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## **Extralegal Practices of Afghan Refugees in Iran: Exploring Feminist Transnationalism and Immigration Theories**

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### **Introduction**

Studies of population movement across international borders have focused on two major forms: emigration of workers seeking a better life and exodus of refugees escaping war and destruction. Among the largest categories of population movement are the refugees. The debate about who and for how long a group is refugee is more scholarly than pragmatic. The international agreement for defining refugee status is based on the mandate from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stating that “refugees are legally defined as people who are outside their countries because of a well-founded fear of persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group, and who cannot or do not want to return home” (UNHCR 2005). Refugees typically escape from a war-torn country into a similarly less developed country, while emigrants tend to move from a less developed country into an advanced industrial country. A growing trend is transnationalism in which immigrants and (as my research suggests) refugees move between communities in host and home countries.

The original immigrant-receiving countries of Canada, Australia, and the United States absorbed a large number of laborers from European countries and emerged as multi-ethnic societies. Since the middle of the twentieth century this trend has changed. The past 50 years have seen three trends in population movement: (1) the European immigrants are replaced by massive numbers of immigrants from Asia, Africa, and the Americas; (2) the old emigrant-sending countries of Europe have become host to a large number of immigrants, primarily from their old colonies; and (3) the international movement of refugees from one less developed country into a neighboring country of similar socioeconomic condition has surpassed the immigration movement.

Originally, transnationalists were observed among the affluent immigrants in the United

States. Previous studies have focused on immigrants, overlooking the emerging transnationalists among refugees. Furthermore, these studies' focus has been on licit economic activities of immigrant transnationalists. My research suggests that movement of Afghan refugees into Iran, another less developed country, is comparable with the immigration and integration of ethnic workers into advanced industrial countries. In addition, new technologies allow a small segment of these refugees to experience transnationalism from below. Transnational feminism's interrogation of globalism delivers analytical flexibility to investigate multi-dimensional aspects of border crossing.

### **Historical Background**

The Afghan population in the early twenty-first century is estimated to be about 27 million living in three countries: Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan. More than 40 ethnic groups are in Afghanistan. The dominant religion is Sunni Islam and most Afghans are bilingual, speaking Dari and Pashto. Iran has been host to the largest number of Afghan refugees in the world since 1982 (Wilkinson 1997). Soviet intervention in Afghanistan coincided with the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1980, which supported the Afghan Mujahidins in their war against the Soviet army. Early Afghan refugees to Iran were welcomed as guests, especially since many were Shiite Hazaras who speak Dari, a dialect of Farsi, Iran's official language. The early refugee families have remained intact, and despite economic difficulties are living together. This group benefited from Iran's national health care and free public education. The government and local and international aid agencies provided health screening and vaccination for children and free reproductive education and health care for women (Gerami 2003; Gerami and Cogswell 2003; Gerami and Lehnerer 2006; UN Inter-Agency 2001). In Iran, only a small fraction of refugees are in camps. Refugees in Pakistan are concentrated in camps in border areas. The majority of the Afghan refugees in Pakistan are Pashtuns who are Sunni Muslims and speak Pashto.

In March 2001, the Ministry of Labor in Iran conducted a survey of refugees, documenting their ethnic, social, and class background, family status, work experience, number of children, contraceptive use, children's education, and more. The census reported 2,349,067 Afghan refugees in Iran. The Iranian officials put the percentage of nonparticipants at 15 percent, but the UNHCR staff estimated at least 20 percent nonparticipation. Nevertheless, this is still the

only systematic data of this population. The Census used the Iranian indicator of patrilineal nuclear family unit and counted 215,581 family units of which 204,781 were male-headed with average size of five members and 10,549 female-headed with average size of four. As it will be demonstrated later in this paper, this was an artificial construction.

The Census allowed for self-identification of ethnicity and reports an impressive list of 257 ethnic/ tribal identities declared by the participants. Approximately two-thirds (about 1,400,000) were equally Tadjick and Hazara. The next four large categories were Pashtuns at 220,000; Baluchi and Saddats, each over 100,000; and the unknown category at 110,000.

In terms of gender and age, men outnumber women in all categories. The largest gap was in the 18 to 59 category of which 68.44 percent were male and 31.56 percent were female. In the over-60 population, 64 percent were male and 36 percent were female. The reason was the overwhelmingly large number of young male refugees. In categories under age 17, boys still outnumbered girls but the gap was smaller at about 4 percent. This attests to the fact that younger children were brought over while the older ones remained with other relatives and especially girls were more likely to be wed before the family left for Iran (Unpublished Report of the Iranian Labor Ministry 2002).

With the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in 1996, increased numbers of Afghan refugees in Iran, additional refugees from Iraq after the 1991 Gulf War, and the changing political scene in Tehran, by mid 1990s the welcome for refugees disappeared. After the overthrow of the Taliban, the United Nations' agencies and the host countries embarked on a program of voluntary repatriation. In spring 2002, Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan signed a tripartite agreement to ensure the safe return and settlement of refugees from their former countries (UNHCR 2003).

As of July 2004, 2.2 million refugees had returned to Afghanistan. Studies of immigration policies in Western Europe and the United States show that state policies often fail to achieve their intended consequences (Hollifield 1992). Currently the Iranian government is implementing policies to encourage the return and resettlement of the Afghan population to their home country. Among them are monetary incentives for repatriating families and, when possible, employment through Iranian-funded projects within Afghanistan. Among the punitive measures are gradual rescinding of residence cards, withdrawal of free health care and education, fines for

employers, raids, and repatriations. Many of these measures, however, have been modified, some due to personal requests from Mr. Karzai, the president of Afghanistan. Regardless, these policies may be ineffective in persuading the majority of the refugees to return to Afghanistan permanently.

My investigations suggest that a dynamic set of complex factors operate in the resettlement of Afghan refugees from Iran. An exchange with a man in 2004, in a Voluntary Repatriation Center in Tehran, Iran—set up by the Iranian government and the UNHCR to repatriate Afghan refugees—illustrates some of these difficulties. The man asked to borrow my companion's cell phone and later my companion showed me that the dialed number was to a town east, at the border of Iran and Afghanistan. Waiting outside the center, the Afghan man openly discussed his case with us. He was calling his relatives to come to register, as all family members had to be present at the time of registration for paperwork. He also called a contact at the border to check on the cost of border crossing should he decide to come back. He offered that he is willing to repatriate but should the conditions be too difficult or he would not get his land back he wanted to ensure he could travel hassle-free back into Iran.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The complex and dynamic forms of population movement challenge systematic typologies of scholars and frustrate aid agencies and policy makers. The new socio-technologies of communication and transportation have hastened the movement as well as the diversity of format and reasons for relocation. Multi-state crossing is a dynamic process, and a population that is forced out due to violence or famine may become immigrants, residents, citizens, and/or transnationalists. On the ground, these imagined and invented classifications lose their applicability much faster than before; moving groups adopt and shed identities bending to and maneuvering forces of globalization. States, UN agencies, and nongovernmental agencies (NGOs) have to adapt as they work among these changing identities. Even very destitute refugees in less developed countries exhibit means of agency and accommodation, some more inventive than others.

To advance the conceptual understanding of the refugee population movement, researchers tend to use frameworks developed primarily to explain immigration patterns and

settlements in developed countries (Tabori 1972; Stein 1986). Theories of immigration posit hypotheses predicting push and pull factors operating in home and host countries. These theories explain the emergence of ethnic communities and ethnic conflicts (Portes 2004). Some conceptual tools developed from immigration theories can aid research on patterns of refugee movement and settlements, problems of repatriation, and finally, the transformation of some refugees into ethnic immigrants and even transnationalists.

The following migration theories contribute to a conceptual understanding of recalcitrant Afghan refugee repatriation, settlement of those returning refugees into Afghanistan, and an emerging transnational segment of these refugees.

*Dual labor market:* Two-tiered labor structure in which highly paid, skilled workers are employed in core industries like auto or steel, while a reserved army of seasonal unskilled workers perform undesirable jobs. The latter often consist of marginalized groups like women, ethnic or racial groups, or migrant refugee laborers (Portes 2004; Bonacich 1973).

*Structural inflation of wages:* Wages reflect more than supply and demand of labor market. They also confer status and prestige. As a result, employers are not free to adjust wage structure based on labor supply. State or industry regulations, union agreement, job categorization, or minimum-wage laws protect the wage structure of citizen workers from labor market fluctuations (Piore 1979). Therefore, undesirable jobs at the bottom of a labor hierarchy need workers who work only for pay, not for mobility or social status.

*Network theory:* Immigrants rely on an interpersonal network of family, clan, village, or caste to settle into a host community. Network theory stipulates that these social networks facilitate the flow of population from their home country to a specific host destination, providing opportunities for immigration, reducing the cost, and enhancing the benefits of immigration (Massey and Liang 1989).

*Enclave communities:* Some of these communities become enclaves in the host society. Studies of Chinatowns in San Francisco or New York and Little Havana in Miami have offered testable hypotheses for social integration of the first and second generation immigrants. Studies have shown that network communities grow as a result of fictitious family or friendship connections (Portes and Jenson 1989).

*Transnationalism:* The new communication technology and travel allow some

immigrants to cross borders, commuting when they “forge and sustain multi-stranded relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. We call these processes transnationalism to emphasize that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders. An essential element is the multiplicity of involvements that transmigrants sustain in both home and host societies” (Basch, Schiller, and Blanc 1994:6). These authors acknowledge the ambiguity and complexity of population movement within the cultural and structural fluidity of globalization.

Portes confirms the novelty of this trend due to the number of people involved, “instantaneous character of communication across space,” and the fact that it has become viable for some immigrant groups (2004:43). Yet he warns against overuse of the term to any form of border crossing as it should be reserved for “activities of an economic, political, and cultural sort that require the involvement of participants on a regular basis as a major part of their occupation” (1997: 17). He offers three main criteria for careful consideration of such an application: that “transnationalism is tied to ...the interest and needs of investors and employers in the advanced countries,” that “these are distinct communities at variance with traditional patterns of immigration adaptation,” and that transnationalism “offers a broader field for autonomous popular initiatives” (p. 4) Portes is not alone in warning against overuse of the concept. Vertovec (2001) suggests that its application to all kinds of travelers and diasporas blurs recognition of this unique pattern of population settlement. Al-Ali, Black, and Koser (2001) disagree and their typology is inclusive of any cross border contact and association between the diaspora and the home communities as they apply the narrative to the Eritrean and Bosnian refugees.

There appear to be agreements on two aspects of transnationalism: that it is a post cold war era phenomenon fueled by the capitalist global economy and that it is made possible to a larger group by the inexpensive socio-technologies of communication and transportation. It is here that study of transnationalists can benefit from a dose of feminist transnationalism.

Chakravorty Spivak gave one of the early feminist responses to the neo-liberal globalization of labor by addressing women in diasporas. She sees “the increased migrancy of labor” as severely damaging “the possibilities of social distribution in developing nations” (1996: 248). The feminist discourse of transnationalism interrogates binary limitations of global as

masculine and local as feminine (Freeman 2001). Kim-Puri declares that transnational feminism is “deeply cynical of dualism” (2005: 142). In a concise summary of the existing literature she gives us four guideposts for transnational feminist sociology as connecting “discursive and material analyses to understand how unequal economic, political, and social relations are mediated and (re)produced through cultural representations and discourses”: that it “highlights the importance of social structure and state,” ...that it “shifts analyses to linkages across cultural context,” and that it “stresses the role of empirical research” (2005:143).

Discourse of gender and globalization can become reductionist if gender is woman and other forms of subjugation and agency within global capitalism are diminished. As Kearney reminds us, globalization has shifted our frame of reference to a “multidimensional global space with unbounded often discontinuous and interpreting subspaces” (1999:522). Grewal and Kaplan (1994) take this blurring of boundaries and explore the possibilities of “scattered hegemonies”. The fluidity of these constructs become clear as Basch et al. demonstrate how states exert their hegemony on their expatriate transnational communities (1994).

Finally, studies of identity formation within globalism remind us that the forces of globalization can rekindle new identity formation inconceivable in earlier forms of capitalist domination. As globalization matures and its centrifugal forces deconstruct notions of spatial boundaries, political hegemonies, cultural unity, and national economy, individuals separately and within communities construct and reclaim new identities. Efforts at forming compound identities (e.g., Asian American), and overlapping identities (e.g., Latina, Tehrangelsi for Tehran + Los Angeles, or Sunni Kurdish Iraqi, remind us of what Kearney calls “both-and- and” identities (99:531).

Another result of de-territorialization is temporal/spatial identities where individuals move between various identities each deemed suitable for a specific location or cultural context. When individuals opt for the convenience of multiple citizenships, by keeping and obtaining more than one passport, they express agency in identity formation and selection. An important aspect of this new identity construction is its public and official declaration. While individuals have claimed or been given multiple identities at private domain, the state had controlled the bestowing of public identities. Now individuals claim pockets of control to circumvent the official dimension of this identity formation. This particularly challenges the state’s desire to maintain their hegemony over



when, how, and to whom they bestow their citizenship. Transnational communities challenge the notion of one singular national identity per person. Therefore, the feminist interrogation of binaries and hegemonies illustrate how global fluidity enhances or hampers identity formation.

### **Research Design**

My interest in the conditions of Afghan refugees in Iran grew out of regular contacts with the refugees, such as with the aforementioned man at the Voluntary Repatriation Center, and the almost matter-of-fact acceptance of this large population among the Iranians. This started with a study of Afghan households and their need assessments and later their response to the official repatriation program.

This research suggests that: (1) the Afghan refugees who are well integrated into Iran pose a great challenge to governments and UN agencies trying to repatriate and resettle them; (2) the longer a household maintains refugee status, the greater the potential for resistance to repatriation and likelihood that the members will become *transnationalists*, maintaining residency in their home and host countries due to established networks in both; and (3) contrary to previous studies' assumption (Portes 1997), transnationalism from below occurs across less developed countries' borders, challenging legal boundaries and official identities. Feminist transnationalism's challenge to hegemonies facilitates recognition of extralegal transnational enterprises from below. In the remaining section, I explore transnationalism of Afghan refugees in Iran, blurring legal boundaries and identities drawing from feminist transnationalism and immigration theories.

During the summers of 2001, 2002, and 2004, I made three trips to Iran and assembled a large collection of primary data from interviews and field notes and obtained secondary data from international agencies and the Iranian government. Initially, the refugee sample in Iran emerged through snowball technique in which the first group of participants suggested or brought others to be interviewed, gradually increasing the sample size. With the aid of UNHCR, Iranian NGOs, Islamic Charities, and staff of clinics in refugee communities, a diverse sample of households emerged.

Each woman client of these agencies was approached with full disclosure of the researchers' identity and goals for research. Clients were not promised any benefits as a result of

the interviews. They were told that the research results would be shared with the organization they were visiting, but that no individual household benefit would be forthcoming. They were also asked if they would be available for future interviews and updates. This process is ultimately self-selective. Some participated in the first interview but were unwilling to be contacted for future updates. Since this population group is transient, they often moved because of housing costs or to seek employment. This began to change in 2002 when the Iranian government started enforcing residency card regulations.

*Notes on Unit of Measurement:* At the time of the Russian invasion, the majority of Afghan population was organized in a tribal kin system. Regardless of ethnicity most members lived in patrilineal patrilocal households. Some were still nomadic, moving during spring and fall in search of pastoral land. Girls were betrothed early and bride price rendered based on customs and agreements. Women moved into their husbands' households and polygyny was practiced by some affluent men (Mehmet and Mehmet 2004; Tapper 1991).

During the research, the realities of refugee life on the ground made my attempts at construction of a scientific unit of analysis unattainable. While I started with an open mind of whether to look for a family or a kin network, the more I met and talked to the participants the more these boundaries became unusable. To begin with, the Farsi word for family, *khanevadeh*, refers to the western equivalent of nuclear heterosexual patriarchal family. On the other hand *khanevar* neatly fits "household" and is used to refer to extended family and people who share residence.

This linguistic unequivalency is confounded by the socio-historical conditions of the Afghan population. Since Afghanistan had remained largely tribal, the refugees' alliance and identification was with their clan or kin. Early on they identified themselves as Tadjik or Baluchi rather than Afghan. Like any other immigrant/refugee population, they gained their national identity in diaspora as Iranians identified them as Afghans irrespective of their tribal origin. Another layer of complexity is added by the nature of refugee status. The refugee population is a group in motion. Members join and depart with varying degree of attachment to and acceptance by the unit. The units are dynamic, changing in terms of size, location, and structure. New members from Afghanistan or other households add benefits and withdraw resources from a unit. The transitory members move in and out; and family dispute changes the definition and

obligation of a unit. A mother-in-law might be included one time and excluded another time.

While mostly patrilineal, the refugee status has promoted some cases of ambilocal residence where the couple can live with either spouse's household depending on the availability of resources and opportunities for work. Anthropologists have observed this type of residence along the coast and islands of Maine and among farming and seafaring communities like the Mabuti of Africa (Haviland 1973). While the Mabuti are egalitarian, Afghan households have remained patrilineal and patrilocal.

For my sample, I kept a record on households by a code consisting of the original members and their age. These changed in consecutive interviews, some even in a period of one week. For some, I kept track of one member who had remained accessible and relied on their update of the unit. Needless to say, some households disintegrated into newer and different units. Therefore, the unit here is a fluid construction of women's narrative with spatial, economic, and culturally imagined boundaries. For example, when a husband marries a second wife, the first one may not count the second (and usually the younger) wife as part of the household. By the same token, the second (or third wife) may not count the first wife but count her children as part of the unit. More men than women counted only sons as part of the unit. In two cases women counted only non-betrothed daughters as part of the unit. Those betrothed—for whom all or partial bride price was received - regardless of their age, were not counted. In one case, a five-year-old daughter holding her mother's veil was betrothed to a nine-year-old boy and the mother expected to wed her when she was 14. According to the mother she belonged to her future husband's household. These complex narratives of household obligations undermine quantitative-only measurements. At the end, the feminist method of narrative construction provided a flexible hierarchy of indicators to identify household with spatial, blood ties, kin ties, and economic obligations, respectively, interacting to form a unit. For the rest of this research I have used family and household interchangeably.

## **Results**

In the summer of 2001, 83 households participated in interviews and allowed for future contact. The Hazaras who had come from Herat were more diverse, but through mosques and their community groups had information about the original sample. Of this group, 23 families

arrived in Iran during the early stages of the Soviet invasion. Fifteen families from my sample arrived in the early 1980s, established a solid social network, and had adult married children and third-generation grandchildren. Refugees arriving after 1995 faced many difficulties. Some were separated during the journey and had trouble joining other family members. Single-headed families are more common among recent refugees as are young unattached men attracted to the booming construction industry in large cities of Iran (Gerami 2003; UNOCHA 2003).

In the summer of 2002, early after the voluntary repatriation had begun, I conducted follow-up interviews. Of the 83 original households, 32 had moved to another city in Iran and 12 had returned to Afghanistan. During the summer of 2004, I located 29 families of the original group and updated their current status. Health care providers, national and local NGO staffs, UN agencies' staffs, and the Alien Registration office staff were interviewed. The preliminary results indicate that due to the withdrawal of benefits like free education and health care, as well as other incentives from international agencies, some refugees have returned to Afghanistan.

According to the UNHCR Commissioner (in a personal interview in July 2004) approximately 900,000 Afghan refugees have returned from Iran. There is no clear data, although officials admit that there is, 'recycling', a flow of repatriated Afghans returning into Iran. Many factors affect decisions to cross borders to Iran or Pakistan. In a study of men in a bus terminal in Khandahar, Elca Stigter reports that many were traveling to Iran or Pakistan for employment where they either had family or knew others through transnational communities (2004). Other researchers have reported on integration problems faced by many repatriated families, particularly those with second-generation girls born outside of Afghanistan (Azerbaijani-Moghadam 2001).

My fieldwork in Iran shows that among refugees three broad categories are discernable: First, the newly arrived poor families who have weak community connections are unable to find regular work and cannot afford the high cost of housing in big cities. Cuts in funding for refugees and tuition for schools have motivated many of these families to return to Afghanistan.

At the other end of the spectrum, a smaller second group has prospered through their long residence in Iran. Through shadowy partnerships with Iranian nationals, they have circumvented the legal system to obtain real estate, establish businesses, and acquire social status. They may have yielded their residence cards but now have Afghan passports and extended Iranian visas.

This group is a clear example of what Basch, Schiller, and Blanc (1994) call *transnationalists*.

The third group has an in-between status. These are families or individuals who have returned from Iran and are now exploring opportunities in Afghanistan. A stipulation in the tripartite agreement allows for a family to stay in Iran maintaining their legal status, while a family member in Afghanistan prepares for their eventual repatriation. For example in my sample, 18 men with high school diplomas had returned to Afghanistan hoping to secure a civil service job in the new Afghan government while their family was safe in Iran. Women said they will wait until they are more certain of the benefits before returning to Afghanistan. These families are another example of *transnationalists*, where men keep two households and women remain in the safety of Iran. Remaining families had myriad problems including the loss of a husband's income, fear for his safety, and the fear of him remarrying in Afghanistan.

The president of Bamyan University told me in 2004 that he cannot offer newly hired faculty running water or electricity in the city of Bamyan in Afghanistan, but has given each one a cell phone to stay in touch with families in Iran. If this refugee situation has any resemblance to other cases of population movement, these integrated refugees will resist repatriation pressure, particularly when they can extend their community across the border and commute between their home and host countries.

### **The Transnationalists**

The socio-structural conditions of Afghanistan are in rapid transformation. The ongoing military operation and the huge influx of foreign aid and foreign workers, combined with the staggering economic problems and regional geo-politics, create a fluid movement of people and goods. For the Afghan transnationalists, cross-border enterprises have implicit and sometimes declared illicit dimensions. I have remained faithful to the transnational feminist discourse of narrative construction and instead of marking an enterprise as legal or illicit, have used equivalent English terminology. Therefore, opium smuggling is 'trade of agricultural goods'. There are myriad of categories include trafficking of refugees, often young men wanting to cross the border and find a place to live and find work, and document production or dealing in agricultural good.. In the case of labor trafficking, the participants would declare that they help relatives to come over and help them to find their footing in the new country. Sometimes another

relative would suggest that the said participant was receiving either a direct percentage of the wages or in-kind remuneration. In some instances, a disgruntle member would disclose information about another member dealing in agricultural goods. Usually this is a euphemism for opium trading since Afghanistan has no other cash crop. This kind of information was often conveyed by a family member who had a dispute with the accused and the researcher would not pursue it as it had serious precautions for all involved.

Altogether, nine families/households had characteristics of transnationalists. They had established residence or business interests in both countries and some members commuted between the two communities to take advantage of opportunities in both. They did not intend to completely relocate to Afghanistan for the foreseeable future but did not rule that out either. This had to do with legal uncertainties in Iran, insecurities in Afghanistan, and their long history and the second and third generations that were raised in Iran.

These transnationalists commuted between enclave communities in Iran and emerging expatriate communities in Afghan cities. They negotiated the two states' and the UNHCR's official identity allocations, and reformulated new identities out of available constructs. Their transnational enterprises were often a combination of the following activities.

*Labor trafficking:* the most common form of transnational enterprise. Laborers were family, clan, or tribe members who wanted to cross borders and needed either financial or logistical assistance. A full-service trafficker would help with the passage, lodging, and work search. These workers were hired for digging wells, work in brick and battery factories, and on construction sites. The last one was more desirable as they lived together and the chances of raids were slimmer on construction sites.

*Documents trade:* including forging of or modifying stolen documents, such as passports, UN registration, residency cards, and birth certificates. The last two had the highest demands and the UN ones were easier to forge or modify. Passports were more risky and only a few could use a forged passport.

*Land acquisition:* where land from repatriated or absentee owners who could not or did not want to farm it was purchased and then rented to the landless villagers. This may entail assistance with capital for farm animals, seeds, or purchase of water rights.

*Commodity trafficking:* including legal transportation of construction materials to be sold

to home builders in Afghan cities and villages and smuggling of electronic goods into Iran and Pakistan. Due to drug trafficking and the “Wild West” nature of the borders, electronic goods, like CD and DVD players, are cheaper in parts of Afghanistan than those sold in stores in cities of Iran and Pakistan. Afghan men and boys trade these and bootlegged copies of Indian movies.

*Aid consultation:* the booming aid work and NGOs’ presence have created opportunities for middle men to assist the locals seeking help. This was mentioned by two men. They claimed that they receive goods that they trade for marketable materials across the border. Although some aid workers speak the language of the villagers, villagers may not understand their pronunciation or the procedure or both (Wakefield reports that villagers did not understand clearly spoken Dari on radio, [2005]). Men who have lived in Iran can help the villagers to communicate with aid workers.

Finally, *trade of agricultural goods (drug trafficking,)*: which is the most profitable and the most dangerous transnational enterprise of that region. It also fuels demands for associated legal and illegal cross-the-border activities. It is suspected that warlords who have the guns are the main dealers, but many small dealers operate with them or trade at the margin of this business and like any other mob enterprise have a combination of legal and illegal dealings (UNODC 2006). It is here that feminist metrology enhances the transnationalism discourse for us to discern rapid transformation of one singular enterprise from legal to illicit and from global to tribal. The case of Mehri illustrates such a fluidity. The following are examples of two transnational households.

*Mehri’s Transnational Entrepreneurship:* Mehri and her husband, Ahmad, had arrived in 1982 with one grown son, four daughters, and her mother-in-law. Ahmad and their sons have worked in various manual jobs and supported the family. Being among the early arrivals, they had residency cards and government subsidies. All their young daughters attended school. Mehri and her husband had basic literacy and their son had attended school up to third grade. In Iran, Mehri had two more children but soon she learned about contraceptives and used an IUD over her husband’s objection.

I met the household first in 2001 and started recording their story. The household had changed and moved several times and had finally settled south of Tehran. When I saw the family, Ahmad had prospered and had several business interests. Their oldest son and three daughters

were married and had their own children. The household consisted of Ahmad and Mehri, all their grown children, their spouses and the grandchildren, Ahmad's single brother, and Mehri's widowed sister and her children. They lived in a three-room house with running water and washroom. By all accounts this was a prosperous household. Ahmad and their sons managed several fruit stands during the day and ice cream and balloon stands at night at city parks.

In 2002 Ahmad himself was the patriarch and now just supervised. He had several young Afghan men working in his various activities. Ahmad had become a labor supplier to three builders in Tehran's construction industry. In a separate interview, his sister-in-law voluntarily shared that Ahmad was involved in trading in agricultural goods. When I returned in 2004, Ahmad had died and his older son had moved his family to Qum, a city south of Tehran. The second son still managed Ahmad's ventures. At that time, Mehri was involved in resolving many family disputes in her large household to keep the family together. Her widowed sister had rented a room in another house and moved her family there, and Mehri had turned one of the rooms into lodging for new Afghan men. By now all new arrivals were considered illegal immigrants but it had not stopped the flow of young men. Mehri's two younger brothers were also living with her.

In addition to being involved in her husband's ventures, Mehri had started a new business enterprise that spanned the three countries. She had created a bride price enterprise facilitating payment for men wishing to marry. Any Afghan man or his family seeking a bride needs to pay a sum in cash or kind to the girl's father. Ideally these are arranged for young children by the families and the payments made by the groom's family in installments. But breakup of family and kin has left many Afghan men without the support of their extended kin and thus they need to secure the bride price on their own.

Mehri, for a fee or in-kind service, would provide men with avenues to procure cash or services for the bride price. For example, a family that needed assistance to move an aging man into Afghanistan from Pakistan would pay Mehri some money; in return, she would dispatch one of her clients to accompany the man from Karachi or a camp in Pakistan to a location in Afghanistan. In another example, a father had sent his second wife to care for an elderly Iranian woman through Mehri. In return, Mehri would take the woman's wages, deduct her own fee, and give the rest to the husband to pay bride price for a son who wanted to marry a girl in Kabul, Afghanistan. These were some of the ingenious ways that Mehri had created a transnational



business system providing services through and underneath the global economy.

*Hossein-allah's Labor Contract:* This household also arrived early during the days that refugees received the extended welcome mat. Unlike others who first stayed on the provincial border of Khorasan, Hossein-allah moved his household to a central city in Iran and stayed there until 2004 when I last interviewed his first wife. In 2001, this household consisted of Hossein-allah and his two wives, 12 children, 28 grandchildren, and an assortment of relatives with their children. They lived in two houses and altogether there were close to 53 members in this unit changing every time that I met Hossein-allah and his two wives.

Two kinds of work were available to Afghan men, manual jobs in construction and brick factories, or for the very few lucky ones, being doormen in apartment high-rises. This is coveted work, bringing the refugee many connections and additional benefits. The footmen come into contact with middle- and upper-middle-class Iranians living in those high-rises. Hossein-allah, his three older sons, and brother-in-law started in brick sweatshops, but later Hossein-allah found a job through another contact as a footman for a new high-rise in the city. This opened up new avenues for Hossein-allah. One of the tenants in the high-rise was a subcontractor for the municipal government, cleaning and tending to the parks and gardens. Hossein-allah started bringing new crops of willing Afghan men and hiring them to the subcontractor. From there he expanded to other venues of labor supply.

The Iranian laws ban Afghans from purchasing real estate. Through legal loopholes and shadowy partnerships, Hossein-allah had obtained real estate and rented it to Afghan families. After 2002 he started buying land from the farmers in Afghanistan who had tribal documents but could not take their land from the warlords or did not want to go and claim their land and work on it. According to him and his brother-in-law in 2002 he had amassed a good number of farms. In 2004, when I returned to talk to the family, Hossein-allah and his second wife and their older son had returned to Afghanistan and were living in Khandahar. His first wife indicated that he did not intend to live there but was exploring business opportunities there and would return. She volunteered that he had returned his green card to the Iranian government and had an Afghan passport and extended Iranian visa.

## **Discussion**

The movement of Afghan refugees has push factors of war and destruction in their home country and pull factors of employment, security, and community in their host countries. There are no agreed upon census by the involved governments and agencies as to the size of the population of refugees who are becoming immigrants and transnationalists. This population movement is unique because the sending and receiving countries are less developed, although at a different scale. This is a multifaceted historical construct of colonial expansionism, imperialist agendas of cold war, geopolitics of the region, and global capitalism.

As Grewal and Kaplan remind us “a feminism that equates the ‘colonized’ with ‘woman’ creating essentialist and monolithic approach that surpasses the issues of diversity, conflict, and multiplicity within categories” (1994:3) may be too essentialist as an analytical tool. Bergeron explains that feminism challenges the “presentation of economic mechanisms of globalization as governed by a unified, intentional, and non contradictory economic logic” (2001:8).

Transnational feminism by deconstructing global capitalism complicates our understanding of verity of exploitation and complexity of agency. Multi layered hegemonies affect the people of South’s exploitation based on their race, ethnicity, and class position while the system loopholes allow for subversion of the transnational domination for identity construction and agency. As this case study of transnationalism by a disfranchised population demonstrates; incorporation into global capital is not a liner process, rather a dialectical multi strand intersectionality of class, gender, ethnic identity, and nation state structure. Transnational feminism demonstrates that global production involves two interconnected streams of trickle down from above in which the North exports sweatshop production to the South and the South accommodates from below through sweatshop economy and extralegal labor and commodity supply. Thus, slums of large cities of the South mushroom with sweatshop productions, hiring marginal and undocumented workers that fuel the global economy from below. These global and regional dynamics interact with tribal patriarchy affecting refugees’ response to displacement and accommodation.

To begin with, Afghan refugees’ situation in Iran calls attention to myriad of sociological theories of population movement, among them push/pull theories and the labor market demands. A dual labor market operates in Iran that absorbs large numbers of Afghans while skilled and unskilled Iranian workers demand different treatments. Although Iran has a high unemployment rate of over 15 percent, the college-educated Iranian youth do not, and socially could not, fill

sweatshop labor demand that is supplied by the refugees. The structural inflation of wages, supported by state subsidies, makes unskilled Iranian laborers too expensive for digging wells or working in brick factories.

Secondly, as a result of the early integration of the refugees, vibrant though poor enclave communities have emerged in large cities of Iran, turning some communities into Afghan townships. These communities provide all the services that immigrant communities have provided for their incoming members across the globe. Tribal and ethnic networks function to attract new members and expand the communities as members of a kin network may congregate into one township versus the other. In interviews, participants referred to kin and tribal contacts for their decision to leave Afghanistan and as to where to settle. Therefore the enclave Afghan communities grew as a result of original network and are affecting households' decision for repatriation and as to where to resettle in Afghanistan.

During the past four years, I have witnessed a cycle in public and political discourses regarding Afghanistan, ranging from indifference to a period of hyper-information; once again it is in a state of indifference. In consecutive interviews, three UNHCR Commissars lamented “donor fatigue,” “shifting policies,” “indifferent public opinion,” and severe “official oversight” on the part of member nations. The staffs in the field were often short-handed and pointed out the difficulty of keeping up with a transient population. Afghanistan conducted its first presidential election in 2004. Meanwhile, the World Bank has issued its first economic report on Afghanistan in 25 years, a bleak report of poverty, economic insecurity, and the spread of only one viable cash crop—opium (Habib 2004). Afghanistan will remain an important link in American geo-politics. There is a significant need for scholarly work associated with public discourse and humanitarian activism. Iraq is not Afghanistan, but now more than ever before, no one can deny that lessons learned in the latter are relevant to the former.

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