ideologies of freedom and perceptions about the relationship of a woman’s body to space.

In *Politics of Piety*, Saba Mahmood examines a group of women in Egypt—what she calls the Egyptian women’s mosque movement—whose performance of their faith are examples of Judith Butler’s “performativity.” Part of this performance includes the act of veiling. The women in Mahmood’s study occupy multiple, historically framed (within each individual) subject-positions. In so doing, they are navigating multiple contexts--the society in which they grew up, the society in which they function at the time, and the imagined societies which are created for them by faith leaders, other Muslims, and even non-Muslim as well as feminists (Mahmood 2004). Among these women, it is in action that the training of a woman’s internal perceptual and ethical framework occurs. This training gives rise to a subjectivity which, while it responds to the structures of Islam, is also a product of their own strong belief that moral/ethical behavior emerges not only from some primarily interior essence or from exterior relationships but also from morally and ethically framed acts—acts of living.

Mahmood uses the examples of modesty and shyness—womanly virtues which she observes are espoused in Islam. While the veil is an external artifact to which many ideologies have become attached—Muslim and non-Muslim alike--in the Islam practiced by the women in *Politics of Piety*, it is part of an internal means to creating and supporting modesty in a very particular way through the act of drawing a curtain between the gaze of society and a woman's body. The form may vary from veiling that covers the entire body, including the face, to a simple scarf worn over the hair, but the principle is the same: in drawing that curtain, the woman is not only expressing her modesty outwardly, she is simultaneously training her inner experience of modesty and thus choosing exterior action to train her interior sensibilities.

Mahmood notes that this choice cannot be seen in the usual formats adopted by the Western popular media, which “. . . portray Muslim women as incomparably bound by the unbreakable chains of religious and patriarchal oppression” (Mahmood 2004:6). She argues against the binarized discourses which tend to limit discussion of veiling to resistance against Western hegemony or to functionalist explanations which focus on veiling as a solution to practical situations like being harassed. Such explanations ignore the role that religion and specific “discursive traditions” play in the resurgence of the veil in societies that might previously have been seen as becoming more Westernized.

In *The Quiet Revolution*, Leila Ahmed discusses the work of Arline Macleod and Sherifa Zuhur—at length. Both working in Egypt, Macleod and Zuhur's work began five years apart and both women focused on the reasons given for veiling. In each case, while religion was the reason offered for veiling and veiling was generally presented as the choice of the individual woman in question, (MacLeod 1991; Zuhur 1992).

Performances of Veiling and Their Meaning: Positive and Negative Freedom

Rukhshana discusses veiling in relation to freedom—the freedom to cover or not cover is associated with mobility

My brother, he was open in the breeze and I was covered, and that was the time I said, “No. If there is justice, God has justice” and in the whole, so many things that women were liberated one thousand four hundred years ago from being buried. If this and many religious came to protect people’s rights, then that is wrong—*to cover myself, it doesn’t make sense to me*. It doesn’t make sense why my brother can enjoy the wind and I cannot. So, since then, it’s hard to accept that, with all the justice this one year for women, it [justice and the requirement to veil] can be together. –Rukhshana (italics mine)

“To cover myself, it doesn’t make sense to me,” says Rukhshana. “It doesn’t make sense why my brother can enjoy the wind and I cannot” and it is the freedom to do what one reasonably wants to do that she is discussing. However, which kind of freedom and what is reasonable for women is contested in and out of Islam and among the women in this study. I’ve described an incident in which a woman who did not veil was criticized by her friends for not doing so. It also happened that women who did veil could find themselves targeted by women who believed strongly that they should not.

Najima and I are sitting in a coffee shop at Metrotown. Customers in the surrounding *Chapters* bookstore are swirling around the for-sale table and Najima tells me that a friend of hers—Aaqila—actually reached over and took a headscarf off of another woman’s head. This is a rumor I have heard about Aaqila, but Najima is the first person who actually knows her well who reports the story to me. (Field Notes 2008)

I was never able to confirm the story with Aaqila herself. However, while I was shopping with a friend in a local shop that was owned by an Afghan family, I did observe the following encounter:

Today, Wanda and I stopped at the tiny convenience store owned by Pirooz to pick up a something to bring friends who had invited us for dinner. At the register, an older woman whom I know slightly—Freshta—was talking very

fast and very emotionally yet quietly and somehow gently to the young woman behind the cash register. The young woman--Lalah—was polite and respectful, occasionally responding with a few words or a sentence in contrast with the torrent of words from Freshta. Freshta was not mollified. Lalah wore a *chador* which framed her face without revealing even her hairline and was pinned in place. Draping over her shoulders, it covered her neck and throat as well. Freshta wore no head covering of any kind, though she did have a scarf draped around her neck. Both women spoke too fast for me to follow easily, and there were combinations of slang words and some Pashto words, so I could not make out most of the conversation. Wanda filled me in. The younger woman—who was perhaps 18 or 19--was being scolded for wearing a *chador*. I thought she bore the scolding with great patience.

It went on for what seemed to be much longer than the actual ten or fifteen minutes it took. I was struck as much by the respectful attitude of the young woman even as she held her ground as I was by the powerful conviction held by the older woman that it was wrong to wear a headscarf. (Field Notes 2009)

Such an encounter could be interpreted through Mahmood's lens of positive and negative freedoms discussed earlier. (Mahmood 2005:10-11).

It is possible to see Lalah's stance as the perspective which argues for self-mastery and Freshta's stance as the perspective which argues for an absence of restraints, but that is not necessarily how the women themselves would characterize it. To my etic gaze, Setara was a picture of modesty and restraint in her dress, her deportment, her pleasure in quoting poetry, yet I don't remember seeing her in any kind of *chador* and certainly not a *chadori*. She once said that she did not think wearing a veil made her a good Muslim any more than not wearing one. It was her right to go without a veil. Setara's preference for not veiling could perhaps be seen as an example of negative freedom, but she was not arguing for an absence of restraint. She just differed about the nature of that restraint.

There is in this argument a useful connection to Lila Abu-Lughod's comments about veiling in her article "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?" Veiling, Abu-

Lughod argues, becomes a kind of useful “portable seclusion” (a phrase she adopts from Hanna Papanek) for a Muslim woman—an enactment of a woman’s agency in choosing her own moral path. Abu-Lughod objects to what she describes as the “reductive interpretation of veiling as the quintessential sign of women’s unfreedom, *even if we object to state imposition of this form, as in Iran or with the Taliban*” (Abu-Lughod 2002:786i, italics mine).

With portable seclusion, a woman carries with her the means which allow her interactions with men and with the rest of the world, allowing her to be both in the world and yet withheld. Two elements of the discourse of the veil—veiling and seclusion/*purdah*—are brought together. Homa Hoodfar asserts these are actually separate phenomena, with seclusion being different from segregation of the sexes in the form of veiling. Seclusion is the sequestering of woman out of the public gaze. Papanek’s “portable seclusion” becomes a way to continue that seclusion while allowing a woman to appear in public (Abu-Lughod 2002; Hoodfar 1993; Papanek 1971), thus combining seclusion with veiling—freedom within restraint.

“I Am Muslim”

A woman at a community celebration for Nawrooz answered my unasked question: “Why do I wear *hijab*? Maybe you think I am oppressed. I am not. I choose to tell people I am Muslim in this way. And Afghan. It is proud—in a good way—to wear *hijab*. I am a good Muslim and a good woman.” She placed the act of *hijab* in the realm of morality—her portable seclusion became a means to be morally in the public gaze. To her, this was her own, self-motivated choice. Yet, Hoodfar asserts, policies and practices regarding veiling have made it “. . . a mechanism in the service of patriarchy, a

means of regulating and controlling women's lives, [yet] women have used the same social institution to free themselves from the bonds of patriarchy" (Hoodfar 1993:5).

Being forced to unveil can be as devastating to women as being forced to veil. The imposition of strictures on women—including veiling—in Iran after the Shah was deposed has been detailed in Marjane Satrap's graphic book *Persepolis*. But during the Shah's regime, Hoodfar's mother and other women for whom at least some form of veiling was synonymous with womanhood and virtuous behavior found it difficult to go out in public without some kind of covering. The Shah's ban on veiling, rather than endowing these women with more liberty had the opposite effect. Because they could not go out in public without some kind of covering, they began to retreat more to the "private" sphere of the home and depend more and more on husbands and other men in their household to acquire their needs from the outside "public" space (Dossa 2004; Hoodfar 1993).

Sources differ about how much unveiling was compulsory under the Soviet regime in Afghanistan (Moghadam 2002; Batur 2004; Pont 2001), and no one in this project reported being forced to unveil during that time, but most of the women I talked with had not veiled in the past even if they did at the time of the study. Most of them were from Kabul, where, for ten years before the Soviet invasion, women had been free to move about in public without veiling so there would have been nothing remarkable for them in not veiling.

In the Vancouver area, veiling was most often articulated to me as an expression of faith. Tooba, in particular, exemplified this aspect of creating interiority with external actions. Though she was not as tall as I was (5'8"), and she stooped a little, Tooba

seemed tall to me. She carried herself with great dignity. Perhaps, too, it was the deep-set eyes and high cheekbones that were emphasized by her ever-present headscarf.

Tooba jaan religiously [as in unfailingly] wears *chador*, framing her face with its high cheekbones and aristocratic demeanor. Tooba and Rabia have been to Mecca for *Hajj* and I am told that Tooba in particular seems to have returned to Canada with a deeper sense of how she should live properly within Islam. Other women in the group tell me that she was not always this pious, that she never wore a headscarf and wore more western clothing. Now—at least whenever I see her—she is clad in all-covering clothes of some kind and wearing a *chador*. Sometimes it slips back off her forehead to reveal black hair. I think she is in her seventies, but I do not know for sure. Often, when we meet for class, she leaves at the end of class to go to midday prayers. From this I have discerned that, whatever she did before *Hajj*, she now commits her life to another pillar of Islam, *salat* (prayers five times a day). (From Field Notes.)

Tooba seemed to have had changes of heart and mind as a result of her *hajj*—changes that allowed her to redefine her interior perceptions in part by using her exterior appearance to signal reconceived sense of self. Mahmood notes that the ritual of praying five times a day is a critical aspect of Islam--“...so centrally important in Islam that the question of whether someone who does not pray regularly qualifies as a Muslim has been the subject of intense debate among theologians” (Mahmood 2005:123). Tooba’s commitment to leaving for prayers certainly underlies their importance, but the question of whether or not a Muslim must pray five times a day throughout the day came up as well. One woman confided to me that she prayed all at once at the end of the day, and when I told her I wanted to include that in my dissertation, she was hesitant—only finally consenting when I said I would not give her name. I never heard anyone criticize her for this, but it seems significant that she did not want to be identified.

Veiling and prayer intersect as performances of both gender and religiosity. Butler reminds us that the performance of gender identity takes place in relationship to

other gendered expectations and context “. . .in which bodies are acted in relationship to the deeply entrenched or sedimented expectations of gendered existence” (Butler 1988:524). For Afghan women, veiling doesn’t occur in isolation, but as a part of their performance of Islamic femininity in relation to other elements as well such as praying, what they eat, and when they eat it. It becomes part of doing good and being good and it is important to “do” gender right, as Butler notes—to participate in constructing and embodying gender as the identified audience for the performance recognizes it (Butler 1988:522).

In Tooba’s actions-- inhabiting the veil, eating only *halal* food, and keeping to a new commitment to the five-times-daily prayers of *salat*, she was, if we follow Mahmood and Butler, performing her role as a Muslim woman. She was, however, not simply performing for others to see but also training her own sensibilities.

It is September 2009—three months after I finished the eighteen months of field work in the Vancouver area and I am driving back to the U.S. after a few days’ visit to Canada. I stopped in at the church on Sunday to see the committee and I spent Tuesday visiting with friends from the women’s group at Crossroads before I began the drive south. However, Tooba was not there and I have wanted all along to ask her some questions. At the border, I pull over near Peace Arch and call her. After exchanging pleasantries and each of us asking after the other’s family, I ask her to help me understand how she thinks about Islam. She laughs at me.

I don’t think I can explain it in one conversation. God is too big. I pray five times a day. This is important. I wear *chador—hijab*—because that is also important. [In answer to another question:] Maybe yes, to honor God, but also to behave the right way. I try to cook *halal*; to keep the body healthy, it is important. Always, I try to do the right thing, the good thing.

It was in these actions that I perceived Tooba as training her own interior sensibilities, making her faith not just a series of expressions or acts of living or a performance for others, but a reality that she breathed in, thereby transforming her own subjectivity. In her comments, I thought I could discern not only the training of interiority that Mahmood describes, but also the processual nature of identity that both Malkki and Kondo have noted (Kondo 1990; Mahmood 2004; Malkki 1997).

In this way, Tooba seems to have created a subjectivity for herself grounded in beliefs wider than belief in self—whether it is the *umma*⁵⁰ or some other community of belief—that may be considered to expand definitions of freedom rather than confine them as is often perceived by Westerners. Drawing on Judith Butler, Mahmood notes that “norms are not simply a social imposition on the subject but constitute the very substance of her intimate, valorized interiority” (Mahmood 2005:23). How, she wonders, are norms “lived and inhabited, aspired to, reached for, and consummated” (Mahmood 2005:23)? For example, Mahmood observes that the veil, for women in the piety movement, is an inextricably linked expression of modesty while, for secularists, modesty is a characteristic which may be expressed in many ways. So, a veil becomes synonymous with modesty and modesty almost cannot be present if there is no veil. Furthermore, without modesty (and therefore without the veil) there is no mobility in some places—particularly parts of Afghanistan, but also in certain settings even in North America. Mobility cannot be present without such evidence of modesty and it is here that much of the power of a transformed subjectivity lies, Mahmood might argue, but in this case, which subjectivity and transformed from what? For Tooba, the transformation seems to

⁵⁰ The *umma* is the community of Islam to which every Muslim belongs.

have been interior as well as exterior, as well as faith-based. She used her exterior actions and presentation as Mahmood observed women in her study to do—to embed, enhance and train the interior ethical being.

However, for Sabia the transformation of subjectivity was affected by additional motivations. Her performance as a veiled woman appears not to have been so much enacted to train her interior. She was responding not just to Muslims but to the wider community of non-Muslims to address fears by Muslim and non-Muslim alike by taking advantage of a historically momentous “teachable moment.”

“We Are Not Afraid About This”

As Sabia describes it, her choice to be veiled was not so much rooted in training her interiority, but in an opportunity to teach the world around her; veiling became what Mahmood describes as “an object of pedagogy” (Mahmood 2005:123). While she espouses the Islamic virtues associated with veiling, it is the use of the *chador* as a tool for teaching about Islam—in particular to make use of her veiled body as a tool for normalizing Islam in the wake of September 11, 2001.

When I met Sabia, she routinely wore a headscarf that covered her hair with the ends draped around her shoulders, and long skirts and loose jackets. However, she told me that before September 11, she had never worn a headscarf. When news of the events of that day began appearing, Sabia was counseled by her children to stay home:

September 11 was bad. My children come from Vancouver to [where we lived then] and say "Mom, don't go outside because you are Muslim, maybe something wrong and I say no, we are not afraid about this. Today I stay at home, tomorrow, what happens tomorrow?"

. . . I never took a job before that and that day I took a job and my husband and I went outside to eat. We went to the restaurant. We went here and there. We went shopping, and people said, “Hello, Sabia,” and I said “Do you know? I am Muslim” . . . We explained to the people; we said what was

going on--all the time—through schools, through college, through university, to nursing program, to church. Every place we went and talked about Afghanistan and the situation and this is the reason people know us very well. (3 September 2013)

“We are not afraid about this,” was not only Sabia’s admonishment to her children, who had obviously sensed or seen that post-September 11 anti-Muslim sentiment would arise or was rising, which indeed it did, as noted in Chapter I. She had chosen to embody her statement by appearing repeatedly in public setting--“Do you know? I am Muslim.” Sometime later, she began to remove the necessity for the verbal statement by adding a headscarf to the statement her body had made with its presence. Now, without saying anything, she was able to articulate to the surrounding non-Muslim society that she was Muslim, and to people who already knew her or knew of her, that she was still the same Sabia they had always known, that Sabia was a Muslim, that Sabia was not a terrorist, and—she hoped they would also draw the conclusion thereby that Muslims were not by definition terrorists. Moreover, she had made her body a teaching instrument, clothing it in history, religion, geography, and politics that stimulated awareness in everyone who saw her. Ahmed observes that this motivation was shared by American women that she interviewed after September 11. She also notes that, for some women, veiling provided a way to feel freer—“liberated” to affirm their identity as Muslims rather than “passively acquiescence in the face of negative stereotyping” (Ahmed 2011:208).

In Sabia’s case, the motivating factor to veil that she articulated was the teachable moment presented by an act of terrorism which had put Muslims—and Afghans--in a negative light. For Tooba and Rabia, it was an artifact of the increased sense of devoutness which they brought home with them from Mecca. For Setara, and for several

other women who resolutely chose not to veil, the choice was motivated more by concepts of freedom and particularly individual freedom of choice which was in part a resistance to the perceived repressions and oppression of the Taliban regime.

Women often become categorized—by default if not by specific definition—as “matter out of place” (Douglas 1966:5), even as sources of chaos. For example, quoting Elizabeth Wilson, Doreen Massey notes that women are linked to chaos in relation to urban space: “[W]omen have fared especially badly in western visions of the metropolis because they have seemed to represent disorder” (Massey 1994:258). The veiling of women is linked to chaos (Mernissi 1987) in two situations with countervailing ideas.

Chaos is a theme in many strands of thought—among them, Islam. The Islamic concept of *fitna*, for example, is linked to women in some of the literature (Mernissi 1987; Walseth and Fasting 2003). By itself, *fitna* alludes to sedition, discord, even chaos. It has its roots in the early history of Islam—the first and second *fitnas* are historical moments in which the *umma*⁵¹ split and both sides went to war against each other—eventually becoming permanent in the difference between Sunni and Shia. So painful was this division to the members of the nascent faith that the fear of sedition, disruption and the chaos emerging therefrom has in some places expanded to include not just larger political change but many kinds of ruptures in existing social order—in particular in relation to the characterizing of women in many Muslim societies (Ansary 2007; Armstrong 2001; Ahmed 2011). According to Fatima Mernissi, in Islam women are repositories of *fitna*. For example, during the Taliban era, Taliban considered the failure

⁵¹ *Umma* refers to the Muslim community. Depending on how it is used, it can refer to a small, local community of Muslims or to the entire community of Muslims across the globe.

to seclude women a so profoundly antithetical to Islam that, for example, a woman could not be examined by a male doctor. She was dependent on her husband to communicate with the doctor or, in some cases, had to be examined through a hole in a partition between doctor and patient. In Taliban era, this came about in considerable part because Taliban would not allow women doctors to work.

In relation to veiling, parts of the global *umma* share the belief that women are by nature “excessive,” as Mernissi puts it (Mernissi 1987). This confluence of notions--that women represent disorder in urban space—is nearly absent among the women consulted for this study. Yet, veiling was indeed an issue in the Vancouver area. For Afghan women, as Abu-Lughod has noted, Western societies may assign identity of victim that comes bundled with discourse about headscarves and veiling, Islam, and assumptions about relations between Afghan women and men. Ironically, they also sometimes become the objects of suspicion as well. The role that this paradox played in ideas about order and disorder became apparent on a field trip for the ESL class to North Vancouver. The group facilitator, Mina, had arranged for the class to go on a field trip and the women had chosen to go to Yaz Bazar for lunch. I had been looking for a way to somehow reciprocate for their kindness in allowing me to learn from them so I offered to treat them and they agreed.

We had agreed to meet today at Yaz Bazar in North Vancouver. I drove over separately after an early morning appointment in Coquitlam. The women in the class had agreed to meet with each other and with Mina, the group facilitator, at Waterfront Station, which is located at the edge of Vancouver Harbor. This is where they would catch the Seabus across the water to Lonsdale Quay in North Vancouver. From there, they could catch the bus or walk up to Yaz Bazar. Later, Mina tells me about a small incident at Waterfront Station. Mina states:

“The women were all together at the station. They were waiting in the Seabus terminal, waiting to go over to Lonsdale Quay. Most of them were

wearing headscarves and they stood in a corner of the station, chatting while they waited, waiting for Mina to join them, and waiting as others arrived in twos or threes, getting off getting off buses from Burnaby or Surrey. There are fourteen women in all—ten Afghan women and four Iranian women—all chatting in Dari or Persian. “

More than half of women were wearing headscarves that day and four were even more covered. While most of those who *hijab* are otherwise wearing Western clothes, four of the women were fully covered but for their faces. Typically, Tabbasum wears a *shalwar kameez*-- trousers and a tunic--and a long headscarf that covers everything but her face and hairline. Shukria wears a white *hijab* which leaves only her face showing and drapes below her shoulders. Waseema and Ziba are similarly covered from head to toe with only their faces showing. The women who did not wear any kind of *hijab* were bareheaded and dressed in trousers, sweaters and jackets or coats (it has been a grey and rainy April day with a stiff wind blowing straight up the street from Lonsdale Quay). Mina goes on:

“One of the women saw that a guard was watching them—staring and staring. For a long time, he stared and watched them. Then, he came up to them and said, ‘What are you doing here? Where are you going?’ And then I got there and I explained our field trip and he left them. “

The guard receded, leaving the women to their own devices. It is possible that he was trying to be helpful, thinking they might be lost, but the tone of Mina’s brief recounting of the incident suggested to me that it was not. My first reaction on hearing about the incident was that the guard was being racist and I was indignant for the women, though when I asked them about it, they did not seem to think it was unusual. “It happens,” said Hamasa. “We don’t think about it.”

There are several elements to this encounter to be noted here. The most likely—that the guard’s attention was attracted by the number of headscarves in the group—focused on headscarves, which signified Islam, which often signified terrorism in Canada as much as it did in the United States and elsewhere. This mindset was more present in the Vancouver area than I expected it would be. I could not interview the guard in question because I was not there, but I often had breakfast at a place where a number of

local RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) community police officers often had breakfast. Sometime after the Waterfront Station incident, several officers were there, so I asked them why they thought the guard might have focused on the women. While one thought he could have meant to help, the other three answered confidently: “Terrorism.”

Of course, at that point in history, terrorist acts in the West had been committed by men (Christian and Muslim) who did not wear traditional dress worn in any of the many Muslim societies throughout the world. Was the sight of a group of women in their fifties, sixties and seventies in headscarves somehow conflated with terrorism, other probabilities to the contrary, most likely because the veil itself had been conflated with Islam? Without having interviewed the guard, I cannot know for sure, but the conflation of women in headscarves with Muslim terrorism often surfaced in conversations engaged in casual settings, so it is at least possible even in a city as liberal as Vancouver. Also, the women’s acceptance of such incidents as usual—indicated by Hamasa’s comment—lead me to suspect that it is so.

Such an incident should perhaps reinscribe our awareness of how women’s bodies—in this case Muslim women and particularly Afghan and Iranian women in Canada—bear the brunt of intergroup labeling. In the weeks following September 11, as I noted earlier, a number of Muslim women who routinely veil were reluctant to go out in public. In the Vancouver area, several women reported to me that at various times, when they crossed the border into the United States, they ran into people who told them they should “go back home”—ostensibly to Afghanistan or Iran—though for some of them, home had been the Vancouver area for more than a decade. Encounters like this led

some visible minority⁵² women with whom I spoke over the year and a half of field work to decide not to cross the border to shop in the United States even after the surge in the Canadian dollar made U.S. prices in Bellingham and Seattle more attractive. “I am Canadian,” exclaimed one woman as she told me of a similar incident. “I have lived here for nearly twenty years. Where would I go?”

Later, in two separate encounters, my perceptions of the incident were somewhat reframed by Mina and then later, by Haleema—an Afghan who had lived in Canada since the 1980s. Mina, who had come from Iran to Canada twelve years before, did not share the indignation I felt at the guard’s actions. Neither did Haleema. Neither woman perceived the loss of freedom and comfort that that the event implied to me. Each told me that she felt safer knowing the guard was vigilant. “I’m glad they do this,” said Mina. “It’s a small price to pay for safety and security.” Haleema observed that it was important to be on the watch for “fanatic” Muslims: “I am not fanatic. Fanatic Muslims give Islam a bad name.” When I asked the women in the group about it, they were nonchalant. If they felt they were inappropriately targeted, they did not acknowledge it, though I noticed that no one that I asked wanted to engage at length in a conversation about the incident.

That Mina and Haleema read the incident so differently from my own indignant take on it probably relates in part to their own histories. Mina had lived in Iran for a number of years after the 1979 revolution and she observed the gradual change in particular when she went out to buy bread. At first, she said, there were women dressed “normally” (i.e., mostly in Western clothes), then

⁵² The category of “visible minority” will be taken up more fully in Chapter VII.

I began to notice that some of the women who used to go without a scarf were wearing a headscarf. . . . Still, we would all stand in line. We would all talk. Then, some women did not come. Then other women would come not in headscarves, but in *chador* [in Iran, fully covered head to toe with only the face showing]. It happened slowly. Over time. Less women. Then only me and the men looked at me very hard.

Eventually there was a day when she was the only woman shopping there and for Mina, that signal change in a small, daily activity told the full story not only of the loss of the Iran in which she had grown up with her family around her, but also the danger of what she regarded as extremism. Though there was a difference—the veiling in Iran was forced and the veiling in Vancouver was voluntary, the connection still lived in her perception.

Haleema had left Afghanistan and was living in Canada by the time the Taliban government took over Afghanistan. She had grown up in Afghanistan in a time when young women were more inclined to wear Western clothes and hairdos, and her family was relatively well off so her experience of women who veiled had been one that was associated with class differences and rural-urban differences in lifestyle.

I never wore *chador*. My family did not wear *chador*—or *burqa*. No hijab, no burqa. I was an educated woman. My family believed in many ways to see God. We did not have to wear hijab to be religious. Women are human beings. They do not have to cover. Fanatics force women to wear *chador*. We are not fanatics.

For both women, the distance traveled from their respective countries it seemed as if was paired with a metaphorical distance which separated them from the women at the station and also rendered those women as matter out of place.

In Western discourse, the combination of veiling with womanhood has led to a curious set of paradoxes. Veiled women are at once invisible and too visible (matter out of place), victim and potential perpetrator, absent yet present. Dossa has noted these

dualities, but added one of her own—"The Invisible Veil" (Dossa 2004). With the exception of bridal veils and nuns' habits (which are themselves vanishing in places like the United States), the West has tended, in recent centuries to treat veiling as if it were an artifact of the distant, medieval past or of people in exotic, faraway places like Saudi Arabia. In the last few decades, but particularly since September 11, 2001, veiling has been described and discussed largely in terms of Islam, and since 2001, it has become a curiously dichotomized symbol representing both the dangers of Islamic terrorism yet also representing women's victimhood by that same religion (Ahmed 2011; Dossa 2004; Mernissi 1987; Hoodfar 1993). Islam does, in fact, encourage modest deportment by women. However, Mernissi observes that the Quran admonishes both men and women to dress modestly, and it contains more adjurations to men than to women. When I encountered Roena she was usually dressed in a jacket and skirt that fell to her knees. In much of Afghanistan, such a skirt would be considered immodest and inappropriately attention-seeking. In the Vancouver area, however, it could be said that it was the veil which drew attention and the knee-length skirt which did not, so it could, theoretically, be possible to argue that Roena was in fact being more modest and appropriate. This particular notion is suggested by the comment of a Saudi woman in an article by Susan Rasmussen:

[T]he hijab is a religious request, covering the head is part of the Islamic code. Some women go without it in other countries. But in Saudi Arabia, we tend to be more on the conservative side. The abaya is more of a social thing. When I go to the market it's more convenient to wear it and walk unnoticed like everybody else. I wouldn't wear it in Houston because it would attract too much attention" (Houston Chronicle, July 2006) [Quoted in Rasmussen 2013:244]

If modesty is a key component of veiling, if the attention paid to veiling focuses not on the inherent seductiveness of the woman uncovered, and if veiling in countries

where it is common exhibits the modest behavior of the woman—avoiding drawing attention to herself—is there a reasonable argument that dressing as Roena does exhibits more modesty in a Western urban setting than the act of veiling?

Conclusions and Observations

The role of veiling in relation to women's freedom of movement in and through public space is conditioned by assumptions about freedom in general and about women in particular. In settings where veiling is common, not only does veiling cover something of a woman's body's presentation, it carries with it its own architecture—making the space a woman occupies her own space and thus allowing her to move about in public space. In addition, she is layering her represented space-of-herself onto a landscape of representations. It allows her to be both visible and invisible, to be categorized. It allows both women and men to understand their place in the social universe more clearly.

Setara, like Sabia, had come of age in the considerably less restrictive eras of Zaher Shah and later Daoud Khan and that time informed her reasoning and beliefs about how women should be treated and how they should be required to behave: In “Daoud Khan time” there were problems, but women had more freedom to decide for themselves how they would dress and act. Sabia was living in Canada at the time of the Taliban government, but Setara was living in Afghanistan. “I do not have to wear a scarf if I do not want to. It is my right to be free here. No one can tell me that I have to wear a scarf. I am a good Muslim. I pray every day.” For Setara, the issue was not portraying a good Muslim in a time when Muslims were being perceived as Other even more so than they had been. Unlike Tooba, Setara had remained in Afghanistan during the Taliban regime and, based on her own experience, she did not consider that a headscarf was necessary to

her comportment as a good Afghan and a good Muslim. Such a perspective encapsulates Mahmood's definition of negative freedom—i.e., a freedom from restraint in which being a good Muslim does not require prescribed actions and intention and commitment to God are sufficient.

Setara, Tooba, Rabia and Sabia were all women “of a certain age,” which is to say that they were all old enough to have been alive in times when issues of veiling were less widely politically fraught. The act of veiling or not veiling was a discourse among Afghans and other Muslims, but not yet a signifier of gender and power caught up in a global conversation threaded throughout with ideologies reflecting colonialism, clashes of civilizations, transnational Islamic movements and other intersecting discourses of gender.

Rasmussen notes that it is “. . .misleading to gloss diverse clothing and head-coverings ‘Islamic dress,’ and to read highly charged meanings of ‘political Islam’ into such dress, projecting onto it Euro-American and Judeo-Christian categories and assumptions regarding gender and religion, hence the need to examine women’s dress from a multiplicity of perspectives, with attention to more concerns. . .” (Rasmussen 2013:246). For the women in this study, the larger political meanings were inevitably present, but each choice to veil or not veil arose from a set of individual beliefs and concerns about how they presented themselves as women and the choices were generally founded on both religious ideologies and ideologies of freedom—whether they veiled or did not veil. As Afghan women and as Muslim women, they and the veils which may or may not have been part of their attire became part of the constellations of meaning which

crisscrossed the setting in which they lived as well as the settings from which they had migrated.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

Rukhshana is pale from fasting. It is Ramadan. She has been listening to me ask questions about refugees repeatedly, questions which I have posed in a way that reflects my confidence in the use of the term “refugee.” Gently, but urgently, she says to me, “We are not refugees,” and she asks, “When do we stop being refugees?” (Field notes)

It was nine months into my field work in the Vancouver area and it was the first time anyone had challenged my use of the word “refugee” in association with “Afghan” and it was the first time I had confronted something of the reality of what it must be like to be labeled “refugee.” It was a category which haunted the discussions of class, the cooperative, and veiling in the previous chapters. My conversation with Rukhshana was also the first time I realized—albeit on a very limited level—1) the permanence of the label and 2) some of the specific ways in which it related to Afghan women in particular.

It seemed especially true for Afghan women because of the nameless and faceless women in *burqas* whose pictures were distributed in media stories about Afghanistan. These images forever associated the categories of refugee and Afghan woman, rendering them not only permanent refugees, but permanent victims. In the Vancouver area, I also observed that—without intention or malice—the structures which were in place also tended to link gender and class to perceptions of refugee status to render many Afghan women into the category of permanent child. This happened in a number of ways, along

with the aforementioned (unarticulated) discourses which *mis*recognized Afghan women as permanent refugees--and therefore permanently temporary—and permanent victims.

Discussion

Both Malkki and Kondo assert that identity is processual and Taylor, Althusser and Foucault all interpret identity in ways that support such an assertion—each articulating identity as some form of negotiation between identifier and identified rather than as a solely self-generated phenomenon. In addition, Fredrick Barth’s discussion of ethnicity and Noah Coburn’s examination of *qaum* both support a view in which the perspective of outsiders to a specified ethnic group or *qaum* must participate in the process of recognition and identity (Althusser 1971; Barth 1969; Coburn 2011; Foucault 1977 and 1995; Kondo 1990; Malkki 1997; Taylor 1994). In the world of forced migration, this appears to be especially true. Each forced migrant or refugee must, in the nature of the circumstances, remake herself—or at least the person she is perceived to be—from site to site in order to survive and this is no less true in the Vancouver area. Demands are different in Vancouver from the demands of, for example, a refugee camp in Pakistan or a journey across the country to Iran. The role of “refugee” itself changes with each setting. Indeed, as Rostami-Povey noted (Chapter VI), the requirements for Afghan women’s self-representation were different in Western societies like the United Kingdom and the United States from the requirements in Iran and Pakistan. In the Western countries, efforts to address or modify the gendered nature of power within the Afghan and Muslim communities were often overshadowed or even eclipsed by the politics of recognition which rendered Muslims and Afghans as outsiders.

As I noted earlier in the dissertation, the identity of “refugee” seemed to be understood as permanent and further categorized as a combination of permanently temporary and permanently Other, so that—as Rukhshana noticed—the ease of belonging did not settle in quite the same way on refugees as it did on other migrants. Other migrant populations experienced this kind of open or unspoken labeling that often seemed to characterize Afghan women, but, as I noted in Chapters II and III, special mention was made in different ways by different people of Afghans. Anouk observed that Afghans—in relation to other groups with whom she had worked—were very “hierarchical,” a sentiment that was echoed by Rukhshana. Elizabeth observed that Afghans and other “Middle Easterners” were “more different” than any other group of refugees with which she had worked. I have also mentioned earlier the casual way refugees’ personal lives were discussed—almost as if they were children or pets who could be discussed in their presence as if they were not there.

In these and other ways, Afghan women are interpellated into the refugee category and its associated assumptions about lack of permanence even when the word “refugee” is never mentioned. It is the condition into which they are recognized and recruited by the prevailing norms and values of the multicultural society which was created, according to the Multiculturalism Act, to celebrate difference. Refugee is a category which registers identity as an immovable and unchanging reality. It has been noted in this dissertation that the move toward multicultural policies was motivated by political and economic necessities—in particular, the need for more biopower (labor). No matter how politically motivated the origins of Canadian multiculturalism were, its stated purposes of accepting and even celebrating differences were nevertheless

incorporated into the ideological frameworks of multiple sectors in Vancouver area society. Over time, the possibilities for claimed identity have multiplied. Different identities have become “nested” within other identities—a notion which was explored in different contexts by Bakic-Hayden and Hayden (Bakic-Hayden and Hayden 1992) and Herb and Kaplan (1994). From governmental policies to individual players who, like Elizabeth and Alicia, felt a mission to help refugees who arrived in Vancouver, the ideologies of state and nonstate apparatuses contributed to the framing of Afghan women in the nested identities of refugee, permanent refugee, and permanent Other.

For these reasons I believe that the refugee identity haunts the other categories of identity for most if not all the Afghan women who were consultants for this study. Much as Foucault in *The History of Sexuality Volume I* (1990) observed that sex was being discussed all the time while it was supposedly being repressed, the discursive environment which I observed to be surrounding Afghan women in the Vancouver area seemed to constantly be shaped by this refugee identity yet rarely declared it openly.

As I noted above, this is partly related to the specific cohort I studied—most of whom were older and also dealing with issues that related to aging as well as refugee status--articulated or not. It is also a reflection of the fact that most Afghans who live in the Vancouver area came there because the political and social circumstances in Afghanistan made the lives they had lived untenable and they were forced to leave. Whether their formal legal admission to Canada came about as a result of acquiring refugee status through the UNHCR or whether they were sponsored to come by family members or sponsoring groups like church refugee committees, the size of the international Afghan refugee population and the compelling story of Afghanistan seemed

powerfully attached to Afghan women no matter how integrated they were or how integrated they felt into the rest of Vancouver society.

Althusser describes interpellation of the subject by state-borne ideologies as a policeman shouting “You there!”—similar to creating the subjection of the individual by a greater, more powerful Subject—the capitalized word distinguishes the difference in power between the two (Althusser 1971b). Thus the powerful Subject interpellating those who are labeled “refugees” through social ideas and practices can be the society which surrounds them every bit as much as the formal structures of the State (in this case, government). Here, Althusser appears to echo Foucault’s emphasis on the role of norms and values in creating powerful influence—perhaps even more powerful than threats, imprisonment and coercion (Foucault 1979).

The Afghan women in this study must respond by continually reinscribing their identities as refugees, as women, as Afghan women, in addition to other categories if they are to access many kinds of services which might be provided. For example, the women who were in the support group to which I taught English were required to self-categorize as Afghan—and later as Iranian—immigrants or refugees in need of support services in order to receive those services.

Foucault argues that the power of norms, values and the “govern-mentality” (sic) can be equal to or even more powerful than the brute, direct application of power in the form of prisons, executions and other, seemingly more forceful forms of power (Dreyfus and Rabinow 2003). In this, he explores strands of thought similar to Althusser and Gramsci—locating power in the unavoidable strength of ideologies (which may be perceived as unforced even if they are forced) that underpin lived reality—or what

Gramsci described as “common sense” (Gramsci 2000:342). It is part of the common sense of multiculturalism that it requires observable, distinctive differences in order to produce the mosaic of diversity which Canadian multiculturalism embraces in its stated policy. In addition, that difference must be, to some degree, fetishized—to use Terence Turner’s term (Turner 1993). At least some degree of essentializing—a feature of Canadian multiculturalism which has been decried by Neil Bissoondath, among others—is required for multiculturalism to work. However, argues Bissoondath, this has contributed to an intensification and institutionalization of tolerance rather than acceptance (Bissoondath 1994).

It is at this point that Afghan women, like many other identified refugee groups, must respond, as the subjects called to in Althusser’s discussion of interpellation must respond. It is the perpetual nature of the politics of recognition present in Canadian multiculturalism that the subject who is called to must respond to in some way. In the case of Afghan women in this study, they must, respond by, in effect, remaining Other in order to belong. The condition of their belonging is that they are part of the configuration of multiple cultures that make up the multicultural mosaic as it is imagined in both political assertions (e.g., the Multicultural Act) and nongovernmental discourses (e.g., discourses present in media and ideals of workers in organizations like settlement agencies and refugee committees).

They must thus remain Other to belong to the larger society: they must be identified and situated as Others to be part of those identified Others who make up the multiple identities which characterize the difference which multiculturalism requires to be multiculturalism. In this, the Canadian multicultural enterprise reflects what Terence

Turner termed *difference multiculturalism* in which the “fetishism” of *difference* becomes “a tag for ethnic identity”. Quoting Todd Gitlin, Turner refers to “interest group pluralism” which Gitlin describes as “romancing the varieties of otherness” (Turner 1993:414). Turner describes an alternative form of multiculturalism which “seeks to use cultural diversity as a basis for challenging, revising, and relativizing basic notions and principles common to dominant and minority cultures alike. . .” (Turner 1993:413). It is this multiculturalism that many in this study believe in even as they are living more often with the fetishism of difference. In the fetishism of difference, identity must be captured and essentialized. It cannot be processual and the individual’s power to define herself, while not stolen or denied completely, is narrowed even—and sometimes precisely—in settings where compassion and respect are dominant. It is embedded in the way that refugee populations are classed, in the way that development projects like the coop are required to press women into “hitting the ground running” (Chapter V), and in the way that a group of Dari- and Farsi-speaking women—many veiled—are given extra scrutiny by a guard at a public transit station (Chapter VI).

At the same time, the Afghan women who were observed as part of this study, sustained a distinct connection with ideals, norms and values that were especially and uniquely their own. It was not that such values were not shared to varying degrees by the surrounding society, but ideals of behavior like the *Mardom-dari* which Zulfacar represented in her research were uniquely prescriptive and allowed me to observe—I thought—perspectives of “Afghanness” in the diverging perspectives on the sewing coop as well as in the contrapuntal discourse of the veil that became apparent in the course of the study.

Discussion of the essentializing effect of Althusserian interpellations, Taylor's politics of recognition and Foucault's governmentality which is followed by assertions of preserved distinctions requires at least some characterization of likely responses to essentialization—in this case, 1) strategic essentializing on the part of those who are essentialized and 2) resistance. They are companions in this setting, by which I mean that each can be seen as the alternative expression of the other.

Strategic Essentialization and Resistance

Strategic essentialization is the concept that encompasses the use of essentialism by the essentialized. It can become a tool used by subaltern groups which endeavor to find a dialogue in which their voices will be heard; it can also be deployed by groups which seek leverage to stand out in the clamorous politics of recognition. It is required in every circumstance where an identity like ethnicity or nationality of origin is connected to receiving services (Spivak 1988a and 1988b; Taylor 1994). In the Vancouver area, the role of multiculturalism makes it necessary to create and maintain specific, identifiable characteristics in order to attract resources and anchor its presence, but also to reinscribe identity in a way that both reinforces connections to traditions in the society of origin and reconfirms its presence as part of the multiply ethnic/cultural makeup that defines multiculturalism in Canada. Afghans must—effectively--remain Other to be part of the multicultural mosaic and Afghan women must reinscribe themselves as permanent refugees and permanent victims in order to benefit from resources available for victimized women refugees that recognize the particular circumstances of Afghan women to be worthy.

Women in this study do respond to the essentialized identities they are given, reinscribing the perceived refugee identities associated with them. They do so—strategically essentializing themselves in those categories--every time they hold a benefit for Afghan widows and orphans or participate in services that are expressly made available to them as a part of a targeted demographic which includes people who are still repairing their lives after the great and wrenching changes of recent decades in Afghanistan. Some of them respond by remaining permanent residents rather than undertaking the process of becoming citizens. They may also respond by reifying aspects of Afghan identity which sustain a certain amount of separateness from the wider society—for example, by participating in cultural faires as Hamasa, Sabia and Roena did; by supporting Dari language lessons for their children or grandchildren, and by deepening their commitment to Islam, as Tooba did. They may even do so by contributing to the field work of an anthropologist-in-training.

Here, I risk being misunderstood. I am not asserting that these women always intentionally participate in reinscribing and reifying the refugee identities and labels. I am asserting that the politics of recognition require them to do so. There may be no shouting police officer (as Althusser describes), but response is unavoidable if they are to function in this setting. Not only do resources—financial and other--become less available for individuals if they do not participate, but resources to their families and to the larger Afghan community may become less available. An individual woman may have access to a support group that is offered primarily for Afghan women, a family may qualify for assistance because of their recognized circumstances as Afghan refugees, and the Afghan community may draw resources for Afghans in Afghanistan with a benefit

concert (which, in turn, may be able to draw resources for putting on the concert in the first place). So, the given identity of refugee may be one to which it is valuable, even necessary, to hew. This may be categorized as “strategic essentialism” in relation to the society which I have identified as doing the hailing and there is certainly that aspect of it, but it was not the only response I observed. It was also possible to discern resistance—resistance to being essentialized and to participating in such essentializing, but also resistance to ideals with which Afghan women were raised—and thus multiply constructed resistance just as strategic essentializing is multiply deployed.

Resistance, in James Scott’s *Domination and the Art of Resistance*, is undertaken in acts such as poaching in the restricted reserves of the nobles of medieval Europe (Scott 1990). As I noted in Chapter VI, one of the reasons women veiled was to strategically confront—resist--prevailing negative discourses about Muslims in general and Afghans more particularly. In addition, women who do not veil may be resisting some prevailing Muslim and Afghan discourses at the same time that they are resisting the Western discourses about Islam and about Afghans in which all Muslim or Afghan women are assumed to be veiled

The difficulty with both concepts—strategic essentialism and resistance—is that each is proposed by those who cite such phenomena as a counterpoint or counterweight to a Western hegemonic influence. In other words, the central ideology is the essentialism of the hegemon or the ideas which are resisted. The word resistance assumes that behaviors like poaching in a restricted reserve or in this case veiling in a society where the dominant pattern is not-veiling are conducted primarily in response to repression. The notion of strategic essentialism sometimes assumes that when, for

example, an Afghan strategically essentializes his or her own identity that it is only a response to the essentializing by others.

I argue that resistance which is perceived in such circumstances may be overread. In relation to veiling, in this study, some women veiled as a sign—to God, to fellow Muslims, to themselves—of their increased piety and an affirmation of identity. The fact that veiling differs from the dominant pattern of the surrounding society does not necessarily indicate that Afghan women (or other Muslim women who veil) are resisting. In relation to strategic essentializing, the reinscription of identity in relation to essentialization by the surrounding society may be purposeful strategizing in order to receive important resources, but it is also a means to retaining a link to ways of life which are missed and valued.

Of course, any activity might serve both ends. However, among many of the women in this study, there was also a dedication to the acts of living through which are threaded habits of generosity present in, for example, *Mardom-dari* which, as Zulfacar explains it, joins generosity not only to personal financial success, but to acts in which many women minister to their community in ways large and small. Women committed such acts of living in multiple ways both large and small.

Roena, for example, participated on many fronts. She expanded her training as a psychologist specializing in early childhood education into teaching early childhood education at the college level. She was also instrumental in supporting and sustaining a local weekly television show which included a segment which taught Dari language skills to very young children. The children's component was Roena's brain child and it often blended the teaching of Dari with information about day to day living skills. Roena's

motivation to do these things may have been rooted in strategically essentializing on one hand, and resistance to the pressures to leave behind a remarkable heritage—to assimilate. That is not how she presented these efforts to me, but perhaps more important, her actions may not support such an assumption. The fact that her education, her financial resources, and her time and energy were visibly employed in returning value and support to the Afghan community suggests Zulfacar’s explanations of *Mardom-dari*. She could easily have taken her education and other resources—her success in the Canadian setting--to accrue financial and other resources to herself and to her family. Instead, she chose to invest considerable resources in the Afghan community. She was able to do so, of course, because she and her husband had attained such high levels of professional and financial success.

An Afghan woman’s agency may be affected, influenced, restricted or prevented in many ways in the context of refugee life because her power to effect her own preferred changes or sustain traditions which are important to her are caught, in so many ways, in the intersection of her multiply nested identities in the Canadian setting. She must—sometimes simultaneously and sometimes separately—interact with those recognized or given (imposed) identities. Nevertheless, my observation of the Afghan women in this study was that they did not only engage in self-essentializing and resistance. They also lived their own values apart from those influential pressures and in so doing, they enacted their own “acts of living”—practices—which confirmed their senses of self and identity.

Therefore, I did not perceive Roena—in her *Mardom-dar* practices with relation to the Afghan community-- to be only strategically essentializing or resisting. My perception was that she was holding to standards that comport with Zulfacar’s

explanation of *Mardom-dari* and that, from her example and those of other Afghan women, this *Weltanschauung* guided principle-driven actions—acts of living—even more than responding to hegemonic influences, local or historically traditional.

Rukhshana and Sabia also exemplified this principle-driven approach for me, though they incorporated it into their lives in different ways. Working in a settlement agency, Rukhshana's work—by definition--required a certain amount of care for (as well as mental and emotional investment in) the needs and well-being of other people and it became clear from how she framed her perspective that she saw the cooperative as a means to ministering to some of the difficulties encountered by Afghan and other newcomer women when they arrived in Canada. For her part, in my interviews with Sabia, I perceived feelings no less heartfelt than those I heard from Rukhshana. Sabia's platform for expressing those feelings was a little different. Where Rukhshana attempted to combine international development paradigms and more contemporary Canadian values with the needs of newcomers to facilitate the transition from Afghanistan to Canada, Sabia deployed traditional Afghan values in service of easing their transition to a society that was in many ways very different from Afghan society. The economic transition did not appear to figure prominently in Sabia's perspective: "It is a place where they can drink some tea and talk, where they can get away from the world a little." It was exactly that world, with all its rushed and moneyed sensibilities that Rukhshana wanted them to be able to access.

The cooperative was a Canadian development project. The ability of a recipient of development aid to respond positively—to succeed—may be lauded as the success of the development program. However, as I observed in Chapter V--in relation to local

development projects--when the program does not achieve its stated goals, the lack of compliance of the recipient is sometimes cited. This is not unique to the sewing cooperative. Lamia Karim's exploration of microcredit financing revealed a similar tendency on some fronts to fault the borrowers' behavior or their intransigent poverty rather than indict the structural factors that, among other things, contribute to an industry of poverty (Karim 2011). Rukhshana's background in working with development programs and her study of successful development programs in Canada provided her with a potentially useful tool for helping her fellow Afghan immigrants. Based on my interviews with these two participants and an observer, it seems as if there was no way for her to see that this would not turn out--as she had anticipated it would--to help Afghan women gain ground in the Canadian economy more quickly than some of their predecessors. That it became, instead (at least at the time of my research) another kind of support program dependent on donated funds seemed clearly to be a source of sadness and disappointment for her. She had hoped that it would be an opportunity for learning, adapting, and using existing skills to earn money for its participants

As I tell her how I met Sabia and how Sabia was arranging for a fund-raising event to raise funds for the cooperative, Rukhshana's face falls. *That was not how it was supposed to be*, she tells me. *The women were supposed to learn how to work together to help each other, to earn their own money, to learn their own skills, to share in the profits. I wanted them to have some independence, some skills.*

In the effort to create the co-op, Rukhshana had been attempting to tread a rather delicate divide. While she never put it in just these terms beyond what was said at the beginning of this chapter, it seemed clear that she was attempting to liberate the women from the essentialization of Afghan women in Canada and from their roles as permanent refugees and permanent victims. She had seen too many people, she said, filter through

the refugee camps and come out the other end learning “dependency.” “I worry that they have learned too well to ask for help rather than become entrepreneurial, independent,” she said. “Refugee camps teach you to wait for help rather than help yourself. Being a refugee is a situation, not a condition, not a permanent lifestyle.”

She also appears to have been resisting other essentializing discourses in which traditional ideals of Afghan womanhood and the experience of dependent refugees in nearby countries had shaped women—she believed—in ways that both denied them agency and even denied them the ability to recognize their own agency where it might exist.

It appears that Rukhshana and Sabia operated on two sides of the aforementioned divide. One side—Sabia’s--was rooted in traditional ideals of Afghan lifestyles and behavior and, to some degree, in a slower world and a world where the headlong rush to make a living was mitigated more by social relationships and interactions. The other side—Rukhshana’s--was an attempt to bridge to a world which emphasized the headlong rush at the expense of centuries of social norms and values that had accompanied Afghan lifestyles which even in the cities retained some of the values inherent in rural life. Knowing this, each woman appeared to be trying to provide a transitional space for Afghan women. Rukhshana’s transitional space was one which attempted to link some familiar touchstones—sewing and women working together—with an entry point in the Canadian economy. The cooperative, in that view, could have provided a vital apprenticeship which was not only a chance to explore a craft, but to sample Canadian economic entrepreneurial opportunities in a relatively safe space while women were taking English classes, getting settled, and otherwise adjusting to their changed worlds. It

would, she hoped, give them necessary support for in functioning successfully in a society that tended to expect immigrants and refugees to, as Dossa puts it, “hit the ground running” (Dossa 2004:63).

While I would categorize Sabia’s approach as the one which depended on reinscribing essentialized notions of both refugees and of Afghan women, Rukhshana’s ambitions also depended on reinscription as well. It was necessary to identify Afghan women as a needy population in part by alluding to oppressive circumstances they had experienced in Afghanistan. In addition, it was their identity as refugees combined with that history that attracted resources, so reinscription—re-essentializing—of Afghan newcomer women into their roles as refugees and victims was necessary even at a fundamental level, to fund the project. Thus, the project itself and its designers were forced-- required—in their roles as project designers—into reproducing the refugee identity and its corollary, gendered identity of permanent victims. This was the case in spite of what I read as Rukhshana’s desire to help other Afghan women to surmount those essentializations: she might have been able to extricate herself—certainly her own self-awareness challenged the notion of refugee—but, in order to create the good outcome toward which she strove, she was caught up in the very structure she was resisting.

This was, however, not the only aspect of categorization of Afghan women that I saw. I also saw women who—in the presumably less-surveilled byways of ordinary acts of living—seemed to have accrued some power to define themselves.

The Power to Define

The power to essentialize populations within Canada—as in every country—is present in governmental policies, discourses and laws. It is also present in the wider society’s enactment of norms and values through discourse and behavior. I have argued that, through these aspects of society and government, Afghan women have also been recognized—and packaged—into specific identities which I define as permanent refugee (permanently temporary and permanent Other), permanent victim, and permanent child. I have also argued that these are identities which are racialized, gendered and classed as well as intersected with each other.

It would be easy to assume that the discursive power of such essentializing is the entire story, but as I have noted, women in this study employ practices of their own, even sometimes when they are appearing to reconfirm the essentializations which surround them. They employ “strategic” essentializations toward enacting their own values—for example, what I identified as *Mardom-dar* behaviors and ideals in the women in this study being enacted in service of the Afghan community as well as in service of women and children in Afghanistan. They also act in ways that—which I either observed or which they confirmed verbally in interviews—resisted prevailing versions of who they were. I perceived resistance in both sides of the local discourses of the veil: in Sabia’s decision to veil as a means to visibly resist the post-September 11, 2001 social and political climate and in Setara’s vigorous defense of her right not to veil in resistance to pressures from women who chose to veil.

However, I also found that reducing such behaviors and ideas to resistance or strategic essentializing positioned the role of the women as too entirely embedded in the

narrative of the hegemonic perspective—whether it was the hegemony of Canadian’s settler society or the powerful influence of more traditional ideals. It suggested that the women’s roles, thoughts or feelings somehow did not exist without the contrapuntal other. To accede to such a simplistic duality would have denied agency and I would have been reinscribing not just the concatenations of classed, gendered and racialized refugee identity, but I would also have been reinscribing the colonial frame which is only able to perceive the officially identified Other in terms of its own power.

In Fran Markowitz’s 1996 article about self-identified “Black Hebrews who “used” their “power to define” (Markowitz 1996:195) themselves as the original Jews regardless of multiple levels and ranges of discourse, policy, historical tradition, and international politics which hewed to a different version of reality. They were able to do this in part because Israel consented to their presence even if Israel’s historical tradition did not comport at all with the narrative offered by the Black Hebrews. Like Canada, Israel has created a population which is multicultural. Though it is overwhelmingly Jewish, it has from the beginning been a state which drew Jews from all over the world (Shipler 2002).⁵³

They extract this power to define by living their lives—in their acts of living—and building their own discursive frames through, for example, the “discourse of the veil” I described in Chapter VI. Setara’s unwillingness to automatically veil everywhere she goes, for example, is articulated in circumstances that might suggest that she is resisting. The vignette I described, after all, situated her in an argument with other Afghan women.

⁵³ The small group of African Americans who arrived in the 1960s to claim their perceived Jewish birthright probably benefitted from Israel’s strong alliance with the United States because they have remained despite repeated efforts to expel them (Markowitz 1996).

However, I did not read her as not-veiling out of resistance, but out of a fundamental belief in her own right to define herself in relation to her perception of her own self—a belief which she rooted in her sense of herself as a faithful Muslim. This mindset, associated with other incidents in relation to her advocacy against domestic abuse among younger couples that she knew, suggested to me that she was well able to identify for herself what was important without the help of a mindset to resist.

In addition, along with other women, she had a wide-ranging set of social relations and networks in the Vancouver metropolitan area than that imagined for her and for other Afghan women (see Chapters II and III). Setara imagined a much larger local world for herself. She did not carry this larger map in her head (I'm writing metaphorically here because Setara was like a number of other Afghan women in her lack of map literacy) as resistance. It was part of who she was, just as being a person who did not veil was part of who she was.

Canada's multiculturalism is more widely inclusive in general—drawing from a wider range of religious, ethnic, national, and other categories of population. Afghans who migrate to Canada arrive into a setting where multiple webs of significance exist and where Afghan women are already categorized. This makes the power of any particular woman to define herself difficult—at least in the formal and public way that Black Hebrews defined themselves in Israel in Markowitz's research. In the nexuses of power and discourse that surround Canadian multiculturalism, Afghan and other migrants, and refugee identity, Afghan women do nevertheless carve out space for themselves where they may define themselves. They do so not only by strategically essentializing and not only by resisting, but by sustaining identity through acts of living—practice-- in part by

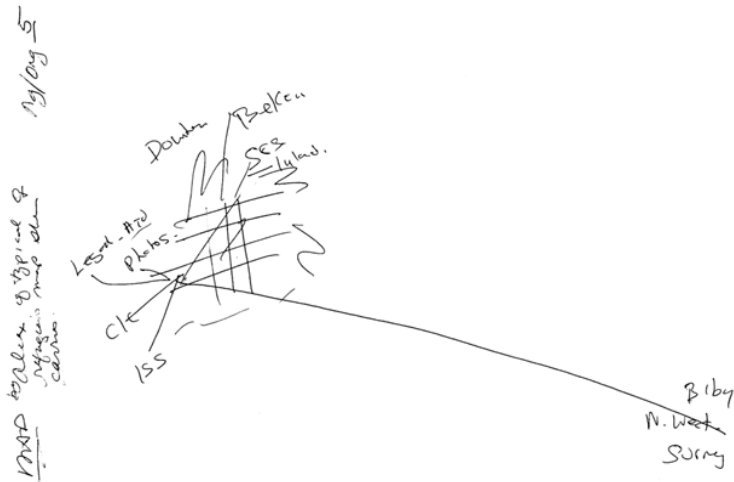
invoking ideals as expressed in Zulfacar's description of *Mardom-dari* (Zulfacar 1998) ideals that emblemize what it means to be good, to be filled with *Insaniyat*—humaneness. Thus, they are situated within their own *Afganiyat*—Afghanness—and in this, they are confirming their own power to define.

APPENDIX

MAPPING EXERCISE

Afghan women and (agency/organization) AO workers tended to see the mobility of Afghan women differently. The following maps suggest this difference.

Dana (AO Worker)



Dana's map.

Dana was the director of a local refugee assistance agency. Her map indicates that the map she imagines for Afghan refugee women focuses on a core area near downtown Vancouver in which a number of agencies and organizations which work with refugees are located—with one Skytrain rail line from Vancouver to Surrey. At the time of the study, Surrey had the second largest population of Afghans in the metropolitan area.

Rose (AO Worker)



Appendix D3: Ag/Org Interview Questions
 easily as a man? Are there places where women
 should/should not go? Can/cannot go?

*- Claudia B. (woman)
 not address
 - Chirine (woman)
 & M/14*

O'Bryan - 3 of 3

*- we still
 have
 many to go
 - Park not
 in community
 - ex in work*

Please use this paper to draw me a simple map of how the
 Vancouver area map might look to an Afghan women or
 other woman (from a refugee group) that you know. Don't
 worry about making it perfect.

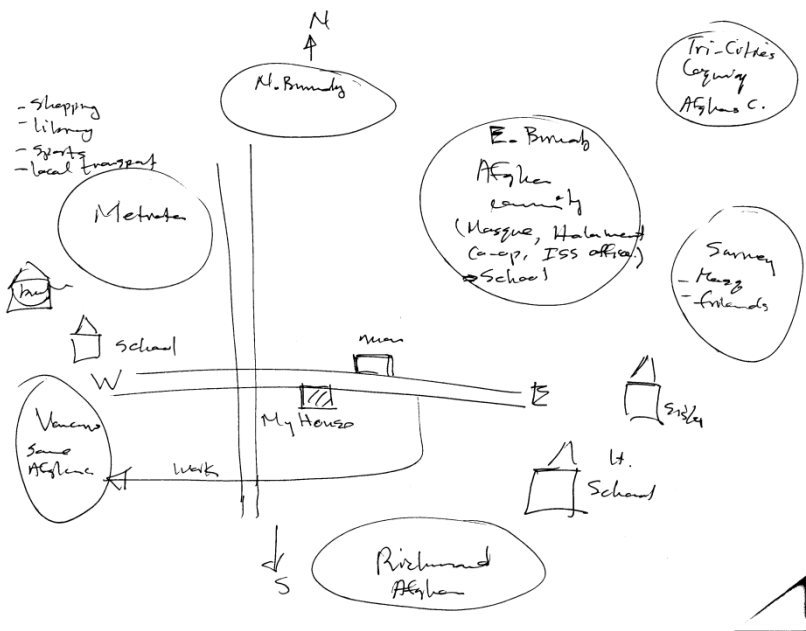
Handwritten notes on the map:
 - VESA (claimant)
 - Honey ex
 - ISS
 - Skytrain
 - Kingsway
 - Blay (claimant)
 - Surrey

Vertical text on the left:
 Rose's Interview
 Rose's map

Rose's map.

Rose works for an international aid agency. Her map focuses on the same downtown core area, but includes Kingsway, which is a major conduit that links Burnaby to the metropolitan area west of Burnaby.

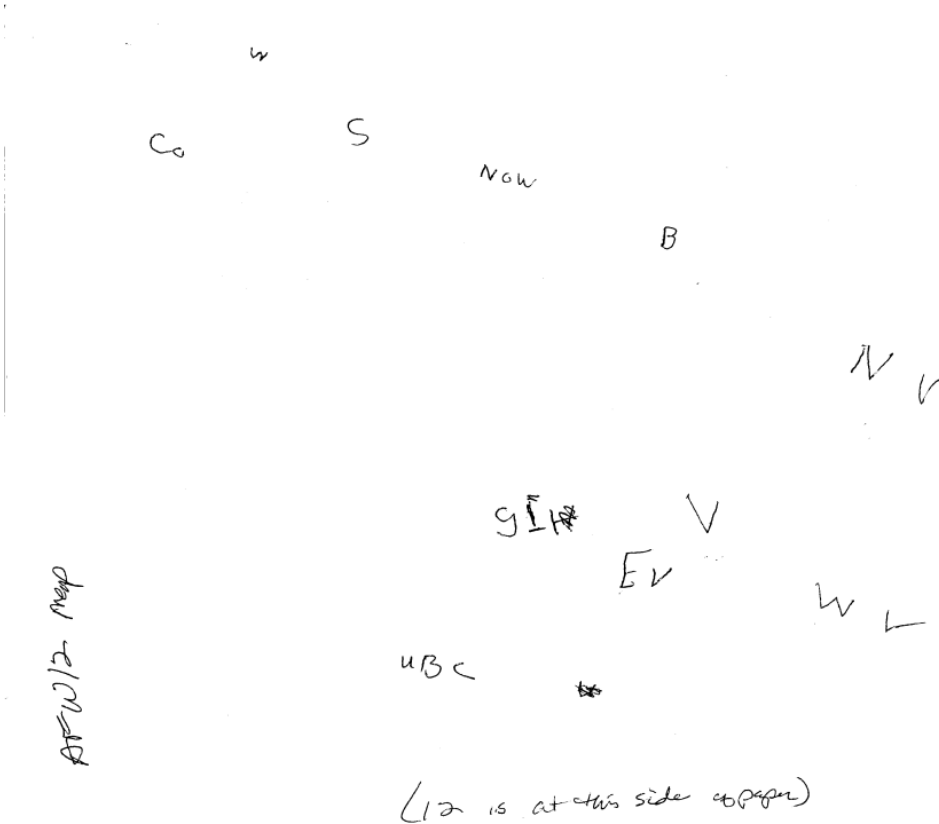
Rukshana (Afghan and AO Worker)



Rukshana's map.

Rukshana experiences the entire metropolitan area as part of her imagined Vancouver.

Sabia (Afghan Woman)



Sabia's map.

The north-south axis is accurate. The east-west axis is mixed up a little: though UBC is properly in the west, West Vancouver is in the east. Coquitlam and Surrey (Co, S) should be in the east and North Vancouver should be to the west of Coquitlam and Surrey. Map literacy was not common for many Afghan women in this study, so these aspects of her map are less important than the fact that Sabia travels the entire metropolitan area. Her map indicates that she goes as far west as UBC, which is located on the westernmost part of the metropolitan area, as far east as Coquitlam, as far north as Whistler (W) and south into Surrey, where she lives in the southern part of Surrey toward the Canada-U.S. border.

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⁵⁴ This article appeared originally in 2004 in what was then the *Berkeley Women's Law Journal*.

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