“QUEERING BORDERS”: WAR, DIASPORA, GENDER AND SEXUALITY AMONG AFGHANS IN THE UNITED STATES

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Abstract:

How did a nation known for a gender-neutral language and celebration of same-sex love through literature and poetry became a masculinist landscape as it learned to live through wars, and how do these wars continue in people's lives thousands of miles away from their homeland? How was the sense of community and safety created by Afghans who settled in the United States during the political turmoil of the Cold War crushed by the US's "War on Terror"? How did the lives of Afghans become engulfed by a continuous regime of surveillance that produces unsettling conditions; temporary and fragile homes marked by frequent violence; subjects defined by mistrust, anxieties and fears, and ultimately vigilant masculinities where the surveilled subjects surveil themselves? In this dissertation, I address these and many other entangled questions through stories of people who have lived through multiple wars and displacements, and who have actively refused imposed borders. Through these stories of lived experiences and border crossings, this work asks that we rethink rigid meanings of wars, diasporas and their complex relationships with gender and sexuality, while also complicating the imaginary borders between the researcher and research subjects.

My particular contribution is a rich ethnographic study of gendered subjectivities among war diasporas. I argue that it is not possible to adequately understand the norms and performances of gender and sexuality and the profound ways in which they shape the lived experiences of diasporas, without first learning to listen carefully to the nuanced stories of these diasporic communities. These narratives offer complex ways to understand perfor-

-mances of gender and sexuality in the context of war and displacement. Grappling with these stories and narratives of many Afghans in diaspora, I use the pages of this dissertation to queer stable borders of nations, war, peace, gender and sexuality both methodologically and conceptually. Through a critical ethnography of war, diaspora and performances of gender and sexuality, this work strives to become deeply attentive to a wide variation of experiences and differences that accompany people's lives as they become displaced, as they cross borders, and as they form a diaspora out of these ever-unfolding events and processes. I hope that this dissertation will help to strengthen the foundation for interdisciplinary scholars who are interested in advancing this critical and desperately needed research.

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Chapter One:

Queering Borders, War and Displacement

In this dissertation, I sew together everyday stories of people who have lived through multiple wars and displacements, and who have actively refused imposed borders. Through these stories of lived experiences and border crossings, this work asks that we rethink rigid meanings of wars, diasporas and their complex relationships with gender and sexuality, while also complicating the imaginary borders between the researcher and research subjects. Before delving further into these themes, let me provide glimpses of these stories through three narratives: Zainab's, Nargis's and my own.

Part 1: Three Stories, Three Borders

Nargis[1]

I remember only a few things from my time in Afghanistan. I remember it was during the Taliban and we were escaping to Pakistan. We were crossing the border. I saw someone with a gun. I was so scared and I also needed to pee. I told my dad I needed to pee but he told me we couldn't wait. We had to keep walking. My dad was holding me up and I was peeing as we were walking. We couldn't wait for me to pee because it was too

[1] Interview.37. All names and identifiers have been changed to protect privacy and confidentiality of my interlocutors.

dangerous. To this day, I remember that moment and the memory comes to me every time I pee.

Zainab[2]

I finished my prayer and was walking to the bus when I saw Shereen. She was holding her little brother and I thought it was her son. I said her son was cute and she laughed and said that was her brother. It was love at first sight. We spent the entire journey together and bonded over our dislike for politicians. I couldn't tell if she was into me in that way but we both cried a lot when we got to Peshawar and had to part ways. I have never been in love so quick yet so deeply. Who knew I would fall in love for the first time crossing a border? I identity as bisexual but only my close friends know. Some people think bisexuality is not real and that I am just lesbian and need to come out. I am not going to prove anything to people. I date both men and women and I can't say where my attraction leans more toward. I move between the two frequently. Every time I think of Afghanistan, I think of crossing the Afghan-Pakistani border and Shereen.

Qais

It was a summer morning in the year 1994 when the courtyard of our tiny refugee home in Islamabad, Pakistan where my family had settled in after fleeing the war in Afghanistan, was filled with laughter, claps, music and cheap perfume of hijras. We had recently moved in to this house after sharing one small room with our uncle's family for

[2] Interview.24

many months since we had fled the war in Afghanistan. The hijra community had sent their members to welcome us and bless us with their prayers as per their tradition in exchange for money, clothes and a good time. Gayatri Reddy explains that Hijras are believed to have the power to bless the newly married couples with fertility, for many hijras this has become their "traditional asexual role."[3] Sometimes they are invited to perform while other times they "perform at weddings, birth ceremonies, and other celebratory functions, it is often as uninvited guests."[4] This was not the very first time for my family to host uninvited guests but this was certainly the very first time having uninvited hijras in our home and on our street. I was confused but there was a sense of belonging in the space. I was enjoying watching their performances trouble the masculine/feminine binary of home and courtyard so radically and flirtatiously. The ambiguity in their gender, floral shalwar kamiz (loose pants and knee-length shirt), bright make up, scruffy faces, colorful bangles, long wigs and their freestyle dancing brought a new meaning of gender to our home. With their masculine presence and feminine body moves, they crossed borders of gender expression with elegance. There were six of them but only five were dancing. The oldest who was their guru would play the music for them and bargain for their labor. The clap of hallow palms of hijras would get louder every time our macho mullah neighbor would look away from them with a face of disgust and bother. Their performances lasted around an hour. They ate some of the rice and kofteh my mom gave them and they left for the next

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[3] Reddy, G. (2003). " Men" who would be kings: Celibacy, emasculation, and the re-production of hijras in contemporary Indian politics. Social research: an international quarterly, 70(1), p.165.
[4] Pamment, C. (2010). Hijraism: Jostling for a third space in Pakistani politics. TDR/The Drama Review, 54(2), p.32.

house. The mullah neighbor always scolded me for singing and dancing. Every time he would catch me dance as I would walk down the stairs or heard music from afar, I would freeze out of fear. He would tell me "men don't dance." The hijras changed that for me. He scolded them and they did not stop. He looked away from them and they grabbed his long beard and ridiculed him flirtatiously. He asked them to leave. They questioned his masculinity and laughed at him.

In Winter of 2004, a decade later, I accompanied four of my friends on a trip to New Delhi. They all needed to see the doctors for eye check-up, kidney problem and one for fertility treatment. My ability to translate between Hindi and Farsi got me a free flight to India with them. For all of us this was our first-time visiting India despite living it through Bollywood for all of our lives. For me this felt like a trip to a place I already knew. I had crossed the Indian-Afghan border in my imaginations multiple times. Bollywood was not my only landscape of imagination about India. I got most of my stories about India, the cruising spots and the underground gay parties from my Kabuliwala ashna, who used to spend winters in India selling dried fruit and lending cash and summers in Kabul running a fabric store. Neither he nor I labelled our desires as gay. To both of us, the gay label felt as foreign as the US soldiers to Afghanistan. Whenever he would come back from India he would bring me namak para, my favorite salty Indian snacks and many stories of the gay life in India. He did not refer to himself as Kabuliwala. He was given the title while living and working in India. The name Kabuliwala, which means the one from Kabul, comes from the 1892 children's story in Bangla, written by Rabindra Nath Tagore, about an Afghan man who travels to Calcutta to make a living by "lending money and selling clothes and

dry fruits to local people."[5] *This famous story is one that has continued to shape the imagination of many Indians about Afghanistan and Kabul, and Kabuliwala has become a default name for seasonal merchants traveling from Afghanistan to India.*

To many, my Kabuliwala was just a money lender or a fabric-seller. To the Afghan and Indian states, he was the bridge between the two cultural borders and "economic agent" bringing the two countries closer in strategic partnership.[6] *To me, he was the transnational movement carrying colorful stories of my queer community from the other side of the border like the floral prints on his fabric. Kabuliwala to me was the unintentional activist helping me in my identity work. David A Snow and Leon Anderson conceptualize identity work as "the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of self-concept."*[7] *My frequent visits with Kabuliwala was as much romantic as it was for me to learn about my own sexuality, the curiosity about others who felt same-sex love across borders and "give meaning to [myself]."*[8] *The love stories Kabuliwala would tell me of his gay Indian friends whom he would meet either online or during cruising in Nehru Park in Delhi felt like the warm pashmina shawl he once brought me from Chandni Chowk in Old Delhi.He claimed to be one of the first merchants who started his money-lending business in India right after the US occupation of Afghanistan.*

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[5] Bose, A. (2004). Afghan refugees in India. Economic and Political Weekly, p.4700.
[6] Arrow, K. J. (1974). The limits of organization. WW Norton & Company.
[7] Snow, D. A., & Anderson, L. (1987). Identity work among the homeless: The verbal construction and avowal of personal identities. American journal of sociology, 92(6), p.1348.
[8] Schwalbe, M. L., & Mason-Schrock, D. (1996). Identity work as group process. Advances in group processes, 13(13), p.47.

Since the US military occupation of Afghanistan in 2001, many Afghans, mainly the upper and middle class, take frequent trips to India for tourism and medical check-up purposes.[9] *Prior to this, India served as host to thousands of Afghans fleeing war in Afghanistan.*[10] *In the aftermaths of the US invasion of Afghanistan, India became the travel destination for Afghans who could and couldn't afford it. My uncle would joke that Afghans are more excited to visit India than Mecca for hajj. Those who cannot afford it will borrow money from friends and relatives. The interest of Afghans traveling to India also stems from the friendly visa policies between the two countries. India is the only country in the region that issues Afghans visa for tourism and medical purposes without much hassle.*[11] *The India-Afghanistan bilateral friendship has strengthened as Pakistan has become the common foe, more recently since the US occupation of Afghanistan on October 7th 2001.*[12]

Being the only one among my friends fluent in Hindi, I was by their side the entire time except for late nights when I would go down to the hotel's cyber café trying to find

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[9] Chanda, R. (2015). Medical tourism and outward FDI in health services: India in South Asia. Handbook on Medical Tourism and Patient Mobility, 296.

[10] Bentz, A. S. (2013). Afghan refugees in Indo-Afghan relations. Cambridge Review of International Affairs, 26(2), 374-391.See also; Naujoks, D. (2009). Emigration, immigration, and diaspora relations in India. Migration Information Source; Schmeidl, S. (2002). (Human) security dilemmas: long-term implications of the Afghan refugee crisis. Third World Quarterly, 23(1), 7-29.

[11] Akcapar, S. K. (2019). Religious conversions in forced migration: Comparative cases of Afghans in India and Iranians in Turkey. Journal of Eurasian Studies, 10(1), 61-74. See also ; Mullen, R. D. (2017). India in Afghanistan: Understanding Development Assistance by Emerging Donors to Conflict-Affected Countries. Policy Brief. Washington, DC.: Stimson Center.

[12] Hanauer, L., & Chalk, P. (2012). India's and Pakistan's Strategies in Afghanistan. RAND corporation.
See also; Dalrymple, W. (2013). Forget NATO v the Taliban. The real Afghan fight is India v Pakistan. The Guardian, 26; Schmidt, J. D. (2014). The Asia-Pacific strategic triangle: unentangling the India, China, US relations on conflict and security in South Asia. Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs, 1(2), 203-222; Tariq, M., Ahmad, M., Perveen, S., & Ghaffar, A. (2015). India-Pak Rivalry in Afghanistan. FWU Journal of Social Sciences, 1.

what Benedict Anderson called my "imagined [queer] community"[13] *in virtual spaces. My Kabuliwala ashna had introduced me to the chatrooms and pages that were frequented by Indians, Pakistanis and Afghans. It was one of these chatrooms where I first came across a queer Afghan who lived in Kansas City and I formed my first ever online relationship. The digital queer culture was just starting to bloom among the queer and trans community because it provided the community a space to connect across borders, languages, sexualities and class yet remain anonymous including to those with whom one developed a love connection. Sandip Roy credits the Internet in the establishment and progress of queer movements in South Asia.*[14] *Cyber spaces became "normal and legitimate way of finding a sexual partner-long term or otherwise."*[15] *In the early days of the Internet in late 1990s and early 2000s, people had limited access to the Internet in their homes; therefore, cyber cafes had emerged as globalized spaces popular among teens and young adults.*[16] *Cyber cafes were queer zones of cruising online and offline. Queer men were able to escape the heteronormative structures of home momentarily in the crowded cyber cafes as long as they could afford it. It is important to note that these cyber cafes were both classed and gendered.*[17] *Not every queer person could afford to pay for the overpriced hourly use of the cyber cafes. The cafes were packed by mostly men, some queer and some not. The*

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[13] Anderson, B. (2006). Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism. Verso Books.

[14] Roy, S. (2003). From Khush List to Gay Bombay. Mobile cultures: New media in queer Asia, 180.

[15] Kaufmann, Jean-Claude. (2012). Love Online. Polity Press; Cambridge. p.5.

[16] Dasgupta, Rohit K. Digital queer cultures in India: Politics, intimacies and belonging. Routledge India, 2017.

[17] Fluri, J. L., & Lehr, R. (2017). The carpetbaggers of Kabul and other American-Afghan entanglements: Intimate development, geopolitics, and the currency of gender and grief (Vol. 31). University of Georgia Press.

escape of heteronormative home was again a patriarchal possibility. Women couldn't often times use these cafes for familial, security and safety reasons.

As I logged in and got on IRC Chatroom in India, someone in the chatroom suggested that I should check out the underground gay club in New Delhi while I am there. He said he couldn't remember the name but there is one. Hearing that there was a gay club probably down the street where I was staying got me not only excited but also curious to experience how it feels to be around openly gay men for the first time in a space blessed by two of my favorites; Bollywood music and dance. Will it be safe for me to go? What if I am arrested? What if someone sees me? Will it be a sin if go to a gay club? Will Allah forgive me? All of these questions popped in my head as my desire to be around other gay men danced in my chest.

I immediately googled "gay clubs in New Delhi" and to my surprise "Pegs N Pints" popped up but the hours underneath the name read only Tuesday nights. It remained "straight" for the rest of the week and weekends. This was a Sunday night. I told myself I had two nights to find either an excuse for my friends or simply sneak out while they were sleeping and join my "imagined community." Tuesday night came and I could not find an excuse to break away from my friends. However, everyone was tired and they went to bed before 10pm. I snuck out of my hotel room in Bhogal, New Delhi, hopped in a rickshaw outside the hotel and made my way to the Pegs N Pints. I got off the rickshaw a few blocks away from the club as per the norm the chatroom gays had told me. As I was getting closer to the door, I started reciting verses from the Quran as per the usual ritual of visiting a new place. I caught myself and wondered if it was appropriate for me to recite Quran while walking to a gay bar. In this dilemma, I looked around and noticed mostly men in what

Butler calls the "gay kinship" groups,[18] walking in the same direction. Some of them seemed nervous, while some confident, staring at one another and giving me eyes like they knew I was a virgin to the neoliberal gay night life.

My desire of experiencing a gay night and meeting the out gays in person for the first time in my life became a phantom when the security guard at the gate refused to let me enter the moment he saw my Afghan passport. I pleaded but he refused. I insisted but then he explained that foreign journalists have visited this place and written about it, exposing it to the state authorities. His refusal was nothing personal against me, he asserted, but a mere fear of the past and for the safety of the people inside who do not want to be exposed. I reluctantly walked away but remained in the courtyard hoping he would let me in later. That later did not come, but the police certainly did. The moment I saw the police car flashing its lights and a number of them rushing into the club, I ran out of the courtyard into the back ally and from there to the main road until I found a rickshaw. On my way back to the hotel, I heard Sufi music coming from Nizamuddin Shrine across the street from the hotel. Nizamuddin Aulia, a 13th century Sufi saint, is known among Muslims across India, Pakistan and Afghanistan as the saint of hope and tolerance.[19] Nizamuddin is one of the largest sufi shrines in India.[20] The landscape holds many graves, shrines, tombs and courtyards where qawwali singers and musicians gather and perform every evening.

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[18] Butler, Judith. (2002). Antigone's claim: Kinship between life and death. Columbia University Press. p.70.
[19] Murshed, M. (2017). Song Of The Dervish: Nizamuddin Auliya: The Saint of Hope and Tolerance. Bloomsbury Publishing.
[20] Saniotis, A. (2008). Enchanted landscapes: Sensuous awareness as mystical practice among Sufis in north India. The Australian Journal of Anthropology, 19(1), 17-26.

I asked the rickshaw-wala to drop me off at the shrine where I spent the night reading poems, attending the midnight zikr and making friends with three gay Muslims in the courtyard who arguably spotted my queerness the moment I walked in. The shrine usually attracts travelers, mureeds (followers) and those with broken hearts and ill bodies. Some of them visit the shrine for a few hours while some travelers stay there for many nights. Lovers tie red pieces of cloth on the trees in the courtyard while sinners cry in a corner while performing endless zikrs.

The men asked me to join them in their small reading circle and I did. I had never imagined my first introduction to the "gay kinship" would take place in a holy Sufi shrine but no wonder Nizamuddin is known for hope and tolerance. As we sat there and read Mawlana Jalaluddin Balkhi's (Rumi) poems in Urdu, we realized that Rumi was in part a glue to our shared queer identity. His poems traveled across borders, religions and languages and made it to the late-night readings of many closeted queers in South Asia. I read his poems growing up in Kabul and Islamabad while the three men at the shrine read them growing up in Agra, the capital of Mughal empire and three-hour train ride from new Delhi.

My night did not go as I had expected but that is usual for a gay closeted brown man escaping "home" and crossing borders to find himself and his community. The three queer men in the shrine were friends who had escaped their homes in Agra. They were not sure if they would stay in Delhi or go back to Agra. They had assumed I were a gay runaway, too, until I told them I was traveling with friends but a runaway for the night. We talked about home and family, love and violence, escape and return.

Part 2: Queering Borders, Wars and Displacements

As Fiona Adamson argues, "people cross borders for a variety of reasons."[21] They not only cross borders for variety of reasons, but they also cross multiple borders. The three stories of Nargis, Zainab and myself engage with multiplicity of borders, both the physical and the imaginary, the visible and the invisible, and many others that remain undefined and in-between. These three stories invite us to reimagine the ways in which we conceptualize territorial borders between nation-states. Nargis's and Zainab's personal reflections and my autoethnographic account trouble the borders of war and peace. These stories rupture the political and imaginative borders of home and diaspora. These narratives offer nuanced ways to understand performances of gender and sexuality in the context of war and displacement. Grappling with these stories and narratives of many other Afghans in diaspora, I use the pages of this dissertation to queer stable borders of nations, war, peace, diaspora, gender and sexuality both methodologically and conceptually. As Judith Butler argues, "the term 'queer' emerges as an interpolation that raises the question of the status of force and opposition, of stability and vulnerability."[22] Utilizing Butler's theorization of queer, I illuminate on the instability of borders through stories, experiences and journeys of my interlocutors.

Through a critical ethnography diaspora of war and their performances of gender and sexuality, this work strives to become deeply attentive to wide variation of experiences

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[21] Adamson, F. B. (2006). Crossing borders: International migration and national security. *International security*, *31*(1). p.168.
[22] Butler, J. (2011). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex*. Routledge.p.172.

and differences that accompany people's lives as they become displaced, as they cross borders, and as they form a diaspora out of these ever-unfolding events and processes.

In IR, the discussions on borders have tended to focus on sovereignty, nation-states, terrorism and security.[23] The focus has been on stability of borders. Douglas Gibler, for instance, argues that states with stable borders more likely become democracies.[24] These discussions are key in understanding nation-state's political and legal border crossings. They conceptualize territorial divides between states and the emergence of nationalism, citizenship and security regimes. However, it is important to understand everyday people's experience of border crossings and what Susanne Wessendorf calls "cross-border lives."[25] This chapter engages with border crossings in its abstract, physical, political and social meanings and its performances of gender and sexuality. Border crossing also implies "seeking out tools from other cultural traditions to access differently ordered pathways of being and becoming."[26] For some it is social, political and religious transgressions as I will explain in the next chapters that center on border crossings of Afghan women between honor and shame, of queer and trans Afghans between homosexual and Muslim.

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[23] For discussion of territorial and political borders See; Salter, M. B. (2008). When the exception becomes the rule: borders, sovereignty, and citizenship. *Citizenship studies*, *12*(4), 365-380; Rudolph, C. (2005). Sovereignty and Territorial Borders in a Global Age 1. *International studies review*, *7*(1), 1-20; Wilson, T. M., & Donnan, H. (1998). Nation, state and identity at international borders. *Border identities: nation and state at international frontiers*, 1-30; Agnew, J. (2008). Borders on the mind: re-framing border thinking. *Ethics & Global Politics*, *1*(4), 175-191; Andreas, P. (2003). Redrawing the line: Borders and security in the twenty-first century. *International security*, *28*(2), 78-111; Konrad, V., & Nicol, H. (2016). *Beyond Walls: Re-inventing the Canada-United States Borderlands*. Routledge.

[24] Gibler, D. M. (2014). Contiguous states, stable borders, and the peace between democracies. *International Studies Quarterly*, *58*(1), 126-129.

[25] Wessendorf, S. (2016). Second-generation transnationalism and roots migration: Cross-border lives. Routledge. p.5

[26] Marsh, V. (2007). Border crossings? Queer spirituality and Asian religion: a first-person account. Gay & Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review, 3(2), p.97.

The idea for this chapter emerged as the notion of border in its physical, abstract, social and political meanings came up during multiple conversations in the field. For some refugees, it is during border crossings that they fall in love, give birth or die. For some, it is where the traumatic memories form.[27] Nargis, a 28- year old Afghan woman whose story I narrated earlier, lives in Washington D.C. She traces her first childhood memory to crossing the Afghan-Pakistani border with her family when she was four years old. Her memories and experience of border crossing, men with guns, and her peeing as they walked have become the ghost of war haunting her to this day. Raymond Duvall, Ayten Gündogdu and Kartik Raj, building on Balibar's conception of borders state that "while some people pass through borders, others are made to live there, to the point that they become or are borders."[28] Afghan-Americans have become border- the border between home and diaspora, the border between Afghan and American and some the border between Muslim and queer or both at the same time.

During one of our subsequent conversations, Nargis said that just like her memory of Afghanistan that begins and ends at crossing border, she lives her life in between borders and in crossing them; "I feel like I am neither American nor Afghan. I sometimes feel free

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[27] For discussions of memory, borders and refugees see; Lacroix, T., & Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2013). Refugee and diaspora memories: The politics of remembering and forgetting. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, *34*(6), 684-696; Farzana, K. F. (2017). *Memories of Burmese Rohingya refugees: contested identity and belonging*. Springer; Summerfield, D. (2000). Childhood, war, refugeedom and 'trauma': Three core questions for mental health professionals. *Transcultural psychiatry*, *37*(3), 417-433.

[28] Duvall, R. D., Gündoğdu, A., & Raj, K. (2009). Borders, Power, and Resistance: Bounding and Challenging Europe. In *Europe and Its Boundaries* (pp. 225-241). Lexington. p.236. See also; Balibar, E. (2009). *We, the people of Europe?: Reflections on transnational citizenship* (Vol. 18). Princeton University Press.

but I know my freedom is limited because I am a brown Muslim woman in America. My family thinks I am a good girl but I know I am not what they think I am. So, I live between borders and I cross them."[29] It is not only memories of home that start and end at borders, it is also the experiences of gender and sexuality. In the discussions of gender and sexuality many members of the Afghan diaspora, particularly those who identify as queer and trans, made references to Pakistan and India as borders and sites where they experienced their first realization of same-sex attraction while stuck in a limbo in Afghanistan-Pakistan border or came across hijras while waiting in India or Pakistan to be resettled to the US. These border crossings then become sites of negotiations, learnings and unlearnings about one's own self and the "imagined communities"[30] across the borders in the region. These border crossings, at times, become the only memory of home and realization of one's sexuality.

The story of Zainab narrated earlier in the chapter demonstrates this. Zainab, a 41-year-old Afghan diasporic woman who identifies as bisexual in her close circle of friends but straight otherwise said that she first realized she was attracted to women while crossing the Turkham border. Zainab came to connect with her sexuality when she and her family got on a bus in Jalalabad smuggling Afghans across the border to Pakistan during the war. They spent many nights on the bus and walking the mountains to make it to Peshawar. Zainab said at the time she was 19-year old and she was promised to marriage to her first cousin. She met Shereen on the bus as they were taking a break to use the restroom and

[29] Interview. 37
[30] Anderson, B. (2006). Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism. Verso Books.

pray. When they met, Zainab knew "it was love at first sight." To understand diaspora and their border crossings and experiences in relation to their gender and sexuality, it is important to engage with borders.[31]

Borders have often times been discussed in their stable sense whether it is territorial borders or gender borders.[32] Through complicating borders and lived experiences of war that lie at the core of war diasporas, this dissertation invites us to see how these borders allow the diasporic and on-the move Afghans to negotiate their gender and sexuality. I queer the stability and rigidity of these borders through sewing the complex narratives of diasporic queer and trans Afghans, diasporic Afghan women and diasporic Afghan men. In doing this, I build on the work of Chicana and Asian American scholars who are among many that have problematized queer diaspora identities, lives and experiences in relation to borders.[33] What do I mean by queering borders? As Emma Pérez suggests, "to queer the border is to look at the usual documents with another critical eye, a nonwhite, noncolonial, nonheteronormative eye."[34] I work with this conceptualization of queering borders in this dissertation.

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[31] Rumford, C. (2006). Theorizing borders. European Journal of Social Theory 9(2): pp.155–169

[32] See; Gibler, D. M. (2014). Contiguous states, stable borders, and the peace between democracies. *International Studies Quarterly*, *58*(1), 126-129; Calavita, K. (2006). Gender, migration, and law: Crossing borders and bridging disciplines. *International Migration Review*, *40*(1), 104-132.

[33] See; Pérez, E. (2003). Queering the borderlands: The challenges of excavating the invisible and unheard. *Frontiers: a journal of women studies*, *24*(2/3), 122-131; Calvo, L. (2001). *Border fantasies: sexual anxieties and political passions in the Mexico-US borderlands*. University of California, Santa Cruz; Esquibel, C. R. (2009). *With Her Machete in Her Hand: Reading Chicana Lesbians*. University of Texas Press; Yarbro-Bejarano, Y. (2011). *The Wounded Heart: Writing on Cherríe Moraga*. University of Texas Press.

[34] Pérez, E. (2003). Queering the borderlands: The challenges of excavating the invisible and unheard. *Frontiers: a journal of women studies*, *24*(2/3), p.128.

Queering borders allows us to rethink the meaning of war and its lived experiences. War does not contain in borders but escapes beyond borders into its diasporas. Border crossing is the movement of bodies, displaced people, sexualities, rituals or loves that refuse borders. It is the transgression between binary and non-binary genders and sexualities. I also queer wars in this dissertation. Queering wars is not only engaging with subjects who are queer and living in times of war but also pushing the meanings and boundaries of wars from its steady paradigm. Queering war extends the meaning of war beyond political violence into war as struggle within oneself, the conflict between sexual orientation and religion, the tension between Islamophobia and homophobia, the move between the category of the faggot and terrorist, the living of double lives, the existence between borders of violent masculine and effeminate homosexual. I explain these border crossings through conceptualization of diasporic journeys.

Diasporic journeys are movements and travels, struggles and displacements that entail multiple border crossings, births, deaths, new beginnings and homes. I engage with diasporic journeys extensively in chapter three. Of the homes that the Afghan diaspora in this research brought up were not all situated in Afghanistan or in the US. These were also homes that were temporarily in their first point(s) of escape as they made their journeys out of war in Afghanistan. Pakistan, India and Germany were three countries that many of the participants in this research brought up as either places they first entered when they left Afghanistan or where they were born and raised before making it to the US. Afghans are dispersed across the world particularly in the neighboring countries of Pakistan, Iran and

India.[35] Germany hosts one of the largest Afghan diasporas in Europe.[36] The journeys of Afghan diaspora entail multiple crossings, returns and departures. As Francis Leo Collins argues, "migrants do not simply follow linear pathways of departure, settlement and assimilation or return."[37] In these pathways, borders hold vital place in the lives, experiences and identity makings of the diasporas. For some, "borders are sites where identity is constantly negotiated,"[38] challenged and bartered.

Engaging with two lived-moments in my life in Pakistan and India, I provide autoethnographic accounts that purposefully queer borders while also demonstrating the existence of queer and trans identities and performances in the region, alongside many hues and shades of sexual and gender diversity, which existed even before the West could conceptualize the complexities of sexuality and gender. The contemporary movements across the borders of Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, although influenced by "Gay International"[39] at the moment, are also rooted in the struggles, celebrations and border crossings of Kabuliwallas, Sufis, merchants, hijras and everyday people who either are displaced or travel. My autoethnographic intervention serves to locate me as one of the Afghan diasporic subjects that I study and the "shared subjective experiences" between the

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[35] Schmeidl, S. (2002). (Human) security dilemmas: long-term implications of the Afghan refugee crisis. Third World Quarterly, 23(1), 7-29.
[36] Haque, K. (2013). Iranian, Afghan, and Pakistani Migrants in Germany: Muslim Populations Beyond Turks and Arabs. Chloe: Beihefte zum Daphnis, 46(1); See also; Shah, I. (2012). An Overview of Relations between Afghanistan and Germany. Journal of European Studies, 28(2).
[37] Collins, F. L. (2009). Transnationalism unbound: detailing new subjects, registers and spatialities of cross-border lives. Geography Compass, 3(1), p.430.
[38] Cunningham, H., & Heyman, J. (2004). Introduction: mobilities and enclosures at borders.p.291.
[39] Massad, J. A. (2002). Re-orienting desire: The gay international and the Arab world. Public culture, 14(2), 361-385.

researcher and the researched.[40] I move between multiple versions of self and other throughout the chapters in this dissertation. The autoethnographic account I provide at the beginning of this chapter is to prepare my readers for this methodological intervention I am making. Locating myself as the subject of my own study is a methodological border crossing that takes place when a researcher's subjects of study are so close to home. The themes of border crossing throughout this dissertation are at times vivid while other times they are embedded in the meanings of concepts and stories I engage with.

Another way I engage with border-crossing in this dissertation is through the act of performance, whether it is the performance of hijras in my exile home in Pakistan, the performances of masculinities of Afghan men in the diaspora, or the double lives of Afghan women, queer and trans Afghans. Performance becomes an act of border crossing between the accepted and the taboo, the haram and the halal, the bisexuality among friends and the straight for the family. During my fieldwork, every time I would bring up the queer and trans identities to the members of Afghan diaspora that lived in Pakistan and India before making it to the US, they mentioned hijras. Benafsha, a 50-year old woman in Hayward, CA said that she lived in Rawalpindi, Pakistan and her next door neighbor was a hijra. Benafsha added, " at first, I was scared of hijras. I would see them dance on the streets and I didn't like them. Then one day I met my hijra neighbor outside our door, she brought us some fruit from her trees and I realized they were just like us, good people."[41]

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[40] Muhanna, A. (2014, July). When the researcher becomes a subject of ethnographic research: Studying "myself" and "others" in Gaza. In *Women's Studies International Forum*(Vol. 45, pp. 112-118).
[41] Focus Group. 6

Hijras hold a pivotal space in both India and Pakistan but not so much in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan the war has stifled such diversity. Prior to the war, they would travel to Jalalabad and Kabul where they had their summer homes.[42] The word hijra in Farsi and Arabic means migration.[43] Hijras not only traveled across borders and boundaries of gender and sexuality but they also crossed physical borders of Afghanistan, India and Pakistan. In Pakistan and India, hijras are outcasts and until very recently outside legal and social protection. They are assumed "dirty" and bisharm, shameless. Because they reject major gender roles and social norms around decency and morality, they fall outside the "normative social order."[44] Since they are outside the normative social order, they are considered "a people freed from the constraints of decency that regulate the rest of society."[45] This freedom allows them to trouble societal norms, challenge people's rigid perception of gender and sexuality, and politically intervene in public spaces.

The performances of gender and sexuality in the lives of diasporic Afghans cross the borders of shame and honor, masculine and effeminate, the faggot and the terrorist similar to those of hijras. Afghan diaspora in the US exist in between and across complex borders of war and peace, home and exile, American and Afghan, invader and invaded and masculine and feminine. Afghan-Americans are a diaspora of war that come with personal

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[42] Peletz, M., Blackwood, E., Boellstorff, T., Geertz, C., Johnson, M., Loos, T., ... & Peletz, M. (2006). Transgenderism and gender pluralism in southeast Asia since early modern times. Current Anthropology, 47(2), 309-340.

[43] Masud, M. K. (1990). The obligation to migrate: the doctrine of hijra in Islamic law. Muslim travelers: pilgrimage, migration, and the religious imagination, 29-49.

[44] Reddy, Gayatri. "" Men" who would be kings: Celibacy, emasculation, and the re-production of hijras in contemporary Indian politics." Social research: an international quarterly 70, no. 1 (2003): 163-200.

[45] Hall, K. (1997). "Go suck your husband's sugarcane": Hijras and the use of sexual insult. Queerly phrased: Language, gender, and sexuality, p.445.

experiences of war which informs their sense of safety, security, home, masculinity and femininity and queerness that lie at the heart of the next chapters in this dissertation. What do I mean by diaspora? In the next two sections, I turn to this question and establish the relationship of diaspora and war, subsequently introduce the Afghan diaspora in the US - the focus of this dissertation.

Displacement and Diaspora

Wars are not contained within borders. This has been extensively discussed in the scholarship on wars, peacebuilding and security studies. James C. Murdoch and Todd Sandler, [46] argue that wars have neighbor spillover effects. Just like peace, democracy, religious ideology, war also moves beyond the borders and state territories. War travels beyond the narrow spatial confinement of nation-states to individuals and groups fleeing the war, crossing borders, finding temporary or permanent new homes. I also argue that war is carried in the experiences, memories, border crossings, escapes, new lives, assimilations, resistance and physical spaces of the diasporas (immigrants, refugees and asylum-seekers). War yields radical displacements and it does not end with the act of escape. It in fact accompanies people just like those half-burnt family photographs they manage to stuff in their bags as they are running out the door. As one of the research participants for this study said, "when we left Afghanistan, I feel like my parents brought the war with them from Afghanistan and now they are sharing it with us every day."[47] War

[46] Murdoch, J. C., & Sandler, T. (2002). Economic growth, civil wars, and spatial spillovers. *Journal of conflict resolution*,*46*(1), 91-110.
[47] Interview. 7 with Nazila.

is then passed onto the next generations through stories, memories, trauma, parenting and above all, existence. To this point, Salman Rushdie says;

> The effect of mass migration has been creation of a radically new type of human being, people who root themselves in the ideas rather than place, in the memories as much as material things; people who have been obliged to define themselves- because they are so defined by others- by their otherness; people in whose deepest selves strange fusions occur, unprecedented unions between what they were and where they find themselves. The migrant suspects reality: having experienced several ways of being, he understands their illusory nature. To see things plainly, you have to cross a frontier.[48]

Who falls under diaspora and who does not? When did this conceptualization occur? The field of diaspora studies makes reference to the Jewish experience of escape and immigration as the historical pivot point that conceptualized the word diaspora.[49] Historically, diasporas, including the Armenian, Tamil, Chinese, Palestinian and others, have significantly impacted the behavior of states in the international arena.[50] They have been used to pressure states, intervene, cooperate and bridge between domestic and international. After the US military occupation of Afghanistan, the international community with the help of Afghan diaspora in the West, mainly the US, UK and Germany,

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[48] Rushdie, S. (2012). *Imaginary homelands: Essays and criticism 1981-1991*. Random House. p.109

[49] Varadarajan, L. (2010). *The domestic abroad: Diasporas in international relations*. Oxford University Press.

[50] Shain, Y., & Barth, A. (2003). Diasporas and international relations theory. *International organization*, *57*(3), 449-479.

installed the government in Kabul.[51] Even today, the key state offices, including the Afghan president's office, is run by the US diaspora.

By diaspora, I refer to immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers residing outside their country of origin: "that segment of people living outside the homeland."[52] Some scholars limit diaspora only to those communities established outside their country of origin as a result of political violence, whereas, some scholars extend the conceptualization of diaspora to economic migrants. Latha Varadarajan studying the case of Indian migrants in the US defines diaspora as "emigrant communities-populations that originate from a nation-state that is different from the one where they reside."[53] This definition limits diaspora to only those who come from established nation-state structures, excluding communities who do not have a state. It also carries a sense of peaceful movement. At the core of diaspora lies "push factors."[54] For scholars such as James Clifford, Khachig Tölölyan and Ann-Marie Fortier, it is the forced migration, legal and illegal border crossings and multiple displacements that become central to the meaning of diaspora.[55] Diaspora is not a singular happening but a process that involves multiple struggles, borders and displacements. It is the latter engagement with diaspora that I build on. It is crucial to

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[51] Zunzer, W. (2004). Diaspora Communities and Civil Conflict Transformation.
[52] Connor, Walter. (1986). "The Impact of Homelands Upon Diasporas." Modern Diasporas in International Politics. New York: St. Martin's, pp. 16–46. See also; Safran, W. (1991). Diasporas in modern societies: Myths of homeland and return. *Diaspora: A journal of transnational studies*, *1*(1), p.16.
[53] Varadarajan, L. (2010). *The domestic abroad: Diasporas in international relations*. Oxford University Press. p.8.
[54] Clifford, J. (1994). Diasporas. *Cultural anthropology*, *9*(3), 302-338. See also; Gilory, P. (1997). Diaspora and the detours of identity. IN WOODWARD, K.(Ed.) Identity and Difference.
[55] Fortier, A. M. (2002). Queer diaspora. *Handbook of lesbian and gay studies*, 183-197; Tölölyan, K. (1996). Rethinking diaspora (s): Stateless power in the transnational moment. *Diaspora: a journal of transnational studies*, *5*(1), 3-36; Clifford, J. (1994). Diasporas. *Cultural anthropology*, *9*(3), 302-338.

mention that the United Nations High Commission for Refugees distinguishes between categories of refugee and migrant; the former having no choice and being in need of protection, fleeing from violence, while the latter have the option to choose to move away from their country of origin to improve their lives.[56] Similar to the complexity of escaping home or choosing to leave home, the definition of diaspora is not one simple agreed upon notion.

September 11 yielded interest for the study of diaspora in international relations and comparative politics[57]. From politicians to publics and scholars, the interest in analyzing, judging, blaming, studying, diagnosing, policing and punishing diasporas grew. Among those studying displacements and wars, there is a strong agreement that political violence produces fear, risk and life-threatening circumstances that force people to escape their homes; "sometimes you just have to leave."[58]

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[56] http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2016/7/55df0e556/unhcr-viewpoint-refugee-migrant-right.html

[57] Shain, Y.(2007). Kinship and Diasporas in International Affairs. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press; Smith, H. A., & Stares, P. (2007). *Diasporas in Conflict: Peace-makers or Peace-wreckers?*. United Nations University Press; Adamson, F. (2006). 'Crossing Borders. International Migration and National Security', International Security, 31, pp. 165-1999; Adamson, F. (2005). 'Global Liberalism Versus Political Islam', International Studies Review (2005), pp. 547-69; Lyons, T. (2006). Diasporas and homeland conflict. *Territoriality and Conflict in an Era of Globalization*, 111-132; Wayland, S. (2004). Ethnonationalist networks and transnational opportunities: the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora. *Review of International Studies*, *30*(3), 405-426; Fair, C. (2005). 'Diaspora Involvement in Insurgencies', Nationalism and Ethnic Politics, 11, pp. 125-56; Daniel Byman et al., Trends for Outside Support in Insurgent Movements (RAND Corporation, 2001); Collier, P., & Hoeffler, A. (2004). Greed and grievance in civil war. *Oxford economic papers*, *56*(4), 563-595.

[58] Davenport, C., Moore, W., & Poe, S. (2003). Sometimes you just have to leave: Domestic threats and forced migration, 1964-1989. International Interactions, 29(1), 27-55. See also; Cox-Edwards, A., & Rodríguez-Oreggia, E. (2009). Remittances and labor force participation in Mexico: an analysis using propensity score matching. World Development, 37(5), 1004-1014. Hakovirta, H. (1986). Third world conflicts and refugeeism: Dimensions, dynamics, and trends of the world refugee problem. Finnish society of sciences and letters. Adhikari, R. (2013). Empowered wives and frustrated husbands: Nursing, gender and migrant Nepali in the UK. International Migration, 51(6), 168-179. Melander, E., & Öberg, M. (2006). Time to go? Duration

People escaping wars and conflicts not only impact the domestic politics of their countries of origin but also shape and change the international world order. During their journeys, they cross territorial borders, come in close contact with regional and international laws and treaties, engage in multiple economic, social, cultural and political acts.[59] Stephen Castle, Hein De Haas and Mark J Miller, analyzing the patterns of migration and border crossings in The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World, argue "migration has played a key role in colonialism, industrialization, nation-state formation and the development of capitalist world market."[60] They go on and add that, however, it has been very recent that mass migrations have become part of international security discussions and seen as significant movements changing the international order.

Radical Displacements: The Case of Afghanistan

The contemporary history of Afghanistan is filled with wars and superpower rivalries, violence and displacement. Within these devastating moments in history, Afghans very vividly recall and talk about two moments that changed everything in their lives; the Soviet Union invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the US military invasion of Afghanistan in 2001.[61] These two invasions that took place decades apart are, in fact, closely connected.

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dependence in forced migration. International Interactions,32(2), 129-152. Aguayo, S., Suhrke, A., & Zolberg, A. R. (1989). Escape from violence. Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in the Developing world.

[59] Czajka, A. (2014). Migration in the Age of the Nation-state: Migrants, Refugees, and the National Order of Things. Alternatives, 39(3), 151-163.

[60] Castles, S., De Haas, H., & Miller, M. J. (2013). *The age of migration: International population movements in the modern world*. Macmillan International Higher Education. p.317.

[61] Dossa, P. (2008). Creating politicized spaces: Afghan immigrant women's stories of migration and displacement. *Affilia*, *23*(1), 10-21.

The Soviet/US Cold War power politics and expansionism brought about the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the civil war followed when the Soviet Union collapsed and the US pulled out all its support from Afghanistan and left the country at the hands of Mujahideen who were once aided, trained and militarized by the US. As Parin Dossa argues, "the United States and the Soviet Union were responsible for turning Afghanistan into an armed camp."[62] Dossa calls Afghanistan a "wounded country." Her ethnographic study with Afghan women in British Columbia who shared their stories of war, loss, nostalgia and displacement reveals a collective pain that many diaspora Afghans share whether in Canada or the United States. This was evident when I spent time with a group of Afghan women in California. I visited them during some of their weekly gatherings that involved sharing meals, tea, gossip and stories of home. The packed room with women between the ages of 35 and 65-years old would echo sounds of laughter, one moment, while the sobbing of cries the next moment. The moment one would start sobbing, the rest would join. One of them said, "we come here to run away from our sad and lonely homes but our pain is so deep that most of the time we end up talking about Afghanistan and the war. We end up crying and being even more sad."[63]

Decades of Afghan displacement provides us with a critical lens to theorize wars differently and consider their implications on domestic and international relations. According to UNHCR statistics, 24 people are escaping their homes as a result of political violence/war just right now as you are reading this sentence.[64] The recent wars in Syria,

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[62] Ibid. p.12
[63] Focus group. 5
[64] UNHCR. (2016). <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2016/6/5763b65a4/global-forced-displacement-hits-record-high.html>

Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia have caused the majority of current displacements. According to UNHCR 2015 Report, the number of refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced people has passed 65 million: "One in every 113 people on Earth has now been driven from their home by persecution, conflict and violence or human rights violations."[65] This does not count the millions of economic migrants around the world. One in every 35 people is a migrant. Fiona Adamson highlights "if all migrants formed a single state, it would be the world's fifth most populous country."[66]

The Afghan displacement marks one of the massive ones in the past four decades. In the aftermaths of 1978, *the Saur Coup d'état,* Afghans who had the means and resources escaped to Iran and Pakistan, and from there some found human smugglers who took them to North America, Western Europe and in later years Australia.[67]The Soviet military occupation of Afghanistan followed the communist *coup d'état* which then caused massive displacement of Afghans across the country, mainly from cities such as Kabul, Herat, Mazar and Jalalanad. Majority of those who started fleeing in late 1970s were financially well-off and politically involved. Mir Hekmatullah Sadat, looking at the scope of Afghan displacement says the number of Afghans in Europe and North America is:

> A topic of debate due to uncertainties and very little census information is available…in Germany, an estimated 80,000 Afghans live, making Germany the most densely populated Western country hosting Afghans.

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[65] UNHCR. (2016). <http://www.unhcr.org/afr/news/press/2016/6/5763ace54/1-human-113-affected-forced-displacement-hits-record-high.html>

[66] Adamson, F. B. (2006). Crossing borders: international migration and national security. *International security*, *31*(1), p.199.

[67] Sadat, M. H. (2008). Hyphenating Afghaniyat (Afghan-ness) in the Afghan diaspora. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, *28*(3), 329-342.

> The next largest Afghan population in Western Europe is in Holland, which has an estimated 30,000 Afghans. A total of 250,000 Afghans live all over Western and Eastern Europe, with Russia hosting one of the largest. Most of the Afghans in the United States have come through either Pakistan or Germany and today a total of 300,000 Afghans live in North America, mostly the United States. Majority of these Afghans live in the city of Fremont, called Little Kabul.[68]

A total of 9 million Afghans lived in Pakistan and Iran; some were forcibly removed and sent back to Afghanistan, some ended up in Europe, some are stuck in the Greek islands and millions still remain displaced in these two neighboring countries.[69] Little Kabul, in the East Bay city of Fremont, California is home for the largest cluster of Afghans.[70] Afghan diaspora in the United States, particularly in Fremont, will be discussed and analyzed in the methodology and empirical chapters.

Four Waves of Migration

From 1978 until today, Afghan's migration pattern has been divided into four different waves. Elaheh Rostami-Povey, analyzing the historical and political roots of Afghan displacement explains these four as ;1) The first wave started with the coup and Soviet military occupation in the late 1970s. This group came from relatively well-off

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[68] Ibid. p.331.
[69] Rostami-Povey, E. (2007). Afghan refugees in Iran, Pakistan, the UK, and the US and life after return: A comparative gender analysis. *Iranian Studies*, *40*(2), 241-261.
[70] Oeppen, C. (2013). A stranger at 'home': interactions between transnational return visits and integration for Afghan-American professionals. *Global Networks*, *13*(2), 261-278.

backgrounds and some with anti-communist political groups. This group used Pakistan as their first point of entry making their way up to Europe and the United States. 2) The second wave left between 1992-1996. This is the civil war displacement, most settled in Iran and Pakistan and some making their way to the west. 3) The third wave of displacement started with the violence of the Taliban between the years of 1996-2001. During this wave, the receiving countries, mainly Pakistan and Iran shifted their political and strategic interest in Afghanistan and became hostile towards receiving Afghan refugees.[71] Majority of the border crossings during these waves happened in the middle of the night, through smugglers, in cargo trucks, over the mountains and directly to refugee camps in the border areas of Pakistan and Iran. 4) The fourth, which is the current wave of Afghan displacement, is the longest one in the history of displacement in Afghanistan. This wave started with the US military occupation of Afghanistan on October 7, 2001. Afghans in the rural areas who were directly under the US bombs started fleeing to Pakistan and Iran and almost a million became internally displaced.[72]

Included in the fourth wave of displacement is a sizeable number of Afghans who are being resettled in the US under the Immigration and Nationality Act, Special Immigration Visa (SIV) which was approved by the Congress and started during Obama's administration as a form of courtesy and responsibility to Iraqis and Afghans aiding the US military in Iraq and Afghanistan either in the form of translators or local contractors.[73] As

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[71] Rostami-Povey, E. (2007). Afghan refugees in Iran, Pakistan, the UK, and the US and life after return: A comparative gender analysis. *Iranian Studies*, *40*(2), 241-261.
[72] ibid.242-244
[73] Adamson, F. B. (2006). Crossing borders: international migration and national security. *International security*, *31*(1), 165-199.

the US started to pull out its troops from Iraq and downsize in Afghanistan, Senator Kennedy emphasized America's "special obligation to keep faith with the Iraqis who have bravely worked for us, and often paid a terrible price for it by providing them with safe refuge in the United States."[74] Congressman Early Blumenauer, one of the drafters of the Afghan Allies and Protection Act which supports the settlement of Afghans who have aided the US military in Afghanistan asserts, " it has been said that to be a friend is fatal. Our Afghan allies put this fact aside in service to courageous military and our country. In return we promised them safety and a new life in the United States. We must keep our promise to our allies."[75] Since 2009, more than 17,000 SIV visas have been issued to Afghans and another 1,500 were allocated for 2018.[76]

Part 3: Overview of Chapters

The stories of Nargis and Zainab, and my own autoethnographic accounts, demonstrate the complexities of diasporas of war and their journeys crossing social, political, territorial and binary borders. These stories demonstrate what a critical ethnographic study can do in terms of developing the contents of the experiences of displacement in the context of war. Through this dissertation, my particular contribution is a rich ethnographic study of

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[74] JFK Library. The Plight of Iraqi Refugees, supra note 13, at 4 (statement of Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, Member, S. Comm. on the Judiciary).

[75] Moulton, S. (2019). Moulton, Blumenaure, Kinzinger , Stivers Introduce Bill to Authorize Special Immigraion Visas to Afghans Translators. Accessed: June 12th, 2019< https://moulton.house.gov/news-stories/press-releases/moulton-introduces-special-immigrant-visas-for-afghan-translators-bill/>

[76]Farivar, M. (2017). Special US Visa Program for Afghans on Hold. Accessed: May 12 2019. https://www.voanews.com/a/special-us-visa-program-afghans-hold/3760546.html. See also https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/special-immg-visa-afghans-employed-us-gov.html

gendered subjectivities among war diasporas. I argue that it is not possible to adequately understand the norms and performances of gender and sexuality and the profound ways in which they shape the lived experiences of diasporas, without learning to listen carefully to the nuanced stories of these diasporic communities. As Veena Das argues, we cannot possibly live the sufferings of other people, however, what we can do is to listen to their stories and try to understand them.[77] This is what I do in this dissertation and beyond that. For me, it is not only listening but living the experiences of my interlocutors. I place my lived experiences under my own gaze and expose my vulnerabilities through the sharing of my stories.

Through the stories of home and diaspora and crossing of borders in this dissertation I argue that diaspora is embedded in the understanding of war. Diaspora is generated by war and, hence, inseparable. My purpose in this dissertation is to demonstrate the complexities of lived experiences of war and displacement, how these experiences are shaped by the identities they hold. The war in Afghanistan is the longest US war in history. The Afghan diaspora is one of the largest in the world. Both the war and the processes of displacement have yielded violence that has impacted Afghans across generations. This research is the ethnographic study of Afghan diaspora in the US that situates their stories, memories and experiences at the center of its analysis. Each chapter becomes lens that I use to queer borders, wars and displacements.

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[77] Das, V. (2015). What does ordinary ethics look like. *Four lectures on ethics: anthropological perspectives*, *3*, 53-125. See also; Das, V., Kleinman, A., Lock, M. M., Ramphele, M., & Reynolds, P. (Eds.). (2001). *Remaking a world: Violence, social suffering, and recovery*. University of California Press.

In this first chapter, I have introduced my research through establishing the connection of diaspora and their lived experiences with border crossings. Moving between and across multiple borders and boundaries centers the experiences of diaspora.[78] Chapter two offers the methodological intervention this dissertation makes. This is where I introduce my approach to queering methodological borders by blurring the lines between myself and my interactors, ethnography and autoethnography, self and other. I conceptualize my methodological approach as (de)colonial ethnography, the border crossings between colonial and decolonial, and studying people, places and cultures existing in the shadows of empire.

Chapter three focuses on the lives of diasporic Afghan women who cross borders of shame and honor, public and private, Afghan and American, home and diaspora by living what I conceptualize as double lives. Through living double lives Afghan diasporic women create solidarities across marginalized identities and experiences which becomes an act of diasporic feminism. Such diasporic feminisms are made up of varied creative practices of resistance while being aware of one's home there, in Afghanistan and home here, in the US, and while negotiating with historical and contemporary realities.

In this conceptualization, then, diasporic feminism is not about doing politics and activism on the streets but also in private and trusted circles. It is not a unilinear movement or an already formulated action; it is the complex and ever unfolding politics of everyday

[78] Butler, K. D. (2001). Defining diaspora, refining a discourse. *Diaspora: a journal of transnational studies*, *10*(2), 189-219; Tölölyan, K. (2007). The contemporary discourse of diaspora studies. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, *27*(3), 647-655.

life, influencing women and queers' freedom, agency, resistance, survival, and even their visions of alliance and solidarity. This chapter also crafts the notion of home-bondedness. I argue that the struggles in exile, loss and fear contribute to home-bonded politics of diasporic subjects. Many, if not most, of the people in this study have lost their homes in Afghanistan, but continue to regard Afghanistan as true home. To some, family is the only place of physical and emotional shelter, and, hence, is home away from home.

Chapter four theorizes, through the voices, stories and experiences of queer and trans Afghans of the diaspora, the intimate borders of homophobia and Islamophobia that queer and trans Afghans cross. I argue that queer and trans Afghans of the diaspora move between two distinct spaces of intimacy: the homophobic familial space and the Islamophobic queer space. Neither do they experience familial spaces merely as spaces of constraint nor do they experience queer spaces merely as spaces of freedom. I rather argue that both of these spaces pose certain constraints on the lives of these Afghans who experience freedom as a constant move from one to another. In doing so, I deploy the metaphor of matryoshka doll to discuss subjectivities that are co-constitutive with complex layers of struggles and violence that define the lives of queer and trans Afghans.

The final chapter troubles the masculinist discourses of Afghan men generated more widely in the post 9/11 world. Since 9/11, Afghan men's masculinities are situated across borders of violent masculine and effeminate homosexual. I argue that to understand Afghan diasporic masculinities, it is crucial to situate Afghan diasporic masculinities within the culture of war and violence of exile, including surveillance regimes. Afghan men perform what I call vigilant masculinities that are informed by fear, violence, scrutiny and uncertainties. Finally, chapter 6 provides a summary of my ethnographic work and

arguments. It demonstrates how analyzing diasporic communities through different lenses of gender and sexuality provide nuanced ways to understand diaspora, war and gender and sexuality.

Chapter 2:

Queering Methodological Borders

How do I

find home

even within

my own body

when

all of me

is colonized?

-de-colonization

Sewing Songs and Stories

"Alamganj burnt down. Its burning smoke is everywhere. Dad, let's leave. I can hear the tank engine outside, getting closer to our house. Let's leave Alamganj."

This popular song created by Farhad Darya during late 1980s, in the middle of the Soviet war in Afghanistan, was playing in the background at De Afghanan restaurant in Fremont, California as I was conducting an interview with Asad, a 30-year old, newly arrived Afghan refugee in the United States who came through the Special Immigration Visa program after serving the US military as a translator for five years in the eastern Afghanistan. I met Asad for the first time in a Lyft ride where he picked me up from Abu Bakr Siddiq mosque in the city of Hayward, California where I was attending a young

Afghan-American man's fatiha (funeral ceremony). The man's sudden death was a mystery for almost everyone in the room, except for his family.

During the Lyft ride, Asad and I connected warmly over our shared nostalgia of home and longing for our elderly mothers who live in Kabul. We also found out that we grew up five blocks away from each other in the northern part of Kabul. Asad lost his oldest brother in a suicide bombing in Kabul in 2016 and his father went missing right after he was born during the Soviet military invasion of Afghanistan. He has one other brother who is in one of the refugee camps in Greece waiting for an unknown future for the past three years. He told me he could not bring his mom with him but hopes that one day he can bring his elderly mom to the US, as she now lives with his uncle's family in the outskirts of Kabul.

After the ten-minute Lyft ride, Asad dropped me off closer to downtown Hayward where I was meeting with a young Afghan-American female activist, Aryana, who lost her mom in the early 1990s' war in Afghanistan. Aryana, then, moved to the US after receiving refugee status together with her father and sister. She lost her father in the gang violence two years after settling in the city of Fremont, California.

Aryana and her sister grew up in the foster home system until they were adopted by an Afghan family when they both were teenagers. Aryana advocates for social justice and gender equality, and she fights to address and end domestic violence in Afghan-American families, which she believes is rampant across all generations among the Afghan diaspora communities in the Bay Area. She also carries out aid projects in Afghanistan. Once a year, she collects financial donations and warm winter clothes from Afghan-Americans all over the US and travels to Afghanistan where she volunteers with local and international NGOs that support Afghan war widows.

After Aryana and I met a couple of times, she said, "you should meet my cousin. I think he will be an interesting person to talk to for your research."[79] *Aryana introduced me to her 27-years old cousin, Ajmal through a text message. I met Ajmal in a café in the Castro District where he works part time while finishing up his degree in religious studies. Ajmal's very Castro style play on femininity and masculinity -- clean trimmed beard, dark kohl in his eyes, subtle rose lipstick and a silver chain hanging a pendent that said Allah in Arabic over his exposed hairy chest -- was a queerly warm welcome to me after conducting many interviews with hetero-masc Afghan men.*

When we sat down to talk, Ajmal asked, "what did my cousin tell you about me?"[80]

"Aryana said you would be a great person to talk to for my research," I responded.

Ajmal smiled, "she is right. I am not your typical Afghan," Then he added, "I take that back. I am not your typical Afghan unless you see me among Afghans in Fremont. I don't wear make-up and all this. I think you're probably the first Afghan who has seen me in my gay element. In Fremont, I am the nice, shy, religious Afghan guy who leads the prayers and people come to me if they have any religious questions."

Ajmal grew up in Afghanistan but after losing his family during a US strike on their village in Farah province in 2009, his uncle sponsored him to come to the US and live with them.

Ajmal remarked, "Every morning when I hop on the train to San Francisco, I leave my Muslim hat behind me and put on my gay hat. I work at Castro to be close to my

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[79] Interview.3
[80] Interview. 4

boyfriend and my queer friends who all live around here. I hope my uncle never sees me like this. He has done a lot for me and I want to respect him and not disappoint him."

Asad lived in the middle of war and two foreign military occupations in Afghanistan. Asad, Aryana and Ajmal lost family members in the war. Asad also aided the warring forces, the United States military in Afghanistan.

Was it the same forces that killed Ajmal's family in the airstrike, I wonder…

Asad is displaced out of his country of origin yet holds a green card here in the United States while his brother's asylum case is in limbo in Greece. His mom is displaced internally out of her home because she cannot live alone as a single female in the middle of war in Kabul.

Aryana, on the other hand, experienced displacement multiple times as she and her sister moved between foster homes after losing her dad in the US.

Ajmal crosses borders of Islam and queerness on daily basis as he gets on the train to Castro and back to Fremont while holding onto the only remains of family he is left with in the fog of war and displacement, his uncle. For Ajmal, living a double life becomes a queer and Muslim survival, a queer and Muslim borderline survival.

In other words, the borders of Asad's, Aryana's, and Ajmal's lives overlap in complex ways in the very zones of wars and displacements that I seek to complicate in this dissertation.

Queering Methodological Borders: De-colonial Ethnography

Asad, Aryana and Ajmal are among the countless storytellers and inspirations who have allowed me to queer the borders of nations, wars, and gendered subjectivities in this

dissertation. Asad, Aryana, Ajmal, and many others whose stories I tell on the pages of this dissertation are people who have befriended me and shared pieces of their lives with me. They generously invited me into their public and privates lives and allowed me to witness the multiple messy borders -- of honor and shame, of masculinity and femininity, of home and diaspora – all of which they cross on daily basis. They, in return, stepped into my life and became spectators of my border crossings as well. Our journeys together have allowed me to narrate and analyze the lived experiences of generations of Afghans at home and in the diaspora. At the same time, such narration has been mired in difficult dilemmas: how does one participate in retelling stories as part of academic knowledge making given the colonial roots and legacies of the very genre of ethnography? In this chapter, I engage postcolonial critiques of ethnography while also providing an account of the ways in which I have grappled with these critiques while queering borders of de-colonial ethnography and borders of self and other.

During my third year of graduate school when I started thinking about what I wanted to research and how I wanted to do it, I was not sure what methodological approach would do justice to the stories and lived experiences of my people, a people whose lives are lived between: war and peace, surveillance and Islamophobia, Afghan and American, and home and diaspora. I wanted to find a way to tell these stories and make them accessible to both academics and ordinary Afghans. Every Afghan of the diaspora holds a unique experience of border crossings, war, and exile. I did not want my methodology to erase these individual stories by inadvertently crafting a narrative of homogeneity. Above all, I wanted to avoid "othering" my people as I constantly reminded myself of Lila Abu-

Lughod's questioning, "are there ways to write about lives so as to constitute others as less other?"[81]

As I wrestled with these questions, it was in ethnography where I found my methodological home. Ethnography "moves beyond abstract concepts found in contemporary theory to focus on the everyday lives of real people caught up in complex macroprocesses."[82] It gives me the freedom to move between creative writing and academic analysis, my academic readers and public audience and my native languages of Dari and Pashto and English. Critical ethnography, as an epistemological approach, furthermore, allows me to narrate stories of people such as Ajmal, Aryana, and Asad, who are caught in complex times and places while situating my own fieldwork under my critical gaze. To go back to the challenge that Abu Lughod poses, I have pushed myself to create an ethnography that avoids "othering" and generalization by sewing "ethnographies of the particular." Rather than generalizing Afghan diaspora as a homogenous and unchanging people, I engage with particular individual stories such as that of Aryana, Asad and Ajmal and their individual complex experiences with borders, wars, and exile.

It is important to remember, however, that despite the diversity within ethnographic approaches and the very important contributions that ethnographic research has made to social science research, ethnography has also been used as a tool for production of knowledge on the colonized by the colonizers. In elaborating on the ways that power and knowledge constitute each other, Edward Said argues that imperialism and orientalism are

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[81] Abu-Lughod, L. (2008). Writing against culture. In *The cultural geography reader*. Routledge. p.473

[82] Chavez, L. R. (2012). *Shadowed lives: Undocumented immigrants in American society*. Cengage Learning. p.3.

two intertwined projects.[83] Even in postcolonial times, ethnography has provided epistemological and ontological access and power to colonizers and imperialists in theorization of the "Other" and their lives and beings. [84] Evans-Pritchard notes the following in relation to the colonial administrators and missionaries engaging in ethnography:

> Between the heyday of the moral philosophers and the earliest anthropological writings in the strict sense, between, that is, the middle of the eighteenth century and the middle of the nineteenth century, knowledge of primitive peoples and of the peoples of the Far East was generally increased. European colonization of America had been widely expanded, British rule had been established in India, and Australia, New Zealand and, South Africa had been settled by European emigrants. The character of ethnographic description of the peoples of these regions began to change from travelers' tales to detailed studies by missionaries and administrators who not only had better opportunities to observe, but were also men of greater culture than the gentlemen of fortune of earlier times.[85]

Colonial ethnography works to create categories based on power relations and arrange human life across racial, gender, nationality and class lines. It is the representation

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[83] Said, E. W. (1979). *Orientalism*. Vintage.

[84] Gregory, D. (2004). *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq* (pp. 1-15). Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub; Mignolo, W. D. (2007). Introduction: Coloniality of power and de-colonial thinking. *Cultural Studies*, *21*(2-3), 155-167.

[85] Evans-Pritchard, E. (1951). Social Anthropology. London: Cohen and West. p.67. See also Asad, T. (1994). Ethnographic representation, statistics and modern power. *Social Research*, 55-88.

of the "Other" for the understanding, consumption and domination by the West,[86] while also giving legitimacy to colonization and its violence on the people the texts are written about.[87] Production of knowledge on colonized populations allowed the colonizers to sustain their power and expand their reach from India to Australia and beyond. From military anthropologists to bible scholars, travel writers and lawyers, the West used ethnography to create the "primitive Other" subjects in need of civilization.[88] For instance, one of the very first writings on current day Afghanistan in 1854 appeared in the form of military memoir and correspondence in the British military writings. In a two-volume collection, Sir William Nott, the Commander of the Army of Kandahar wrote about the people, culture and tribes of the region.[89] Some of these 19th century British writings resurfaced in the post invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and because of these writings, "in British imaginations, Afghans tend to remain warlike, medieval, murderous and unruly."[90] Neither the colonization nor the colonial approach to research on the "primitive people" of Africa and Asia ended as Fanon says "when the last white policeman left and the last European flag came down."[91] The violence of colonization through laws, social systems,

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[86] James, M. (2016). Diaspora as an ethnographic method: Decolonial reflections on researching urban multi-culture in outer East London. Young, 24(3), 222-237.
[87] Gonzalez, M. C. (2003). An ethics for postcolonial ethnography. Expressions of ethnography: Novel approaches to qualitative methods, 77-86.
[88] Said, E. W. (1989). Representing the colonized: Anthropology's interlocutors. *Critical inquiry*, *15*(2), 205-225. See also; Asad, T. (1994). Ethnographic representation, statistics and modern power. *Social Research*, 55-88.
[89] Nott, W. (1854). *Memoirs and Correspondence of Major-General Sir William Nott* (Vol. 2). Hurst and Blackett. For more British colonial travel and ethnographic writings on Afghanistan see; Sale, L. F. W. (1969). *The first Afghan war*. Archon Books; Kaye, J. W. (1856). *The life and correspondence of Major-General Sir John Malcolm, GCB: late envoy to Persia, and governor of Bombay* (Vol. 2).
[90] Fowler, C. (2007). *Chasing tales: travel writing, journalism and the history of British ideas about Afghanistan* (Vol. 12). Rodopi.p.5
[91] Fanon, F. (1970). Black skin, white masks (p. 120). London: Paladin.

military invasions and production of knowledge continues to shape everyday lives of colonized populations to this day.

To break away from ethnographies that "serve the interests of colonialist agency,"[92] and ethnographies that produce cultural imperialism, indigenous, Third World and scholars of color have introduced alternative ethnographies that are queer, feminist and decolonial.[93] De-colonial ethnography is one of the approaches introduced by these scholars, which I utilize in my fieldwork and dissertation writing. What is de-colonial ethnography and what does it accomplish? Emma Pérez explains de-colonial ethnography as undoing the constructions of colonizing ontologies and epistemologies.[94] It introduces the voices of those who have been historically silenced in the mainstream and it foregrounds the struggles of the colonized while engaging with the "poetics of human relations."[95] De-colonial ethnography centers the work of black, brown, queer, trans, women and historically oppressed people. As a strategy on the ground, de-colonizing ethnography engages with multiple languages and interpretations, indigenous ways of storytelling and

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[92] Gonzalez, M. C. (2003). An ethics for postcolonial ethnography. *Expressions of ethnography: Novel approaches to qualitative methods*, p.82.

[93] See; Smith, L. T. (2013). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. Zed Books Ltd; Benson, K., & Nagar, R. (2006). Collaboration as resistance? Reconsidering the processes, products, and possibilities of feminist oral history and ethnography. *Gender, Place & Culture*, *13*(5), 581-592; Gonzalez, M. C. (2003). An ethics for postcolonial ethnography. *Expressions of ethnography: Novel approaches to qualitative methods*, 77-86; Abu-Lughod, L. (1990). Can there be a feminist ethnography? *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory*, *5*(1), 7-27.

[94] Pérez, E. (1999). The decolonial imaginary: Writing Chicanas into history. Indiana University Press.

[95] James, M. (2016). Diaspora as an ethnographic method: Decolonial reflections on researching urban multi-culture in outer East London. Young, 24(3), 222-237.

narratives and doing poetry and art. As Lisa Flores puts it "one important practice of de-colonization is replacing silence with voice."[96]

My methodology in this dissertation is crucially informed by these aforementioned discussions of decolonial ethnography. At the same time, however, it is shaped by the very borders I study and complicate – including the hyphenated border between "de" and "colonial." This is the border of possibility and impossibility. There are times that I am able to walk away from the colonial modes of knowledge production, yet, there are times that I am working within those modes myself. My methodology is also informed by the ongoing foreign military invasion of Afghanistan, displacement of millions of Afghans, and the colonial systems of knowledge production that have accompanied these and that I have become part of willingly or unwillingly.

I went to the field confident that I would undo the construction of colonial knowledge produced on Afghans since the 19th century British colonialism that stepped in current day Afghanistan.

I assumed that all in the Afghan diaspora are victims of state surveillance and violence, until I met an Afghan-American police officer patrolling the Fremont streets.

I assumed they all are against the Muslim Ban and they are anti-war in Afghanistan

Until I met Omar Qudrat

[96] Flores, L. A. (2000). Reclaiming the "other": Toward a Chicana feminist critical perspective. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *24*(5). p.693

Omar Qudrat is an Afghan-American Muslim Republican who was running for a seat in Congress. Qudrat strongly supported the Muslim Ban and served in the US military in Afghanistan.

As I observed these complex contradictions, I asked myself:

How do I

find home

even within

my own body

when

all of me

is colonized?

The process and act of questioning and imagining the possibilities and impossibilities of de-colonization which Emma Pérez calls "de-colonial imaginary"[97] was the beginning of de-colonial ethnography for me. It made me think about the intimate borders Afghan diaspora crosses; colonizer and colonized, Afghan and American, suspect and police officer. It made me reflect on the languages I was/not using with my interlocutors. Richa Nagar emphasizes the question of language and the field researchers' "in/ability to talk across worlds."[98] I talked across generations of Afghan diaspora. I was

[97] Pérez, E. (2003). Queering the borderlands: The challenges of excavating the invisible and unheard. *Frontiers: a journal of women studies*, *24*(2/3), 122-131.
[98] Nagar, R. (2002). Footloose researchers, 'traveling' theories, and the politics of transnational feminist praxis. *Gender, place and culture: A journal of Feminist Geography*, *9*(2), p.179.

able to talk to those who spoke only English, those who spoke only Dari, those who spoke only Pashto. I talked to those individuals who spoke through silence and body language. During one of the focus group discussions, I noticed that one of the participants who fully understood English but preferred to speak in Dari contributed very effectively and changed the dynamic of the focus group very positively. There was a richer discussion on language and the words that do not translate, the barriers that they create. Crossing language borders became my daily routine and one of immediate bonding between my interlocutors and me.

Questions of language in the making of stories and knowledge regularly came up during my time in Fremont and Virginia. For instance, in one conversation with Ajmal, we noted, "why were we speaking in English the entire time while switching to Dari or Pashto when a joke came up?" Why did the Dari and Pashto parts in the conversation feel like home? During my first couple of life history interviews, I caught myself using academic jargon that did not make any sense to my interlocutors, which immediately created a power relation between us. Nagar's question on language is also on how to "eliminate the theoretical language"[99] that makes the research inaccessible for the same people whose stories we collect. I eliminated the academic jargon and the theoretical framework that created barriers for my interlocutors during our conversations. As a brown person trained in a white academia I questioned if I had become a colonizer? I started my PhD program as an international student from Afghanistan and gradually became a part of the Afghan diaspora; had I crossed the border between colonized and the colonizer during this process, I asked?

[99] Ibid. p.182.

My thinking and questioning about these borders did not end when I left the field. It continued as I transcribed my recordings, went back to my interlocutors to clarify some points, re-read my field notes, visited my field sites not as a researcher but a friend and attended their weddings, funerals, parties and graduations. I continue to ask these questions even as I am writing these sentences. This ongoing questioning has led me to yet another border--the methodological border defined by the hyphen between de and colonial: de-colonial. Border thinking is a "decolonial project" as Walter Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova argue.[100] De-colonizing implies the possibilities and impossibilities of undoing. The hyphenated border in the word de-colonial invites a conversation around possibilities and impossibilities of a de-colonial ethnography. Can I find home even within my own body when all of me is colonized? I repeat this questioning again as it lingers repeatedly in my head every time I think of de-coloniality. The hyphenated border between de-colonial ethnography refers to ethnographic research that is informed by both colonial and postcolonial approaches and experiences. It is the gray zone between the colonial and decolonial attempts. It implies a possibility that is also an impossibility. It captures people who are still living under colonial violence, laws, social systems and foreign military invasions. Thus, Edward Said's argument that "the experience of being colonized…signified a great deal to the regions and peoples of the world whose experiences as dependents, subalterns and subjects of the West did not end" becomes an ongoing presence in the ways that I come to the idea and practice of decolonial ethnography. The experiences of Afghans both at home and in the diaspora continue to be

[100] Mignolo, W. D., & Tlostanova, M. V. (2006). Theorizing from the borders: shifting to geo- and body-politics of knowledge. *European Journal of Social Theory*, *9*(2), 205-221.

those of dependents and subaltern subjects. They live under wars both at home and in the diaspora. Diasporic Afghans in the US who constitute my research subjects not only form a war diaspora; they also define a diaspora that lives in a country that, in the words of one of the participants in this research, "has invaded their homeland."[101]

Even as many elements in my methodological approach are inspired and informed by de-colonial ethnography, then, it would be naïve to assume that this study can fully disentangle itself from colonial tools and imaginations that have shaped knowledge-power nexus in dominant academia. To begin with, this research is informed by my own identities as a queer Muslim border-crosser, born and raised during two military occupations and now a diasporic subject. I am partly colonized and partly free. I am free because I don't live in the fear of being blown up in a suicide bombing like my siblings and mother do back home in Kabul. I carry this privileged freedom as a burden and guilt on my soul every time I hear their shaky voices on the other side of the phone telling me about surviving another suicide attack or roadside bomb. This freedom -- or should I say the "gift of freedom"[102] -- chokes me like the ashes and chemicals of Mother of All Bombs dropped by the US in Nangarhar province. I am colonized because my soul still lingers in occupied Kabul, in my father's garden, in the veins of the grapevines he planted for me seven years ago before I left Kabul, the last time I saw him. I am colonized because I am an asylee, a caged bird with my wings clipped, my right to travel contained and denied to even attend my father's funeral. I am free because in my dreams I travel to his grave and find myself

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[101] Interview. 15 with Safi.
[102] Nguyen, M. T. (2012). *The gift of freedom: War, debt, and other refugee passages*. Duke University Press.

weeping and promising him that I will water his grapevines now that he is gone. I wake up, sing songs of freedom and dance on the Gay Pride parade floats like I am free, a liberated queer as I am told. In fact, even as I write these words, I no longer know what I mean by partly colonized and partly free; so I turn to Maya Angelou's *Caged Bird*:

> A free bird leaps
> on the back of the wind
> and floats downstream
> till the current ends
> and dips his wing
> in the orange sun rays
> and dares to claim the sky.
>
> But a bird that stalks
> down his narrow cage
> can seldom see through
> his bars of rage
> his wings are clipped and
> his feet are tied
> so he opens his throat to sing.
>
> The caged bird sings
> with a fearful trill
> of things unknown
> but longed for still
> and his tune is heard
> on the distant hill
> for the caged bird
> sings of freedom.
>
> The free bird thinks of another breeze
> and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees
> and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright lawn
> and he names the sky his own.
>
> But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
> his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
> his wings are clipped and his feet are tied
> so he opens his throat to sing.
>
> The caged bird sings
> with a fearful trill

of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.[103]

The participants who enabled this research are a diaspora that lives on a land invaded by European colonizers. In carrying out a significant part of this work in my own native languages and the ancestral languages of my research participants, Dari and Pashto, I begin imagining a decolonial ethnography. Yet, in translating those words back into English, I resort to a tongue in which neither I, nor many of this study's participants, dream. It is not a language that any of our ancestors spoke. With the Afghan diaspora that was born and raised here in the US, "we spoke an orphan language."[104] Some of them knew Dari and/or Pashto but only spoke it when they couldn't express themselves in English or find the right word. My thick accent in English gave it away that I was not born and raised here. It made the older Afghans comfortable right away. They would tell me that they wish their kids spoke Dari and Pashto like I did. Then they would fault themselves for not speaking to them in Dari and Pashto when they were younger due to their own fear that the children would not assimilate and, hence, be subject to discrimination in a new country and

[103] Angelou, M. (1983). Caged bird. *Shaker, why don't you sing*.

[104] Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *How to tame a wild tongue*. p.38

culture. For instance, Shah Mahmood, a 63-years old Afghan man who used to be a Dari lecturer in the Department of Languages and Literature at Kabul University mourned the loss of communication between him, his wife and their children:

> we got so busy when we escaped to the US that we did not have time to see our kids. We worked two jobs and we saw them on the weekends if we got lucky. We encouraged them to speak in English so that they wouldn't become us, taxi drivers and house cleaners. Thirty years later, my wife and I don't even know our kids anymore. Our English is broken and their Dari is broken. We try to talk sometimes but very brief and nothing meaningful.

Shah Mahmood and his wife have come up with what Gloria Anzaldúa calls a "border tongue," a hybrid of English and Dari that is rooted in the violence of border crossings, loss and exile. Over the course of my fieldwork in Fremont, I met up with Shah Mahmood a few times. He treated me like his son and called me often to see how I was doing. He was longing to speak the language he taught in Kabul when he was young. During one of our meetings, he brought me a few books on the war and history of Afghanistan that were written in Dari. He said he bought the books many years ago hoping that his kids would read them one day but now he was ready to part with them. As I recall these moments with Shah Mahmood, I find myself drifting toward the words of Ray Gwyn Smith:[105]

Who is to say that robbing a people of

[105] Gloria Anzaldúa in explaining the violence of loss of language and the struggles of Chicanos quotes Ray Gwyn Smith's poem that very well the conversation on diaspora, language and loss. Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *How to tame a wild tongue* (pp. 2947-2955). na. p.34

its language is less violent than war?

The concepts and labels I use, queer, trans, LGBTQIA, gender, sexuality, surveillance and masculinities are all liberal concepts that do not translate fully in my own native languages. These labels at times become the tools to isolate and create categories of "civilized and "uncivilized," "educated" and "uneducated" " us" and "Others." My de-colonial moment was when I let go of these labels and carried my conversations on these subjects without using them. With some of the older Afghans, I knew that using labels like gay and lesbian would immediately stop the conversation. Instead, I started with the word "dosti," friendship. Dosti bacha ba bacha and dukhtar ba dukhtar, friendship of a guy with a guy and girl with a girl. The conversations then moved to encompass love, intimacies, desires and sex naturally as some of them opened up talking about the existence of such dosti that did not carry any labels - "it was there and everyone knew about it and it was just not labelled like people do it in the US."[106] However, I ended up using these labels throughout my dissertation because without these labels I am not sure how to make my dissertation intelligible to English speakers who are not part of the Afghan diaspora and culture.

Last, I try to create theories and concepts, knowledge and representations about a people's loss of home, a mother's grief over loss of her children to a culture and language she does not understand, a woman's multiple versions of herself and a queer body's unknown and nameless death. I do this to make these experiences and lives intelligible to

[106] Focus group discussion 10.

some who are far removed from any of these experiences. Therefore, my reconceptualization of de-colonial ethnography encompasses these complicated social interactions, border-crossings, power relations and realities.

Retelling Wars, Loves, and Histories in a Decolonial Framework

Ethnography allowed me to understand "the social conditions and experiences which play[ed] a role in constituting subjectivities and identities."[107] For example, the four waves of displacement that I discuss in chapter one is one of the social conditions that play a key role in Afghan diaspora's understanding of home. When the first wave of Afghans came to the US, "their stay here meant to be temporary."[108] There was hope that the war in Afghanistan would end and they would return. Today after four decades of war and displacements, that hope is troubled. Afghans who have come to the US in the recent years find themselves alienated by the long-established Afghan diaspora. Some of these Afghans are translators who helped the US military in Afghanistan and now they are seen with suspicious eyes by the Afghan diaspora that are critical of the invasion.

Conducting ethnographic research helped me to observe the everyday lives and experiences of Afghan diaspora living in California and Washington D.C, Maryland and Virginia and engage in multiple meanings, understandings and complexities that embody the diasporic experience while also being reflective, accountable, responsible and aware of my positionality as a researcher. I went back to my own Afghan communities after being

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[107] McRobbie, A., & Mcrobbie, A. (2003). *Postmodernism and popular culture*. Routledge. p.188
[108] Saed, Z., & Muradi, S. (Eds.). (2010). *One Story, Thirty Stories: An Anthology of Contemporary Afghan American Literature*. University of Arkansas Press. p.xvi.

isolated from them for many years. During this isolation, I came out. I lived and experienced a queer life with its losses and gains. I attended academia, an elite institution that gave me the language, concepts, and theories not only to accept myself but also go back and study my own people. I had to learn to pause and reflect on all these privileges when I came across Afghans who did not benefit from the privileges of access to education in an elite institution.

For me, de-colonial ethnography is crossing the borders of ethnography and feminist auto-ethnography, which entails a poetic sense of reflection into my own life and experiences in every chapter, some apparent, some not so apparent. It is the troubling of self-other border and exposure of my vulnerabilities for my own critical gaze and the gaze of others. De-colonial ethnography, then, is acknowledging and meditating on forms of power and privilege,[109] and my own vulnerabilities and insecurities. I have the power over my exposure and I can control, to some extent what I disclose about myself. I also have agency over holding my secrets. My interlocutors had this power when we interacted and talked, but now the power to write their stories lies in my hand.

This study constitutes the first ethnographic research on Afghan-American diaspora that moves beyond California.[110] Neglected far too long in academic research, Afghan diaspora is of crucial importance for anyone interested in questions of migrations, wars,

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[109] Roman, L., & Apple, M. W. (1990). Is naturalism a move away from positivism? Materialist and feminist approaches to subjectivity in ethnographic research. *Qualitative inquiry in education: The continuing debate*, 38-73.

[110] Since California is known for its Afghan diaspora, the research studies on Afghan-Americans have focused mainly on Afghans in California. For example, see; Smith, V. J. (2009). Ethical and effective ethnographic research methods: a case study with afghan refugees in California. *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics*, *4*(3), 59-72;

borders, gender, and sexuality. To better prepare myself for my fieldwork, and get to know the Afghan diaspora in both regions, I attended the Afghan-American Conference in 2017 in Washington D.C, which not only connected me to the community but also allowed me to come back to it and hold workshops, panels and conversations on issues related to my research and important to the community, including masculinities, surveillance and queer and trans identities.

I conducted a year-long qualitative research including de-colonial ethnography, sixty life history interviews and twelve focus group discussions with Afghan diaspora in California, Washington D.C, Maryland and Virginia. The participants were between the ages of 20-68-years old who identified as Afghan-American. The wider age range allowed me to collect data on the younger generation of Afghans who were born and raised here, as well as those older adults who have first-hand memories of Afghanistan. Since the Afghan migration to the US started in late 70s, the adults who are over 40 are the first-generation Afghan- Americans and have memories of Afghanistan and the war. Some of them have come to the US more recently. Bearing in mind the ethnic diversity of Afghans, I ensured to recruit participants who identify as Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara and Uzbek. My research also included people who identified as religious, culturally Muslim, ex-Muslim, queer and trans. I lived in Hayward, California and Springfield, Virginia among Afghan diaspora communities while conducting my fieldwork.

I recruited the participants for this study through my social networks (online and offline), living in the field; Fremont, CA and Springfield, VA and Afghan-American organizations. Participants contacted me via email and cell phone. When I first arrived in

the field, I spent time in public spaces where Afghans hang out. I visited parks, mosques and markets. I went to the local businesses and shops owned by Afghans and I requested them to put my fliers up on their bulletin board. This strategy introduced me to Afghans who owned restaurants, grocery stores, gas stations and other small businesses. These Afghans are known in the community and they are often times well respected and trusted. I was lucky to find them and they helped me graciously during this process. The recruitment also happened through snowballing effect. Some of the participants responded to my email invites and social media postings. I interviewed them and they introduced me to their friends, family members and close circles. This proved to be highly effective in a community where the individuals are deeply connected with one another and trust is built through kinship, friends and families.

Afghan diaspora is a community that has been under continuous state surveillance since 11 September 2001. Years of state-sponsored surveillance on this community and the current political climate impacting Muslim Americans have made Afghans suspicious of researchers. I am not only aware of these painful realities but I also live them. Therefore, I understood their suspicion, their mistrust in authority and researchers, and sympathized with them. Valerie J Smith, who has conducted an in-depth qualitative research including ethnography, interviews and focus groups with the Afghan diaspora in Fremont, CA states that Afghans do not easily trust people.[111] They have every reason not to trust bearing in mind the current political climate, as one of my interlocutors said, "margazeeda aina az

[111] Smith, V. J. (2009). Ethical and effective ethnographic research methods: a case study with afghan refugees in California. *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics*, *4*(3), 59-72.

raispan maitarsa." The one who has been stung by a snake is scared of even rope. To gain trust, a researcher has to build relationship with the community leaders and respected individuals in the community. To this end, I volunteered with the Afghan Coalition in Fremont, established contacts with the scholars in the community and other well-respected and networked individuals in California, Washington D.C, Maryland and Virginia.

I lived among Afghan communities, and attended gatherings and mosques regularly. From attending community events, such as poetry night and funerals to weddings, I become part of the community in a short period of time. When I moved to Fremont, California to start my fieldwork and live among Afghans, I went with the assumption that I will right away find a community, be welcomed and connect with Afghans from where I left in 2012 when I left Afghanistan. It was a delusion that ended with the first day I arrived in the field. As an Afghan myself, I believed it would be easy to establish trust and start my work right away. However, I was not aware of how much Afghan diasporas in these concentrated communities have been affected by regimes of security and surveillance that has shaken their sense of trust.

With the increased state sponsored surveillance on the Muslim communities, particularly Afghans diasporic communities have become cautious and suspicious when a newcomer joins their community and appears in social gatherings, participates in community activities, and lives in the neighborhood. As my ethical and moral responsibility, I let the community know I was a researcher and that I was attending the events and gatherings as part of my research. This researcher identity in many ways distanced me initially from the community. I also went to the field with a sense of

entitlement: “This is my community and they should be happy that finally one of their own kind is researching and writing about them.” This sort of attitude which is ingrained in many researchers’ minds going to the field created the initial barriers between the community and me. Part of this was also in my attempt to down play my other identities and present myself as researcher. I realized I was doing interviews but they were quite rigid and structured in their forms and discussions that felt empty. I realized people were giving me answers that they assumed I wanted to hear.

The more time I spent in the field and the more people connected with me based on my identities other than that of researcher, the conversations became more organic, vulnerable and real. I utilized my life experiences, identities and my positionality to more sensitively navigate the interviews and conversations, with the aim of cultivating a respectful and attentive research atmosphere. I approached each person I met in the field as an individual with a unique experience and connected with them at different levels, honoring their experiences, while knowing that each person has a different way of responding to questions and processing the emotions that may accompany discussing my research topics. I was also fully aware that I was a researcher who is familiar with the cultural, historical, social and political phenomena impacting Afghans in the US so I remained attentive to their feelings, vulnerabilities, respect and safety throughout my research study. The shared sense of pain, vulnerability, displacement and (in)security connected me with the Afghan community across different generations. I officiated a queer Afghan wedding, led the weekly discussions with the elderly Afghan women in Freemont on gender, sexuality and war and made friendships that have become my sense of

community away from home and strength in this writing process. While introducing myself as a researcher, I would tell the people I met and those who participated in this research that I was conducting research on gender and sexuality among Afghans in the diaspora.

Creating Stories with Ethnographic Methods

(a) Life Histories

I conducted sixty interviews in the form of life history accounts to supplement my ethnographic work. Why do I call it life history accounts? They entailed multiple rounds of conversations with the same people where they shared their lived experiences of war, displacement, home, gender, sexuality and surveillance. During our one on one conversations, I let the participants lead the conversation and I listened. I occasionally asked questions from what they were sharing with me. Afghans come with a strong background of oral history.[112] Through stories and narrations generations would connect and pass down knowledge and history. I remember we would sit around sandali, the traditional form of Afghan heating similar to Japanese Kotatso, during cold and dark winter nights. Until the dim and shaky lantern burned its last drops of oil, my oldest sister would tell us stories of Kabul before the war started. She would tell us how there was no curfew and they would go to theaters to watch the latest Bollywood movies. The walnut trees on both sides of the road that stretched from Kabul to our village in Shamali stood tall and

[112] For oral history and storytelling in Afghanistan see; Hyman, A. (2002). Nationalism in Afghanistan. International Journal of Middle East Studies, 34(2), 299-315; Mills, M. A. (1991). Rhetorics and politics in Afghan traditional storytelling (No. 12). University of Pennsylvania Press.

green until the Russians burnt them down fearing the Mujahideen would carry out ambush-style attacks on them. We would listen to these stories like sacred rituals as they transported us away from the present to a past we never lived.

In doing the life history accounts with the Afghan diaspora, I did what I used to do sitting around sandali. I listened. I asked questions only if I needed them to elaborate more. These life history accounts informed me how Afghan diaspora in the United States define, conceptualize, live and perform their gender and sexual identities and how their memories, experiences and trauma of war shape those understandings and meanings. The questions that led this research were, how do the diasporic experiences of war and displacement shape understandings and conduct of gender and sexualities in re-terretorial lands and how do the American born and raised Afghans negotiate, claim and contest their gender and sexual identities? The life history accounts complemented the participant observations I conducted. At times, these one-on-one conversations turned into healing moments, coming outs, sharing of secrets and pain and going down the memory lane of times and places that we shared and are nostalgic about. However, at times these moments became opportunities for some of my participants to express their homophobia.

I met Zulaikha at a gathering who expressed interest in my research and we set up a time for the next day to meet. A couple of hours into our conversation, we were talking about homelessness in San Francisco and Zulaikha started sobbing. It was very sudden and I was not prepared for it. She said she got homeless a couple of months ago when her roommate found out she was lesbian. Zulaikha moved to the US in the summer of 2010 on her own to study at one of the universities in California. In the process she came out as lesbian but kept it from her family back home and the Afghan community in the Bay Area.

She said, " I was kissing my girlfriend goodbye outside this restaurant and all a sudden my roommate who is this Afghan man saw us. I got very scared but I was hoping he did not see us. When I got home, he was waiting at the door and called me a whore and a disease. I tried to explain it to him but he said he wouldn't listen. He moved to the US a few months ago with his wife and now they have a newborn baby. I stayed up all night worried and I did not know what to do. In the morning, I packed and left. The lease was under my name but I did not want to kick them out since they were new in the country. Where would they go with their newborn?"[113]

Zulaikha and I made plans to meet again and I hopped on the train to Hayward to meet Sediq, one of my other research participants. Sediq was introduced to me through one of the community leaders. Sediq moved to the US a few months ago through the SIV program. He sounded nostalgic about home and he was happy to talk to someone who knew exactly where he lived and worked in Kabul. We had been to the same elementary school in Kabul and grew up in the same neighborhood in the west side of the city. More than anything, longing for lamb kabob sold on the streets of Kabul connected us and Sediq invited me to meet his family and make lamb kabob with him on the new grill he just bought. Towards the end of our conversation, I asked him what has shocked him the most during his time in the US. He said, "oh this homosexuality disease. Even some Afghans have it. My wife and I went through a rough start here. We were sharing this apartment with this one Afghan woman. She seemed very nice and friendly. One night I was driving and I saw her kissing another woman. She was lesbian. An Afghan girl and Muslim,

[113] Interview.16

lesbian. Can you believe that? I went home and told my wife and we both were so worried hoping she hadn't given us or our daughter any diseases. Thankfully, she moved out the next day. We never saw her again."[114] Zulaikha and Sediq's life history accounts allowed me to see the complex webs of identities and experiences Afghans live in. If it was an interview, I would have not been able to find this intimate yet troubling connection between Zulaikha. The flowing and engaging nature of life history made possible for me to know both Sediq and Zulaikha more and learn about their beliefs and values, likes and dislikes, sexuality and homophobia.

(b) Focus Group Discussions

Frances Montell, analyzing the importance of focus groups in feminist studies, argues "the interaction among participants in group interviews provides a valuable resource for studying issues of gender and sexuality. In addition, focus groups can be both consciousness-raising and empowering for the research subjects and for the researcher herself, and allow for a more egalitarian and less exploitative dynamic than other methods"[115] I conducted 12 focus group discussions among Afghan diaspora in California, Washington D.C, Maryland and Virginia. These group discussions brought in people of all genders, ethnicities, ages (20-68) and education backgrounds. Afghans historically have a deeper and culturally close relationship with storytelling and discussions.[116] Among

[114] Interview.17
[115] Montell, F. (1999). Focus group interviews: A new feminist method. *NWSA journal*, p.44.
[116] Saed, Z., & Muradi, S. (Eds.). (2010). *One Story, Thirty Stories: An Anthology of Contemporary Afghan American Literature*. University of Arkansas Press.

Pashtoons, for instance, jergas or group conversations, are part of the everyday lives in Afghanistan and in diasporas.

For these collective discussions, we gathered for afternoon tea or homemade dinners, discussed borders, war, displacement, gender and sexuality. Some of these discussions took place at mosques, coffee shops or people's houses. These conversations brought out deeper conversations on sensitive and complex issues that were usually not discussed during one-on-one conversations. Focus groups are also high in external validity since the conversation in focus groups "mirror the kinds of conversations participants might have in their daily lives."[117] Focus groups are culturally common and effective ways of discussion among Afghans, which was at times preferred than one-on-one interviews, particularly by older Afghans who had participated in jirgas before. My research is centered around people's everyday experiences, memories and stories. For this purpose, focus groups "elicit stories and in-depth explanations of people's thoughts and experiences."[118] During these collective conversations, some participants used their native languages of Dari and Pashto to express themselves. Two of these focus groups discussions were held with elderly in Dari and Pashto.

The focus group with the elderly Afghan women was where the stories of "home" here and "home" there were crafted through nostalgic recollections of leaving, border crossings, wars and struggles in the diaspora. The group gets together twice a week in the afternoon to eat, make crafts, check on one another and avoid the loneliness in their lives.

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[117] Hollander, J. A. (2004). The social contexts of focus groups. *Journal of contemporary ethnography*, *33*(5), p.607
[118] Ibid.

Every single of the 13 women who were in the room carried a wealth of knowledge about the history of Afghanistan, the decades of war and ways to survive in exile. One moment humor, another, in tears, they told me how they have packed and left their homes in Afghanistan in the middle of the night, crossed borders into Pakistan and some Iran, making it to Germany and eventually to the US.

I facilitated the focus group discussions while the participants took the lead on the conversation. I asked questions only to clarify. I spoke when I noticed some of the participants were monopolizing the conversation. I encouraged those who were relatively quieter to share their thoughts. The conversations flowed organically, particularly in the groups that were relatively younger.

(c) Feminist Autoethnography:

Autoethnography is a qualitative study that combines ethnography with autobiography.[119] It is a form of narrative that situates self in social context.[120] It is a way to be attentive to the researcher's positionality- power, privileges, vulnerabilities and experiences. As a method of inquiry, autoethnography has been adopted by many fields of study including sociology, geography and even psychology. However, political science has yet to fully embrace this process of knowledge production. Carolyn Ellis asserts that "the political scientists are still holding out."[121] Autoethnography serves as a link between the personal and socio-political matters. As a methodology, it provides a venue for lived-

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[119] Pace, S. (2012). Writing the self into research using grounded theory analytic strategies in autoethnography.
[120] Reed-Danahay, D. (1997). *Auto/ethnography*. New York: Berg.
[121] Ellis, C. (2004). *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*. Rowman Altamira.p.13

experiences to give meaning and purpose to abstract concepts and theories. I employ this methodology in order to move between time, borders and space and connect the personal with the political and social. This reflexive method of inquiry allows me to situate myself as the subject of my own study.[122] Through reflection of self and its experiences, autoethnography weaves the individual with the system and structures with the hope of shedding a closer light to the complex webs of being, living and politicizing the lived-experiences in geographies with history and legacy of colonialism, interventions, displacements and war. Haneen Ghabra calls this connecting self with the broader structures "speaking back to the system."[123] Additionally, feminist autoethnography is also employed in my work and allows for "the explicit reflection on one's personal experience to break outside the circle of conventional social science and confront, court and coax that aching pain or haunting memory that one does not understand about one's experience."[124] My dissertation not only reflects on haunting memories but also theorizes such moments within the feminist and queer paradigm.

Autoethnography exposes my vulnerabilities which is often discouraged in academia.[125] At the same time, I am aware that my use of autoethnography might lead some to argue that this approach situates self at the center of research, and thereby becomes a

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[122] Maréchal, G. (2010). Autoethnography In AJ Mills.
[123] Ghabra, H. (2015). Disrupting Privileged and Oppressed Spaces: Reflecting Ethically on my Arabness through Feminist Autoethnography. *Kaleidoscope: A Graduate Journal of Qualitative Communication Research*, *14*(1). p.3
[124] Allen, K. R., & Piercy, F. P. (2005). Feminist autoethnography. *Research methods in family therapy*, *2*, p.158.
[125] McIvor, Onowa (2010). I Am My Subject: Blending Indigenous Research Methodology and Autoethnography Through Integrity-based, Spirit-based Research. Canadian Journal of Native Education, 33(1), 137-155.

hindrance to research objectivity. Indeed, my purpose in this dissertation is to move away from ethnography that overemphasizes objectivity, a practice where "cultures and people were reinvented and redefined to fit inside the biased reclassification and philosophical systems of the objective researcher."[126] Feminist ethnographers have long argued that it is impossible for an ethnographer to completely remove themselves of the research they are conducting. The researcher and the participants are both part of a research and they define, challenge and mold one another in complicated ways. Therefore, I "embrace my vulnerability with a purpose."[127] In the naked exposure of my lived experiences of war, diasporic journeys and queerness in three different countries, I intend to offer alternative ways to observe subjectivity while entangling it with my own positionality as a researcher. I expose my lived-experiences and make my vulnerabilities accessible for "judgment and evaluation."[128] As Onowa McIvor emphasizes, autoethnography is "an open invitation to judgment and scrutiny. One hopes that through sharing some of one's intimate details, it also opens possibilities of compassion, kindness and greater levels of understanding."[129] My hope, here, is to generate further knowledge on gender and sexuality of Afghans in the diaspora. My narratives and reflections engage with social and political systems and structures while troubling the subjective-objective divide.

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[126] Madison, D. S. (2011). Critical ethnography: Method, ethics, and performance. Sage publications.p.5
[127] Jones, S. H. (2016). Autoethnography and queer theory: Making possibilities. In *Qualitative inquiry and human rights*.Routledge.p.136
[128] McIvor, Onowa (2010). I Am My Subject: Blending Indigenous Research Methodology and Autoethnography Through Integrity-based, Spirit-based Research. Canadian Journal of Native Education, 33(1).p139
[129] Ibid.p.143

The fact that I assume it is necessary for me to provide a justification for my methodology and an explanation on how self-ethnography can be a mode of inquiry in political science should tell a lot about marginalization of autoethnography in academic research. On marginalization of autoethnography and my own identities that inform my approach to research, I borrow knowledge from Allison Upshaw, an African American, female artist- scholar of autoethnography; "the challenge with using methods that are themselves marginalized and nominally accepted when you are a marginalized group, is that it is even more difficult to be considered a serious scholar…I have always lived in liminal spaces between acceptances and rejection. The fact that I am drawn to methods that will reinforce that status, while helping others to understand it, is not surprising nor is it something I fear."[130]

Queering Methodological Borders

Going to the field, my intention was to conduct a queer ethnography- engaging with queer theory while also examining queerness in heteronormative, heterosexual and homophobic spaces. My intention was to bring my many identities and experiences including queer into the field. On multiplicity of identities and public spaces, Audre Lorde says, " as a Black lesbian feminist comfortable with the many different ingredients of my identity, and a woman committed to racial and sexual freedom from oppression, I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this

[130] Upshaw, A. (2017). My Body Knows Things: This Black Woman's Storied Theory in Performative Autoethnography. In *Doing Autoethnography*. Brill Sense. p.61

as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self."[131] Being an out queer and activist in the Muslim communities in the Twin Cities for many years now, my assumption was that it would be easy to go back to my own people, Afghans, and present my whole being without hiding one or another. Similar to Lorde, as a queer, Muslim, immigrant from Afghanistan living in the Midwest America, I am forced to hide one or some of my identities in spaces where I don't feel safe or comfortable.

I was ready to be my "meaningful whole" in the field. However, I soon learned that unlike Lorde, I was not fully comfortable with parts of my identity. This was due to many other circumstances around me, including war and displacement, that are central to my research. What do I tell my research participants that I am gay or I am queer? Neither the word queer nor gay translates into my native languages. The Dari and Pashto versions of these identities still carry negative connotations similar to what queer used to be. Do these terms fully define me? I box myself into these categories at times to make myself understandable to the US queers I engage with on a daily basis. Do I have to box myself for my own people who speak my languages, who have the same sense of humor, who don't need me to explain to them why I ended up in the US and who don't question my civility when I eat rice with my hands?

Being used to strangers guessing my sexual orientation, I had convinced myself that the moment I come across any Afghans in the field, they would assume my sexual orientation. However, I soon realized that for these Afghans I was more than my sexual

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[131] Lorde, A. (1980). Age, race, class, and sex: Women redefining difference. *Women in Culture: An Intersectional Anthology for Gender and Women's Studies*, p.858

orientation. To some of these Afghans I was a piece of home, a refugee similar to them, someone under surveillance just like them and at times the "imagined community" member from Afghanistan. To some, I was like a cousin they wanted to laugh with. To others, I was like the guest they did not need to question out of norms of hospitality. I am not saying that nobody in the field questioned my sexuality. I am sure it crossed their minds and some even asked. They live in a neoliberal state where these identities and labels matter and are heard and discussed everywhere. Part of them not asking me was my conscious self-presentation which fluidly moved between queer, gay, femme, masculine and even at times heterosexual. There were other times that I found myself in a room with queer and trans Afghans performing Friday prayers. Such encounters are not new to queer ethnographers,[132] particularly those that hold multiple marginalized identities. My sense of fluidity and, at times, silence was part of my de-colonial ethnography. Margaret Wilson on the complicated negotiations queer ethnographers in the field have to make argues, "in the field, ethnographers try to negotiate a balance between the self-representation they feel they need to present and the people they think they are."[133] I was consciously making this negotiation at all times.

There were moments in the field that challenged my own understanding of myself and the decisions I have made in life. One of those moments was when I met with a group of six Afghan men to conduct a focus group discussion. Three of them were people I was

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[132] Lewin, E., Leap, W. L., & Leap, W. (Eds.). (1996). *Out in the field: Reflections of lesbian and gay anthropologists*. University of Illinois Press.
[133] Willson, M. (1995). Afterword: Perspective and difference: Sexualization, the field, and the ethnographer. Taboo: Sex, identity and erotic subjectivity in anthropological fieldwork, p.194.

introduced to by my contacts. They said they would bring their friends to the focus group. We made plans to meet at an Afghan restaurant over dinner and conduct the focus group. I arrived a bit early and got us a table. The men walked in and I realized I knew three of them from Afghanistan. We used to be friends but then I moved to the US and we lost touch. It was a moment of joy. We hugged and couldn't believe we all were together after almost a decade. We went down the memory lane and relived the days we spent together through stories. Half way through our dinner, I realized they hadn't changed at all but I had. I was not an out queer back then. Today, I am. They didn't know. I did not tell them. Within that moment, I questioned if it is worth it to be out while losing so much. It was a moment I realized one loses a lot more than expected in the process of coming out and engaging with the performance and experiences of queerness.

Conclusion:

Ethnography has long been recognized as a crucial mode of inquiry into questions related to war, memory, trauma, and the everyday gendered performances of identity and belonging. As a political scientist pushing the methodological boundaries of the field from within, my work places ethnography at the center of politics of life and experiences, while also imagining how such an approach can both acknowledge and complicate colonizing modes of knowledge production. In the relationships I made during my fieldwork, as well as in my subsequent analysis and reflections, I have sought to engage with de-colonial ethnography – a hyphenated border -- that does more justice to my work, which is itself defined by multiple shifting borders. This hyphenated border between de and colonial, then, allows me to move between, across, and within borders. As someone carrying the

perpetual violence of war and displacement through my experiences, memory, traumas, and DNA, it is the borderline in de-coloniality that allows me to find a home in the pages for this dissertation -- not only for myself, but also for the stories that I have inherited with love and trust from so many people who have made this study possible.

Chapter 3: Double Lives: Diasporic Feminism and Politics of Freedom and Agency

Bano e Atash nisheenam, zaghm e nasori zaminam. Bas k dar suz wo aa ham. Marg goyadam afareenam. Dukhatar e Afghan zameenam. I am a lady residing on the land of fire. I am an unhealing wound on earth. Being in fire for this long, even death salutes me. I am a woman from the Afghan land.

- Aryana Sayeed, an Afghan diaspora feminist singer.

Aryana Sayeed's song was playing in the background as I was taking puffs from a freshly made hookah at an Afghan hookah bar on the evening of Halloween 2017 in Fremont, California waiting for my interviewee to arrive. I was the very first to arrive for this Afghan style Halloween party. I had no costume since I did not know it was happening until Laila, one of the people I had interviewed earlier that day at a mosque in Fremont, messaged me and told me that this event was happening. She insisted that I go and said that she would join me later to continue our conversation. When I arrived at the hookah bar, I quickly noticed the bare exterior - no windows, just a large gray metal door that blended in with the gray concrete wall, resembling any of the American military compounds in Afghanistan. As I pulled open the door, a young Afghan-American man stopped me and asked for the passcode. The man, who I had seen around before, told me that it was a private party and that all guests must know the passcode. I stepped back outside and called Laila who gave me the passcode and told me to tell the man at the front door that we are friends and from the same circle. This passcode entry rule reminded me of the Soviet times in

Afghanistan. Back then, everyone had to be home before 10:00pm[134], the curfew time reinforced by the state and closely monitored by the Soviet soldiers patrolling the streets and dirt roads. If you were out past 10:00pm, you had to know the nam-e-shaw, name of the night, the secret passcode or else you would be arrested and you might disappear forever.

Tonight, as 10:00pm arrived, Afghan-Americans started showing up in groups of fives, sixes and more. The once empty hookah bar was now full. Some wore costumes, while others were dressed up for a night out. The most popular costumes were cats and the orange jumpsuit of Guantanamo Bay prisoners. Music, a mix of Afghan, Bollywood and American Hip Hop, lured some party-goers to the dance floor, and was the background noise for the others smoking hookah and some sipping on their alcoholic drinks while chatting with friends. Laila arrived wearing what she explained as the "regular white liberal dude" costume, a tucked in checkered shirt, khaki pants and a tie. After ordering her drink and taking a couple of puffs from my hookah, she looked at me and said "isn't it a great place for your research? This is where you can see our secret lives, the real us with our close friends and cousins. We come here every Monday evening right after the Ta'leef Collective [a progressive and all-gender mosque led by white converts that offers classes on reciting Quran and basic Islamic teachings]. Our parents think we are at the mosque but Monday night sessions end earlier so we come here to chill and breath for a second."[135]

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[134] Edg, Konrad. Letter from Kabul. Middle East Research and Information Project. Vol.119. < https://www.merip.org/mer/mer119/letter-kabul>
[135] Interview. 6 with Laila

My conversation with Laila and the ethnographic observation in the hookah bar was not my first entry into the secret lives of Afghan-Americans, the diaspora of war and a community under tight state surveillance since September 11, 2001. As a queer Afghan, I have lived and continue to live a double life myself. I held the belief that living a double life was a rare reality and somehow, I was one of the few living it. My introduction to the double lives of many Afghan-Americans, particularly women and queer Afghans, started with my research in the Bay Area. From interracial romantic and sexual relationships to secret marriages and queer lives to renting out an apartment with a gay cousin without their parents' knowledge, Afghan diaspora's double lives complicate and problematize the discourses and narratives of diaspora' politics of daily lives, journeys, agency, freedom, resistance, gender and sexualities. I theorize that living double lives is a political act informed by social, historical and political realities and circumstances. Through performances of double lives, I argue that Afghan-American women and queers construct, engage with, and advance what I refer to as diasporic feminism. Diasporic feminism refers to the practice of feminism through diasporic journeys while being aware of one's home "there" as well as one's home "here," all the while negotiating with realities of the past and the conditions and circumstances in the present.

Diasporic feminism is not about doing politics and activism only in public spheres but also in private and trusting kinship circles. Diasporic feminism is beyond a movement and action, it is the complex politics of everyday life, shaping women and queers' freedom, agency, resistance, survival and solidarity politics. Having a secret life outside and at times within the kinship and family circle allows women and queer diaspora to adhere to the

societal "politics of respectability"[136] yet have their own agency in exploring and living their own versions of self, desires, needs, purpose and dreams in their own created versions of lives. I refer to this expression, performance and living of freedom as clandestine freedom. Clandestine freedom introduces us to complexities of being, having agency, freedom making and engagement with the question of "unfreedom", while complicating and challenging the western discourse that freedom is an individual's autonomy, the ability to act based on one's desire, will, consciousness, goals and aspirations despite pressure and force by others[137]. Many schools of thought, including liberalism and feminist IR, equate freedom with individual autonomy. For Feminism, freedom is liberation of women and women's rights, women having agency and autonomy on what they do and how they do it. This emphasis of freedom as autonomy goes back to Immanuel Kant who sees freedom as an individual's ability to lead their own life and achieve their purpose and goals based on their rational will[138].

Feminist's notion of freedom draws from the liberal tradition which places autonomy at the core of freedom while categorizing it into negative and positive. When there is an absence of restraints, including state imposed, to making a choice or taking an

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[136] For politics of respectability see; Higginbotham, E. B. (1993). Righteous discontent: The women's movement in the Black Baptist church, 1880-1920. American Mathematical Soc. Also, White, E. F. (2010). Dark continent of our bodies: Black feminism & politics of respectability. Temple University Press.

[137] Berlin, Isaiah Berlin. (1969). "Two Concepts of Liberty," in Four Essays on Liberty (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

[138] Kant, Immanuel Kant. (1991). The Metaphysics of Morals (Cambridge: Cambridge University).

action, it is understood as negative freedom[139]. On the other hand, positive freedom refers to the capacity to act based on a free will guided by self-interest[140]. The notions of negative and positive freedom as Saba Mahmood asserts, "provide the ground on which much of the feminist debate unfolds."[141] These scholarly debates, although pivotal and pioneering in theorization of individual freedom and agency, make interventions within two dichotomies; freedom and unfreedom. Freedom and expressions of agency are more complicated than either having it or not having it. Saba Mahmood in the analysis of women's mosque movement in Egypt, a non-liberal movement, introduces us to the complexities of freedom and agency beyond the liberal notion of freedom as autonomy and agency as resistance. Mahmood argues, "the liberatory goals of feminism should be re-thought in light of the fact that the desire for freedom and liberation is historically situated and its motivational force cannot be assumed a priori, but needs to be re-considered in light of other desires, historical projects, and capabilities that inhere in a discursively and historically located subject."[142] Mahmood's critique and invitation to re-consider freedom beyond liberation-focused territory allows us to expand our feminist lens and situate desires and experiences that are sometimes at odds with liberal comforts and understandings. Building on Mahmood's pivotal work, I argue that clandestine freedom takes us to those

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[139] Bentham and Hobbes introduced these concepts and many other political theorists have built on their work. See Simhony, Avital. (1993) "Beyond Negative and Positive Freedom: T.H. Green's View of Freedom," in Political Theory 21 (1):28-54.

[140] Berlin, Isaiah Berlin. (1969). "Two Concepts of Liberty," in Four Essays on Liberty (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. Green, Thomas Hill. (1986). Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation and Other Writings ed. P. Harris. And J. Morrow (Cambridge: Cambridge University).

[141] Mahmood, S. (2011). *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton University Press. p.89.

[142] Mahmood, S. (2009). Agency, performativity, and the feminist subject. In *Pieties and Gender*. p.40

spheres, capabilities, spaces, desires, "site of women's agency"[143] and experiences that problematize the liberation-centered and individual-focused notions of freedom and agency.

Theorizing double lives, I engage with, build on, yet also offer a critique of liberal feminist discourses of freedom and agency. My trajectory of critique is guided by Foucault's conceptualization of this critical intervention; "a critique does not consist in saying that things aren't good the way they are. It consists in seeing on just what type of assumptions, of familiar notions, of established and unexamined ways of thinking the accepted practices are based."[144] The existing work on freedom and agency allows me to learn, reflect and engage with questions of gender, sexuality, diaspora and political violence critically while also calling our attention to new ways of freedom making and agency holding. My in-depth conversations, semi-formal interviews and ethnographic work with diasporic subjects who have lived-experiences and trauma of war and displacement offer nuances to the politics of diasporic daily lives and experiences. I bring to light silence as a site and moment of analysis in the lives of Afghan women and queer diaspora which provides us alternative understandings of freedom and agency.

In theorization of freedom and agency in the contemporary liberal societies, silence is juxtaposed as an antithesis. The expectation is for one to resist and subvert in order to be considered free and agentic. To be free means to make confessions in public and private spaces about one's agony, discomfort, oppression and struggles. To this, I want to call

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[143] Ibid. 11-46

[144] Rabinow, P., & Rose, N. (1954). Foucault today. *The essential Foucault: Selections from the essential works of Foucault*, *1984*. p.1

attention the work of poststructuralist, queer feminist Michel Foucault who sees disruption of silence as a form of governmentality. In the History of Sexuality, Foucault offers a critique of the Western society's emphasis on confession as truth production: "It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relations in the modern ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites; one confesses one's crimes, one's sins… one confesses-or is forced to confess….confession frees, but power reduces one to silence."[145] This obsession with speaking about one's secrets is seen not only as an obligation but as the only way to truth. Foucault's intervention allows us to observe the violence of power at the heart of speaking and confession that stigmatizes and at times criminalizes silence. I come back to Foucault's notion of governmentality in the discussion of politics of sex later in this chapter and in coming out in the following chapter[146].

While patriarchy, Islam and masculine Muslim man images, discourses and representations have sought to explain Muslim women's silence, I call our attention to understanding, conceptualizing and theorizing Muslim women's silence as agency in itself. On this, Evelynn M. Hammonds, whose work has placed the sexuality of black women at the forefront of feminist discussion, makes a remarkable intervention in the politics of silences. In "Toward a Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality: The Problematic of Silence", Hammonds interrogates the politics of silence on black female sexualities and, at times, by black women themselves and situates silence at the heart of strategic and political agency. She writes, "since silence about sexuality is being produced by black women and black

[145] Foucault, M. (1980). The history of sexuality. Volume one: An introduction. pp.59-60
[146] For Foucault's discussion of governmentality see: Foucault M (2007b) Subjectivity and truth. The Politics of Truth, ed. Lotringer S. Los Angeles: Semiotexte, pp. 147–167. (Orig. published: About the beginning of the hermeneutics of the self. Political Theory 21(2), 1993: 198–227.)

feminist theorists, that silence itself suggests that black women do have some degree of agency."[147] Taking Hammonds' point further, I argue that silence not only is agency but also survival. Here, agency should not be confused with choice. The violence of war and displacement has not left Afghans with much of a choice but survival in most cases. Silence is also resistance against imperial feminism, gendered orientalism and colonial systems, structures and norms that advocate for mainstream western feminism. Here, I am aware of departing from Saba Mahmood's notion of agency who sees it as capacity for action, not "resistance to relations of domination."[148] In my analysis, agency is the capacity for action as much as it is a form of resistance to the violent systems of war, displacement, state surveillance, racism and Islamophobia. By agency as the capacity for action, I refer to the ways Afghan diasporic women, for instance organize a queer wedding for their siblings while hiding it from their parents, uncles and aunts. By agency as resistance, I refer to some diasporic Afghans rejections of queer, gay and lesbian labels despite being in same-sex relationships. For the women's mosque movement in Egypt, their piety as agency comes from their understanding of Islam as "practices of pious living."[149] This was at a time when Egypt was going through secularization and the state's projects promoted a move towards Islam as a cultural practice rather than a religious practice and a way of life[150]. During the

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[147] Hammonds, E. M. (1999). Toward a genealogy of black female sexuality: The problematic of silence. Feminist theory and the body: A reader, p.102

[148] Mahmood, S. (2009). Agency, performativity, and the feminist subject. In Pieties and Gender. pp. 15

[149] Ibid.p.17

[150] For secularization in Egypt see: Al-Ali, N., & Ali, N. S. (2000). Secularism, gender and the state in the Middle East: the Egyptian women's movement (Vol. 14). Cambridge University Press; Asad, T. (2001). Thinking about secularism and law in Egypt. ISIM paper, 1. Najjar, F. M. (1996). The debate on Islam and secularism in Egypt. Arab Studies Quarterly, 1-21. Mahmood, S. (2012). Sectarian conflict and family law in contemporary Egypt. American Ethnologist, 39(1), 54-62

secularization, Egyptian women, for the most part, did not leave Egypt or go through a war like the subjects in my case study. Afghan women diaspora's silence is in part informed by political resistance. For these women, silence is not absence of agency but agency in its non-western feminist sense.

Diaspora women's silence should not be seen as merely passive and inactive stand to systems of oppression, patriarchy and misogyny, but as political modes, social strategies and a tactful mechanism of practical critique of and response to voice-centered feminist approaches. Diaspora women's silence draws our attention to the radical and selfless ways of loving, caring and protecting one's family from harm and further trauma postwar and displacement. Afghan-American women's lives and their making and shaping of feminism challenge the Western feminist theorization of freedom and agency in general and Muslim women's lives in particular. Second wave feminism as Ranjoo Seodu Herr argues, "subscribes to the idea that all women everywhere face exactly the same oppression merely by virtue of their sex/gender."[151] Recognizing the pivotal contribution of Second Wave Feminism to advancement of the universalist notion of sisterhood, critics have also pointed to the assumption made by the Second Wave Feminism that all women suffer from inequalities predominantly due to patriarchy. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, through her critique of Western feminists' homogenization of women in the Third World, invites us to observe this trend in the scholarship produced by Western feminists on Third World women. Mohanty asserts, "in any given piece of feminist analysis, women are

[151] Herr, Ranjoo Seodu. (2014). Reclaiming Third World Feminism: or Why Transnational Feminism Needs Third World Feminism. Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism. Vol.12. pp.1-30.

characterized as a singular group on the basis of shared oppression. What binds women together is a sociological notion of "sameness" of their oppression"[152] Women across the world do face gendered and sexed violence and oppressions due to patriarchy but the complexities of violence and oppression faced by women also depend upon their other intersecting identities and experiences such as race, class, geography, education, war and peace, citizenship, military occupations, colonialism, gender expressions and status.

Scholarship on diasporas in the context of state interactions, assimilation, markets and labor force and migration policies has contributed immensely to the understanding of diaspora in international relations.[153] Feminist scholarships and queer studies have also complicated the notion of diaspora, interrogating its relation with home, belonging, queerness, womanhood and race.[154] My work on diaspora with a feminist and queer lens is

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[152] Mohanty, C. T. (1988). Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses. *Feminist review*, (30). p.337

[153] Adamson, F. B., & Demetriou, M. (2007). Remapping the boundaries ofstate'andnational identity': Incorporating diasporas into IR theorizing. *European Journal of International Relations*, *13*(4), 489-526. Laitin, D. D. (1998). *Identity in formation: The Russian-speaking populations in the near abroad*. Cornell University Press. Varadarajan, L. (2010). *The domestic abroad: Diasporas in international relations*. Oxford University Press. Esman, M. J. (2009). *Diasporas in the contemporary world*. Polity. Délano, A., & Gamlen, A. (2014). Comparing and theorizing state–diaspora relations. *Political Geography*, *41*, 43-53. Safran, W. (1991). Diasporas in modern societies: Myths of homeland and return. *Diaspora: A journal of transnational studies*, *1*(1), 83-99.

[154] Brah, Avtar. (1996). Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities. New York: Routledge.p.190. Fortier, A. M. (2001). 'Coming home' Queer migrations and multiple evocations of home. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *4*(4), 405-424. Gopinath, G. (2005). *Impossible desires: Queer diasporas and South Asian public cultures*. Duke University Press. Luibhéid, E. (2008). Queer/migration: An unruly body of scholarship. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, *14*(2), 169-190.Manalansan IV, M. F. (2003). *Global divas: Filipino gay men in the diaspora*. Duke University Press. Mojab, S., & Gorman, R. (2007). Dispersed nationalism: War, diaspora and Kurdish women's organizing. *Journal of middle east women's studies*, *3*(1), 58-85. Puar, J. K. (2008). 'The Turban is not a hat': Queer diaspora and practices of profiling. *Sikh Formations*, *4*(1), 47-91. Shakhsari, S. (2012). From homoerotics of exile to homopolitics of diaspora: Cyberspace, the war on terror, and the hypervisible Iranian queer. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, *8*(3), 14-40.

informed by this existing scholarship. I add to this literature by introducing border crossings in the context of experiences of war and displacement in the analysis of the daily lives of women and queers in diaspora. Diaspora women's and queers' lives and experiences challenge the fundamental conceptualizations of resistance, silence, sexualities, body, family and solidarity politics. Afghan diasporic women cross borders of honor and shame, home and diaspora, freedom and unfreedom by living double lives. Diaspora women, particularly the Muslim diaspora women, have remained in the margins and at times are absent in the scholarship in international relations and comparative politics. The few scholarly publications that do address Muslim women typically engage in homogenization of Muslim women's lives, experiences and identities.[155] Experiences and lives of more than 1.8 billion people have often been homogenized as "the Muslim world" a term that has been often times used to refer to a place where "women's rights needed defending."[156] An exception in this area of research is the scholarship by Muslim women

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[155] See for example; Shukla, S., & Shukla, S. (1996). Political Participation of Muslim Women. *The Indian Journal of Political Science,57*(1/4), 1-13; Barlow, R., & Akbarzadeh, S. (2006). Women's Rights in the Muslim World: Reform or Reconstruction? *Third World Quarterly,27*(8), 1481-1494; Patel, S., & Westermann, J. (2018). Women and Islamic-State Terrorism: An Assessment of How Gender Perspectives Are Integrated in Countering Violent Extremism Policy and Practices. *Security Challenges, 14*(2), 53-83; Tessler, M., & Nachtwey, J. (1998). Islam and Attitudes toward International Conflict: Evidence from Survey Research in the Arab World. *The Journal of Conflict Resolution, 42*(5), 619-636.

[156] Abu-Lughod. p.8

themselves,[157] who engage in what Abu-Lughod calls "writing against culture"[158]. Shy, backward, weak, oppressed; sexually, physically and mentally, lacking agency and the unhappy virgins are a few of the orientalist and colonial discursive representations of Muslim women, be it in the homelands or diasporic lands, and scholars refer to this as "gendered orientalism"[159]. These timeless and ahistorical stereotypes and representations of Muslim women situate their oppressions within Islamic cultures, Islam, localities and patriarchal systems of kinship and tribalism. Muslim women's continued oppression, gendered marginalization and gendered violence are seen in separation from the political climate at the national, regional and global level.[160] Oppression is observed and analyzed

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[157] Please see Abu-Lughod, L. (1993). Finding a place for Islam: Egyptian television serials and the national interest. *Public culture*, *5*(3), 493-513. Abu-Lughod, J. L. (1999). *New York, Chicago, Los Angeles: America's Global Cities*. U of Minnesota Press. Abu-Lughod, L. (2002). Do Muslim women really need saving? Anthropological reflections on cultural relativism and its others. *American anthropologist*, *104*(3), 783-790. Abu-Lughod, L. (2008). Writing against culture. In *The Cultural Geography Reader* (pp. 62-71). Routledge. Najmabadi, A. (2005). *Women with mustaches and men without beards: Gender and sexual anxieties of Iranian modernity*. University of California Press.
Khan, S. (2014). Reading Partition Muslim Masculinities and Femininities in an Age of Terror. *Muslim Women, Transnational Feminism and the Ethics of Pedagogy: Contested Imaginaries in Post-9/11 Cultural Practice*, 59. Raja, R. (2014). Western women and Islam: Embracing and negotiating Muslim identity. *Policy Perspectives: The Journal of the Institute of Policy Studies*, *11*(1), 3-31.

[158] Abu-Lughod, L. (1991) `Writing Against Culture', in Richard Fox (ed.)

[159] This body of work engages with Edward Said's scholarship on Orientalism. For more on this topic see; Ahmad, D. (2009). Not Yet Beyond the Veil: Muslim Women in American Popular Literature. *Social Text*, *27*(2 (99)), 105-131. Kabbani, R. (1986). *Europe's myths of Orient: devise and rule.* Springer. Abu-Lughod, L. (2013). *Do Muslim women need saving?*. Harvard University Press ; Nayak, M. (2006). Orientalism and 'Saving' US state identity after 9/11. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, *8*(1), 42-61. Khalid, M. (2011). Gender, Orientalism and Representations of the 'Other' in the War on Terror. *Global Change, Peace & Security*, *23*(1), 15-29.

[160] Alsultany, E. (2013). Arabs and Muslims in the Media after 9/11: Representational Strategies for a "Postrace" Era. *American Quarterly, 65*(1), 161-169; Bracke, S. (2011). Subjects of debate: Secular and sexual exceptionalism, and Muslim women in the Netherlands. *Feminist Review,* (98), 28-46. For work that paints Muslim women as oppressed and victims see; Weber, B. (2009). Freedom from Violence, Freedom to Make the World: Muslim Women's Memoirs, Gendered Violence, and Voices for Change in Germany. *Women in German Yearbook, 25*, 199-

in isolation from the historical and contemporary colonial and military invasions that have placed patriarchal and gendered systems and structures across borders and identities.[161]

Such narratives and discourses locate "[women's oppression] within local barbaric patriarchies. National, regional or international links to the local conditions that constrain women's choices, and that at times brutalize them, are never interrogated."[162] As Edward Said argues, there are two themes that continuously appear in the Western discursive construction of the Other; violence and sexuality[163]. Within the contemporary white colonial feminist discursive explorations, Muslim women abroad and in the US appear in need of liberation, freedom, military saving and western human rights protection from their religion, cultures, men and traditions[164]. The Orientalist depictions of Muslim women is either of hypersexualized or sexually oppressed and veiled[165]. Veil has become the archetype of absent agency and oppressive Islam and Muslim men in the post 9/11 world. As Lila Abu-Lughod argues, Muslim women in general and Afghan women in particular became the western saving projects.[166] The United States gained national and international

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222; Adamson, C. (2007). Gendered Anxieties: Islam, Women's Rights, and Moral Hierarchy in Java. *Anthropological Quarterly, 80*(1), 5-37; Nasrin, T., & Ali, A. (2006). Dissident Women's Voices Coming Out of Islam. *Off Our Backs, 36*(3), 42-42; Totten, M. (2013). RADICAL ISLAM'S GLOBAL REACTION: The Push for Blasphemy Laws. *World Affairs, 175*(5), 25-31.

[161] Kandiyoti, D. (2007). Between the Hammer and the Anvil: Post-Conflict Reconstruction, Islam and Women's Rights. *Third World Quarterly, 28*(3), 503-517.

[162] Khan, S. (2014). The Two Faces of Afghan Women: Oppressed and Exotic. Women Studies International Forum. p.100.

[163] Said, E. (1978). Orientalism: Western representations of the Orient. New York: Pantheon.

[164] Yegenoglu, M. (1998). Colonial fantasies: Towards a feminist reading of Orientalism. Cambridge University Press.

[165] Lewis, R. (2004). Rethinking orientalism: women, travel and the Ottoman harem. IB Tauris. Lal, Ruby. (2005). Domesticity and power in the early Mughal world. Cambridge University Press.

[166] See Abu-Lughod's Do Muslim Women Need Saving? (2013).

support for the military occupation of Afghanistan. Post 9/11, Muslim women have been "used to justify military interventions."[167]

Afghan women became the symbol of oppression and gendered and religious violence post 9/11. This was the very first time that the Afghans in general and Afghan women in particular were placed at the center of Western political discussions, negotiations and security debates. The role of colonial women in these projects of liberation and freedom of the "Other" have been undertheorized. Women of empire, who are considered icons of feminism and human rights, advance their states' colonial and security interests by using the plight of women's rights around the world. From "Lord Cromer of British-ruled Egypt to French ladies in Algeria and Laura Bush, [these women of empire] with military troops behind them claim to be saving or liberating Muslim women"[168]. Leila Ahmed calls these women "colonial feminists."[169] These imperial feminist movements have reinforced the Orientalist stereotypes about Afghan women, stripped them of their agency and simplified their complicated experiences, systems, structures and struggles for the invasion of the empire and the justification of nearly two decades of war that continues until now. Ahmed argues that the colonial feminism calls for women's rights to support colonial interests.[170] This colonial feminist's plight for women's rights is not an emerging phenomenon post 9/11.

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[167] Khan, S. (2014). The Two Faces of Afghan Women: Oppressed and Exotic. Women Studies International Forum. 100-109.
[168] Ibid.p.34
[169] Ahmed, Leila. (1992). Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate. New Haven: CT: Yale University Press.
[170] Ibid.p.32

In Colonial Algeria, Frantz Fanon states that French Colonial policy placed Algerian women's liberation at the forefront of their colonial strategies[171]. French colonials, particularly French women, became obsessed with Algerian women's unveiling and so-called freedom. Anthropologists studying colonized communities and individuals have argued that colonial discourses and narratives of the "Other" are quite similar regardless of place and time. The discourses often times center experiences, images, bodies, gender and sexualities of the colonized women. Lila Abu-Lughod argues that, "the historical record is full of similar cases" and there are similarities between narratives of Afghan women in the aftermaths of the September 11th attacks and that of Algerian women during French colonialism[172].

Right after the military occupation of Afghanistan, Laura Bush in her radio address stated, "Good morning. I'm Laura Bush. And I am delivering this week's radio address to kick off a worldwide effort to focus on the brutality against women and children in Afghanistan…because of our recent military gains in much of Afghanistan, women are no longer imprisoned in their homes. They can listen to music and teach their daughters without fear of punishment…The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women."[173] The call for women's rights and freedom is not new to imperial projects. Such statements and narratives gathered public sympathizers and supporters for

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[171] Fanon, F. (1965). This is the Voice of Algeria. *A Dying Colonialism. New York: Monthly Review*, 69-98.
[172] Abu-Lughod. p.34
[173] Bush, L. 2001a. 'Radio Address by Laura Bush to the Nation.' Accessed June 13 2018 < http:// www.state.gov/g/wi/7192.htm> ; See also; Shepherd, L. J. (2006). Veiled references: Constructions of gender in the Bush administration discourse on the attacks on Afghanistan post-9/11. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, *8*(1), 19-41; Stabile, C. A., & Kumar, D. (2005). Unveiling imperialism: media, gender and the war on Afghanistan. *Media, Culture & Society*, *27*(5), 765-782.

the "War on Terror," particularly among Western liberal feminists. In the condemnation of Taliban for their mistreatment of women, Jasbir Puar argues, "Bush's administration has in essence occupied the space of default global feminists."[174] Afghan women's veil became the symbol of religious and cultural oppression. Similar to this radio address, colonial feminism has used Muslim women's images, veils, sufferings, sexuality and experiences to justify violence on the same women they argue to save and the continued occupation of their lands, homes and lives. During the French occupation of Algeria, French feminists were pivotal in colonial projects placing women's liberation as a shield for the French violence on the Algerian land. Marnia Lazreg in Eloquence of Silence writes:

> Perhaps the most spectacular example of the colonial appropriation of women's voices, and the silencing of those among them who had begun to take women revolutionaries….as role models by not donning the veil, was the event of May 16, 1958 [four years before Algeria got its independence]. On that day a demonstration was organized by rebellious French generals in Algiers to show their determination to keep Algeria French. To give the government of France evidence that Algerians were in agreement with them, the generals had a few thousand native men bused in from nearby villages along with a few women who were solemnly unveiled by French women…Rounding up Algerians and bringing them to demonstrations of loyalty to France was not in itself an unusual act during the colonial era. But to unveil women at a well-choreographed ceremony added to the event a symbolic

[174] Puar, J. K., & Rai, A. (2002). Monster, terrorist, fag: The war on terrorism and the production of docile patriots. *Social Text*, *20*(3), p.127

dimension that dramatized the one constant feature of the Algerian occupation by France: its obsession with women"[175]

Muslim women's freedom and oppression become political and apolitical as per the demands of imperial powers. The sufferings of Afghan women were ignored when the United States supported the militants during the Cold War in Afghanistan. The United States not only remained silent on women's issues during this era but also bombed cities, towns, villages and aided the militants to continue the war, which impacted the lives of every single Afghan in and outside the country and continues to do so in the generations to come. Afghan women and their rights and freedom became a political issue when the United States decided to bomb and invade Afghanistan in order to free women from "covers."[176]

Many Western feminists, mainly in the United States, supported the War on Terror and invasion of Afghanistan under the name of democracy and freedom for women. These feminists "cheered American and other Western women in every level of the army on their way to liberate Afghan women from their borqa."[177] As Saba Mahmood and Charles Hierschkin put it, "following the September 11th attacks, the burqa-clad body of the Afghan woman became the visible sign of an invisible enemy that threatens not only "us,"

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[175] Lazreg, Marnia. (1994). The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question. New York: Routledge. p.135.

[176] Viner, K. (2002, 21 September). Feminism as imperialism. The Guardian, p. 11. < https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/sep/21/gender.usa> See also ; Kinnvall, C. (2004). Globalization and religious nationalism: Self, identity, and the search for ontological security. *Political psychology*, *25*(5), 741-767.

[177] Rostami-Povey, Elaheh. (2007). Afghan Refugees in Iran, Pakistan, the U.K., and the U.S. and Life after Return: A Comparative Gender Analysis. *Iranian Studies, 40*(2).p.256.

citizens of the West, but our entire civilization."[178] Liberation of Afghan women from their veils was perpetrated as a rescue mission and protection of the "western" civilization that this piece of blue cloth threatened.

Scholars have also noted that in the aftermaths of the military occupation of Afghanistan, too much emphasis on the Taliban and Al Qaida diverted attention away from the masculinist protection of Afghan women by Bush and Blaire and the violence of the occupation that has taken and continues to take the lives of many women.[179] Mahmood and Hirschkind assert that the debate on the war in Afghanistan neglected the United States involvement in the violence and its impact on women, instead, the focus was on Taliban and Islam:

> "It was striking how a number of commentators, in discussions that preceded the war, regularly failed to connect the predicament of women in Afghanistan with the massive military and economic support that the US provided, as part of its Cold War strategy, to the most extreme of Afghan religious militant groups. This silence, a concomitant of the recharged enthusiasm for the US military both within academia and among the American public more generally, also characterized much of the response both to reports of mounting civilian casualties resulting from the

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[178] Mahmood Saba and Charles Hirschkind. 2002). Feminism, Taliban, and The Political of Counter-Insurgency. Anthropological Quaterly.75.2. p.341

[179] See Stanley, L., & Wise, S. (2000). But the empress has no clothes! Some awkward questions about the 'missing revolution'in feminist theory. *Feminist Theory*, *1*(3), 261-288. Young, I. M. (2003). The logic of masculinist protection: Reflections on the current security state. *Signs: journal of women in culture and society*, *29*(1), 1-25.

bombing campaign, and to the widespread famine that the campaign threatened to aggravate."[180]

This connection is also missing when it comes to the impact of war not only on the Afghan women in Afghanistan but also in the diaspora. Home and diaspora have an inevitable bond. Home is embedded within the notion of diaspora.[181] Diaspora and home are in constant dialogue. Home defines belonging, identity, security, safety, love and the present and future for diaspora, yet home also becomes the site of violence, scrutiny, insecurity, fear and death. Home is not only the home left behind but the home made in other places, other lands and the home built here. Some diasporic journeys take people through several lands, borders and homes until one becomes the home they settle in[182]. Whatever happens in the homeland impacts the diaspora in the hostland[183]. The relationship

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[180] Mahmood Saba and Charles Hirschkind. 2002). Feminism, Taliban, and The Political of Counter-Insurgency. Anthropological Quaterly.75.2. p.341.

[181] Brah, Avtar. (1996). Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities. New York: Routledge.p.190

[182] For several journeys refugees, migrants and the diaspora communities go through, please see: Long, L. D., & Oxfeld, E. (Eds.). (2004). *Coming home?: refugees, migrants, and those who stayed behind.* University of Pennsylvania Press. Stola, D. (1992). Forced migrations in Central European history. *International Migration Review*, *26*(2), 324-341. Düvell, F. (2012). Transit migration: A blurred and politicised concept. *Population, Space and Place*, *18*(4), 415-427. Peisker, V. C., & Tilbury, F. (2003). "Active" and "passive" resettlement: The influence of support services and refugees' own resources on resettlement style. *International Migration*, *41*(5), 61-91. Tölölyan, K. (1996). Rethinking diaspora (s): Stateless power in the transnational moment. *Diaspora: a journal of transnational studies*, *5*(1), 3-36. Brown, J. M. (2006). *Global South Asians: introducing the modern diaspora* (Vol. 1). Cambridge University Press.

[183] On the homeland and diaspora connections, please see; Schein, L. (1999). Diaspora politics, homeland erotics, and the materializing of memory. *positions: east asia cultures critique*, *7*(3), 697-731. Safran, W. (1991). Diasporas in modern societies: Myths of homeland and return. *Diaspora: A journal of transnational studies*, *1*(1), 83-99. Varadarajan, L. (2010). *The domestic abroad: Diasporas in international relations*. Oxford University Press. Patterson, R. (2006). Transnationalism: diaspora-homeland development. *Social forces*, *84*(4), 1891-1907.

of home there with home here for the diaspora of war is very complicated. I conceptualize this relationship as home-bondedness. Home-bondedness is the close relationship to home as in family, culture, kindship and values set by this intimate proximity. Home-bondedness is also a sense of intimate security and safety. It is the crossing of borders of homeland and diaspora through emotions, dreams, stories and memory. For diaspora, home-bondedness is also the formation of close ties with the home left behind and the home made in exile. Frishta Fresh Bastan, an Afghan diasporic poet crafts this intimate home-bondedness of diaspora with home left behind in one of her poems:

Dear Diaspora,

I know you feel so deeply connected

to a place you left behind

willingly or unwillingly

or only visited through your dreams

or have lived through generations of memories

It's like when the soil of "back home"

Is threatened

and you can physically feel the pain

yet you're thousands of miles away

when sufferings transcended borders

the cries and pleas echo towards you

carried through the clouds

patterned in the stars

and reflected on the moon

you still share the same sky

But you also feel their happiness

pray for their safety

for strangers

not even blood relatives

But you share the same pride

same hope

same dreams of peace and freedom

of course, you feel everything

Diaspora,

I know your heart refuses to let go

A tree is dead with no roots.[184]

One comes to understand this unique bond when entering a diaspora family's home. During my ethnographic work, I was fortunate enough to share meals, chai, stories and conversations in the homes of some of my participants. When I walked into Paimana's house in Springfield, Virginia, from the old classical Afghan music to the red rugs and smell of cardamom tea, everything took me back to Afghanistan. In every sense, sight, smell, sound and touch, one could find her homeland. Over the course of the day, constantly switching between English and Dari, we spent our time chatting about home, the nostalgia, the war, the escape, the desire of return and anxiety of belonging. Paimana would stop from time to time and ask me, "Do I sound American? Be honest. I think I am very Afghan,

[184] Bastan, Frishta Fresh. (2019). "Dear Diaspora." Fresh Poetry. Instagram. < https://www.instagram.com/freshpoetry/?hl=en>

don't you think so? I don't want to lose myself here." This bondedness of home and diaspora explains clandestine freedom and agency lived and expressed by Afghan women and queers in diaspora, particularly among the Afghan diaspora in the United States. How do Afghan women negotiate the home here and home there? How are homes situated in their imaginations? How are freedom and agency conceptualized and understood by a population who have experienced war and the chaos of displacement? How does home-bondedness shape diaspora women and queers' agency and freedom? In the following section, I explore these inquiries through my observations in the field and a close analysis of conversations from life history accounts and focus group discussions from the field.

Little Kabul, a tiny part of Fremont, California populated by Afghan diaspora became the site of state sponsored surveillance, policing and continued FBI raids in the aftermaths of September 11th. As I have argued that what happens there, impacts here, the invasion of there (Afghanistan) prompted the Homeland Security to tighten its surveillance on the Afghans here (the United States). In the later sections of this chapter, I theorize the connection between home there and home here, but prior to that, it is important to interrogate the notion of diaspora.

The term diaspora originates from the Greek-dia, "through", and speirein, "to scatter,"[185] meaning dispersion from. This dispersion originates from somewhere and that somewhere is home. Home is situated in the roots, memories and frequent references of diaspora. Avtar Brah eloquently puts that, "at the heart of the notion of diaspora is the image of a journey."[186] I emphasize the word journey here and throughout this chapter. It

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[185] Brah, Avtar. (1996). Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities. New York: Routledge.
[186] Ibid. p.182

is indeed journey, not travel. These journeys are rooted somewhere and begin under certain circumstances, continue with multiple conditions, obstacles, struggles, experiences and engage with several modes of economies and political and social structures and systems. These journeys could be physical crossings of borders and regimes or continued production of identities. Stuart Hall refers to diaspora as, "constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference."[187]

September 11th placed diasporas at the forefront of research in political science once again. From politicians to policy makers, the public and academia, the interest in interrogating, questioning, blaming, studying, diagnosing, policing and punishing the Muslim diaspora grew. However, prior to that, diasporas were studied primarily within the scholarship on globalization. These two junctures in history; globalization and 9/11 yielded interest for the study of diaspora in international relations and comparative politics[188]. Among those studying displacements and wars, there is a strong agreement that political violence produces fear, risk and life-threatening circumstances that force people to escape their homes; "sometimes you just have to leave"[189]. You are left with no choice but to

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[187] Hall, S. (2014). Cultural identity and diaspora. In *Diaspora and visual culture* (pp. 35-47). Routledge.

[188] Yossi Shain, Kinship and Diasporas in International Affairs (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007); Hazel Smith and Paul Stares (eds), Diasporas in Conflict (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2007); Fiona Adamson, 'Crossing Borders. International Migration and National Security', International Security, 31 (2006), pp. 165-1999; Fiona Adamson, 'Global Liberalism Versus Political Islam', International Studies Review (2005), pp. 547-69; Terrence Lyons, 'Diasporas and Homeland Conflict', in Miles Kahler and Barbara Walter (eds), Territoriality and Conflict in an Era of Globalization (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2006); Sarah Wayland, 'Ethnonationalist Networks and Transnational Opportunities: The Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora', Review of International Studies, 20 (2004), pp. 405-26; Christine Fair, 'Diaspora Involvement in Insurgencies', Nationalism and Ethnic Politics, 11 (2005), pp. 125-56; Daniel Byman et al., Trends for Outside Support in Insurgent Movements (RAND Corporation, 2001); Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, Greed and Grievances in Civil War, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 2355 (200

[189] Davenport, C., Moore, W., & Poe, S. (2003). Sometimes you just have to leave: Domestic threats and forced migration, 1964-1989. International Interactions, 29(1), 27-55. Cox-Edwards, A., & Rodríguez-Oreggia, E. (2009). Remittances and labor force participation in Mexico: an analysis using propensity score

escape. The emphasis on having no choice but to escape was made by my research participants several times during my fieldwork in California. Parveen, a 55-year old widow who fled Afghanistan with her newlywed husband in late 1980s and settled in Fremont, California said "khana, mal wo darayee khuda kulisha mandaim. Sar wo jaan e khuda zinda kashaidam. Dega chi chara dashtaim - we left our home, belongings and all the wealth. We managed to escape with our heads and bodies. What other options did we have?"[190] The only options Afghans had was to flee or stay and risk their lives. It is important to highlight that those who leave their homes have the means to do so. Others, with no means to escape war and conflicts, stay behind and leave their lives at the hands of fate. Class, race, ethnicity, political affiliations, gender and sexuality at times determine trajectories of diasporic journeys. The Afghan diaspora who have made their journeys to the West either come from wealthy families, political elites or have had friends and families in the West who sponsored them while they were in exile in Pakistan and/or Iran[191]. Some of the Afghan diaspora who left Afghanistan in the early days of war mentioned their wealthy background back home and well-connected family ties to the elites or family networks in the United States as reasons for making it here. However, the recent arrivals come from a diverse background, majority of whom I met during my field work are working class.

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matching. World Development, 37(5), 1004-1014. Hakovirta, H. (1986). Third world conflicts and refugeeism: Dimensions, dynamics, and trends of the world refugee problem. Finnish society of sciences and letters. Adhikari, R. (2013). Empowered wives and frustrated husbands: Nursing, gender and migrant Nepali in the UK. International Migration, 51(6), 168-179. Melander, E., & Öberg, M. (2006). Time to go? Duration dependence in forced migration. International Interactions,32(2), 129-152. Aguayo, S., Suhrke, A., & Zolberg, A. R. (1989). Escape from violence. Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in the Developing world.

[190] Interview.8.

[191] Rostami-Povey, E. (2007). *Afghan women: Identity and invasion*. Zed Books. p.89

I would like to go back to Brah's notion of journey, "these border crossing [journeys] are territorial, political, economic, cultural and psychological."[192] Diaspora journeys are not bound to the physical sense of movement and space alone but these journeys in fact transcend the emotional, psychological, ideological, linguistic and cultural boundaries and borders. I refer to these movements, negotiations, transformations, struggles and survivals as diasporic journeys. Diasporic journeys may begin with leaving of home and border crossings but these journeys continue with the diasporic subjects for the rest of their lives as they settle in their new reterritorial homes, grow into adulthood, move from place to place, negotiate their identities, barter with other cultures and languages, challenge systems and structures and try to survive regimes of power, including racism and Islamophobia that oppress them on daily basis.

A critical, yet undertheorized journey, that many diasporic subjects who identify as women and queer take is living double lives. In the scholarship on diaspora and migration, double lives as a journey and means of political resistance, social negotiations and survival trajectories remain understudied. Afghan diaspora women's transgression of sociocultural and religious boundaries in their private lives challenge the long-held western feminist discourses of unfree, oppressed, sexless victim Muslim women stereotypes and narratives. Many of the women and queer identifying Afghan-Americans I met for this research mentioned their double lives as a strategy to protect their family, honor, name, reputation and love of home; a home left behind by their parents, a home destroyed by colonial empires and wars, a home built in diaspora and a home residing in their memories and

[192] Brah, Avtar. (1996). Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities. New York: Routledge.p.209

imaginations. As time passed and I was able to build trust with my participants they invited me to their secret lives. Here we danced at gay bars, met up for drinks, visited hookah bars right after Friday prayers at a mosque, and became part of a gay Afghan men's wedding ceremony organized by the all-female cousins and sisters of the groom without their parents' knowledge.

Diasporic life in itself is a double life but for women and queer diaspora it gets even more complex. Afghan Americans are not just any diaspora of Afghans in a foreign land. They are a diaspora in a country that has militarily invaded their homeland - a home that is always on their parents' tongue, references, memories, trauma and nostalgia. Some of them still have their loved ones under the United States occupation in Afghanistan. Shakila, a 28-year old Afghan woman who got political asylum in the United States eight years ago, now lives in Alexandria, Virginia with her American boyfriend. She explained her double life and her complicated sense of freedom and agency this way, "my parents have no idea that I have a boyfriend and who is also a white American but he is Muslim. He converted to Islam when we met. I told him I wouldn't be with him unless he is Muslim…My parents live in Kabul under the US occupation and war. I am here in the US alone. I can tell them about my boyfriend if I want to but I don't want to tell them. You know what I mean. It will really break them. We are Afghan. I care for them. They are already going through a war. They have survived the war but this news will kill them….you know it is pretty fucked up- now that I am thinking about it. I am sleeping with someone whose government displaced me and brought war where I was born and raised. Basically, I am sleeping with the enemy. It is messed up. [she laughs and continues] maybe because it is so taboo, I like it. I don't know. I am just processing it. You can say that the war has really messed up our

lives. I am living a life that my parents don't know anything about. But hey I don't drink and I still wear my chadar (veil) so they should be happy."[193]

Shakila's life, choices and sexual exploration not only challenge the feminists' account of Muslim and Afghan women as victims, subordinate and unfree but they also offer refutation of dominant freedom and agency discourses[194]. Clandestine freedom is not her only option. She can afford to live the colonial feminist notion of freedom and Lorde's "break the silence."[195] Yet, she chooses not to; "I can tell them about my boyfriend if I want to but I don't want to tell them." Here, there is a clear sense of freedom in what she wants and does. She makes this decision of hiding with reasons and rationalities that are beyond many feminists' discourses of the Muslim women. Her politics of desire for the "enemy," as she calls it and appeal to what she considers "taboo" decolonizes the Afghan women's sexuality and agency. She politicizes her body and acts of sexual intimacy to resist the violence inflicted upon her body through experiences of war and journeys of

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[193] Interview.39

[194] The subordinate, unfree and victim depiction of Muslim women is not a new phenomenon in academia, policy circles or literary work. Two key works that are still considered pivotal in the theorization of feminism today are Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill's work. In 1792, more than 200 years ago, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman by Mary Wollstonecraft narrating about Muslim women and Islam asserts ", in the true style of Mahomentanism, [they] are treated as a kind of subordinate beings, and not as part of the human species, when improvable reason is allowed to be the dignified distinction which raises men above the brute creation" Janes, R. M. (2017). On the Reception of Mary Wollstonecraft'sa Vindication of the Rights of Woman. In *Mary Wollstonecraft* (pp. 25-34). Routledge. See also Mill, J. S. (1869). *The subjection of women* (Vol. 1). Transaction Publishers. Mill states ", [Christianity] has been the religion of the progressive portion of mankind, and Islamism, Brahminism, etc. have been those of the stationary portions." Another work that played a key role in perpetuation of Muslim women as powerless and weak is Minces' work. She asserts ", while women elsewhere gradually liberated themselves—to some extent—from the total supremacy of men, most women in the Muslim world continued to be totally subordinate. They live under a system which has barely changed despite the undeniable evolution of their societies." Minces, J. (1982). *The house of obedience: Women in Arab society*. Palgrave Macmillan.

[195] Lorde, A. (1977). The transformation of silence into language and action. *Identity Politics in the Women's Movement*, 81-84.

displacement. In the words of Homi Bhabha, Shakila's clandestine freedom and agency, "speak of the reality of survival and negotiation that constitutes the lived moment of resistance."[196]

Her agency is being aware of her roots, history, identities and the war in Afghanistan that shape her experiences and life decisions and choices. She also chooses to transgress sexually and engage in clandestine activities and freedom making while having agency over her decision who to sleep with (has to be Muslim), wear her chadar, not drink alcohol and maintaining her close relationship with her family back home. Freedom for Shakila is not about disclosing her secret life to her parents or as Foucault calls it "confession". It is not about drinking alcohol as Juliet Minces suggests, in the House of Obedience: Women in the Arab Society, where she claims that Muslim women should drink alcohol to liberate themselves[197]. Unveiling is not Shakila's liberation as unremittingly argued by mainstream feminism. In the post 9/11 world, veil and burqa have become synonymous with the religious and cultural oppression of Muslim women and their lack of agency. Shakila's agency over her chadar invites us to conceptualize agency differently and understand the "politics of piety"[198] through the lens of those who choose to veil. As Abu-Lughod asserts, "veiling must not be confused with, or made to stand for, lack of agency…veiling has become caught up almost everywhere now in a politics of

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[196] Bhabha, H. K. (1992). Freedom's Basis in the Indeterminate. *October*, *61*, p.57.

[197] Minces, J. (1982). *The house of obedience: Women in Arab society*. Palgrave Macmillan. p.49. Also in; Hamid, S. (2006). Between orientalism and postmodernism: the changing nature of western feminist thought towards the Middle East. *Hawwa*, *4*(1), 76-92.

[198] Mahmood, Saba. (2011). *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton University Press.

representation-of class, of piety, and of political affiliation."[199] The act of veiling involves as much agency as the act of wearing a bikini. Farkhunda, one of my interlocutors in the city of Hayward, offers inquiry into the double standards of colonial feminism in this way, "I choose to wear hijab just like someone chooses to wear a bikini but I am not sure why mine is seen as oppression and hers as freedom."[200]

Freedom is neither about Shakila sleeping with a white American man as what some colonial feminists would argue. Freedom for her is living her authentic self while also caring about those bonded to her in blood, experiences of war and survival. For her, being able to convert a white American man into Islam and sleeping with him while considering him the enemy is freedom. Her radical existence in exile and making complicated freedom decisions is a "lived moment of resistance."[201]

Like Shakila, many of the women and queer identifying individuals who took part in this research referred to their close relationship with their families and their love for them as a reason for not telling them about their secret lives. "It will break them", "I can't hurt them"," They have already gone through a lot" were constant reasons coupled with complex emotions brought up by almost everyone who said they lived a double life. Fatima, a 21-year old college student who has never been to Afghanistan but claims to have lived in "Afghanistan through [her] parents stories, memories and trauma," complicated this notion of care and bonded relationship that was mentioned by many others. Fatima

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[199] Abu-Lughod, L. (2013). *Do Muslim women need saving?*. Harvard University Press. p.39
[200] Interview 11.
[201] Bhabha, H. K. (2012). *The location of culture*. Routledge. Bhabha, H. K. (1992). Freedom's Basis in the Indeterminate. *October*, *61*, 46-57.

disclosed her lesbian identity to me after we hung out a few times and got to know each other well. She said she has been in a relationship for the past three years with another Afghan woman who wears hijab and is "fully covered":

> "People assume that my girlfriend is my best friend. Even when I am hanging out with my girlfriend every day, nobody can suspect because we both are Muslim and femme. So, it makes it easier to keep it as a secret. She wears hijab and is fully covered helps too. People think that a hijabi cannot be queer. People are stupid… I don't want the words to get out because I care for my mom and dad. I know it will affect them and that is why I have to live a double life. I just don't want anyone hurting them…. The person I am with is also Afghan and if I come out that will also out her. I worry about what is gonna happen if I come out because her family is very conservative. Maybe coming out is not for us. It will destroy home for us."[202]

Fatima's narrative invites us to see agency in relation to what I called earlier home-bondedness; home as in family, community, lover, kinship, security, trust, a site of identity construction[203], and community. Quynh N Pham defines bonded agency as, "a hermeneutic of enduring one's embeddedness in relations of power as well as in thick webs of sociality."[204] Agency is constructed through structures of relationships. This bonded framework of agency calls into question the liberal and feminist notion of agency as individual autonomy. Is agency individualistic? What are other ways we can reimagine

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[202] Interview 27.
[203] Dupuis, A., & Thorns, D. C. (1998). Home, home ownership and the search for ontological security. Sociological Review, 46, 24–47.
[204] Phạm, Q. N. (2013). Enduring bonds: Politics and life outside freedom as autonomy. *Alternatives*, *38*(1), p.31.

agency? Agency for some is woven "in the thick webs of sociality" and this web is not of power as Foucault would suggest but of care, love, intimacy and lived experiences. Diaspora subjects live in close-knit communities for reasons of economic, social and emotional support. Another reason that has brought diaspora communities in closer proximity to one another is the systematic racism and isolation that they face at varying degrees. Therefore, one's agency is embedded and conditioned upon other community member's happiness, safety, lives and identities. It is one's duty to care for others as that is, in fact, caring for self.[205] The self and others are interconnected in many ways. Afghan diaspora's sense of care for one another guides us to Foucauldian notion of care. Most Afghans' ethical values are significantly influenced by Sufi Islam which calls for selflessness as a spiritual and ethical state of being[206]. At times, self is voided in the pursuit of community. I am not romanticizing the notion of community here. Community could be a site of peace, security and love ,yet also a space of conflict and chaos as James Clifford argues, "community can be a site of both support and oppression."[207] For Afghans, selflessness is not only pursued but also honored, respected and seen as an ethical act of sacrifice and love. Fatima's silence on her lesbian identity and love for another Afghan

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[205] Foucault, M. (1988). The care of the self. Also see in; Fornet-Betancourt, R., Becker, H., Gomez-Müller, A., & Gauthier, J. D. (1987). The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom: An interview with Michel Foucault on January 20, 1984. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, *12*(2-3), 112-131.

[206] Sufism has influenced the everyday lives of Afghans; rituals, ethical and moral values and practices of Islam. The war impacted these ways of living and practicing Islam. However, the Afghan diaspora in the US still carry very similar values and ethical standings as forms of resistance to Saudi versions of Islam that has hoped to dominate the everyday lives of Afghans in Afghanistan. For selflessness in sufism see; Heck, P. (2006). Mysticism as Morality: The Case of Sufism. *The Journal of Religious Ethics, 34*(2), 253-286. See also; O'Dell, E. (2017). Subversives and Saints: Sufism and the State in Central Asia. In JONES P. (Ed.), *Islam, Society, and Politics in Central Asia* (pp. 99-126). Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh.

[207] Clifford, J. (1994). Diasporas. *Cultural anthropology*, *9*(3), 302-338.

woman deprives her of many moments of joy, togetherness and "care for self." Yet, she ethically and rationally pursues selflessness and offers sacrifice of those advantages so that she has cared for and protected her "home." Selflessness is a vital element of Afghanyat[208], Afghan code; the ways of living like an Afghan. While selflessness is pursued as an ethical and spiritual state of being a good Afghan, Muslim and human, selfishness is seen as deviance from the norms of Afghanyat. There is even an Afghan proverb, khudkhwahi ba khuda maiziba, selfishness only suits God.

Agency is embedded in the ethical webs of selflessness and care for home. Home bondedness exists in a spatial, physical, relational, and abstract realm of meaning and identity making. Avtar Brah calls this sense of home, "as the site of everyday lived experiences." The experiences of love, war, displacement, poverty, struggles in diaspora, surveillance and sharing tales of a home left behind over a few cups of chai constitute home for many Afghans. For a population dealing with trauma of war and state sponsored surveillance, suspension, mistrust and everyday racism and microaggressions, home embodies, "ontological security."[209] It becomes a zone of safety, domain of intimacy and geography of support and survival. Fatima's silence is home-bonded agency and politics of survival.

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[208] Garakani, T. (2009). *Place-making in the margins: A case study of Afghan refugees in Iran (1980–2001)*. Teachers College, Columbia University.

[209] In the theory of human existence, Giddens frames ontological security as a state of being secure psychologically within the realm of kinship and trust; "ontological security refers to a "person's fundamental sense of safety in the world and includes a basic trust of other people. Obtaining such trust becomes necessary in order for a person to maintain a sense of psychological well-being and avoid existential anxiety." Giddens, Anthony (1991) Modernity and Self-Identity. New York: Polity Press. pp.38-39

Politics of survival and resistance for Afghans who fled the colonial wars as adults lie in the memories and tales of home. They are also in the holdings of values and traditions of home; a home that they wrapped in their bokhcha as they were fleeing political violence in the middle of the night. Today, that "home," and the hopes of returning to it keep them alive. Anne-Marie Fortier in "Coming Home: Queer Migrations and Multiple Evacuations of Home" argues that for "[diaspora] home remains widely sentimentalized as space of comfort and seamless belonging."[210] For diaspora of war, home "resides in the memory,"[211] and it is sentimentalized not only as a space of comfort but also as a site of resistance to forces that seized 'home' from them, as narrated in Bastan's poem earlier.

Conclusion:

Double lives as diasporic journeys make conceptual interventions in diasporic studies and feminist IR and call attention to alternative theorization of freedom and agency. The two or many different lives that people live on daily basis to survive demonstrate that, "each self has a public as well as a private side and many more layers within in, from the conscious to the deeply unconscious."[212] The everyday life politics of Afghan women and queer diaspora interrupt the simplified dichotomy of freedom and unfreedom put forward by colonial feminists. Not everyone either has or does not have freedom and agency. It is much more complicated than that. Afghan women diaspora and the Afghan queer diaspora introduce us to clandestine freedom and home-bonded agency that comes from a place of

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[210] Fortier, A. M. (2001). 'Coming home' Queer migrations and multiple evocations of home. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *4*(4), p.412.
[211] Hooks, B. (1990). *Homeplace: A site of resistance*.p.499
[212] Walley, C. J. (1997). Searching for "voices": Feminism, anthropology, and the global debate over female genital operations. *Cultural Anthropology*, *12*(3), p.412

care, love, war, displacement and diasporic experiences. This chapter also engages with the critique of feminist work on Muslim women in general and Afghan women in particular. The critique also offers other possibilities of imaging, framing and doing feminism, in plural forms that are rooted in the experiences, identities and 'homes' of individuals and communities.

Afghan women living double lives in the diaspora, "find ways to exist in a world that is diminishing,"[213] and aim to protect the sense of imaginary home for their parents from a place of care, love and resistance to the Western feminist notion of freedom and liberation as losing veil and virginity. In the words of Clifford, "the lived experiences of diasporic women thus involve painful difficulty in mediating discrepant worlds."[214] These women, de-colonizing sex, their home-bondedness; to their bodies and families, home here, home there and traditions, cross borders of freedom, unfreedom and the in-between, honor and shame, silence and speaking out, and public and private. Through their political existence in a racialized and surveilled world, they make critical interventions in the fields of feminist IR, international relations, political violence and diaspora studies. Afghan women's diasporic feminism re-imagines, reconceptualizes and politicizes silence. Their complex lived experiences of freedom and agency uphold the argument that silence is as political as speaking out.[215]

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[213] Ahmed, S. (2014). Selfcare as warfare. Retrieved from http://feministkilljoys.com/2014/08/25/selfcare-as-warfare/

[214] Clifford, J. (1994). Diasporas. *Cultural anthropology*, *9*(3), p.314.

[215] Roy, Arundhati. (2017). The god of small things. See also; Khot, M. (2001). The Feminist Voice in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things. *Indian Feminisms*, 213-22.

Chapter 4

The Faggot and the Terrorist: Living at the Intersections of Homophobia and Islamophobia

On 12 June 2016, I woke up at 2am to the sound of Allah-u-Akbar that I had set as my alarm for the month of Ramadan. I did not want to wake up but I had to do suhor, the breakfast before fasting. I dragged my sleepy body to the kitchen and started the tea going. To prepare myself mentally for another long day of fasting during a hot summer in Minnesota, I switched on the TV and played Quran recitation. I picked up my phone to check the news on Kabul. In exile, my habit of checking the news on Afghanistan turns into a daily ritual more often so, twice a year; during summers and the month of Ramadan. Summers, because the terrorists start their seasonal patterns of suicide bombing attacks.[216] It is this time of the year when the colorful dancing kites in the sky of Kabul disappear in the smoke of bombs. It is this time of the year when the trees in Pul-e-Kheshti, right by the Kabul river, hang burnt pieces of clothes and human flesh among their red and purple mulberries. During summers, the city becomes alive with its lush trees, colorful kites and packs of people everywhere; yet it dies in one second, one blast. As people say in Kabul, the city becomes *aroos e biwa*, a widow bride.

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[216] For seasonal patterns of terrorism/suicide bombing, please see: Feyyaz, M. (2013). Conceptualizing Terrorism Trend Patterns in Pakistan an Empirical Perspective. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, *7*(1). Yom, S., & Saleh, B. (2004). Palestinian suicide bombers: A statistical analysis. *ECAAR News Network*, *8*. Townsley, M., Johnson, S. D., & Ratcliffe, J. H. (2008). Space time dynamics of insurgent activity in Iraq. *Security Journal*, *21*(3), 139-146

Similarly, Kabul witnesses its Ramadan in the same way. One moment streets are packed with people shopping for spices and sweets for dinner and the next they choke on their own blood and bomb smoke. One senses fear in Kabul's morning fog and afternoon dust. It is not the fear of not being a good Muslim during this holy month that engulfs every Kabuli, nor is this the fear being able to hold onto one's commitment to fasting during long hot days. The fear is one of sheer survival: will I survive the suicide bombing this Ramadan? Will my loved ones make it through another holy yet bloody month? In the past few years, the Taliban and the Islamic State (IS) have increased the number of suicide bombing attacks during Ramadan,[217] arguing that the doors of paradise are open throughout the holy month.

That same morning, after doing suhor, I opened my Facebook and noticed the headline "a gunman opened fire in a gay night club." My heart sank and I rushed to learn more: where is it? What gay club? Who did it? I hope he is not Muslim. I soon find out more: Omar Mateen, an Afghan-American, Muslim man killed 49 and injured 53 queer and trans individuals at Pulse Night Club in Orlando that night, mostly Latinx. My mind and heart process a thousand pains and fears while mourning over the loss of many queer and trans lives with whom I might have crossed paths if I lived in Orlando. Mateen spoke my language. Was he gay? Was this an act of terrorism? Was it homophobia? Some of these questions continue to surface in public discussions, yet Omar Mateen is dead and the questions will remain unanswered.

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[217] Serhan, Yasmin. (2017). Is ISIS More Violent During Ramadan? The Atlantic. < https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/06/is-isis-more-violent-during-ramadan/531444/>

The Orlando tragedy happened during a heated season of US presidential campaigns; not surprisingly, it generated conversation on migration and its nexus with national security in the US.[218] Right after the Orlando massacre, Donald Trump during his visit to New Hampshire, used the Orlando shooting to advance his anti-immigration and anti-Muslim policies. In the speech he said, "the only reason the killer was in America in the first place is because we allowed his family to come here. That is a fact, and a fact we need to talk about."[219] This rhetoric gained support as he pushed for the Muslim Ban.[220] The first Executive Order on the Muslim Ban went into effect in January 2017 which gave blatant support to an already Islamophobic environment in the country. Mateen's act of violence and hate crime against queer and trans lives also gave US politicians more reasons to justify the increased surveillance of Muslims at the airports and public spaces, and in their homes, mosques and schools.[221]

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[218] See; Kerwin, D. (2016). How robust refugee protection policies can strengthen human and national security. *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, *4*(3), 83-140;
Schmid, A. P. (2016). Links between terrorism and migration. *International Centre For Counter Terrorism (ICCT) ICCT Research Paper*.

[219] Detrow, Scott. (2016). "Trump Calls to Ban Immigration From Countries With 'Proven History Of Terrorism'" < https://www.npr.org/2016/06/13/481910989/trump-expands-immigration-ban-to-countries-with-proven-history-of-terrorism.

[220] Berenson, Tessa. (2016). Donald Trump Pushes for Muslim Ban after the Orlando Shooting. http://time.com/4366912/donald-trump-orlando-shooting-muslim-ban/

[221] Ali, H. B. M., & Shamimah Binti Haja Mohideen, M. E. (2016). Islamophobic rhetoric in the wake of the Orlando mass killing. *International Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences*, *1*(3), 19-25.
Also see: Boot, Max. (2016). After Orlando: A Long War. < https://www.wsj.com/articles/after-orlando-a-long-war-1466187385>. Khan, M. H., Adnan, H. M., Kaur, S., Khuhro, R. A., Asghar, R., & Jabeen, S. (2019). Muslims' Representation in Donald Trump's Anti-Muslim-Islam Statement: A Critical Discourse Analysis. *Religions*, *10*(2), 115.

More importantly, the shooting at Pulse night club politicized queer Muslim identity and sexuality while also giving global visibility to issues of homophobia and Islamophobia. In the matter of hours, the media turned Mateen from a gunman to a terrorist and later a fag; a closeted Afghan, Muslim fag who was sexually oppressed by his religion, family and native roots.[222] His first marriage failed and his second was failing, while he was hopelessly cruising the gay clubs and online gay apps. Mateen became queer as in failure.[223] What do I mean by failure? Failure has multiple meanings in the case of Mateen. He came out of the closet through his death. His failure was in being queer while a Muslim- the two juxtaposed identities that in their contrary, do not fit the neoliberal queer mold. He failed at living outside the neoliberal closet while also failing to live as the heterosexual man he was expected to live. He even failed at being a terrorist because he was queer. Mateen is one example of a larger system that produces the faggot and the terrorist discourses and subjects which center the discussions of this chapter. In this chapter, I engage with the everyday experiences and border crossings of homophobia and Islamophobia in the lives of queer and trans Afghan diaspora in the US who live in peculiar times and conflict spaces. Throughout this chapter, I also remain reflective of my own experiences of homophobia and Islamophobia both here in the United States and in Afghanistan; the two homes that define and connect, yet problematize Afghan diaspora as an identity and experience. In this conversation, I place myself under my own analytical

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[222] Please see: Alvarez, Lizette, Richard Pérez-Peña and Christine Hauser. (2016). "Orlando Gunman Was Cool and Calm after the Masscre, Police Say." < https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/14/us/orlando-shooting.html> . Hicklin, Aaron. (2016). Was Orlando Gunman Omar Mateen a Self-Hating Gay Man? His Ex-Wife Weighs in. < https://www.out.com/news-opinion/2016/6/14/was-orlando-gunman-omar-mateen-self-hating-gay-man-his-ex-wife-weighs>.

[223] Halberstam, J., & Halberstam, J. (2011). *The queer art of failure*. Duke University Press.

gaze. I provide an auto-ethnographic account of my own border crossings and lived-experiences experiences. I expose my home to public judgement. Home is not just a spatial structure or an abstract relation. Home does not just refer to my own society, kinships and people. Home is my own self- the home inside me that holds my identities and experiences. Home is my body that drifts across borders of halal and haram, Muslim and queer, faggot and terrorist. I become my own home. Based on research data collected during my field work with Afghan diaspora in the United States, I develop the concept of matryoshka doll subjectivity which represents multiplicity and complexities of queer and trans Afghan diasporic subjects in the United States. I argue that the rise of Islamophobia in the US has smothered the lives of queer and trans Muslims in general and Afghans in particular, both within Muslim and in the larger queer and trans communities.

The queer and trans Afghan diaspora move between two distinct spaces of intimacy: the homophobic familial space; and the Islamophobic queer space. They cross these complicated borders on a daily basis. Neither do they experience the familial spaces merely as spaces of constraint, nor do they experience the queer spaces merely as spaces of freedom. Rather, both of these spaces pose certain constraints on the lives of queer and trans Afghans who experience freedom and violence as an unending dance. The chapter also complicates the queer and trans Afghan diasporic experiences of oppression and marginalization within the larger Muslim, Arab and South Asian communities. My research reveals that discussions of homophobia within the Muslim communities at large and in the Afghan community specifically are ignored by Muslims for fear of perpetuating Islamophobia. The questions that undergird my inquiry are: how do queer and trans Afghans navigate their lives in such fragile and volatile times and violent spaces? In what

ways do the United States' gay rights movements and what Joseph Massad calls the "gay international" nurture Islamophobia and advance the violence of homoempire "at home," where home is both US and Afghanistan? In grappling with these questions, the rest of this chapter complicates dominant understandings of queer and trans Afghan subjectivity and adds new layers to academic conversations about home, empire, homonormativity, Islamophobia and homonationalism.

The Faggot and the Terrorist:

Post 9/11, critical scholarship has closely engaged with Muslim and Arab sexuality within the violence of the "War on Terror" and the production of the "faggot terrorist" and "homosexual Muslim man." Jasbir Puar's work on homo-nationalism in this context explores the nexus between race, sexuality and US imperialism.[224] Nivi Manchanda's work complicates the representation of Muslim man, particularly Afghan man in post 9/11 era within the framework of Orientalism and homo-nationalism. The image of Pashtun men is plaited within the discourse of "deviance" and "queerness."[225] Regardless of whether the debate was about saving the Afghan women from Afghan men, or about capturing Osama Bin Laden, the Afghan men at home and abroad became the symbol of the monster terrorist,[226] at times, the effeminate homosexual.[227] Both of these images signify savagery,

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[224] Puar, J. K. (2017). *Terrorist assemblages: Homonationalism in queer times*. Duke University Press; Puar, J. K., & Rai, A. (2002). Monster, terrorist, fag: The war on terrorism and the production of docile patriots. *Social Text*, *20*(3), 117-148.
[225] Manchanda, N. (2015). Queering the Pashtun: Afghan sexuality in the homo-nationalist imaginary. *Third World Quarterly*, *36*(1), 130-146.
[226] Puar, J. K., & Rai, A. (2002). Monster, terrorist, fag: The war on terrorism and the production of docile patriots. *Social Text*, *20*(3), 117-148.
[227] See photos by Thomas Dworzak that I discuss in this chapter. Dworzak, T., Anderson, J. L., & Rees, T. (2003). Taliban. London: Trolley.

danger, violence and a "clash of civilizations."[228] The monster terrorist is there to kill and immolate and the effeminate homosexual is there to defy heterosexuality and end human production – both herald annihilation. Both the monster terrorist and the effeminate homosexual become threats to the liberal and heteronormative masculine Western societies.

When the US militarily invaded Afghanistan, it was as if Christopher Columbus once again "discovered" another part of the world. The western world wanted to learn everything about Afghanistan and consume this exotic land and its savage people. From gay travel writers to queer bloggers, photographers, journalists and military anthropologists, the west produced knowledge about Afghans and Afghanistan, and entangled it with their already distorted understandings of Islam, in ways that justified the invasion and continue to do so after 18 years. The representation of Afghan man in the discourses of the west moved between two dangerous existences- the dolled-up faggot and the terrorist. In the early days of the US invasion of Afghanistan, reports about Afghan sexuality, particularly the effeminacy of the Pashtuns started to circulate among the international community. From Daily Telegraph to San Francisco Chronicles, the news discussed Afghan men's sexuality as in mystery.[229] The US Department of Defense even hired Anna Maria Cardinalli, a social scientist, to solve the mystery on Afghan

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[228] Huntington, S. P. (2000). The clash of civilizations?. In *Culture and Politics* (pp. 99-118). Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

[229] See for example; Farmer, Ben. "Paedophilia Culturally Accepted in South Afghanistan."; Joel Brinkley, "Afghanistan's Dirty Little Secret," San Francisco Chronicle, August 29, 2010; Daily Kos. (2010). Afghan Men Struggle with Sexual Identity, Research Finds. < https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2010/01/30/832249/-Afghan-Men-Struggle-With-Sexual-Identity-Study-Finds>

homosexuality and the effeminacy of the men who produced a large report titled "Pashtun Sexuality."[230] Author Chris Stephen, in an article titled "Startled Marines Find Afghan Men All Made up to See Them," writes:

> British Marines returning from an operation deep in the Afghan mountains spoke last night of an alarming new threat-being propositioned by swarms of gay local farmers. An Arbroath Marine, James Fletcher, said "they were more terrifying than the Al-Qaeda. One bloke who had painted his toenails was offering to paint ours. They go about hand in hand, mincing around the village. While the Marines failed to find any Al-Qaeda during the seven-day Operation Condor, every village [they] went into [they] got a group of men wearing make-up coming up to [them], stroking [their] hair and cheeks and making kissing noises.[231]

Such imperial journalistic work about Afghan men's sexuality and the faggot/terrorist juxtaposition was subsequently supported by the Dutch Photographer Thomas Dworzak's collection of photos called "Taliban." Dworzak finds undeveloped camera rolls at the Photography Studios in Kandahar and develops them. He claims the photos are of Taliban while these photos could be of any ordinary Afghans. His only proof to this is that the men appear with beard, traditional clothes, eyeliner and some with guns.

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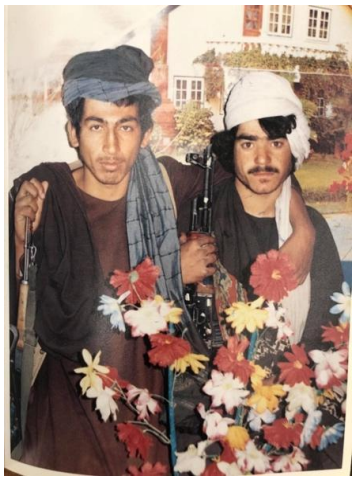
[230] Cardinalli,A. M. (2009). "Pashtun Sexuality." HTT AF-6 Research Updates and Findings, https://docs.go ogle.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:znKX3soYgusJ:www.imagesoflife-online.co.uk/HTTAF6.doc+&hl=en&gl =uk&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESiSZIeBiz7AsASvZJTIH23FgQ5B6laCMaNWwgIOnSlyRet97PIL B5a5P8Cn gE6SDZGAQSWIjhVM1GYm7JEFohnc_sYQtTJWtzVW7GRakTBgfHVne38yiRnmFvFGWE0 XMgQZ XiBG&sig=AHIEtbQkkHkrBIEaY8ZXLYadp3aJPdRnRg.

[231] Stephen, Chris. (2002). "Startled Marines find Afghan Men all Made up to See Them," Scotsman. < https://www.scotsman.com/news/world/startled-marines-find-afghan-men-all-made-up-to-see-them-1-568279>

He writes, “Pashtun men, Kandaharis in particular, are conscious of their personal appearance. Many of them line their eyes with black kohl and color their toenails, with henna. Some of these fighters wear colored sandals and stick flowers to their guns.” In highlighting such attributes as self-consciousness about appearances, painting toenails and floral prints and décor that are associated with queerness in the West, Dworzak brings in his white Eurocentric and queerphobic lens into the lives of Afghans and not only homosexualizes them but also labels them as Taliban, the terrorist. This move between the terrorist and faggot implies an embedded savagery, a danger and destruction underlying both categories. See below photos by Thomas Dworzak:



Representation of Afghan queerness through fake flowers, Kalashnikov rifles, eyeliner, heels and in front of a backdrop of what looks to be a western home, insinuates the queerness of Afghans as fake, savage and comic yet dangerous to the "modern world." In a public survey examining the attitudes of people towards homosexuality in the US conducted in 1974 by Darrell Steffensmeier & Renée Steffensmeier, they find that "male subjects tend to view the male homosexual as a sexual failure and to perceive him as personally threatening or dangerous."[232] Even today men are more likely than women to discriminate against homosexuality.[233] Majority of the representations of Afghan men as the failed queer and dangerous homosexual are the work of the white western, heterosexual or gay men.[234] These photographs also resemble those of the French colonizers in Algeria that were used as colonial postcards.[235] In the words of Edward Said, "it remains the professional Orientalist's job to piece together a portrait, a restored picture as it were, of the Orient or the Oriental; fragments, such as those unearthed by Sacy, supply the material, but the narrative shape, continuity, and figures are constructed by the scholar, for whom

[232] Steffensmeier, D., & Steffensmeier, R. (1974). Sex differences in reactions to homosexuals: Research continuities and further developments. Journal of Sex Research, 10(1), p.52

[233] Worthen, M. G. (2013). An argument for separate analyses of attitudes toward lesbian, gay, bisexual men, bisexual women, MtF and FtM transgender individuals. Sex Roles, 68(11-12), 703-723.

[234] See ; Reynolds, M. (2002). "Kandahar's Lightly Veiled Homosexual Habits," Los Angeles Times;
Farmer, Ben. (2011) "Paedophilia Culturally Accepted in South Afghanistan," Daily Telegraph. http://www.examiner.com/article/afghan-pedophilia-a-way-of-life-say-u-s-soldiers-and-journalists; Dworzak, Thomas. Taliban. London: Trolley, 2003; Baer, James. (2007). "Closely Watched Pashtuns – A Critique of Western Journalists' Reporting Bias about 'Gay Kandahar'." Pukaar

[235] Alloula, M. (1986). The colonial harem (Vol. 21). U of Minnesota Press.

scholarship consists of circumventing the unruly (un-Occidental) non-history of the Orient with orderly chronicle, portraits, and plots."[236]

In the queer and trans focus group discussion I conducted in Los Angeles, one of the participants brought up these photos in the discussion. When asked how queer and trans Afghans are perceived by non-Afghans in the social settings and gatherings, Jawaid, a 19-year old who was the youngest in the group said, "like a terrorist." Zalmai, 37-year-old, who identifies as trans, added;

"I wear surma, eyeliner, every day because I love it. I have loved it since I was a kid because I saw my mom wearing it. When my mom passed away a few years ago, I started wearing it. Even many white gays wear eyeliner these days. One time at a gay bar, this one guy told me I looked like the Taliban with my eyeliner. And then he showed me these pictures on google. I had never seen these photos before and now every time I wear surma I think about that ugly conversation and, honestly, I avoid wearing it some days for that reason."[237]

Michael Luongo, a gay American travel writer authored the homoerotica book, "Gay Travels in the Muslim World."[238] The book sold thousands of copies amidst the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. In the book, Luongo situates Afghan men with the faggot and terrorist dichotomies that dehumanizes Afghan men while being exoticized for the consumption of the white gay travelers to Afghanistan. Luongo makes his first gay colonial travels to Afghanistan in 2004 with the hope of "infiltrating" the gay Afghan life. He writes,

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[236] Said, E. W. (1979). Orientalism. Vintage. p.85
[237] Focus group discussion.9 in Los Angeles.
[238] Luongo, M. (2013). *Gay Travels in the Muslim World*. Routledge.

> In the two years between 9/11 and my visit to Afghanistan, my curiosity about the country's gay life was also piqued. I frequently ran across articles hinting at widespread traditional Afghan acceptance of homosexuality. The New York Times mentioned boys covered in make-up who greeted U.S. soldiers. Details magazine discussed the homosocial standards of much of Islamic culture, based on separation of the genders, and reviewed Trolley Press' 2003 book "Taliban," in which photographer Thomas Dworzak presented images of effeminate Taliban warriors that he unearthed. I also read "An Unexpected Light," by British adventurer Jason Elliot, which discussed war-weary Afghan men who expressed delight about his soft skin when he visited during the Russian invasion. All these works, and others, however, were compiled by straights who wavered between curiosity and repulsion at the phenomena they discussed. To the best of my knowledge, no gay Westerner had infiltrated gay Afghan life. I decided I would be the one to do this.[239]

Luongo further speaks of this "infiltration" of gay Afghan life when he befriends an Afghan man and goes to his home and parties with his friends while, according to him, they all "desired"(?) him. He writes, "each man waited expectantly as they showed me pictures, searching intensely for my reaction. It was as if each wanted to prove his bravery, and with each photo, I felt as if I were being wooed. Courage against the Taliban seemed to be their erotic calling card… As the night progressed, I was comfortable enough to stay over, and Ali and I slept in each other's arms, after caressing each other for hours."[240]

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[239] Luongo, Michael. (2004). Eroticism Among Kabul's Warriors. Gay City News. < https://www.gaycitynews.nyc/stories/2004/10/eroticism-among-2004-05-05.html>
[240] Ibid.

Luongo writes about the gay life in Afghanistan within a homonationalist understanding of queerness while placing white gay colonizers as the desired and worthy to be "wooed" by the sexually frustrated and gun loving Afghan men.

Such exoticization and sexualization of war and the enemy is not unique to a gay erotica travel writer. Abdullah, a gay Afghan man who lives in Los Angeles but was born in Afghanistan in the midst of war, finds himself being sexualized yet rejected at the same time in the gay Los Angeles scene. I met Abdullah at a café in West Hollywood (WeHo), where he lives with two other brown queers. Abdullah, 27, moved away from his family after finding a job in Los Angeles. For him and majority of other queer and trans Afghans I met for this research, education and job offered opportunities to move away from home and explore their sexuality. He said: "First I barely get dates online because I am not white and I don't look like Adam Lambert or Gus Kenworthy. When I get dates, white guys always ask me where I am from. When I tell them that my family migrated from Afghanistan, they make rude jokes like, 'oh hope you are not a terrorist or how can you be Muslim and gay?'[241] This kind of curiosity around Muslim man's sexuality and performance has remained central in the case of Omar Mateen. His wife and ex were questioned, secret lovers were found, and they provided testimonies on Mateen's sexuality and sexual desires and practices, all pointing to his failed sexuality, or what Raihan Sharif calls "inadequate queerness."[242]

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[241] Interview .51.

[242] Sharif, R. (2015). White Gaze Saving Brown Queers: Homonationalism Meets Imperialist Islamophobia. *Limina*, *21*(1).

What was going through your mind when you first learned about the Pulse night club shooting? I asked this question from every queer and trans Afghan who took part in this research. Every single one of them said "I was scared." Followed by, "I was hoping he wasn't Muslim." Masood, a 27-year-old Afghan-American who identifies as gay and resided in the Bay Area of California shared his account of what he was thinking that day:

> Hmmm. You are actually the first Afghan who asked me about this. I woke up that morning and thought it was going to be just another Ramadan day but then I learned about the shooting at the gay club. I was scared and numb at the same time. You know what I mean? I thought I was finally safe. I was kicked out of my house about five years ago when my family came to know I like men. Someone from the mosque told them but I don't know who. When the Orlando [shooting] happened, I was even scared to walk outside that day. I texted my queer friends and we were all in a group chat, most are POC. We were just sharing our feelings and being there for each other. I then got a call from my cousin. This cousin I haven't talked to for years. I thought he was concerned about me or something happened at home but no. Guess what he told me? I answered the phone and he tells me "so many of your fags died. Do you still want to be a fag? Allah makes both worlds *jehanum,* hell for you guys." I dropped his call and tried to ignore what he said. Later that day, my friends and I all attended a vigil for the Pulse victims. It was here in Castro. This one gay guy asked me where I was from and I told him my parents are from Afghanistan but I am from here, the Bay Area. He looked at me and said " don't

Muslims throw gays down the buildings? Wasn't that terrorist Muslim? Why are you here?[243]

LGBTQIA and Muslim are two marginalized identities that have continuously moved between danger zones, whether we look at the 1980s HIV/AIDS crisis or 9/11.[244] Similar to Muslims post 9/11, gays were considered as threat to life; of their own and others around them. They both have posed danger in the imaginaries of the white, heterosexual, cisgender, middle-class, citizens of the United States. The Human Terrain System, "an intelligence gathering program that embeds social scientists with combat brigades in Iraq and Afghanistan" founded by the US Army in 2005,[245] produced a report on Pashtun sexuality in Afghanistan. This report gives accounts of the US military encounters with local Afghans and uses these encounters to explain the Afghan sexuality as a disease: "The presence of a culturally-dependent homosexuality appears to affect a far greater population…some medics treated an outbreak of gonorrhea among the local national interpreters on their camp. Approximately 12 out of nearly 20 young male interpreters present in the camp had contracted the disease, and most had done so anally."[246] The discourses on Afghan men even today move across borders of danger; the sick homosexual and the terrorist.

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[243] Interview. 44

[244] Fullilove, M. T., & FULLILOVE III, R. E. (1999). Stigma as an obstacle to AIDS action: The case of the African American community. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *42*(7), 1117-1129; Rudy, K. (2000). Queer theory and feminism. *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, *29*(2), 195-216; Gamson, J. (1989). Silence, death, and the invisible enemy: AIDS activism and social movement "newness". *Social problems*, *36*(4), 351-367: Cadwell, S. (1991). Twice removed: The stigma suffered by gay men with AIDS. *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, *61*(3), 236-246.

[245] González, R. J. (2009). American counterinsurgency: Human science and the human terrain; González, R. J. (2008). 'Human terrain' Past, present and future applications. *Anthropology Today*, *24*(1), 21-26.

[246] Cardinalli, A. (2010). Pashtun sexuality. *Unclassified Human Terrain Team (HTT) AF-6: Research Update and Findings*, p.2

Imperial Solidarities

The US "War on Terror" waged since 2001 has continuously argued to counter terrorism and bring democracy in "nations that harbor terrorism."[247] The Western democracy projects in the Muslim nations have been obsessed with saving Muslim women from angry, sexually oppressed and violent Muslim men and serving them with American style rights like the old school midwestern hot dish or all time America's favorite, bacon. The case of Rahaf Mohammed, an 18-year old Saudi woman who escaped her family's torture and oppressive regime's violence on women in early 2019 is a pivotal instance of the gendered orientalism during the US "War on Terror." I acknowledge the sufferings Rahaf went through and I do neither deny nor want the world to ignore the Saudi regime's violence against women, refugees, poor and the LGBTQIA communities. In fact, Saudi crimes against humanity and war-inflicted violence go beyond the Saudi kingdom into many other Muslim majority countries including Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, Sudan, Somalia and many others where the Saudi state has perpetrated and supported violence and oppression. Indeed, many scholars discuss Saudi's violence in its own kingdom and in other Muslims nations.[248]

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[247] Lehrer, R. (2002). Unbalancing the Terrorists' Checkbook: Analysis of US Policy in Its Economic War on International Terrorism. *Tul. J. Int'l & Comp. L.*, *10*, 333. See Also: Bush, G. W. (2001). Address to a joint session of Congress and the American people. *Harv. JL & Pub. Pol'y*, *25*, xviii. Carothers, T. (2003). Promoting democracy and fighting terror. *Foreign Aff.*, *82*, 84. Giroux, Henry A. *Terror of neoliberalism: Authoritarianism and the eclipse of democracy*. Routledge, 2018.

[248] See; Ghadbian, N. (2000). Political Islam and violence. *New Political Science*, *22*(1), 77-88; Haynes, J. (2001). Transnational religious actors and international politics. *Third World Quarterly*, *22*(2), 143-158; Bonnefoy, L. (2011). Violence in contemporary Yemen: state, society and Salafis. *The Muslim World*, *101*(2), 324-346; Hill, G. (2017). *Yemen endures: civil war, Saudi adventurism and the future of Arabia*. Oxford University Press;

Here, however, I am concerned with the way the West responded to Rahaf and how this response demonstrates the continuation of projects defined by gendered orientalism that is rooted in Islamophobia and western hegemony. Feminists in Australia, Canada and the US went to streets asking their governments to allow Rahaf Mohammed's entry into their countries. In Australia, a group of women calling themselves the Secret Sisterhood held a topless demonstration in front of the Saudi consulate in Sydney demanding the Australian government to accept Rahaf as a refugee.[249] Rahaf was eventually saved by Canadians and the next day photos of her eating bacon, drinking Starbucks and fashioning a knee-length dress with no hijab went viral. The headlines trended that "Saudi teen granted asylum in Canada makes the most of her new life - eating BACON for breakfast and grabbing a Starbucks coffee with her legs exposed."[250] She was also escorted by white women (who were more "covered" than her?) into press conferences and public speeches. Such productions of what Reina Lewis calls "gendered orientalism" in relation to the production of Muslim women's oppression as well as their saving by the benevolent west shape the colonial and military invasion narratives and politics in the aftermaths of September 11. As scholars such as Minoo Moallem and Laura Nader argue, imperial

[249] Giordano, Chiara. (2019). Australian Women Hold Topless Protest in Support of Saudi Teen's Asylum Bid. < https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/australasia/australia-topless-protest-rahaf-saudi-arabia-asylum-sydney-runaway-a8720491.html>

[250] Rahman, Khaleda. (2019) "Saudi teen granted asylum in Canada makes the most of her new life-eating Bacon for breakfast and grabbing a Starbucks coffee with her legs exposed." < https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6597381/Saudi-teen-granted-asylum-Canada-eats-BACON-time-grabbing-Starbucks.html>

feminists have used Muslim women, particularly the narratives of veil and oppression, to empower and advance colonialism and orientalism.[251]

In Chapter 3, I engage with this particular discussion of "imperial feminism"[252] and global feminist sisterhood and solidarities. "Global sisterhood" has been established based on hierarchies of power, race, class, gender, nationality and religion.[253] Today, these solidarities have gone beyond women's rights discourses and into LGBTQIA rights more broadly. The advocacy of LGBTQIA rights discourse has taken on what Rahul Rao calls, "the modern-day civilizing mission"[254] of the third world. Here, however, I observe these hierarchical and "civilizing" solidarities in relation to queer and trans identities, which I call imperial solidarities. Imperial solidarities establish gendered and sexed hierarchies of unity between: the West and the East, the civilized white and the savage brown and black, the global north and the global south, the Muslim and the non-Muslim, and the savior and the saved. In the words of Jon Binnie, these solidarities establish "new racism in international politics."[255] Imperial solidarities are then utilized to advance projects of

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[251] Moallem, Minoo. (2005). Am I a Muslim woman? Nationalist reactions and postcolonial transactions. *Shattering the stereotypes: Muslim women speak out*, 51-55; Nader, L. (1989). Orientalism, occidentalism and the control of women. *Cultural dynamics*, *2*(3), 323-355.

[252] See: Amos, V., & Parmar, P. (1984). Challenging imperial feminism. *Feminist review*, *17*(1), 3-19. McClintock, A. (2013). *Imperial leather: Race, gender, and sexuality in the colonial contest*. Routledge.
Maira, S. (2008). Belly dancing: Arab-face, Orientalist feminism, and US empire. American Quarterly, 60(2), 317-345. Maira, S. (2009). " Good" and" Bad" Muslim Citizens: Feminists, Terrorists, and US Orientalisms. Feminist Studies, 35(3), 631-656.

[253] Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminism without borders*. Duke University Press. See also; Rao, R. (2011). Queer in the Time of Terror.

[254] Rao, R. (2015). Echoes of imperialism in LGBT activism. *Echoes of Empire: Memory, Identity and Colonial Legacies*, 355-372. See also; Hoad, N. (2018). Arrested development or the queerness of savages: resisting evolutionary narratives of difference. In *Routledge Handbook of Queer Development Studies* (pp. 89-117). Routledge.

[255] Binnie, Jon. (2007). Globalization, Sexuality and. *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*.

homoempire, including Islamophobia, racism and "Othering" of non-white sexualities and gender expressions. Imperial gay movement, a major part of these solidarities, works to uphold gay rights above anything including security and safety. It functions to support and advance Western military interventions in other nations by upholding the gay rights and pushing states and nations to come out. How does coming out advance imperial projects and solidarities?

Rainbow flags and stickers became signs of imperial gay progress in the middle of a military invasion and war in Afghanistan. Afghanistan made international news when rainbow decorated cars were spotted on the roads in several cities. Commentators joked that Afghanistan was coming out of the closet because cars in the cities such as Kabul, Mazar and Herat displayed rainbow flags. The Guardian wrote "even more remarkably, Afghan drivers seemed to have little concern about using their cars to openly advertise being gay and proud of it….there was certainly something very unusual about this apparently new openness."[256] The assumption that Afghans have concerns with being gay and that carrying a rainbow flag signifies "openness" situates a country and nation within the orientalist discourses of backward and uncivilized. Growing up in Afghanistan, I was aware of an ancient Afghan saying that when one sees rainbow in the sky, the tradition is to pray because that is when Allah is happy and he will bring all wishes true even if one wants to become of the opposite gender. This ambiguous nature of the rainbow always existed in the country and it was never correlated with the "gay international." It was present on the cover of my cheap notebooks, tasteless bubble gum and even walls of my

[256] Arabzadah, Nushin. (2011). "Afghanistan's Accidental Gay Pride," *The Guardians*. < https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/may/24/gay-pride-afghanistan-rainbow-flags>

elementary school. It was unsettling for me when the West tried to force visibility on queerness of Afghans. It reminded me of Foucault's argument that the discourse around sexuality is often times shaped to create hierarchies of power.[257] The rainbow discourse not only situated the West as sexually superior but it also called attention to LGBTQIA existence in Afghanistan, placing queer and trans Afghans under scrutiny. Some queer and trans Afghans in the country and in the diaspora found themselves asking, "What if I don't want to be visible? What if my sexuality is something private and sacred to me? What if calling attention to my sexuality endangers my life?"

When these drivers came to know about the association of the rainbow to queer and trans people in the West, they were embarrassed about their liking for the rainbow and they started taking them off their cars. The Guardian references "the embarrassment over the trend for the rainbow flags on cars in Kabul reminds us of how far Afghanistan is from the liberal west."[258] In such narratives, the west is situated as a place where humanity begins, civilization and rights emerge, while the rest of the world stays caught in its conservative, backward and unsophisticated history.

A year later, the photo of an American soldier flying a rainbow flag on a US military base in Afghanistan went viral. The photo was picked up by media after someone posted it on Facebook showing the support and progress of US military towards LGBT rights. The liberal TV host Rachel Maddow blogged about the photo writing "thanks to the extraordinary progress on gay rights in the U.S. military in recent years, images that were

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[257] Foucault, M. (1990). *The history of sexuality: An introduction*. Vintage.
[258] Arabzadah, Nushin. (2011). "Afghanistan's Accidental Gay Pride," *The Guardians*. < https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/may/24/gay-pride-afghanistan-rainbow-flags>

once hard to imagine are now becoming more common."[259] Maddow's blog while celebrating the LGBT progress in the military and establishing solidarities among queer and trans communities across the world failed to address the US military occupation in Afghanistan that has taken the lives of many Afghans, including queer and trans Afghan civilians.

For a queer Afghan, such an image of the US occupying soldier on an occupied land with a rainbow flag is a representation of not only Puar's "homonationalism", but what I call homoempire. The empire is not only occupying a nation militarily but also creating selective and dividing solidarities through establishment of its "liberal gay rights." While homonationalism serves to include queer and trans Americans as part of nation-state making, homoempire advances its violence and empire making projects through queer and trans soldiers beyond the nation-state borders.

Here I expand on Jasbir Puar's "homonationalism" argument. Puar argues that post 9/11 some gays and lesbians have been elevated from the rank of secondary citizen to the level of citizen that is worthy of protection as symbolic representation of protecting the nation. Prior to this change, gays and lesbians were seen as too dangerous for the nation and the continuation of heterosexual reproductions. Gays and lesbians did not deserve to be protected, and they did not have the right to protect others through military service.[260] Puar writes, homonationalism is "a facet of modernity and a historical shift marked by the

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[259] Maddow, Rachel. (2012). "The Importance of a Pride Flag in Afghanistan," *MSNBC*. http://www.msnbc.com/rachel-maddow-show/the-importance-pride-flag-afghan

[260] For a discussion of gays and lesbians in the US military see ; Belkin, A. (2001). The Pentagon's gay ban is not based on military necessity. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *41*(1), 103-119; Trivette, S. A. (2010). Secret handshakes and decoder rings: The queer space of don't Ask/don't tell. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, *7*(3), 214-228; Currah, P. (2013). Homonationalism, state rationalities, and sex contradictions. *Theory & event*, *16*(1).

entrance of some homosexual bodies as worthy of protection by nation-states, a constitutive and fundamental reorientation of the relationship between the state, capitalism, and sexuality."[261]

Homonationalism creates categories of good vs. bad queers, the appropriate queers vs the inappropriate queers. The white, cisgender, gay man who is also a citizen and of a certain socio-economic background becomes the good queer while the rest; black, brown, transgender, refugees, people with disabilities, poor and Muslims become the bad queers who pose danger, are not even worthy of military colonialism (in the case of trans) and,[262] therefore, left to die. As Karma R. Chávez argues, "among the most prominent of those marked for death are queered Muslim subjects, who are framed as sexually depraved terrorist."[263]

The tragedy of Orlando positioned Muslims as the "sexually depraved terrorists," yet it gave visibility to queer and trans Muslims in general and Afghans in particular. As an activist in the queer and trans Muslim community, I took it upon myself to share my

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[261] Puar, Jasbir. (2013). Rethinking homonationalism. International Journal of Middle East Studies, 45(2), p.337.

[262] See; Harrison-Quintana, J., & Herman, J. L. (2013). Still serving in silence: Transgender service members and veterans in the National Transgender Discrimination Survey. LGBTQ Policy Journal, 3(1), 1-13; Gurung, S., Ventuneac, A., Rendina, H. J., Savarese, E., Grov, C., & Parsons, J. T. (2018). Prevalence of military sexual trauma and sexual orientation discrimination among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender military personnel: a descriptive study. Sexuality research and social policy, 15(1), 74-82; Gonzalez, K. A., Ramirez, J. L., & Galupo, M. P. (2018). Increase in GLBTQ minority stress following the 2016 US presidential election. Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 14(1-2), 130-151.

[263] Chávez, K. R. (2015). The precariousness of homonationalism: The queer agency of terrorism in post-9/11 rhetoric. QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking, 2(3), p.33. See also ; Puar, J. K., & Rai, A. (2002). Monster, terrorist, fag: The war on terrorism and the production of docile patriots. Social Text, 20(3), 117-148 ; Haritaworn, J., Kuntsman, A., & Posocco, S. (Eds.). (2014). Queer necropolitics. Routledge; Aizura, A. Z. (2014). Trans feminine value, racialized others and the limits of necropolitics. In Queer Necropolitics (pp. 129-148). Routledge.

knowledge and experience about Islam and homosexuality. After my MPR radio interview, my phone was ringing all day with journalists requesting to interview me or asking me if I knew any other queer and trans Muslims. The Muslims for Progressive Values that is based in the US gathered a list of trust-worthy media outlets and shared it with all of us, the activists. I agreed to talk to a journalist from NPR who claimed to be interested in my research and its importance in post-Orlando times. She sounded very kind and expressed her shared pain with the queer and trans communities. "I can't imagine what you are going through right now. You are Muslim, Afghan and queer. That's a lot." Our conversation went well despite the fact that her questions mostly centered around Islam and homosexuality and whether or not all Muslims are homophobic. She called me back that afternoon and said there was a problem: the network wanted to run my story but the producer wanted me to talk more about homophobia I had encountered among Afghans and the larger Muslim community. I told her that rather than align my words with the producer's expectations, I preferred to situate Mateen's act of violence against queer and trans Latinx individuals in the larger context of homophobia and transphobia, gun violence, and toxic masculinity in the country. She insisted again that I should at least say a few words on how Islam oppresses gay rights. I denied and the interview was never broadcast.

The imperial gay movement works in ways that are deeply reminiscent of the imperial feminists, or feminists whom Leila Ahmed identified in 1999 As "colonial

feminists."[264] Imperial feminists save brown women from brown men,[265] while imperial gay movement commits itself to saving brown and black gays from brown and black homophobes and their backward cultures and religions.[266] Echoing Lila Abu-Lughod's famous article and book, "Do Muslim Women Need Saving?," I wanted to ask the journalist, "do queer and trans Muslims need saving?" Imperial solidarities are regimes of Eurocentric, liberal, white, middle class unities and sympathies based on similarities and differences. Imperial solidarity in the case of queer and trans Muslims is the understanding of queer and trans Muslims' struggles through the lens of white queer and trans superiority and savior values. It is the erasure of Muslim identity and experience from the very idea of queerness, the kind of erasure that becomes what Audre Lorde once referred to "as the master's tool of divide and conquer."[267] The journalist's continued insistence that I denounce Islam as anti queer and trans and Muslims as homophobic was orchestrated within the realm of imperial queer solidarity that shames and devalues Islam, advancing instead, regimes of Islamophobia. Karma R. Chávez states that "in the moments like [the tragedy of Orlando] many will suggest and have already suggested that homophobia and transphobia are worse in communities of color, in particular black and Muslim communities, and the supposed pervasiveness of those views serves as a justification to

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[264] Ahmed, L. (1999). *A border passage*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. See also; Ahmed, L. (2005). The discourse of the veil. *Postcolonialisms: An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism*, 315-38; Rajan, R. S., & Park, Y. M. (2000). Postcolonial feminism/postcolonialism and feminism. *A companion to postcolonial studies*, 53-71; Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminism without borders*. Duke University Press.

[265] Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak?. *Can the subaltern speak? Reflections on the history of an idea*, 21-78.

[266] See; Rao, R. (2011). Queer in the Time of Terror. p.50

[267] Lorde, A. (2003). The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. *Feminist postcolonial theory: A reader*, *25*, 27.

target those communities in a variety of ways: to chastise them, police them, sanction them, or in the case of various iteration of the war on terror, to bomb them in the name of gay rights."[268]

On 25 September 2014, "dozens of people applauded and cheered as a fatigue-wearing Mayor Pete Buttigieg arrived in the South Bend International Airport's passenger terminal"[269] after serving seven months of war-time deployment during the Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. Buttigieg, a democratic party presidential candidate in the US who is gay and married to another gay man, has become the symbol of liberal progress and gay rights since he made the announcement of his presidential candidacy. Buttigieg writes in his pre-campaign memoir that it was his military time in Afghanistan in 2014 that forced him to come to peace with his sexuality and come out of closet publicly eventually. The war in Afghanistan made him consider his coming out. He reflected "on the possibility that I might get killed in action, thirty-two years old, single for basically all my adult life…[I] needed to come out."[270]

What does one do during a military deployment in a war zone while every civilian is considered an enemy suspect? How many Afghans did Buttigieg kill? Were they women? Were they queer? Were they the same women and queers that Buttigieg's "democracy" promised to save? Did he kill any of my ex-lovers? Did he bomb them in their forever closets? Will he ever come out as a colonizer? Will I be disowned by my queer and trans community if I pose these questions? I think about these questions and I hear

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[268] Chávez, K. R. (2016). Refusing queer violence. *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, *3*(3). p.161.
[269] NavyTimes. (2014). South Bend Mayor Back from Afghanistan from Deployment.
[270] Buttigieg, Pete. (2019). Shortest Way Home: One Mayor's Challenge and a Model for America's Future. Liveright Publishing. p.265.

them from other diasporic queer and trans Muslims. I asked some of these questions when Omar Mateen killed 49 and injured 53 queer and trans Latinx.

Pete Buttigieg and Omar Mateen are two figures that occupy the sexualized and sensualized images of queerness- the soldier and the terrorist. They both "embody the sexiness of nationalism and queerness of violence."[271] They both have complicated shared identities and experiences, of queerness and Afghanistan, of violence and terror. Buttigieg and Mateen are both often excluded from the nation because of their queerness, yet they both become part of the same nation through acts of violence. Buttigieg's acts of military violence in Afghanistan makes him a hero citizen while Mateen's acts of violence against queer and trans communities makes him a home-grown terrorist. Yet, their ways of being incorporated into the nation through violence is shaped by a long and deeply racialized history of gendered orientalism and imperial solidarity. In other words, the inclusion and exclusion of the queer soldier and the queer terrorist are part and parcel of a "new racism," which defines the core of imperial solidarities. Imperial solidarities establish certain forms of queer ties that serve the project of empire within and outside the nation yet also create differences that trouble any form of real or imagined belongings among queers. One queer's violence gets celebrated while the other queer's violence condemned, not only him but his whole "race."?

[271] Kuntsman, A. (2008). The soldier and the terrorist: Sexy nationalism, queer violence. *Sexualities*, *11*(1-2). p.143.

The Matryoshka Doll Subjectivity: Queer and Trans Afghans:

In early 2017, the Afghan American Conference (AAC) hosted its 3rd annual gathering that brought together more than 350 Afghan-Americans in Washington D.C. This conference of diasporic Afghans, for the very first time since its inauguration in 2015, placed a session titled Making Space for Queer Afghans on its agenda. This revolutionary step was sparked by the Orlando shooting in June 2016. The conference braved to discuss a taboo subject that had always been brushed under the red Afghan rug in some Afghan homes and the larger community. I attended the conference both as a researcher and a participant. The LGBTQIA session was squeezed into the agenda on the last day of the conference, which again symbolized the marginalization of the queer and trans Afghans and the importance of this issue. AAC is the first gathering of Afghans where the LGBTQIA issues were given a time slot. In the same year, 2017, the annual Islamic Society of North America Conference was held in Chicago where Linda Sarsour gave the keynote. In this conference, the Muslim for Progressive Values (MPV), a faith-based human rights organization founded by Ani Zonneveld, a Muslim woman imam, held a table to raise awareness around LGBTQIA Muslim identities and Islam. MPV was expelled from the convention by the conference Director, Basharat Saleem and other organizers, who called MPV's work anti-Islam and unethical for a family-oriented Muslim conference.[272]

At the Making Space for Queer Afghans session there were around 40 people in the room, eight men and the rest were women. The session turned into a healing circle where many people shed tears and cried for the hurt and pain they have experienced from their

[272] Muslim for Progressive Values. (2017). Statement to ISNA. < http://www.mpvusa.org/mpv-calls-out>

family members and larger Afghan community in the process of learning and unlearning about their sexuality and desires. There were people who came to support the queer and trans Afghans and there were people who came to question how one can be Muslim, Afghan and queer. At the end of the session, a queer woman said "I didn't know we existed. I can't believe there are so many of us, queer and trans Afghans. They are trying to erase us. Let's remain connected and rise."

At times it is the erasure while other times it is denial. Some of my interlocutors situated the erasure and denial of queerness among the Afghan diaspora in the context of war and exile. The struggles in war and exile do not provide a friendly space for non-heterosexual and non-binary performances of gender and sexuality. Despite a celebrated queer and trans Afghan history and literature, hetrosexualized history promises survival and safety in the diaspora. This was brought up in many formal and informal conversations I had with those who participated in this research. Ali, a 33-year-old gay Muslim who lives in Virginia put it this way:

> In our culture we have saints, heroes and icons like Rumi, Hafez and Sultan Mahmood Ghaznavi who spent their lives talking about men, beauty, desires and their gayness. I remember reading their poems and learning about their lovers. But what happened among Afghan-American community is that those archetypes became less important and they resorted to other narratives such as we are warriors, we are strong, we fight, we beat the Russians.[273]

[273] Interview.28

Denial of a queer history and gay saints and resorting, instead, to a warrior and a fighter past possibly tell us about the violence of war and exile that forces the diaspora to heterosexual imaginations of the homeland.[274] Diaspora implies a sense of force and disruption. It is not about travel and peaceful movement; rather, as Anne Marie-Fortier argues, it is about "forced migration and displacement."[275] The queerness of the Afghan saints and icons shifted in the diasporic narratives as if to allow the members of the Afghan diaspora a tool to deal with the traumas of war and exile. Being an Afghan means that at some point your family was disrupted or completely destroyed by war. In the current day United States under the "War or Terror" and the Muslim Ban, being a Muslim means that you or your loved ones are in constant fear of disruption either by the state or the society.[276] This disruption of war and the added violence in exile contribute not only to the Afghan diasporic families' denial and erasure of queerness but also the queer and trans Afghans' construction of multiple thick and thin layers of lives, identities, secrets and experiences similar to matryoshka dolls. It is relatively less hard to survive the violence in war if you are a heterosexual man. Not that the bombs and rockets discriminate against people based on gender and sexual identities, but the people who wage and fight wars do. War is not only a masculine phenomenon but also a heteronormative one that makes survival harder for queer and trans individuals. Similarly, in exile, with its border crossings, uncertainties

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[274] For the discussion of heterosexual and heteronormative homeland please see; Dib, F. Z. Impossible Return: Demythologizing Homeland and Complex Identity in Caryl Philips's A State of Independence; Najmabadi, A. (2005). *Women with mustaches and men without beards: Gender and sexual anxieties of Iranian modernity*. Univ of California Press.
[275] Fortier, A. M. (2002). Queer diaspora. *Handbook of lesbian and gay studies*, 183-197. See also; Brubaker, R. (2005). The 'diaspora'. *Ethnic and racial studies*, *28*(1), 1-19.
[276] Kundnani, A. (2014). *The Muslims are coming!: Islamophobia, extremism, and the domestic war on terror*. Verso Trade. See also; Sides, J., & Gross, K. (2013). Stereotypes of Muslims and Support for the War on Terror. *The Journal of Politics*, *75*(3), 583-598.

and surveillance, families rather have men, heterosexual men, to provide for and protect them. War and exile are already hard enough that families rather not have a queer or trans child to make this violence even harder.

Colorfully painted and nested one inside the other, matryoshkas are popular dolls in Central and East Asia; "the figures inside may be of either gender."[277] Matryoshka stand for the complex embodiment of femininities and masculinities, secrets and truth, and intersectionality of identities and oppressions. I argue that queer and trans Afghan diaspora build themselves in the form of matryoshkas for many reasons, including the violence of homophobia and Islamophobia, the two complicated spaces of terror that they must learn to breathe in.

Matryoshkas appeared in my research in multiple discussions, particularly during the interviews with the queer and trans Afghans. I was interviewing Rahman, a 42-year-old queer Afghan, at his home in Washington D.C when I noticed a matryoshka sitting on his shelf. This reminded me of the matryoshka on our family shelf back in Kabul when I was a kid. I was born in the midst of Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. From homes to stores and streets, everything stood in its bare minimalist form. The brick walls in our house were empty. The old wooden shelf attached to the wall in our living room carried nothing but a big yellow clay chicken and a matryoshka doll, gift of a communist relative who had returned from a study abroad in Moscow. I asked Rahman where he got the matryoshka. He responded;

[277] Pavljuk, Marina. (2017). Matryoshka- The Russian Soul. The Medium. < https://medium.com/@marina.pavljuk/matryoshka-the-russian-soul-6fa47a5ee8a0>

> That is an old one. One of the few items my family packed with them from Kabul when we left in the 80s. My mom says I loved it and carried it everywhere so she couldn't part with it. I have a faded memory of it. I think I was five or six years old. I remember the Russian soldiers were crossing by our house. I was playing in dirt with my cousins and we ran after them asking for candy. One of them threw this doll at me and I thought it was filled with candy but there were more dolls inside. As if that soldier knew I was gay. He gave me a doll. I sometimes think I have become that doll with many secrets and mysteries.[278]

Rahman's claim to becoming the matryoshka points to his multiple identities; queer, Muslim, Afghan, brown and a refugee. Like the matryoshka, Rahman reveals his mysteries, the different versions of self-depending on where he is and who is around him. As a practicing Muslim, Rahman adds, "it is not easy to be among gays who constantly mock down Islam. You know what I mean. Most gays hate all religions, especially Islam. I pretend I am not Muslim when I am around them. Then there is my family. I go to an Afghan mehmani [party] and they are making fun of gays and I have to pretend I am not gay."[279]

Rahman's matryoshka doll subjectivity retells the complicated "terrains of belonging" and unbelonging that queer and trans Afghans have to navigate on a daily basis.[280] They become the "inadequate queer" in queer spaces and "inadequate Afghan/Muslim" in Afghan/Muslim spaces. In addressing this complexity, there has been

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[278] Interview 54.
[279] Ibid.
[280] Fortier, A. M. (2002). Queer diaspora. *Handbook of lesbian and gay studies*, 183-197.

a growing queer and trans Muslim activism in the US since late 1990s.[281] Al Fatiha (The Opening) which was established in 1998 by Faisal Alam, a queer Pakistani-American gave visibility to queer and trans Muslims in the US and later in Europe for the very first time.[282] However, this activism of queer and trans Muslims in the US became complicated in the aftermaths of the "War on Terror." Since then, queer and trans Muslims have been caught in the webs of homophobia and Islamophobia. Neither in queer spaces nor in the Muslim communities, they find a safe "terrain of belonging." As Momin Rahman argues, "gay Muslims occupy an intersectional social location between political and social cultures, and…they suffer oppression through this position. Gay Muslims illustrate this nexus of oppression, caught between cultural and political Islamophobia and homophobia."[283] In racialized queer and trans spaces where whiteness regulates the production of social and cultural queer norms, queer and trans Muslims find themselves further marginalized. In big cities such as Los Angeles, San Francisco and Washington D.C queer social spaces become

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[281] See; Rayside, D. (2011). Muslim American communities' response to queer visibility. *Contemporary Islam*, *5*(2), 109-134; Boellstorff, T. (2005). Between religion and desire: Being Muslim and gay in Indonesia. *American Anthropologist*, *107*(4), 575-585; Rahman, M. (2010). Queer as intersectionality: Theorizing gay Muslim identities. *Sociology*, *44*(5), 944-961; Habib, S. (2016). LGBT Activism in the M iddle E ast. *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Gender and Sexuality Studies*, 1-6 Naber, N. C. (2012). *Arab America: Gender, cultural politics, and activism*. NYU Press; Ritchie, J. (2010). How do you say "come out of the closet" in Arabic? Queer activism and the politics of visibility in Israel-Palestine. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, *16*(4), 557-575; Naber, N., & Zaatari, Z. (2014). Reframing the war on terror: Feminist and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) activism in the context of the 2006 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. *Cultural Dynamics*, *26*(1), 91-111.

[282] Minwalla, O., Rosser, B. S., Feldman, J., & Varga, C. (2005). Identity experience among progressive gay Muslims in North America: A qualitative study within Al-Fatiha. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, *7*(2), 113-128. See also; Abraham, I. (2009). 'Out to get us': queer Muslims and the clash of sexual civilisations in Australia. *Contemporary Islam*, *3*(1), 79-97. Puar, J. K. (2005). Queer times, queer assemblages. *Social text*, *23*(3-4 (84-85)), 121-139.

[283] Rahman, M. (2010). Queer as intersectionality: Theorizing gay Muslim identities. *Sociology*, *44*(5), 944-961.

the ruling land of the white gay men where nonwhite existences become either fetishized or invisible to the white gaze.[284]

This position of queer and trans Muslims in general and Afghans in particular was further complicated by the Orlando shooting. Afghans have to navigate this struggle delicately in order to avoid the further perpetuation of Islamophobia and the violence of imperial gay movement on Muslims and Muslim countries. In all the sixty interviews and twelve focus group discussions that I conducted with the Afghan diaspora in California, Washington D.C, Maryland and Virginia, I brought up the Orlando shooting. All the participants were aware of the shooting but majority of the straight identifying men said that they had never paid attention to the "gay" part of it. "Honestly, nothing about Mateen's gay identity was discussed among Afghans. I am just hearing about the gay part now,"[285] However, all those interviewees who identified as women, straight and queer, in my study were aware of the LGBTQIA relation to the Orlando shooting, both in relation to the victims and the shooter. Afsana, one of the well-known Afghan socialites in the Bay Area who openly advocates for inclusion of queer and trans identities in the Afghan-American communities, explained the homophobia of Afghan men thus:

> We have a lot of open gay Afghan guys in the Bay Area. The gay piece in the Orlando shooting was rarely discussed. Afghan guys have problem with gays. I have a safe space and they make yucky faces to me if I invite gay Afghans over …they tell me hell no. When I am here and if a gay friend is around, I notice that

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[284] Han, C. S. (2007). They don't want to cruise your type: Gay men of color and the racial politics of exclusion. *Social Identities*, *13*(1), 51-67. See also; Perez, H. (2005). You can have my brown body and eat it, too!. *Social Text*, *84*, 171.
[285] Interview. 57 (with Nabil).

> [straight Afghan men] have a very hard time accepting gays or understanding them. Some Afghans see it against Islam because no straight Muslim imam has gone to say that on behalf of Islam it is okay to be gay. I had a lot of cousins that are gay. But they just disappeared from our lives. I have younger cousins who are closeted. My gay Afghan friends live with their friends and they are out but they don't live in the Afghan community. They just have multiple versions of their lives, you can say. One of my gay Afghan friends just had an engagement and nobody from his family attended it.[286]

One Friday afternoon right after the jumma prayer at one of the Afghan mosques in the East Bay area of California, the imam announced that there was going to be a funeral prayer for a young Afghan man in a few minutes. I decided to stay for the funeral prayer. The family of the young man had gathered on one side of the mosque while relatives, friends and community members were walking in and filling up the rows on the carpet. The imam started the prayer and finished it without mentioning the name of the young man or what caused the death. I remember from the many funeral prayers I have attended in Afghanistan that the imam usually mentions the reasons for the person's death – often, it is a suicide bombing, a rocket, illness or old age. This time there was no mention of the dead person's name and or the reasons behind his passing from this world. This nameless dead person, was it his wish to remain nameless? In the two hour long funeral prayer that included recitation of Quran, chatting with the family members and people walking around and passing cups of tea with sugar cubes, nobody mentioned anything about the dead

[286] Interview. 21

person. The silences surrounding the name and any other details felt political. I left the mosque with many questions on my mind and headed to meet with Nasrullah, a 28-year-old Afghan man who does not identify as queer or gay but who told me he is attracted to men and does not care about the labels. I got to the café where I was meeting Nasrullah a few minutes late. I told Nasrullah that I was attending a funeral.

Nasrullah immediately said a name, " …. his funeral?"

"Who?" I asked.

"The funeral you just attended was of a gay Afghan who killed himself on Wednesday night," Nasrullah said. "His family found out that he was gay and they got him engaged with someone back home. You see why I also don't like the labels. I knew the guy very well. We used to run into each other in the mosque on Friday afternoons and then at night at Moby Dick in the Castro."[287]

The recent research on queer and trans Muslims has established the nexus between non-white sexuality, the security regimes and the "War on Terror" (Puar 2002, 2017; Abraham 2009; Bhattacharyya 2013; Rahman 2010; Shakhsari 2010, 2014). This research has been key in understanding the violence of empire on queer and trans Muslim identities and complexities. However, the concerns that drive my work are: when and how postcolonial scholars of color can critically engage with the Muslim homophobia and hetero-Muslim violence on queer and trans Muslims? How one can delicately avoid perpetuation of Islamophobia while also addressing the homophobia within the Muslim communities? As much as secrecy on sexuality and gender identity gives agency and

[287] Interview 44.

freedom to queer and trans Afghans, living at the intersection of Islamophobia, homophobia and racism turn queer and trans Afghans into matryoshka dolls -- the nurturing, secretive, feminine subjects that must abide by the heteronormativity of both the Muslim communities and of the empire. Who is responsible for the disappearing of queer and trans Afghans from history, from everyday life, from Afghan spaces, and from their own funerals? Is this disappearance the work of the Islamophobia of the empire, or is the homophobia of Muslims responsible for it? The stories and analysis I share in this chapter insist that we cannot consider one without the other, for both continue to co-constitute each other to perpetrate a violent disappearance of queer Afghans.

Chapter 5

Terror of War and Exile: Political Violence and Production of Vigilant Masculinities

"there have been so many times
I have seen a man wanting to weep
but
instead
beat his heart until it was unconscious."

-masculine

Nayyirha Waheed

In March 2017 and 2018, I attended the Afghan American Conference in Washington D.C and New York where I met hundreds of Afghan-Americans. The conference brings together more than three hundred and fifty young Afghan diaspora from all the United States between the ages of 18-40 to discuss issues ranging from Afghan-American identity to religion and the relationship between home and diaspora. The issues around gender and sexuality are slowly making their way on the agenda of this conference. About half of the attendees were men. Most of these men were dressed in slim-fit stylish navy blue and grey suits and ties with freshly trimmed hipster beards while fashioning a variation of pompadour hairstyles. They looked like the brown version of the white Hollywood red carpet. The hallways of the George Washington University and the New York University had never witnessed that many brown Muslims at one time.

The men high-fived, fist bumped and shook each other's hands like American bros would do in the hallways and during the networking events. Yet, they also hugged and showed affection like it was old-day Afghanistan. At times, their masculine energy made

my femme queer existence in the space invisible yet also hyper-visible. In return, my femininity and visible queerness that I carried not only in my mannerism but also with my embroidered purse, gold sparkly shoes and colorful outfits helped them in their performances of masculinities. There is a direct relationship between hetero-masculinities and queer-femininities. Across societies and histories, heterosexual men have gained and claimed their masculinities through either the subordination of femininities, particularly the faggots or the mere existence of femininities around them.

The first time I attended the conference, I was standing by a table that showcased books and arts by Afghan diaspora, I heard a group of men behind me passing commentary on my purse. One said " I think it is a new kuni fashion." In Dari and Pashto, the word kuni stands for the fag. Kuni implies not only non-heterosexuality but also emasculation, the one being penetrated. Fag represents not only sexuality but also deviant male femininities. It is a word that reinforces heterosexuality and masculine superiority over any forms of sexualities and femininities.

C.J Pascoe in establishing the relationship between masculinity and sexuality asserts, " the relationship between masculinity and sexuality is embedded in the specter of the faggot." Faggot signifies a penetrated masculinity in which "to be penetrated is to abdicate power."[288] Am I the only fag here? I questioned every time I entered a workshop room or walked in the packed hallways. I smiled every time I spotted another queer person. We would give each other the gay acknowledgment look yet keep our distance. In exchange for that one fag comment, I received many compliments on my shinny shoes, queer outfits

[288] Bersani, Leo. (1987). Is the rectum a grave?. *October*, *43*. p.212

and purse from the same men whose masculine expressions troubled my femme queerness. Despite presence of many Afghan-American men in the space, I oddly didn't feel unsafe by any means as I often do when I am surrounded by a pack of white bros at academic conferences where I am not only the fag but the brown Muslim fag. Why did I feel safe despite so many hetero-masculine Afghan men around me?

My sense of safety at the Afghan American Conference in both occasions came from the moments I found myself in rooms packed with these masculine men breaking down and sobbing while sharing their stories of war, struggles in the diaspora and (in)securities. During the gender breakout session that divided participants based on gender self-identification, a young man who appeared to be in his 20s stood up and said "I lost my dad at a young age in Afghanistan before we moved here. It was already hard to be an Afghan refugee without a male figure growing up here but then September 11 happened and it got even worse. I was only 10-years old and the kids would call me a terrorist. It was too much to deal with. I dropped out [of] high school to take care of my family and made sure my sisters and younger brothers were safe. I learned how to be a masculine man, a protector from a young age."[289] These were times that troubled the tough and rough representations of Afghan masculinities that exist in academia and media. These were moments that introduced me to multiple forms of masculinities and the fluidity in the performances of masculinities among Afghan men that are often times not discussed or represented. Connell explains "there is abundant evidence that masculinities are multiple,

[289] Field notes/observation. AAC 2018

with internal complexities and even contradictions; also that masculinities change in history."[290]

Afghan men's sense and performances of masculinities are much more complicated than represented since the US invasion of Afghanistan on October 7th, 2001. As this chapter demonstrates, masculinities of Afghan men have changed over time during decades of war and displacement. In the stories these young men shared during the conference, and the conversations and interviews I had with many men during my research, there lain the memories of war and separation, the terror of surveillance and fear of loss and the becoming of a Muslim Afghan man during the "War on Terror." Some of these men were born and raised in the middle of war in Afghanistan who learned from a young age how to be a protector and survive the war through expressions of manliness. During one of the gender-breakouts where the men-identifying participants gathered to discuss masculinity, war and exile, one of the men stood up sobbing and said " my dad already had PTSD from the war he went through in Afghanistan and then FBI would come to his shop every week after September 11 asking him for information about Afghans in the area and for him to collaborate. He took it out on us at home and became abusive to us and my mom. Then he got fed-up and moved back to Afghanistan in 2004. He couldn't deal with all the surveillance and racism. Then my uncle left. Growing up, I didn't have any man in my family to look up to. They either left for Afghanistan or were in prison. To this day I hate

[290] Connell, R. W. (2012). *Masculinities*. < http://www.raewynconnell.net/p/masculinities_20.html>

my dad but can I blame him?"[291] He sobbed in the arms of a group of men who held him and consoled him.

These voices and stories rarely make it to the academic research. As Hopkins asserts the voices and identities of Muslim men are "usually silenced, often unheard and frequently distorted."[292] The research on Muslim men has nearly universally focused on negative aspects of their identities.[293] Representation of Muslim man lurks between the violently masculine patriarchal and the dangerously effeminate homosexual (Puar and Rai 2002). Since the invasion of Afghanistan on October 7th, 2001, the West has been obsessed with Afghan men's masculinities and sexuality and Afghan women's veils and rights.

These orientalist representations situate Afghan masculinity within the cultural paradigms, ignoring the political and social conditions that give birth to and nurture Afghan diasporic masculinities. My work here is an invitation to understand Afghan diasporic masculinities through the experiences, voices and understandings of Afghan men themselves. What does it mean to be an Afghan man in times of war? What does it mean to be part of a diaspora in a place whose state has militarily occupied your homeland? How does the state surveillance in exile and experiences and memories of war shape one's notion and performances of masculinities? In answering these sets of questions in this chapter, I argue that to understand Afghan diasporic masculinities, it is crucial to situate Afghan diasporic masculinities within the culture of war and violence of exile, including

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[291] Field notes/observation. AAC 2017

[292] Hopkins, P. (2007). Young Muslim men's experiences of local landscapes after 11 September 2001. *Geographies of Muslim Identities: Diaspora, Gender and Belonging, Re-materialising Cultural Geography*, p.189.

[293] Ewing, K. P. (2008). *Stolen honor: stigmatizing Muslim men in Berlin*. Stanford University Press.

surveillance regimes. By war, I refer here not only to the war in Afghanistan but also the US "War on Terror" which has become the war on Muslims[294], particularly Muslim men who have become suspects through the racialized structure of security regimes in the West. The experiences of war and displacement shape Afghan diasporic men's understanding and performances of masculinities. I argue that Afghan diasporic masculinities are informed by the decades of war in Afghanistan and the US "War on Terror." These masculinities are home-bonded. I have engaged with home-bondedness in the previous chapters and in this chapter, I once again trace the relationship between Afghan diasporic masculinities and home, both in the diaspora and in Afghanistan. Afghan diasporic men in the United States perform what I conceptualize as vigilant masculinities. Vigilance here refers to the state of caution and being alert at all times that is yielded as a result of a certain exposure to direct and indirect violence. Vigilant masculinities are performances of manliness that come from a place of subordination, powerlessness, vulnerability and loss.

Vigilant masculinities are home-bonded. They are informed by experiences of war and displacement that force men to stay alert and respond belligerently in maintaining the remains of their identity and home. It is a state of fighting for survival and holding onto the remains. In diaspora, vigilant masculinities are produced by neoliberal democracies as regimes of control. The racialized and gendered regimes of security in the United States, for instance, situate Muslim men in vigilance to their performance of masculinity.

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[294] See; Mamdani, M. (2005). *Good Muslim, bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the roots of terror*. Harmony; Howell, S., & Shryock, A. (2003). Cracking Down on Diaspora: Arab Detroit and America's" War on Terror". *Anthropological Quarterly*, *76*(3), 443-462; Nguyen, T. (2005). *We are all suspects now: Untold stories from immigrant communities after 9/11*. Beacon Press.

Continued degradation and humiliation of Muslim men, be it through FBI visits to their homes, mosques and work places, TSA searches at the airports or through tapping their phones and social media, the state creates vigilant masculine subjects who are in constant state of fear and (in)securities. Vigilant masculinities have an inevitable bond with control. They are produced partly as a result of state control while enabling the same vigilant masculine men to become the controller through reproduction of similar systems of surveillance and control on women and queer and trans individuals in their own families and communities. In other words, men who are controlled through state surveillance, engage in domestic violence and homophobia to claim their lost masculinities.

To understand vigilant masculinities among Afghan diasporic men in the United States, it is important to establish the relationship between war and masculinities while also examining the changing patterns of masculinity performances during the war in Afghanistan and diasporic journeys of the displaced Afghans here in the United States. As I have argued before, diaspora and home have an inevitable bond. To understand masculinities of a diaspora, it is important to engage with social and political circumstances at home. Drawing on my fieldwork with Afghan diaspora in the United States, in this chapter, I begin the conversation on vigilant masculinities in the context of war, home and surveillance.

War and Masculinities

Masculinities and war are interconnected. War is in fact the space of masculinity making through violence and sacrifice. Robert Nye asserts, "the construction of a soldier willing to sacrifice himself for his country has thus been a more or less permanent activity, operating

in war and in peace to fix in his body masculine traits that appear natural to him and others."[295] War is where an 18-year old boy from small town Iowa gets to claim his manhood through sacrifice and allegiance to soldierhood. When we speak of war, the one masculine figure form in our imagination is soldier. Solider is a particular type of person with certain type of masculinities that are hegemonic and superior to the rest. The interconnectedness of masculinity and war goes back to the ancient Greece "where masculinity was measured in terms of war-fighting prowess."[296] Today, construction of masculinities continues to play a key role in waging wars, militarism, surveillance, military occupations, transnational terrorism, the "War on Terror", nationalism, homo-nationalism, and the making of the immigrant, citizen and non-citizen categories. Feminist scholars have contributed immensely to the understanding of masculinities and military.[297] Research on masculinities and contemporary military institutions peaked in post invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. However, the impact of war on the masculinities of those civilians living, experiencing and escaping the same wars has remained under-theorized in the field

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[295] Nye, R. A. (2007). Western masculinities in war and peace. *The American Historical Review*, *112*(2), p.438.

[296] Duncanson, Claire. Forces for Good? Military Masculinities and Peace building in Afghanistan and Iraq. Palgrave Macmillan. 2013. p.141

[297] See; Baaz, M. E., & Stern, M. (2009). Why do soldiers rape? Masculinity, violence, and sexuality in the armed forces in the Congo (DRC). *International studies quarterly*, *53*(2), 495-518; Duncanson, C. (2013). *Forces for good: Military masculinities and peacebuilding in Afghanistan and Iraq*. Springer; Meger, S. (2010). Rape of the Congo: Understanding sexual violence in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, *28*(2), 119-135; Sharoni, S. (1994). Gender, military occupation and violence against women. *Women and the Israeli occupation: The politics of change*, 107; Alison, M. (2004). Women as agents of political violence: Gendering security. *security dialogue*, *35*(4), 447-463.

of political science. The decades of war in Afghanistan and the US "War on Terror" have shaped masculinities of Afghans living in the homeland and in the diaspora.

Since the US military occupation of Afghanistan on October 7th, 2001, construction of masculine identities by the machinery and presence of the Western occupying forces and Taliban have contributed immensely to the ongoing violence. The US occupation has turned the country into a militarized state. The occupation took place within gendered rhetoric. The militarization of the country is also carried out within the masculine/feminine dichotomy. Nancy Jabbra, explaining the gendered nature of occupation and the militarization of Afghanistan within the context of masculine American soldier and effeminate Afghan man argues that the image of the Afghan man after September 11 became of the "effeminate or homosexual…where the Other [Afghan] male has been conquered (his country penetrated) and rendered harmless."[298] Afghan men has also been portrayed as vicious killers and toxic masculine. This image, portrayed by the Western media, also became an everyday discussion in gatherings of Afghan men. From mosques to schools and weddings to chitchat among old, young and teenage Afghans, the penetration of Afghanistan by the American soldiers is talked about in serious and humorous ways. After a Jumma prayer in Virginia, I was having lunch with a group of Afghan men who were interested in my research. I sat next to Khan, a 28-year-old, ex-US military translator. Khan moved to the US with his wife and two kids as part of the SIV cases in 2014. He serves at a restaurant full time and drives for Uber late at nights after his serving job. I asked him if he is happy here in the US. He smirked and said "what do you

[298] Jabbra, Nancy. (2006). Women, Words and Wars: Explaining 9/11 and Justifying the US Military Action in Afghanistan and Iraq. Journal of International Women's Studies. Vol.8.1.

think? Do I look happy? They fucked us in Afghanistan and we ran away here. It is like jumping from one fire to another. Here, they have turned us [men] to women. We are scared even when we come to the mosque, fearing that they would tag us as terrorist and throw us in some jail. I do most of my prayers at home. Once in a blue moon I take a chance and come to the mosque. We had some honor in Kabul. Here we have no honor and no manhood."

Khan's constant references to penetration, emasculation and shifting of gender roles during the war and diasporic journeys signify the war's impact on men's not only performances of masculinities but also perceptions of their own masculinities. The experience and trauma of war leaves men feeling emasculated and reduced to the position of women, who are seen in powerless positions.[299] Khan is aware of the US surveillance regime over everyday lives of Afghan diaspora living in the US. It is the installation of fear in the minds and lives of men like Khan that make them feel what Kimmel would call "impotent manhood."[300] Diasporic Afghan men in the US carry the burden of fear double folds- the fear they struggled with during the war in Afghanistan and the fear of surveillance they have to deal with here in the US. It is in the jumping from one fire to another where vigilant masculinities emerge. It is the constant state of fear that make Afghan diasporic men engage in performances of vigilant masculinities.

I do not argue that construction of vigilant masculinities started with the US or USSR military occupation of Afghanistan. However, as Cynthia Enloe states, "no person,

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[299] Lwambo, D. (2013). 'Before the war, I was a man': men and masculinities in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. *Gender & Development*, *21*(1), 47-66.
[300] Kimmel, M. (2017). *Manhood in America*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

no community, no national movement can be militarized without changing the ways in which femininity and masculinity are brought to bear in daily life."[301] Afghanistan has gone through not one but two superpower military invasions; the USSR in 1980s and now the US. The past four decades of war and military occupations of Afghanistan, have changed the way Afghan men understand, approach and perform their masculinities. A nation known for a gender-neutral language, celebration of same sex love through literature and poetry and gender fluid sense of fashion and clothing became a masculine geography and patriarchal society through the everyday violence of war and struggles for survival.

While the scholarship on Afghanistan puts the blame of vigilant masculinities on patriarchy by referring to Afghanistan as "belt of classic patriarchy,"[302] I argue that vigilant masculinities are embedded in the culture of war, presence of occupying forces in the homeland, their war machines and journeys of displacement and exile. How are vigilant masculinities formed and performed at times of war and displacement? How does the military presence of an occupying force impact construction of local and diasporic masculinities? In the rest of this chapter, I grapple with these questions through textual analysis of the interviews, focused groups discussions, conversations and observations I had in the field. In chapter 4, I have extensively discussed the effeminization and faggification of Afghans in the US cultural and political productions. This chapter focuses on masculinities in relation to war and diasporic journeys.

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[301] Enloe, Cynthia. 1993. The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

[302] The "patriarchal belt" refers to the geographical zone stretching from North Africa across the Middle East and into South Asia and parts of rural China: John C Caldwell. Theory of Fertility Decline, Population and Social Structure (London; New York: Academic Press, 1982).

Vigilant Masculinities and Home-bondedness

People escape war but the war does not escape them. The diasporas of war find themselves bonded not only to home but the experiences of violence, survival and constant state of fear with the home they left behind. With the two major occupations; the 1980s' USRR and now the US, masculinities in Afghanistan have been defined and shaped by the violence of the war and presence of these occupying foreign forces. Foreign military forces occupy what Connell conceptualizes as hegemonic masculinities.[303] Connell argues that "[Hegemonic masculinity] embodie[s] the currently most honored way of being a man, it require[s] all other men to position themselves to it, and it ideologically legitimate[s] subordination."[304] For hegemonic masculinities to be in play, there is a need for subordination. Afghan masculinities are placed in subordinate positions. Subordinate masculinities are hypermasculine yet effeminate, weak yet dangerous, lacking honor and civility.

Historically, Afghans have associated masculinity with honor and courage.[305] Across societies and histories, honor and courage also associated with land and home; saving and defending the land and making home and protecting it. Therefore, the gendered relationship of Afghans with land and home is not unique only to Afghans (Barfield 2010). Under the honor codes of Afghanya*t* (Afghanness*)*, Afghans consider Afghanistan and its

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[303] See Hinojosa, R. (2010). Doing hegemony: Military, men, and constructing a hegemonic masculinity. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, *18*(2), 179-194. "Hegemonic masculinities are at the top of the gender hierarchy and exist in relation to subordinated gender constructs. Traditional constructions of hegemonic masculinities include risk-taking, self-discipline, physical toughness and/or muscular development, aggression, violence, emotional control, and overt heterosexual desire."p.189.

[304] Connell,R.W. and Messerschmit, J.W. "Hegemonic masculinity: rethinking the concept." Gender and Society.Vol.19.6. p.832.

[305] Fluri. 2010. p. 282.

protection as part of their honor and dignity. Hence, they refer to it as part of their *namoos,* an honor that is determinant of one's masculinity. The US military established its hegemonic masculinity position in Afghanistan first through its invasion of the land and second through house raids. Additionally, they maintained this sense of hegemonic masculinity through establishing checkpoints, arresting and imprisoning men who were deemed Al-Qaeda suspects and burning down poppy fields and patrolling the cities and villages across the country. Habib, a 36-year old Afghan man who left Afghanistan in late 2011 through smugglers and made it to Germany and finally was married with an Afghan woman in Virginia, shared his accounts of US house raids this way: "I am from Takhar province, that is where I was born and lived until I left for Germany. The US military started their night raids in our villages in Takhar in 2011. They would barge into our houses in the middle of the night and wouldn't care about the women and children in the house sleeping. They would walk in with their shoes all over our house and drag all the men outside and make us stand like we were a herd of sheep and cows. It was so humiliating. We couldn't even defend ourselves or protect the women and children. They had big guns and tanks. We had nothing. One night they came in and killed people for no reason and that's when I decided to leave. To this day, I can't see my sisters and mom in the eye because I couldn't do anything to protect them."[306]

In the spring of 2011, NATO troops killed four civilians, including two women during their house raids in Takhar province. Takharis, who were already fed up with the frequent night raids that not only emasculated them but also threatened their lives, took the

[306] Interview. 58

bodies of these four killed on the streets during a riot that gathered 3,000 to 4,000 Afghans.[307] The night raids were used to instill fear in the lives of Afghans and communicate to the men who are often times considered as the heads of households in Afghanistan that they weren't men enough anymore. They weren't the men who protect their families anymore. They weren't worthy of honor and trust. These night raids were the young and amateur colonizers' games of conquer and conquest. For some of them, these were the only points of contact with the civilians. The night raids not only emasculated the Afghan men whose masculinities were considered incompetent yet dangerous but also helped the soldiers to claim hegemonic masculinities.

Hegemonic and subordinate masculinities have a codependency relationship. Connell and Messerschmit argue that hegemonic masculinities stand against subordinate masculinities, "only a minority of men might enact [hegemonic masculinity]. Hegemonic masculinity functions at different levels: society, household, state, education, religion, and war.[308] The occupation, by placing the occupying forces' masculinities in a hegemonic position, pushed Afghan masculinities into subordination. I see a direct relationship between subordinate masculinities and vigilant masculinities. It is from these subordinate spaces, where vigilant masculinities are born and shaped. It is these moments of helplessness, emasculation and fear that keep Afghan men on alert and reaching out to any means to protect themselves and their families.

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[307] Rahimi, Sangar and Ray Rivera. 2011. A NATO Raid Sets off a Deadly Afghan Protest.<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/19/world/asia/19afghanistan.html?_r=0>
[308] Ibid.

In discussing why protection of family becomes a responsibility for men during war and exile, Zaki, a 40- year old man who grew up in Kabul during the USSR invasion stated that "war makes very young boys to grow up fast and protect their families."[309] He said his own experience during the war in Afghanistan has made him to always worry about his wife when she goes to work: "I always check on her and my friends think I am controlling but can you blame me? I am just afraid something would happen to her and I wouldn't be there to protect her."[310] He shared his memory of war in Afghanistan that he believes has shaped his sense of control and fear:

> I was a kid, maybe around four when a Russian helicopter crashed in front of our house. My grandfather was holding me in his arms and we walked to see the crash. I was looking at the burning helicopter and was thinking what if it hit our house? Then a few years later, our next-door neighbor was bombed one afternoon. My sister and I were alone at home and we were taking an afternoon nap. We woke up and ran outside. I saw a limb in front of our house. I was only 9 years old. There was nobody in the house except my sister and me. I was searching for my dad's gun and telling my sister I will protect her and they can't come for us. I was only a child but there was so much violence around me that made me grow up fast and take responsibility to protect my family.[311]

Zaki traces his construction of vigilance to his experience of war where young kids become men in order to survive and protect their loved ones. The construction of vigilant

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[309] Interview .41
[310] Ibid.
[311] Ibid.

masculinities is rooted in the violence of home. It is the home that they have left behind and it is the home they are making here in the diaspora under the US "War on Terror." During war the responsibility to protect becomes a domain of men. Desiree Lwambo in studying construction of masculinities in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo conceptualizes such sense of responsibility expressed by men as male privilege.[312] I don't disagree that the responsibility to protect family and home stems from the male privilege. However, war is a masculine phenomenon. The foreign military occupying forces are majority men. Similar to other characteristics of war that is a man's domain, responsibility to protect and saving one's home and family against the violence of war becomes a man's domain unless the family does not have a male member.

In cases where the family does not have any or many men, the women take on the responsibility and even at times become bacha posh, dressed up as a boy. In many households in Afghanistan where their men have been killed during the war, been disabled, are outside the country in exile or put in jail, they dress a young female member as male and make her responsible to take care of the family and protecting them. Rona, a 37 -year old woman who works as psychiatrist in Maryland shared during the focus group discussion that her sister is a bacha posh. Rona and her three sisters and parents fled Kabul in 1989, the year the USSR left Afghanistan. Rona said;

> I was young and I remember one day my mom cut my oldest sister's hair very short and gave her boys' clothes to wear. A few days later we fled Kabul in the middle

[312] Lwambo, D. (2013). 'Before the war, I was a man': men and masculinities in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. *Gender & Development*, *21*(1), 47-66.

of the night to Pakistan. My mom later said that she had to do it because my sister was a teenager and they were afraid something would happen to her crossing the border. My sister still wears boys' clothes and literally controls our house.[313]

Bacha posh here reminds us of the emergence of masculinities as survival mechanisms during war. It is with the performance of bacha poshi that comes a sense of safety during wartimes.[314] Gender involves performance as Judith Butler argues; "gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of a being.... gender proves to be performance – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be"[315] Rona's sister engaged with this performance of gender that now has become part of her identity. She has penetrated into the male privilege of responsibility, however, without her choice. Having three other sisters and no brothers, for her bacha poshi has become not only a safety but also domain of protection and an identity that is home-bonded. She has learned that both the war and exile are domains of masculinities and violence. To provide safety for her family, she has to perform bacha poshi. By perform, I here refer to vigilant masculinities. She is not only wearing men's clothes but also performing a masculinity that is vigilant- informed by trauma of border crossings, memories of war and

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[313] Focus group discussion # 11.

[314] Billaud, J. (2015). *Kabul carnival: Gender politics in postwar Afghanistan*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

[315] Butler, J. (1988). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. *Theatre journal*, *40*(4), 519-531.

struggles in the diaspora. A struggle that many of the participants in this research brought up was surveillance. The next section engages with surveillance and vigilant masculinities.

Vigilant Masculinities, Security and Surveillance

In international relations, the relationship between masculinities and security is examined from either a state or military perspective. Feminist international relations has engaged in discussion of masculinities within the context of militarization, securitization, humanitarianism and interventions (Enloe 2000, Henry 2007 and 2009, Peterson 1997, Shepherd 2008, Tickner 2001, Weldes 1999). This engagement, although pivotal for theorization of masculinities and security, leaves out people's everyday experience of war and the regimes of surveillance in relation to their masculinities. How does surveillance shape the understanding and performances of masculinities in the lives of surveilled subjects?

Technologies of surveillance in policing the everyday lives of Muslim diaspora in the US did not emerge during the US "War on Terror." However, the PATRIOT Act in 2001 legitimized surveillance in communities of color, particularly Muslims in the United States.[316] Sunaina Maira defines surveillance as "a technology of disciplining and managing racialized populations within neoliberal capitalism, and a racialized mode of governmentality or imperial state."[317] In the Post 9/11 world, the regimes of national and international security produced political subjects fit for scrutiny and surveillance. These

[316] Maira, S. (2014). Surveillance effects: South Asian, Arab, and Afghan American youth in the war on terror. *At the limits of justice: Women of colour on terror*, 86-106.
[317] Maira, S. (2019). Coming of age under surveillance: South Asian, Arab and Afghan American Youth and Post 9/11 Activism. in Activisms and Surveillance State. ed. Aziz Choudry. Pluto Press. p.81.

political subjects are racialized, gendered and classed. They are the working-class Muslim, Arab, Afghan and South Asian men, who have become potential suspects in the eyes of the neoliberal security regimes. Class is a category not much discussed in the surveillance discourses. The working class and undocumented Muslims, particularly from poor nations such as Afghanistan are obscured in the discussion of surveillance and state violence on Muslims. Afghans occupy a troubled space even within Muslim and South Asian communities; not Muslim enough, too dispersed of a people and too poor of a nation. Therefore, the surveilled Afghan diaspora embody the category of not only what Mahmood Mamdani calls the "bad Muslim"[318] but also the "bad citizen." In the words of Mustafa, one of my research participants "being an immigrant from a worn torn country you are not seen as man enough anywhere you go so we feel emasculated not only in white communities but also in Muslim communities."[319] Studying the Afghan diaspora's experiences of state violence and surveillance provide us with nuanced approach to theorization of masculinities in relation to state surveillance.

Afghan diaspora in the US were the first community that came under state scrutiny in the aftermaths of 9/11. As I have established in the first chapter, Little Kabul in Fremont, home to thousands of Afghan diaspora, became a neighborhood with heavy police presence, FBI visits and journalistic inquiry. The continued surveillance of Afghans in Fremont and other cities further displaced them within their already diasporic spaces.

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[318] Mamdani, M. (2005). *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the roots of terror*. Harmony.
[319] Interview 50.

Azita, a 34-year old Afghan woman who was born in Fremont but moved to San Francisco with her family in 2003 put it this way:

> Fremont was the closest we could get to Afghanistan. The views, weather, the landscape and even the Elizabeth park, all reminded us of Afghanistan. You could smell Afghan food on the streets and ran into so many Afghans like it was back home. Right after 9/11, everything changed. The FBI showed up everywhere. Police was after all of us. They started tapping our phones and computers like it was the communist times all over again. They arrested many Afghans and some of the men disappeared. Fremont is like a ghost town now. That is why we moved away.[320]

Afghan diaspora in the US lived in big communities for reasons of safety and nostalgia. Fremont for many of the people I met became a home away from home. Afghans would celebrate Eid and 4th of July with Afghan style barbeque/kabob at the Elizabeth Park, which according to many Afghans resembles the picnic areas in Kabul. However, that sense of community was taken away from them once again in the US "War on Terror." Home for Afghan diaspora was once again disturbed and displaced. This is not the first time that Afghans live under surveillance. Some of them are aware of the USSR surveillance on their lives during the Cold War. Azita's comparison of the FBI surveillance to the communist times is in reference to the USSR invasion of Afghanistan. Afghans' landlines were tapped, schools, work and streets were surveilled and spies were trained even from within the families and communities to report potential dangers to the state. Many men started to

[320] Interview 13

disappear.[321] With such a history and present of surveillance, I argue that Afghans in the diaspora live in a state of perpetual surveillance. Perpetual surveillance is a continuous regime of surveillance that produces unsettling conditions, temporary and fragile homes, and subjects that carry mistrust, anxiety and fear. It is this state of perpetual surveillance in the lives of Afghan diaspora that shapes vigilant masculinities. Afghan diasporic men fear to attend mosque, google anything related to Islam, discuss or defend their faith in public spaces, grow beard or engage in any sort of protests and activism. Being under such scrutiny, they have come to do what Foucault calls self-surveillance and self-regulation.[322] A key element of perpetual surveillance is self-regulation. This is when the "fear of surveillance becomes internalized"[323] and the surveilled subject surveils themselves.

Fawad, a 31-year old high school teacher in northern Virginia discussed the relationship between vigilant masculinities and self-regulation in the lives of Afghan diasporic men. Fawad said:

> I think the more we are under scrutiny and target of hate we stick to what we have control over. Anyone who is of Muslim refugee community in current day US feels this way. The war pulled the rug of safety from under our feet. With losing so much, we want to control as much as we can. So much of Afghan masculinity comes from what we have lost in war and in exile. We are ridiculed [for] not being able to provide for our families. It is a humiliating position for men to be unable to

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[321] Kakar, M. (1995). *Afghanistan: The Soviet invasion and the Afghan response, 1979-1982*. University of California Press.
[322] Foucault, M. (2012). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Vintage.
[323] Maira, S. (2019). Coming of age under surveillance: South Asian, Arab and Afghan American Youth and Post 9/11 Activism. in Activisms and Surveillance State. ed. Aziz Choudry. Pluto Press. p.83.

provide. Therefore, some men end up controlling their families through violence. That's why there is so much domestic violence in our communities.[324]

Control and loss are integral to vigilant masculinities. For losing safety, home and the ability to provide, some Afghan diasporic men resort to control. The loss they have already experienced and the fear of losing more oblige them to latch onto control, mainly in the domains that they have some remaining power. That domain is often times home. Home becomes a site of control for vigilant masculine men in diaspora, because home is the only place where they have some power. Home here has both an abstract meaning and familial and relational connotation. Feeling of loss, humiliation and the inability to provide rattles these men's position and sense of masculinity.[325] Therefore, they resort to domestic violence. Psychologists, feminist scholars and human rights organizations have closely studied the causal relationship between domestic violence and masculinity.[326] Mohammed Baobaid, studying the relationship between masculinity and gender violence, argues that domestic violence is "the dominating culture of masculinity that shapes and organizes [societies] essentially creates a cultural climate where women face repression in practically every sphere of social interaction."[327] These studies indicate that the concept of masculinity and its meaning and performance create an unequal power dynamic that leads to domestic

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[324] Interview 55

[325] Turner, S. E., & Bowen, W. G. (1999). Choice of major: The changing (unchanging) gender gap. *ILR Review*, *52*(2), 289-313.

[326] Anderson, K. L., & Umberson, D. (2001). Gendering violence: Masculinity and power in men's accounts of domestic violence. *Gender & society*, *15*(3), 358-380. See also : Mullaney, J. L. (2007). Telling it like a man: Masculinities and battering men's accounts of their violence. *Men and Masculinities*, *10*(2), 222-247.

[327] Baobaid, Mohammed. ed. Lahoucine Ouzgane. 2006. Masculinity and Gender Violence in Yemen. Islamic Masulinities. Zed Books: London. p.177

violence. Domestic violence has a close proximity with vigilant masculinities. It allows men to claim their lost masculinities.

Conclusion

In the field of political science, scholars have established the relationship between masculinities and war.[328] However, this relationship is within the essentialist theorization of patriarchy. Cynthia Cockburn exploring the causal relationship between gender and war argues "patriarchal gender relations predispose our societies to war. They are a driving force perpetuating war."[329] While this research is crucial in theorization of masculinities and war, this sort of essentialist ontology is unable to account for factors such as surveillance, displacement and home-bondedness. This problem becomes especially pronounced in the case of Muslim societies. The study of masculinities in the Muslim world has often been in the realm of behavioralism or culturalism.[330] From media to academia, the recent political unrests, revolutions and wars in the Muslim world have been fetishized

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[328]See; Messerschmidt, J., & Messner, M. (2018). Hegemonic, Nonhegemonic, and "New" Masculinities. In Messerschmidt J., Martin P., Messner M., & Connell R. (Eds.), *Gender Reckonings: New Social Theory and Research* (pp. 35-56). New York: NYU; Sjoberg, L. (2015). Seeing sex, gender, and sexuality in international security. *International Journal, 70*(3), 434-453; Hooper, C. (1999). Masculinities, IR and the 'Gender Variable': A Cost-Benefit Analysis for (Sympathetic) Gender Sceptics. *Review of International Studies, 25*(3), 475-491; Theidon, K. (2009). Reconstructing Masculinities: The Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration of Former Combatants in Colombia. *Human Rights Quarterly, 31*(1), 1-34; Baaz, M., & Stern, M. (2009). Why Do Soldiers Rape? Masculinity, Violence, and Sexuality in the Armed Forces in the Congo (DRC). *International Studies Quarterly, 53*(2), 495-518; Cohen, D., & Nordås, R. (2014). Sexual violence in armed conflict: Introducing the SVAC dataset, 1989–2009. *Journal of Peace Research, 51*(3), 418-428.

[329] Cockburn, C. (2011). Gender relations as causal in militarization and war: A feminist standpoint. In *Making Gender, Making War* .Routledge.p.6.

[330] Amar, Paul. 2011. Middle East Masculinity Studies Discourses of Men in Crisis: Industries of Gender in Revolution. Journal of Middle East Women's Studies. Vol.7.3. 36-70

within the discourses of sexually deprived Muslim man, oppressed Muslim woman and secretly homosexual terrorists. Such scholarship tends to blame patriarchy for the political violence in the Muslim world. Blaming patriarchy is a simplistic approach to studying the complex relationship between masculinities and political violence.

To understand masculinities in the lives of diasporas of war, it is important to study the circumstances that shape and trouble their masculinities. The US "War on Terror" and the decades of war in Afghanistan have placed Afghans, particularly diasporic men under a state of perpetual surveillance. Since 9/11, the US government has tapped their phones and email accounts while surveilling their movements, homes, businesses and neighborhoods. Similar to the heavy presence of law enforcement officers in black and Latino neighborhoods across the country, Muslims in post 9/11 became the new blacks. Fremont, where thousands of Afghans called it home, turned into a police city, further displacing Afghans.

Their first home they left behind, Afghanistan, has been under decades of war and uncertainties. The USSR invasion in 1980s and the US invasion in 2001 have emasculated Afghan men while claiming to free Afghan women from oppressions of a patriarchal society. The gendered nature of the invasion has created subjects that are in need of rescue (women) and subjects that are to be feared (men). While the dangerous Afghan man category was created during the war in Afghanistan, the US "War on Terror" has created the suspect Afghan man. Caught between the dangerous and the suspect, vigilant masculinities are informed by loss, war, violence and fear. Fear was brought up by different generations of Afghan diaspora I talked to. I was sitting at the Abu Bakr Sediq mosque in Fremont, CA, after a Jumah prayer, trying to understand the fear surveillance has instilled

in the community through the experience of the religious leaders. One of the imams was talking to me while his three kids were running around. His oldest son who was around 8 or 9 wrapped a scarf on his head and whirled like a dervish. His two younger sisters were twirling around him as he placed himself in the center. The imam stopped our conversation, got up and took the scarf off his son's head. He told him "don't do this again. Men don't wear a scarf or whirl like that. Go look after your sisters. That is what men do." He came back upset and said to me "he is just a kid. I don't want him to grow up a weak man like that. I am worried what would happen to my family if something happens to me tomorrow. We are being watched every day. You won't survive in exile if you are not a real man."[331]

The whirling son and the imam's words took me back to the exile I lived in Pakistan. I, too, loved to wrap a scarf around my head and whirl or wear my mom's high heels and walk in the hallway of our apartment building that was crowded with bags, blankets and pillows of our neighbors who were also Afghan refugees. I would be often yelled at by this one old man with long white beard and a brown lungi, turban who looked like a Muslim Santa Clause. We all called him Qazi Sahib, Judge. They said he used to be a judge in Kabul. Qazi Sahib lived with his wife and three sons in the corner apartment right by the stairs that went down to the basement where there was the videogame arcade I worked at. He would poke me with his cane every time he would see me walking down the stairs like a diva on Hollywood red carpet. He once pushed me with his cane while I was wearing my mom's heels and putting on a show to my friends one hot afternoon when everyone else was sleeping. As I was getting up the floor and everyone was laughing at my

[331] Interview 33

failed heel show, he said, “you are hurting your father with this. He lost everything in the war to save your life. Now it is your turn to be a man and protect him.” That memory of Qazi Sahib’s cane has ceased to haunt me as I shape my arguments about vigilant masculinities in this dissertation. The imam’s concerns about his whirling son’s survival reminds me that Qazi Sahib’s cane wasn’t of toxic but vigilant masculinities that is informed by displacement, fear and loss.

Conclusion

How did a nation known for a gender-neutral language, celebration of same sex love through literature and poetry and gender fluid sense of fashion and clothing became a masculinist landscape as it learned to live through wars, and how do these wars continue in people's lives thousands of miles away from their homeland? How was the sense of community and safety created by Afghans who settled in the United States during the political turmoil of the Cold War crushed by the US's "War on Terror"? How did the lives of Afghans become engulfed by a continuous regime of surveillance that produces unsettling conditions; temporary and fragile homes marked by frequent violence; subjects defined by mistrust, anxieties and fears, and ultimately vigilant masculinities where the surveilled subjects surveil themselves? How do queer and trans Afghans navigate their lives under conditions of Islamophobia and homophobia? In what ways, Afghan diasporic women's lives and performances of freedom and unfreedom are informed by home?

In trying to address these and many other entangled questions in this dissertation, I have retold diverse and multi-faceted stories of border crossings in the context of war and displacement. These stories are lived experience of the Afghan diaspora in the United States: they come from diasporic women who cross borders of honor and shame, freedom and unfreedom, home and diaspora; they come from queer and trans diasporic Afghans who wander everyday across the intimate borders of homophobia and Islamophobia. These stories come from Afghan diasporic men who become the effeminate homosexual and the violent masculine during the US "War on Terror." They come from Rahman, Nargis, Zainab, Asad, Aryana, Ajmal and many other Afghans,

including myself. In imagining a de-colonial ethnography, this dissertation asks that we rethink rigid meanings of wars, diasporas and their complex relationships with gender and sexuality. The stories and arguments in these chapters build upon each other to advance substantive empirical, methodological, and conceptual conversations in feminist IR, gender studies, and diaspora studies.

The people whose stories I have shared, and entangled with my own journeys, in the preceding pages, complicate the dominant narratives about gendered experiences of war and displacement. They engage the relationship between traumas of war and geographical displacement by exploring the meanings, understandings and performances of masculinities, femininities and queerness and their challenges, transformations, and contestations among those who leave their war-torn homelands to make new homes. The members of Afghan diaspora in California, Washington D.C, Maryland and Virginia generously shared their experiences with me for this work, and helped me to narrate and theorize how displaced people cross borders and live through memories of war while performing their gender and sexuality in these journeys. Border, in this sense, goes beyond the geographical demarcation. Border is "political, subjective (e.g. cultural) and epistemic and, contrary to frontiers, the very concept of 'border' implies the existence of people, languages, religions and knowledge on both sides linked through relations established by the coloniality of power."[332] For a diaspora of war, 'border' carries meanings, emotions and struggles that cannot be easily apprehended by available academic frameworks.

[332] Mignolo, W. D., & Tlostanova, M. V. (2006). Theorizing from the borders: shifting to geo-and body-politics of knowledge. *European Journal of Social Theory*, *9*(2), p.208.

Soheila Ghaussy, an Afghan diasporic poet and scholar, writes thus about border crossings of Afghans in the midst of a war:[333]

Because the groves were sweet and I recall
pomegranates. Because the almond air
was fused with fumes

and smoke, later, when the city choked
Because all those with carts and oxen
with clan and kin and chicken flocks

fled. Because they prayed while I
slept with one eye shut, one open
safe and far from a home

. . . .

The others fled until their bare soles
bled. I shed enough of my childhood
to see them harden

because they packed up bags, swung children
onto donkeys' backs
a straw's width from breaking

and walked
to a border near Herat, a border near Mazar
a border just past Kandahar.

These border crossings that Ghaussy writes about so vividly came with a life-time of trauma and memories of war. I can never forget the words of Zari, one of the first people I met in Fremont during my fieldwork who often spoke of her and her family's border

[333] This is only a part of the poem. For full poem see; Ghaussy, Soheila. "Lament." Full Bleed: Journal of Arts & Design. < https://www.full-bleed.org/migration/2017/5/4/poems-of-soheila-ghaussy>

crossings and haunting memories: "When we fled the war in Afghanistan, it was in the middle of the night. We had very little time to pack quickly; food, some clothes and cash in our bokhcha (suitcase). When we got to the US, we unwrapped our bokhcha and realized we had also packed war."[334]

Throughout my fieldwork and writing of this dissertation, Zari's words continued to grab me. I could not stop asking how Zari, the 53-years old Afghan diasporic woman who runs a store in East Bay, California packed war in her bokhcha. As I got to know her more, she opened up and shared her fear of loss and violence for her two daughters -- one of whom was born in Kabul and the other in the US. Both are adults now, but Zari is scared every time they leave the house. She is scared they wouldn't come back. Zari lost her only sister during the early days of war in Afghanistan. Zari and her little sister lived together with their parents in north of Kabul. The Soviet soldiers came and took her and nobody saw her again: "I am scared the same will happen to my daughters. We are a diaspora of war."[335]

By diaspora, I refer to that segment of a people living outside the "homeland" due to forced displacement or dispossession. Many scholarly approaches tend to homogenize the diasporic group, emphasizing its dilemmas, difficulties, and transitions in common across the membership.[336] My dissertation, by contrast, is a critical ethnographic study,

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[334] Interview.2
[335] Ibid.
[336] See for example; Skeleton, R. (2003). The Chinese diaspora or the migration of Chinese peoples. *The Chinese diaspora: Space, place, mobility, and identity*, *51*; Baumann, G. (1996). *Contesting culture: Discourses of identity in multi-ethnic London* (Vol. 100). Cambridge University Press; Nandy, A. (1990). Dialogue and the Diaspora. *Third Text*, *11*, 99-108; Moghissi, H. (Ed.). (2007). *Muslim diaspora: Gender, culture and identity* (Vol. 2). Routledge; Küçükcan, T. (2004). The making of Turkish-Muslim diaspora in Britain: religious collective identity in a multicultural public sphere. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, *24*(2), 243-258.

through which I am deeply attentive to variation of experiences and differences within the group at the level of individual migrants.

Sylvester's theoretical framework of war as experience is useful in understanding the significance of gender and sexual identities in shaping the experiences of Afghans in the US. In a word, there is far greater diversity of sexual and gender identity in the Afghan diaspora than is conventionally assumed. However, I have been careful to steer my analysis away from any explanations that establish a causal relationship between war and the sexual or gender identities of those exiled by it. What I have strived to offer, instead, is a rich ethnographic study of gendered subjectivities defined by a war diaspora. I argue that it is not possible to adequately understand the structures and norms of gender and sexuality and the profound ways in which they shape the lived experiences of refugees, without learning to listen carefully to the nuanced stories of these refugee communities who have crossed borders and continue to do so on daily basis.

In chapter one, I introduce some of the stories and the ways they allow us to rethink borders, lived experiences of war and displacement in relation to gender and sexuality. I place myself under my own analytical gaze to highlight the importance of auto-ethnography and my need in this work to eliminate the barriers between my interlocutors and myself. In chapter two, I engage postcolonial critiques of ethnography while also providing an account of the ways in which I have grappled with these critiques while

queering borders of de-colonial ethnography and the self-other borders. Emphasizing on the importance of auto-ethnography, I complicate the imaginary borders between the researcher and research subjects. Subsequently, chapter three moves us to an empirical discussion of the double lives of Afghan diasporic women. These double lives allows them to cross borders of shame and honor, private and public life while expressing their agency and living their freedom.

In Chapter Four, I turn to the struggles of queer and trans diasporic Afghans who have become the faggot and the terrorist while existing in the across the borders of homophobia and Islamophobia. Finally, Chapter five challenges the violent masculine discourses around Afghan men fabricated in the US "War on Terror" era. Through the concept of vigilant masculinities, I highlight Afghan diasporic men's complex performance of masculinities in the context of war and exile.

Taken together, the various chapters of this dissertation offer different lenses to understand the ways in which patriarchal war diasporas establish rigid norms of gender and sexuality in public and private spaces, wherein heterosexual men recuperate their masculinity through protecting their families' honor in order to cope with "new" spatial, political, social and cultural changes. Heteronormative imaginations of homeland come to define, restructure, and reinforce diasporic hierarchies of gender and norms of sexuality in exiles' new homes. In addition, this work challenges the tired but still dominant stereotype of the oppressed, weak, sexless and apolitical Muslim woman narrative by introducing the concept of "double lives," a practice of diasporic feminism that calls attention to re-theorization of freedom and agency in liberal feminist understandings of international

relations. My critical ethnographic engagement with the everyday lives of Afghan diaspora women has allowed me to argue that living double lives is a political act that is informed by social, historical and political realities and circumstances. An appreciation of this everyday political and social labor enables alternative understandings of the multi-faceted ways in which Afghan women's and queer sexualities are informed by colonial experiences, military wars and violence of displacement.

Critical, yet undertheorized by scholars is the journey of emasculated men by experiences of war and surveillance, women and queer diasporic subjects. In bringing to light the experiences of these diasporic subjects, this dissertation introduces the notions of diasporic journeys, "double lives," home- bondedness, matryoshka doll subjectivity and vigilant masculinities. The narratives of 153 people who participated in various capacities (see Chapter Two) in this study over the 12 months of my fieldwork, powerfully convey that diasporic journeys are not bonded to the physical sense of border crossings alone but these journeys, in fact, transcend the emotional, psychological, ideological, political, linguistic and cultural boundaries and borders. These border crossings, negotiations, transformations, struggles and survivals--that I refer to as "diasporic journeys"—do begin with leaving home and crossing borders; however, but they do not end at a pre-defined border. Rather, border-crossings become an everyday, and deeply political, reality for diasporic subjects for the rest of their lives as they settle in new homes, grow into adulthood, and move from place to place, negotiating their identities, bartering with other cultures and languages, challenging systems and structures and trying to survive regimes of power, including racism, surveillance and Islamophobia each of which encage them in overlapping systems of violence on a daily basis.

Methodologically, this dissertation contributes to queering borders of de-colonial ethnography. The notion and practices associated with de-colonial ethnography have allowed me to engage with my research population at a deeper level while also being reflective of my own politics of positionality as a queer Muslim and Afghan and holding similar experiences of war and displacement. As a feminist researcher, I am committed to continuous reflection upon my own positionality as a critical ethnographer with complex identities that at times are similar yet different from those whom I study.

The United States' "War on Terror" and its "Muslim Ban" have wreaked havoc in the lives of queer and trans Muslims in the US and elsewhere -- physically, socially and politically. In the United States, queer and trans Muslims find themselves torn, conflicted and displaced between their sexuality and religion -- their queer identity and their Muslim identity -- and these experiences require continued exploration and analysis. Future research must look at the complex ways the US's state surveillance of Muslims and its "War on Terror" have shaped the genders and sexualities of Muslims, who navigate their lives precariously at the intersections of Islamophobia and homophobia. It is my hope that this dissertation will help to strengthen the foundation for interdisciplinary scholars who are interested in advancing this critical and desperately needed research.

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